

Marketing to Increase Freshwater Angler Participation in Florida

Dennis D. MacKee, *Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, 620 South Meridian Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600*

Abstract: Faced with continuing declines in license sales, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (GFC) opted to identify areas of declining sales within the state and focus on developing tactics designed to increase participation and license sales in specific counties. Counties were identified based on historic sales trends and a test program was developed to see if a concerted effort in a tighter geography would be more productive than generic programs instituted statewide. Two counties with declining license sales and 1 county with growing license sales were selected for the initial phase. Regional staff was asked to participate in a strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis and then participate in developing communications and promotional tactics designed to increase license sales in the specific counties. Tactics have been developed and implementation is beginning.

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The Florida Game and Fresh Water Commission (GFC) analyzed resident fishing license sales trends at the statewide level and identified continued declines generally ranging $\leq 5\%$ annually. The steady erosion was too small to identify 1 specific explanation, and it was concluded based on a review of secondary research, as well as input from all areas of the organization, that there was not 1 discreet explanation nor solution for the declines. In preparing to put together a marketing program with a limited budget, the GFC evaluated several methods of segmenting the market including demographics, psychographics, age, gender, income, lifestyle, length of residency, and others. It was agreed that the most actionable segmentation strategy was geographic.

Based on this decision, a license sales analysis by county was conducted which confirmed that a geographic segmentation was appropriate. From fiscal year 1995-96 to fiscal year 1996-97 statewide license sales had a net decline of 8,378 units. At the county level there was a broad range of sales increases and decreases (Fig.1). The most serious declines, those exceeding 5%, were reported in 14 counties out of a statewide total of 67 counties. These 14 counties represented losses during the period

of 15,686 resident licenses. This loss was enough to represent all of the statewide declines and erode almost an equal amount of gains generated by other positively performing counties. This analysis confirmed our decision to focus on specific geographic areas. In a search for common explanations for the declines among these counties, several theories were espoused. Many, but not all of the counties had high population densities. Many, but not all, were coastal counties, and some coastal counties performed well during the same period. Some had similar demographic make-up and some didn't. It was concluded that each county probably had its own set of factors at work and that we would have to put together specific plans for each individual county.

A multi-disciplinary task force made up of regional field staff, information and education, marketing, law enforcement, and fisheries and wildlife divisions was created to determine the magnitude and direction of the project. This committee

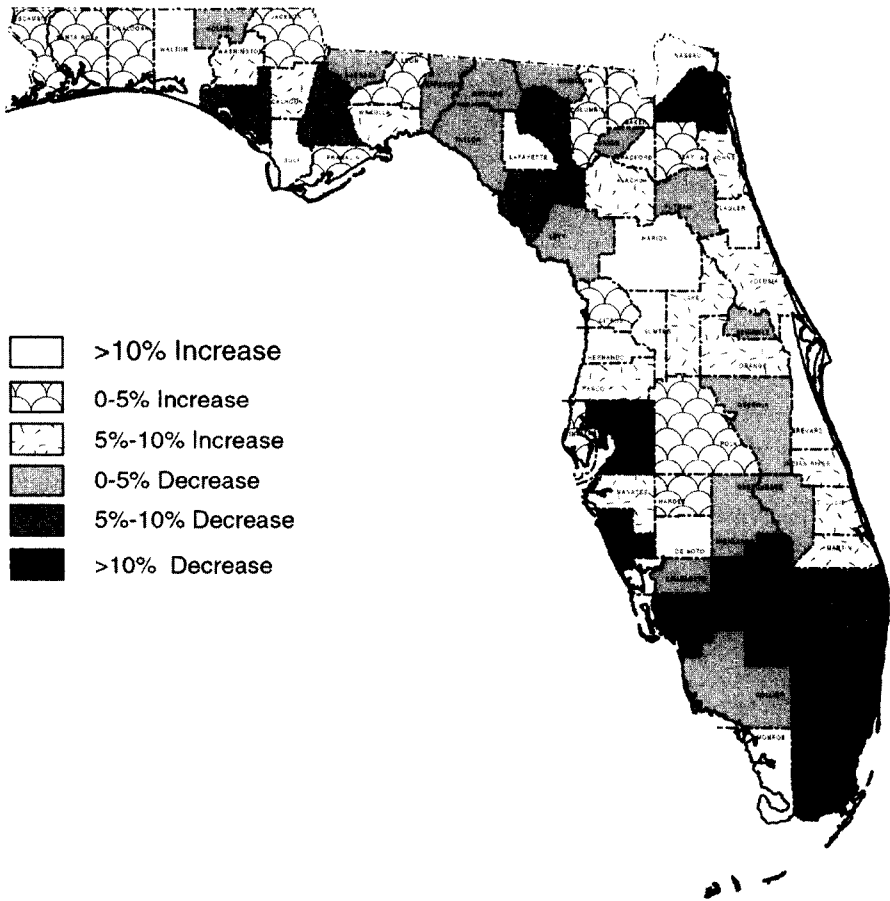


Figure 1. Resident freshwater fishing licenses. 1995/96 vs. 1996/97

concluded that a test program would be initiated in 2 declining counties and 1 positive performing county. This would both address our capability to reverse declining trends, as well as to evaluate the feasibility of increasing participation in healthy areas. The declining counties selected were Hillsborough and Duval. The healthy county selected was Polk (adjacent to Hillsborough). The original task force remained in place to develop appropriate plans.

The group focused its energy on specific solutions for each county based on that area's strengths and weaknesses. One common element was created for each county. A newspaper tabloid supplement was developed addressing non-anglers and new anglers. The content of the tabloid focused on the "how-to" and family values related to fishing. The centerfold was a map of fishing spots localized for each county. In sum, the tabloid addressed how, why, and where to fish close to home. The newspaper tabloid format was chosen for its low production cost of approximately 3 cents per copy plus distribution costs, allowing us to reach a large audience.

The group developed several other tactics to supplement the tabloid. It was discovered that by using the multi-disciplinary task force, we were able to identify and develop many opportunities that we would have missed if participation were limited. Every division represented made a positive contribution. A few examples of the ideas that were developed include the following: producing area fishing maps to be distributed as trayliners in local restaurants, identifying auto dealers who would be willing to give fishing licenses as auto purchase incentives, using several local celebrity spokespersons to record public service announcements, posting materials at tax collector's and sub-agent's offices, posting "Fishing Allowed" signs at appropriate water bodies, and sending reminders to existing anglers by one of our private sector partners.

As this is still work in progress it is too early to measure the effectiveness, but there has already been some learning related to the project. First, by focusing on smaller geographies we will save money and will be more likely to employ effective tactics. Second, by broadening the participation in problem solving, we were able to develop better targeted and more effective programs, as well as improve morale. Third, it will be easier to establish measurable goals and measure the effectiveness of the tactics. Lastly, there has been the unexpected benefit of local sports writers, residents, resource managers, conservationists, and government officials embracing the project because of the feeling that their county is getting some special attention. As a result, the project is gaining more active local support.