

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR'S SPORT FISH STOCKING POLICIES QUESTIONED

Significant recommendations are contained in a far reaching study of Federal and State sport fish production and stocking policies just completed by an independent panel of experts and submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The main thrust of the 31 recommendations is the Federal-State relationship--in general, that there be greater control by States of fish production and stocking of all public waters except in special situations. Federal hatcheries were started to stock waters on Federal lands like national forests and parks, especially in States where these lands represent a sizable part of the total lands within the States. The ideal Federal role, according to a poll of State governments, is best described as being limited to a backup production of certain fish like steelhead trout and salmon and more Federal emphasis on research into problems such as fish nutrition and disease control in hatcheries.

The report points out that there are 515 publicly-operated fish hatcheries in the United States--425 State-operated and 90 federally-operated. The report did not cover private hatcheries. Trout production dominates fish culture programs for the Nation's inland waters, with 346 Federal and State hatcheries producing over 500 million trout eggs, more than 100 million trout fingerlings, and about 70 million large trout (10 inch) a year.

Ninety-two Federal and State hatcheries are involved in warmwater fish production. These include bluegill, largemouth bass, and channel catfish. Most of these are in the eastern two-thirds of the country and annual production totals 100 million fish.

Striped bass, walleye, northern pike, and muskellunge fingerling production totals about 23 million a year. Production of these species is hampered by the inability to feed their fragile fry on artificial diets.

Chinook and coho salmon and steelhead trout dominate the West's Federal and State hatchery production programs with over 320 million of these species produced yearly. On the Atlantic coast a relatively new program to restore the Atlantic salmon produces a quarter million smolts yearly.

Noteworthy among the report's recommendations are:

--That the States assume full management and financial responsibility for stocking the inland public fishing waters within their respective boundaries, except for special situations which justify assistance from Federal or local government, or from private utilities or other appropriate sources.

--That the existing Federal fish stocking program for Indian lands be evaluated .

--That the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continue to implement the decision already made to remove the Federal Government from responsibility for stocking private farm ponds; further, that responsibility be shifted in a manner which does not abruptly burden any State financially.

--That the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service adopt a policy prohibiting the stocking of Federal fish in private waters lacking public access.

--That the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service not provide fish for "put-and-take" programs, except in large Federal reservoirs under heavy fishing pressure when the State involved cannot develop the optional recreational potential without assistance; provided, however, that the Service should not provide more than half the fish used in such reservoir situations.

--That the Federal service should not provide fish for put-and-take stocking in urban areas or for urban recreational programs.

--That substantial fish culture operations which are found to be necessary involving endangered species be carried on in new facilities built and operated with funds not derived from the sale of sport fishing licenses.

--That the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service increase their emphasis on research and development activities relating to the culture of Pacific salmon and steelhead; further, that they encourage and participate in a State-Federal review of existing and proposed projects in this field; and further, that they encourage and participate in the development of a State-Federal system for jointly assigning priorities to and responsibilities for research and development goals.

The report was prepared at the request of the Interior Department. The task force surveyed State and Federal fish production programs, solicited the opinions of State fish and game officials about appropriate Federal-State cooperation, and developed its recommendations.

Chairman of the group was Dr. Alex Calhoun, former chief of California's inland fisheries program. Other official members were Charles Kelly, director, Alabama Division of Game and Fish; Chuck Burrows, supervisor, fisheries section, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Bud Phelps, director, Utah Wildlife Resources Division; and Carl Sullivan, executive secretary, Sport Fishing Institute. Kelly is chairman of the executive committee and Phelps second vice-president of the International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners. Burrows is a member of the American Fisheries Society.

Advisory members were Spencer Smith, western field coordinator of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, and Dr. Fred Cleaver, director, Columbia River Fisheries Development program, Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service.

The report will be given serious consideration by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fishery specialists and managers in developing program objectives for Federal fish production and research efforts.

The report titled "Report of National Task Force for Public Fish Hatchery Policy" will be distributed to each State, every member of Congress, to all the fish hatcheries involved, and a limited number of copies will be available to the public on written request addressed to Deputy Associate Director for Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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