



Reps. Dingell and Mast Introduce Forage Fish Conservation Bill Backed by Recreational Fishing and Boating Groups

Washington, D.C. – November 1, 2021 – Last week, the recreational fishing and boating community applauded the introduction of the Forage Fish Conservation Act by Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) and Congressman Brian Mast (R-Fla.). The legislation and its Senate companion bill ([S. 1484](#)) would require federal fisheries managers to account for the role forage fish play in the marine ecosystem when catch limits are set on these small but important fish.

“The American Sportfishing Association is grateful to Reps. Dingell and Mast for their leadership on forage fish conservation,” said Mike Leonard, vice president of government affairs for the [American Sportfishing Association](#). “This legislation, which establishes a framework for ensuring forage fish are not over-exploited, is critical for all the anglers and businesses who depend on healthy marine resources.”

In 2014, the Commission on Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Management, chaired by Bass Pro Shops Founder and CEO Johnny Morris and Maverick Boat Group Founder Scott Deal, released [a report](#) identifying key policy changes to the federal marine fisheries management system to benefit fisheries conservation and public access. One of the six key recommendations of that report was improving management and conservation of forage fish.

“We thank Reps. Dingell and Mast for their commitment to conservation and their bipartisan recognition that a healthy marine ecosystem depends on the tiniest fish in the sea,” said Jeff Angers, president of the [Center for Sportfishing Policy](#). “It is critical that we balance the demand for forage fish with the value these fish provide when left in the ocean as food for recreationally important predator species.”

Forage fish provide food for nearly all recreationally important fish species, as well as seabirds and other marine life. Meanwhile, human demand for these nutrient-rich species continues to increase.

However, the Magnuson-Stevens Act is not currently designed to account for the unique role of forage fish in the marine ecosystem, instead relying on traditional single-species management approaches. The Forage Fish Conservation Act would require that the impacts on fish populations and the marine ecosystem be considered before allowing harvest on any currently unmanaged forage species, and that predator needs be accounted for in existing management plans for forage fish.

“Forage fish stocks and vibrant recreational fisheries are fundamentally linked,” said Jason Schratwieser, president of the [International Game Fish Association](#). “We are hopeful that this important piece of legislation will be passed to safeguard the little fish that play such a big role in our marine ecosystems.”

“The Forage Fish Conservation Act introduced by Representatives Debbie Dingell and Brian Mast goes a long way in expanding upon responsible conservation practices and fostering healthy marine ecosystems – a priority for the recreational boating and fishing community,” said Frank Hugelmeyer, president of the [National Marine Manufacturers Association](#). “This is a major step forward in protecting forage fish and sportfish stocks for generations to come, and we encourage swift passage of this key conservation initiative in Congress.”

“A lot of attention in fisheries management focuses on predator fish species popular with both anglers and the commercial fishing industry,” said Chris Horton, senior director of fisheries policy for the [Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation](#). “However, you can’t have abundant recreational and commercial fisheries without a healthy base of forage fish, and this bill takes a big step to account for, and protect, the role of forage fish in the ecosystem.”

“Millions of Americans enjoy valuable time among family and friends on the water every year with more than 70 percent of all boat outings involving fishing,” said Chris Edmonston, vice president of government affairs for [BoatU.S.](#) “We thank Reps. Dingell and Mast for introducing the Forage Fish Conservation Act because without forage fish, the future of recreational fishing and boating is in jeopardy.”

“This bill prioritizes management strategies to preserve our nation’s fishing economy,” said Whit Fosburgh, CEO of the [Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership](#). “Sportfishing depends on healthy forage fish populations, who serve as prey for species like striped bass, speckled trout and tuna. This bill will use science-based strategies to address forage fish management gaps to help maintain sustainable populations. We appreciate Representative Dingell and Representative Mast for working with a broad coalition to advance conservation efforts and healthier ecosystems across the country.”

The coalition of groups supporting the Forage Fish Conservation Act includes American Sportfishing Association, BoatU.S., Center for Sportfishing Policy, Coastal Conservation Association, Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, International Game Fish Association, National Marine Manufacturers Association and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

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