

2007 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 and out-of-state anglers a variety of license options to choose from. The modification has allowed for revenues to double, which provides additional support for activities important to state saltwater recreational anglers.

As of May 2007, approximately 1,415,457 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 2007, 119,255 individual saltwater recreational licenses of all available types have been purchased, resulting in the generation of approximately \$1.16 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.

FY 2007 Highlights

Artificial Reefs – Nineteen artificial reef construction projects were completed on permitted reef sites along the coast during the year, including the addition of 4 tug boats, 2 deck barges, 600 concrete reef units, 37 armored personnel carriers and 8 reef balls. In addition to these activities, the Cooper River Bridge Demolition Project concluded with 25 additional deployments of material during the past fiscal year. Over 240,000 tons of concrete and steel bridge rubble from the demolished Cooper River Bridges were placed on 12 different permitted reef sites. Additionally, 5,000 tons of smaller sized rubble were placed around the new Mt. Pleasant Observation/Fishing Pier to create an inshore reef accessible to pier anglers. Routine monitoring and assessment of numerous reefs were conducted, and 5 new or missing reef buoys were deployed on estuarine and offshore reefs. The new SC artificial reef guide, which includes detailed maps with coordinate locations, was completed and distributed to numerous tackle and dive shops as well as to various fishing clubs throughout the state. – \$157.6K

Marine Fish – SCDNR's Marine Gamefish Tagging Program continues to promote angler ethics and conservation through the support of license-generated funds. Last year, participants tagged 1,795 fish. Information was received from 225 recaptured fish. The top species tagged and released was red drum, followed by weakfish, reflecting a change in tagging effort toward species where more data are needed. Another important component in SCDNR's effort to maintain high quality fishing opportunities is our effort to monitor recreationally important species. Staff 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 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 4 fishing tournaments and obtained useful biological information on 362 fish. Recreational anglers donated 265 additional fish through the drop-off freezer program, and returned



tags from 523 fish that were tagged by SCDNR 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 so they can later be identified as hatchery-raised fish, and then transported to the stocking area. During FY2007, over 1.9 million red drum were released as part of a license funded project. Specifically, 1,943,905 small juvenile fish were released in the Colleton and North Edisto rivers; 5,000 six to thirteen-inch fish were released at Bennett's Point and Wiggins boat landings; 1,000 thirteen-inch fish were stocked in the Little River Inlet; and 500 legal sized fish (>15 inches) were released in the Ashley River. Non-lethal sampling using cutting edge genetic techniques are being used to distinguish between wild and stocked fish, allowing fish to be caught by other anglers another day. Additionally, this project has expanded its cooperating angler program, which now includes 253 anglers who have produced 750 genetic samples. An effort to monitor populations of various species of coastal sharks was continued this year with sampling conducted from Winyah Bay to Port Royal Sound. The data collected from this project will help increase our understanding of the importance of SC estuaries to maintain healthy stocks of various shark species and the dynamics and movements of these populations. Additionally, a recreational fisheries survey was conducted to learn more about the opinions and attitudes of saltwater license holders towards finfish stocks and regulations. – \$421.7K

Oysters – Over 43,167 bushels of shell were planted on 7 public and state shellfish grounds during FY2007. Eighteen 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. Additionally, license money has helped researchers expand their statewide assessment of oyster recruitment. 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, by calling (843) 953-9854, or from the SCDNR Web site (www.dnr.sc.gov), click on "Marine", then "SC Public Shellfish Grounds." – \$273K



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 75,000 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 90 education programs in FY2007. The CCD Program's education initiatives included marine animal dissections, a shorebird and waterfowl program, barrier island activities, catch and release angling programs, and a volunteer Monofilament Recycling Program. Additionally, CCD helped launch a new Public Event Series to help reflect ongoing research and management projects of the SCDNR, including highlighting various license-funded projects. CCD Program information and application forms are now available online at www.dnr.sc.gov/ccd/ – \$130K