However, recreational fishing catch and effort is estimated as noted above.

Getting a better idea of what fish recreational anglers are catching by scientifically valid electronic recording will take all or most of the guesswork out of projecting recreational harvest.

I have been recording catch and effort on my charter boat for the past eight years electronically on an iPad, and this year plan to switch to a cellphone. The software I use (by Harbor Lights Software) has been approved by NOAA in the Greater Atlantic Region. The software allows captains to take a cellphone, iPad or tablet on their vessel and record catch, effort, released fish, fish saved as food and the size of the fish in real time. The system is GPS-based and can also track trips as an option, reporting the exact locations the fish are caught.

The software generates electronic reports that fulfill NOAA reporting requirements, and reports are also sent to the State of Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Division to fulfill reporting requirements such as the charter boat requirement this year to record all fish electronically. The software can also be used to fulfill reporting requirements for commercial rod & reel fishermen.

Electronic recording for me has been fun, educational for my customers and has saved me a bunch of time. My hope is that the lessons learned reporting charter boat recreational catch and effort can be transferred to recreational fishing in general.

We need to continue to fund electronic reporting projects, particularly those that explore using smartphone electronic reporting of recreational fishing in general. Better recreational catch data is needed so accurate harvest limits can be established that give anglers greater access to the fish.

This year NOAA has formed a task force to explore electronic recording in the recreational sector and to come up with a plan to integrate it into the fishery. Find out more at NOAA electronic recording.