

General Fisheries Marketing Session

Marketing Recreational Sport Fishing— Whose Job Is It? A Review

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Abstract: Recent nationwide trends showing stable or declining fishing license sales and participation should challenge resource agencies and the fishing tackle industry to question the wisdom of doing business as usual. A special fisheries session at the 1997 Annual Conference of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies was devoted to addressing a marketing and outreach approach to the problem. Speakers included representatives from 2 state fisheries agencies, the fishing tackle industry, a market research group, the outdoor media, and a national bass fishing organization.

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What started from a simple discussion in a vehicle 2 years ago while driving back from the annual Southeastern Association meeting in Arkansas is amazing to me. On that trip, 3 other Fisheries Division employees and I were discussing topics that might make an interesting session at our Southeastern Conference last year. The subjects of angler recruitment, marketing sport fisheries, steady or declining license sales, and the need for some organized effort to increase fishing participation kept surfacing. We decided to visit with colleagues to learn if others shared our interests for a special fisheries' session and pursue the session if we could arrange for speakers. The rest is history as our quality speakers last year were eager and enthusiastic about bringing "Marketing Recreational Sport Fishing—Whose Job Is It?" to the forefront.

My purpose today is to briefly recap that session last year to set the stage for the exciting program before us, and to pass on a few insights the speakers shared last year for those of you who did not attend. Actually, for me as well because while I was present during parts of the session, my conference hosting duties frequently called me out to attend to meeting details. I am really looking forward to this just to catch up.

Norville Prosser with the American Sportfishing Association served as an effective and efficient moderator for the special session. He noted that this topic is critical to the future of sportfishing, yet lacks understanding and support. The trends indicating stable or decreasing fishing license sales should be troubling to all as our customers and constituents are leaving us—and 'us' means state fish and wildlife agencies, the federal government, the media for the sport angler, and the fishing tackle industry. Norville challenged us to evaluate the risk of doing business as usual versus taking a more aggressive approach of outreach and marketing our product—sport fishing. He further noted that Congress, through the Federal Aid to Sport Fish Restoration Act Wallop-Breaux Amendments, has already provided the way with the eligibility of outreach as a fundable purpose. Of course, with the passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) this past session of Congress, marketing and outreach received a tremendous boost with some serious money becoming available.

Mark Duda, Mr. Representative Management, started us off with a primer on marketing. After all, if we are to concentrate effort on marketing and effective outreach, we darn well better know what it is and how to do it. He noted marketing is not selling but in fact the opposite of selling. It is a deliberate and orderly process that focuses on the needs of the customer and ends with the products, services, programs, and strategies. If we do the research, develop the plan, and then provide the goods and services the customers demand, we will be successful and just happen to sell more fishing licenses and tackle along the way.

Mark then presented trends of anglers and the sport of fishing. We were surprised to learn that the age-old concern of the single-female headed households being responsible for the decline of angler recruitment was not true. Reasons for the decline are more complicated. The top 5 issues that did influence angling were amount of free time, loss of interest, work obligations, family obligations, and not having anyone to go fishing with. Many of us fisheries managers strive to make fishing better so people go fishing, right? Mark noted neither size nor number of fish caught were significant factors in fishing satisfaction.

Many of the problems have been identified and we cannot make more time in the day, so we must deal with the problem. How do we deal with the things competing for a person's time? Promotion of the wholesomeness and benefits of fishing will be important as well as simply keeping the fishing issue in front of the public. Managing fisheries for family outings, relaxing experiences, and enjoying the outdoors should become part of our consciousness. Clearly, we must implement marketing strategies that address the decline in fishing participation.

We next heard about marketing from top representatives of the sportfishing industry. First up was Mr. Gary Dollahon, director of Marketing Communications for

the Brunswick Outdoor Recreation Group. Gary contrasted the marketing strategies of the past, focusing on the products, to those of the present, which focus more on emotional qualities and adventure. Zebco and Quantum used to promote rods and reels. Now, they promote the fun of fishing, and that fishing is more fun and can be done with the whole family than many of the activities competing for their time and money. Gary noted Zebco's campaign "The Fun is Catching" and "Fishing is a Contact Sport." As they are successful in selling fun, they will be in selling rods and reels, and we state fish and game agencies will sell more fishing licenses. Finally, Gary urged us to not sell the fish but rather sell the splash.

John Storm from the Storm Manufacturing Company gave us a religion! John's approach to marketing has been influenced by the book "Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary," which looked at nonbelievers. John described parallels between the "unbelievers" in the spiritual sense, or the unchurched, with the "unbelievers" in fishing, or the nonanglers. He proposed that we in the fishing business have become so immersed in the fishing subculture that we lost touch with nonanglers, and challenged us to get inside the mind of "Unfished Harry and Mary." Amen, brothers and sisters! John left us a list of ideas for action, which included lots of hands-on ideas to get nonanglers hooked on fishing. We cannot forget the large segment of society that have not fished or are not fishing now. Anyone have the angler recruitment bible? We need it now!

Like the governmental fish and game agencies and the fishing tackle industries, Steve Quinn from the In-Fisherman, noted the angling media have a vested interest in maintaining or increasing angling participation. Steve recapped many ways in which the media work with both government and industry. He called on the fisheries biologists to realize their jobs are not complete by simply managing the fish populations; rather, they must get the word out about their research and management, about new opportunities, and about the benefits of fishing. By doing so, biologists gain credibility and may actually encourage some nonanglers to try fishing. Finally, Steve challenged us fisheries administrators to establish pathways for field biologists to communicate and publish with the popular media and not just scientific articles. Similarly, educators were challenged to encourage their students to not only focus on fisheries, but to receive training in communication, human dimensions, and marketing so they will be more effective in the work place.

Our host today, the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, has been the most radical to date. They actually hired a professional marketer from the private industry to focus on the angling decline. Holy Cow! From pushing burgers to pushing fish! What Dennis MacKee made crystal clear, however, was the answer to the question "whose job is it?" regarding the marketing issue. At the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, marketing was the job of everyone and not just the promotional department. Marketing was instilled as cultural change from the top to the bottom, and the principles of marketing employed. The customer became the focus as well as the fisheries resources. The several initiatives Florida implemented were noted. These included "Fish Orlando!," community pond development, and specialized lake opportunities such as Tenoroc Fish Management Area. Obviously,

they focused on getting the product the customer wanted to these customers who would take advantage of the opportunities. Finally, the process of purchasing a fishing license was made as convenient as possible. No more locating a bait shop or agency office to buy the license but simply calling a toll-free telephone number and ordering the license. And get this, they sell a five-year license! What will they think of next? Cooperating with private industry in providing free licenses with new vehicle purchases? Get out of here! And Florida is partnering with industries such as boat manufacturers and vehicle manufacturers. The unique thing about Florida's program is that it does not concentrate on any one thing but a broad spectrum approach. Dennis MacKee noted it best when he said it is a change in the agency culture and it is the job of everyone in the agency to market.

Joe Janisch, Arizona Game and Fish Department, got personal. He got personal about marketing. He believed it was the only way to make it relevant. Joe wanted us to think outside the box. We have not done that for some time in the fisheries profession, so the challenge was needed. He suggested many of you fisheries biologists still believe the fish is your customer and he made it clear that is not the case—the customers are anglers and potential anglers. The fish don't care about the future of fishing; people care, so we need to be focusing our efforts toward the people, our customers.

Batting cleanup at last year's session was Bruce Shupp of B.A.S.S., Inc. Bruce pointed out that everyone associated with sportfishing has an opinion about why fishing participation has been declining and what should be done to reverse the trend. Many of these opinions were based on localized experiences and perspectives. Bruce said what was missing was an organized national strategic outreach plan that includes information from a cross-section of stakeholders. Bruce reiterated the need of all associated with sportfishing to become involved in marketing the activity, and provided several specific needs for which effort should be directed. Finally, Bruce closed by reporting on the progress of the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council in recommending a national outreach strategy supported by the American League of Anglers and Boaters and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As you now know that plan is becoming reality and the funding assured through passage of TEA-21 which includes additional amendments to Wallop-Breaux. The draft strategic plan was out for review during most of the month of August, and the final plan was adopted at a 15 September Council meeting in Savannah, Georgia.

Challenges for marketing and outreach were laid before us. Both the means and money are now available. It is a time for optimism and a time for hard work. Whose job is it? It is your job! You now have both the money and plan before you. Now, let's learn how to become more effective and efficient in getting the job done.