



March 27, 2020

The Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of Virginia
State Capitol
3rd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor Northam,

Thank you for your continued leadership during this extremely challenging time for the nation in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand the difficult decisions you are facing daily under constantly changing conditions to prioritize public safety, while also attempting to minimize disruptions to the economy and social wellbeing.

As the nation's recreational fishing industry trade association, the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) represents the businesses that support America's \$125 billion recreational fishing economy. Virginia's 990,904 recreational fishermen contribute \$1.3 billion to the commonwealth's economy, supporting 9,785 jobs.

In addition to its tremendous economic impacts, recreational fishing is also a strong part of Virginia's culture. Particularly during this pandemic, recreational fishing provides an ideal means for individuals and families to get outdoors and boost their physical and mental health in a way that doesn't necessitate close contact with others. Many Governors have encouraged forms of outdoor recreation, such as recreational fishing, as a positive and appropriate activity compatible with social distancing guidelines.

As you continue to direct the commonwealth's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that you consider the following requests:

1. Deem recreational fishing-dependent businesses, such as fishing tackle manufacturers and retailers, as "essential businesses" that are allowed to remain open under proper safety and social distancing guidelines. Recreational fishing provides mental and physical health benefits associated with being outdoors. In addition, recreational fishing provides an important food source for many individuals who harvest what they catch. Therefore, closing businesses that support recreational fishing will not only limit participation in this safe and healthy activity, but will also remove a means of acquiring food.
2. Allow fishing access sites, including boat ramps and parks, to remain open as much as possible. While we understand the need to close certain areas, including those that are readily overcrowded or require active staffing, in general most public lands and waters can remain accessible in accordance with social distancing guidelines. Blanket closures to all state facilities may not only limit the public's ability to access the outdoors, but in some cases may have the unintended effect of congregating fishing activity into whatever non-state-owned areas remain open. We understand the challenge in striking the right balance between public safety and allowing access, and ask that you work with your state parks and fisheries officials to maintain public access in as many areas as possible.

Thank you for your attention to these requests. Allowing recreational fishing business and activity to continue is not only important to provide some level of stability and public safety

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during this unprecedented crisis, but also to help ensure a speedier recovery when the crisis is over. The sportfishing industry stands ready to assist you however we can.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss these matters further, please contact Mike Leonard, ASA's Vice President of Government Affairs, at 703-888-7796 or mleonard@asafishing.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn Hughes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "G".

Glenn Hughes
President