



Students Change Policies to Create Sustainable Fishing Practices

In 1999, [Grayson Schleppegrell](#) and a group of friends discovered that the swordfish population on the Charleston Bump (a deepwater bottom feature off the coast of Charleston) was plummeting. Thanks to the work of Grayson, and others like him, by 2008, the adult swordfish population had fully recovered and it now stands at 110% of the goal.



Grayson’s 5th grade class saw an article in the newspaper noting how long-line fishing was endangering the swordfish population. They learned that long-line fishing results in lots of bycatch, where juvenile swordfish and other species are caught in the line by accident and then tossed back - often dead. The young people understood immediately that this approach was unsustainable.

When Grayson took the issue to his Earth Force teacher, Ms. Golespey, she challenged them do something about it. Using the Community Action and Problem-Solving Process, Grayson and his classmates researched the problem and developed a strategy.



Grayson being interviewed in 2001 for the Brower Youth Award.

They decided to lobby state government to have the bycatch count towards a fisherman’s total catch limit. This would disincentivize practices like long-line fishing. They also lobbied to create a “safe zone” during key breeding periods, which prohibits fishing in certain areas during that period. Ultimately, [both bills passed](#) and are still in effect today. Grayson won the [Brower Youth Award](#) for his work on this project.

After connecting with a group in Washington, DC who was already working on the issue, they threw their support behind a national policy. In 2001, Congress voted to count all fish regardless of size, and banned or bought out longline fishing operations.

“Ms. Golespey was the first person to really challenge my reasoning as a young person,” says Grayson. “By treating young people as adults, you prepare them for adulthood.” To this day, Grayson considers Ms. Golespey as one of his mentors.

This experience in working with the government to protect the local swordfish population primed Grayson for his role as a lawyer today.

“Earth Force absolutely prepares students to be contributing members of society,” says Grayson.