

## **Transitioning the California Recreational Fisheries Survey**

The California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS) collects data from marine recreational anglers on their catch to produce estimates of the number of fish by species that are caught and the number of trips made by anglers to catch them. State and federal decision-makers, such as the Pacific Recreational Fisheries Information Network (RecFIN), use CRFS data and estimates to manage the fisheries off California's coast rendering the accuracy of the data and estimates essential. Currently, the state has a contract with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) to conduct CRFS field sampling, data management and estimate production. DFG plans to assume full responsibility for those functions beginning January 1, 2011.

Since CRFS's inception, it has been envisioned as a state-run program. Collecting biological data, conducting creel surveys and producing catch estimates are core functions of DFG, and its staff has the expertise and experience necessary to provide decision-makers with the best available information. In managing all aspects of the CRFS effort, DFG can ensure the quality of the data and estimates, control costs, modify survey or estimate procedures to accommodate changing resource management issues, and increase data access to DFG staff, managers and stakeholders. Additionally, by assuming functional responsibility, the contract management challenges from budget constraints should not interfere with the continuation of work. Currently, the inability to make timely payments to PSMFC can result in stop work orders.

There are several items which also should be taken into consideration before a transition occurs. PSMFC has run the CRFS sampling program since its inception in 2004. It hires and trains fishery technicians, many of which have extensive experience in collecting similar data used for CRFS, entering data into established databases, and producing monthly estimates of catch and effort. PSMFC is not constrained by state hiring freezes, travel restrictions, furloughs or lengthy budget processes to acquire additional positions, thus allowing it to provide continuous staffing levels depending on available funds. DFG will need to redirect existing staff (many of which have worked with CRFS from the beginning), and hire a substantial number of seasonal staff to develop and manage CRFS-specific databases, provide web-based data access, and modify and develop estimation programs.

Oregon and Washington supply catch and effort information to RecFIN, and run their own data collection and analysis programs. DFG has laid the groundwork with the PSMFC CRFS contract manager for the transition. DFG's Information Technology Branch has the ability to create relational databases and make the data web-available, and reliable funding sources through the federal Sport Fish Restoration Act and the state's Ocean Protection Council have been identified. The steps DFG has taken and the resources it will secure will help ensure DFG's ability to successfully assume this important program.