

DO WE NEED A SOUTHEASTERN INFORMATION AND EDUCATION UNIT?

by

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In June I made a proposal to some of you that we form a southeastern cooperative I & E unit to tackle problems that were common to us all in a way that individually most of us could not afford. These could include film productions, radio programs and spots, TV programs and spots, teaching guides, general information publications such as our recent Atlantic Flyway Waterfowl Guide, employee training materials, research on public awareness, needs and desires, research on the effectiveness of I & E programs and possibly training for I & E employees.

Since the similar southeastern cooperative disease study and statistical units were located at colleges, I suggested that this one be similarly located. This drew more flack than any other part of the proposal. Since I & E problems tend to be more practical than academic, these critics may have a good point.

Everyone was scared to death of funding such a unit and with rising costs eroding already slim budgets I can appreciate their concern. I think Virginia could save enough on programs we are now funding single-handedly to pledge our share of support for such a unit. States that have fully staffed in-house programs in all aspects of I & E work may not realize such savings. I see no reason why beyond a basic commitment to set up and staff such an office participation in specific projects could not be optional. Salary and office budget for a regional coordinator might not cost more than \$1,000 per participating state.

I think a salaried coordinator for such a program would be essential for success and should be the only expenditure of funds required for which no tangible return could be shown. I foresee that visiting with each of us on a regular basis to gain input from all states would be an important part of this person's work. It would be his job to enlist support, sell planned projects, and arbitrate differences of opinion to see that we each got the maximum input and output from the project.

It is possible that a coordinating committee could oversee the program at less cost in dollars, but it would cost the states furnishing personnel more than those who just sent money. This inequity might cause friction. I personally feel that neither I nor any member of my staff could devote the necessary time to produce more than mediocre work. Since the whole concept was to produce dynamic works that we presently have neither time nor money to tackle, I think such a penny pinching approach would produce equally impoverished results. If we have to compromise to save, I think a part-time paid person would be preferable.

I asked for a list of preferred projects and those pessimists who suggested we could never agree on what problems to tackle may be proven right yet. The only item everyone agreed upon as worthy of our attention was the threat of anti-hunting sentiment, but many were skeptical that we could deal with it effectively. Research was an often listed service that we might be able to contract for collectively with or without a formal unit. Other suggestions included education projects and youth contact programs. The chronic I & E problems of low budgets, lack of recognition, the exhibit dilemmas, etc. were also mentioned but if hundreds of us who have wrestled with these problems over the years have been unable to solve them, it is doubtful a unit such as this could pull any rabbits out of the hat.

I hope that before we leave this conference we can take a critical look at what a cooperative unit could do for us and then see if such aid would be worth its cost. In Virginia we have neither the staff time nor funds to undertake the production of feature

films. With the sophisticated tastes of today's audiences exposed constantly to the best commercial productions via TV, some of our back room productions of the 1950's are almost laughable. We have decided since we can't make first class films we will make none at all. Even so, we have ideas on films we would like to see produced. Should we send our order to Missouri? I think not, but maybe if enough other states were interested in an idea a film could be produced.

Although we have one weekly 7 minute TV show in addition to occasional specials and guest appearances, we are unable to scratch the surface of the potential this media has to offer. We can't afford to produce 30 minute specials or series on hunter and boating safety. The stations have told us they would run them if we could. It strains our budget to afford a few spot announcements.

Our radio involvement is similarly limited. We provide news and information of interest to sportsmen but can't scratch the surface of the potential for dynamic agency messages on important conservation issues to be played in public service time.

Educational efforts are likewise restricted to cooperative contacts with educators who allow us some input into their curriculum planning. We continue to pass out our colorful free leaflets to teachers who undoubtedly pass them out to their students with the admonition that killing animals is morally wrong and that hunting is a base activity that should be stopped. We could use some ecologically accurate teaching units that explain the dynamics of wildlife population the way it really is.

On the other hand, our publications are probably as complete and well produced as anyone elses in the region for the monies committed. We have a strong news program and our hunting and boating safety programs are among the best in the region. My point is, we all have strengths and weaknesses and perhaps pooling our resources can help us overcome some of these weaknesses.

I was just recently informed that a number of our commissioners meeting in Atlanta came up with the idea of establishing a movie footage pool from which could be drawn the basic ingredients for regional TV programs that would support hunting and the role of wildlife agencies. Presumably such a project would be funded jointly by all participating states. They want our reaction and if possible a formal proposal as to how such a system could be set up so that they might act on it at this conference. So your director may be on the verge of committing your or other agency funds to this type of project already. I am sure you are aware as are they that the International Association of Game and Fish Commissioners has a similar project in mind but they apparently want to beat them to the punch.

Before we open the floor for discussion, I would like to introduce Allen Van Campen of Webb and Athey, Inc. of Richmond, who will present some ideas on how their professional communication services might be able to help us do a more effective and timely job.

Webb and Athey have produced numerous national and international award winning TV public service messages in addition to some outstanding radio messages for the Virginia Game Commission. I think if you listen closely they may offer you an opportunity to get in on some of these quality productions at prices comparable to the cost of Missouri film prints. Dick Athey is an avid hunter and it was his general dissatisfaction with the way things were going for hunters and hunting that brought him to my office in the first place. I will let Allen present his thoughts and demonstrate some of the approaches we have worked out.