



What are the NOAA Fisheries recreational fishing survey and data standards?

The standards set clear criteria to guide the design, improvement, and quality of data produced by the agency’s recreational fishing surveys. The standards also align with requirements and best practices of other federal agencies that produce statistics for decision-making. They provide clear and concise requirements for data collection and distribution, thereby promoting data consistency across the national network of recreational fishing surveys. The standards help reduce ambiguity and potential misinterpretation of recreational fishing data.

All data collection programs administered by NOAA Fisheries’ Marine Recreational Information Program will adhere to these standards. Some of the standards are also relevant to state programs certified or funded by MRIP.

Can you explain the change to cumulative estimates?

The intent of this shift is to make better use of existing data to best inform fisheries management. While the data is still produced every two months, it is now combined with the prior waves (see the tables below). Aggregating data is a common statistical approach to increase sample sizes over time and smooth spikes/anomalies in data. As a result of increased sample sizes, the catch and effort estimates will become more precise throughout the year.

To better serve our data users and partners, we are also providing new fishing-year options for catch, effort and length-frequency queries in addition to the traditional calendar-year option. These fishing year options were added to support data users who manage fisheries that don’t align with the calendar year, reducing the need to produce custom estimates.

Estimates produced prior to 2023:

Sequence	2-month “wave” estimates	Preliminary Data Available (Approx. Date)
Wave 1	January-February	April 15
Wave 2	March-April	June 15
Wave 3	May-June	August 15
Wave 4	July-August	October 15
Wave 5	September-October	December 15

Sequence	2-month “wave” estimates	Preliminary Data Available (Approx. Date)
Wave 6	November-December	February 15

New estimates produced effective first survey of 2023:

Sequence	Cumulative Estimates	Preliminary Data Available (Approx. Date)
Wave 1	January-February	April 15
Wave 2	January-April	June 15
Wave 3	January-June	August 15
Wave 4	January-August	October 15
Wave 5	January-October	December 15
Wave 6	January-December	February 15

Are you hiding data?

No. The intent of the shift to cumulative estimates is to make better use of existing data to best inform fisheries management. There is a misperception that this is hiding data; this is not true. Aggregating data is a common statistical approach to increase sample sizes, so estimates are more reflective of the recreational fishing community’s activities. Estimates are still produced every two months. Furthermore, this shift has no impact on the underlying survey respondent data used to produce our estimates; all of those data remain publicly available on our website.

If the statistics I need are not part of the agency's official estimates, will I still be able to access them?

Yes. [Survey respondent raw data](#) used to produce estimates from our general surveys, tools, and templates will remain available for data users to customize estimates to meet their unique data needs.

We remain committed to providing our partners and data users with the support necessary to help inform and improve fisheries management. We will work with our data customers to explore ways to improve estimates for data-limited fisheries (e.g., by using multi-year averaging techniques and increasing sample sizes).

What is the precision standard?

As part of the government’s guidelines for statistical programs, the Office of Management and Budget requires federal agencies to establish their own criteria for determining when an estimate is too unreliable or imprecise to publicly release, known as the precision standard.

Our precision standard requires not providing highly imprecise estimates with a percent standard error above 50, which are typically not statistically different from zero. The standard was developed through collaborative feedback from partners who explored effects of imprecise estimates on stock assessment results. Partners determined estimates above 40 PSE should be used with caution. The U.S. Census Bureau does not provide estimates with a PSE above 30. The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program continues to set a goal of achieving PSEs below 30.

The precision standard is intended to promote improved use of existing data, and create flexibility for data users to pursue alternative analysis options that use more precise estimates for data-limited fisheries. It also reduces potential misinterpretation of data to best inform sustainable fisheries management.

We are delaying the implementation of our precision standard to allow additional time to work with data users to prepare for the transition. However, we have added additional language to our query tool, cautioning against the use of highly imprecise estimates.

Was there an opportunity to provide input on the survey and data standards prior to implementation?

In 2019, prior to the standards being finalized, we solicited detailed feedback from internal and external parties. We leveraged our partnerships with interstate fisheries commissions and fisheries information networks to connect with state partners and obtain feedback.

We used feedback we received to make changes to our data queries (i.e. adding several different fishing-year/season catch and effort estimation options), timeline for implementation (phased to provide adequate adaptation time for data users), and support to our partners. We developed several tools, such as a data-user handbook, and provided seminars for customers and the public prior to and during the implementation of the standards.

Our precision standard also reflects guidance from state and federal stock assessment scientists and managers from New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the Southeast, who explored the effects of imprecise estimates on stock assessment results.

How is NOAA Fisheries helping its partners transition to the standards?

The survey and data standards are being implemented through a phased approach, which began in late 2020, to help provide adequate adaptation time for fisheries stock assessors and managers. To help our partners and data customers familiarize themselves with the standards and changes, the agency has:

- Delivered presentations to regional Fisheries Information Networks, fisheries management councils, and the Northeast Region Coordinating Council, among others.
- Published the [MRIP Data User Handbook](#), which contains detailed information about downloading, exporting, querying, and analyzing the agency's marine recreational fishing data.
- Added a preview query to the program's Query Tool to acclimate data users and managers to the switch.
- Held a [Data User Seminar Series](#) to provide stock assessors and fisheries analysts with best practices for accessing, analyzing, and using recreational fishing data

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