

Status of National Recreational Fishing and Boating Outreach Strategy

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Abstract: The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC) was asked by the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recommend a strategy that will increase recreational boating and fishing participation and help to instill a conservation ethic through increased emphasis on effective education and outreach programs. This request was made in order to be able to rapidly and effectively implement the provisions of the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) which provides a minimum of \$36 million over a 5-year period for marketing recreational fishing and boating.

Our mission was “to recommend an informed, consensus-based national outreach strategy that will increase participation in recreational angling and boating and thereby increase public awareness and appreciation of the need for protecting, conserving, and restoring this nation’s aquatic natural resources.” To develop the plan, the SFBPC sought input from user groups, fisheries administrators, and industry leaders via the Internet and a series of national and regional meetings. There were over 400 participants attending these meetings.

The plan has 5 all encompassing precepts, namely:

1. Recognize, reinforce, and commit to the importance of sustainable aquatic habitat and natural resource conservation,
2. Emphasize that boaters and anglers are conservationists by demonstrating their commitment and contribution to conservation efforts,
3. Focus efforts on urban boating and fishing needs and opportunities,
4. Champion the use of a single coordinated, encompassing effort to promote recreational boating and fishing involving all stakeholders, and
5. Encourage the industry to implement the Strategic Plan by supporting this unified, comprehensive marketing and outreach effort.

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Recreational boating and fishing are among this country’s favorite pastimes, with over 50 million Americans participating and enjoying this country’s aquatic resources. However, after years of steady growth, since 1990 recreational boating and

fishing participation did not maintain parity with the nation's population growth, with some states experiencing actual declines in boat sales and fishing license sales. Declines are occurring in some states despite their extensive education and outreach efforts.

Recreational boating and fishing contribute to conserving aquatic resources through excise taxes on fishing equipment and motor boat fuel that fund the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program. Thus, the retention and recruitment of boaters and anglers will ensure continued funding for aquatic conservation and restoration at both the federal and state level. Outreach and communication are tools for natural resource conservation.

The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC) was asked by the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recommend a strategy that will increase recreational boating and fishing participation and help to instill the conservation ethic through increased emphasis on effective education and outreach programs. The underlying presumption of the strategies and tactics developed in the resulting plan is that, as people become more involved in these outdoor activities, they place a higher value on aquatic resource quality and therefore will be more likely to support conservation efforts. The SFBPC engaged in an exhaustive national consensus-building effort among user groups and stakeholders to identify problems, set objectives, and devise strategies to meet those objectives. Previous research on participation in boating and fishing were used to guide this effort.

This Strategic Plan is a result of that overall effort. The Plan will be funded by \$36 million from the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program over the next 5 years. These funds may be augmented by up to \$2.5 million per year in Wallop-Breaux administrative funds. In addition, this plan calls for generating up to an additional \$72 million over the next 5 years. This funding may be provided by the following types of contribution:

- In Kind: such as placing the plan's logo/icon on packaging and in advertising,
- Co-operative: state and local matching funds, or
- Hard Dollar: Direct industry financial contributions.

The SFBPC sought input from user groups, fisheries administrators, and industry leaders via the Internet and a series of national and regional meetings. There were over 400 participants attending these meetings, including state representatives (39.9%), media (3.6%), federal employees (18.6%), advocacy groups (14.2%), law enforcement (1.6%), industry (19.8%), and others (2.3%).

As a result of their input, 5 guiding principles were established. These are:

1. Recognize, reinforce, and commit to the importance of sustainable aquatic habitat and natural resource conservation,
2. Emphasize that boaters and anglers are conservationists by demonstrating their commitment and contribution to conservation efforts,
3. Focus efforts of urban boating and fishing needs and opportunities,
4. Champion the use of a single, coordinated, encompassing effort to promote recreational boating and fishing involving all stakeholders, and

5. Encourage the industry to implement the Strategic Plan by supporting this unified, comprehensive marketing and outreach effort.

With these principles in mind, the stakeholders and a technical advisory committee reviewed the current situation and developed the following key considerations.

1. Demographic changes are problematic for increased participation.
 - A. Minority populations, with low rates of participation, are growing 3 times faster than Anglo populations.
 - B. Other populations with low participation rates are also among the fastest growing (e.g. older Americans and those who live in urban areas).
2. Motivations between and among boaters and anglers are varied.
 - A. Boaters' motivations center around stress release and socializing. Motivations vary by type of boat involved—sailing, cruising, fishing.
 - B. Anglers' motivations vary from catch-oriented to socially-oriented.
 - C. There is a misconception that there is a "typical" boater or angler. This limits participation by "non-typical" segments.
2. Boating and fishing are social behaviors.
 - A. Exposure early in life is important—95% of adults anglers fished as children.
 - B. A social network is needed to recruit and retain adult boaters and anglers.
 - C. Education is needed to increase skill levels and enjoyment and to foster long-term participation.
4. Among the most important constraints to boating and fishing are:
 - Perceived lack of time and/or money,
 - Lack of access to (or knowledge of) facilities,
 - Negative images of water quality, fish contamination, and boater safety issues,
 - Inconsistent delivery of satisfactory boating and fishing products, services, and facilities, and
 - Lack of a consistent positive image of boating and angling.

Moreover, generation of awareness, renewed interest, and motivation and facilitation of participation are hampered by 3 categories of consumer constraints. First, intrapersonal constraints—what the individual consumer rationally or emotionally thinks about boating or fishing and the state of the aquatic resource. Second, interpersonal constraints—social considerations affecting consumers' participation. And third, structural constraints, such as lack of boating or bank fishing access, that may block/hamper participation.

The overall objective of this strategic plan is to retain and recruit recreational boating and fishing participants. At the same time, efforts will encourage a conservation ethic and respect for the aquatic resource. Within this framework, the resulting plan was limited to 5 specific manageable objectives, with strategies and tactics identified for each (see the National Plan itself, or view it on line at <http://www.fws.gov/r9sfpc/outcome.htm>, for details).

Objective 1: Create a top-of-mind recreational boating and fishing campaign to develop awareness, trial and continued participation.

Objective 2: Educate people as to how and where to boat and fish.

Objective 3: Target market segments and create messages that address each segment's specific needs.

Objective 4: Educate stakeholders on marketing, outreach and implementation of national strategies to targeted user groups.

Objective 5: Make availability of and access to boating and fishing locations easy and simple.

Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation

A non-profit educational corporation, [501 "c"3] called the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, will be established to continue development and implementation of the Strategic Plan. The initial by-laws are to be those required by such educational tax-exempt organizations. The Foundation will be staffed minimally to include a president or executive director, administrative assistant, and a financial officer. The Strategic Plan will be presented to the Secretary of the Interior in September 1998. It is envisioned that many of the projects will be out-sourced to specialists in appropriate fields.

Conclusion

The overarching consideration is to ensure that the objectives, strategies, and tactics are consistent with the guiding principles that were achieved through consensus-building efforts.

The plan is intended to be national in scope, regional in application, and local in implementation. Continuous change is a persistent marketing challenge, so the plan must also be flexible. To keep current, classic marketing employs a disciplined process including measurement and analysis. It is often said, "If it cannot be measured, it does not exist." Therefore, one of the biggest challenges for the Foundation in implementing this plan will be to constantly measure the effectiveness and efficiency of their activities and adjust accordingly. It is and always will be a work in progress.