

MARINE SPORT FISHERY RESEARCH

Our inland waters cannot absorb the growing recreational needs, and the people are turning more and more to the marine environment to satisfy their recreation demands.

The myth of superabundance, the comforting but false conviction that our natural resources are inexhaustible, is as wrong about the oceans as elsewhere. Marine resources are dwindling as demands are growing. And it would be just as wrong to take assurance in a dream that technology can cure everything. But research can help in evaluating the effects of our own activities, defining the needs for regulation and instituting the scientific management of habitats and fish populations.

If we can accumulate knowledge in time, we can avoid the need for crash programs which have often characterized studies brought on by the failure of a fishery or by massive and irreversible changes in the environment.

National significance

Marine sport fishing is already a giant, and still growing. In 1955 there were 4.5 million salt-water anglers who fished 58 million man-days. Ten years later we find over 8 million anglers fished nearly 96 million man-days and spent nearly \$800 million doing it. These 8 million anglers caught 737 million fish weighing 1.4 billion pounds. If the present trend continues, there will be 12 million salt-water anglers in 1975. It is estimated that salt-water fishing will account for 30% of the National angling effort in the year 2000.

Needs

In the National interest, a recreational resource of this magnitude requires measures of supply and demand. The drain on the supply is not just a question of salt-water sport fisherman. The marine fishes are also sought by increasing numbers of American as well as foreign commercial fishermen. Such species as tunas, swordfish, albacore, salmon, bluefish, and many others are both sport and commercial fishes.

As the supplies diminish, effective resource planning and the strategy of resource use will have to take into account not only the economic costs, but the social cost of lost recreational opportunities.

The oceans, bays, sounds, and tidal areas are absorbing a significant share of the astounding increase in demands for recreational fishing, but marine fish stocks are not inexhaustible.

Increasing pressures from commercial and sport fishing are already threatening the supply of certain species. Some of our most popular species are tied to the coast and its estuaries during some stage of their life history. These are the areas most vulnerable to rapid changes and degradation from industry, agriculture, and residential developments. The effects of pollution, sedimentation, channeling, ditching, diking, filling, and drainage are sometimes dramatic but all too often are insidious and difficult to discern until too late. Although some very good research has been completed, virtually nothing is known on a broad enough scale to either evaluate the effects of changes in terms of biological, economic or sociological implications.

There is at this time no systematic and periodic way of measuring the amount of fishing, the catch by species and area, the resources and facilities involved, and their economic values.

Also lacking are management and development programs. This gap stems from two deficiencies—the lack of knowledge to guide management and totally inadequate funding at the State level where major responsibility rests for these functions. More than one-half of the States have no clear-cut statutory or organizational authority for management of marine game fishes, and only six have a salt-water license, a source of funds that support the substantial management and development program of inland fisheries by the States.

Criteria

The Federal Government function in marine game fish research comes about in a number of ways.

First, because many of the marine game fish are migratory, they are interstate, inter-regional and in some instances international resources. Some coastal species may range during their migrations between Florida and Maine, and subject to taking by commercial and sport fishermen of every State they pass through or by. No one State has the resources to study the fish over its whole range.