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## Nation's Oldest Marine Fish Conservation Organization Turns 50!

This year marks the 50th anniversary of *Wild Oceans*, the nation's oldest non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to marine fisheries. Formerly known as the National Coalition for Marine Conservation (NCMC), *Wild Oceans* has been at the forefront of ocean fish conservation since 1973 helping to shape national fisheries policy and becoming one of the most influential and respected groups in the conservation community.

Beginning with founders Chis Weld and Frank Carlton's involvement in the drafting of the original Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, *Wild Oceans* has been dedicated to uniting fishermen and other ocean advocates to preserve both marine fish and fishing opportunities. Chris and Frank gave the organization its winning philosophy: keep conservation the #1 goal; stay lean and mean; work with other fishing and environmental groups whenever possible; choose issues that establish precedent and principle; and remember that what matters most is making a difference, not who gets credit. This philosophy still guides *Wild Oceans* today.

Chris and Frank also hired the organization's first paid employee, Ken Hinman, who would help lead *Wild Oceans* for the next 41 years, the last 23 as its President. During Ken's tenure, the organization co-founded numerous alliances uniting fishermen and conservationists, including the Marine Fish Conservation Network, Ocean Wildlife Campaign, "Menhaden Matter" and "Take Marlin Off the Menu". *Wild Oceans*, still NCMC at the time, also took a leading role in the 1996 reauthorization of the Magnuson Act, achieving much-needed conservation priorities such as; required targets and timetables for ending overfishing, a mandate to reduce bycatch in all fisheries, and identification of essential fish habitat. Long-time *Wild Oceans* Board member Tim Choate says of the organization, "I believe that the future of fishing is conservation on every level - from how we chose to fish, to influencing national and international regulations. For five decades now, *Wild Oceans* has been leading the way in these efforts by identifying emerging problems, offering science-based solutions and determining where best to advocate for precedent-setting policy changes, all the while drawing in other fishing and environmental NGOs to the cause."

*Wild Oceans* has been and continues to be influential in initiatives that improve fisheries management for large marine species. Their 1998 report *Ocean Roulette*, which highlights the impact of pelagic longlines on the decline of large marine fish, led to the National Marine Fisheries Service closing 133,000 square miles of U.S. waters to longlining. This greatly aided in rebuilding the depleted Atlantic swordfish stock and helped reduce bycatch of billfish and other species. *Wild Oceans* was also instrumental in enacting measures to prohibit the commercial harvest and sale of

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Atlantic billfish in the United States. Later, the group worked alongside the International Game Fish Association to achieve the passage of the Billfish Conservation Act of 2012, which prohibits the importation and sale of billfish in the entire continental United States. This, coupled with their “Take Marlin Off the Menu” campaign raised billfish conservation awareness and has saved an estimated 30,000 billfish a year since its passage. Today, *Wild Oceans* continues its efforts to conserve large marine fish with groundbreaking research to identify and protect critical billfish spawning habitat in the Pacific.

In addition to championing the protection of large marine fish, *Wild Oceans* is also at the forefront of conserving little fish, the prey that sustain predator populations. *Wild Oceans* turned the spotlight on the importance of protecting predator-prey interactions in 1999 when the organization hosted a workshop on the issue and then published the proceedings as *Conservation in a Fish-Eat-Fish World*. They immediately got to work implementing the report’s recommendations by first tackling the management of Atlantic menhaden, the primary prey for striped bass – work that led to the adoption of ecological reference points that are today used to set fishing limits that account for menhaden’s role in the food web.

A natural outgrowth of their work on menhaden, *Wild Oceans’ Forage First!* campaign was launched in 2006, bringing together a broad coalition that brought about pivotal changes in the way forage fisheries around the United States are managed. Best practices for managing forage fish are synthesized in *Wild Oceans’* 2015 report, *Resource Sharing: The Berkeley Criterion*, in which author Ken Hinman suggests strategies that sustain fishing in a way that protects the broader ecosystem and its living communities. Says current *Wild Oceans* President Rob Kramer, “No other organization has done more to advance the protection and management of forage fish, making their conservation a national environmental priority.”

On April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, one-hundred and twenty fishermen, conservationists and friends gathered for a much-deserved tribute to the multi-decade efforts of *Wild Oceans* and to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of the organization’s former Chairman and one of its biggest fans, Tim Choate. The group raised nearly \$50,000 at the event to continue its important work, which is needed now more than ever.

For half a century *Wild Oceans* and its small staff and dedicated board of directors have diligently and quietly made a difference protecting our oceans and the sportfish that inhabit our watery worlds. And *for the future of fishing*, hopefully they will continue to do so for another 50 years.

**For more information, Ken Hinman Tells the *Wild Oceans* Story at 2022 Forum  
(see YouTube link below)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM2KankpdN0>

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