

What's In A Name?

Should the American Fisheries Society change its name?

YES. What's in a name? A name is used to provide a verbal description of an object of complexity. A good name provides an unambiguous and accurate mental picture of an object. However, no matter how clear a name is, it will be interpreted differently by every audience. For example, the word "fish" conjures up many images, like a leaping salmon or thrashing bass; or to a child, one of the stylized fishes in his or her coloring book. All of these images share something, but all differ according to the audience. When members of an organization choose a name, they must be very careful to ensure that target audiences interpret the name in the way it was intended. Does our name—the American Fisheries Society—portray the image we intend it to? Does it accurately reflect our present activities and those of the future?

The Society began in 1870 under the banner The American Fish Culturists' Association. Over time, the Society grew, and the emergence of the science of fisheries management resulted in a shift away from a pure focus on fish culture. The membership (still almost entirely from the U.S.) responded by changing the name to better reflect the new role of the Society. And so, in 1884, the American Fisheries Society came into existence. Today this name still portrays its originally intended image—that of an organization of American fisheries professionals.

Many people in the Society believe it is time to reexamine our name to ensure it still accurately portrays the intended image. We could engage in lengthy debate over what image the term "fisheries" portrays, but we believe that the ambiguity of the term is healthy. It is likely that the Society's image is in some way reflected by its activities. The term "American," however, elicits different responses depending on the receiving audience, and some audiences are not viewing us in the image we desire. Whether intended or not, "American" implies a resident of the United States. To most target audiences both within and outside the U.S. borders, we are the equivalent of the "United States Fisheries Society."

Admittedly, the Society is still largely comprised of U.S. members, but growth from other countries has stepped up considerably. For example, AFS membership from U.S. sources rose 18% between 1980 and 1990, while that of international members rose by 100%. The Society is now less "American" than ever, and for this and other reasons, the name has become outdated. It no longer accurately describes the Society of today, and what we anticipate it to be in the future.

Our organization has among others, the goal of advancing the conservation, development, and wise use of fishery resources for optimum use and enjoyment of all mankind.

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NO. In 1884 AFS was the name,
Following the 1984 referendum it was the same,
Ask again and the members will tell you,
Changing the name is not a game,
And the American Fisheries Society is the name that must remain.

Unequivocally, I argue to keep the name of the American Fisheries Society without change. My position does not reflect a closed mind but a thoughtful evaluation of the pros and cons of a name change. In response to President Nielsen's article in the November–December issue of *Fisheries*, I wish to present the other side of the name game.

Allegedly, a name change would indicate responsiveness of the Society to the concerns of its members. The referendum of 1984, when a proposed name change was placed on the ballot, indicated that leadership of the Society was out of step with the desire of the members by a 2 : 1 majority. It's doubtful that the issue has changed appreciably since then.

The proposed name change seems to be an honest desire to accommodate the Society's Canadian members. Although the Society was founded and has focused most of its energy within the United States, the name does not limit it to the political boundaries of one nation. The name American Fisheries Society encompasses both the Northern and Southern hemispheres of the New World. It is a name that identifies us. It is a name with recognition and not easily confused with other organizations.

As a Society, we are large in our profession but small when compared to other organizations such as the National Audubon Society, The Wildlife Society, or the American Medical Association. Can we afford to change our name and run the risk of losing identity? The most frequently proposed new name is the "North American Fisheries Society;" will that be confused with the North American Lake Management Society? Both deal with aquatic environment. Would the proposed new name be offensive to our southern neighbors? Would it improve our identity in European, Asian, and African countries? Would it improve our identity in Washington, DC, or even change things in Ottawa, Canada?

The current name has not limited participation in the Society by Canadians as reflected by the election of many Canadian members (most recently Richard A. Ryder in 1980 and Johanna M. Reinhart in 1985) as presidents of the Society. The current name did not prevent the Society from holding several annual meetings in Canada including, most recently, the 1988 meeting in Toronto, Ontario, or from selecting Halifax, Nova Scotia, as the site of the 1994 meeting.

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Many members of the Society have been drawn to the organization in the hope of seeing this goal realized. There are two real hurdles that must be overcome to make this a reality. AFS must make a concerted effort to provide leadership to the fisheries community to ensure the continued well-being of our fishery resources. The Society must also become more effective outside of the United States, particularly in Canada. Both of these challenges can be indirectly enhanced by the Society adopting a name that better reflects our international nature.

A decision to change the name of the Society would reflect our willingness to accept a greater leadership role in fisheries science and management as members of the international fisheries community. We have entered a period of unparalleled public awareness of environmental issues; issues that are more frequently international in scope. The new process of decision-making is based on public participation, and all participants need the most up-to-date scientific information to make the right decisions. Our Society more than any other is in the position to provide the leadership that is so desperately needed on international issues.

The current name is an impediment to the Society achieving its goals in Canada and other areas outside the U.S. Because an increasing number of fisheries issues are transboundary, AFS has identified the need to be more involved in facilitating international solutions. Canadian members have experienced difficulty in representing AFS interests and explaining that AFS is an international organization and not a United States organization. Therefore, changing the name of the Society will allow members to more effectively address international and transboundary fisheries issues.

The benefits of a name change are easily envisioned by Canadians, Mexicans, and members of other countries, but will it have a negative impact on U.S. members? We think not. Overall, we anticipate an improvement in the effectiveness of the Society in addressing transboundary issues. It is difficult to envision anything but continued improvements in our ability to address local or regional issues within the U.S. borders.

So what should our new name be? The "North American Fisheries Society" would meet today's needs while still preserving tradition. Alternatively, "Fisheries Society of the Americas" would reflect the Society's role in the future.

So what is in a name? We think a great deal. Our Society requires a name that accurately describes our membership, mission, and goals. A change in the name would be a small inconvenience compared to the potentially enormous impact it could have on our ability to be a progressive and driving force in the global conservation of aquatic resources.

Les Stanfield and Bob White
AFS Canadian Concerns Committee

Nominations for Awards Deadlines

15 May for John E. Skinner Memorial Fund
1 June for Excellence in Fisheries Education

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The Society has grown dramatically in the past few years and has expanded programs through its Divisions, Sections, committees, and most importantly publications; but the expansion has still lagged behind the need. The Society has been unable to develop a more active and aggressive program in Canada because of the shortage of funds to address all priority issues, not because of the Society's name. Members of the Society residing in the United States cannot appreciably affect the political system and decisions in Canada. U.S. members can, however, share information and assist Canadian members as they develop active programs tailored to their needs and within their system of government.

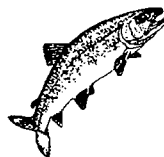
Each day the world seems to become smaller as we realize that actions in one geopolitical region affect formerly remote corners of the world. The Society is concerned with global issues as reflected by the articles on global climate change in the November–December issue of *Fisheries*. If we are to change our name we should not consider a name that would more narrowly focus our interest but, conversely, one that reflects our even broader interest. "The World Fisheries Society" would be easily confused with the World Aquaculture Society. "The Fisheries Society" would place us on a parallel with The Wildlife Society but would not be appreciated by our Asian or European colleagues. Perhaps the "Intergalactic Fisheries Society" would be descriptive enough to include interests of members in the U.S., Canada, and even future colonists in other worlds. If we can't get bigger, let's not get smaller. Let's remain the American Fisheries Society.

If we change our name not only will it move us from the front of the alphabet to somewhere in the middle, but we will have to change letterhead, establish new library files, and I would have to buy a new belt buckle.

Nick C. Parker
President-elect, AFS Southern Division

Future AFS Meetings

San Antonio, Texas, 8–12 September 1991
Rapid City, South Dakota, 14–17 September 1992
Portland, Oregon, 26 August–4 September 1993



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