

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION SESSION

I & E EXPANSION THROUGH REGIONALIZATION

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If you bite off more than you can chew, you're in trouble. That I discovered after I'd accepted Malcolm King's invitation and after I'd given him the title of my presentation here this afternoon.

So, to avoid further embarrassment and try to make things a bit more digestible, I'll not go whole hog, but just take smaller bites as we consider now, "I & E Expansion through Regionalization."

In our various I & E programs, we find many limiting factors that influence our activities so that our goals and objectives may differ from region to region and, often, from state to state. Knowing that there is a difference in native fauna and flora, opportunities for outdoor recreational activities, money, manpower, and management among the states represented here today, I believe that I should concentrate my presentation on two things, *people* and *space* — the "space" being primarily land and water areas within a state.

Of the two, I believe we can agree that *people* is the more important and I hope that we agree that an effective I & E effort is dependent, to a great degree, on a soundly balanced public relations program "for the people, to the people, and from the people."

We all use the modern tools of communication — press, television, radio, and many of the more controllable forms of audio-visuals such as departmental bulletins, magazines, slide shows, exhibits, and so forth. Each has certain advantages and limitations — but mostly advantages, as we present information "for the people to the people" — and, I believe mostly limitations in that part of our public relations program which comes "from the people."

Rapport is the key issue — that establishment of grass roots contact and exchange of ideas with the people. I might illustrate my point by referring to the polls which are in vogue this politically important year. The pollsters have no problem in organizing and presenting their information to the public, but if their presentations have any validity or any authenticity whatsoever, they must first have had personal contact with representative samples of the many publics which compose our society today.

Now I know that many of the states have made the grass roots approach to establish rapport with the people — a kind of decentralization of I & E activities with varying degrees of centralized control. This we have done in Texas and this is how we try to make it work:

Our state, with its 267,339 square miles of mountains, high plains, prairies, pine forests, coastal marshes, and bays — and representations from twenty-six ethnic groups, has been divided into five geographical regions, for a more efficient administration of parks and wildlife services provided by our department. Although the regional boundaries are on county lines, ecological similarity and population distribution played major roles in the division.

Each region is further divided into districts — averaging four per region — headed by a game management district supervisor, who is directly responsible to his regional supervisor. The primary responsibility of the game management officers and supervisors is law enforcement.

Each region has its director as chief administrative officer. His staff consists of a supervisor for law enforcement, as mentioned, a supervisor for inland fisheries,

wildlife management, parks operation, fiscal operations, information-education, and the two coastal regions have marine fishery supervisors. Each region has its needed complement of field technicians, clerical and secretarial help. Every regional employee is directly responsible to the director, who, in turn, answers to his appropriate service director and so on up the chain of command to the State Headquarters in Austin.

Although the I & E officers are under the direct supervision of their regional directors, there is a very close-knit staff relationship between the regional director, the I & E officer, I & E director, and various I & E sectional chiefs.

Our five I & E officers are considered to be specialists, trained in: photography; public speaking; reporting; news, magazine and special publications writing; public relations and dissemination of information through all public and private media. They're tuned to transmit and receive information.

Each is provided basic photographic equipment and accessories, portable tape recorders, projectors, screens, a dozen or so motion picture films (for emergency programs) and other audio-visual equipment and materials. Training in the use of these technical tools is provided by the State Headquarters I & E staff.

The I & E officer is charged with the responsibility of being the best informed man in his region. He is expected to obtain first-hand information from the various functional supervisors who are officed with him and he is required to go into the field, visiting district offices, wildlife management areas, fish hatcheries and other department installations, periodically, for a refreshed-on-the-ground contact with those people who meet daily with the public.

The I & E man promotes the conservation education program in the schools and colleges in his region; he prepares weekly news items from happenings in his area; he prepares and promotes magazine articles for our monthly magazine, *Texas Parks and Wildlife*; he prepares slide shows for the usage of his regional personnel who have public programs and meetings; radio and television stations are provided taped or live-program assistance — and to help him do these things, he conducts in-service training programs which enlist and prepare the regional field men to improve their effectiveness through good public relations activities.

Without the cooperation of field personnel in his region, the I&E man is doomed — it is physically impossible for him to fill all requests for programs in schools; make the weekly meetings of the civic and service clubs in his territory; serve as trouble shooter in handling those misinformed or disgruntled landowners and sportsmen we all encounter. The fact that our regional directors are all boosters of our I&E effort certainly insures and enhances the cooperation of the field people.

Interregional exchange of information is accomplished in several ways:

Our weekly news packet, which is prepared, in part, from items submitted by the I&E officers, goes to all department personnel.

The department magazine goes to all employees, and a monthly house organ, perhaps tritely titled "The Grapevine," provides our people with items of personal information, as well as basic knowledge of current programs, exhibit schedules, new plans in operations or proposed changes in departmental procedure.

Naturally, there is the daily flow of correspondence, telephone calls, and numerous meetings to explain and inform. Regional I&E officers meet with State Headquarters I&E semi-annually, or more often if there is a need.

These are communications activities designed to keep our people informed. It's a basic public relations principle that you must first sell your organization to the people it employs if you expect to sell your products or services to your public consumers.

Each Regional I & E Officer is charged with keeping his people informed and with seeing that *they* keep him informed. Not only is he expected to be the chief public relations training man in his region, but he is expected to participate actively in all phases of the department's contact work with the people. In doing this, he is able to compare public reaction to his own efforts with public reaction reported to him by departmental field personnel who meet the public.

In meeting with sportsmen, landowners, civic, church, and youth groups, he has an excellent opportunity to feel the public pulse of a large cross-section of our society. We expect him to see the local needs and, if he is unable to satisfy them, enlist the services of other departmental personnel who can. One of his main jobs is to keep the fires from starting or to extinguish them before they become statewide and begin to scorch too many influential tails!

Fortunately, our I & E field men are not all expert in every phase of all the duties assigned them — they're just human, and as such they are able to "humanize" our department. Computers are wonderful, but I don't know of any successful computerized I & E program — at least not in our line of work!

Our regional I & E officer may be very good at preparing and presenting slide programs — one of our most versatile tools; another may find that radio covers his area well and gets good results; another may concentrate on school programs and P.T.A. meetings; one may find excellent cooperation with television outlets, while another finds that *local news features and announcements are doing the most good in his region.*

We encourage them to do that which they do well — improving upon it — but we also caution, and actually insist, that they expand their interest so that no opportunity for public contact or public service is ignored. This is where the Headquarters staff is made available for training and consultation.

State contract printing requirements and the needs for specialized equipment and technicians make it necessary that some I & E productions and services emanate from the Capitol — but, even here, field personnel are consulted and their talents enlisted. This we consider as absolutely necessary to create a good internal as well as an acceptable public image of our department.

As you might suspect, our program is not perfect. Space is a problem. All of our regions are too large for one I & E man to cover effectively. Region I, which encompasses our mountains, Panhandle, Permian Basin, and part of the Edwards Plateau, is larger than most of the member states of this organization. Two of its major population centers, Amarillo and El Paso, are 300 or more miles from the Regional Headquarters in San Angelo — one north, the other west. This is not bragging — if anything, it's complaining and, we believe, some justification for employing additional I & E field men.

Space can be conquered, but it takes a more comprehensive and complete utilization of public informational media — something which we cannot always control — or the employment of additional I & E specialists, strategically stationed and properly utilized.

Just this reference to financing — money can't be ignored. You must have adequate funds for tools and technicians to get the job done.

Our two major expense items are printing and office supplies, which includes the printing cost of the magazine, and personal services, which includes salaries and travel expenses. The first item is the larger of the two and it amounts to approximately \$200,000 a year — and growing!

For the past three years, less than five percent of the department's annual expenditures has been charged against I & E. This is about the same as it was before we went to the regional program and does not necessarily mean less money for I & E, but more money available to the entire department. We believe that seven-and-a-half percent of the budget for I & E would not be unreasonable.

This brings us to the last and probably most important facet of our Information — Education Program — selling the administration and policy makers.

Perhaps it's unfortunate that these key people are *not* computers — programmed to accept volumes of technical data, specialized information, complaints, suggestions, proposals, and, within a matter of seconds, produce a complete and precise answer to our I & E problems — but, they, too, are human — at least ours are.

They are concerned with I & E, but not I & E alone! Wildlife research, law enforcement, fiscal foul-ups, personnel problems, pressure groups, are just a few of their concerns. Add to these, legislative appropriations, directives, and other state and

federal controls and mandates and you might wonder how they find any time at all for hearing ideas and suggestions from their I & E staff.

I & E people must create a good I & E image to sell their program to the administration. This is done simply by providing quality services and materials needed and demanded by the public, and by providing new ideas and suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the entire department.

The I & E Director, with his Headquarters staff, can present beautifully done, slick publications; impressive statistics on departmental film utilization, press coverage, and outstanding, unique photography to our administration as evidence of what we are doing or in argument that we should do more, and . . . frequently it produces just another time at bat.

But, a few unsolicited words of praise for a local radio program, Lion's Club presentation, Boy Scout meeting, or P.T.A. panel, provided by our regional I & E officers, or their P R -minded field men, invariably makes a hit with our bosses. This is the kind of evidence — this public acceptance and approval of our efforts — which, to them justifies I & E. This is information "from the people."

A growing population, compacting our space which cannot expand, foretells new and challenging problems in our programs "for the people, to the people, and from the people." Regionalization may not be the answer, but grass-roots rapport in programs involving the utilization of our natural resources will become increasingly important.

More people means more problems — for this we should be thankful — without problems there would be no need for I & E — there would be no jobs for you and me.