



# NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

5:00 p.m. June 9, 1998

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## TRANSPORTATION ACT SPELLS SUCCESS FOR ANGLERS, BOATERS, AND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

The millions of dollars anglers and boaters spend for fishing equipment and boating fuel now will provide better protection for natural resources, create more recreation opportunities, and continue to improve boating safety, thanks to a major transportation act signed into law today by President Clinton. Thousands of miles of crumbling roads within the National Wildlife Refuge System also will be repaired under the new law's provisions.

"Through the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21), President Clinton and Congress have created an even greater legacy of care for the Nation's aquatic natural resources and the people who enjoy them," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "In addition, the act now places the National Wildlife Refuge System on a par with other major land-managing agencies by providing significant support for refuge road repair."

"I applaud Congress' efforts to address the maintenance needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System," said Director Clark. "I also want to recognize the tremendous leadership of Senators John Chafee and Max Baucus in making sure this legislation addressed these needs. Receiving this funding under the Federal Lands Highways Program will help us ensure safe and accessible roads for the 30 million Americans who visit national wildlife refuges each year. It will also allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to target limited resources toward vital wildlife conservation programs on refuges."

Sport fishing, boating, and refuge system benefits from the new law include:

**Repairing Refuge Roads:** The act's Federal Lands Highways Program includes \$20 million in new funding for wildlife refuge roads each year from 1999 to 2003. According to Federal Highway Administration (FHA) studies, refuge roads are used more intensively by the public than all national forest roads and Department of Defense roads combined. Currently, the refuge system suffers from a \$158-million road maintenance backlog for its 4,250 miles of public roads and 424 bridges. Based on an FHA analysis, 70 percent of refuge roads are in poor condition, 25 percent are in fair condition, and only 5 percent are considered in good

condition. In addition, 90 percent of refuge bridges need safety and maintenance repairs.

**Additional Assets for Aquatic Resource Conservation:** The act will generate a projected increase of \$135 million in transfers of revenues to the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, which fuels the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program. The fund now receives 11.5 cents of every 18.3 cents in Federal tax collected on every gallon of gasoline used by boaters. This figure will rise to 13 cents on October 1, 2001, and to 13.5 cents on October 1, 2003. The mechanism that provides for these increases in transfers also will apply to small-engine fuel taxes, which will be used for wetlands restoration.

**Continuing Clean Vessel Program Successes:** The new law makes \$10 million available annually from 1999 to 2003 under the highly successful clean vessel program. The funds provide for marine sanitation pumpout facilities that help minimize the dumping of human waste into waters.

**Better Boating Access and Infrastructure:** The new act increases from 12.5 percent to 15 percent the amount of money each state must spend on boating access from its Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program apportionment. In addition, the act provides \$8 million annually from 2000 to 2003 to meet the special needs of recreational boats that are not trailered. The new Service-administered program will provide funds to states to pay up to 75 percent of the costs of building, renovating, or maintaining public marine facilities such as slips, mooring buoys, day docks, and navigational aids.

**Education and Outreach Emphasis:** A new national outreach and communications program for sport fishing and boating is funded at \$5 million in 1999, and funding increases progressively each year until it reaches \$10 million in 2003. The program is expected to increase interest in sport fishing and boating and in the conservation ethic these activities instill in participants. The Fish and Wildlife Service also is authorized to spend up to \$2.5 million a year of Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration administrative funds for outreach and communications programs. In addition, the amount of Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration money states may spend on aquatic resource education efforts increases from 10 to 15 percent of each state's Sport Fish Restoration apportionment.

**Boating Safety Funding Stability:** TEA 21 also provides additional support and a more stable source of funding for grants to states for boating safety programs.

TEA 21 is the successor to the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which expired September 30, 1997. Congress extended ISTEA through March 31; funds from the act were available through the end of May. The U.S. Senate voted 88 to 5 and the U.S. House of Representatives voted 297 to 86 to approve the TEA 21 conference report. The bill was approved for the President's signature May 22.

The Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, provided for within ISTEA and TEA 21, makes funding available for the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program and Recreational Boating Safety Program. The programs are funded through excise taxes on fishing tackle, electric trolling motors, flasher-type sonar fish finders, motorboat and small-engine fuels, and import duties on fishing tackle and pleasure boats. Considered a model user-pays, user-benefits program, the Service-administered Sport Fish Restoration Program provides grants to states for sport fish restoration and management, aquatic education and boating access.

Deposits in the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, which is comprised of the Sport Fish Restoration Account and the Boating Safety Account, will exceed \$334 million for Fiscal Year 1998. States will receive \$272 million from the Sport Fish Restoration Account this year.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages almost 93 million acres of land and water consisting of 514 national wildlife refuges, 78 ecological services field stations, 65 national fish hatcheries, 50 wildlife coordination areas, and 38 wetland management districts with waterfowl production areas.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.