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CCA Files Lawsuit to Stop Gulf Grouper Giveaway *“Fundamentally flawed” catch share program a threat to angling*

HOUSTON, TX – Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) today filed a lawsuit in federal district court in Fort Myers, Florida, challenging the adoption and implementation of Amendment 29 to the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Management Plan approved by United States Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke on August 30. Amendment 29 gives away a majority share of Gulf grouper to the commercial fishing industry through a catch share program,

“CCA has stated from the beginning that this management action is fundamentally flawed,” said Chester Brewer, chairman of the CCA National Government Relations Committee. “In moving forward with Amendment 29, the federal government has disregarded the multiple provisions in the Magnuson Stevens Act designed to govern the impacts of such action on other participants in the fishery. The only ones considered in this amendment are the commercial fishermen.”

Catch share systems bestow a percentage of a public fishery resource to a select group of commercial fishermen, based on their catch history, to harvest for their own personal gain. The commercial entities pay nothing back to the public for the permanent property right to harvest a public resource, but catch share systems are nonetheless being emphasized in federal fisheries as a way to reduce overcapacity and improve economic efficiency in the commercial sector. CCA has contended that in fisheries where there is a large and growing recreational sector, exclusive fishing rights proposals maximize benefits to the commercial fishing industry while ignoring the participation and beneficial economic impacts of recreational fishing.

“In more than 30 years of practice in fisheries law, I have not seen a more arbitrary action than this one,” said Robert G. Hayes, CCA general counsel. CCA has asked for an

expedited hearing and expects the government to answer the lawsuit within the next 60 days. “We are going to proceed as quickly as the court will allow to prevent the implementation of this egregious decision.”

To see a copy of the official comments CCA submitted to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council on Amendment 29 in June 2009, visit the Catch Share section of the CCA Newsroom at www.JoinCCA.org.

Anglers call for exit strategy on red snapper disaster

CCA seeks guidelines for opening areas, disaster relief for impacted businesses

HOUSTON, TX – CCA is calling for a number of measures to reduce the impact of management action to address a disastrous red snapper situation in the South Atlantic.

“If the federal government is going to impose significant closures that will negatively impact recreational anglers and related businesses in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, then it is vital for the government to develop a real exit strategy from this terrible situation,” said Richen Brame, CCA South Atlantic fisheries director. “CCA is calling for specific, measurable criteria to determine when the objective of this plan will be met and recreational fishermen will be allowed to resume catching bottom fish.”

CCA has also requested that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council conduct further review of the existing science to confirm the status of red snapper.

“All the extensive remedies being discussed are the result of a single stock assessment, the first full assessment ever conducted on South Atlantic red snapper. The federal government is asking anglers to swallow a very bitter pill with these unprecedented management proposals to close such a huge area to bottom fishing,” said Russell Kent, CCA National vice president. “With the Freedom to Fish language that CCA developed in the Magnuson Stevens Act, the federal government should at least develop guidelines to monitor and reopen those areas as soon as possible.”

Among the Freedom to Fish requirements are specific, measurable criteria to determine the conservation benefits of the closed area on the affected stocks of fish, a timetable for periodic review of the continued need for the closed area at least once every three years, and provisions for reopening the closed area to recreational fishing whenever the targeted conservation problem no longer exists.

In addition to requesting firm guidelines for terminating the closures, CCA will explore the feasibility of seeking a federal declaration of “resource disaster” to allow businesses impacted by the closures, such as charter boats and tackle shops, to receive financial relief.

“The inescapable fact is that the federal government has done a terrible job of managing this fishery and there is no silver bullet at this point to fix decades of neglect,” said Kent. “But the government should take responsibility for fixing what they can now, and helping the people who are bearing the greatest financial burden as a result of the closure is a good first step.”

Conservationists call for U.S. action to save bluefin tuna

International impasse leaves bluefin on the brink

HOUSTON, TX – Citing the failure of the international community to rein in harvest of bluefin tuna, Coastal Conservation Association is urging the United States to proceed with an effort to list the Atlantic bluefin on Appendix I to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and prohibit the international trade in bluefin.

“It is clear from the last meetings of International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the failure of the European Union to agree on a ban that we are left with only one option to save bluefin tuna,” said Chester Brewer, chairman of CCA’s National Government Relations Committee. “It is time for the United States to demonstrate some leadership and insist that all international trade in Atlantic bluefin tuna be halted, while hope for a recovery still remains.”

The call to list bluefin tuna as an endangered species was outlined in a letter from CCA National Chairman Venable Proctor to Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. Proctor pointed to ICCAT’s own independent review of its approach to fisheries management, which concluded that the management of bluefin tuna is an “international disgrace,” as evidence of the need for the United States to take more of a leadership role.

“ICCAT has failed to take any action to enforce its own regulations on its own members, which violate already excessive quotas with impunity, resulting in annual harvests that have been 400 percent of levels recommended by biologists intimately familiar with the species,” Proctor stated. “There is no longer any reason to expect ICCAT to end the overexploitation of bluefin.”

“American fishermen and markets are not responsible for driving bluefin tuna to the edge of extinction, but we need to lead the solution to salvage what is left and set it on a road to recovery,” said Dr. Russell Nelson, CCA’s Gulf fisheries consultant.

An Appendix I listing means that a species ranks among the most endangered of CITES-listed animals and is threatened with extinction. Such a CITES listing prohibits all international trade in specimens of these species except when the purpose of the import is not commercial, such as for scientific research.



Dominion Awards \$200,000 Grant to CCA Maryland for Monitoring Buoy at the Gooses

The Dominion Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Dominion Resources, has awarded a \$200,000 grant to the Coastal Conservation Association Maryland (CCA MD) to purchase an open-water monitoring buoy for placement over the Dominion Reef at the Gooses, an artificial reef in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay.

The effort is a partnership with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Chesapeake Bay Office, the Maryland Artificial Reef Initiative (MARI), the Friends of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail and other Chesapeake Bay organizations. CCA MD has placed the grant funds with Maryland Artificial Reef Initiative (MARI).

"The buoy at the Dominion Reef at the Gooses offers something for everyone who loves and values the Chesapeake Bay," said William C. Hall Jr., a vice president for Dominion Resources and president of the company's Dominion Foundation. "It provides educational opportunities for students, vital data for scientists working to restore the Bay, and weather, wave and water information for boaters and anglers. As part of the Capt. John Smith Chesapeake Trail, it even has something for the history buff. Dominion is honored to be a partner in this important project."

The buoy will monitor the health of local Bay waters and help assess benefits to fish populations that are created by the Dominion Reef. A wide variety of environmental measurements important to scientists, students and anglers will be collected during the coming years. The buoy also will be part of the Captain John Smith Trail, the nation's first national water trail covering 3,000 miles of the historic route Smith took in 1607-08.

"Maryland is pleased to continue to have Dominion as a partner in our efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay," said DNR Secretary John Griffin. "In addition to providing critical water quality data, this project will aid anglers and promote boating safety by providing real-time water and weather conditions."

"Partnerships such as this harness the strengths and creativity of corporations, government agencies and non-profit organizations to address the bay's restoration," said David O'Neill, President of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail. "We are very pleased that the Dominion Foundation has asked that the buoy be tied into the country's first all-water National Historic Trail."

As part of the Maryland Artificial Reef System (MARI), the Dominion Reef at the Gooses covers a 320-acre site with approximately 80 acres of concrete that serves as habitat for fish and other Bay life. Dominion provided a \$250,000 grant in 2008 to pay for building the reef and seeding it with oysters and oyster shell. It is located about 10 miles southeast of Chesapeake Beach and northwest of Lusby, Calvert County, where Dominion's liquefied natural gas storage facility is located.

The buoy, which will be installed by next spring, will provide real time data through DNR and NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System (CBIBS) websites: www.eyesonthebay.net and www.buoybay.org, respectively. Additionally, up-to-date data and interpretive information will be available via the CBIBS 877-BUOYBAY telephone service.

The buoy system will be similar to those currently used by NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Interpretative Buoy System (CBIBS) and water quality, waves, currents, and meteorological sensor packages and a telemetry package to relay the data to websites in real-time.

"We appreciate this opportunity to augment observing capabilities in Chesapeake Bay, particularly to serve an area where we don't currently collect such measurements" said Peyton Robertson, Director of NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Office.

Both DNR and CCA believe this collaboration will benefit thousands of Maryland citizens.

"This grant will allow a broad cross section of Marylanders to become aware of current information through easily accessible websites," said Tony Friedrich, CCA MD executive director. "Not only will recreational anglers and boaters find information such as wind conditions, but any citizen will be able to learn about the life on this reef. Monitoring results will lead to greater public awareness of the value of projects such as oyster restoration to improve water quality in the Bay."

Participants in this project include: Dominion – www.dom.com; DNR- www.dnr.maryland.gov; NOAA - www.noaa.gov; CCA MD - www.ccamd.org; MARI - www.ccamd.org/MARI; The Chesapeake Bay Foundation - www.cbf.org; Friends of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail - www.friendsofthejohnsmithtrail.org; Chesapeake Bay Observing System – www.cbos.org. Many of these groups and others will use their websites to communicate data from the buoy to their members and the general public.

CCA Texas Funds Artificial Reef Project

\$50,000 to help establish nearshore reef off Port Mansfield

The CCA Texas Executive Board recently approved \$50,000 for the development of another artificial reef in state waters. The Port Mansfield nearshore reefing project, spearheaded by the Texas Parks Wildlife Department (TPWD) Artificial Reef Program, is located approximately 7 nautical miles out of Port Mansfield in about 65 feet of water.

This contribution is the latest by the CCA Texas Habitat Today for Fish Tomorrow (HTFT) program, which is dedicated to creating and restoring habitat for the coastal fisheries of Texas. This latest contribution brings the total contributions and dollars secured by HTFT to \$135,000 for nearshore artificial reefing up and down the Texas coast.

"These funds will assist TPWD in developing a spectacular nearshore fishing reef at the Port Mansfield PS-1047 (South Padre Island 1047) reefing site," said Dale Shively, TPWD Artificial Reef Program Coordinator.

The reef is located a short boat ride out of Port Mansfield jetties and was intended to accommodate fishermen with smaller boats. With its close proximity, the reef makes an excellent destination for the average weekend angler.

"In July of this year, the program reefed a 100-foot tugboat and 800 concrete culverts ranging in size from 24 inches to 72 inches, and has several hundred more to deploy within this 160 acre site," said Shively. "The funds from CCA Texas are greatly appreciated by both TPWD and the local community at Port Mansfield. This is another great example of how a non-profit organization can team up with the State of Texas to play an even larger role in the stewardship of our marine resources."

CCA Texas' contribution to the Port Mansfield reefing project along with the April 2009 commitment to the Vancouver reefing site off Freeport is helping to bring the vision of the TPWD nearshore reefing program closer to reality for anglers and the state's marine resources. The effort to bring valuable habitat to the Texas nearshore waters has been hugely successful in other states such as Alabama. CCA Texas is proud to be a part of the program and will continue to find opportunities to create productive reefing sites up and down the entire Texas coast for all recreational anglers to enjoy.

"Habitat Today for Fish Tomorrow is an initiative and commitment that CCA Texas takes very seriously," said Mark Ray, chairman of CCA Texas. "These offshore reefing projects will impact the Gulf of Mexico fishery for generations. We remain committed to finding partners like the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Offshore Reefing initiative, that maximize the impact of the dollars raised by our volunteers."



Cheap license shortchanges New York anglers

New York's recent adoption of a saltwater fishing license has long been awaited by CCA NY and other responsible anglers who believe that, just like other sportsmen, saltwater fishermen have a moral obligation to help support the management of the species that they target. However, we were concerned to learn that the license adopted would cost a mere \$10, an amount that would minimize its contribution to DEC coffers (although an increased level of expected Wallop-Breaux funding remains a plus.)

The current economic crunch, resulting in a loss of state tax revenues and a cut in spending for all state departments, had a big impact on the Department of Environmental Conservation, and in particular the Marine Bureau. The State Legislature now expects the Bureau to rely on license revenues for a significant part of its funding, despite a license that will cost barely more than half of what was originally contemplated.

In the end, it will be the resource and the anglers who enjoy it who will suffer from the shortsightedness of license opponents, and the willingness of legislators to give in to the questionable arguments of the sportfishing industry, which somehow convinced them that an additional \$9 in the annual license fee would dissuade anglers from buying the graphite rods, braided lines and high-tech reels that have become the common tools of anglers fishing in state waters.

CCA NY will work to convince the legislature that, without a fully-funded Marine Bureau, neither anglers nor the angling industry will be able to enjoy the full potential of New York's marine resources.

CCA PNW Response to Obama Salmon Plan

It is ironic that Oregon strives to be a leader in sustainability, yet we continue to subject our wild salmon runs to unsustainable harvest practices that are pushing the fish toward extinction.

Each year taxpayers, electric utility rate payers and others collectively contribute about \$1 billion to salmon recovery efforts, yet more than half of our region's salmon and steelhead runs are extinct. And while the Obama administration should be applauded for shining a light on salmon recovery efforts, that light is focused in the wrong direction.

There is a reason we have not moved the dial on recovery, or achieved better results from hatchery reform, hydro practices and habitat improvements; it is the way we harvest – and continually over-harvest – our fish. Currently, the commercial fishing gear used in the Columbia River and elsewhere (gillnets) is non-selective and kills large numbers of ESA-listed and wild salmon and steelhead. Gillnets are designed to entangle fish in the nets, leading to suffocation and death before selection is possible. All marine life that gets caught in a gillnet dies, from salmon and steelhead to seals and seabirds. Ironically Oregon, a “green” state, is one of the few places in the country to still allow gillnets.

We have the ability to restore our runs -- and our fishing economy -- by changing our harvest practices.

There was a time when Oregon used sustainable harvest practices -- you can still see the remnants of old wooden fish weirs in the Columbia today -- but the forms of commercial fishing gear capable of the live capture, selection and release of wild fish, known as selective harvest (seines, pound nets, fish traps), are currently illegal in our state. However, there is a silver lining.

Our neighbors to the North, with whom we share a vital river, are testing alternative methods of commercial fishing gear. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is conducting selective gear tests on the lower Columbia River this fall. The goal is to find an efficient harvest method that allows for the live sorting of wild and hatchery fish, enabling wild fish to be released unharmed.

Programs that advance the selective commercial harvest of a dwindling resource are the kind of efforts the Obama administration should support. Implementing the use of selective gear is an effective, achievable way to create a sustainable fishery for all stakeholders – both recreational and commercial – a solution that is supported by science. And, it opens the door to providing a greater return on the investment that taxpayers are contributing to salmon recovery.

Timothy Egan of The New York Times once remarked that, "In the Northwest, a river without a salmon is a body without a soul." The drive for new harvest methods is not about dividing up dwindling runs between recreational and commercial anglers or curtailing commercial fishing. It is about preserving the future, or in Egan's words, the soul of our region. Implementing selective harvest methods would allow all stakeholders, including the fish, to enjoy a much larger return on the billion-dollar investment we are making in recovery. If Oregon hopes to remain a leader in sustainability, the state needs to apply those same principles to our fisheries.

South Carolina launches into oyster recycling season

November and December mean oyster roast season in South Carolina. With the establishment of the Topwater Action Program as its habitat effort, it now means it is oyster recycling season as well. As one of the focuses of the habitat program, the collection of oyster shells from many sources around the state is a primary activity for the creation of new marine habitat in the summer months of 2010.

“With the overwhelming success we have experienced in the last 24 months with this program, CCA SC is looking to expand the recycling effort of the Topwater Action Program this fall and winter,” said project coordinator Chuck Blankin.

The program is setting ambitious goals to expand its oyster recycling efforts in several targeted steps. The first is to increase the cooperative arrangement with more public oyster festivals to recycle shells from these events. In conjunction with that, negotiations are ongoing with several municipalities around the state for the establishment of oyster recycling centers at water treatment facilities. This would expand the reach of the program by allowing the public in locations away from the coast to contribute to the state’s coastal resources.

“Our belief is that the more locations we can provide for the general public to take shells, the more shells we can recycle and put back to work improving our marine resources,” said Gary Visor.

Please contact the state office to find out more ways you can participate in this nationally recognized habitat program.

SPECs go west

Gulf Coast Research Lab's Seatrout Population Enhancement Cooperative (SPEC) project successfully spawned Bay St. Louis speckled trout and hopes to release them in the near future. The lab has released Biloxi Bay trout on a number of occasions, but wanted to maintain genetic separation with breeding stock from Bay St. Louis to the west.

The brood stock was caught in December 2007 by CCA Mississippi members and spawned naturally in the lab's aquaculture center. The new spawn will be coming home to the Jourdan River in the near future.

SPEC is a cooperative project between GCRL and the DMR, was founded to test the effectiveness of using hatchery-reared seatrout to help support and/or enhance the seatrout population in Mississippi. The spotted seatrout, known locally as speckled trout, is one of Mississippi’s premier sport fishes. Because of its near-shore lifecycle, it is susceptible to depletion owing to habitat destruction and demand for food and recreation. GCRL is developing the methods to acquire, maintain and spawn broodstock of spotted seatrout to facilitate production, rearing, tagging, releasing and assessing the effects and effectiveness of stocking juveniles.