

New Rules for Saltwater Fishing

What You Need to Know Before You Go Out

Steve Medeiros

Effective January 5, 2010, the Rhode Island saltwater recreational fishing license legislation became law when the General Assembly voted to override the Governor's veto.

Must I Buy A License?

Under federal law, every saltwater angler must be registered. It can be done via the Federal Angler Registry (register online at www.countmyfish.noaa.gov) or through a state license. The Rhode Island license gives everyone the option. Anglers can register with Rhode Island or use the Federal Registry. Either will be accepted.

The Rhode Island license will be \$7, but the Federal Angler Registry is free in 2010, and will be \$15-\$25 starting in 2011. R.I. Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) will accept either of these. Anglers who fish in Rhode Island and Connecticut will probably want the RI license because it is accepted in Connecticut and at \$7 is a deal compared to the Connecticut nonresident license fee. Connecticut does not accept a Federal Angler Registry permit.

An individual will be considered to be fishing recreationally if they are engaged in the process of angling or spearfishing, or if they possess equipment used for angling or spearfishing and are also in possession of finfish.

When Will The License Be Available?

RIDEM plans to begin the license process approximately May 15. Anglers will be able to purchase a RI license online from home or by phone. The Federal Angler Registry began on January 1.

Who Is Exempted From The License Requirement?

- Under the age of 16;
- Permanently disabled or blind;
- On leave from active military duty; and
- A passenger on a licensed party or charter boat.

What Happens To The Money?

All money collected from Rhode Island license fees, other than \$2 commission paid to the vendors, will be deposited into a restricted receipt account, mandated by law, and can be used only for the following purposes:

- Administering and enforcing the recreational fishing license program;

RHODE ISLAND LICENSE FEES

- Resident.....\$7.00
- Nonresident.....\$10.00
- Resident/nonresident 7-Day License....\$5.00
- Residents over age 65 must obtain a license, but there is no fee.



Father Andy and son Nicholas Berg caught this 30 pound striped bass just off the southwest coast of Block Island. *Photo: RISAA.*

- Managing Rhode Island's marine recreational fisheries, with particular reference to improving state-based fishery catch and effort statistics and stock assessments; and
- Enhancing recreational fishing opportunities.

Accountability

On an annual basis, RIDEM must prepare a report that details the number of recreational fishing licenses issued, the amount of license fee revenue received, the expenditures made during the prior year using that money, and how RIDEM plans to use the revenue during the next year. The report shall also include additional information relating to administration and enforcement of the program and the status of recreational fishing stock assessments.

This annual report must be presented to the R.I. Marine Fisheries Council, and must conduct one or more public meetings to solicit input from recreational anglers and the general public. The Fisheries Council shall annually prepare an addendum to this report, setting forth the Council's recommendations for modifying the program.

This final report must be presented annually to the R.I. General Assembly.

Reciprocity

Rhode Island will honor the license of any other state that affords reciprocity to Rhode Island residents holding a state license. Currently this will extend to Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York.

Background

The constitution of Rhode Island gives authority to the General Assembly to provide for the conservation of the natural resources of the state, including its marine fisheries. The state of Rhode Island has historically established programs to provide for and regulate recreational fishing.

The federal government and regional management councils also establish regulatory programs, management measures, quotas, and other restrictions that affect recreational anglers, and Rhode Island functions in whole or in part in the context of federal and regional programs, depending on the fishery.

The regulatory programs and management measures governing marine recreational fisheries are based primarily on catch and effort statistics from recreational fisherman, and on fishery resource assessments, which gauge the biological status of fish stocks. Since 1979, recreational fishing assessments have been based on the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS), administered by the federal government in partnership with the states. Fishermen have never been pleased with this program.

In 2006, under the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (the U.S. law that governs all marine fisheries) Congress acknowledged major flaws in the accuracy of the assessments provided by MRFSS, and called upon the National Marine Fisheries Service to undertake programmatic reforms, including the establishment of a universal registry of all saltwater anglers to provide a more accurate and



Steve Katkowski caught this 22 inch tautog in Potters Pond on Rhode Island's south shore. *Photo: RISAA.*

efficient means for acquiring recreational catch and effort data.

In 2008, NMFS initiated a new Marine Recreational Information Program to replace MRFSS, and enacted rules requiring marine recreational fisherman to either register under a new national program, or be registered or licensed by a state program that meets federal requirements.

All coastal states have enacted, or are in the process of enacting, marine recreational fishing license or registry programs. Our neighbors in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York have a saltwater license in place.

The interests of recreational saltwater anglers in Rhode Island can best be met by establishing a state program that meets federal requirements, contributes to improved state-based recreational fishing assessments and stock assessments, and supports fair and effective regulatory programs and quota allocations for Rhode Island's marine recreational fisheries.

~Steve Medeiros is president of the R.I. Salt Water Anglers Association.



Louie Cahill took third place for biggest catch with this 9.8 pound fluke caught under the Newport Bridge. *Photo: Bob Masse.*

Go Deeper!

To learn more about the local salt water fishing licensing program visit http://www.risaa.org/rec_license.html

To obtain a R.I. license visit <http://www.saltwater.ri.gov/>

Sign up on the federal registry at www.countmyfish.noaa.gov