



Supporting Fish & Fishermen

An Introduction to the Magnuson-Stevens
Fishery Conservation and Management Act

This booklet provides an introduction to fishery management in U.S. federal ocean waters, where fishing is primarily managed through the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, also known as the Magnuson-Stevens Act or MSA. Common fishery management terms are referenced in **bolded blue** throughout the text and are defined in the glossary at the end of the booklet. Throughout the booklet, we refer to people who fish as “fishermen,” which is the term preferred by many people in the North American fishing community.



Who is Ocean Conservancy?

Ocean Conservancy is working to protect the ocean from today's greatest global challenges. Together with our partners, we create evidence-based solutions for a healthy ocean and the wildlife and communities that depend on it.

Our Fish Conservation Program has spent decades working with fishermen and lifting up the voices of the communities that depend on our ocean. We work to find practical solutions to today's fishery management challenges to ensure sustainable fishing and healthy coastal communities far into the future.



Contents

Fishing Is an American Tradition and an Important Economic Driver	1
The Basics of U.S. Fishery Management	3
Fifty Years of Bipartisan Cooperation Managing Our Fisheries	5
The Five “Ws” of Fishery Management	7
Science-Based Limits for Long-term Sustainability	9
Bringing Fish Stocks Back from the Brink	11
The Magnuson-Stevens Act is Guided by 10 National Standards	13
What the Magnuson-Stevens Act Does and Does Not Do	14
Conservation and Economic Benefits Go Hand in Hand	15
Securing a Sustainable Future for U.S. Fisheries Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act	17
Glossary	19
References	20

Fishing Is an American Tradition...

History is often told as the story of a land, but arguably whole chapters of our nation's history are stories of water. Our vast oceans, teeming with fish like cod, herring, mackerel and salmon, support the families, businesses, communities and traditions of people living here. Fishing is an important part of life for many people and cultures. American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander people have thousands of years of fishing traditions. Commercial fishermen can spend weeks at sea to bring in a fresh catch. Recreational fisherman may spend just a few days each year trying to catch the big one. And for many of us, having fish for dinner is one of the few remaining connections to the wild-caught natural resources of our nation. When fisheries are sustainable, they can support both the needs of people and the health of the ocean.

It has not always been smooth sailing for our fisheries. Historic **overfishing** led to failing fishing ports and businesses. Fishermen, working with fishery managers and scientists, sacrificed and worked hard to bring our fisheries back. Over time, the United States has built a strong system to manage our fisheries that shows that fish can rebound when we give them a chance. Many fisheries have improved over the last few decades, but new challenges make it clear that the status quo isn't sufficient to keep fish at abundant levels that support communities and marine ecosystems.

We depend on fish, and so does the ocean. It's our responsibility to manage fisheries sustainably in order to build a more vibrant future for the ocean and ensure generations to come can continue our nation's fishing traditions.

Fisheries form an important part of our economy. Commercial and recreational fishing generated over **\$321 billion in sales impacts** and supported **2.3 million jobs** in 2022.

A "**fishery**" can mean lots of things: the fish that are caught, the act of fishing, and the people who fish.



...and an Important Economic Driver

TYPES OF FISHING



Commercial

These fishermen fish with the intent of selling their catch for profit and as a livelihood. Commercial fishing operations can vary in size from a family-run operation on a small vessel to an operation with an entire fleet of vessels that belong to a large corporation.



Recreational — For-hire

Captains and crew make a living by taking people out fishing. Large headboats charge per individual, while charter captains reserve their boat for a small private group.



Recreational — Private Anglers

These fishermen catch fish primarily for entertainment and cannot sell their catch.



Subsistence

This type of fishing refers to a way of life that includes fishing, hunting, gathering and related activities which are integral to food security, culture and economic well-being. Most subsistence fishing is not directly managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, but many aspects of federal fishery management have impacts on subsistence species and users.



The Basics of U.S. Fishery Management

Conserving our fish and eating them too

THE VISION

Healthy fish populations and resilient ocean ecosystems that support sustainable fishing, thriving fishing-related businesses, recreational opportunities and cultural practices and deliver nutritious food to the tables of people across America and the world.

HOW WE GET THERE

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

First signed in 1976 and reauthorized twice, the Magnuson-Stevens Act is the landmark law that guides the long-term sustainable use of our ocean fish resources. The law is guided by three key objectives:

1. It supports fishing businesses and sustainable fishing opportunities (see page 15).
2. It paves the way to ending **overfishing** in our waters using **annual catch limits** (see page 9).
3. It oversees the **rebuilding** of U.S. fisheries that are in poor condition (see page 11).

“Fishery resources are finite but renewable. If placed under sound management before overfishing has caused irreversible effects, the fisheries can be conserved and maintained.”

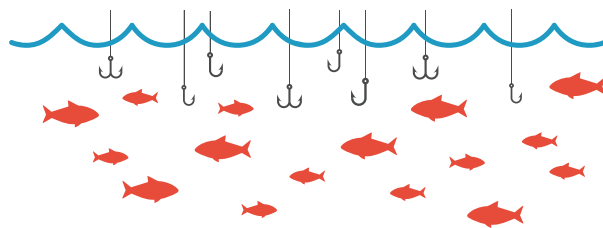
The Magnuson-Stevens Act

The Magnuson-Stevens Act works by establishing science-based management principles that are guided by the 10 National Standards (see page 13). **Regional fishery management councils** develop plans based on these principles that are designed to meet regional needs, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Marine Fisheries Service (also called NMFS or NOAA Fisheries) reviews and implements these plans to meet conservation and management goals.

SUSTAINABLE, SCIENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT IS DESIGNED TO PREVENT:

Overfishing of a fish stock.

Overfishing occurs when a stock is caught at a rate that is too high to be sustainable. Overfishing is associated with many negative outcomes, including an overfished stock.



An overfished stock.

Overfished refers to the size of a stock. An overfished stock has a size that is too low and jeopardizes its ability to ensure sustainable yields in the future.



To put it in banking terms, overfishing is like taking more out of an account than is going in. Eventually, when savings are spent down, the fish stock will become overfished, similar to bankruptcy.



I was impressed from the start at how [the Magnuson-Stevens Act] emerged from a bipartisan partnership: Senators Magnuson and Stevens working together. It confirmed for me that people are meant to work together.”

Erv DeSmet, Angler
Woodinville, WA

NOAA Fisheries

NOAA is the federal agency charged with managing fisheries in federal ocean waters. Ultimately, the secretary of commerce has the authority and responsibility to manage fisheries under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

The arm of NOAA that carries out management is NOAA Fisheries. NOAA Fisheries carries out science to support management, writes and implements regulations, and works in other areas that affect fish, such as habitat restoration. It coordinates with the **regional fishery management councils** and other regional and international management bodies.

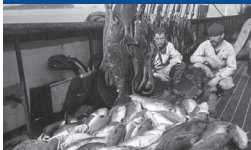
Fifty Years of Bipartisan Cooperation Managing Our Fisheries

SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL

American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have harvested fish and other marine resources utilizing traditional harvest and management methods.

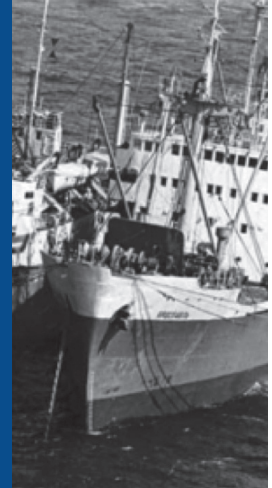
BEFORE 1950s

Ocean resources were considered by many to be inexhaustible. There were few limits on fishing.



1950s-1970s

After World War II, commercial fishing boomed due to new technology and larger vessels. Fishermen could travel farther offshore, where there were few federal regulations to manage catch. At the same time, large foreign vessels capable of catching vast quantities of fish moved closer to U.S. shores. As domestic catch began to dwindle, concerns grew over the impact of fishing on fish stocks.



1950

1960

1970

Major milestones of the Magnuson-Stevens Act ➤

1976

To prevent foreign fishing fleets from taking fish near American shores, Congress passed the bipartisan Fishery Conservation & Management Act. Spearheaded by Senators Ted Stevens (R-AK) and Warren Magnuson (D-WA), the Act:

- Balanced conservation and **fishery** development.
- Established a 200-mile zone to protect domestic fisheries.
- Called for sustainable management to prevent **overfishing**.



Photo credit: Stevens Foundation

1980s-1990s

As domestic fisheries developed, intensive fishing caused many fish stocks to continue to decline.



1996-2006

Despite improvements in the law, fish stocks made only modest gains, in part because managers could ignore scientific advice and there was little accountability for excessive fishing.

2007-PRESENT

Requiring science-based management and annual catch limits was a breakthrough that led to the rebuilding of dozens of stocks. Many fisheries are healthier now than they were in previous decades, but progress has started to stall. New challenges threaten the sustainability of fishery resources.

1980

1990

2000

2010

1980

The Fishery Conservation and Management Act was renamed the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act after Senator Magnuson.

1996

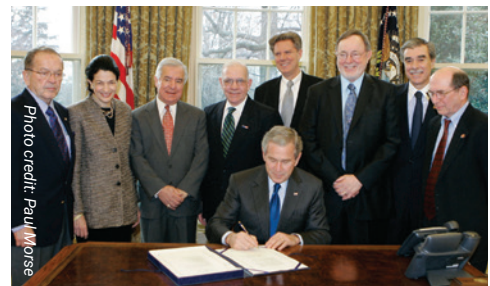
Recognizing fish stocks were continuing to decline, Congress passed the Sustainable Fisheries Act to reauthorize and strengthen the law, renaming it the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to honor continued bipartisanship. The Magnuson-Stevens Act:

- Added provisions for the timely **rebuilding** of fish stocks.
- Strengthened management to define and end **overfishing** immediately.

2006

In response to continued overfishing, Congress again reauthorized the Magnuson-Stevens Act. President Bush signed the bill into law in early 2007. The Act:

- Required managers to set **annual catch limits** at or below what is suggested by the best available science.
- Added **accountability measures** for exceeding fishing limits.



The Five “Ws” of Fishery Management

At its core, fishery management is about ensuring we have plenty of fish now and in the future by balancing the number of fish in the sea with what is caught by fishermen.


WHAT is managed?


We manage how many fish are caught and killed each year. This means accounting for the health of the stock in the water, considering the impacts of fishing on other components of the ecosystem, and implementing measures that influence the amount of fishing that takes place. Management is about sustaining both the fish and the **fishery**, so management is designed to achieve environmental, economic and social goals.

WHY do we manage?

It's simple: We manage to ensure we have enough fish to continue to enjoy all the social and economic benefits of healthy fisheries now and in the future. Management brings stability and accountability into fisheries, and helps address tough questions around sharing the fish, which are a public resource.

506 
stocks managed

8.4 billion
 pounds landed
commercially

437 million
fish landed as part of
recreational fishing 

**All numbers are from 2022 or 2023,
the most recent data available.*



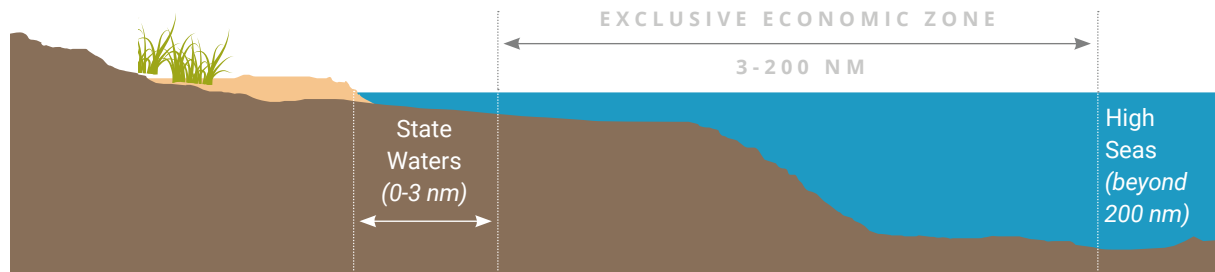
Photo credit: Stephen Marnot

WHEN do we manage?

Management happens year-round and must be frequently reassessed and adjusted to ensure the long-term health of our stocks. Fishing seasons are opened and closed, annual sustainable limits on catch are set, and data on fisheries are collected regularly to support good management. The overall goal of management is the long-term health of stocks and the ecosystem that can provide the greatest benefit to the nation. **Overfished** stocks are put in **rebuilding** plans to bring them back to healthy levels.

WHERE do we manage?

The Magnuson-Stevens Act manages fishing that takes place in waters generally between 3 and 200 nautical miles (nm) offshore in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ). States manage fisheries within 3 nm of the shore* in coordination with other states and federal agencies. Beyond 200 nm are international waters, which are known as the "high seas," and are managed by the international community, including the U.S.

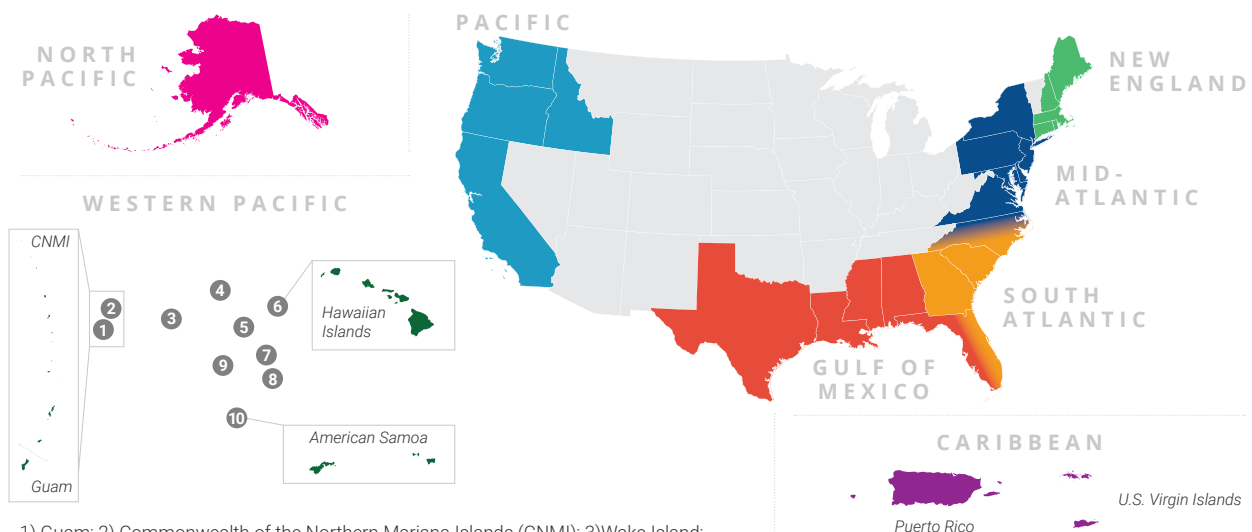


* Some state water boundaries extend to 9 nm offshore.

Source: National Energy Education Development Project (public domain)

WHO are the managers?

The Magnuson-Stevens Act established a unique management structure with eight **regional fishery management councils** that are charged with developing **fishery management plans** and sustainable management measures for fisheries in their jurisdictions. The councils are comprised of regional fishermen, industry representatives, federal and state managers, scientists and NGOs, and, in some regions, Tribal representatives. Aside from federal and state managers, most council members are nominated by the governor of their state and are appointed by the secretary of commerce. To manage effectively, councils are advised by several auxiliary groups, including advisory panels, management teams and Scientific and Statistical Committees, which are made up of expert scientists. Management decisions made by the councils go to the secretary of commerce and NOAA Fisheries for approval (or disapproval) and implementation.



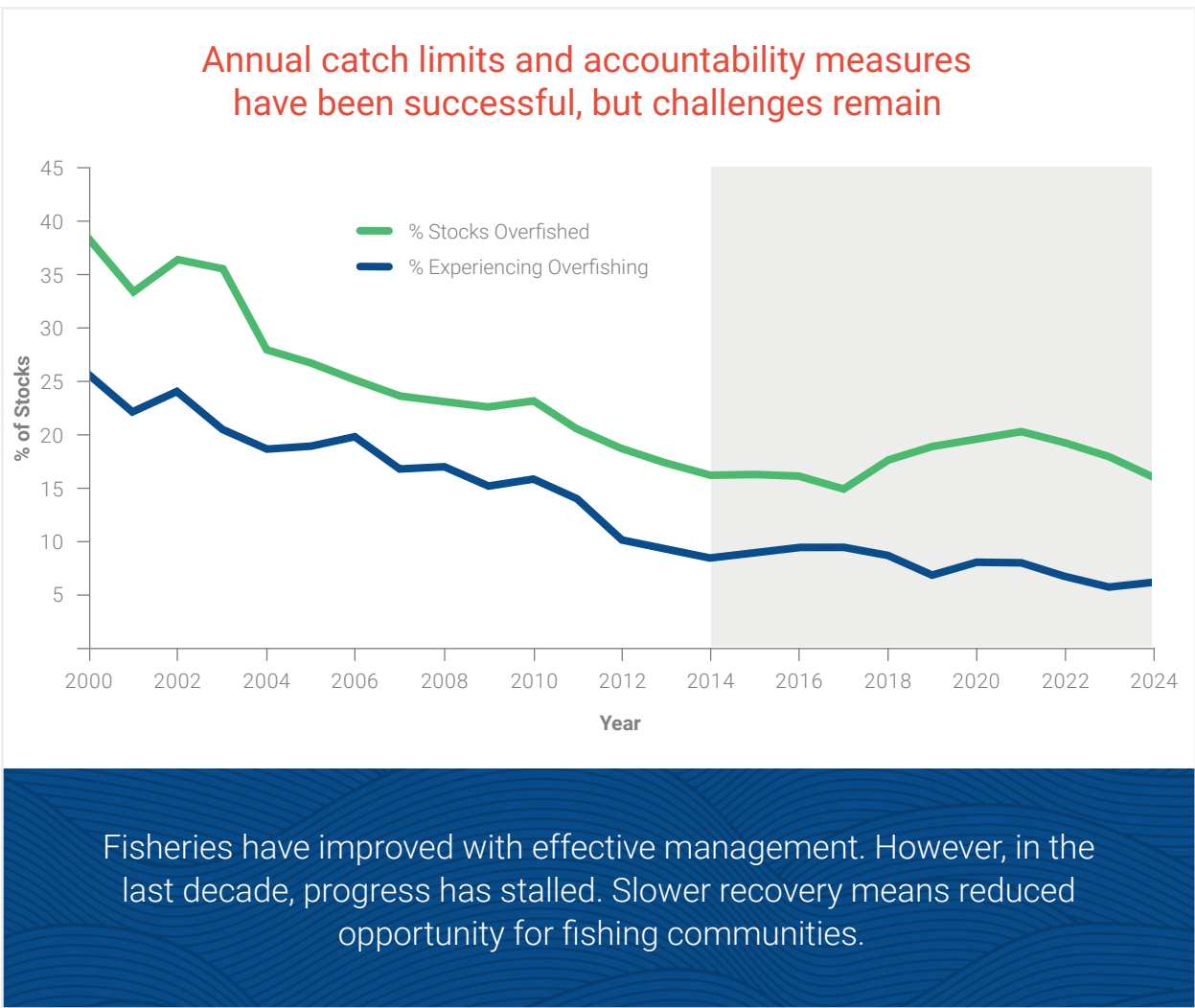
1) Guam; 2) Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); 3) Wake Island; 4) Midway Atoll; 5) Johnston Island; 6) Hawaiian Islands; 7) Palmyra Atoll and Kingman Reef; 8) Jarvis Island; 9) Baker and Howland Islands; 10) American Samoa

Source: U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils

Science-Based Limits For Long-Term Sustainability

Science plays an essential role in how fisheries are managed. Each year, the **regional fishery management councils** work with their science advisors to determine the sustainable amount of fish that can be caught and killed. This limit, the **annual catch limit** (ACL), is the fundamental conservation tool in the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Fishing is regulated to avoid exceeding that limit, as exceeding the ACL could result in **overfishing**. Overfishing harms the long-term health of the stock and leads to more restrictive management measures and less stability for fishermen over time. As of 2024, 23 stocks were experiencing overfishing and 16 stocks were overfished.

If catch overages happen, managers must implement **accountability measures** to ensure the health of the stock is not significantly affected. This could include restricting fishing in the next year to allow the stock to reproduce. In some cases, accountability measures apply only to the sector of fishing (e.g., commercial fishermen or private anglers) that had the overage. That way, sectors that are fishing responsibly are not penalized. However, fishermen are all in this together. If one sector regularly overfishes, the access and catch will be impacted for all fishermen.



The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires **regional fishery management councils** to set ACLs at levels that provide the greatest overall benefit to the nation. This means managers consider trade-offs between social, economic and ecological factors, take uncertainty into account, and set fishing levels that aim to achieve long-term sustainability for both fish and fishermen. ACLs aren't meant to be inherently restrictive. They reflect the reality of the health of the stock and management objectives. The Magnuson-Stevens Act does not dictate the management approaches that councils should use to achieve an ACL, just that fishing should not be allowed to exceed this sustainable limit.

DEMYSTIFYING STOCK STATUS

NOAA Fisheries reports annually to Congress on the health of our **fish stocks**. This table decodes the terms used in those updates. Overfishing occurs when a stock is caught at a rate that is too high to be sustainable, and an overfished stock has a size that is too low and jeopardizes its ability to ensure sustainable yields in the future. Stocks can be one of four combinations of states when it comes to overfished and overfishing.

		Rate of Fishing	
		No overfishing	Overfishing
Size of Stock	Not Overfished	Fish stock is healthy and being fished at sustainable levels	Fish stock is healthy, but too many fish are being caught
	Overfished	Fish stock is at a smaller size than is sustainable, but the rate of fishing is not too high	Fish stock is at an unhealthy size and too many fish are being caught



My fishing guide business and that of other charter captains relies on having enough fish in the water. We need a strong [Magnuson-Stevens Act] with strong annual catch limits to ensure an abundance of fish in the water for all of us to catch for many generations.”

Capt. Abbie Schuster
Kismet Outfitters
Martha's Vineyard & Maine

Bringing Fish Stocks Back from the Brink

What happens when a **fish stock** is **overfished**? Thanks to a 1996 revision to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, managers are required to develop a plan to rebuild it back to sustainable levels.

These plans typically achieve **rebuilding** by reducing fishing during the rebuilding period, which can take just a few years or stretch for decades. Fifty-one fish stocks have been rebuilt since 2000; much of that progress has been made since 2007, when new requirements for catch limits and **accountability measures** helped achieve the levels of fishing called for rebuilding plans.

There is a common trade-off managers face when they must decide how quickly to rebuild a stock: Faster rebuilding could cause more economic impact in the short term but result in better outcomes in the long term. The Magnuson-Stevens Act calls for plans to set a rebuilding period that is as short as possible and considers biology, environmental conditions, and the need for coordination with international management.

There is a misconception that the law requires all rebuilding plans to be 10 years or shorter; in fact, most current plans (50%) are longer than 10 years, and some plans are as long as 100 years. While rebuilding is a powerful tool for sustainable fisheries, there are still many challenges with stocks failing to rebuild even while in a rebuilding plan. Eight stocks that are currently rebuilding are in their second plan after the first one failed, and two stocks are in their third plan (as of 2023). Other plans have been either revised or extended.

REBUILDING HAS MANY BENEFITS

Rebuilt stocks often mean:



More opportunities
and access for fishermen.



Benefits for the ecosystem.



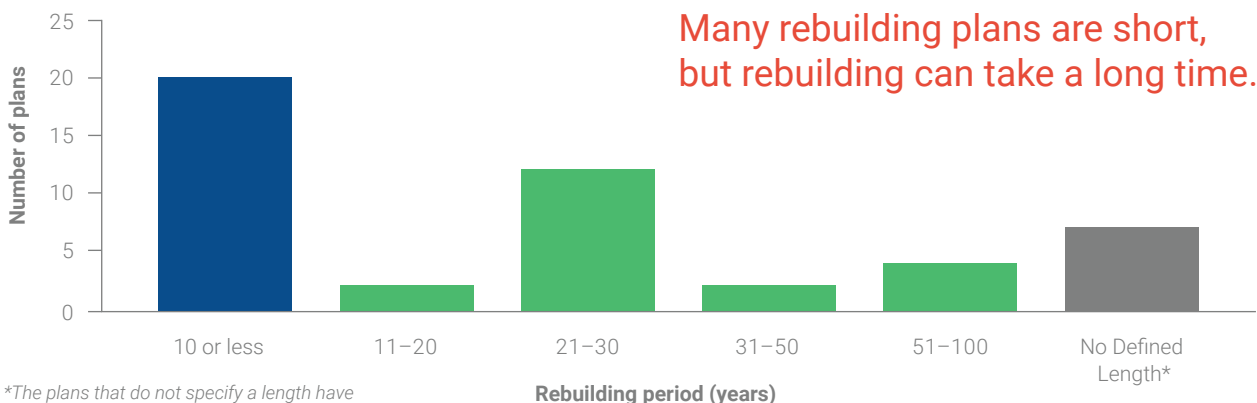
More stability
and less risk of fishery collapse.



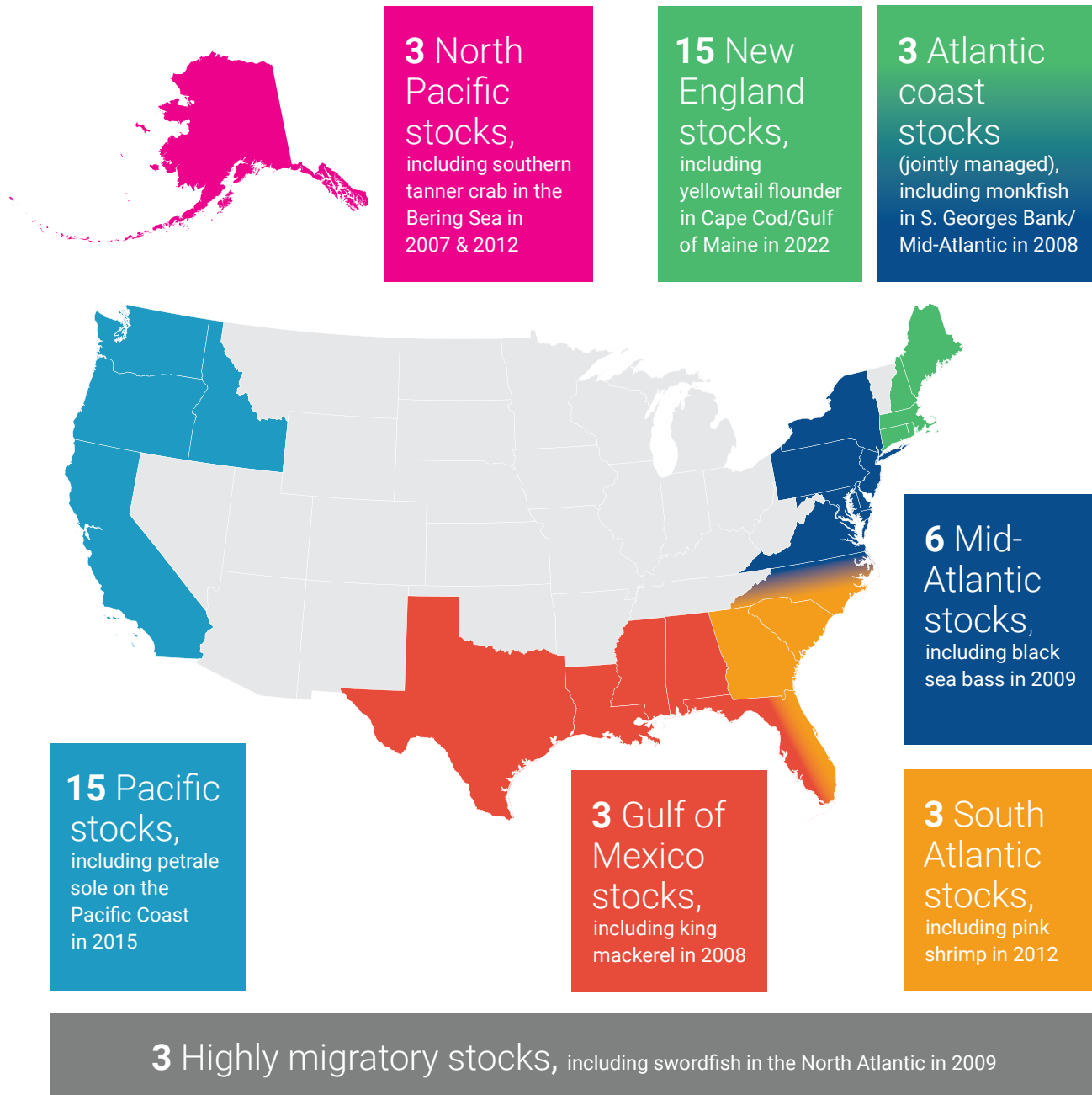
Greater availability
for seafood consumers.



Net economic benefits for coastal communities.



Since 2000, 51 fish stocks have been rebuilt back to healthy stock sizes.



*As of December 31, 2024.

Once a stock is rebuilt, sustainable management must continue to avoid a stock becoming overfished once again. Of the 51 stocks that have been rebuilt, 11 have become overfished again and needed another rebuilding plan.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act Is Guided by 10 National Standards

In addition to setting **annual catch limits** and **rebuilding** requirements, the Magnuson-Stevens Act guides management by establishing the National Standards. According to these ten principles, the most effective fishery management requires managers to:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| NS 1. Optimum yield | Prevent overfishing while maintaining sustainable fisheries for the long term. |
| NS 2. Science | Use the best scientific information available. |
| NS 3. Stock units | Manage stocks as a unit when it makes sense. |
| NS 4. Allocation | Set allocations of fishing quota among different users and states that are fair and equitable, promote conservation and avoid consolidation. |
| NS 5. Utilization | Use the fish resource efficiently, but not with economic allocation as its sole purpose. |
| NS 6. The unexpected | Plan for things like uncertainty, variation and disasters. |
| NS 7. Efficiency | Minimize costs of regulation and avoid duplication. |
| NS 8. Fishing communities | Consider fishing communities, aiming for sustained participation and minimization of adverse economic impacts. |
| NS 9. Bycatch | Minimize how many fish are caught unintentionally and how many of those fish die. |
| NS 10. Safety | Promote the safety of human life at sea. |

Paraphrased from 16 U.S.C. § 1851(a)(1-10).















Photo credit: Patricia Chambers

What the Magnuson-Stevens Act Does and Does Not Do

The Magnuson-Stevens Act isn't prescriptive when it comes to the tools councils can use to manage their **fish stocks**. Managers can use many different approaches, including size, bag and trip limits; habitat restrictions; season lengths; permits; individual allocations or catch shares; fishing rates and other options to manage sustainably.

Successful management means removing the amount of fish that provides the most benefit to the nation after considering environmental, economic and social factors — referred to as **optimum yield**. Managers determine the optimum yield for each stock, a value that can't exceed the largest amount of fish that can be caught without jeopardizing the sustainability of the stock (the **maximum sustainable yield**). So long as managers are meeting the science-based standards for management, **fishery management plans** can take many approaches to achieve sustainability and support fishing.

What the Magnuson-Stevens Act does:	What the Magnuson-Stevens Act does <i>NOT</i> do:
 Requires fishery management to be consistent with the 10 National Standards.	 Does not specify which type of management should be used for a given fishery.
 Requires using science-based annual catch limits and accountability measures to prevent overfishing.	 Does not specify where science and data come from. Information used in management can come from many sources.
 Requires that overfished stocks be rebuilt in as short an amount of time as possible.	 Does not require all overfished stocks to be rebuilt within 10 years.
 Requires management plans to specify criteria that can be used to manage the fishery, like maximum sustainable yield, optimum yield, and definitions for overfishing and overfished.	 Does not specify what to consider in optimum yield. If the fishery has specific social priorities (e.g., managing for localized abundance) those could be considered in the weighing of trade-offs to determine optimum yield.
 Requires that allocations of quota are fair and equitable among users while considering conservation.	 Does not lock in quota allocations between states or sectors.
 Requires identification of essential fish habitats and minimization of the adverse impacts of fishing, as well as consultation with federal agencies when non-fishing actions could affect those habitats.	 Does not mandate establishment of areas closed to fishing or prohibit specific uses of habitats or areas.

Conservation and Economic Benefits Go Hand in Hand

The economic stability of many coastal communities depends in large part on healthy ocean ecosystems that provide a steady, healthy supply of fish.

The economic impact of fishing extends far beyond just recreational and commercial fishermen. For example, fish processors and packagers rely on commercial fishing. In many coastal areas, recreational fishing is a major driver of tourism revenues for local dining and lodging establishments. Subsistence fishermen depend on healthy fish as a primary source of food and culture. The impact of fishing also carries inland. Restaurants across the country serve sustainable, wild-caught U.S. seafood. And fishing gear and boat manufacturers nationwide provide consumer goods to coastal fishermen.

Conservation and economic benefits go hand in hand. The strong science-based fishery management system established in the Magnuson-Stevens Act supports the commercial and recreational fishing industries and the wider economic activity they generate. These connections between fishing and many industries, communities and people means that significant disruptions and ocean changes due to climate change that threaten the stability of fisheries will also have broader impacts.

Commercial and recreational fisheries in the U.S. generated **2.3 million jobs**, almost **\$321 billion in sales impacts**, and **\$148.9 billion in value-added impacts** throughout the national economy in 2022.

Quick facts

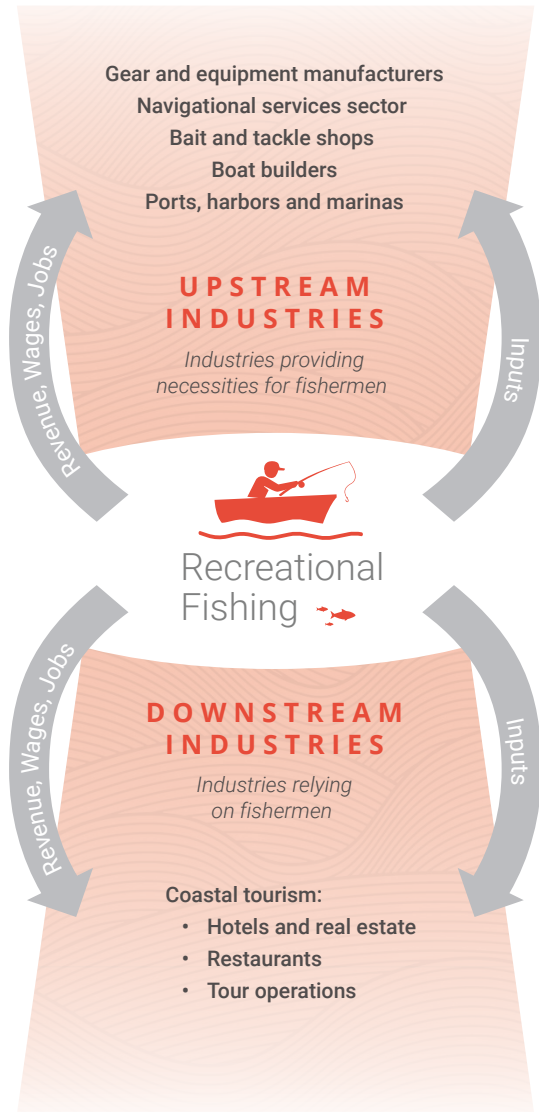
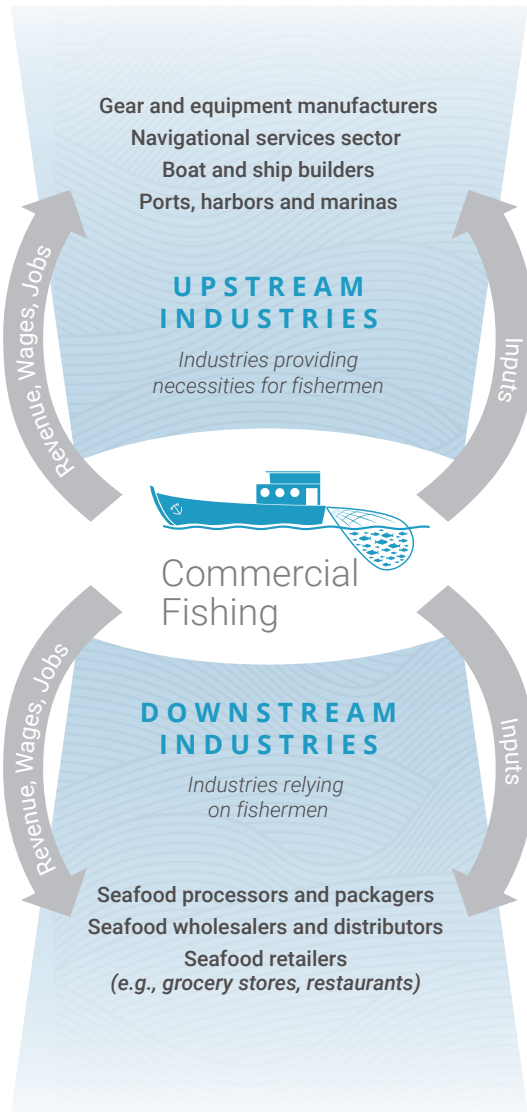
Anglers took **201 million saltwater fishing trips** in 2022 and spent **\$72.3 billion on recreational trips** and durable goods equipment for fishing.

Over **20 million pounds of fish** were taken for subsistence in rural Alaska in 2018.

150 fishing ports in the U.S. had over 1 million pounds of fish landed and/or greater than \$1 million in revenue in 2023.

Commercial landings revenues in the U.S. totaled **\$5.9 billion** in 2022.

The Marine Fishing Economy



The healthier the resource,
the healthier the economics
of our business.”

Capt. Bill Tucker
Commercial Reef Fish Fisherman
Dunedin, FL



Securing a Sustainable Future for U.S. Fisheries Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act

The Magnuson-Stevens Act has always been about balance: between conservation and resource development, between local needs and national principles, and among the diverse stakeholders that rely on and enjoy fishing and fish. Over time, Congress has improved the law, but there is more to be done to secure a positive future for our oceans, fish and fishing communities.

Managing fisheries is a big and complex task, and challenges remain. Our fisheries continue to face long-standing management issues, such as successfully recovering rebuilding stocks, maintaining progress on ending overfishing, and ensuring decision making supports fishing communities. Now, there are new challenges that are putting additional pressure on the management system. Climate change is causing fish distributions to shift, making fisheries less productive, and contributing to extreme events that cause widespread ecosystem and fishery disruptions; these impacts affect every facet of management. Past improvements to the Magnuson-Stevens Act have addressed many challenges not originally considered, and the law is a framework we can continue to build on to address these new and old challenges and move forward on the path to sustainable and productive fisheries.



Photo credit: Peter Mangolds

Glossary

Fishery management is full of terms that are commonly used but can be confusing. Here are a few important terms.

- **Annual Catch Limit (ACL):** The amount of fish (usually for one species in one region) that can be caught sustainably by fishermen over a period of one year. This amount can't exceed the scientific limit determined by experts using the best available science.
- **Accountability Measure (AM):** A management measure that provides accountability for a fishery to stay within its annual catch limit. Examples of accountability measures include modifications to bag and gear limits, area closures and payback provisions, where if the catch limit is exceeded in one year, the next year's quota would be reduced by the overage.
- **Bycatch:** Caught or discarded animals that fishermen do not want, cannot sell or are not allowed to keep. Bycatch includes fish, marine mammals, sea turtles and seabirds that become hooked or entangled in fishing gear unintentionally and can be injured or killed. NOAA Fisheries refers to bycatch as "discarded catch of marine species and unobserved mortality due to a direct encounter with fishing vessels and gear."
- **Fishery:** One or more stocks of fish that can be treated as a unit for purposes of conservation and management and which are identified based on geographic, scientific, technical, recreational and economic characteristics; a fishery can also refer to fishing for such stocks.
- **Fishery Management Plan (FMP):** These plans are required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act for any species that require conservation and management. An FMP includes background, data and analysis for a stock or stock complex; descriptions and considerations of the fishing fleet; and management measures.
- **Fish stock:** Species, geographical grouping or other category of fish capable of being managed as a unit. A fish stock may be one or several species. The law includes finfish, invertebrates, and other marine animal and plant life under the term "fish," while excluding marine mammals and birds.
- **Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY):** The highest possible catch, usually of a single species, that can be sustainably taken over time by keeping the stock at the level producing maximum growth. MSY depends on environmental conditions, the biology of the stock, and the distribution of catch among fleets.
- **Optimum Yield (OY):** The amount of fish that can be caught of a managed species that will provide the greatest overall benefit to the nation with respect to food production and recreational opportunities. The OY is based on the maximum sustainable yield reduced by any relevant social, economic or ecological factors, and is the ultimate goal for management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
- **Overfishing:** When the annual rate of catch is too high to be sustainable. Overfishing reduces the resource and jeopardizes the health of the stock and the long-term stability and profitability of fishing activities.
- **Overfishing Limit (OFL):** The maximum amount of a fish stock that can be caught in a year without resulting in overfishing.
- **Overfished:** When the stock size is too small to ensure sustainable yields in the future. Overfished stocks need to be rebuilt in order to support healthy ecosystems, profitable businesses and recreational access. In most cases, fishing continues on overfished stocks while they are rebuilding.
- **Rebuilding:** The process of increasing the abundance of a fish stock that is overfished or was overfished to the target stock size that supports sustainable catch. When a stock reaches this target, it is considered rebuilt.
- **Regional Fishery Management Councils:** These eight councils are responsible for the fisheries that require conservation and management in their region. Council members represent the commercial and recreational fishing sectors, in addition to environmental, academic and government interests. Councils write fishery management plans, which are approved (or disapproved) and implemented by NOAA Fisheries.

Key Provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act

Provisions	United States Code	Magnuson-Stevens Act
National Standards	16 U.S.C. § 1851(a)(1-10)	Section 301(a)(1-10)
How the regional councils work	16 U.S.C. § 1852	Section 302
Contents of fishery management plans	16 U.S.C. § 1853	Section 303
Annual catch limits and accountability measures to prevent overfishing	16 U.S.C. § 1853(a)(15) 16 U.S.C. § 1852(h)(6)	Section 303(a)(15) Section 302(h)(6)
Rebuilding overfished stocks	16 U.S.C. § 1854(e)	Section 304(e)

References

PAGES 1-2

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2022. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-248B. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/fisheries-economics-united-states>.

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Status of Stocks 2023: Annual Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/status-stocks-2023>.

PAGES 3-4

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Public Law 94-265 (1976) as amended by Public Law 109-479 (2006), 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

PAGES 5-6

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Public Law 94-265 (1976), 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006, Public Law 190-479 (2007).

Senate Report No. 109-229 to accompany S. 2012 (April 4, 2006). Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/109th-congress/senate-report/229/1>.

Sustainable Fisheries Act, Public Law 104-297 (1996).

Warren G. Magnuson, The Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976: First Step

Toward Improved Management of Marine Fisheries. 52 Wash. L. Rev. 427,428 (1977).

PAGES 7-8

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Fisheries of the United States, 2022. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Current Fishery Statistics No. 2022. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-2022>.

PAGES 9-10

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Status of Stocks 2023.

PAGES 11-12

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Fishery Stock Status Quarterly Updates: Rebuilt Stocks as of December 31, 2024. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2025-01/Q4-2024-rebuilt-list.pdf>.

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Status of Stocks 2023.

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Fish Stocks in Rebuilding Plans in 2023: A Trend Analysis. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2024-04/2023-SOS-TrendsAnalysis.pdf>.

Sustainable Fisheries Act, Public Law 104-297 (1996).

PAGES 13-14

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

PAGE 15

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2022.

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Fisheries of the United States, 2022.

National Marine Fisheries Service (2025). Fisheries One Stop Shop: Top Ports, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/foss>.

Brown, C.B., Fall, J.A., et al. 2021. Alaska Subsistence and Personal Use Salmon Fisheries 2018 Annual Report. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Technical Paper No. 484. Available at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/techpap/TP484.pdf>.

PAGE 17

National Marine Fisheries Service (2024). Status of Stocks 2023.

Link, J.S., Griffis, R, and S. Busch (editors). (2015). NOAA Fisheries Climate Science Strategy. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Tech Memo NMFS-F/SPO-155, 70p.

BACK COVER

Warren G. Magnuson, The Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976: First Step Toward Improved Management of Marine Fisheries. (1977).

“The greatness of nations is founded on abundant natural resources. The endurance of great nations depends upon how wisely they manage those resources.”

Senator Warren Magnuson



OCEANCONSERVANCY.ORG