

Reauthorizing the Magnuson Stevens Act

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Steve Midway

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In 1976, Congress passed the Magnuson-Stevens Act (Magnuson–Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act). The Act originally focused on zoning and controlling territorial waters, and establishing regional councils to manage fish stocks, among other things. The Act has been reauthorized a several times and has generally been viewed as a bipartisan success story. Many fish stocks have been rebuilt or are otherwise in better shape than they were a few decades ago, and Magnuson-Stevens rightfully gets some of the credit.



U.S. Senators Warren Magnuson (D-WA) and Ted Stevens (R-AK) Source: NOAA Fisheries

The Magnuson-Stevens Act is now up for reauthorization, this time sponsored by Representative Don Young of Alaska. Generally speaking, many federally-managed fish stocks are in better shape than they have been in a long time. As a result, the Bill (HR 200) remains ostensibly about fishery conservation and management but seeks to also make some structural changes that would—in the words of the bill’s title—“increase flexibility” in how fisheries are managed.



Representative Don Young (R-AK).

One fishery management issue that has evolved as a result of recent fishery management success is how to open up more access to recovering fish stocks. How many more fish can safely be taken each year when a fish stock is growing? What should the role be of the federal government, regional councils, and state agencies as fisheries grow and management changes? And as more fish are allowed to be landed, which sectors of a fishery should be given more access? These are all pressing questions in an environment of fishery management applied to rebuilding stocks.

Of course, one concern is what will happen if we relax many of the things that made Magnuson-Stevens so successful. In other words, are fish stocks now safely rebuilding and no longer need Magnuson-Stevens? Or will they remain in good shape only with essential provisions of Magnuson-Stevens? Several Democrats are arguing against reauthorization, claiming that the deregulation would be dangerous to the health of many fish stocks. [Opposition to the bill](#) has been led by California Representative Jarred Huffman.

More coverage can be found [here](#), along with a position [for](#) and [against](#) the reauthorization.

Where do you stand on Magnuson-Stevens Act and its reauthorization?