

Project Narrative

The Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF), in partnership with seafood dealer Red's Best, LLC, is requesting an EFP in support of an ongoing study that would conditionally allow vessels with skate permits to exceed skate possession limits for the purpose of quantifying the economic and ecological benefits and consequences of an increased skate wing trip limit. This application requests a renewal of the study's permit for the 2026 fishing year. During its first year, participating vessels used fewer than 50 out of 700 allowed trips as of March 19, 2026. These trips took place only during Season 2 (September 1, 2025–April 30, 2026) of the skate wing fishery. This renewed EFP would authorize a second year of the study to allow use of the remaining balance of 650 experimental fishing trips during Seasons 1 and 2 of the 2026 fishing year.

Based on our annual monitoring reports for fishing years 2021–2024 and monitoring reports to date for fishing year 2025, skate landings have remained well below the total allowable landings (TAL), ranging from 40 to 70 percent of the TAL. Monthly landings in the 2025 fishing year have been higher than those of 2024, but total landings remain at only 67 percent of the TAL as of March 19, 2026. The applicant seeks to continue to address the underutilization of the skate resource by renewing for participating vessels an exemption to the 4,000 lb (1,814 kilogram (kg)) per trip skate wing possession limit (9,080 lb (4,119 kg) in whole weight) in Season 1 (May 1–August 31), and the 6,000 lb (2,722 kg) per trip possession limit of skate wings (13,620 lb (6,178 kg) in whole weight) in Season 2 (September 1–April 30).

Under this EFP, the trip limits would be increased to 7,000 lb (3,175 kg) of skate wings, or 15,890 lb (7,208 kg) whole weight, per trip in Season 1, and 9,000 lb (4,082 kg) of skate wings, or 20,430 lb (9,267 kg) whole weight, per trip in Season 2. The participating vessels would be authorized to take up to 650 trips that exceed the possession limit in the 2026 fishing year. Participating vessels are a mix of full-time and part-time gillnetters; the part-time gillnetters would likely have all of their trips occur under this EFP; only a portion of trips by full-time gillnetters would be taken with the increased trip limit. All trips under the EFP would be exclusively wing trips without bait skate landings. This EFP could increase skate wing landings by almost 2 million lb (907 mt) and, given recent skate wing ex-vessel prices, would have an

approximate ex-vessel value of over \$1.5 million. In addition, given the overlap with the monkfish fishery, which at times has been constrained by skate trip limits in the Southern Fishery Management Area, this EFP could improve utilization of the monkfish annual catch limit.

All participating vessels would collect data on all large-mesh gillnet trips fished with and without the increased skate wing trip limit. Data collection would include trip duration, number of nets set and soak time, quantity and value of skate catch and other catch, and fuel used. Skate wing catch and monkfish catch would be compared between trips conducted with and without the increased trip limit to inform project objectives.

The EFP would include conditions to: (1) Mitigate the potential for this EFP to trigger the 85-percent TAL possession limit reduction; (2) avoid a sustained negative impact on ex-vessel skate price; and (3) avoid triggering monkfish accountability measures in the monkfish Northern Fishery Management Area (NFMA).

If skate landings surpass 70 percent of the TAL, and/or NMFS projects that the 85-percent TAL threshold will be met in either Season 1 or Season 2, the EFP may be suspended for the remainder of the applicable season and vessels would be subject to the fishery-wide possession limit. This EFP could result in a maximum of 1.95 million lb (885 mt) of skate wings being landed, or just over 14 percent of the proposed 2026 skate wing TAL (91 FR 14674, March 26, 2026). However, that estimate assumes that each EFP trip would land the full possession limit. Any trip that exceeds the skate wing possession limit, even by a small amount, would count against the 650-trip limit. The 70-percent TAL threshold for this EFP has been selected to mitigate the potential for this EFP to trigger the 85-percent TAL possession limit reduction.

The applicant has acknowledged concerns regarding the potential for this project to reduce ex-vessel skate price. They are planning to self-regulate the participating vessels in coordination with other skate wing dealers and, if the skate market is slow and there is any negative impact on price as a result of the increased trip landings under this project EFP, they plan to instruct participating vessels not to make any trips under the permit with increased landings until the market and price stabilizes. NMFS will support ex-vessel price monitoring using dealer reports and data reported by participating vessels under the EFP. To further address this concern, NMFS will

regularly assess ex-vessel prices and other market changes with CFRF. These periodic evaluations will provide opportunities to identify unintended market consequences and, if necessary, suspend the EFP. No sustained negative effect of the EFP on skate wing ex-vessel prices was detected during fishing year 2025.

The monkfish TAL for the NFMA has been fully utilized in recent years, and increased fishing effort for skate in statistical area 521 could contribute to monkfish TAL overages in the northern area. Therefore, the EFP includes a condition that if NMFS projects that the NFMA monkfish TAL will be exceeded and the accountability measure will be triggered, the EFP would stop in the NFMA for the remainder of the project period. During the 2025 fishing year, no trips under this EFP have taken place in the NFMA.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 31, 2026.

David R. Blankinship,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-06426 Filed 4-1-26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey

AGENCY: National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of Information Collection, request for comment.

SUMMARY: The Department of Commerce, in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA), invites the general public and other Federal agencies to comment on

proposed, and continuing information collections, which helps us assess the impact of our information collection requirements and minimize the public's reporting burden. The purpose of this notice is to allow for 60 days of public comment preceding submission of the collection to OMB.

DATES: To ensure consideration, comments regarding this proposed information collection must be received on or before June 1, 2026.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments to Adrienne Thomas, NOAA PRA Officer, at NOAA.PRA@noaa.gov. Please reference OMB Control Number 0648–0652 in the subject line of your comments. All comments received are part of the public record and will generally be posted on <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Requests for additional information or specific questions related to collection activities should be directed to Rob Andrews, Survey Statistician, NOAA Fisheries, 200 Harry S. Truman Pkwy., Annapolis, MD 21401, (302) 827–3226, rob.andrews@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Abstract

This is a request for revision and extension of an approved information collection. Marine recreational anglers are surveyed to collect catch and effort data, fish biology data, and angler socioeconomic characteristics. These data are required to carry out provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), as amended, regarding conservation and management of fishery resources.

Marine recreational fishing catch and effort data are collected through a combination of mail surveys, telephone surveys and on-site intercept surveys with recreational anglers. The Fishing Effort Survey (FES) is conducted by the NOAA Fisheries, Office of Science and Technology (OST). The FES is a self-administered, household mail survey that samples from a residential address frame to collect data on the number of recreational anglers and the number of recreational fishing trips. The survey estimates marine recreational fishing activity for all coastal states from Maine through Florida, as well as Hawaii.

FES estimates are combined with estimates derived from complementary surveys of fishing trips, the Access-Point Angler Intercept Survey, to

estimate total, state-level fishing catch, by species. These estimates are used in the development, implementation, and monitoring of fishery management programs by NOAA Fisheries, regional fishery management councils, interstate marine fisheries commissions, and state fishery agencies.

Previously, the FES was administered bi-monthly, estimating recreational fishing effort for two-month waves. In 2024, OST tested an experimental survey design that included monthly sampling and estimation and a modified questionnaire. The study concluded that the revised design resulted in more timely and accurate estimates of fishing activity. This information collection request will include a revision to transition from bi-monthly to monthly administration of the FES.

Additionally, the request will include an experiment to evaluate online reporting. Specifically, the collection will include a pilot study testing a web-push survey design that will encourage online reporting before providing the option of a mail response. The design will be evaluated with respect to data quality, timeliness of reporting and cost.

II. Method of Collection

Information will be collected through self-administered mail surveys and web surveys.

III. Data

OMB Control Number: 0648–0652.

Form Number(s): None.

Type of Review: Regular submission (revision and extension of current information collection).

Affected Public: Individuals or households.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 112,500.

Estimated Time per Response: 5 minutes.

Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 9,338 hours.

Estimated Total Annual Cost to Public: 0.

Respondent's Obligation: Voluntary.

Legal Authority: Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*).

IV. Request for Comments

We are soliciting public comments to permit the Department/Bureau to: (a) Evaluate whether the proposed information collection is necessary for the proper functions of the Department, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) Evaluate the accuracy of our estimate of the time and cost burden for this proposed collection, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c)

Evaluate ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) Minimize the reporting burden on those who are to respond, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments that you submit in response to this notice are a matter of public record. We will include or summarize each comment in our request to OMB to approve this information collection request. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Sheleen Dumas,

Departmental PRA Compliance Officer, Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Commerce Department.

[FR Doc. 2026–06390 Filed 4–1–26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XF645]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to facilitate the use of fishing year (FY) 2026 and 2027 monkfish research set-aside (RSA) days-at-sea (DAS) warrants further consideration. The EFP would allow federally permitted fishing vessels to fish outside fishery regulations in support of exempted fishing activities proposed by Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance (CCCFA). Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested