

# Protecting forage fish

## 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 per-cent** since 1980, and nearly half of all overwintering bird species are considered to be in significant decline.

### THE FORAGE FISH CONSERVATION ACT, H.R. 2236

- Provides a national definition for forage fish, which is not federally defined;
- Limits new fishing of unmanaged forage species until the impact on existing fisheries, fishing communities and the marine ecosystem is assessed;
- Directs fishery managers to account for predator (e.g. seabirds, larger fish, and sea mammals) needs in their existing management plans for forage fish;
- Specifies that councils consider forage fish when establishing research priorities; and
- Requires conservation and management of river herring and shad in the ocean.

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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

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

Krill: Razorbill, Arctic Tern, Bermuda Petrel



Atlantic puffin

### **For more information, contact:**

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