

**TESTIMONY OF
PHIL FAULKNER, OWNER/FOUNDER
NAUTICSTAR BOATS**

**HEARING ON
REAUTHORIZATION OF THE MAGNUSON-STEVENSON FISHERY
CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT: OVERSIGHT OF
FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES**

**BEFORE THE
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES, AND
COAST GUARD**

SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Sullivan, Ranking Member Peters, Senator Wicker and Members of the subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the challenges facing marine recreational anglers and the recreational fishing industry. My name is Phil Faulkner, and I am a recreational fisherman.

In my spare time, I like to fish for recreation like millions of my fellow Americans. For my day job, I own a company in Amory, Mississippi – NauticStar Boats. With more than 25 years of boat manufacturing experience, we produce family boats ranging from 18 feet to 28 feet in length – with at least 85 percent of these boats built for recreational fishing. Our dealer network consists of 75 dealers in 28 states, and we are honored to manufacture the number one selling center console boat in Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

Let me tell you a little bit more about my business and the industry I am so blessed to be a part of. I work in a uniquely American business—the boat-building business. Ninety-five percent of boats sold in the United States are made in the United States. And here’s why: we make the finest quality boats right here in America, and boats do not ship well in containers from China.

More than 70 percent of boats purchased in the U.S. are bought so owners can fish from them. And they buy boats when they have consistent access to America’s public resources.

Uncertainty about access, uncertainty about consistent fishing seasons, uncertainty about fisheries management will often discourage a potential angler from justifying an investment in purchasing a boat. Therefore, the market never reaches its potential.

The marine recreational fishing industry contributes \$63 billion a year to the U.S. economy from coast to coast and every state in between. (Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2015) It is a common misconception that the saltwater fishing economy resides only in coastal communities. I'm here to report otherwise. I may come from a coastal state, but I live 300 miles from the coast. And many of my suppliers and other businesses in the industry are situated far from the coast in interior states. Additionally, many of my vendors conduct their business in interior, land-locked states.

At NauticStar, I employ 300 hard-working Americans in Amory, Mississippi – in Senator Wicker's home state. They are fine workers. I pay good wages and health benefits. We take pride in producing the highest quality boats on the market, and we are dedicated to our customers. That is why I am here today – to be a face and a voice for the 440,000 Americans employed in the industry and the 11 million Americans who enjoy recreational fishing on America's public waters. (Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2015)

Our business affects more than me and my 300 employees. We do business with suppliers from many parts of the country who contribute to every boat we make. They include companies like Composites One, based in Arlington Heights, Ill., that provides us with fiberglass and catalysts to make hulls of boats. AOC Resins, in Collierville, Tenn., provides us with resins that we mix with fiberglass. Ashland Chemicals which supplies us with gelcoat is based in Fort Smith, Ark. SeaStar Solutions supplies us with steering systems and control cables from their locations in Litchfield, Ill., and Limerick, Penn. As I mentioned, the saltwater recreational fishing economy reaches far beyond the U.S. coastline.

When I have spare time, I get down to the coast and get out on the water with my kids and grandkids, and we enjoy family time together with the hope of catching a few fish.

As I sit here today, I could not be more proud of what recreational fishermen and recreational boaters contribute to conservation. We, outdoorsmen, are the original conservationists. Through license sales and excise taxes paid on fishing equipment and boat motor fuel, anglers and boaters contribute \$1.3 billion annually to

sportfish conservation and management, boating safety and infrastructure, and habitat restoration. An additional \$400 million is donated to conservation and fishing organizations who do so much to support our passion each year. Recreational anglers and boaters are generous with our time and our resources because we care deeply about the culture and memories born from time spent on America's public waters.

But in recent years, the federal government has been focused on denying public access to America's public resources. This problem has found a solution thanks to Senator Wicker.

I would like to thank my Senator for sponsoring Senate Bill 1520, the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2017. The Modern Fish Act would bring much needed modernization to the way recreational fishing is managed in federal waters. And this is important because marine recreational fishermen have felt like an afterthought of the federal government for decades. Federal fisheries policies do not reflect the depth and breadth of the recreational fishing industry and the need for more public access for anglers. Furthermore, current federal fisheries management is limiting the true economic potential of the recreational fishing industry. With unreasonably short seasons, abrupt fishing closures and inconsistency in setting seasons from year to year, recreational anglers, and the businesses they support, are not fully confident they will have access to America's public marine resources under the current system. Without the confidence of access and confidence in federal fisheries management, anglers don't buy boats. Families don't go fishing.

The way marine fisheries are managed affects me. It affects my business. And it affects my family.

Congress can provide balance and consistency to the long-ignored recreational fishing sector by modernizing recreational fisheries management by passing the Modern Fish Act.

I am happy to answer questions. Thank you for having me.