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Oral Testimony on:

“Fishing = Jobs: How Strengthening America’s Fisheries Strengthens Our Economy.”

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I am the Vice President and Reef Deployment Director for the Emerald Coast Reef Association. Our Mission is to improve the fishery in the Gulf of Mexico by providing habitat and evaluating the effectiveness of artificial reefs. Our mission is accomplished 100% with volunteer effort and private contributions. The majority of our members are private recreational fishermen and divers.

Florida is known as the Fishing Capital of the World. The importance of free and open access to the fishery to Floridians is tremendous. Fishing is not simply a hobby for many fishermen and women in Florida; it is an important part of our cultural identity. It is part of our unique heritage. Denying millions of Americans free and open access to the fishery is denying them their heritage

For years, our government agencies have attempted to maintain the health of the fishery by restricting access. Catch Shares, Sector Separation and Marine Protected Areas are all proposed plans to manage the problems of our fishery. While well intentioned, access limiting plans, manage but do not solve fishery problems. These plans hurt our economy and deny millions of people their right to access our Nations’ Natural Resource.

Recreational fishing, including the charter industry support a wide range of jobs. In Florida alone, there are nearly 1 million registered boats. All these boats need insurance, maintenance, storage, fuel etc. These services support a wide range of jobs. Even people who do not fish are economically affected when the fishing activities are reduced because; jobs are created by fishing activities. When fishing access is restricted, the side effect is...fewer jobs.

The Economic importance of free and open access to the fishery, in the State of Florida, is enormous. In Florida, Saltwater fishing alone is a \$5.7 Billion dollar industry that supports over 150 thousand jobs. In 2011, the Boating industry in Florida was \$32.3 Billion dollars. In 2003, the FWC stated that for every One dollar spent building artificial reefs; it created \$131.00 in recreational value. In 2008, the Director of the FFWCC stated that “Recreational Saltwater fishing generates a staggering amount of consumer spending in this state’s economy – roughly \$14.3 million per day...” “That’s close to \$10,000 per minute.”

Artificial Reefs provide solutions to many of the problems facing our fishery and our economy. Imagine what the return on investment would be in 2012 dollars and, all the jobs that could be created, if more money was spent building artificial reefs that support a healthy and sustainable fishery!

In the Florida Panhandle, 95% of our seafloor is sandy bottom so, artificial reef building is critical to building and maintaining a healthy a sustainable fishery. One of the biggest obstacles to reef building in the Florida Panhandle is the one-size-fits-all permitting by the Jacksonville District of the USACOE. The Florida Panhandles underwater topography is identical to Alabama, whose underwater permits are granted by the Mobile District of the USACOE. Generous permitting in Alabama has provided them the opportunity to create the largest Artificial Reef Building program in the United States, even though they have less than 60 miles of coastline on the Gulf of Mexico.

I stand before you today and respectfully request that our Government Agencies that are charged with managing our fishery please weigh the economic and cultural importance of free and open access to our natural resource when they are forming management plans. Please use our tax dollars to create real solutions (Artificial Reefs) that will build a healthy and sustainable fishery, a thriving economy and restore our birthright... access to our fishery.

Thank you so much for listening and for your consideration.