



**Testimony on the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (S 1214)  
Before the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works  
Subcommittee on Water and Wildlife**

**By Gordon Robertson, Vice President  
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Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the record regarding S 1214, the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act. The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) is the sportfishing industry's trade association, committed to representing the interests of the sportfishing and boating industries.

ASA also invests in long-term ventures to ensure the industry will remain strong and prosperous as well as safeguard and promote the enduring social, economic, and conservation values of sportfishing in America. America's 60 million anglers generate over \$45 billion in retail sales with a \$125 billion impact on the nation's economy creating employment for over one million people.

In addition, through the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, passed in 1950 at the request of the recreational fishing industry, special excise taxes on fishing gear and boating fuel have contributed over \$8 billion for fish conservation. Added each year to this are the nearly \$650 million in annual fishing license sales plus approximately \$200 million in private donations by anglers for conservation efforts.

ASA and its member companies pride themselves on being conservationists first and foremost. The sportfishing industry is dependent upon healthy and abundant fish populations and habitat being available to the public. The landscape scale projects now being conducted by partnerships under the umbrella of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan will help to ensure our nation's aquatic resources are conserved and available for future generations to enjoy through recreational fishing and boating. Because it will provide a significant boost to America's fisheries resources and the recreational fishing community, ASA fully supports the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act.

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### **Compliment to Current Programs**

Currently, the majority of fisheries management programs are conducted by state and insular territory fish and wildlife agencies through funding from the Sport Fish Restoration Program (SFRP) and recreational fishing license fees. The former is generated primarily from a federal manufacturers' excise tax on recreational fishing equipment and that part of the federal fuel tax attributed to motorboat and small engine use. These monies are used for a variety of essential and beneficial fisheries projects, such as research, surveys, fish hatchery operations, and fishing and boating access. While projects currently conducted by state agencies are necessary and essential to fisheries throughout the United States, agencies are unable to fully address the suite of challenges facing fish populations and habitats solely through license revenue and the SFRP alone.

Unfortunately, many of our nation's aquatic habitats are degraded to the point that many fish are struggling to survive, and these habitat needs are greater than current funds can meet. Aquatic systems face threats from a variety of fronts, including dams, water diversions, point- and non-point source pollution, and human development. The impacts humans have made on aquatic systems have not bypassed fish – over one-third of North American fish species are listed as imperiled. The projects under the SFRP address the core management strategies that are the backbone of fisheries management in our country, but cannot fully tackle the challenges that are facing our nation's fisheries. What is needed is a comprehensive program and dedicated funding source that can begin to address the threats to fish and their habitat at a regional and landscape scale through a variety of on-the-ground projects.

This need is demonstrated by the three billion dollars in grant requests received by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act monies for fish habitat projects and the \$55.8 million identified by the Department of the Interior for habitat grant needs for fiscal year 2010.

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan is designed to work with and enhance existing fisheries programs. The Action Plan focuses available funds and resources on high priority projects to provide watershed level impacts, while encouraging collaboration among organizations to achieve project goals. Additionally, the Action Plan is not regulatory, and will not establish any new mandates on how or what work is to be done. These voluntary and incentive-based programs address species and habitat needs over their entire range, whether it is in one state, several states, or an entire coastal system. By pooling funds and resources among partners and forgoing

“ownership” and a possessive mind-set, the Action Plan will result in greater conservation benefits than individual efforts would.

### **What Legislative Action Will Do**

Passage of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act will provide several benefits to the Action Plan that are not currently available. The bill will give appropriate Congressional endorsement, standards and guidelines to the infrastructure and oversight under which the Fish Habitat Partnerships are formed. Through the multi-stakeholder National Fish Habitat Board that the bill establishes, projects will be recommended to the Secretary of Interior for funding. The bill authorizes a meaningful amount of funding (\$75 million) annually for conducting priority habitat improvement projects through the regional Fish Habitat Partnerships. While the current level of allocations provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Partnerships has been extremely beneficial for getting partnerships up and running, this funding has been piecemeal and considerably less than what is needed to fully address the challenges facing fish habitat.

The Act will also provide federal authorization for acquisition of fish and aquatic habitat, which does not currently exist in federal law. All land acquisition is voluntary and non-regulatory, providing protection for private landowners' rights. Additionally, the “bottom-up” nature of the partnerships assures that priority areas, species, and systems are identified by partners with a working knowledge of what habitats most need to be addressed.

### **Conclusions**

ASA greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on S 1214. Despite the current economic challenges that our country faces, we believe that our country must take decisive action now to commit to conserving our invaluable fisheries resources. The National Fish Habitat Conservation Act provides the necessary investment in fish habitat to continue supplying quality recreational fishing opportunities to the people and businesses that depend on them.

In addition to its high economic value, the heritage of fishing as a family friendly outdoor activity plays a vital societal and conservation role in this Nation. Fishing is a traditional American pastime that introduces new generations to the great outdoors and reconnects others with outdoor activities. By improving the health of aquatic habitat and enhancing fishing opportunities across the country, the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act will help ensure that this tradition continues for generations to come. We look forward to working with the Chair and members of the Subcommittee on this very worthwhile and important legislation.