



REPORT TO CONGRESS

MARINE RECREATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAM: REPORT ON STATE PARTNERSHIPS

Developed pursuant to: Section 202 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018 and Senate Report 115-264

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THE MODERNIZING RECREATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ACT OF 2018,
PUBLIC LAW 115-405 (12/31/18), INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGE

(2) State Programs—The Secretary shall exempt from registration under the program recreational fishermen and charter fishing vessels licensed, permitted, or registered under the laws of a State if the Secretary determines that information from the State program is suitable for the Secretary’s use or is used to assist in completing marine recreational fisheries statistical surveys, or evaluating the effects of proposed conservation and management measures for marine recreational fisheries.

(4) Federal-State Partnerships

(A) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall establish a partnership with a State to develop best practices for implementing the State program established under paragraph (2)

(B) GUIDANCE.—The Secretary shall develop guidance, in cooperation with the States, that details best practices for administering State programs pursuant to paragraph (2), and provide such guidance to the States.

(C) BIENNIAL REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress and publish biennial reports that include—

(i) the estimated accuracy of—

(I) the information provided under subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (1) for each registry program established under that paragraph; and

(II) the information from each State program that is used to assist in completing surveys or evaluating effects of conservation and management measures under paragraph (2);

(ii) priorities for improving recreational fishing data collection; and

(iii) an explanation of any use of information collected by such State programs and by the Secretary.

*SENATE REPORT 115-264 (6/5/18), FOR S. 1520, WHICH BECAME LAW
AS THE MFA, STATED*

[Section 202] would add a provision to section 401(g) of the [Magnuson-Stevens Act] on Federal-State partnerships, including directing the Secretary to establish a partnership with States to develop guidance detailing best practices for administering State programs, providing biennial reports to Congress on the accuracy of registry programs. This section also would direct the Secretary to make grants to States to improve implementation of State programs and assist them in complying with requirements related to changes in recreational data collection.

THIS REPORT RESPONDS TO THE COMMITTEE’S REQUEST.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) completed and submitted to Congress the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Plan for State Partnerships to support state-Federal partnership in conducting surveys of marine recreational fishing and in improving survey designs and estimates of catch and effort. The plan relies on existing partnership agreements between NMFS and the states and Fisheries Information Networks (FIN). It describes the existing cooperative agreements for data collection, memoranda of agreement in place under the National Saltwater Angler Registry and State Exemption Program (NSAR), and state participation in MRIP Regional Implementation Teams and regional planning and priority setting. The plan identifies potential ways to improve the existing partnerships in three areas: State-Federal Program Administration, State-Conducted Catch and Effort Surveys, and State Saltwater Angler Registries.

Best Practices for State Programs are provided for angler registries based on the final rule for NSAR at 50 CFR 600, subpart P – and for state surveys based on the new MRIP Survey and Data Standards adopted in December 2020. The report also includes an assessment of states' current status of meeting their required data submissions, including applicable data quality evaluations under their NSAR Memoranda of Agreement with NMFS. In addition, the report includes a list of uses made of recreational catch and effort data collected by states, as well as a summary list of state data collection priorities by region.

II. MRIP PLAN FOR STATE PARTNERSHIPS

NMFS completed the [MRIP Plan for State Partnerships](#), in consultation with state partners and the FINs, to address the provisions of section 202 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018, Public Law 115-405 (MFA). The plan recognizes that NMFS, through MRIP and the Fisheries Information System (FIS) programs, has established and long maintained partnerships with states and other regional partners in fisheries data collection. The plan for implementation of the provisions of MFA section 202 leverages these existing programs as the foundation of the required state partnership program and adds new program components, as needed, to address all MFA requirements. The current state programs are primarily derived from regional FIN programs for the principal fisheries regions, which represent well-established, longstanding active partnerships, including federal funding support for state data collection activities. These include: Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) for the Atlantic Coast; Gulf Fisheries Information Network (GulfFIN) for the Gulf Coast; Pacific Recreational Fisheries Information Network (RecFIN) for the Pacific Coast of California through Washington; and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center-coordinated Western Pacific Fishery Information Network (WPacFIN) for Hawaii and the territories of Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Through ACCSP, GulfFIN, and RecFIN, NMFS provides funding support to states for MRIP recreational survey work as specified in Cooperative Agreements (CA). In addition, NMFS has established partnerships, including funding recreational data collection, via CAs with GulfFIN for Puerto Rico and directly with Hawaii.

MRIP has also established [Regional Implementation Teams](#), consisting of all primary partners in each region, to assess partner data collection needs and priorities. The Regional Implementation Teams consist of the FINs for the Atlantic, Gulf, and West Coast regions, and ad hoc teams for the Alaska, Pacific Islands, Caribbean, and Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) regions. The ad hoc teams include all regional partners, including states and territories, regional fishery management councils, interstate marine fisheries commissions, NMFS Headquarters Offices of Sustainable Fisheries (OSF) and Science and Technology (OST), and NMFS Regional Offices and Fisheries Science Centers. The MRIP Regional Implementation Teams completed, and are currently updating, MRIP Regional Implementation Plans that define regional recreational catch and effort data needs, preferred survey methods, and priorities for data collection improvements, including priorities identified by the state partner members.

Furthermore, NMFS and all states except Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have adopted Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) for data sharing under the NSAR (see 50 CFR 600, subpart P). Under these MOAs, qualifying states agree to submit either state saltwater fishing license/registration data or state recreational catch and effort survey data and are, in turn, designated as Exempted States by NMFS. Anglers and for-hire vessels from Exempted States are not required to register federally with NMFS.

The MRIP Plan for State Partnerships – prepared in consultation with states, FINs, and MRIP Regional Implementation Teams – incorporates and builds on the existing CAs, MOAs, and Regional Implementation Plans. The plan: 1) reinforces and proposes expansion of, as necessary, existing MOAs with states and FINs; and 2) describes “best practices for implementing the State program” and “guidance . . . that details best practices for administering State programs” based on applicable provisions of the existing final rule for the NSAR and State Exemption Program (for state registries) and the MRIP Survey and Data Standards (for surveys and estimation).

III. BEST PRACTICES FOR STATE PROGRAMS

As noted above, the MRIP Plan for State Partnerships – prepared in consultation with states, FINs, and MRIP Regional Implementation Teams – incorporates and builds on the existing CAs, MOAs, and Regional Implementation Plans. In consultation with the MRIP Regional Implementation Teams through the MRIP Regional Implementation Council,¹ NMFS identified and included in the plan a number of measures that provide potential opportunities to improve the state-federal partnerships for recreational catch and effort data collection, building on the current FIN and state CAs, and the Regional Implementation Plan process in which the states and NMFS play pivotal roles. Collectively, these measures constitute the best practices for implementing and administering state programs:

¹ www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/new-mrip-organizational-structure-reflects-greater-emphasis-regional-implementation

State-Federal Program Administration – Measures to improve the performance of the state-Federal recreational data collection partnerships under the current FIN and CA programs in place may include the following:

- Ensure FINs have current Strategic Plans or equivalent policy-level measures in place that reflect priorities of MRIP Regional Implementation Plans.
- Ensure FIN governing documents clearly define the roles of each partner in data collection, estimation, information management, quality assurance and quality control, and data confidentiality.
- Streamline annual funding distribution to FINs under 5-year CAs by moving funds during the first quarter of each fiscal year, as possible.
- Compile and publish an inventory of survey improvement needs, including estimated costs, from MRIP Regional Implementation Plans.
- Create a formal MOA to establish cooperative statistics programs among all partners in non-FIN regions (or add states and territories to current FINs, e.g., add Hawaii to RecFIN).
- Cooperatively develop national standards and guidelines on recreational data confidentiality.
- Improve state-Federal collaboration on investigating differences among estimates from overlapping programs.

State-Conducted Catch and Effort Surveys – Measures to improve the quality of data provided by state survey contributions may include the following, as appropriate to the priorities of the states and the regional partnership as expressed in the MRIP Regional Implementation Plan:

- Ensure that all components of state-conducted surveys have been certified consistent with [NMFS Policy Directive 04-114](#).
- Ensure that state surveys address priority needs as reflected in MRIP Regional Implementation Plans.
- Establish regional goals for estimate precision and coverage and expand data collection to address them.
- Where MRIP general surveys do not meet more rigorous or timely needs for catch estimates, evaluate implementation of certified specialized survey designs to supplement the general survey.
- Implement the provisions of the MRIP Survey and Data Standards that are applicable to state programs.² Cooperative efforts among MRIP, FINs, and the states are ongoing to implement these standards in catch and effort surveys.
- Implement comprehensive Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) measures.

² The MRIP Survey and Data Standards, Appendix E, was established by NMFS in December 2020. See www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/recreational-fishing-survey-and-data-standards.

State Saltwater Angler Registries: Data quality for registry data can be expressed one of two ways: as completeness of the registry, or as the degree to which the database is error-free and free of non-angler entries.

- With respect to completeness, the following can be undertaken to improve the state registry data:
 - Timeliness of submission: Exempted states are required to submit their registry updates at least annually in January. In addition, those states in which the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey is conducted (Maine through Mississippi) have been asked to submit updated current license holder lists electronically each month to ensure the survey performs as designed. Nearly all states have met this request (see third column of Appendix A).
 - State license exceptions: Many states provide exceptions to license or registration requirements for certain anglers. The fewer such exceptions, the more complete the database.
 - Non-compliant anglers and for-hire vessel operators: Non-compliance with state licensing and registration requirements is a major source of incompleteness of the state registries. Data provided in the ninth column of the table in Appendix A indicates high percentages of reported saltwater shore and private boat fishing trips by those without fishing licenses. Improving compliance through more effective licensing programs, public outreach, and active enforcement are important measures necessary to significantly improve the completeness of state registries.
- With respect to the reduction of error rates and non-angler entries in the state databases, the following measures would be helpful:
 - Reduce or eliminate inclusion of saltwater privileges in state combination licenses. Also, eliminate general fishing licenses or require a saltwater stamp or endorsement for general fishing license holders who wish to fish in saltwater. These measures will reduce the large number of individuals who purchase combination licenses or general fishing licenses to cover desired privileges, but do not fish in saltwater.
 - Add QA/QC measures that states can take to reduce error rates in registry databases.

IV. EVALUATION OF STATE DATA SUBMITTED PURSUANT TO §401(g)(1) OF THE MAGNUSON-STEVENSON ACT

In consultation with the FINs and Exempted States, NMFS prepared spreadsheets, updated through 2021, that describe each Exempted State's data submission status with respect to fulfilling its agreement in the NSAR MOA and the currently applicable best practices cited in section III above. Appendix A includes information for the states designated as Exempted States based on submission of state license or registration data. Appendix B includes information from state contributions to qualifying regional surveys of recreational catch and effort.

V. PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SURVEYS TO MEET MRIP REGIONAL PARTNER NEEDS

The MRIP Plan for State Partnerships (see section II above) describes the MRIP Regional Implementation Planning process and the role of Regional Implementation Teams. Each team is responsible for identifying regional needs and developing MRIP Regional Implementation Plans to implement improved data collection designs that address regional and national needs. Specifically, the plans include:

- Descriptions of regional needs for recreational fishing statistics, including needs for coverage, resolution, precision, and timeliness of survey estimates.
- A baseline assessment of current data collection programs, including the extent to which current programs satisfy needs and identification of data collection gaps.
- Recommendations and justification for a sequential, prioritized approach for implementing improved methods that address national and regional needs that are currently unmet.
- A proposed process for combining statistics derived from multiple sources.
- Estimated costs, overall and for individual survey components.

In summary, NMFS expects that opportunities to apply future funding increases to state and other partner recreational catch and effort data collection and estimation programs will be based on needs and priorities identified through the MRIP regional implementation planning process.

As of December 2022, Regional Implementation Plans have been adopted for all regions, and all regional partners are actively updating Regional Implementation Plans. Appendix D compiles priority needs extracted from the plans adopted by the MRIP Regional Implementation Teams.

VI. USES OF DATA PROVIDED BY MRIP STATE SURVEY PARTNERS

Recreational catch and effort data – whether collected by state agencies as part of state-conducted survey programs, by state partners under NMFS-FIN or NMFS-state MOAs, or by NMFS contractors – are used to prepare estimates of the numbers and weight of marine fish species removed from the population as a result of recreational harvest or (combined with independently derived release mortality proportions) of recreational catch and release. The catch estimates are stratified by species, sub-region, state, fishing mode, area fished, sampling period or wave (usually 2 months or 1 month), and catch type.

Multi-year time series of estimates of population removals are an integral part of fisheries stock assessments. The data collected by states under the NMFS-state partnerships described herein are essential to support analyses in fisheries stock assessments conducted by NMFS and the states.

Estimates of harvested fish are also essential to supporting fisheries management decision-making. Catch data from various strata are used to conduct analyses that facilitate decisions on what combinations of management measures will allow sustainable fishing and prevent overfishing. Catch estimates are used to monitor whether annual catch limits or other periodic

management targets have been met or exceeded and to suggest when and how management intervention is needed to achieve conservation goals.

In October, 2022, NMFS completed a Transition Plan for use of state-generated catch data in Gulf of Mexico fisheries stock assessment and management. This Transition Plan will allow use of state survey data for all states in red snapper analysis and management. In addition, Florida's State Reef Fish Survey data and Louisiana's LA Creel data will be available for use in reef fish and all managed fisheries, respectively.

APPENDIX A: Characteristics of Exempted States' License and Registration Data Submitted Pursuant to State/NOAA Memoranda of Agreement Under the National Saltwater Angler Registry and State Exemption Program

State/ Territory	Does the Exempted State submit its registry updates to NOAA at least annually in January as required by section IV (A) of its NSAR MOA (Y/N)?	(FES states only; ME-MS) Does the Exempted State submit updated current license holder lists electronically each month (Y/N)?	Comments on frequency of submission	Other than fishing on for-hire vessels and by anglers under age 16, does the state provide significant exceptions to license or registration requirements for certain anglers (Y/N)? If so, what are the exceptions?	Comments on state license/registration exceptions.	Does the state issue a license, registration, stamp, or other endorsement that specifically provides saltwater-only fishing privileges?	Are there exceptions to saltwater-only license, etc. requirements? (e.g., combination or lifetime licenses that include saltwater fishing with other privileges)? If yes, describe.	(FES states only; ME -MS) For 2021, what was the percent of saltwater shore and private boat fishing trips reported by households in the non-matched sample frame (those that do not have licenses)?	(FES states only; ME -MS) For 2021, what was the rate at which NSAR addresses match to the address frame by state?
Maine	Y	Y	none	Y	1. Residents under age 70 who purchase a freshwater fishing license, if they state they fish in saltwater. 2. Persons fishing on a licensed fishing pier.	Yes, but see comment 1 in the preceding column.	N	54.2	91
New Hampshire	Y	Y	none	N	none	Y	N	60.9	91
Massachusetts	Y	Y	none	N	none	Y	N	68.9	85
Rhode Island	Y	Y	none	N	none	Y	N	62.9	80

Connecticut	Y	Y	none	N	none	Y	Y, for certain combination licenses that include saltwater privileges	77.6	89
New York	Y	Y	none	N	none	Y	N	73.3	84
New Jersey	Y	Y	none	N	none	Y	N	80.5	92
Pennsylvania	Y	Y (by agreement, PA submits its limited updates quarterly)	none	N	none	Y	N	N/A	N/A
Delaware	Y	Y	none	N	none	Y	N	56.9	95
Maryland	Y	Y	none	Y	1. Persons who fish on a vessel with a Consolidated Bay and Sport Boat license. However, all such persons must obtain a free Bay and Coastal Sport Registration.	Y, when license and registration requirements are combined	Y, for a Senior Consolidated Fishing License for persons over 65 to fish in any state waters	55.6	95

Virginia	Y	Y	none	Y	1. Persons who fish on a boat with a Recreational Boat license; with MD or PRFC license; from licensed pier; are residents over age 65; from private property. However, all such persons must register with the Fishing Identification Program.	Y, when license and registration requirements are combined	Y, for a number of lifetime and combination license categories.	69.1	95
North Carolina	Y	Y	none	Y	1. Persons who fish on a fishing pier that holds an Ocean Fishing Pier Blanket CRFL. 2. 269,000 holders of lifetime licenses as of 1/1/2006 were grandfathered.	Y	Y, for several Unified Lifetime and Annual Unified license options.	50.3	95

South Carolina	Y	Y	none	Y	1. Persons who fish on a state-licensed fishing pier.	Y	Y, for holders of Disability Licenses and of Senior fishing licenses for persons over age 64.	48.3	97
Georgia	Y	Y	none	Y	1. Persons who fish on a state-licensed fishing pier.	Y	N	87.1	97
Florida	Y	Y	none	Y	1. Persons who fish on a state-licensed fishing pier. 2. State residents age 65 and older. Residents who fish for reef fish species are required to have a no-cost reef fish permit, which adds unlicensed seniors to the state registry database.	Y	Y, for holders of a number of combination licenses	59.8	96
Alabama	Y	Y	none	Y	1. State residents age 65 and older.	Y	Y, for holders of several lifetime combination licenses	74.1	96

Mississippi	Y	N (MS DMR has advised NMFS that it will begin submitting updates monthly in 2023.)	Provision of annual updates has usually been delayed past Jan. 15. However, see note in preceding column.	N	1. MS provides for a discounted lifetime license for residents over age 65.	Y	Yes, for holders of several lifetime combination licenses.	93.3	96
Louisiana	Y	N/A	none	N	1. LA exempts seniors born before June 1, 1940 from licensing.	Y	Yes, for holders of certain lifetime combination licenses and annual Sportsman's Paradise combination licenses.	N/A	N/A
Texas	Y	N/A	none	N	none	Y, with saltwater stamp	Y, for several combination and lifetime licenses.	N/A	N/A

APPENDIX B: Characteristics of Exempted States’ Recreational Catch and Effort Data Submitted Pursuant to State/NOAA Memoranda of Agreement Under the National Saltwater Angler Registry and State Exemption Program

State/Territory	Has the Qualifying Regional Survey adopted governing documents, including a formal agreement among the partners establishing partner roles and responsibilities, data sharing commitments, and a strategic plan or equivalent process for establishing shared goals and objectives?	Comments on governing documents.	Has the qualifying Regional Survey established standards for data quality, confidentiality, and access?	Comments on standards.
Alaska	N	None	N	
Washington	N	The collective participation in RecFIN by the states of Washington, Oregon, and California is indicative of the agreement among the partners (states and PSMFC) to share data, strategically plan for funding and fishery data needs, and collaborate on research and management projects. However, formal RecFIN centralized documentation and agreements do not currently exist. RecFIN is prepared to cooperate with its partner agencies and MRIP to consolidate and enhance its governing documents to fulfill this requirement.	N	RecFIN has developed confidentiality policy and non-disclosure agreement documentation establishing confidentiality and data access standards and procedures. However, RecFIN does not have dedicated documentation and agreements that establish formal standards for data quality, confidentiality, and access for all three partner states. To fulfill this requirement, RecFIN will coordinate with MRIP and the partner states regarding updates to MRIP survey and data standards, and will continue to work with its partners to develop data sharing agreements between RecFIN and each respective state.
Oregon	N	The collective participation in RecFIN by the states of Washington, Oregon, and California is indicative of the agreement among the partners (states and PSMFC) to share data, strategically plan for funding and fishery data needs, and collaborate on research and management projects. However, formal RecFIN centralized documentation and agreements do not currently exist. RecFIN is prepared to cooperate with its partner agencies and MRIP to consolidate and enhance its governing documents to fulfill this requirement.	N	Data collected by the ODFW Ocean Recreational Boat Survey (ORBS) is governed by several state strategies, standards, and statutes, including the “Open Data Standard” and confidentiality requirements. RecFIN has developed confidentiality policy and non-disclosure agreement documentation establishing confidentiality and data access standards and procedures. However, RecFIN does not have dedicated documentation and agreements that establish formal standards for data quality, confidentiality, and access for all three partner states. To fulfill this requirement, RecFIN will coordinate with MRIP and the partner states regarding updates to MRIP survey and data standards, and will

				continue to work with its partners to develop data sharing agreements between RecFIN and each respective state.
State/Territory	Has the Qualifying Regional Survey adopted governing documents, including a formal agreement among the partners establishing partner roles and responsibilities, data sharing commitments, and a strategic plan or equivalent process for establishing shared goals and objectives?	Comments on governing documents.	Has the qualifying Regional Survey established standards for data quality, confidentiality, and access?	Comments on standards.

				California has adopted data standards for quality, confidentiality and promotes access to California data through RecFIN. In 2021 CDFW and Pacific States Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) ratified a Data Sharing MOU to establish confidentiality and access standards to establish confidentiality and access standards.. After the development of state data sharing MOUs, PSMFC may align and update regional confidential and access standards. RecFIN has developed confidentiality policy and non-disclosure agreement documentation establishing confidentiality and data access standards and procedures. However, RecFIN does not have dedicated documentation and agreements that establish formal standards for data quality, confidentiality, and access for all three partner states. To fulfill this requirement, RecFIN will coordinate with MRIP and the partner states regarding updates to MRIP survey and data standards, and will continue to work with its partners to develop data sharing agreements between RecFIN and each respective state.
California	N	The collective participation in RecFIN by the states of Washington, Oregon, and California is indicative of the agreement among the partners (states and PSMFC) to share data, strategically plan for funding and fishery data needs, and collaborate on research and management projects. However, formal RecFIN centralized documentation and agreements do not currently exist. RecFIN is prepared to cooperate with its partner agencies and MRIP to consolidate and enhance its governing documents to fulfill this requirement.	N	
American Samoa	N		N	
Guam	N		N	
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	N		N	

State/Territory	Is the Qualifying Regional Survey funded in whole or in part with NMFS funds? (Y/N, source)	Does the Exempted State submit its survey-derived catch and effort data as required by section IV (A) of its NSAR MOA (Y/N)?	Comments on submission of Exempted State catch and effort data	Has the Exempted State completed any survey or data related analyses or improvements specified in Addendum II to its NSAR MOA?	Comments on Exempted State completion of Addendum II provisions.	Is the qualifying state survey MRIP-certified?
Alaska	N	Y	none	N/A	none	N
Washington	Y	Y	none	Y	none	N
Oregon	Y	Y	none	Y	none	N
California	Y	N	CA is not providing Ocean Salmon Project data and certain CRFS highly migratory species data due to concerns regarding data quality and when appropriate to be made available.	N/A	none	N
American Samoa	N	Y	none	N/A	none	N
Guam	N	Y	none	N/A	none	N
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	N	Y	none	N/A	none	N

State/Territory	Comments on status of MRIP certification.	Are the Terms of Reference for the certification still met?	Does the qualifying state survey meet requirements of the MRIP Preliminary Standards for Survey Coverage and Basic Data Elements	Comments on state survey conformance to MRIP Preliminary Standards for Survey Coverage and Basic Data Elements	Does the state survey program include quality assurance/quality control procedures?
Alaska	Certification may be sought following completion of the pending MRIP Regional Implementation Plan.	N/A	Y	none	?
Washington	Certification review is in progress and is expected to be completed in FY 23.	N/A	Y	none	Y
Oregon	Certification review is in progress and is expected to be completed in FY 23.	N/A	Y	none	Y
California	Certification review is in progress and is expected to be completed in FY 23.	N/A	Y	none	Y
American Samoa	Pre-certification technical design review has been requested by the territory and is planned for FY 23.	N/A	Y	none	N
Guam	Pre-certification technical design review has been requested by the territory and is planned for FY 23.	N/A	Y	none	N
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	Pre-certification technical design review has been requested by the commonwealth and is planned for FY 23.	N/A	Y	none	N

APPENDIX C: MRIP Regional Implementation Plan Priorities

Alaska Regional Implementation Priorities (Priorities in Review)
Priority: Modernization of survey programs.
Priority: Inclusion of marine species, samples, and locations not currently sampled by dockside sampling programs.
Priority: Develop data storage and assimilation structure and policy.
Priority: Improved recreational release data.
Atlantic Coast Regional Implementation Priorities (Adopted 9/2017)
Priority: More precise catch estimates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendation: Improve precision first for those managed species with chronically high-percent standard errors (PSE) and/or small annual catch limits (ACL). • Recommendation: Investigate targeted sampling design changes, alternative estimation approaches, and methods to optimize sampling effort (with strategic allocation of samples at existing or increased levels).
Priority: A comprehensive for-hire data collection program.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive for-hire data collection program (including headboats and charter boats fishing in state and Federal waters) that minimizes the burden of reporting and leverages data sharing among Federal and state partners.
Priority: More precise and more accurate discard data.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendation: Improve existing for-hire headboat at-sea discard monitoring and angler interviewing program. Include more robust sample sizes to support more precise discard data and improve outreach efforts to increase participation. • Recommendation: Convene Atlantic and Gulf partners at a workshop to evaluate and discuss improvements to existing discarded fish data collections and to discuss and develop new methods.

Priority: Biological sampling for recreational fisheries conducted outside of APAIS.

• **Recommendation:** Develop a supplemental survey to collect length, weight, age structures, and sex ratios from managed species, and allow for the collection of trip-level data on area fished, depths fished, fishing methods used, and characteristics of discards (e.g., numbers by species, proportions under legal size limits, immediate mortalities, and notable impairments).

Priority: Improved spatial resolution and technical guidance for post-stratification of estimates.

• **Recommendation:** Develop web tools to allow users to obtain custom estimates or estimates for a standardized set of regions with standardized, pre-defined boundaries with the appropriate calibration factors applied.

Priority: More timely catch estimates.

• **Recommendation:** Improve the timeliness of recreational catch and harvest estimates, but not without evaluating the tradeoffs between improved timeliness and improved precision.

**Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Regional Implementation Priorities
(Adopted 10/2017)**

Priority: Redesign the Large Pelagics Survey (LPS)

• **Recommendation:** Complete a re-design of the existing LPS (Maine to Virginia) that incorporates nonresponse weights, improves data collection on trips originating from private access sites, corrects for tournament v. non-tournament biases, and optimizes sample sizes to improve PSEs on rare event species.

• **Recommendation:** Re-estimate historical catch and effort estimates using this new design.

Priority: Expand the LPS

• **Recommendation:** Expand the LPS throughout the Atlantic HMS region (from Maine to Texas) or add an offshore stratum to existing saltwater recreational fishing surveys to greatly improve collection of HMS recreational data collection throughout a region with a substantial population of HMS anglers.

Priority: Include Atlantic HMS for-hire vessels in Federal for-hire electronic logbook reporting programs.

• **Recommendation:** Continue to work with the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, Southeast Regional Office and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program on planned for-hire electronic logbook reporting programs that will collect adequate data on HMS trips so a separate HMS logbook will not be required for vessels with multiple Federal for-hire permits.

Priority: Reduce the reporting burden placed on anglers

- **Recommendation:** Continue to work with regional partners on the ONE-STOP REPORTING initiative to develop tools that will allow the submission of a single electronic report to satisfy the reporting 26 requirements of multiple jurisdictional authorities to reduce reporting burden. For-hire owners and captains would no longer need to report the same fishing trip to multiple agencies.

Priority: Develop a method of integrating Atlantic HMS catch and effort data from multiple sources (e.g., the LPS, APAIS, the Fishing Effort Survey, and the Greater Atlantic vessel trip reports).

- **Recommendation:** Generate a single unified Atlantic HMS estimate to support greater clarity in management.

Priority: Evaluate the combination of catch card harvest reporting programs with tournament landings reporting programs, as well as the expansion of tournament landings reporting programs.

- **Recommendation:** Require operators of all HMS tournaments to report all species landings to eliminate duplicate reporting and streamline the reporting process.

Priority: Improve and expand data collection on recreational shark fisheries.

- **Recommendation:** Create a more targeted sampling frame for data collection and/or expanding state catch card harvest reporting programs and tournament landings reporting programs.

Priority: Revise the HMS charter/headboat permit category

- **Recommendation:** Distinguish for-hire vessels authorized to fish commercially and recreationally from those that are only authorized to fish recreationally.

Priority: Evaluate opportunities to revise the Large Pelagics Biological Survey

- **Recommendation:** Expand funding so the program can collect data from a broader range of species.

Priority: Improve HMS recreational data collection in the Caribbean.

- **Recommendation:** Continue to work with data partners in the U.S. Caribbean and the MRIP to reestablish the MRIP general surveys in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Gulf Coast Regional Implementation Priorities (Adopted 10/2016)

Priority: Full funding to support base-level general survey sampling.

• **Recommendation:** Provide an additional \$1.4 million in implementation funds (for a total of \$3 million) to support base-level general survey sampling.

Priority: Funding to support LA Creel, Snapper Check, and Tails n’ Scales.

• **Recommendation:** Once LA Creel has earned certification, provide \$1.9 million to support implementation.

• **Recommendation:** If Alabama Snapper Check earns certification, provide \$75,000 to support implementation.

• **Recommendation:** If Tails n’ Scales earns certification, provide \$60,000 to support implementation.

Priority: More timely catch estimates.

• **Recommendation:** Provide monthly catch and effort estimates and reduce lag time for annual catch and effort estimates (esp. for those species that are managed with ACLs).

Priority: Regional, coordinated, supplemental biological sampling program.

• **Recommendation:** Establish a supplemental biological sampling program that provides length and age compositions representative of recreational catch and, where feasible, compatible with existing catch monitoring programs. Note: If it is not feasible to establish a supplemental biological sampling program that is compatible with existing catch monitoring programs, a standalone biological sampling program should be implemented.

• **Recommendation:** Define data standards to ensure biological sampling programs are compatible from state to state and able to provide information to support regional stock assessments.

Priority: For-hire electronic logbook implementation and validation.

• **Recommendation:** Establish a census-style logbook reporting program to collect catch and effort data from the for-hire recreational fishery. Ensure methodologies provide representative and cost-effective data for use in monitoring catch and assessing stocks.

• **Recommendation:** If a census-style for-hire logbook reporting program is implemented, provide funds to support compliance tracking, information validation, and the dockside and at-sea collection of biostatistical information.

Priority: Improved recreational fishery discard data.

• **Note:** To support stock assessments, data should include: numbers of fish discarded; size distribution of discards; depth distribution of discarding; proportions of discards caught with

circle hooks; proportions of discards vented prior to release; and proportions of discards that suffer mortality following release.

- **Recommendation:** Hold a workshop to discuss current methods of collecting discard data, alternative methods of collecting discard data (e.g., at-sea observation of the for-hire fishery), and data standards to support stock assessments.

- **Recommendation:** Pursue the certification of an at-sea for-hire discard monitoring program. Consider collecting complementary data through in-person intercepts so the detailed knowledge of the size distribution and condition of released fish observed in the for-hire fishery can be applied and expanded to anglers fishing from private boats (for whom observer coverage is not feasible).

- **Recommendation:** Provide funds to support the continued conduct of for-hire observer surveys on the Atlantic coast of Florida.

Priority: Improved spatial resolution and technical guidance for post-stratification of estimates.

- **Recommendation:** Provide coordinated guidance on the calibration of post-stratified estimates to support a more uniform stock assessment process at state and regional levels. Regularly revisit the spatial and temporal resolution of the estimation process.

Pacific Coast Regional Implementation Priorities (Adopted 12/2019)

Priority: Maintain and restore base level funding for sampling saltwater recreational anglers and for-hire operators.

- **Recommendation:** Provide funding needed to maintain the current service level and to restore lost base levels of sampling (including new funding for certified programs).

Priority: Implement and support enhanced electronic data collection.

- **Recommendation:** Implement and support electronic data collection applications across all sampling modes.

Priority: Increase on-board sampling.

- **Recommendation:** Expand on-board sampling of commercial passenger fishing vessels or recreational charter boats.

Priority: Investigate and maintain video effort counts.

- **Recommendation:** Explore new, high-tech hardware and software to improve current, round-the-clock monitoring of recreational fishing vessels as they exit harbors to fish the ocean.

Priority: Stratify party charter sampling by trip type and sampling period for Southern California highly migratory fisheries.

- **Recommendation:** California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) – To account for the unique attributes of the HMS fishery, create a separate HMS dockside sampling program.

Priority: Provide improved access to the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) database.

- **Recommendation:** Standardize MRFSS data elements to match the data model of the contemporary RecFIN dataset; leverage the relational structure of the current RecFIN database to create linkage between MRFSS data types; document and provide access to relevant MRFSS metadata; and develop enhanced reporting tools for MRFSS data.

Priority: State calibration of historical catch.

- **Recommendation:** Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) – Comprehensively reconstruct all marine fish recreational ocean boat landings from 1979 to 2001. For this comprehensive reconstruction, four species categories will be reconstructed (rockfish, lingcod, flatfish and miscellaneous), constituting the bulk of the managed marine fish species.

- **Recommendation:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) – Inventory available data, assess formats, standardize electronic formatting of pre-1990 WDFW data, and compare WDFW and MRFSS data to identify the best data sources and develop the most complete dataset possible while eliminating duplication. This may include re-estimation of historical total catch if sufficient data and design documentation allow.

Pacific Islands Regional Implementation Priorities (Adopted 12/2017)

Priority: Expert technical review of the Territorial creel surveys.

- **Recommendation:** Evaluate the statistical rigor of the existing survey designs; identify sources of errors and bias in the catch estimates; identify gaps and needs to improve the catch estimates; evaluate the expansion algorithm (including the estimation of the noncommercial segment of the total catch) and recommend potential improvements.

Priority: Complete the review process and secure MRIP certifications for the recommended regional survey designs.

- **Recommendation:** Review the boat-based and shore-based data collection program in American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); conduct the review in the Territories to ensure reviewers are aware of institutional capabilities and able to craft recommendations appropriate for each area.

Priority: Full funding for the surveys that meet the minimum survey standards for Hawaii, American Samoa, and the Mariana Archipelago.

- **Recommendation:** Hawaii – Provide funds to implement a mail-based alternative to the Coastal Household Telephone Survey; hire additional samplers; and create and host a database and data entry program that will accommodate changes to survey designs.
- **Recommendation:** American Samoa – Provide funds to support a pilot survey to address the spatial and fishery sampling gaps of the current non-commercial creel program.
- **Recommendation:** Guam – Provide funds to purchase electronic devices with photographic capabilities and image analysis software that will help field samplers accurately identify catch to the species level.
- **Recommendation:** CNMI – Provide funds to expand the coverage of the current shore-based creel survey across Saipan and to neighboring islands; support an aerial survey of spearfishermen; and provide technical assistance managing new surveys and consolidating new data streams to produce catch and effort estimates.

Priority: Improved timeliness of non-commercial catch estimates.

- **Recommendation:** Provide funding to support: (a) the development of a tool that will summarize current data holdings and indicate the level of additional data that is needed to attain precision for noncommercial catch estimates, and (b) the hiring of data managers to oversee the timely submission and transcription of data sheets and monitor data collection progress.

U.S. Caribbean Regional Implementation Priorities (Adopted 05/2017)

Priority: Develop a governance structure that will ensure consistent, accurate, and stable staff administration and data collection and management outcomes.

- **Recommendation:** Establish a regional Steering Committee; create a durable, overarching governance structure; develop a centralized personnel management mechanism; and establish a regional data management portal. (Staff retention and compensation are particularly necessary areas of improvement.)

Priority: Design and implement a saltwater recreational fishing data collection program for the U.S. Virgin Islands that is attuned to and functions within the unique character of that island group.

- **Recommendation:** Develop a Fishing Effort Survey frame based on verified contact information for each recreational fishing mode (e.g., shoreline, private boat, for-hire, and tournament); develop an Access Point Angler Intercept Survey register of public fishing sites; develop an angler intercept survey design that provides adequate coverage, accuracy, and consistency within the context of sampler security; develop a tournament sampling

methodology to ensure statistically robust sampling; and, as appropriate, include ecologically and economically important invertebrate species (e.g., queen conch and spiny lobster).

Priority: Refine the existing saltwater recreational fishing data collection program in Puerto Rico to strengthen programmatic oversight and administration and ensure data are being collected from all fishing modes and for all species important to management.

• **Recommendation:** Replace the current Coastal Household Telephone Survey methodology with a Fishing Effort Survey methodology for obtaining effort information; ascertain the importance of alternative shoreline fishing methods (e.g., kayak, jet ski, snorkel, and scuba) to the island's recreational harvest; modify current tournament sampling methodology to ensure statistically robust sampling; and, as appropriate, include ecologically and economically important invertebrate species (e.g., queen conch and spiny lobster).

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