

FISHERIES: Obama admin jumps to squelch rumors of U.S. fishing ban (03/11/2010)

Allison Winter, E&E reporter

The Obama administration is trying to dash rumors that it planned to ban recreational fishing in marine waters and the Great Lakes in the wake of a series of Internet posts warning that such a prohibition was imminent.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief Jane Lubchenco told a House panel yesterday that her agency had no plans to halt fishing. And National Marine Fisheries Service chief Eric Schwaab released a statement last night saying NOAA "is committed to adopting policies that will ensure that current and future generations have the opportunity to enjoy the great tradition of recreational fishing."

The rumors apparently started with an online [column](#) Tuesday on ESPN's outdoors Web site, which said the administration's new oceans policy could prohibit fishing in oceans, Great Lakes and inland waters. Robert Montgomery's column questioned whether environmental groups have had undue influence on the plan.

The news blog Drudge Report reposted the column, and dozens of right-wing bloggers wrote yesterday that President Obama would ban recreational fishing.

For instance, [Gateway Pundit](#) blogger Jim Hoft wrote: "Obama's Latest Assault on Freedom -- New regulations Will Ban Sport Fishing." He quoted from the ESPN column, adding, "Barack Obama has a message for America's 60,000,000 anglers -- We don't need you."

Fox Nation also featured this headline yesterday: "Obama to ban sport fishing?" with links to Hoft and ESPN.

The administration is drafting plans for a new ocean policy and marine zoning system. The recommendations from the inter-agency ocean task force are expected this month and would likely lead to an executive order from Obama on ocean policy. The plan could eventually lead to efforts to map the sea for different uses, but draft reports from the group made no suggestions to ban fishing.

But with rumors flying yesterday, Reps. Paul Broun (R-Ga.) and Kathy Dahlkemper (D-Pa.) both expressed concern about the issue in a House Science Committee hearing. They asked the NOAA chief if the administration is considering a ban on recreational fishing.

"Will you please reassure me and the angling public, whether commercial or recreational that their issues are going to be taken into consideration?" Broun asked.

"Both commercial and recreational fishing are vitally important to this nation," Lubchenco said. "We are not proposing any blanket ban on recreational fishing. I would strongly oppose that, and it is not in the works."

Lubchenco said one of her priorities as NOAA chief is to do a better job of working with both commercial and recreational fishers, whose interests are "absolutely part of NOAA's responsibility to represent." She is planning a summit in Washington with recreational fishers next month

The suggestion that the administration's new ocean policy could limit fishing may have struck a nerve with a fishing industry that has clashed for years with federal regulators. NOAA faces growing criticism from recreational and commercial fishers concerned about catch reductions and enforcement crackdowns.

Thousands from the fishing industry gathered outside the Capitol last month to protest strict new reductions in their catch that stemmed from mandates to end overfishing and rebuild fisheries that were part of massive fisheries legislation Congress passed in 2006. Fishers took to a stage to question whether NOAA listened more to environmentalists than fishers and chanted "Jane's gotta go!" ([E&ENews PM](#), Feb. 24).

ESPN outdoors editor Steve Bowman issued an apology yesterday afternoon, saying the article should have been clearly identified as commentary, not news, and should have had more balance. The Web site has since altered the article and added a header identifying it as an opinion piece.