



NEWS

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FEDERAL ACCOUNTANTS FERRET OUT ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO SUPPORT FISH CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

How does better Federal Government accounting lead to bigger fish? The answer is by providing additional dollars for aquatic resources, such as a recent unusual \$21.5-million transfer to the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund (ARTF), the backbone of financial support for sport fish conservation efforts in the United States.

The fund transfer amount represents a 12-year backlog of excise tax revenues on fishing equipment and boats imported to the United States from 1986 to May 1998. The revenues were due to the ARTF but were not transferred until August 20, 1998. U.S. Customs Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials said the delay was caused by changes in accounting systems, tariff numbering systems, and differing definitions of fish nets, as well as a move from Washington, DC, to Indianapolis, Indiana, of the office that handles import duty reporting.

The transfer followed a one-year study by representatives of Customs and the Service's Division of Federal Aid. The study received strong support from Congressman John Tanner and Senator John Breaux. The Service administers the Sport Fish Restoration Program, which is funded by the ARTF.

"The discovery and transfer of these additional funds gives an enormous boost to states and to anglers and boaters across the country," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "American anglers owe a big 'thank-you' to Senator Breaux; Congressman Tanner; the Customs Service staff; and especially Lanny Moore, an accountant in the Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal Aid Division, for ensuring that the Sport Fish Restoration Program receives full funding from all appropriate sources. Efforts by the American Sportfishing Association, American League of Anglers and Boaters, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies also were instrumental in bringing about this transfer."

In the future, states will receive an additional \$1.5 to \$2 million each year as a result of the study's findings. The effort identified 13 categories of imported taxed items that, since 1986, either were unreported or underreported for use in the ARTF. Taxes on those items now will be included in the annual total of Sport Fish Restoration Program funds that are apportioned to the states.

Sport Fish Restoration Program funds are distributed for projects proposed by states and approved by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The funds pay up to 75 percent of the cost of each project; states contribute at least 25 percent of the cost.

Funding for the Sport Fish Restoration Program results from a 10-percent excise tax on fishing equipment and a 3-percent tax on electric trolling motors and sonar fish finders. Program funding also comes from a portion of the Federal fuels tax and import duties on fishing tackle and pleasure boats.

Distribution of sport fish restoration funds to the states is based on the land and water area and the number of fishing license holders in each state.

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 the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, consisting of more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.