

AUDIENCES SERVED BY FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE EXTENSION

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Abstract: A system for program development and evaluation of fisheries and wildlife extension programs is presented. The system based on the character and needs of potential audiences. Landowners, commercial interests, general public, youth groups and conservation organizations are considered the important citizen audiences. Significant professional audiences include university colleagues, natural resource agency professionals, and university students. For each audience, a rationale for involvement and suggestions for the nature and extent of program development is provided.

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State level extension programs in wildlife and fisheries began in 1936 when Texas hired its 1st specialist (Cornwell 1967). In 1966, 23 states employed 28 specialists, and as of January, 1980, 30 states employed 42 specialists in wildlife and fish management (USDA 1980). Widespread support for expansion of programs in fisheries and wildlife and other areas of natural resource conservation resulted in passage of the Renewable Natural Resources Extension Act of 1978. The law encourages development of new specialist programs in the remaining 20 states and increased staffing of extension professionals in resource management in states already providing extension expertise in natural resource conservation. However, the literature available to help extension professionals, whether they be administrators, agents, or specialists, to direct and evaluate new or expanding programs in wildlife and fisheries is sparse. Existing publications describe what specialists do and point out that educational programs delivered at the county-level through extension agents serve audiences often inaccessible to state and federal agencies (Cornwell, 1967, USDA 1980, Smith and Berryman 1962, Benson 1977). Benson (1977:60) concluded, "It is not possible to generalize about the worth of 1 Specialist's duties and involvement compared to those in other localities. Needs of wildlife and persons interacting with wildlife should dictate programs and the role of the Specialist." We agree that specialist programs should relate to state and local needs of wildlife and people, but we believe that generalizations from 1 state to another are appropriate if the criteria for evaluation focus on audiences development and satisfaction rather than on the details of specialist programs.

Our perspective on the relationship between programs developed by the specialist and the audiences served is conceptualized in Fig. 1. In this article we describe how the specialist can multiply the educational benefits of his programs by identifying and working with a diversity of citizen and professional audiences.

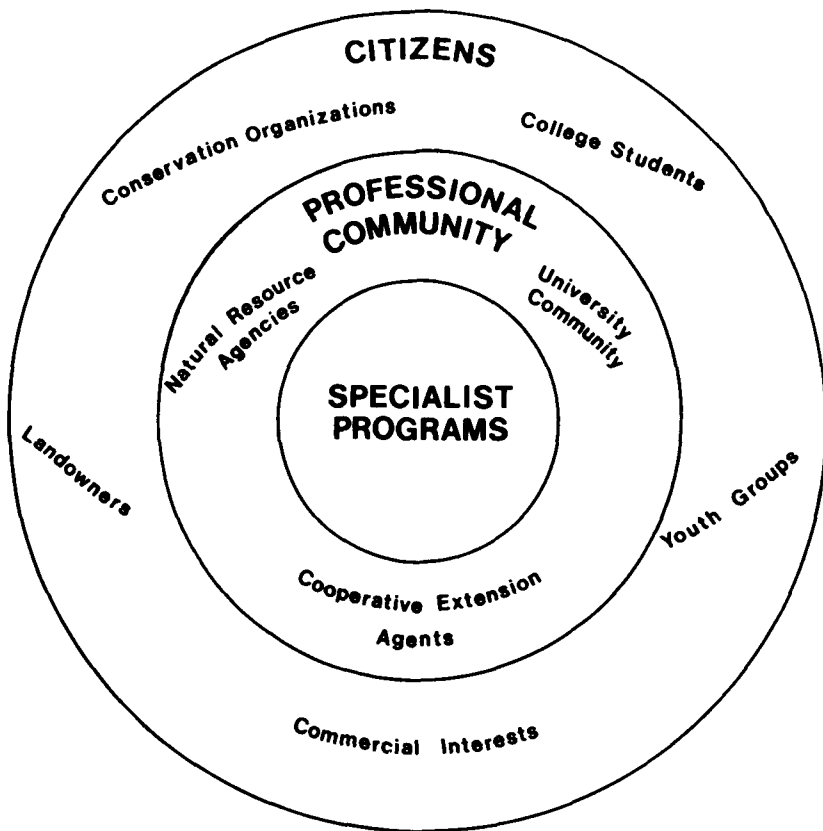


Fig. 1 Relationship between specialist programs and their audiences.

AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Citizen Audiences

In contrast to agricultural and forest products of private lands, fish and wildlife resources are owned by the public. Responsibility for conservation of wildlife resources rests at state and federal levels, but private citizens own the habitats essential to survival of fish and wildlife. Therefore, landowners share with public agencies a moral responsibility for stewardship of the resources. Working with landowners to improve wildlife and fish habitat through county extension agents and in cooperation with county-based professionals in soil and water conservation and forestry is an essential program component for extension specialists. Closely allied to programs aimed at enhancing habitats, are programs to reduce damage caused to agricultural crops, livestock, gardens, and homes by wildlife. Similarly, fisheries specialists help owners of farm ponds deal with nuisance aquatic weeds, fish kills, and undesirable fish populations. Opportunities to assist landowners

reach the extension specialist through extension agents, state and federal agency professionals, and direct appeal by individual landowners. Since the primary duty of the extension specialist is to educate, the specialist effort is best spent by producing publications and mass-media programs covering the more frequent problem areas, by holding workshops for professionals who serve landowners individually, or by referring requests to local professionals. However, the specialist must have some personal contact with landowners to understand their problems.

Landowners who contemplate major investments to commercialize wildlife or fishery resources through establishment of shooting preserves or aquaculture enterprises are special clients. If demand for extension assistance is sufficient, a specialist position may be created to serve these specialized citizens. Several southern states have specialists who conduct applied research and serve producers of catfish, crayfish, and baitfish. In other states, such as Virginia, demand is insufficient for a full-time aquaculture specialist. To avoid servicing individuals needs at the expense of educating broader audiences, we spent a limited amount of time in direct consultation with any citizen or business or concern. Following the on-site visit, a report detailing management recommendations is sent to the client. The report may include a list of consultants, agencies and industries dealing with natural resource management.

Citizen interest in wildlife and fishery conservation extends beyond landowners to include people in all walks of life and all but the youngest in age. Having an impact on this audience, termed the 'general public,' requires different strategies from those employed to assist individual landowners or other special groups who request assistance. Members of the general public who have similar but unarticulated needs can be served by television, radio and newsprint stories. Wildlife damage control, hunter safety, feeding wild birds, and aquatic weed control in farm ponds are good subjects for the mass media approach. An index of subjects to cover can be generated by reviewing the requests for information made by extension agents and the distribution rate of extension bulletins. Repeated requests for solutions to the same problems are handled more efficiently by the preparation of extension bulletins and mass media programs than by individual responses.

Programs in appreciation, understanding and management of wildlife and fisheries resources are accepted readily by youth groups, particularly 4-H. Teaching materials accompanied by high-quality, interesting illustrations will be used by extension agents who participate in public school 4-H programs. 4-H programs built around rigorous outdoor recreation activities generate highly motivated youth audiences. Youth thoroughly enthused with outdoor sports will pay close attention to well presented programs on fisheries and wildlife conservation and outdoor ethics for resource users. What works for 4-H will also work with little modification for other youth organizations in outdoor recreational activities.

Widespread public concern with natural resource conservation gives strength to citizen organizations. The specialist should attempt to work with the leadership of these organizations. Because the specialist is unfettered by agency policy and politics and has access to the vast information resources and services of the university, the specialist can provide relatively unbiased analyses of resource management problems. The specialist will find citizen conservation organization an interested audience for educational programs. By working with responsible organizations, the specialist assists them in making sound decisions on controversial issues and promoting policies and programs beneficial to fisheries and wildlife resources.

Professional Community

It is essential that the specialist build strong working relationships with his academic colleagues at the university. This is a reciprocal situation because the specialist will share public concerns and problems with the research and teaching faculty, adding relevancy to their work while the public will benefit from the results of research directed toward practical problems. The specialist will also help locate new sources of funding for research. This healthy interchange of information among specialists and teaching-research faculty constitutes a strong justification for housing specialists within the appropriate academic department.

Another justification for placing the specialist in the fisheries and wildlife department results from his usefulness to the developing professional. Extension specialists help orient undergraduate and graduate students to the realities of the 'real world' through advising student organizations, giving lectures and seminars, serving on graduate student committees, introducing students to clientele groups or prospective employers, and discussing public involvement with fisheries and wildlife conservation.

Finally, we believe the extension specialist is in an ideal position to act as liaison between the university and natural resource agencies. Both the appointed leaders and the professional staff of conservation agencies have educational needs that can be served by workshops and short courses provided by extension. The specialist can help agencies identify their needs and coordinate the instructional resources of the university to meet those needs.

SUMMARY

Extension specialist programs in wildlife and fisheries management vary greatly from state to state depending on the particular characteristics of wildlife and fishery resources and specific needs of the people who use them. An analysis of specialist program development from the perspective of citizen and professional audiences for educational programs offers guidelines for the expansion of existing programs, development of new state programs and evaluating program effectiveness. By interacting cooperatively with agency professionals, university colleagues and citizen leaders, and through the creative use of the mass media, the specialist can multiply his effectiveness and contribute to the strength of cooperating agencies, institutions and organizations.

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