

Protect forage fisheries

Benefits to seabirds and the economy

Arctic Tern

 Audubon

THE IMPORTANCE OF FORAGE FISH

Serving as the basis of the marine food web, forage fish (sardines, anchovies, and herring) and invertebrates (krill and horseshoe crabs) play a critical role in the ocean ecosystem. These fish are the food source for seabirds, such as Atlantic Puffins, Bald Eagles, and Ospreys, and larger fish species, such as tuna, salmon, and cod, as well as sharks, dolphins, and whales. Although not eaten directly by humans, forage fish act as the foundation of a **billion dollar commercial and recreational fishing industry** made up of tens of thousands of fishermen across the country, supporting **over a million jobs** and feeding millions of seafood lovers.

Seabirds, too, rely on forage fish and the greater marine ecosystem for their food. Recent evidence suggests that globally, forage fish populations must be at least one-third of their long-term biomass for healthy seabird reproduction.

FORAGE FISHERIES ARE UNDER THREAT

Forage fisheries are threatened as demand increases. These fish populations are being depleted to make fertilizer, products such as cosmetics, and fish meal for livestock and fish farming. As a result, overwintering seabird populations have **decreased by up to 50 percent** since 1980, and nearly half of all overwintering bird species are considered to be in significant decline.

WHY NEW LEGISLATION IS NEEDED

- A **nationally consistent definition of “forage fish”** is necessary and does not yet exist.
- Current legislation does not focus specifically on forage fish, which leaves **many forage fish species unmanaged**. For example, there are no biologically-based catch limits for some forage fish, such as river herring and shad.
- **Scientific research** focused on forage fish is necessary for effective management.
- **Ecosystem-based management**, recognizing the critical role that forage fish play, is needed for successful marine conservation.

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Seabirds that rely on forage fish and invertebrate species:

Anchovy: Sandwich Tern, Caspian Tern, Guadalupe Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet

Herring: Atlantic Puffin, Herring Gull, Arctic Tern, Marbled Murrelet

Menhaden: Osprey, Common Loon, Brown Pelican

Sandlance: Common Tern, Least Tern, Roseate Tern, Black-legged Kittiwake, Horned Puffin

Krill: Razorbill, Arctic Tern, Bermuda Petrel



Atlantic puffin

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