

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS



American Sportfishing Association
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YOUTH COASTAL FISHING PROGRAM ACT

Recreational fishing is a great way to connect people, especially youth, to nature.

Not only does spending time in nature provide [health benefits](#),¹ but research has also shown that participants in outdoor recreation place higher importance on [environmental values](#)² and stand as [stronger conservation stewards](#).³ This is clearly the case with the recreational anglers, who collectively contribute [\\$1.7 billion annually](#) to conservation through license fees, excise taxes and direct donations.⁴

[88% of current fishing participants](#) fished before the age of 12,⁵ highlighting the importance of being exposed to fishing at a young age. As technology competes for young people's attention, fishing offers them a [way to unplug](#), learn about nature and create lasting memories.⁶ Learning to fish at a young age helps young peoples' mental and physical wellbeing as they grow into adults.

Many barriers exist that limit underserved communities, particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), from participating in the outdoors. Some of these barriers include [a lack of connection to nature, feelings of "otherness" and lack of awareness](#).⁷ These barriers make it difficult for BIPOC individuals to access and participate in outdoor recreation activities. Early introduction to outdoor recreation in a safe, accessible and inclusive space is needed to grow participation.

In coastal areas, the ocean may provide the closest and most accessible form of nature in which to recreate. Coastal areas account for less than 10% of the total land in the contiguous United States yet are home to almost [40% of the U.S. population](#).⁸

There are numerous examples of programs around the country in which state and local organizations and agencies take youth fishing. Children come away with special memories of a fun day on the water and a better understanding of the marine environment. For many, this ocean adventure is a first-time experience.

By expanding these programs and exposing more youth to fishing, barriers to the outdoors can be broken. Children can gain the skills and confidence to continue recreating in the outdoors. Hopefully, children will also gain a lifelong love for the sport and continue to fish into adulthood, passing their knowledge on to young people in their families and communities.



Captain Rollo's Kids at Sea

Some federal agencies have programs that include connecting youth to nature, including the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's [Urban Wildlife Conservation Program](#) and the U.S. Forest Service's [Urban and Community Forestry Program](#). However, there is no similar outdoor connection program within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which manages federal marine fisheries.

The Youth Coastal Fishing Program Act would create a new grant program within the Department of Commerce, administered by NOAA, to fund community-based programs that take youth fishing in the ocean and Great Lakes. This program would improve equitable access to nature by providing youth with experiences on the water interacting first-hand with the marine environment, lessons in marine science and environmental stewardship they otherwise may never receive and set them on a path to continued participation in outdoor recreation. ■

Youth Coastal Fishing Program Act Overview

- **Authorizes \$2 million for FY23, administered by NOAA, to award grants for youth fishing projects**
- **Eligible recipients are nonprofits, education institutions, state, local and tribal governments and Native Hawaiian organizations**
- **Funds can be used for purchasing equipment, transportation, boat/guide rental, and other related expenses**
- **Projects must include a recreational fishing experience in tidal river, coastal, ocean or Great Lakes waters; education about marine science, conservation and fishing regulations; and information on where how to continue fishing**
- **Priority given to projects targeted at underserved communities**
- **Administrative costs to carry out the program are limited to 3%**



¹ Kristen Weir, "Nurtured by nature: Psychological research is advancing our understanding of how time in nature can improve our mental health and sharpen our cognition" American Psychological Association (2020) <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>

² Silva Larson, et al., *Does Participation in Outdoor Activities Determine Residents' Appreciation of Nature: A Case Study From the Great Barrier Reef, Australia* (Environment and Natural Resources Research, 4, 211-226).

³ W. Hunter Holland, et al., *A Systematic Review of the Psychological, Social, and Educational Outcomes Associated With Participation in Wildland Recreational Activities* (Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership, 10:3, 2018).

⁴ American Sportfishing Association, *Sportfishing in America* (2021).

⁵ Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation, "Fishing Nets 5 Million New & Returning Anglers in 2020," Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (2020) <https://news.takemefishing.org/prelim-special-report-2021>

⁶ Debbie Hanson, "5 Reasons You Should Teach a Kid to Fish," [takemefishing.org](https://www.takemefishing.org/blog/december-2016/5-reasons-you-should-teach-a-kid-to-fish/) (2016) <https://www.takemefishing.org/blog/december-2016/5-reasons-you-should-teach-a-kid-to-fish/>

⁷ Myron Floyd, et al., *Barriers and Strategies to Connecting Urban Audiences to Wildlife and Nature: Results from a Multi-Method Research Project* (NC State Extension, 2016).

⁸ NOAA, "What percentage of the American population lives near the coast?," NOAA (2021) <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/population.html>

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