

Joint Statement To Conserve Marine, Estuarine and Riverine Habitat

presented at Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting

Washington, D.C.

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Statement: The undersigned parties agree to use available mandates and to expand interagency efforts to minimize adverse effects of human activities on marine, estuarine, and riverine species and their habitats. This statement offers general guidance to states, federal agencies and regional bodies that share responsibility for fish habitat through their respective roles in decisions of research, management, and specific human activities. All decisions related to habitat conservation and use must accommodate the ecological needs of living natural resources in marine, estuarine, and riverine systems.

Objectives:

1. To minimize avoidable adverse impacts to fish stocks and their habitat. Our shared intent is to grant these valuable resources an appropriate level of management concern that reflects their tremendous socioeconomic-cultural value to the Nation. Any determination of public interest should balance these values with other uses.

2. To conserve, restore, and enhance fish habitats for the long-term benefit of all users. This applies equally to habitats of existing fish stocks and the historic ranges of stocks covered by a restoration plan. Aggressive action may be warranted to recover lost benefits.

3. To promote innovative programs that will increase our knowledge of management strategies that may reduce habitat loss or augment fish stocks, including:

a) Beneficial uses of dredged material;

b) Mitigation techniques for specific habitats accomplished in a manner that does not adversely impact the habitat needs of other important living natural resources.

c) Restoration measures for specific stocks.

4. To improve our use of existing authorities and adopt new interagency procedures that will improve our habitat management efforts, including:

a) Policies, guidelines, and/or regulations regarding "no net

loss" of wetlands;

b) Recognition, support, and promotion of ecologically responsible wetland enhancement and management techniques that will add benefits for living resources of special concern while maintaining values for other important living resources;

c) Early identification procedures to accord special

recognition to deserving habitats; and,

d) Incorporating all agencies into such efforts as fishery management plans (with the Fishery Management Councils established under the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act and with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission).

5. To foster greater interagency cooperation and collaboration, including:

a) Shared priority statements, policies, and management plans that will improve overall awareness of habitat programs in other agencies;

b) Joint research and management initiatives to address

common issues and needs; and,

c) Improved decision-making protocols, including mechanisms to incorporate best-available information into decisions affecting living resources and their habitat in ecological units within meaningful biogeographic regions rather than administrative or political jurisdiction.

Recommended Actions:

Our shared responsibilities for marine, estuarine, and riverine habitats invite frequent opportunities for collaboration, including:

1) Share general information, recommendations, and decisions for other important living resources that relate to habitats or related resources, e.g., habitat policies or habitat discussions in Fishery Management Plans.

2) Collaborate with other parties on actions that relate to habitat or living resources, e.g., management plans or mitigation protocols.

3) Initiate new agreements to improve our efforts to conserve and manage living resources and their habitat, e.g. development and implementation of strategic multi-objective resource planning to address issues in resource or habitat management.