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Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
December 16, 2009

FISHERMEN TO MARCH ON WASHINGTON "United We Fish" To Seek Congressional Support On February 24

December 16, 2009 - In a historic show of solidarity, recreational and commercial fishermen will gather together on the steps of the Capitol on February 24, 2010 from noon until 3 p.m. in an organized demonstration against the unintended negative impacts of the Magnuson Stevens Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the federal fisheries law which was revised in January of 2007. Coordinating the march under the flag of United We Fish, rally organizers are hoping to see a large show of force in defense of coastal communities.

"The closures keep coming and it's good to see the collective fishing communities and industries, both recreational and commercial, calling for scientific based Magnuson reform," said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). "We are all in this together." Donofrio cited recent closures of amberjack, black sea bass and red snapper fisheries as examples of what he calls a "broken" federal fisheries law.

The groups organized through United We Fish are hoping to prove to legislators just how many American anglers and business owners are truly being impacted by the overly restrictive management requirements created by MSA based on non scientific arbitrary deadlines. According to Bob Zales of the Conservation Cooperative of Gulf Fishermen (CCGF), the time-specific deadlines mandated by MSA coupled with flawed data collection methods are forcing anglers off the water. "We fully support real science based management and the conservation of our marine resources while also being able to sustain recreational and commercial fishing activities, providing locally caught seafood, sustaining small family businesses, and supporting our coastal communities."

This effort is being coordinated by many organizations and individuals including but not limited to the RFA, CCGF, United Boatmen of New York, United Boatmen of New Jersey, New York Sportfishing Federation, Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association and the Fishing Rights Alliance. "Some people have asked 'why, it's winter'," said Donofrio who said he's gotten the required permits and expects a large crowd in DC on February 24th, regardless of weather. "We can't let seasons stop the momentum, and if we wait any longer none of us will be fishing. Many members of Congress will be standing shoulder to shoulder with us," Donofrio said.

Nils Stolpe, a consultant to the commercial fishing industry and columnist for SavingSeafood.org said that over the past three decades since the original Magnuson Act was established, fishermen have been gradually phased out of the fisheries management process, regardless of sector. "The scientists have been put in charge, and as the list of closures and restrictions up above painfully demonstrates, the Act has been turned into a

weapon that is now being used against fishermen and fishing communities."

U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) first introduced the *Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2008* in the 110th Congress to incorporate "limited flexibility" into federal fisheries management. More than 100 fishing groups and industry members from around the country pledged their support for the legislation and the bill's 19 bipartisan coastal cosponsors, but the bill languished during the volatile economic climate in advance of the presidential elections in November of 2008.

Realizing that fisheries closures would continue without congressional intervention, in March of this year, Rep. Pallone and fellow Representatives John Adler (D-NJ), Henry Brown, Jr. (R-SC), Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL), Barney Frank (D-MA), Walter B. Jones, Jr. (R-NC), Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), Frank LoBiondo (D-NJ), Mike McIntyre (D-NC), Michael Michaud (D-ME), Solomon Ortiz (D-TX) and John Tierney (D-MA), reintroduced the *Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009 (HR 1584)*. Twenty-five total co-sponsors have since pledged support to date including Rob Andrews (D-NJ), Timothy Bishop (D-NY), Allen Boyd (D-FL), Joe Courtney (D-CT), Peter King (R-NY), Rob Wittman (R-VA), Jo Bonner (R-AL), John Mica (R-FL), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH), Clifford Stearns (R-FL), Donna Christensen (D-VI), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), and Ander Crenshaw (R-FL).

Following a letter-writing campaign by the RFA-NY and members of the New York Sportfishing Federation, senior Democratic Senator Charles Schumer of New York announced his Senate version of the bill (S.1255). Currently, the Senate bill to correct the flaws in MSA has no co-sponsors, which is something United We Fish organizers are hoping will change in February.

"New York's Senator Schumer is as concerned about his fishing constituents as he is about the fish, just as Congressmen Pallone, Frank, Jones, LoBiondo, Kennedy, Adler and others in the House of Representatives are," said Stolpe. "Hence they have formed the nucleus of a growing movement in Congress that, in spite of the editorial opinion of the New York Times and the expenditure of many millions of dollars by the Pew Charitable Trusts, is aimed at preserving recreational and commercial fishing, the lifestyles of millions of fishermen, and the tens of thousands of businesses and hundreds of fishing communities that they support," Stolpe added.

Organizers from within the recreational fishing sector are hoping to get commitment from all user groups and across varied state and regional boundaries. "This is much bigger than any one state issue or individual grievance," said RFA's Managing Director Jim Hutchinson, Jr. "Whether it's our restrictive fluke fishery in New York, the arbitrary closure of state waters for our anglers in California, or the shutdown of red snapper and amberjack down south, our community has been divided by preservationist tactics for too long. It's time to unite the clans in defense of our coastal heritage and traditions," Hutchinson said.

"We need to let Congress and NOAA know that we are the collective voice of the recreational fishing community and the collective voice does not accept the current broken management system which wreaks such havoc on all of us and our businesses," said Donofrio, adding "The goal on February 24th will be to get all of our congressional friends to attend."

"At this point Senator Schumer and his Congressional colleagues in the House deserve

the thanks and the support of every one of us who fishes, whether for fun or profit," said Stolpe.

The United We Fish rally is set for 2/24/10 at noon at the Capitol. For details as they become available, sign up for the RFA's email newsletter on the homepage at www.joinrfa.org.

About Recreational Fishing Alliance

The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. *The RFA Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries.* For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.