



NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE



Photo by: Toby Curtis
NOAA Fisheries Service

NOAA

Help Maintain Healthy Fisheries: Protect Our Marine Habitats

Our Greater Atlantic Region Marine Habitats

The predominant marine ecosystems of the Greater Atlantic Region include the rocky shores of New England, the sandy beaches of the Mid-Atlantic and the extensive salt marsh system that runs along the back bays, barrier islands and river basins from Maine to Chesapeake Bay. These ecosystems, including associated seagrass meadows, estuaries, and mudflats, provide vital habitat for saltwater fish and other marine life. These coastal, marine, and riverine habitats are among some of the most biologically rich and economically valuable areas in the northeast. They provide a range of benefits by:

- Providing shelter, feeding, spawning, and nursery grounds for fish and wildlife, including important recreational sportfish and the prey they depend upon.
- Providing recreational opportunities for the public's use and enjoyment.
- Protecting life and property by helping to buffer coastal communities against natural hazards such as storms, coastal flooding, and sea level rise.
- Supporting the biodiversity on which marine and coastal ecosystems depend.
- Aiding water quality by filtering pollution and sediment from runoff.



Threats

In recent decades, declines in recreational fisheries catches have been linked to the degradation and pollution of key fish habitats. Human activities have significantly altered coastal and marine habitat over time. Valuable habitat continues to be degraded, lost, altered or made inaccessible due to:

- Coastal development
- Pollution and littering
- Disposal of unwanted fishing tackle
- Fishing gear impacts
- Bait collection/harvest
- Invasive species
- Dams and Barriers to migrating fish
- Boating through sensitive aquatic habitat areas
- Climate change



Impacts to eelgrass habitat from moorings

How It Affects You

The degradation and loss of habitat has significant economic, social and environmental consequences. For example:

- It is estimated that 85% of our commercial and recreational fish and shellfish depend on estuarine habitats during some point in their life cycles. When these marine habitats are destroyed or injured, the ability of fish and other marine life to spawn, hatch, or mature is impaired.
- Long-term releases of pollution into our watersheds, rivers, streams, and estuaries can cause harmful algal blooms or low oxygen conditions that degrade or kill fish and marine habitat. The direct effect is that fish may be diseased, damaged or depleted; and recreational and commercial fishing, a large part of our nation's economy, may be threatened.
- Injured or destroyed marine habitat may indirectly upset the ecological balance and food chain.

Given the continuing trend for human populations to concentrate near the coasts, the pressures and potential impacts on coastal and marine habitat will only increase. Once habitat is damaged or lost it is difficult and costly to recover the benefits and services that it provides. Thus, NOAA's Habitat Conservation Division is working to sustain healthy coastal and marine habitat and the communities and economies* that depend on them.

**In 2011, saltwater angling contributed \$4.9 billion in economic activity for northeast coastal state economies. (Fisheries Economics of the U.S., 2011)*

NOAA Fisheries Service Role

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to the stewardship of living marine resources through science-based conservation and management, and the promotion of healthy ecosystems.

The Habitat Conservation Division's primary mission is to ensure that living marine resources have sufficient healthy habitat to sustain populations. We work closely with other federal and state agencies, the fishing industry, environmental groups, and the public to accomplish these goals.

What You Can Do

Anglers can help by:

- Promoting ethical behavior in the use of aquatic resources.
- Never disposing trash, waste, or plastics into the ocean. Avoid spilling, and never dump any pollutants on land or in the water.
- Recycling trash, including worn-out lines, leaders, and hooks.
- Limiting the use of boats and vehicles to approved areas thus avoiding sensitive marine habitats.
- Volunteering for beach clean-ups and wetland restorations.
- Starting your own fishing line recycling program if there isn't a convenient location in your community (www.boatus.com/foundation/Monofilament).
- Participating in community natural resources planning efforts. Get involved in protecting essential fish habitat.
- Reporting pollution problems to local, state, and Federal Authorities (1-888-372-7342, <http://www2.epa.gov/home/report-spills-and-environmental-violations>)

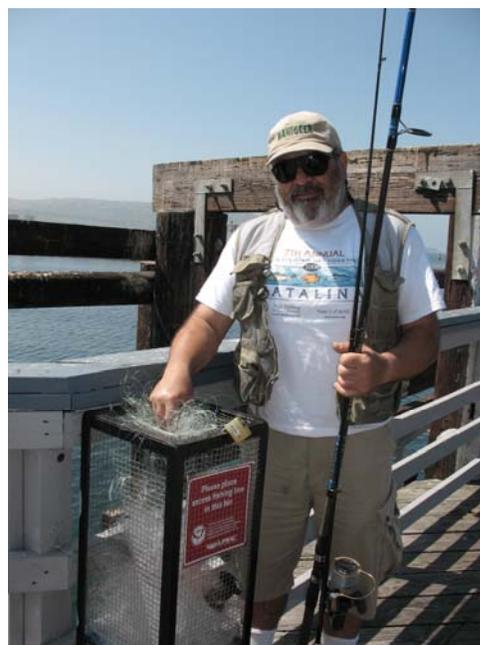
Where to Get More Information

Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
Habitat Conservation Division
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

Website:

<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/habitat/>

Picture: Fisherman participating in the fishing line recycling program



Other Useful Links

Listed below are other useful websites regarding fish habitat issues and how you can become involved:

[New England Fisheries Management Council](http://www.nefmc.org) (www.nefmc.org)

[Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council](http://www.mafmc.org) (www.mafmc.org)

[Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission](http://www.asmfc.org) (www.asmfc.org)

[Northeast Fisheries Science Center](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov) (www.nefsc.noaa.gov)

[NOAA Habitat Blueprint](http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/blueprint/index.html) (www.habitat.noaa.gov/blueprint/index.html)

[Climate Smart Habitat Conservation](http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/ourwork/climate.html) (www.habitat.noaa.gov/ourwork/climate.html)

[Hydropower and Fish Passage](http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/protection/hydro/index.html) (www.habitat.noaa.gov/protection/hydro/index.html)

[National Fish Habitat Action Plan](http://www.fishhabitat.org) (www.fishhabitat.org)

