

## Using Long-term Angler Education to Recruit Anglers and Develop Aquatic Stewards

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*Abstract:* Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologists evaluated the fishing activity and environmental attitudes of campers following participation in the Joe Budd Summer Fish Camp. The study's objectives were to determine if attending fish camp enhanced long-term fishing participation and awareness of and importance of protecting aquatic resources. Findings were based on a 19-question survey received from 260 (75.1%) campers who had participated in at least one week of camp from 2000 through 2006. Participants in a school based fishing program ( $n = 258$ ) were used as a comparison group. More than 93% of campers, with no prior fishing experience, continued to fish after attending fish camp. Nearly two-thirds of campers that showed moderate (3 to 10 times per year) fishing activity prior to attending camp increased their fishing activity following camp. Attending a long-term angler education program increased the number of days fishing each year by campers. Campers rated all nine aquatic concern statements as more important to them than the comparison group did. When campers were asked, "has anything happened that has helped you go fishing or fish more often after attending fish camp?", the most frequent written response for just over 44% of 140 responding was greater skills and knowledge. Analyses showed that camp participation established fishing as a valued leisure activity and significantly moved participants toward becoming life-long anglers and active stewards of natural systems.

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