U.S. Ocean Fish Stocks:
An Excellent Return on Investment

Performance of U.S. Ocean Fish Stocks

U.S. ocean fish stocks are one of the nation's most valuable natural resources, and with prudent stewardship, they have significant potential for growth and return on investment. Our ocean fish are governed by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), a law passed and strengthened with bipartisan support that aims to maximize the long-term performance of fisheries by sustaining the natural capital upon which they depend.

PAYING DIVIDENDS

Congress, recognizing the role that healthy fish stocks play in maintaining the fishing economy, **appropriated $340 million** for fishery science and management programs in fiscal year 2012. These and previous investments have paid significant dividends:

- U.S. commercial and saltwater recreational fisheries generate approximately **$166 billion in sales impacts** and support **1.4 million full- and part-time American jobs.**[1]
- In 2010, all U.S. coastal regions experienced **increases in total value** of fisheries landings.[2]
- In 2011, **overfishing ended** on five stocks, four were **no longer highly depleted** and were rebuilding, and four were **rebuilt** to a healthy level (see chart).[3] Some stocks, such as mid-Atlantic summer flounder, bring in millions of dollars and create thousands of jobs for the economy.[4] Since 2000, 23 U.S. ocean fish stocks have been rebuilt to healthy levels.[5]
- Federal managers have **established fishery management plans**, including science-based catch limits to prevent overfishing, covering nearly all 528 federally managed ocean fish stocks.[6]

Although significant progress has been made, continuing investments in research and management totaling $349 million are needed in fiscal year 2013 to protect and restore America's valuable fishery resources. Congressional investments in data collection and analysis provide managers with the information necessary to maintain a healthy and diverse portfolio of U.S. fish stocks and to increase the domestic supply of fish as depleted populations rebound. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) estimates that rebuilding all U.S. fish populations to healthy levels would deliver taxpayers an additional $31 billion in annual sales and support 500,000 new American jobs.[7]

Recommended Fiscal Year 2013 Investments

The Pew Environment Group recommends that Congress continue to invest in the following six relatively low-cost but high-yield investments for fiscal year 2013, totaling $349 million:

- **Expand Annual Stock Assessments: $68.6 million**
  Stock assessments are scientific analyses of the health of fish populations and the amount of fishing they can support. Investment in assessments will increase the scientific certainty of catch limits and help fishery managers to increase fishing opportunities as appropriate and minimize the risk of overfishing.
- **Fisheries Statistics: $23.5 million**
  Fisheries statistics programs enhance commercial and recreational saltwater fishing data and analysis, enabling managers to reduce the risk of overfishing while maintaining access to the fishery. The Marine Recreational Information Program, which was created in 2006 to improve the quality and accuracy of recreational fishing data, is funded primarily through this line item.
- **Survey and Monitoring Projects: $24.3 million**
  Survey and monitoring projects provide timely analysis of catch and fishing effort, information that is critical to setting catch limits and improving estimates of ecosystem change, amount of fish killed by commercial and recreational fishing, and population size.
- **Observers/Training: $43.1 million**
  Trained fisheries observers collect essential data on fishing vessels at sea on the amount and type of **all** fish and other ocean wildlife caught by fishermen. These data are used for compliance monitoring and scientific assessments of fish stock health.
- **Cooperative Research: $12 million**
  Cooperative research programs pay fishermen, working under the direction of federal scientists, to collect fisheries data and test more-sustainable fishing gear and practices. They also enable managers to tap into the on-the-water knowledge of fishermen.
- **Fisheries Research and Management Programs: $177.6 million**
  Fisheries research and management programs provide accurate and timely information and analysis of the biology and population status of managed fish, as well as the socioeconomic impacts of fishery management actions.

In the current economic climate, these recommendations represent the minimum investments necessary in fiscal year 2013 to maintain a healthy fisheries portfolio. Congress should continue to place a priority on investments in fisheries research and management programs that support fishing jobs, coastal communities, and healthy fish stocks.

2011 Stock Accomplishments[8]

Overfishing Ended	Rebuilding in Progress	Rebuilt to Healthy Levels
Sandbar shark *(Atlantic)*	**Yellowedge grouper** *(Gulf of Mexico)*	**Haddock** *(Gulf of Maine)*
Yellowfin tuna *(eastern tropical Pacific)*	**Winter flounder** *(Georges Bank)*	**Summer flounder** *(mid-Atlantic coast)*
Winter flounder *(southern New England/ mid-Atlantic)*	**Smooth skate** *(Gulf of Maine)*	**Snow crab** *(Bering Sea)*
Winter flounder *(Georges Bank)*	**Black sea bass** *(southern Atlantic coast)*	**Widow rockfish** *(Pacific coast)*
Tilefish *(southern Atlantic coast)*		

SOURCES

[1] National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2009. www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st5/publication/fisheries_economics_2009.html. Note: 2009 is the most recent year for which these data are available. Also, the value estimate would increase considerably if the additional economic output of diving and other ecotourism industries that depend on thriving fish populations were included.
[2] NMFS. Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2010. www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/fus/fus10/index.html.
[3] NMFS. 2011 Status of U.S. Fisheries: Fourth Quarter Update. Dec. 31, 2011. www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm.
[4] Gates, J.M. 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-fishpopulations-85899370665.
[5] 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. www.legislative.noaa.gov/Testimony/Schwaab120111.pdf.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Schwaab, E. Testimony on Implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act Before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and the Coast Guard. P. 3. March 8, 2011. www.legislative.noaa.gov/112testimony.html.
[8] NMFS. 2011 Status of U.S. Fisheries: Fourth Quarter Update. Dec. 31, 2011. www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm.

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