AFS Policy Statement #1:
North American Fisheries Policy (Revised)
(Full Text)

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Executive Summary

The North American Fisheries Policy has evolved during the last 50 years as have demands on the fishery resources. The following policy is divided into eight sections:

Article 1: Jurisdiction of Fisheries. This section identifies responsibilities for fisheries management.
Article 2: Administration. A goal will be to balance aquatic resource and human needs to ensure long-term sustainability of fishery resources.
Article 3: Research. Management of aquatic resources needs to be based on sound, most-current science.
Article 4: Management of Fisheries. Management of fisheries must be in the best interest of the fisheries for current and future generations of users.
Article 5: Aquaculture. Aquaculture is a growing industry for meeting a growing demand for aquatic resources.
Article 6: Transplantation of Species. Use of cultured fishes continues to play an important role in maintaining fish stocks.
Article 7: Professional Education and Training. Fishery scientists, managers, and administrators must be highly qualified to meet the demands of today's fishery profession.
Article 8: Public Information and Education. Fisheries professionals and the American Fisheries Society have key roles in transferring information and knowledge so that they are understandable to the public.

North American Fisheries Policy

The American Fisheries Society (Society) promotes the well-being of North American fish throughout their geographic ranges and promotes natural genetic variability within and among populations. North American ecosystems, biological communities, habitats, and their genetic and ecological diversity should be maintained, restored, and enhanced where possible. A goal is to ensure self-sustaining populations that would support commercial and recreational fishing both now and in the future. Further, the Society seeks to increase scientific understanding of all aquatic-dependent species, biological communities, and ecosystems and encourages the actions necessary for their long-term conservation. The Society also seeks to assist government agencies in fulfilling the international treaty obligations of the United States, Canada, and Mexico with respect to aquatic species and their habitats, and threatened and endangered aquatic species; to the extent consistent with the forgoing purposes, the Society seeks to promote the public's appreciation and understanding of the aquatic world, its biological diversity, its fishery

communities, and its ecological processes. The Society needs to help people understand that future uses depend on biological, physical, and sociological constraints and that even the best management of limited resources cannot meet all the needs of an ever-growing population.

Article I. Jurisdiction of Fisheries

Responsible governments act as stewards to guard and protect living aquatic resources and to ensure their perpetuation. In this regard, governments are responsible to the people. When a government grants permission for private control of an area or enterprise, that transfer should have minimal and temporary impact on public trust rights and access to common property and resources. Each nation has jurisdiction over the living aquatic resources and the fisheries in its internal waters, its territorial seas, and any internationally recognized fishing zones contiguous to its territorial seas, but jurisdiction may lie with internal government units or be delegated to international agencies or private interests as appropriate.

Any aquatic resource exploited for recreational or commercial harvest and managed by two or more jurisdictions (including federal, state, provincial, or tribal) or nations should be studied and managed as common units through agreement between the parties concerned. Any transboundary aquatic resource not now subject to study and management should be brought under agreement as soon as possible.

Article II. Administration

Fishery administrators need complete and accurate information on the status of aquatic resources. This information will be used in balancing aquatic resource and human needs. Commercial fisheries should be administered to ensure the long-term sustainability of populations of aquatic resources (including nontarget, bycatch species) and their habitats. Sport fisheries should also be administered to provide long-term sustainability of aquatic populations and their habitats while at the same time ensuring a diversity of recreational opportunities to a wide range of public interests (including consumptive and nonconsumptive as diverse as for religious and subsistence uses).

When conflicts arise among user interests, the sustainability of the aquatic resources involved should be considered foremost. If requirements for sustainability can be met, allocation should be considered to meet diverse public demands. The goal of today's fishery managers should be to manage aquatic species and their habitats so as to avoid the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act and other similar laws and treaties in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and elsewhere. Recommendations to implement management or regulatory changes should be based on informed scientific judgment. Where information is incomplete, the best available information should be used so that needed management is not delayed. Interested publics need to be involved throughout the decision-making process. It is important to receive public input as well as to educate the public on the necessity for changes in management.

Article III. Research

The management of aquatic species and their habitats requires continuous updating of scientific information on the status of populations and the condition of their habitats. For all species, this includes monitoring utilized populations. Data should be generated by a variety of disciplines and research interests and should be validated by peer review and scientific replication. New information must be communicated among researchers, managers, administrators, and policy makers. Administrators, researchers, and public information officers should work together to ensure that research needs for sustainable fisheries are understood and supported.

To support an ecosystem approach to management, researchers and administrators need to conduct research focused on developing an understanding of the multidimensional and interconnected nature of aquatic resource communities and their habitats. Good laboratory practices should be used and should incorporate consideration for humane treatment of study animals, as embodied in all relevant legislation at federal, state, provincial, and tribal levels.

Article IV. Management of Fisheries

Agencies are responsible for preserving biodiversity, concomitant with maintaining long-term sustainability of utilized resources and should coordinate their activities through an ecosystem approach to management. All agencies (federal, state, provincial, and tribal) should work cooperatively and apply an ecological approach that includes habitat and watershed perspectives, community interactions, and genetic and ecological processes. Critical to this effort, managers should communicate their needs, coordinate their activities, and share natural resource data. Whenever an agency or private enterprise proposes a project that has the potential to alter the quality or quantity of aquatic habitat, these entities should carefully review alternative plans and assess the risks and environmental impacts to aquatic ecosystems.

Mitigating measures need to be included in management alternatives. Decisions ultimately need to be made that not only conserve but, where possible, restore or improve aquatic resources and aquatic habitats. Since mitigation measures do not always preserve or protect aquatic species and their habitat, it may be necessary for fishery biologists and administrators to recommend and choose not to proceed with a project.

North American fisheries are an important part of the food industry that supplies a great variety of food products for human and domestic animal consumption. Management of these fisheries must be in the best interest of the fisheries and future generations of users and requires conservation of the resources and their environment, and promotion of the economic welfare of the fishing industry and the well-being of the consumer. Commercial fisheries should be conducted to the greatest extent possible with minimal bycatch, and fishing gear should not damage the environment.

Management manipulation of habitat should include integrating biotic, chemical, and physical processes within the management framework. Needs of all ecosystem components, including all life stages of involved species, should be considered during planning, implementing, and monitoring of habitat management activities. Habitat management may involve active manipulation or may be left to the influence of natural processes. Management may require preservation with no human use to ensure maintenance of biodiversity.

Fishery managers need to understand the relationship of the effects of pollution on aquatic resources, including potential effects of toxic substances that can bioaccumulate and be passed on to the consumer. They must work together to conserve and enforce fish habitat, curtail pollution, and manage increasing, often conflicting, demands on diminishing resources.

There is a need to maintain representative natural areas for scientific, educational, subsistence, religious, and cultural values. The needs of consumers and fishers must be weighed against long-term sustainability of fishery populations being harvested. Where this has not occurred, fish populations such as haddock, Atlantic cod, red snapper, Pacific herring, Pacific halibut, salmon, and king crab have declined. In many cases, this has been the result of excessive harvest and/or degradation of one or more habitats required in the life history of these species. As an alternative to harvest, the promotion of nonconsumptive use of some of the wild resources such as photography, viewing, and catch-and-release fishing may be necessary to ensure long-term sustainability.

Public Access to Fishing Waters. Where possible, access for public fishing on both inland and coastal waters should be acquired and developed. Fishing opportunities should be made available to all interested publics, including people of all ages and those with disabilities. A diversity of interests, including recreational, religious, subsistence, and commercial fisheries, should be accommodated. It is equally important to preserve some areas in their wilderness form, making access difficult or almost impossible.

Regulations. Fishing regulations should be simple, easily interpreted, and consistent with management goals for the fishery. All regulations should be clearly stated and adequately publicized and explained.

Article V. Aquaculture

Aquaculture provides income, food, bait, and recreation to a rapidly increasing proportion of the population. This includes a growing demand for aquarium fish due to dwindling wild stocks. While commercial aquaculture has immense potential for supplying protein-rich food for humans, aquaculture facilities and practices should have minimal impact on natural aquatic environments and populations. As an international industry, the commercial aquaculture industry must work closely with federal, state, and provincial regulators to control epizootic outbreaks of diseases, to prevent the release of exotic species into the wild, and to ensure that effluents from facilities are better than required by water quality regulations. State, provincial, tribal, and federal managers need to

provide consistency in regulations that will facilitate transport, prevent escape of exotics into the wild, or prohibit placement of aquaculture facilities where they will affect wild populations and assist in disease diagnosis and treatment. Where possible, federal, state, and provincial managers will encourage the aquaculture industry to use indigenous species in their facilities. In 1991, the American Fisheries Society adopted a position statement on commercial aquaculture that included the following four principles:

1. Federal, state, tribal, and provincial jurisdictions should cooperatively promulgate and enforce regulations to ensure both the health of aquatic organisms and the quality of food products. Animals that are to be moved from one biogeographic area to another or to natural waters should be quarantined to prevent disease transmission. Processing plants and fresh and processed food products should be inspected regularly to safeguard human health.

2. To prevent disruption of natural aquatic communities should cultured organisms escape confinement, the use of organisms native to each facility's region is strongly encouraged.

3. When commercially cultured fish are considered for stocking in natural waters, every consideration should be given to protecting the genetic integrity of native fishes.

4. Aquaculture facilities should meet prevailing environmental standards for wastewater treatment and sludge control.

Article VI. Transplantation of Species

Stocking of cultured fishes has historically been an important approach to increasing fish production for recreation and commercial use. It has been and will be an important means to reestablish indigenous, sport, and commercial species. Historically, stocking of desirable game species has had beneficial effects for commercial and recreational fishers as well as undesirable effects on native species through competition, diseases, and possible increased exploitation. When native species already threatened or endangered are potentially affected, the use of cultured fishes should be very carefully regulated and ecological risk minimized.

All fish stocking should be part of a well-developed management plan. Before any stocking program is initiated, the federal, state, provincial, tribal, or private interest should evaluate stocking proposals using the American Fisheries Society's protocol concerning introductions of species. All federal, state, provincial, and tribal regulations should be adhered to prior to the initiation of any stocking program. Potential effects on the immediate fishery-as well as throughout the entire watershed, including the downstream areas-must be evaluated. The evaluation should cover all management practices, including transplantation through deliberate stocking, unauthorized or illegal, and accidental introductions.

Habitats exist that will not maintain self-reproducing or self-sustaining populations. In these situations, a put-and-take stocking program may be used to artificially sustain a fishery. Put-and-take fisheries help increase fishing opportunities (e.g., fishing clinics, fishing opportunities for the mobility-impaired, urban fishing). Put-and-take fisheries need to be managed so as not to impact surrounding native fish populations.

Article VII. Professional Education and Training

In addition to having the necessary biological skills, fishery scientists, fishery managers, and fishery administrators must be highly trained professionals able to work in a complex environment and handle a variety of issues, including personnel management, dispute resolution, contracts management, and political influence. A bachelor's degree is considered a minimal educational requirement, and a master's degree is an increasingly frequent requirement. A doctorate is preferred, and sometimes considered mandatory, for most federal, state, provincial, and private institutions involved in research. Master's and doctorate programs for fisheries professionals must also accommodate a changing world and ever-increasing need for a broad range of skills. The benefit of augmenting sound technical and research skills with good communication and management skills should not be overlooked. The Society has a certification program that helps set the standard for fisheries professionals. Hiring policies of fisheries agencies should give priority and salary advantage to individuals based on professional ability (obtained from a combination of education and work experience).

The wide range of job requirements and skills needed by today's fishery professionals make it difficult for educational institutions to meet all training requirements. Students with a broad education should expect additional on-the-job training. Continuing on-the-job training is an important aspect of an agency's responsibility for managing its personnel. Because technology changes rapidly, personnel can lose touch with scientific progress unless they are constantly working to stay abreast of the science through continuing education or experience. Extra training should be provided by employers who move biologists and scientists into administrative positions.

Article VIII. Public Information and Education

Everyone needs to be educated about the relationships of fish within aquatic ecosystems. The public also needs to understand the critical role that human dimension plays in the management and utilization of ecosystems. Public understanding and acceptance of current and proposed programs influence the scope and scale of fisheries management. Actual information about fisheries, such as the reasons for regulations and the basic biology and ecology of the animals, must be made available in understandable and acceptable forms.

Ecosystem health is an issue of fundamental importance to human health and general well-being; therefore, knowledge and understanding about this subject must be incorporated into school education programs. Fisheries professionals and the American Fisheries Society have key roles in transferring scientific information and knowledge in

understandable language to the public. Such a transfer includes educational materials in the area of aquatic ecosystem health as well as other important fishery habitat information and publications for use in school curricula. These materials should be available to the public at large, including media, decision makers, and interested individuals and organizations. A free-flow of easily understood, current scientific information in an open environment is essential to the formation of sound public policy related to fisheries resource management.

History of the North American Fisheries Policy

During the 63rd annual meeting (1933) of the American Fisheries Society, President Fred A. Westerman appointed a committee to draft an American Game Fish Policy. After five years of effort, the North American Fish Policy was presented at the 68th annual meeting by E. L. Wickliff, was adopted by the membership, and was published in Volume 68 of the Transactions of the American Fisheries Society (1939:40-51).

In 1954, A. S. Hazzard presented a much shorter version of the policy to the Society, which voted to adopt it. The document was published in Volume 84 of the Transactions of the American Fisheries Society (1955:377-380).

In 1964, Hazzard presented yet another revision of the policy at the 94th annual meeting. It was adopted and published in Volume 94 of the Transactions of the American Fisheries Society (1965:117-118).

In 1970, Edwin L. Cooper offered a revision of the policy to the Society's Executive Committee, and it was accepted at the organization's semi-annual meeting in Chicago, Illinois, 24 March 1970.

In 1973, an updated version of the policy was presented to the Executive Committee by William F. Royce during the Society's semi-annual meeting in Washington, DC. The policy was then adopted by the Society at its annual meeting in Orlando, Florida, in September 1973.

In 1993, President Ray Hubley charged a committee to update the North American Fisheries Policy to reflect changes in objectives and management practices affecting aquatic resources. A draft update was published in Fisheries in April 1995, and the Society approved the final version during the August 1995 annual meeting in Tampa, Florida.

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