

## What you didn't know about fishing licenses and why to buy now...

Compiled by: Bob Wattendorf

Other states charge \$20 for a fishing license; Florida only gets \$12. It's reached the point where some anglers are calling on legislators to raise the fees. Although a few anglers view fishing licenses as a necessary evil that is as inevitable as taxes, most understand what the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) uses the money for and put the value they receive in return into perspective. Those anglers realize their fishing licenses are a great recreational deal and even a bargain that helps ensure safe and sustainable recreation fishing for themselves, their families, friends and future generations.

Read on to for a great offer on 5-year freshwater fishing licenses.



*Ryan O'Meara with a trophy bass--let's keep the future bright for anglers.*

Fishing as recreation goes back at least 3,000 years. In North America, Thaddeus Norris in his 1864 publication, *The American Angler's Book* specifically referred to the need for conservation. In Florida, the State Department of Game and Fresh Water Fish sold the first state fishing licenses in 1925 to support conservation ([MyFWC.com/Fishing/Timeline](http://MyFWC.com/Fishing/Timeline)). Costs were \$2 for out-of-county residents, free for county residents, and \$5 for out-of-state. Back then, \$2 would buy what \$23 buys today. Since 1989, resident anglers have paid \$12 for a freshwater or saltwater fishing license (saltwater fees have not increased since the Legislature established them in 1989). Those fees in 2006 dollars equate to \$20 and are the 13<sup>th</sup> least expensive among state freshwater fishing license fees and fifth lowest of the 11 states that sell saltwater licenses. The average resident fishing license for fresh or saltwater in other states is also about \$20.



*Senator Dockery, Chairman Barreto and Executive Director Haddad stock a brood bass into a spawning raceway at the dedication of the Florida Bass Conservation Center. A facility funded in large part by license fees and SFR.*

State law guarantees Florida anglers that all money from the sale of fishing licenses goes to the FWC to help fulfill the mission of "Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people." Congress mandated that state legislatures agree to these terms in order to receive the benefits of the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration act (SFR).

In 1950, congressmen Dingell and Johnson created the original SFR program wherein fishing tackle is assessed an excise fee. The "Wallop-Breaux" amendment in 1984 expanded the act by adding import duties on sport fishing equipment, pleasure boats and yachts as well as tax revenue from motorboat fuel sales. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reimburses states from these funds

for \$3 of every \$4 spent on qualifying Sport Fish Restoration projects.

In 1994, passage of the Transportation Equity Act (TEA-21) authorized a National Outreach and Communications Program to increase participation in angling and boating and to impress on boaters and anglers the importance of healthy aquatic habitats. It also increased the minimum level of spending for boating access to 15 percent and raised the maximum allowable expenditure of Sport Fish Restoration apportionments for aquatic education and outreach to 15 percent. The 1994 Act further created a Boating Infrastructure Grant program for construction or maintenance of facilities for recreational boats longer than 26 feet. TEA-21 also raised the amount of Federal gas tax credited to Sport Fish Restoration and established a "permanent" appropriation for the Boating Safety Account. The result is one of the most successful "user pays - user benefits" programs in the world.



*License fees and matching SFR money also pay for boat ramps and boating safety.*

The amount of money Florida receives is based on the size of the state (40 percent) and the number of paid licensed anglers (60 percent) - not licenses and permits, but the people who hold them. As an example, an angler having a freshwater license, a saltwater license, and a snook permit, counts only once. Since Florida does not charge license fees to youth under 16, adults over 65, or resident saltwater anglers fishing from the shore, Florida recovers a somewhat smaller proportion of the funds than do other states. This is becoming an increasing problem as other states adjust their license structure to maximize the number of paid license holders they certify for federal aid and thus recover a greater proportion of the excise taxes on tackle and motor boat fuel taxes paid by our anglers. Each certified holder generates approximately \$7 more for sport fish restoration in Florida.

Sport Fish Restoration provided \$9.1 million dollars for Florida in 2006, of which 15 percent (\$1.4 million) went to boating access. Of the remaining, \$7.7 million, freshwater fisheries conservation received \$3.2 million and saltwater fisheries conservation received \$4.5 million, based on the estimated number of resident freshwater anglers versus saltwater anglers. Those dollars go to protect a recreational fishing resource that has an economic benefit to Floridians of more than \$8 billion ([MyFWC.com/Facts](http://MyFWC.com/Facts)).

Activities such as habitat restoration, fish stocking, conservation law enforcement, artificial reefs, youth fishing clinics and boating access all depend on fishing license fees and matching Sport Fish Restoration funds. Consequently, the FWC encourages all anglers to buy a license ([MyFWC.com/License](http://MyFWC.com/License)). Even a legally exempt angler can contribute to the future of our fisheries resources and the health of our habitat in this way. Moreover, the Federal SFR program contributes approximately \$7 for each new license holder.

If you want an even more painless way to contribute, buy a five-year freshwater fishing license right now, and you will automatically receive a free-bonus package from the FWC via mail with fishing-related products donated by the industry worth more than the cost of the license (\$60 plus issuance fees). This offer only applies to the first 3,000 licenses sold after March 1, 2007 and

will probably last until the end of May; see [MyFWC.com/Fishing/5yr-2007.html](http://MyFWC.com/Fishing/5yr-2007.html) for details and to verify if the offer is still available. The FWC will get the \$7 SFR match each of the 5-years your license is valid, and you can fish for today's prices even if the Legislature decides to increase fees.

*Visit [MyFWC.com/Fishing/Updates](http://MyFWC.com/Fishing/Updates) for more FishBuster columns.*