

Valley Angler

Time to Register With NOAA

by Bill Thompson

Attention all salt water anglers, as of the 1st of January you must register with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; NOAA for short. This applies to all recreational anglers who fish for anadromous species in tidal waters or in Federal waters. If you fish for striped bass, smelt or in Federal waters more than 3 miles from shore you need to register.

It is easy to do and it doesn't take a lot of time. Simply go to: <http://www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov> or call 1-888-647-7411. At the moment it is free, although that will change next year. I say it is simple because my personal secretary, Janet, did it for me.

The reason for this is to help NOAA gather better information from recreational fishermen. In the future NOAA will be able to garner information on catch and harvest rates of saltwater fish from anglers like you and me. It is hoped that by having this additional information NOAA will be able to further safe guard the long term health of our marine resources.

There are a couple of exceptions. If you are under the age of 16 or if you are fishing from a boat that already has a valid commercial license you do not have to register. If you are registered in another state you are covered and will not be required to register in New Hampshire.

This year there is no cost to register, however next year there will be a fee unless your state has a saltwater fishing license. Good news or bad depending on how you look at it. New Hampshire will require you to have a saltwater fishing license beginning in 2011. The new saltwater license is going to cost you 15 bucks, but you will not have to register with NOAA and the 15 bucks will stay here in New Hampshire to help manage saltwater fisheries.

By the way if you live in Maine or any other coastal state you will need to register, unless your state already has a saltwater license in place. All this information is available at New Hampshire's Fish and Game web site: <http://www.fishnh.com/marine>.

Needless to say, as you might expect, this is all quite controversial. Any time the Federal requires anybody to register for anything it is controversial. If you have a mind to believe that the Feds have their fingers into too much stuff already than it is doubtful that you will have a positive outlook on this. On the other hand if you put a little spin on it, anything we can do to help preserve and protect our saltwater fisheries is a good thing.

In one way I am glad that New Hampshire decided to go with a saltwater license. At least the funds collected will stay in state. My thought is that in the end New Hampshire is going to lose revenue. Let's face it, we don't have a lot of coast line and it is going to be a lot easier for fishermen from neighboring states to bypass us for either Maine or Massachusetts. I have said from the beginning that the smart thing to have done was for all of the New England states to come together and have one fishing license that would cover all of them. I am fully aware that is near impossible to have state agencies much less individual state legislatures come together on anything as they are all out for the almighty dollar, it would, however shown a rare stroke of common sense on their part.

What's done is done and it is now the law so before you head down to the coast to wet a line be sure and register with NOAA before you go.

See you on the river.