



Rebuilding U.S. Fisheries: Success Stories

Efforts to protect and rebuild America's ocean fish are working. Rebounding fish populations create jobs, support coastal economies, repair damaged marine ecosystems, increase recreational fishing opportunities, and bring back fresh, local seafood. The benefits of ending overfishing and rebuilding depleted fish populations are far-reaching, and the cost of further delay would be significant. For example, commercial fishermen targeting depleted stocks in New England, the South Atlantic, and the Gulf of Mexico lost an estimated \$164.2 million and realized just 25 percent of potential revenue in 2009 because of overfishing.¹

Rebuilding America's ocean fish populations would provide the following estimated benefits:

- An additional \$31 billion in annual sales, and support for 500,000 new U.S. jobs.²
- Up to \$500 million in New England by 2026.³
- \$570 million annually in the mid-Atlantic.⁴
- A threefold increase in the net economic value of many U.S. fisheries.⁵

To ensure these benefits, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the law that governs fisheries in federal waters, requires sustainable management of ocean fish populations based on two principles: prevent taking more fish in a year than nature can replace (in other words, end overfishing), and rebuild depleted fish populations.⁶

In fisheries where managers have implemented these conservation mandates effectively, many depleted ocean fish populations have fully recovered, and others have made remarkable



PHOTO: J. GONCALVES

BLUEFISH (*POMATOMUS SALTATRIX*)

progress toward recovery. Since 2000, 23 U.S. ocean fish populations have been rebuilt to healthy levels.⁷

We must capitalize on these successes and finish the job of rebuilding valuable U.S. fisheries. Unfortunately, 34 of America's most commercially and recreationally important ocean fish populations are still subject to overfishing, and 40 have been depleted to unhealthy levels.⁸

As America's ocean fish populations continue to rebound, Congress should reject proposals to delay or weaken conservation deadlines. Instead, it should support efforts to increase funding to improve fisheries data collection and research and provide targeted assistance to fishermen as they make the transition to sustainability. Doing so will allow the nation to enjoy the benefits of healthy fish populations while preserving them for future generations.

Fully Rebuilt Stocks

New England Scallops

During the 1990s, efforts to rebuild depleted New England groundfish populations brought an unexpected benefit. Critical bottom fishing areas were closed, enabling depleted Atlantic sea scallop populations to recover and become fully rebuilt by 2001.⁹ The U.S. Atlantic sea scallop fishery is one of America's most valuable and also is the most valuable wild scallop fishery in the world.¹⁰



BY DANN BLACKWOOD/U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

SEA SCALLOP (*PLACOPECTEN MAGELLANICUS*)

Mid-Atlantic Bluefish

Officials determined in the late 1990s that the population of mid-Atlantic bluefish was at an unhealthy level. To restore this valuable fishery, federal managers implemented a nine-year rebuilding plan, which reached its goal a year ahead of schedule, leading officials to declare bluefish fully rebuilt in 2009.¹¹



BY JOE RICHARDS

BLUEFISH (*POMATOMUS SALTATRIX*)

Pacific Lingcod

When fishery managers found lingcod to be depleted in the Pacific Ocean, they applied science-based measures to implement a 10-year rebuilding plan. The Pacific lingcod population was rebuilt several years ahead of schedule.¹²



BY JIM LYLE

LINGCOD (*OPHIODON ELONGATUS*)

BY HERB SEGARS



SUMMER FLOUNDER (*PARALICHTHYS DENTATUS*)

Mid-Atlantic Summer Flounder

After years of delay, fishery managers finally took steps in 2000 to rebuild this recreationally and commercially important species, and today mid-Atlantic summer flounder has recovered from decades of overfishing. The summer flounder population was declared fully rebuilt in 2010.¹³

Showing Promise

BY DON DEMARIA/SEAPICS



RED SNAPPER (*LUTJANUS CAMPECHANUS*)

Gulf Red Snapper

The Gulf of Mexico red snapper population was subject to overfishing and remained depleted for decades until new conservation and management measures were implemented in 2007.¹⁴ The most recent stock assessment found that overfishing had stopped and that Gulf red snapper were recovering as they increased in size, abundance, and geographic range.¹⁵ Based on these findings and subsequent analyses, managers have begun to increase catch levels.¹⁶ With a continued commitment to rebuilding, fishermen in the Gulf eventually will be able to sustainably catch three times the amount of red snapper that is caught today.¹⁷

Endnotes

¹ Ecotrust. The Hidden Cost of Overfishing to Commercial Fishermen: A 2009 Snapshot of Lost Revenues. 2011. <www.pewenvironment.org/uploadedFiles/PEG/Publications/Report/FINAL_Cost_of_Overfishing_Commercial_Study_Full_Analysis_FINAL_7_20_11.pdf>

² Testimony of Eric Schwaab on Eight Bills That Would Amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources. P. 3. Dec. 1, 2011. <<http://www.legislative.noaa.gov/Testimony/Schwaab120111.pdf>>

³ New England Fishery Management Council. Final Amendment 13 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan Including a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis. Figure 208. P. I-602. <http://www.nefmc.org/nemulti/planamen/final_amend13_dec03_section_22.pdf>

⁴ J.M. Gates. Investing in Our Future: The Economic Case for Rebuilding Mid-Atlantic Fish Populations. Pew Environment Group. 2009. <<http://pewenvironment.org/news-room/reports/investing-in-our-future-the-economic-case-for-rebuilding-mid-atlantic-fish-populations-85899370665>>

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Endnotes continued

⁵ U.R. Sumaila *et al.* Fish Economics: The Benefits of Rebuilding U.S. Ocean Fish Populations. Fisheries Economics Research Unit, Fisheries Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. October 2005. <www.feru.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/publications/Sumaila2005_RebuildingBenefitsUSA.pdf>

⁶ Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1854(e), 2007. <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2007/docs/act_draft.pdf>

⁷ Testimony of Eric Schwaab, *op. cit.*

⁸ NMFS, 2011 Status of U.S. Fisheries: Fourth Quarter Update, December 2011. <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm> (Note: 22 are both depleted and currently subject to overfishing.)

⁹ NMFS, Fish Watch—U.S. Seafood Facts: Atlantic Sea Scallop. <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/species/atl_sea_scallop.htm>

¹⁰ New England Fisheries Science Center, Status of Fisheries Resources Off the Northeastern U.S. <www.nefsc.noaa.gov/sos/spsyn/iv/scallop/>

¹¹ NMFS, Fish Watch—U.S. Seafood Facts: Bluefish. <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/species/bluefish.htm>

¹² NMFS, Fish Watch—U.S. Seafood Facts: Lingcod. <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/species/lingcod.htm>

¹³ U.S. Department of Commerce, Letter to Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Dec. 12, 2011. <www.mafmc.org/press/2011/Summer_Flounder_Rebuilt.pdf>

¹⁴ Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC), Final Amendment 27 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan and Amendment 14 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan, June 2007. <<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/RedSnapper/pdfs/FinalRFAMend27-ShrimpAmend14.pdf>>

¹⁵ GMFMC, Stock Assessment of Red Snapper in the Gulf of Mexico: SEDAR Update Assessment 2009, Report of the Update Assessment Workshop, Dec. 3, 2009. <<http://www.gulfcouncil.org/beta/GMFMCweb/downloads/BB%202010-02/B%20-%204%20Red%20Snapper%20Update%202009%205%200.pdf>>

¹⁶ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Southeast Regional Office, Southeast Fishery Bulletin FB11-039, April 28, 2011. <<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/bulletins/pdfs/2011/FB11-039%20FR%20for%20Gulf%20Red%20Snapper%20reg%20amend.pdf>>

¹⁷ GMFMC, Final Amendment 27 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan and Amendment 14 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan. <<http://www.gulfcouncil.org/beta/gmfmcweb/downloads/Final%20RF%20Amend%2027-%20Shrimp%20Amend%2014.pdf>>

For more information, please contact:

Lee Crockett | Director | Federal Fisheries Policy | Pew Environment Group
202-552-2065 lcrockett@pewtrusts.org

Chris Dorsett | Director | Fish Conservation and Gulf Restoration Program | Ocean Conservancy
512-524-7431 cdorsett@oceanconservancy.org

Regan Nelson | Senior Oceans Advocate | Natural Resources Defense Council
202-289-2437 rnelson@nrdc.org

Corry Westbrook | Federal Policy Director | Oceana
202-833-3900 cwestbrook@oceana.org

Roberta Elias | Deputy Director | Marine and Fisheries Policy | World Wildlife Fund
202-495-4648 Roberta.Elias@wwfus.org

Sean Cosgrove | Ocean Campaign Director | Conservation Law Foundation
202-421-3585 scosgrove@clf.org