



A VOICE OF INFLUENCE FOR SENSIBLE PUBLIC POLICY

Beyond its original impetus in stabilizing a national industry during the Great Depression, the main purpose of the American Sportfishing Association—like all trade associations—is to combine the power of businesses to effectively influence relevant public policy.



ON THE FRONT LINES

Although the American Sportfishing Association was headquartered in Chicago for some 35 years, we've always been active in government affairs, meeting with presidents and Cabinet members, testifying before Congress, and keeping members informed about relevant legislation.

As early as 1938, we had a lobbyist based in Washington, D.C., representing the industry's interests on Capitol Hill and with federal government agencies.

Toward the end of the 20th century—when some of the most consequential legislation affecting the industry was passed—the importance of having a strong presence in the nation's capital was clear.

We officially made the move to Washington, D.C., in 1994. Today, ours is just one of thousands of national trade associations headquartered in and around the capital.

Two laws have been the focus of our public-policy advocacy: the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, primarily affecting freshwater fisheries and access to them, and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, affecting saltwater fisheries.



Members Make a Difference

Individual members of the American Sportfishing Association contribute greatly to successful advocacy on many issues with broad environmental benefits. A good example is an effort in California called Water For Fish involving sportfishing business leaders, angler groups, and conservation organizations. They are working together to combine their clout to save vulnerable West Coast salmon runs that have been devastated by water diversions.



Top: President George W. Bush met with an array of leaders in outdoor recreation in 2004 at his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

(White House Photo by Eric Draper)

Above: President Richard Nixon met with a broad group of conservation leaders, including the vice president of the Sport Fishing Institute (then the sister organization to the American Sportfishing Association) in 1970.

(White House Photo)

Advocacy by leaders of the sportfishing industry and conservation community led to a broad-scooped Executive Order on Recreational Fisheries signed by President Bill Clinton in 1995.

(White House Photo)

LANDMARK LAW

No public policy has been as consequential to the sportfishing industry as the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, now commonly called “Wallop-Breaux” after its Congressional sponsors. Passed in 1950, this law is significant for two reasons: 1) its upfront effect on businesses’ bottom line, and 2) its long-term effect on sustaining fishing opportunities and a healthy environment.

Sportfishing gear manufacturers pay a percentage of their product cost in excise taxes, so it’s a law that has a direct fiscal impact on businesses. Ever since 1984, boaters pay an excise tax on certain motor boat fuels, too. These tax monies are pooled into a special fund and later matched by state fish and wildlife agencies. Ultimately this pays for much of this country’s fisheries and habitat conservation as well as the infrastructure that allows access to fishing and boating.

The idea for an excise tax on certain fishing equipment was conceived as early as 1939, and the American Sportfishing Association vacillated several times over the next decade in our support and opposition to both the general concept and specific variations of the law. Perhaps this back-and-forth of positions should not be surprising considering the law engenders both challenges and advantages for businesses.

Because the law is reauthorized every six years or so, throughout its history we’ve remained steadfast in advocating for the most sensible legal provisions that minimize the fiscal and administrative challenges to businesses and maximize the conservation benefits.



For almost half its history, the American Sportfishing Association was based in Chicago, but it always had a role in national government affairs. The Sport Fishing Institute, its sister organization dedicated to fisheries conservation, was always based in Washington, D.C. Pictured is the previous headquarters, including a sportfishing museum and a 1-acre fishing pond, that opened during National Fishing Week in 1979. The facility was sold in 1987 so that the organization could establish a stronger presence in Washington, D.C.

An example that demonstrates the importance of our “watchdog” role occurred in the 1990s, when Congress made a backroom deal to modify a provision that ensured excise tax monies went into the special fund for fishing and boating. Congress essentially pilfered the fund, making a change that allowed the tax money to go into the U.S. Treasury’s general fund, which can be used for any federal government program.

We joined forces with other leading industry and conservation groups, fighting to get tax monies put back into the special fund so that they would be used as originally intended. This affected hundreds of millions of dollars of the industry’s investments in the future of fishing and boating.



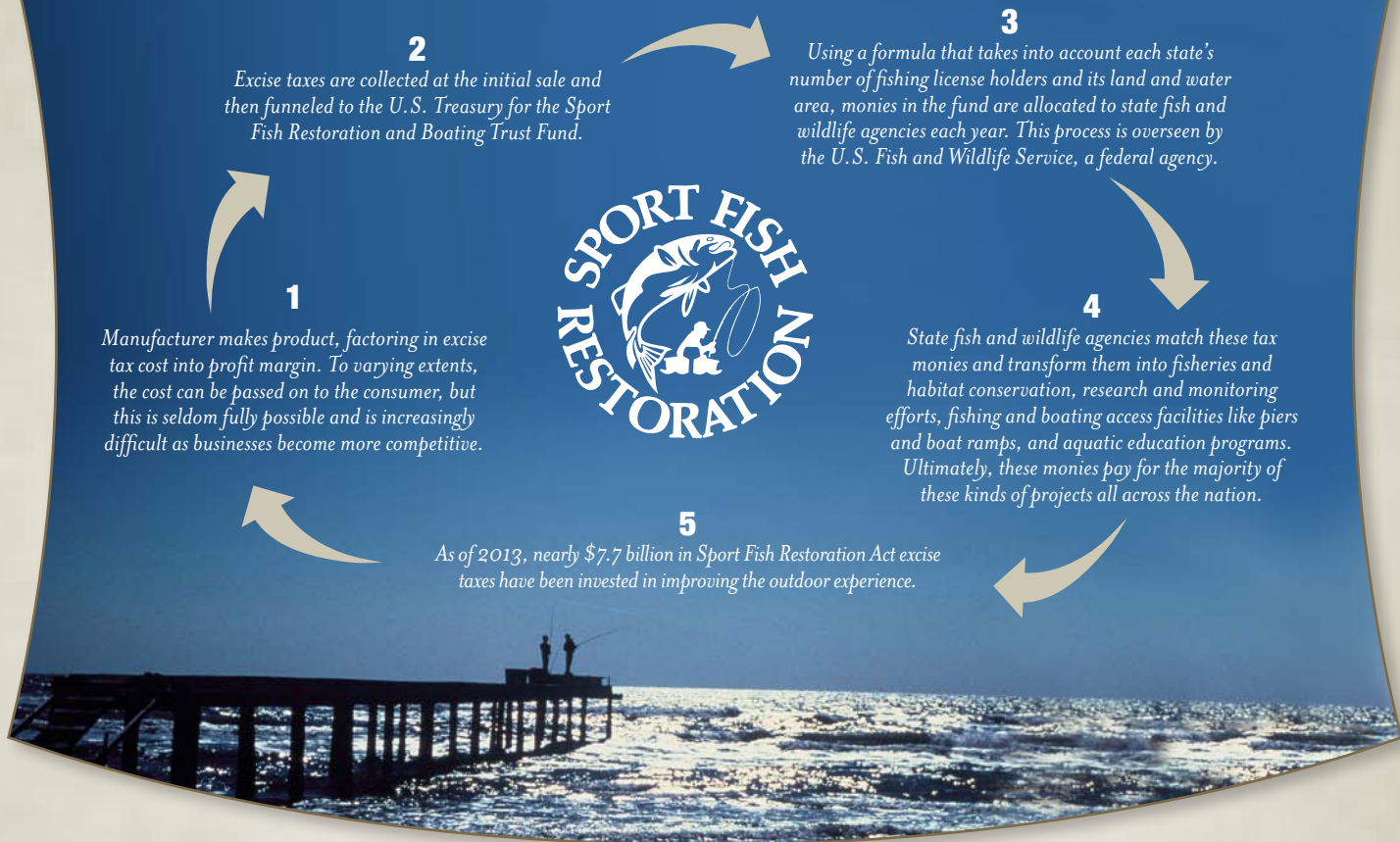
Courtesy: Mike Schoonveld



Sport Fish Restoration Act excise taxes are a big part of the restoration of Great Lakes fisheries and the growth of sportfishing there—a good example of our return on investment. According to a recent study by Southwick & Associates, sportfishing in the Great Lakes went from nearly nonexistent in the 1950s to current world-class status for salmon, trout, walleye, and yellow perch, generating \$3 billion annually in retail sales and supporting nearly 50,000 jobs.



A Tax Transformation



The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1950, was originally sponsored by Congressman John Dingell and Senator Edwin Johnson. During a reauthorization process for the act in 1984, Senator Malcolm Wallop and Congressman (later Senator) John Breaux sponsored changes that greatly expanded the tax by including certain motor boat fuels. This is why the act often used to be called "Dingell-Johnson" and is now frequently referred to as "Wallop-Breaux."



John Dingell and Edwin Johnson



Malcolm Wallop and John Breaux

A SEA CHANGE

As an iconic American pastime for generations, fishing in the American Sportfishing Association's early days evoked wholesome images of kids wiling away hot summer days at their favorite fishing hole on a quiet backwoods pond. This imprint on the American consciousness was epitomized in the 1960s by "The Andy Griffith Show's" Opie and Andy pondering life's lessons while catching trout on Myers Lake.

Today, the way fishing is envisaged is just as likely to include the high stakes competition of the tournament trail or the intense adventure of seeking large quarry offshore. The sport of fishing now encompasses a remarkable variety of experiences, with saltwater fishing's growing popularity one of the biggest differences from those earlier days.

Public policy affecting saltwater fisheries and their habitat (and fish that migrate between salt- and freshwater) evolved much later than conservation measures for freshwater fish and inland waterways. It's just been in the past few decades that an array of groups with a shared interest in promoting healthy oceans and sustainable fisheries—including our association—has successfully raised awareness of the management challenges along our coasts.

Saltwater fisheries face different pressures given their importance to a commercial industry; in some cases, fish populations have been devastated by harvest practices such as gillnetting and bottom trawling. Many others have simply been harvested in an unsustainable manner for far too long.

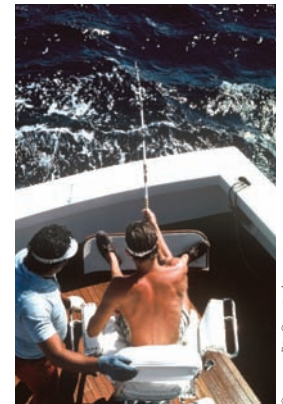
Saltwater fisheries conservation is more complicated because it is governed by multiple agencies at the state, federal, and international levels. In addition, most regulations, such as those setting size and harvest limits, and allocations for commercial and recreational catch, are set by multi-state fishery councils and commissions.

Established individually in the 1940s, three interstate marine fishery commissions manage and conserve coastal fisheries within the first 3 miles of the nation's coastline.

In addition, eight regional fishery management councils were established by a broad-scoped law passed in 1976, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. This is the primary law for ensuring the well-being of saltwater fisheries that spend at least part of their life cycle beyond the first 3 miles of coast.

Similar to our "watchdog" role related to the Sport Fish Restoration Act, we consistently represent the interests of the sportfishing community when opportunities arise to influence provisions of this and other laws and policies related to saltwater fisheries.

For the past two decades, saltwater fishing activity (the number of days anglers spent saltwater fishing) grew by more than 30 percent. This coincided with the recovery of popular sportfisheries such as striped bass, weakfish, and flounder.



Courtesy: Rip Cunningham

For example, when the Magnuson-Stevens Act was amended in 1996, we lobbied successfully for two amendments. One was aimed at preventing overfishing by limiting fishery management councils' ability to allow harvest levels that aren't sustainable. The other required the councils to address commercial bycatch, such as requiring shrimpers in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico to use devices that reduce fish bycatch and waste.

When the act was amended in 2006, we joined with several partners to push for a provision to improve the role of science in fisheries management decisions and place limits on the establish-

ment of coastal no-fishing areas. Our efforts help ensure that these decisions, and discussions about measures that restrict access to public resources, involve an open public process, have a solid scientific basis, and include criteria to assess the conservation benefits of no-fishing areas over time. In 2008, we also worked with President George W. Bush's staff to ensure that any coastal areas receiving special protection by Presidential Proclamation provide for appropriate sportfishing access.

All of these recent efforts are important because, over the last decade, a small group of organizations have aggressively pushed

for a vast network of coastal no-fishing zones that prohibit all fishing and nearly all other public recreation. At times, no-fishing areas have been proposed or established in some of the most popular saltwater fishing areas in the country without a clear basis for such extreme restrictions.

Such an approach contrasts starkly with public policies established over the last century for America's national public land networks. On hundreds of millions of acres of national forests, parks, wildlife refuges, and Bureau of Land Management rangelands, public access and activities are considered in the context of conservation and management priorities but are not presumed incompatible.

As always, we will advocate for careful conservation practices, especially when fisheries are in trouble. However, we contend that an emphasis on broad bans to public access as a panacea to conservation challenges is a dangerous direction to take. Such an approach alienates many of those who have the strongest and most direct stake in ensuring the lasting protection of our natural resources.

It also discounts the leadership role the sportfishing community has repeatedly demonstrated in influencing positive change for clean water, healthy habitat, and abundant fisheries over many decades.



During and after the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, the American Sportfishing Association took major action to help sportfishing businesses. We surveyed retailers throughout the region to assess the economic impacts and urged the Obama Administration to make federal financial assistance available to recreational fishing-dependent businesses. We supported disaster relief legislation that included allocations for these businesses, too. We also recommended the administration develop a long-term compensation plan to help businesses overcome devastating losses. Lastly, our FishAmerica Foundation gave special emphasis to Gulf Coast restoration projects to assist in sportfisheries recovery.

Anglers Put Fish First



The sportfishing community—especially angler groups—led the drive for further protections for Atlantic coastal striped bass and red drum after both species were nearly decimated in the 1970s and 1980s due to intense overfishing. President George W. Bush signed an Executive Order establishing gamefish status for these species in 2007. This banned the commercial sale of these two highly popular recreational species in federal waters (a number of states already prohibit their sale in state waters—the area within 3 miles of the coast). Alongside the President are leaders representing the sportfishing community, businesses, and government who helped make it happen. (White House Photo by Eric Draper)