

2006 Saltwater Recreational Fisheries License Report

Introduction

The South Carolina Recreational Fisheries License Program, since its inception in July 1992, has provided significant benefits to the state. Allocated funds continue to support programs, activities and resource management functions that are of great value to the protection, maintenance, enhancement and enjoyment of healthy and diverse marine recreational fisheries, associated fish stocks and marine habitats. The original Marine Recreational Fishing Stamp program was modified in 2002 to give South Carolina resident anglers and out-of-state anglers a variety of license options to choose from. The modification allowed for revenues to double, which provided additional support for activities important to state saltwater recreational anglers.

As of May 2006, approximately 1,283,941 individual saltwater stamps/licenses have been sold to marine recreational anglers over the course of the program's existence. Between 1992 and 2002, over 48,000 individual saltwater fishing stamps have been sold to collectors, and nearly 13,000 prints of the original artwork for these stamps have been sold to art collectors and conservationists. Since July 2005, 106,385 individual saltwater recreational licenses of all available types have been purchased, resulting in the generation of approximately \$1.14 million total, the vast majority of which by law must be used to benefit saltwater recreational fisheries for the state. The following are highlights of the activities, projects and programs carried out by the Marine Resources Division that received support from the Saltwater Recreational Fisheries License Program over this past fiscal year.

2005 Highlights

Artificial Reefs – Seventeen artificial reef construction projects were completed on permitted reef sites along the coast during the year, including the addition of 3 steel hulled boats, 2 steel barges, 500 concrete reef units, 3,000 pieces of concrete culvert pipe, and 50 steel shipping containers. In addition to these activities, over 100,000 tons of concrete rubble from the demolished Cooper River Bridges was placed on 10 different permitted reef sites. Routine monitoring and assessment of numerous reefs was conducted, and 11 new or missing reef buoys were deployed on estuarine and offshore reefs. A new SC artificial reef guide was developed which includes maps as well as coordinates to all the newest reef locations and materials. - \$307K

Marine Fish - SCDNR's Marine Gamefish Tagging Program continues to promote angler ethics and conservation with the support of license-generated funds. Last year, participants tagged 2,124 fish. Information was received from 269 recaptured fish. The top two species tagged and released were red drum and bluefish. A five-year project focused on documenting movement and dispersal patterns of the common dolphin off of South Carolina and along the East Coast was concluded this year. Over the course of this project, a total of 4,919 dolphinfish were tagged and released by 730 different anglers as well as SCDNR biologists. A total of 116 tag recoveries have been reported to date, with movement of individual fish documented from the Florida Straights to Rhode Island, and even into the eastern Atlantic Ocean as far away as the Azores. Another important component in SCDNR's effort to maintain high quality fishing opportunities is our effort to monitor and stock recreationally important species. Staff are assigned to collect size, age and reproductive information from a variety of species. Information is collected using gear designed to catch and record data in a standardized, repeatable fashion using long-lines to catch large adult red drum offshore, trammel nets to catch the smaller juvenile red and black drum,



flounder, sheepshead and seatrout inshore, and electro-shocking in estuarine waters farther upstream. SCDNR fisheries biologists also visit fishing tournaments and manage fish drop-off freezers in several locations where participating anglers can donate specimens for scientific study. Over the past year, staff visited 6 fishing tournaments and obtained useful biological information on 558 fish. Recreational anglers donated 192 additional fish in the freezer program and returned tags from 386 fish tagged by DNR biologists. Another useful and popular program supported through saltwater recreational fisheries license funds is SCDNR's red drum stocking research program. Time and patience are necessary for managing a healthy brood stock and conditioning them to spawn on cue. Larvae that are produced must then be carefully maintained in ponds or tanks, marked with a chemical agent, so they can later be identified as hatchery-raised fish, and then transported to the stocking area. During fall 2005, over 2.2 million red drum were released as part of a license funded activity. Specifically, 767,000 fish were released in the Colleton River, 616,000 fish were released in the North Edisto River and 854,000 fish were released in Winyah Bay. Mean sizes of fish released this year were much larger than those produced and released the previous year. It is expected that these larger fish will exhibit a higher survival rate than those previously stocked. New ways to distinguish between wild and stocked fish are being investigated, using cutting edge genetic techniques, which are beginning to show promise. In addition, a new effort to monitor populations of various species of coastal sharks was continued this year. - \$617K

Oysters - Over 46,620 bushels of shell were planted on 5 public grounds during 2005. Seventeen shell recycling sites, located throughout the coastal zone, continue to serve as collection points for donated shell, allowing the public to participate in oyster reef restoration and enhancement in recreational harvesting areas. SCDNR biologists are also testing new and better ways to enhance and restore local shellfish beds. Researchers are testing different ways to place shell on banks, covering some of the shell with different materials to reduce erosion and are using volunteers to build and monitor oyster reefs in different areas and under different conditions. Shellfish maps are available to the public free of charge by writing: Recreational Shellfish Maps, Shellfish Management Program, SCDNR, P.O. Box 12559, Charleston, SC 29442-2559 or by calling (843) 953-9854 or from the SCDNR Web site (www.dnr.sc.gov), click on "Marine", then "SC Public Shellfish Grounds." - \$376K

Education, Information, Outreach - The saltwater license website ([HTTP://SALTWATERFISHING.SC.GOV](http://SALTWATERFISHING.SC.GOV)) continues to provide the public with updated information on rules and regulations and saltwater fishing related news. The website averages about 30,000 hits per month. The Coastal Informational Distribution System (CIDS) continues to distribute educational publications to numerous tackle shops, fishing piers, and marinas along the coast. The Carolina Coastal Discovery (CCD) Marine Education Program continues to provide vessel and land based education activities operating out of the Marine Resources Division and SCDNR facilities in the Ashepoo-Combahee-Edisto (ACE) Basin, conducting nearly 60 education programs this year.

The CCD Program expanded education initiatives to include new marine animal dissections, a shorebird and waterfowl program, barrier island activities, catch and release angling programs, and a volunteer Monofilament Recycling Program. CCD Program information and application forms are now available online at www.dnr.sc.gov/ccd/ - \$178K

