



**Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan  
Regional Constituent Workshop #8  
Gulf of Mexico Region – Houston, Texas  
July 8, 2004**

The eighth in the series of Regional Constituent Workshops supporting the development of the new National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan for 2005-2009 was held at the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) Headquarters, Houston, Texas on July 8<sup>th</sup> for constituents in the Gulf of Mexico Region. The regional workshops were designed to provide Recreational Fisheries constituents the opportunity to share their vision of an effective and successful Federal Recreational Fisheries Program, describe the characteristics and attributes of this Program, and discuss them in the context of a review of the draft NOAA Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan.

Pat Murray, President of the Texas CCA Chapter, welcomed the attendees. Pam Basco of the International Game Fish Association also provided remarks, introduced the newly formed Houston Big Game Fishing Club, and described her support for increased communication between local anglers and NOAA. Michael Kelly, Division Chief of NMFS Constituent Affairs Division, welcomed the group on behalf of NOAA. Following introductory comments by the workshop team, the attendees participated in a facilitated session designed to elicit ideas from each individual, share these ideas and prioritize them through small group interaction, and then jointly develop an affinity diagram representing a collection of the key attributes and characteristics of the group. The following diagram represents the product of this exercise. After a plenary review, the current draft of the Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan was introduced and the attendees were given the opportunity to comment on the contrasts and similarities between their group product and the draft Strategic Plan.

Results of Affinity Diagramming Process: Characteristics and Attributes of the Future Federal Recreational Fisheries Program

Commercial Fisheries	International	Management	Clear Communications	Data	Education	Coordination
Information on Commercial Boats	Researching Commercial Fisheries Internationally	Ecosystem Based Management	Easy to Understand Data and Documents; Public Needs to Understand	Data Collection: Expand Techniques and Technology	Youth Education	Local Input on Regular Basis Integrating Into Local, State and Federal Regulatory Decisions
Consistent RE; Economic Impact, Recreational vs. Commercial	Develop Smaller Conservation Programs in 3rd World Countries	Maximize Wise Use of Resources	More Clarity in Regulations and Laws	More Data Collection, More Research	The Value of Family Time on the Water - The Education and Self Esteem of Being on the Water	Collaborative Management and Data Collection
Better Observation Programs for Monitoring Commercial Catch/Bycatch Efforts and True Scientific Data		Ecosystems Management		Accurately Collect Species Population and Harvest Data		Coordination Among Jurisdictions
Bycatch Kill: Longliners, Shrimpers; Throwback Kill, Circle Hooks		Proactive Management		Target Correct User Groups		Allow States More Jurisdiction for Species That Are State-Specific
		Impact of Circle Hooks		Statistically Valid Data		
		Recognize Recreational Angling Role in Conservation		Expand Tagging Technology		
		Raising Billfish Size Limits		More Emphasis on the Scientific Contributions of Fishing		
				Identification of Users		Other
				More and Better Science, Collaborative Research		Effective Enforcement

The group noted a general similarity between their product and interests and the draft Strategic Plan. As this was the eighth workshop and the plan was continually evolving the group assumed that this relative match showed that the process of constituent input was working. Pam Basco made a pointed comment that the plan had evolved dramatically since its introduction in March and that this was an important step in building good constituent relations.

The subsequent group discussion of the draft Strategic Plan included comments on the need for commercial fisheries to be included in the plan. The attendees felt that the current draft version of the Plan focuses too exclusively on recreational fisheries. It was felt that it should include those aspects of commercial fishing that impact the quality and sustainability of recreational fishing.

A key concept of importance to the attendees was the idea of clarity and good communications. Participants felt that government products needed to have fine print and bureaucratic wording removed from documents intended for the constituent community. The idea of all products being written at a tenth grade level was suggested. This need for clarity was seen in both general products, such as reports, and especially in rules and regulations. An example of tournament rules that appeared to conflict with government regulations was offered as an example of the negative impacts of unclear communications and language.

An additional discussion point was the challenge of implementation once the Strategic Plan is finalized. Constituent groups and government representatives agreed that the collaborative relationship and process developed thus far would be key to successfully implementing the plan in the future.

In general, the attendees were pleased to see the increase in interaction between the government and constituents brought about by the workshops. They indicated cautious optimism toward the new NOAA commitment to Recreational Fisheries and the potential for actual implementation of the emerging strategy.