

The Fish Arkansas Campaign: A True Market Approach

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Abstract: As a management agency, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has successfully improved the quality of the state's fisheries resource. It has also actively promoted use of the resource. However, fishing license sales have been static recently and considering the competition for the public's discretionary time, a new promotional campaign has been jointly developed by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, and Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods/Blackwood Martin (an advertising firm) to more effectively and widely market the fishing opportunities of Arkansas.

The centerpiece of the Fish Arkansas Campaign is a 76-page four-color, magazine-style, fishing guide that will be distributed free from government and commercial facilities. The guide will contain information on fishing and family vacations in Arkansas. It will be advertised in local, regional, and national media. The campaign is scheduled to run for 3 years and will cost \$230,000. After the 3 years, its success will be evaluated.

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Within its longtime role as the primary fisheries resources manager in the state, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) has traditionally been more involved with production and use of the resource than with promotion of it. However, in the face of apparently declining or static license sales and aggressive and diverse competition for the public's discretionary time, effective promotion of the fisheries resource is needed now more than ever. Still, it is essential to have a good product. Otherwise, promotion becomes a matter of "smoke and mirrors."

Arkansas is blessed with an abundance and variety of lakes and streams. The AGFC itself has built over 40 lakes (totaling over 22,000 acres), hundreds of angler

access facilities (many handicapped-accessible), and has conducted a multitude of fisheries management activities aimed at improving the quality of Arkansas' sport-fish population. In general, the results of these efforts and those of other agencies have been successful. We have provided access; protected, created, and improved fish habitat; regulated anglers to the benefit of the resource; stocked millions of fish; and produced high quality fisheries—and that should be the real basis for all our marketing effort.

As a result of management efforts, Arkansas does have a good fisheries "product." We have also done a very good job (especially recently) promoting our fisheries resources and getting people involved in them on many levels. In the past few years, we initiated a mobile aquarium program. We have 2 of these aquariums that travel to special events and schools around the state and are viewed by over half a million people every year. This extremely popular program is much in demand. In cooperation with other agencies, AGFC sponsors a variety of outreach programs intended to provide hands-on experience to students and others in the world of resource management and understanding. There are over 100 schools enrolled in Arkansas' Water Education Team Program, and the 2-year-old Stream Team Program already has almost 200 teams. The newly adopted Hooked on Fishing—Not on Drugs Program has been integrated into the curriculum of many schools. We have put 50-gallon aquariums into many classrooms. Hundreds of students and teachers attend Aquatic Wild workshops and classes each year. AGFC sponsors fishing clinics and derbies all over the state and thousands of people participate in them. In 1997, AGFC stocked 65,000 fish in over 150 fishing derbies that were attended by over 22,000 people. We have an expanding Tackle Lending Library Project. Our Information and Education Section utilizes all media formats aggressively to inform, educate, and entertain the public about our fish and wildlife resources. Our Commission has made a special commitment to continuing and improving our outreach efforts.

Tourism research has consistently shown that fishing is one of the top 5 reasons why in-state and out-of-state fishermen vacation in Arkansas. Fishing was tied with festivals and craft fairs as the fourth most popular activity among all leisure travelers in the state. Among Arkansans traveling within their own state, fishing ranked number one—ahead of national/state parks and camping. Approximately 600 fishing tournaments are held in Arkansas annually. Currently, world records are held in Arkansas for brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), walleye (*Stizostedion vitreum*), hybrid striped bass (*Morone saxatilis* X *M. chrysops*), and white amur (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*). A number of current world line-class records for brown trout and other species were caught in Arkansas. Four of the world's largest and best boat manufacturers (Bass Cat, Champion, Ranger, and Viper) and the world's largest lure maker (Pradco) are located in Arkansas. Many other fishing-related industries are located within the state. In Fiscal Year 1995/96, 177,233 non-resident and 397,587 resident fishing licenses were sold. The overall economic impact of angling in Arkansas in 1996 was estimated to be \$584,559,776. Literally thousands of Arkansas jobs depend on the fishing industry.

It is arguably a measure of our management successes and that the value of our natural resources is understood that in 1996 voters in Arkansas passed a Conservation

Sales Tax for use by the AG&FC, Arkansas Parks and Tourism, and 2 other state agencies. This was viewed as a signal that both the product and the promotion were working and that the public wanted more.

Now we have an ambitious new fishing promotion campaign underway. This effort joins AGFC, Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism (ADPT), and Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods/Blackwood Martin (CJRW/BM), the largest advertising agency in the state. The campaign will utilize local, regional, and national media to promote fishing throughout Arkansas.

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The Fish Arkansas Campaign

The objective of the campaign (which is in its initial stage) is to produce an "Arkansas First-Time National and Regional Fishing Marketing Program" that will eventually include magazine, newspaper, and radio advertising and promotion. The plan involves establishing a 3-year partnership between private industry, including the hospitality industry, fishing suppliers, vendors, and business operators with AGFC and ADPT. Corporate entities with business interests in fishing and hunting will be acquired as sponsors of the program. The "First Fisherman of Arkansas," Governor Mike Huckabee, has taken an active role in the program and is its major spokesman. The Governor presided over the first news conference that announced the campaign and will formally recognize the secured sponsors in the second major news conference.

Arkansas Fishing Guide

The centerpiece of the campaign will be a 4-color, high-quality facts/image magazine devoted to Arkansas fishing and family fishing vacations. This fishing guide will be distributed free of charge. About 22 pages of advertising space will be sold to the hospitality industry of Arkansas. Four-color full-page, ½-page, ¼-page, and ⅛-page ads will be sold to marinas, resorts, destination cities, regional associations, hotels, motels, restaurants, attractions, sporting goods suppliers/manufacturers, and retail outlets of all kinds. Inexpensive 2-color classified ads will also be sold to these entities with special emphasis given to fishing guides, outfitters, bait and tackle shops, and "mom and pop" small businesses. The guide will be distributed through 14 state-operated tourist centers; 14 sport, boat, and travel shows; regional association offices throughout the state; selected Chambers of Commerce; retail fishing outlets; marinas; resorts; attractions; high-traffic locations; corporate sponsors/dealers; the Governor's Office; AGFC; ADPT; AGFC field employees; AGFC facilities; Arkansas Economic Development Commission; ADPT facilities; and other sites.

The guide will be advertised in-state and out-of-state in newspapers, fishing publications, and television. In fishing-related consumer magazines, 1/4-page ads and classified listings will be inserted during the first half of 1999. The guides will be advertised in 4 major newspapers in surrounding states and in all the daily newspapers of Arkansas. Television advertising will be aired during fishing programs on TNN, ESPN, and ESPN2 on cable in the following markets: Little Rock, Memphis, Dallas, and Tulsa.

The Fish Arkansas Campaign is scheduled to run 3 years and will cost an estimated \$230,000. The State of Arkansas commitment to the program is \$70,000 (\$35,000 from each of the agencies) and the remainder of the total cost will be defrayed through sponsorship and advertisement. After the 3 years, the participants will use several tactics to evaluate the success or failure of the program. AGFC will assess changes in license sales as compared to previous years and to concurrent national trends. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Hunting and Fishing Survey will also be used to measure changes in participation. ADPT will utilize a direct mail survey during the second year of the campaign to determine if survey respondents' participation in fishing has increased as a result of receipt of the guide or not. CJRW/BM will conduct market analysis to evaluate the effect of paid advertising and will obviously know if it has profited from the venture. The future of the campaign depends on the results of the above evaluations.