Posted on **Mar 27, 2014** in [**Top Shots**](http://www.sportfishingmag.com/blogs/top-shots)**,** [**fisheries law**](http://www.sportfishingmag.com/tags/fisheries-law)**,** [**magnuson-stevens**](http://www.sportfishingmag.com/tags/magnuson-stevens)**,** [**recreational fishing and boating industry**](http://www.sportfishingmag.com/tags/recreational-fishing-and-boating-industry)

The Year of Recognition for Recreational Fishing

by Doug Olander



[Enlarge Photo](http://www.sportfishingmag.com/files/imagecache/enlarged_image/_images/201403/family%20fishing%20%28CW%29.jpg)

Chris Woodward

Yesterday morning, I listened in (I was invited, btw, not eavesdropping) to a National Press Club event. The topic: “Saltwater Recreational Fishing’s Future,” a report signed off by some big names in angling who spoke at this briefing, notably John L. Morris, founder of Bass Pro Shops and Scott Deal, president of Maverick Boats.

What’s at stake for *you* — assuming by virtue of your reading this that you are, most probably, a recreational-fishing enthusiast — is huge. That’s because an impressively unified recreational fishing-boating industry is working very hard to make changes in how this nation’s fisheries are managed.

The fundamental motivation stems from the all-too-well-documented management processes and protocols based on commercial fishing and fisheries. Traditionally, that’s been the focus of the National Marine Fisheries Service, as an arm of the Commerce Department, from the very first Magnuson-Stevens legislation in 1976 — when the situation was vastly different than today (and a major goal was reducing foreign-fishing-fleet catch in our waters).

That focus has changed somewhat in recent years as the message that sport fishing, more than just a hobby, represents a significant economic driver in this country (with saltwater angling alone generating $70 billion/year, according to government figures). But not enough: In short, fisheries management in the United States has simply not caught up to the reality of how important (in part as coastal populations soar), saltwater angling has become.

One critical example cited in the press briefing is *how we allocate our limited fish stocks*. For the most part, federal allotments that dole out specific percentages to commercial and recreational sectors year after year have been locked in place for decades, based on formulas and situations often obsolete — formulated in a time very different from the world as it is today. But re-allocating stocks is a sticky business and, so far, our federal fishery management councils have dragged their feet.

When re-allocations are considered, in most cases, the sport of fishing stands to gain precisely because things have changed. And that will be particularly true if the *economic impacts* of fishing, both commercial and recreational, are taken into account (as they should be, and as recreational-fishing interests and advocates are pushing for).

The reason all this is so very timely *now* has to do with what’s known as the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act; the actual title is a bit longer but, bottom line, is that this is the nation’s blueprint for managing it’s marine fisheries. And this year it’s up for being recast by Congress to reflect a changing world and ways the act can be improved going forward.

The big concern: Recreational fishing will (again) be lost in the shuffle, and changes that *should* be considered will be overlooked in the reauthorization of this vital legislation determining the direction of fisheries management for years to come.

That’s why the big push now: As federal legislators start working on the language of a reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens bill, it’s vital that this time around our voice is heard and recreational fisheries does not yet again become an afterthought. This time we have more savvy and committed interests on The Hill who’ll be doing their best to make sure that management strategies are not based exclusively or primarily on commercial fishing.

At some point, the 11 million saltwater anglers in this country will be called upon to actively support those efforts. Hopefully we’ll all be ready to do just that.