

NEWS RELEASES IN ALABAMA HOW AND WHY

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, honored guests and members of the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners, you are very kind to invite me to discuss with this distinguished group the subject, "News Releases in Alabama—How and Why."

Alabama's Department of Conservation has a continuous news release program. This program is neither original, unique nor ideal; we have borrowed heavily from your time-tested ideas and innovations. Our news release program is somewhat flexible, but we have adopted some basic principles that have consistently helped promote conservation in Alabama.

To place this program before you as a model would be highly presumptuous on my part. Many of you have solid, successful systems of releasing news. Naturally, the wise publicist tailors the news release program to fit the local needs and problems. Our methods, we believe, are simply the best ways yet to get the job done in Alabama. Having a common goal—influencing as many people as possible through the medium of news releases—we all benefit from a pooling of promotional programs. As we discreetly glean from this pool, we may find ideas for handling news releases more efficiently.

I will not bother you with lengthy and repetitious statements about the "Five W's" of news. The "Who, What, Why, When and Where" along with the "How" still form the "meat" of the story, for you are already familiar with these primary ingredients of a news release. Instead of dwelling on the technical aspects of news writing, I will attempt to set out some of the basic concepts of a news release program.

I know of no better peg to hang our thoughts upon than the traditional question—"Why do we use news releases?" In a broad sense they are effective communication media for informing and influencing public opinion; however, the most important function of news releases is to promote your agency's program.

This basic "story to tell and program to sell" philosophy is the chief cornerstone of conservation publicity. If the presentation of news is sound, honest and the program of your agency is sincere, the news release will sell, inform and educate the reading, viewing and listening public.

HOW AND WHY

Wire Services:

Most stories are much more valuable to newspapers, radio and TV on the day the news breaks. What happened last week or last month is usually of more interest to historians than editors. To take advantage of every news facility available to you and to prevent time from "spoiling" important, fast-breaking news, use the wire services. The Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) are indispensable in getting news to every daily newspaper, radio and television station soon after the release is prepared.

After releasing to the wire services, follow up by mailing a revised or rewritten release to weekly newspapers in time for their deadline. Please do not get the impression that every release should be handled

this way. The general type release mailing will serve the purpose of most statewide (undated) news items. But when the big and sometimes unexpected story breaks, the wire is our best way to speed the story to the masses.

Releases for Daily Newspapers:

Large daily newspapers carry the news of the state, nation and the world; therefore, for your news to compete, every effort must be made to get the release out to daily newspapers when the story is new and fresh. Keep in mind every item must have a valid news angle and give full and reliable information.

To regularly break into the newspapers' illustrious lineup, our conservation news releases must be important, interesting and extremely well prepared. Package type releases mailed to "dailies" on a given day in the week are often a waste of time and effort. It has been our experience that package releases (called "handouts" and "canned copy" by many editors) are seldom reprinted.

Local News Releases for Daily and Weekly Newspapers:

Each year many game and fish events provide opportunities for news items with local application. Many daily and all weekly newspapers are particularly interested in local news.

The weekly newspaper, to survive the avalanche of big city newspapers that daily flood its territory must "play up" news of local interest. Their necessity, then, becomes our opportunity to slant our stories to their needs. For example, the deer kill of a small rural county would hardly create a ripple of interest in a faraway metropolitan area but the story is a potential "headliner" in the small weekly.

Unlimited column space is available when you visit the area, write a good release and provide photographs if possible. If you operate within a crimped budget, many commercial organizations will furnish ample supplies of free photographs and mats that may be adapted to the news release when appropriate cutlines are prepared.

To Get Special Attention for News Releases:

The conservation publicist should know the men who must carry his message. Without their cooperation, most of our releases will wind up in the wastebasket. We must get acquainted with outdoor writers, sports editors, wire editors and TV and radio newscasters. It pays to pay them a visit and to get to know them personally, and take into consideration their interests, needs and limitations.

We cannot promise them a train load of full-grown bucks for their private hunt, but we must make reasonable efforts to cultivate their lasting friendship. Call on or write these editors and broadcasters when you have a special project to promote. They will respond with more space and more words devoted to your news item.

CONCLUSION

To stay in business we must have the public's good will. While "a job well done," may be the best public relations, this performance story must be told for maximum results. The unsung song, even if it has good melody and lyrics, is soon a dust-covered sheet.

To summarize, I suggest you write a good news release that contains news; release only when you have a sound news item; vary release date and pass up the big package release on certain days, and know the people that handle news.

News releases are our most important communication media. Make use of them at every opportunity to sell your agency's valuable public services.