U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Conserving America's Fisheries

The Fisheries Program's Vision for the Future

The Nation's Fisheries Provide Invaluable Biological, Social, and Economic Benefits

The Nation's fish and other aquatic resources are among the richest and most diverse in the world. These resources, and the recreational, commercial, and subsistence opportunities they provide, have helped support the Nation's growth by providing enormous ecological, social and economic benefits.

Preliminary surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) show that recreational fishing contributed more than $35 billion annually to the American economy in 2001 alone. An economic analysis conducted independently by the American Sportfishing Association in 1996 showed that recreational fishing's overall economic impact to the economy was $108.4 billion annually, including 1.2 million jobs and $28.3 billion in personal income.

The Nation's Aquatic Systems are in Crisis

Despite efforts by the Service and others to conserve fish and other aquatic resources, a growing number are declining at alarming rates. More than 400 aquatic species either have, or need, special protection in some part of their natural or historic range. The number of species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 2002 has increased to 19 amphibian, 21 crustacean, 70 mussel, and 115 fish species. Several threatened and endangered species of fish are important recreational, subsistence, and commercial species, including several species or populations of salmon, sturgeon, and trout.

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Biologists analyze samples from a chinook salmon.

The Service's Fisheries Program has played a vital role in conserving and managing fish and other aquatic resources since 1871.

The reasons for these declines are linked largely to habitat loss or alteration (including flow changes, sedimentation, and pollution) and the impacts of harmful exotic or transplanted species. Clearly, there is increasing urgency to identify and implement actions that will reverse these alarming trends before it is too late.

A New Vision for the Future

Completion of the Fisheries Program's *Vision for the Future* is a major milestone along a critically-important pathway that the Program is traveling with its stakeholders and partners. The journey began in 1999 when the Service invited the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council to help evaluate the National Fish Hatchery System. The Council delivered its findings and recommendations to the Service in September 2000 with the report *Saving a System in Peril.*

In 2001, the Service reached out to the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council again for assistance in preparing a national vision to define regional goals and objectives designed to fulfill the Service's Fisheries Program strategies. The Council responded by assembling a steering committee comprised of fishery administrators and executives to work with others from federal, state, and tribal governments and conservation organizations. Together, they produced a report, entitled *A Partnership Agenda for Fisheries Conservation*, that offered guidance and recommendations to the Service and its Fisheries Program in six key partnership areas: Aquatic Species Conservation and Management, Public Use, Cooperation with Native Americans, Leadership in Aquatic Science and Technology, Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management, and National Aquatic Habitat Planning.

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Sockeye salmon return to spawning grounds in an Alaskan stream. Salmon support both wildlife and subsistence users.

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Dovetailing on these key areas, the Fisheries Program completed *Conserving America's Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Program Vision for the Future* in 2002. It establishes a clear vision for the Program, which states, "*The vision of the Service and its Fisheries Program is working with partners to restore and maintain fish and other aquatic resources at self-sustaining levels and to support Federal mitigation programs for the benefit of the American public.*" To achieve this vision, the Fisheries Program will work with its partners to:

- *Protect* the health of aquatic habitats
- *Restore* fish and other aquatic resources
- Provide opportunities to *enjoy* the benefits of healthy aquatic resources.

These components provide a framework to work with partners and stakeholders to step-down the *Vision* into meaningful actions that will guide the Program's operational activities.

A Renewed Commitment to Partners and Seven New Focus Areas

The Service is recommitting to its role as a partner in conserving America's fish and other aquatic resources. In many respects, the *Vision* directs the Fisheries Program to continue undertaking activities it has performed well in the past. In other respects, the *Vision* signals a clear intention for the Program to do business differently and expand its involvement in other resource management activities. The Fisheries Program will focus its efforts and activities on what it is best positioned to contribute based on its unique resources and capabilities, recognizing that sound science and solid partnerships will continue to be the keys to aquatic resource stewardship. In keeping with this vision, the Program has identified seven areas of emphasis on which it will concentrate its efforts. These are:

- Partnerships and Accountability
- Aquatic Species Conservation and Management
- Public Use
- Cooperation with Native Americans
- Leadership in Science and Technology
- Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management
- Workforce Management

Five Criteria

The Fisheries Program will use five criteria in deciding what activities, opportunities, and issues to address for each of the seven priority areas set out by the *Vision*. The Service will weigh potential actions by:

- The strength of Federal authority and responsibility
- The extent to which our efforts will complement others in the fisheries and aquatic resource conservation community
- The likelihood that our efforts will produce measurable resource results
- The likelihood that our efforts will produce significant economic or social benefits
- The extent of partner support.

Biologists spawn fish at the Norfork National Fish Hatchery in Arkansas. USFWS

The Service and its partners and stakeholders are confident that this Vision represents an important milestone along the pathway of genuine partnerships. Just as importantly, they know this pathway leads to a brighter future for America's aquatic resources and that it will put the fish back into the Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Recreational fishing opportunities abound for children as well as adults.

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Biologists electroshocking invasive fish in a stream in Alaska.

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