



NEWSCAST

The Newsletter of the Marine Recreational Information Program

**NOAA
FISHERIES**



November 13, 2014

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The Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP, is the way NOAA Fisheries is counting and reporting marine recreational catch and effort. It is a customer-driven initiative that not only produces better estimates, but does so through a process grounded in the principles of transparency, accountability and engagement.

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Improving the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey

NOAA Fisheries is intending to move, within the next few years, to a new MRIP-based method for surveying Atlantic and Gulf Coast saltwater recreational shore and private boat anglers about their fishing trips.

We are making available preliminary findings from an extensive, [multi-year MRIP pilot project](#), which previews a promising new method for surveying saltwater recreational anglers about their trips. The findings indicate mail surveys are likely do a better job of capturing recreational fishing trips (fishing effort) by reaching a broader population of anglers, getting more accurate information from respondents, and delivering higher response rates. Earlier this year, we highlighted the results of the three previous pilot studies that led us to this final project. You can find the final reports for the previous studies at the following links: [2009](#) [2010](#) [2011](#)

The pilot study was conducted across four states (Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, and Florida) and showed that more people report fishing in a mail survey than the telephone survey. Varying by state and fishing mode, mail survey estimates of total effort were 2-6 times higher than the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) estimates that are currently being used to measure fishing effort. This doesn't necessarily mean fishing effort itself has changed, but rather our ability to accurately measure it has. This also does not mean that we have been overfishing or have been underestimating abundance.

We know that our new survey will likely show increases - and in some cases potentially significant increases - in overall fishing effort. Because of the complex relationship between effort estimates and other data that go into determining fishery health, higher effort estimates alone do not necessarily mean that overfishing has or is occurring. In addition, we can't know how the results we've seen from our pilot study, conducted over a limited amount of time and geography, will play out on a larger scale. It will take a minimum of two years before we can determine exactly how the new numbers compare with those from our current survey, and how they fit into the stock assessment - and ultimately management - processes.

Given the implications of this project report, NOAA Fisheries identified members for a [Transition Team](#) that includes experts from state agencies, Regional Fishery Management Councils, Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, and NOAA Fisheries. The charge of the team is to produce a comprehensive transition strategy. The Team's work is just beginning, and will follow a four-step process:

Step 1: State and Regional Input - The Transition Team will work with state and regional data partners and stakeholders to determine their top concerns and priorities with respect to the transition process.

Step 2: Side-by-Side Comparison - NOAA Fisheries will conduct the new mail survey alongside the current coastal telephone survey on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts in 2015 and 2016 (and additional years, if necessary).

Step 3: Calibration - The transition team will develop a method for calibrating the two sets of estimates and use it to adjust historical time series of data, as necessary.

Step 4: Transition - Decision-makers will carefully work the calibrated estimates into fishery stock assessments beginning in 2016. Managers will then begin using the results to set the fishing levels and annual catch limits. This will occur no earlier than 2017.

Only after all four elements have been achieved will we use the estimates from the new methodology in the management process.

We expect to conduct the new mail survey alongside the telephone survey for a minimum of two years to determine how effort estimates using the old and new methodologies compare. The current phone survey will continue to provide shore and private boat recreational fishing effort information for the Atlantic and Gulf coasts for science and management decision-making at least through 2016. We will not fully shift to the new survey method until we are confident that we can explain any differences between estimates, and determine how to integrate the new numbers into stock assessments and catch accounting. Only then will it be appropriate to base management decisions on the revised estimates.

As with any changes to angler surveys, we are unable to predict what differences we will see in effort estimates based on our improved methodology. However, we do know that we'll be doing a better job of contacting more anglers, which ensures that we are collecting better data.

If you would like more information about the pilot project or the Transition Team, MRIP will be hosting a webinar on November 24, 2014 from 2-3pm EST at

<https://noaast.adobeconnect.com/mripstakeholders/>

In the Next Newscast:

Learn what else MRIP has been working on this fall and what we're looking forward to in 2015.

Ask MRIP

Do you have questions about MRIP or our surveys? Ask us and we'll answer your question in an upcoming newsletter. If you've got a question about MRIP that you'd like answered, please e-mail Leah Sharpe at Leah.Sharpe@noaa.gov.