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Regional Management of Fisheries

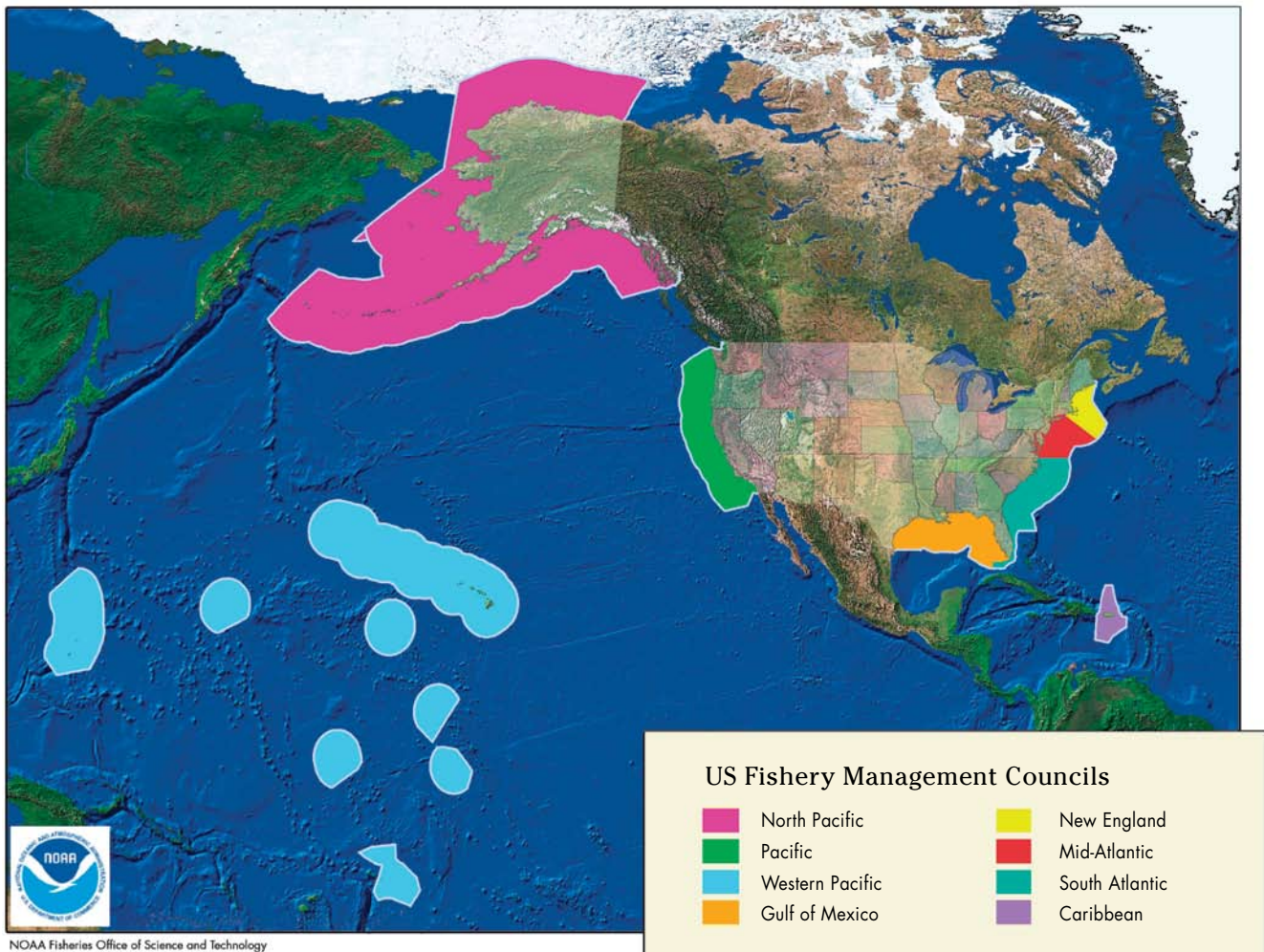
Unlike forestry, mining, and many other natural resource industries, fisheries cannot be effectively managed by a single State or Federal entity. Fisheries differ a great deal across the country. For example, Western Pacific fisheries focus on pelagic and migratory fish stocks such as tuna, which require international management. In the South Atlantic, fisheries provide recreational opportunities for millions of people. In the North Pacific, high volume commercial fisheries target crabs, salmon, and groundfish such as pollock.

To address these regional differences, the Regional Fishery Management Council system was created in 1976 with the passage of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The unique Council system was designed to allow regional, participatory governance by knowledgeable people with a stake in fishery management. Each Council's voting members include one National Marine Fisheries Service representative, a representative of each State fishery agency in the Council area, several private citizens nominated by State governors and approved by the Secretary of Commerce because of their specific qualifications, and in some regions, a representative from local tribal or territorial governments. Non-voting membership includes regional representatives from the US Coast Guard, the Department of State, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Marine Fisheries Commission.

The eight Regional Fishery Management Councils serve as the front line of fisheries management, where regionally specific management measures (such as fishing seasons, quotas, and closed areas) are initiated, developed, and ultimately adopted in a fully transparent and public process. After adoption by Council vote, these measures are subject to approval by the Secretary of Commerce, regulatory implementation by the National Marine Fisheries Service, and enforcement by the US Coast Guard and other authorities. The Councils develop fishery measures in the offshore area (seaward of state waters out to 200 nautical miles); state waters, typically out to three miles offshore are managed cooperatively with State authorities.

Council decisions are subject to rigorous scientific analysis. Scientists and policy analysts evaluate potential fishery regulations for both environmental and socioeconomic impacts. Proposed regulations are vetted by expert panels of scientists, stakeholders, and by the public, before a Council makes a final decision. The open process provided by the Council system allows everyone to have a say in the stewardship of our marine resources and how fisheries are managed.

Commercial and recreational fisheries have a major economic impact in the United States, both nationally and in the communities where fishing takes place. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, commercial and recreational saltwater fishing generated more than \$185 billion in sales and supported more than two million jobs in 2006. The commercial fishing industry — harvesters, seafood processors and dealers, seafood wholesalers and seafood retailers — generated \$103 billion in sales, \$44 billion in income and supported 1.5 million jobs in 2006, while recreational fishing generated \$82 billion in sales, \$24 billion in income, and supported 534,000 jobs the same year. The Council system provides an opportunity to provide stability in fisheries employment for our nation, while protecting marine biodiversity and, in some cases, rebuilding depleted fish stocks.



Opportunities & Challenges

- *Establishing annual catch limits and catch monitoring programs*
- *Allocating finite fish resources when demand is increasing*
- *Implementing catch share programs to boost efficiency*
- *Developing ecosystem-based approaches for fisheries management*
- *Coordinating with other agencies on ocean use and conservation*
- *Addressing international conservation and management issues*
- *Increasing stakeholder participation and public outreach*
- *Integrating new perspectives on natural resource use and protection*
- *Dealing with increasing workloads without adequate funding*

The recently reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act provides the Councils with new opportunities and tools to address management challenges. The Act established four new fishery management goals: to end overfishing, promote market-based fishery management approaches, improve fisheries science and increase the role of science in decision-making, and enhance international cooperation with regard to fisheries management. To attain these goals, the Councils must adopt annual catch limits for each managed fishery, which may not exceed levels recommended by the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees. For any fish stocks already subject to overfishing, the Councils must adopt catch limits to end overfishing by the year 2010. For all other stocks, annual catch limits must be established by 2011. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also authorizes and encourages Councils to eliminate derby-style fishing through market-based approaches to management.

In addition to being the primary public forum for developing fishing regulations, the Councils are the best place to integrate ecosystem-based management principles into fishery management. Both the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the US Commission on Ocean Policy have identified the need for an ecosystem approach to ocean resource management. The regional focus of the Council system provides an ideal opportunity to implement ecosystem-based management at a regional scale, using a bottom-up approach. However, without dedicated funding for on-the-ground ecosystem-based fishery management at the Council level, NOAA's extensive research and development work on ecosystem relationships will remain fallow.

Adequate funding is one of the biggest challenges for the Regional Fishery Management Councils. The ability of Councils to develop new, mandatory programs to comply with the law, provide innovative, fresh approaches to resource conservation, and optimize sustainable economic yield from marine fisheries has been limited by funding. The Councils are currently funded within the National Marine Fisheries Service budget from various line items at a level averaging less than \$25 million, divided among all the Councils. Based on a comprehensive analysis of funding needed to meet the basic requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other laws, as well as new requirements set forth by the recent Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization, the regional Councils would require funding in the order of \$40 million per year. In comparison to the \$185 billion in economic activity generated from fisheries each year, funding for the Councils is a small investment to ensure healthy oceans and fisheries for future generations.

