



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
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June 3, 2011
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RFA-NJ SUBMITS OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON DEP ACCESS PLAN Says State's 'One Size Fits All' Plan Too Restrictive For Surfcasting

The Recreational Fishing Alliance's New Jersey chapter (RFA-NJ) today submitted official comments to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in response to the agency's new public access rules ([see www.joinrfa.org/press/NJDEP_060311.pdf](http://www.joinrfa.org/press/NJDEP_060311.pdf))

According to the Associated Press, New Jersey rewrote its beach rules earlier this year after a court struck down old ones requiring access points every quarter-mile along the shore, as well as parking and bathrooms nearby. The ruling came in a lawsuit brought by the South Jersey beach town of Avalon that claimed the state overstepped its bounds by requiring too much public access, as well as unreasonable requirements such as 24-hour, round-the-clock access to beaches and marinas.

The new rules ask, but don't require, coastal towns to adopt a public access plan spelling out exactly where the public can get to the beach, which is precisely what has caused the public to turn out in strong opposition to much of the plan, particularly in terms of surfcasting and beach access.

"RFA-NJ has obvious concerns with the plan as it relates to coastal fishing access throughout the state," said RFA-NJ board member Greg O'Connell. "We've spent the last couple of months compiling feedback from our members through meetings, public hearings and comprehensive review of the DEP's actual access plan, so we believe strongly that the comments that delivered today on behalf of RFA-NJ accurately represent the greater good for our coastal anglers," said O'Connell who also chairs the RFA-NJ Surf Advisory Panel.

Capt Adam Nowalsky who runs a charter boat out of Great Bay Marina said that tempering the needs of coastal surfcasters with those of boat owners has been a critical component of RFA-NJ's analysis of the DEP plan. "A few years ago under the Corzine administration, this access plan would've led to serious problems for boat owners who could've been forced to deal with mandatory, round-the-clock public access at their marina or boatyard, and I couldn't imagine what owners would've had to endure," Nowalsky said.

"But this plan that we've been reviewing as an organization over the past several months is loaded with new issues that impact our surfcasting community, not to mention our kayak and car-top fishermen, so it's our hope that the DEP will adequately address the issues brought forth in our official comments and heard through the recent public hearings," Nowalsky added.

New Jersey's surf fishing community has been especially concerned about the DEP's new access rules, and with good reason. According to the RFA's Executive Director Jim Donofrio, the access amendments have been swinging like a pendulum from one administration to the next, though he's hopeful a comprehensive review of the plan can strike the right balance for all coastal fishermen.

"RFA has significant concerns about the potential impacts on angling access resultant of the proposed changes by DEP, which is why we took the time to analyze the entire document and listen in on the public hearings in order to provide the most detailed comments for addressing concerns," Donofrio said "As an organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all saltwater anglers, we are certainly in support of specific language in the plan that would protect our local marinas and dockside tackle shops from having to endure excessive amounts of liability in terms of safety, damages, and theft if required to provide unrestricted, 24-hour public access."

Donofrio said many groups which turned out in staunch opposition to the DEP's entire plan perhaps didn't take enough time to read the entire proposal.

“We were a bit shocked to see that some conservation and outdoor groups would sign onto broad-based coalitions to publicly oppose all the exemptions contained within the plan, perhaps without even looking at the plan itself,” he said, adding “we can’t have towns closing down beach access or parking facilities for surfcasters, but our angling community shouldn’t be supporting the concept that marinas and dockside facilities must open up 24/7 access to the public either, that’s just ridiculous.”

RFA said much of the criticism with regard to the DEP’s latest public access plan was centered on the ‘one size fits all’ nature of the language, which is why RFA said it took time to analyze the entire plan before submitting official comments on behalf of all saltwater anglers.

“Let’s hope the state DEP takes a comprehensive look at this plan to ensure that the public trust doctrine is kept intact, that the rights of saltwater anglers are safeguarded while at the same time our boat, marine and tackle industry jobs are also duly protected,” Donofrio added.

Click here to view RFA-NJ’s official comments (or visit www.joinrfa.org/press/NJDEP_060311.pdf).

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s 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.