



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Participation Faces Threat of “Death Spiral” Study Finds California’s licensing program too costly and antiquated

March 23, 2015 (Sacramento, CA): Today, California’s leading advocate for salt- and freshwater recreational anglers released a study that finds that the high cost of purchasing an “annual” recreational fishing license has proven to be a formidable barrier to access and has contributed to an unprecedented decline in recreational fishing.

This comprehensive study may be the first time an effort has been made to compare the cost and value of annual fishing licenses, state-by-state. The results provide California policy makers an insight as to how costly annual fishing licenses are impacting participation rates, and how it could harm the State’s economy and communities dependent on recreational fishing for \$4.9 billion in economic activity each year.

The study finds that, since 1980, annual recreational fishing license sales have declined by over 55% in a state that has witnessed a near 60% increase in population. It also reaches an alarming conclusion that there could be less than 500,000 annual licenses sold by 2027 – a 77% decline from 1980.

“The dramatic decline in fishing participation should be a wakeup call for California anglers and state politicians,” said Marko Mlikotin, executive director of the California Sportfishing League. “If the State recognizes recreational fishing’s economic value, it will need to take immediate action to stop a rapidly-declining participation rate from turning into an out-of-control death spiral. Reforming a costly and antiquated licensing program, and lifting unwarranted restrictions on fishing, is the first step to protecting a great form of family recreation that supports jobs and our state’s economy.”

Key Findings

Fishing in California is Costly

- California offers the 2nd highest fresh/saltwater annual fishing license in the U.S. What once sold for \$5 in 1980, costs \$47.01 today, not including permits that could increase the cost to as much as \$120 a year.
- California’s “annual” base residential license of \$47.01 is 66% above the average fishing license cost of all coastal states (\$28.30) and 76% above the average fishing license cost for all states (\$26.73), not including additional permits.

California Offers Less Value Than Any Other States

- Even though Washington’s saltwater/fresh water “combo” license is the costliest license in the U.S., many states, including Washington, offer greater savings and value to their anglers by requiring fewer permits, and the option of purchasing a fresh or saltwater license, independently, at a reduced price. California does not.
- California also operates under an antiqued calendar system, whereby licenses expire on December 31st of every year, regardless of when purchased. This system discourages anglers from purchasing a license that is not valid a full 12 months.

Decline in License Sales Exposes Threat of Death Spiral

- Despite having one of the longest coastlines in the U.S.; over 4,000 lakes/reservoirs; and thousands of rivers and streams; California’s fishing participation rate is ranked dead last in the United States.
- Since 1980, when annual licenses were sold for as little as \$5.00, California’s annual fishing license sales have dropped by more than 55% ([1980](#): 2.26 million; [2014](#): 990k), while our state’s population has increased by nearly 60%. In 2014, 40,000 fewer annual fishing licenses were sold compared to 2013.
- If the 35-year trend remains constant, annual fishing license sales could fall below 500,000 by 2027, or another 49% over the next 12 years. Should this occur, between 1980 and 2027, annual license sales will have dropped 78%. This downward trend could accelerate if fees are increased substantially, or new regulations are imposed that increase costs or barriers to fishing.

The study also introduces policy recommendations as to how the state could address high costs and unwarranted restrictions on fishing that have led to an unprecedented and alarming trend. The State has a strong incentive to consider them, as fishing licenses are a major source of revenue for fishing and wildlife programs. These programs will face continued revenue shortfalls as the number of California anglers decline.

The California Sportfishing League (CSL) is a nonprofit coalition of fresh and saltwater anglers, and small business owners devoted to protecting access to recreational fishing. Recreational fishing contributes over \$4.9 billion annually to California’s economy, a major of outdoor tourism and jobs.

The study is available at www.SportfishingConservation.org or [click here](#).

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