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**SEVEN FEDERAL AGENCIES SIGN COMPREHENSIVE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES  
CONSERVATION PLAN TO GUIDE FUTURE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

What better way to celebrate National Fishing Week than to ensure future generations will enjoy better fishing opportunities? Improving one of America's most treasured outdoor activities-- fishing--is the chief goal of the seven Cabinet-level agencies that recently signed an unprecedented Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan unveiled today in Washington, DC.

The Federal agencies are helping kick off National Fishing Week by releasing the conservation plan today at a gathering of fisheries experts and enthusiasts from participating Departments and agencies, State and Tribal agencies, fisheries managers, conservation groups, and the sportfishing industry at a ceremony at the Kennedy Center. The Kennedy Center ceremony to present the plan was sponsored by a grant from the Chevrolet/Geo Environmental program, a unique private-public partnership to conserve and restore outdoor resources, and by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The conservation plan was required by President Clinton's Executive Order 12962, aimed at boosting recreational fisheries, signed and issued during National Fishing Week last year. The conservation plan recognizes the vital role recreational fisheries play in the social, cultural, and economic well-being of American society. It calls for increasing recreational fishing opportunities nationwide by strengthening efforts to conserve, restore, and enhance aquatic systems.

"There's no better time to unveil this plan than National Fishing Week," said Deputy Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Rogers. "All the fishing events going on nationwide this week spawn tomorrow's conservationists. Anglers contribute hundreds of millions of dollars a year to conserving natural resources through license fees and excise taxes on gear and are some of the strongest advocates for clean water and healthy habitats."

"This plan ensures that Federal agencies will work more with States, Tribes, and the sportfishing public to increase recreational fishing opportunities nationwide by improving

fisheries habitats, increasing access to Federal land, and educating the public about the importance of these aquatic resources to the economy and society," said National Marine Fisheries Service Director Rollie Schmitten.

The conservation plan outlines strategies the seven signatory Federal agencies will pursue over the next 5 years to improve recreational fisheries within the context of their programs and responsibilities. By the end of this year, each agency will develop a specific plan detailing actions to meet the goals of the conservation plan. Participating agencies include Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, Defense, Energy, and Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Agencies signing on to the plan will design strategies to improve fisheries and their habitats and increase angling opportunities and access on Federal lands. To support these goals, the plan calls for increasing partnerships among Federal, State, Tribal, and private organizations and expanding efforts to educate the public about the value and need for healthy aquatic resources.

The plan includes "success indicators" to measure agency achievements in meeting the plan's goals. For example, Federal agencies will annually report how many areas were opened to angling use, how many new boat ramps or fishing piers were constructed, how many angler education programs were conducted, how many river miles supporting recreational fisheries were restored or enhanced, or the effectiveness of their partnership efforts.

Based on the agencies' annual reports, the plan's effectiveness will be evaluated each year by the National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council and the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. The former, co-chaired by the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce, is made up of representatives of the Departments participating in the conservation plan. The latter is a Federally chartered advisory panel made up of sportfishing and boating advocates from the private sector and state agencies which advises the Interior Secretary on fishing and boating issues. The councils' responsibilities for reviewing the plan's success also were established under President Clinton's Executive Order on Recreational Fisheries.

Copies of the Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan are available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Publications Unit, 4040 North Fairfax Drive, Room 130, Arlington, Virginia, 22203; telephone 703-358-1711.