

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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WAL-MART GIVES \$36 MILLION TO ANTI-FISHING GROUPS RFA Says Walton Family Foundation Supports MPA & Catch Share Efforts

August 17, 2011 - Wal-Mart announced this week its efforts to help fund the demise of both the recreational and commercial fishing industry while also working to ensure that the next generation of sportsmen will have less access to coastal fish stocks than at any point in U.S. history.

In August 16th news release from Wal-Mart corporate headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, the Walton Family Foundation announced investments totaling more than \$71.8 million awarded to various environmental initiatives in 2010, with over \$36 million alone handed over to Marine Conservation grantees including Ocean Conservancy, Conservation International Foundation, Marine Stewardship Council, World Wildlife Fund and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).

According to the release, the Walton Family Foundation "focuses on globally important marine areas and works with grantees and other partners to create networks of effectively managed protected areas that conserve key biological features, and ensure the sustainable utilization of marine resources - especially fisheries - in a way that benefits both nature and people."

Scott Burns, former director of marine conservation at World Wildlife Fund and now director of Walton Family Foundation's environmental efforts, said money will go to "protect and conserve natural resources while also recognizing the roles these waters play in the livelihoods of those who live nearby." The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) countered that these specially managed areas of coastal waters are also referred to as marine protected areas or marine reserves, and the end result is denied angler access, of no benefit to the very people whom Wal-Mart claims to benefit.

"A quick visit to the Ocean Conservancy website should be telling enough for anglers interested in learning where Wal-Mart's profits are being spent," said RFA executive director Jim Donofrio. "These folks are pushing hard to complete California's network of exclusionary zones throughout the entire length of coastline, and they've made it very clear that they would like to see the West Coast version of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) extended into other coastal U.S. waters," he said.

The release said that targeted marine areas moving forward include Indonesia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, the Gulf of California and the Gulf of Mexico.

"Here's an organization which has publicly opposed creation of artificial reefs used by Wal-Mart's tackle buyers, in some cases openly advocating for their removal, yet the Walton family is handing over tons of money for support," Donofrio said of Ocean Conservancy in particular.

"Shopping for fishing equipment at Wal-Mart is contributing directly to the demise of our sport, it's supporting lost fishing opportunities and decreased coastal access for all Americans," Donofrio said, adding "I hope all RFA members across the country will remember that when it's time to gear up, but I would also wonder if perhaps our industry can help spread the message and support our local tackle shops by also pulling product off Wal-Mart's shelves."

In April, RFA announced its support of a national boycott of the Safeway Supermarket chain (which also includes Genuardi's in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware) because of that corporation's support for California's MLPA initiative. "Apparently Safeway has gotten some bad advice from the people in the ocean protection racket, a community to which the California-based mega-corporation is now donating profits," said Jim Martin, West Coast Regional Director of the RFA. "Safeway says it is supporting groups that make a difference like the Food Marketing Institute's Sustainable Seafood Working Group, the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions and the World Wildlife Fund's Aquaculture Dialogues, but it's little more than corporate greenwashing."

RFA believes it's time that Wal-Mart was added to the angler boycott list as well.

"The Walton family created this huge corporate entity which has threatened the vibrancy of our local retail outlets, and now they're essentially doing the same thing with our fishing communities," Donofrio said. "Much like Safeway has done with their financial investment in the environmental business community, Wal-Mart apparently prefers customers buy farm-raised fish and seafood caught by foreign countries outside of U.S. waters, while denying individual anglers the ability to head down to the ocean to score a few fish for their own table."

According to the official release, the Walton Family Foundation is also working "to create economic incentives for ocean conservation," while candidly pledging their support for "projects that reverse the incentives to fish unsustainably that exist in 'open access fisheries' by creating catch share programs."

"Our local outfitters and tackle shops along the coast have had to face an immense challenge by going up against Wal-Mart's purchasing power during the last decade, but now that the Walton family is so up front about their opposition to open access fisheries, it's hard for me to believe that any sportsmen would ever be interested in shopping there again," Donofrio said.

"California anglers have been outraged to learn that money they spend at a Safeway grocery store might end up in the hands of extremist, anti-fishing groups like the EDF and the Ocean Conservancy, I hope more anglers will join the national boycott by sending a message to Wal-Mart as well as Safeway," Martin added.

According to the Walton Family Foundation website, Sam and Helen Walton launched their "modest retail business in 1962" with guiding principle of helping "increase opportunity and improve the lives of others along the way." It is that principle the foundation says, that makes them "more focused than ever on sustaining the Walton's timeless small-town values and deep commitment to making life better for individuals and communities alike."

RFA said grassroots efforts to combat the anti-fishing agenda are more than just an uphill climb. "The EDF catch share coffers are already filled to the top, while Pew Charitable Trusts has billions in reserve," Donofrio said. "When you add another \$36 million annual commitment from the Walton family each year, I can't see how our local efforts can get anywhere unless the national manufacturers step up and openly denounce this corporate takeover once and for all."

"The individual anglers and local business owners are being denied opportunity, and I hope the federal trade representatives are willing to get onboard with their support of real small-town values," Donofrio said, adding that Ocean Conservancy and EDF combined received more than \$10 million in Walton Family Foundation grants in 2010.

About Recreational Fishing AllianceThe Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. The RFA Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.