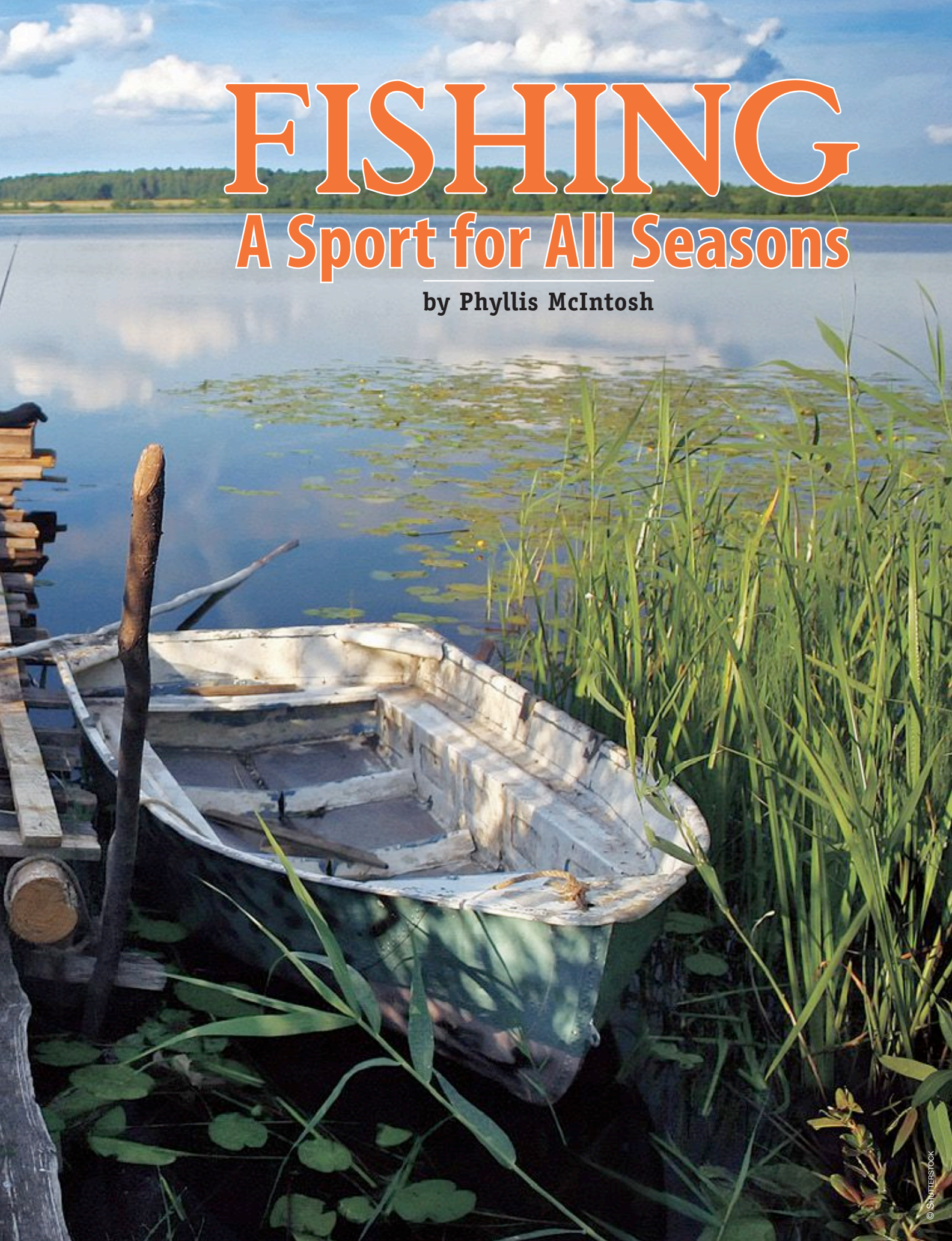




FISHING

A Sport for All Seasons

by Phyllis McIntosh





© SHUTTERSTOCK



© SHUTTERSTOCK

(*Top:* A girl fishes at the edge of a lake.)

(*Bottom:* A boy shows off his catch of trout.)

In the United States, the phrase *goin' fishin'* is synonymous with taking a break and leaving everyday cares behind to go enjoy the outdoors, spend time with family or friends, and, if you're lucky, catch some tasty fish. That message is reinforced in slogans emblazoned on hats, T-shirts, and bumper stickers. One of the most popular slogans is, "A bad day fishing is better than a good day at work."

According to the American Sportfishing Association, fishing is a hobby pursued by some 40 million Americans, including more than 8 million youngsters between the ages of 6 and 15. More Americans fish than play golf and tennis combined.

With 12,000 miles of ocean coastline, more than 3.5 million miles of rivers and streams, and five Great Lakes that together contain one-fifth of the surface freshwater in the world, the United States is a fishing paradise. Anglers pursue their passion in the tropical waters of the Florida Keys, through holes bored in the ice-covered lakes of Minnesota, and, increasingly, in the shadows of city skyscrapers.

Because recreational fishing is an economic boon to various regions of the country, government plays a major role in regulating it and in managing fishery resources to perpetuate the sport for future generations.

Fishing Favorites

Part of fishing's appeal is that it is accessible to all ages and every pocket-book. Any youngster with a stick, string, and hook, and some wriggly worms for bait, can try his or her luck in the local stream or pond. Serious fishermen, on the other hand, can easily invest thousands of dollars in boats and specialized fishing gear with which to pursue their favorite kind of fishing.

Most sport fishing is done with a rod, reel, line, hooks, and a wide variety of baits and lures. Catching fish with a hook is known as angling, and fishermen are often called anglers. Saltwater anglers fish from piers and docks, in the surf along the beach, on shallow saltwater flats, and in the open ocean for species ranging from the foot-long speckled sea trout to giant tuna and marlin that can top 1,000 pounds. Freshwater anglers drop their lines from shore, boats, bridges, and docks in pursuit of such specimens as bass, trout, salmon, and catfish.

Specific kinds of fishing most popular in the United States include:

- **Bass fishing.** Bass fishing supports a multi-billion dollar industry, with stores, television shows, magazines, and video games dedicated to the sport. Though the various kinds of bass are good to eat, many bass fishermen simply enjoy the challenge of hooking the feisty fish, which tend to jump and fight aggressively. After weighing and measuring their catches, anglers often return the fish unharmed



to the water, a practice known as catch and release.

Major competitions attract anglers from around the country who vie for top prizes up to a million dollars. After their sizes are recorded by tournament officials, fish are placed in holding tanks and are even treated for stress or injuries before being released back into the wild. Anglers are penalized for having a fish die during competition.

Bass fishing is so popular that in 2008 the Illinois High School Association sanctioned it as a competitive school sport, and Illinois went on to host the first high school state championship fishing tournament in the country.

Top: A fisherman displays a largemouth bass he caught. Anglers enjoy the challenge of hooking these aggressive fish.

Bottom: A woman casts her fly-fishing rod in the Firehole River in Yellowstone National Park.



(A deep sea fisherman struggles to reel in his catch.)

- **Fly fishing.** Fly fishermen use special rods and lines to cast artificial lures, known as flies, onto or just below the surface of the water. The flies are made by fastening hair, fur, feathers, or other materials onto a hook to imitate insects or other living things on which fish prey. Some flies are of bright colors to attract fish and entice them to bite. For many anglers, much of the enjoyment of the sport lies in tying their own flies, which they create by following patterns, studying actual insects, or simply relying on their imagination.

Most often associated with fishing for trout or salmon in mountain streams, fly fishing is also a popular method for catching a variety of marine species. Like bass fishermen, fly fishermen enjoy competing in tournaments held at both freshwater and saltwater venues.

- **Deep sea fishing.** Fishing in the open ocean is not for the faint of heart—or

the budget conscious. Going after large marine species such as giant tuna, marlin, and sharks requires a seaworthy vessel outfitted with heavy duty fishing gear and such features as a fighting chair, from which a fisherman can wrestle a hooked specimen for up to several hours before landing it.

Because of the equipment and expertise required, many deep sea fishermen charter boats with experienced captains who know how to navigate open water, find the best fishing spots, and handle large, aggressive fish.

- **Ice fishing.** Catching fish through holes drilled in the ice on a frozen lake is a popular winter pastime in the northern United States, especially around the Great Lakes. The sport requires specialized gear, including an auger or saw to cut holes in the ice, a skimmer to remove new ice as it forms, and a heater to warm the anglers and keep the fishing hole from freezing shut.

Modern ice fishermen use power augers to drill upward of a hundred holes a day and sonar and underwater cameras to locate fish beneath the ice. They set up camp in portable heated huts that they transport onto a lake with a snowmobile or truck. Some shelters are simply protection against the cold. Others are more like mobile homes, equipped with such amenities as satellite TV, bathrooms, stoves, and full-size beds. Some ice fishing resorts rent out fish huts and provide shuttle service back and forth to the frozen lakes.

Fishing on a frozen lake can be a risky business if the ice is not thick enough or a warm spell weakens the ice cover. On the Great Lakes, winds can break off huge sections of ice, trapping fishermen. In February 2009,

100 ice fishermen had to be rescued by helicopter and the Coast Guard from an ice sheet in Lake Erie; one man who had fallen into the water died soon after rescue.

Nevertheless, ice fishing remains a favorite social activity during the long, cold northern winters. An annual ice fishing contest on Gull Lake in Minnesota, billed as the largest such event in the world, attracts more than 10,000 participants who vie for \$150,000 in prizes. All proceeds are donated to local charities.

Recent Trends in Fishing

- **High-Tech fishing.** Technology is making possible many new gadgets that help anglers locate and catch more fish. Hand-held global positioning satellite (GPS) devices can map out a course and enable fishermen to keep track of the most productive fishing spots. The latest generation of sonar fish finders scans a wide swath of water beneath the boat and provides clear 3-D images of individual fish as well as bottom features such as ledges and rocks where fish might hide. Touch screens bring up an array of data on water temperature and other sea conditions.

Fishermen also can choose among dozens of fishing “apps” (computer software applications) for smartphones that enable anglers to log vital information about their catches and keep up-to-date on weather, tides, fish feeding times, water safety, and the best places to catch certain fish. Those who can’t get enough fishing on the water can hone their skills with a host of fishing-related video games.

Likewise, the Internet is awash with websites dedicated to every conceivable type of fishing, where anglers

can learn the latest tips and techniques and chat with fellow enthusiasts around the country and the world.

- **Urban fishing.** Fishing is often associated with images of pristine streams, mountain lakes, and deserted beaches. But in fact, today’s fisherman is often likely to cast a line from a bridge or dock beside a busy city freeway or airport. Strict anti-pollution laws have cleaned up urban waterways that were once too contaminated for fish to thrive. New York City’s harbor and rivers now teem with fish, as does the Potomac River, which flows through Washington, D.C., and the Detroit River in Michigan, whose waters once flowed blue and orange with contaminants from steel mills and chemical plants. Fish are even returning to Cleveland’s infamous Cuyahoga River, once so polluted that it actually caught fire.

As a result, many U.S. fishermen, a majority of whom live in urban areas, are choosing to pursue their hobby close to home. Magazines and websites run articles listing the top urban fishing spots in the country. A number of states and cities have established urban fishing programs to introduce inner city youngsters and families to the joys of fishing. In the summer of 2010, more than 40,000 city kids participated in summer fishing clinics offered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and volunteer fishermen’s organizations in that state. Nationally, Hooked on Fishing—Not

Using a power auger, an ice fisherman drills a hole in a frozen lake.



This ice fisherman caught a Northern Pike.



Top: The Potomac River, which flows through Washington, D.C., offers numerous opportunities for urban fishing.

Bottom: Kayaks are becoming increasingly popular with fishermen because they are quiet and do not disturb fish and other wildlife.

on Drugs[®], a program of the Future Fisherman Foundation, teaches self-esteem and care for the environment along with angling skills at thousands of locations in more than 30 states.

- **Kayak fishing.** In an increasingly complicated world, more and more anglers are turning to the simplicity of kayak fishing in both fresh and saltwater. These small, motorless vessels are quiet and non-polluting, and they do not disturb fish and other wildlife. Enthu-

siasts say they enjoy the exercise of paddling their kayaks and exploring waters that cannot be fished from conventional boats.

Weighing only 30 to 50 pounds, kayaks are easy to transport and quick to launch, making it possible for anglers to fit in a bit of fishing at the end of a workday. Furthermore, a good kayak can be had for several hundred dollars, while a fishing boat easily costs \$20,000 and requires expensive fuel, a registration fee, and a trailer to transport it.

Just because the boat is small doesn't mean the catch has to be. One kayak fisherman in Hawaii landed a 225-pound blue marlin that was almost as long as his kayak.

...

One thing is certain: As long as there are fish in the sea—or in the river, the lake, or pond—anglers in the United States will continue to pursue a passion that runs deep in their history and culture. Author John Steinbeck put it well when he said: “All Americans are born fishermen. For a man to admit a distaste for fishing would be like denouncing mother love or hating moonlight.”



© SHUTTERSTOCK

Fish Talk

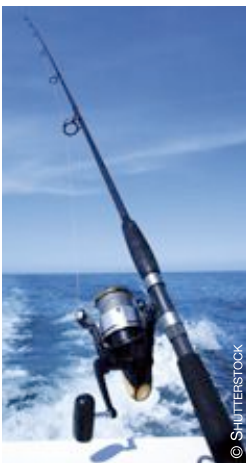
bait – a natural attractant, such as a worm, insect, or other creature on which fish feed, that is attached to a hook to entice fish to bite

chumming – releasing ground-up bait or fish parts into the water to attract fish

jig – a weighted lure with a flowing, twisting tail or other appendage to attract fish

jigging – moving a jig or other lure up and down in the water to attract fish

lure – a piece of rubber, plastic, or wood, usually fashioned to look like a small fish or insect, that is used to tempt fish to bite



© SHUTTERSTOCK

reel – a mechanical spool-like device on a fishing rod that holds, releases, and rewinds the line

rod – a long, thin pole used for fishing

(Top: Lure
Left: Fishing rod and reel)

sinker – a weight of lead or other metal attached to the end of a fishing line to make the bait or lure sink into the water

strike – a “hit” by a fish taking the bait or lure

tackle – fishing gear and accessories

trolling – fishing by slowly running a boat that is trailing lines with lures or bait

waders – waterproof boots that reach to the hips or the chest and are fastened with suspenders; they enable anglers to fish while standing in fairly deep water

Websites of Interest

American Sportfishing Association

www.asafishing.org

As the trade association of the sportfishing industry in the United States, the American Sportfishing Association publishes reports and statistics about trends in recreational fishing and the economic impact of fishing on various parts of the country.

Kayak Fishing Magazine

www.kayakfishingmagazine.net

This online magazine includes everything an angler might want to know about getting started in the growing hobby of kayak fishing and provides a forum where fishermen can share tips and information.

Take Me Fishing

www.takemefishing.org

Hosted by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, this website provides basic guidance on how to fish and enjoy fishing with your family. It offers information about different types of fishing and where to fish in each state.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

www.fws.gov/fisheries

This official website features news and information about the U.S. government’s efforts to protect fish habitats and conserve and restore fish in U.S. waterways.

WomenFishing

www.womenfishing.com

A collection of information on all aspects of fishing from basic techniques to boating safety, as well as articles, videos, blogs, and forums, this website offers something for everyone who has an interest in fishing—even kids.

PHYLLIS McINTOSH is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in many national magazines.

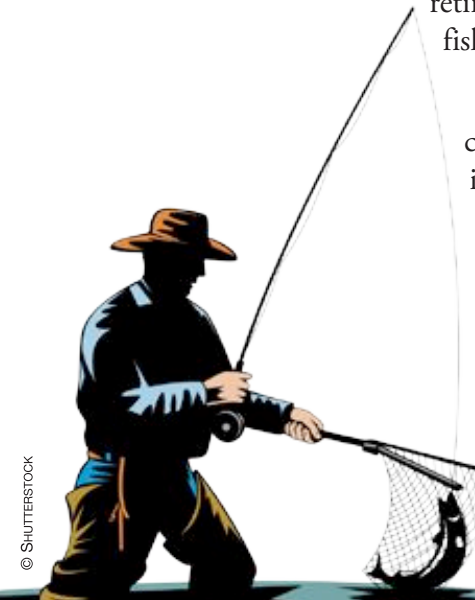


Fishing in American Culture

Fishing has a long tradition in the literature and culture of the United States. Two of the most famous characters in American fiction—Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn—are closely associated with fishing, a reflection of author Mark Twain’s own life along the Mississippi River.

Another famous writer, Ernest Hemingway, loved to fish near his homes in Florida and Idaho and popularized fly fishing in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*. His later work, *The Old Man and the Sea*, immortalizes the lonely struggle between an aging fisherman and a giant marlin off the coast of Cuba.

Likewise, fishing has played a prominent role in some acclaimed American movies. A 1992 film, *A River Runs Through It*, about two brothers growing up in Montana, did much to acquaint moviegoers with the sport of fly fishing. In 1981’s *On Golden Pond*, a retired professor comes to terms with aging and reconnects with his daughter while fishing on a peaceful lake.



Fishing-related terms also have become part of the standard American lexicon. We fish for compliments and for clues to solve a mystery. A *fishing expedition* is an attempt to trick someone into divulging information. A more recent type of fishing, with the alternate spelling *phishing*, refers to a computer scam in which criminals attempt to acquire passwords or personal data by posing online as a bank or other legitimate organization. A person who is fooled by someone is said to have *taken the bait*, and if fooled completely, the person is said to have fallen for the deception *hook, line, and sinker*—a reference to a captured fish swallowing the hook, the lead weight, and the piece of line between them. The highly uncomplimentary term *bottom feeder*, inspired by fish that feed low on the food chain at the bottom of a body of water, describes a low-life person who profits from the misfortunes of others.

Regulating and Restoring

Fishing is one of the few pastimes regulated and supported by individual states and the U.S. government. The goal of regulation is to conserve fish populations so that anglers will continue to enjoy success—and continue to spend money to pursue their hobby. According to the American Sportfishing Association, the nation's 40 million anglers generate more than \$45 billion a year in retail sales and support one million jobs, for an overall economic impact of \$125 billion. Fishing contributes significantly to the economies of coastal states, such as Florida, Texas, and California, and to Great Lakes states, such as Michigan, which has more than 3,000 miles of coastline.

States manage fishing by requiring people who want to fish to purchase fishing licenses, sometimes separate ones for freshwater and saltwater fishing. State laws establish fishing seasons, limit the size and number of fish of certain species that an angler can keep, and regulate the type of fishing gear that can be used. Sales of fishing licenses generate \$600 mil-

lion a year for conservation and management efforts of state fish and wildlife agencies. For example, these funds allow state fishery biologists to study and protect fish populations by collecting information from anglers or by tagging fish and tracking their movements.

To manage fish populations, most states operate hatcheries to raise fish for release into state waters. In New York, for example, 12 hatcheries, each specializing in different species, raise several million fish a year for stocking 1,200 public waterways.

On the federal level, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service operates 70 national fish hatcheries and 16 fishery research centers to restore declining fish populations nationwide and to replace fish lost to floods, drought, and habitat destruction. Federal excise taxes and import duties on fishing gear, pleasure boats, and boat fuel provide about \$600 million a year for a federal program that helps states manage fisheries and educate the public about fishing, conservation, and water safety.



Most states operate fish hatcheries that raise fish for release into lakes and streams.

Inset: A crop of fish at a state fish hatchery.