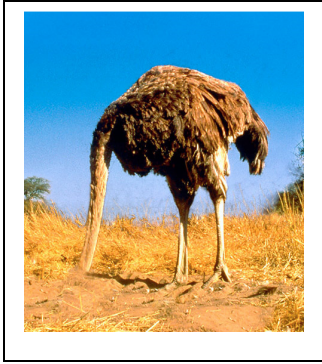


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**Call it conspiracy, cooperation or coincidence, but no matter what you call it, the public record isn't going to change**

Nils E. Stolpe/Fish Net USA

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In his latest column in Saltwater Sportsman magazine, New England Fishery Management Council member and chairman of the Council's Groundfish Committee Rip Cunningham devoted almost a thousand words to refuting the existence of a catch shares "conspiracy" that, he leaned towards thinking, was "*a bunch of BS conjured up by anti-regulation crackpots with too much time on their hands and too little brainpower to figure out something constructive to do.*"

I've been chronicling – and documenting – the push for catch share management for several years, and in doing that I haven't come in contact with any fishermen who I would describe as anything close to anti-regulation, as crackpots, with too much time on their hands, or with too little brainpower to figure out something constructive to do. Rather, I've found virtually all of them to be hard working, hard fishing individuals who are concerned about a multi-million dollar taxpayer funded campaign to transfer ownership and/or control of what are now public fisheries resources into private hands (see my article *The Catch Share Choo Choo is leaving the Station* at [http://www.fishnet-usa.com/Future\\_of\\_fishing.pdf](http://www.fishnet-usa.com/Future_of_fishing.pdf)). And at a national level I suspect I'm at least as well connected to recreational, commercial and party/charter fishing circles as he is.

So why is he using such a derogatory and grossly inaccurate description of fishermen concerned about catch shares and the future of fishing? Perhaps for the same reason that his column is accompanied by a half-page illustration of three hovering helicopters in silhouette: a transparent attempt to paint all of the fishermen – and the people in fishing-dependent businesses – who are opposed to any unilateral, top-down imposition of any form of management on their fisheries as over-the-edge extremists and therefore not worthy of anything other than ridicule. That's called marginalization, and it's something that the anti-fishing activists, the foundations that support them and the fishermen – and perhaps even the journalists - who they've bought off have become very effective at doing.

And then Mr. Cunningham gets into funding by the Pew Charitable Trusts of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and other ENGOs that advocate for catch shares, writing "*don't confuse the conspiracy with the truth; we have learned that the last funding happened 10 years ago.*" While I find it admirable when anyone admits to learning anything at all, in this instance Mr. Cunningham didn't learn anything approaching enough. All told EDF got less than \$2 million from Pew - minimal dollars in the mega-foundation world (see <http://www.fishtruth.net/EnvDefense.htm>) - and that funding appears to have stopped in 2004. That's not quite ten years, but I guess it's close enough for Saltwater Sportsman. However, EDF has received over \$20 million from the Marine Conservation program of the Walton Family

Foundation (Walmart) from 2007 to 2009, over \$9 million from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (Intel) since 2005 (all of which was for the EDF catch shares campaign), and \$1.5 million from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation since 2008.

Further, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), a federal quasi-agency, just announced that it will fund 18 new projects totaling over \$2 million that *“will engage fishermen around the country in the design and implementation of effective catch-share fisheries.”* The funds for this were provided by the Walton and Moore Foundations, two of NFWF’s “foundation partners,” which are described as *“supporting NFWF’s National Fisheries Innovation Fund, which will assist the transition of United States fisheries to catch share programs by encouraging fishermen to pursue innovative management strategies through a competitive grant award process.”*

The NFWF lists among its corporate partners Exxon/Mobil, Shell, Chevron, BP, Conoco Phillips and Walmart.

That’s either a pretty big bundle of truth that Mr. Cunningham seems to have overlooked or a trophy-sized red herring that he wanted his readers to swallow. While he zeroed right in on the relatively paltry funding of EDF by Pew from way back when, in his zeal to further discredit the “crackpots” completely missed the boat on \$30 million plus in funding for promoting catch shares by other foundations which are apparently working in close coordination with government agencies (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, parent agency to the National Marine Fisheries Service, is one of the NFWF’s Federal partners).

On top of this, NOAA head Jane Lubchenco has transferred tens of millions of sorely needed research dollars from the National Marine Fisheries Service research budget into her catch shares program, and many of these millions are available to the regional fisheries management councils for instituting catch shares programs.

I’ve been directly and indirectly involved with the federal fisheries management process since its inception in 1976, and one of the most noticeable changes that it has undergone in the intervening three plus decades is its enthusiastic embracing of rampant bureaucratization. Both NMFS and the regional councils have become administrative empires and are accordingly subject to all of the bureaucratic pressures that entails. Chief among these, particularly over the last several years, are budgetary pressures. Quite simply, the money isn’t flowing from the taxpayers the way it used to. So what impact on the regional council system do you think the availability of millions of dollars to establish catch share programs is going to have? If you are on a regional fishery management council, if you work for a regional fishery management council or if your job depends on the workings of a fishery management council, should you be expected to think anything is more important than swelling the coffers of that council? And, considering today’s economic realities, what’s the only way to do that? Push catch shares, of course. With an arrangement like that, it doesn’t take an edict from on high to make catch shares management the rule. All it takes is an understanding of how bureaucracies work and a cynical willingness to take advantage of that.

And we can add to this the fact that, besides providing transportation to and bed and bread in what tend to be fairly nice digs in fairly pleasant locales at least several times a year, serving on a regional fishery management council can contribute significantly to one’s bank account. Because of this, some council members (though definitely not all of them) put a high premium on being reappointed to their council seats when their terms expire.

The governors of each coastal state recommend several people for each council seat as it becomes available. The final decision on who is appointed is made by Ms. Lubchenco's agency. Speaking in Boston in May, 2009, she said "*the scientific evidence is compelling that catch shares can also help restore the health of ecosystems and get fisheries on a path to profitability and sustainability. These results, ... these scientific analyses, ... are why moving forward to implement more catch share programs is a high priority for me. I see catch shares as the best way for many fisheries to both meet the Magnuson mandates and have healthy, profitable fisheries that are sustainable.*" How far do you think being a catch share proponent will go in getting someone appointed or reappointed to a council? How far do you think not being a catch share supporter will go in the other direction?

And then we have the following three paragraphs taken from the Alex C. Walker Foundation website (at <http://walker-foundation.org/net/org/project.aspx?projectid=81773&p=50769> - emphasis added). The Walker Foundation is a strong supporter of catch shares and other such market manipulations as a way to regulate us and effect social change.

*EDF staff continues to support managers and industry leaders in an increasingly broad and rapid transition to catch shares in many different New England fisheries. We coordinate our policy change efforts with allies including the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fisherman's Association, Oceana, Earth Justice, Conservation Law Foundation, the New England Aquarium, and The Nature Conservancy.*

*New NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco played a leadership role in securing \$35 million in combined FY09 and FY10 federal appropriations to help the groundfish industry transition to sectors. EDF staff played key roles in broadening consensus support for her leadership. We continue to coordinate closely with NGO, fishing industry and agency allies to work through priority issues critical to the successful implementation of sectors by May 1, 2010.*

*In the months leading up to the sector vote, support for catch shares far outweighed opposition in the regional media. As fishermen come to grips with low catch limits and a new management system, however, opponents have been more vocal than supporters. In response, we have had to increase our regional media focus and sophistication, including online media tools such as fishermen's forums, blogs, and news aggregation websites. Our goals include identifying and amplifying pro-catch share fishermen's voices, answering misinformation about catch shares and addressing genuine concerns about catch share design.*

Whether this is evidence of a conspiracy or not, it's obvious that the people in charge at Saltwater Sportsman want their readers to believe that there's neither cooperation nor coordination involved in the national drive to implement catch shares. By the use of black helicopter imagery and demeaning descriptions of people who recognize what's really happening, they're trying to manipulate their readers into writing off people who recognize the extent of the push by mega-foundations, ENGOs and federal agencies working together to "revolutionize" fishery management. These organizations want, and are still campaigning for, this in spite of the fact that our most credible fisheries scientists agree that this year, for the very time, we'll be free of overfishing in U.S. waters. (I have to add that we've gotten here with catch share management in place for a meaningful time in less than 5% of our fisheries.)

The evidence that this coordination and cooperation, or whatever it's called, exists is overwhelming, even without the on-the-record recognition of it by the very same groups that are involved in coordinating and cooperating. Arguing that it doesn't seems an awfully strange role for a publication that claims to be "the fishing authority since 1939." Perhaps Saltwater Sportsman should stick to fishing.

And I would strongly suggest that you etch indelibly into your memory the use of the phrase "*anti-regulation crackpots with too much time on their hands and too little brainpower*" by someone who serves – and is well paid to serve – on a federal regional fisheries management council. Whether we see the future of fisheries management the way they do or not, don't we all deserve better from council members than that?