

USING I&E TO BALANCE THE BUDGET; OR MARKETING HUNTING AND FISHING

MICHAEL F. O'MALLEY, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, P.O. Box 40747, Nashville, TN 37204

Abstract: Declining license sales and unchecked inflation are causing severe financial problems for most state fish and wildlife agencies. One of the methods used by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to help balance the budget is to increase the number of fishing and hunting license buyers. A promotional campaign by the Information Section was begun in 1977 to increase the number of resident and non-resident license buyers. Emphasis has been placed on promoting warm water fishing, where the agency planning process has identified that the supply is greater than the demand. The results of this campaign cannot yet be fully analyzed, but early license sales indicate that a continuous 3 year decline in license sales has been reversed. There are many problems associated with treating hunting and fishing as marketable commodities, but a well planned promotional campaign can be very beneficial.

Proc. Ann. Conf. S.E. Assoc. Fish & Wildl. Agencies 33: 771-774

Professional wildlife management has always been a people management problem. But recently, it has become a money management problem as well.

Most state wildlife agencies are facing severe financial problems, and wildlife administrators across the country must confront this growing problem daily. But these same administrators who must make tough budgetary decisions have been overlooking an easy source of additional income within their own agency, their information and education people.

Financial problems which plague state wildlife agencies are caused primarily by 2 factors: inflation and reduced license sales. There is very little that wildlife administrators can do to offset inflation, but there is a lot that can be done to reverse the nationwide downward trend in license sales, thereby increasing this agency's operating budget. But to do this requires a heretical shift in thinking on the part of I&E personnel, and their bosses. And that change is to treat hunting and fishing as marketable commodities, to actively promote resident hunting and fishing, and to encourage non-resident hunters and fishermen to visit their state.

When fiscal problems plague an agency, there are only 2 solutions: decrease expenditures or increase revenue. Characteristically, fish and wildlife agencies which survive solely from license sales and federal aid attempt to increase revenue by increasing license costs, and/or seeking legislative appropriations. But there is a third way to increase revenue, and that is to increase the number of hunting and fishing license buyers. This third method has been overlooked or avoided for years, for a variety of reasons, but it is time now to seriously reconsider this option and to cash in on this tourism related bonanza which we have been neglecting.

CASE HISTORY

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) has been exceptionally hard hit by inflation and reduced license sales. Prior to 1979, the TWRA was funded solely by license fees and federal aid from Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds, just as many state fish and wildlife agencies are. (In 1979, the Tennessee legislature passed an appropriation for the first time of \$42,000 to the TWRA for endangered species work.) But the number of resident hunting and fishing licenses sold in FY 1977-78 was actually less than what was sold in FY 1960-61, even though the population of Tennessee increased significantly during that 17 year period. In 1960, 11.8% of the population of Tennessee bought a hunting and fishing license. By 1978, that percentage had dropped to 9.9%.

Extreme measures were taken to reduce expenditures. From 1973 to the present, full-time personnel were reduced by 16%; offices were moved and consolidated; equipment and land purchases were virtually eliminated; travel was reduced, etc.

In 1974, an overall license increase was passed by the Tennessee legislature to help offset rising costs. A temporary drop in license sales was anticipated, and occurred. But, unfortunately, it was not temporary. License sales continued to drop through 1977, to the point mentioned previously where there were fewer sales than in 1960. We had fewer dollars to spend in 1979-80 than we did in 1977-78, even though 1979-80 dollars were worth much less.

Additional revenue was necessary, but another general license increase was ruled out for political reasons, and because of the fear that another license increase would further reduce license sales. A legislative package was prepared to gain additional revenue through piecemeal increases, to offset this financial burden temporarily.

At this same time, the TWRA was instituting a comprehensive planning process, on a species by species basis. Each species plan identified the supply of available hunting and fishing opportunity, and the demand for that same recreational pursuit. Many of the species plans indicated that the supply of hunting or fishing opportunity for that species was greater than the demand, and, therefore, one of the goals of these particular plans was to increase the demand. This presented a perfect opportunity to do 2 things at once: meet the goal of these species plans to increase demand, and increase revenue by increased license sales. Both of these could be accomplished only by an active promotional campaign by the Information Section.

METHODS

The first major thrust of the promotional campaign was aimed at generating additional warm water fishermen. Tennessee has a vast amount of warm water fishing opportunity in federal ownership (TVA and Corps of Engineers impoundments), and most warm water fish are underharvested. We also have trophy striped bass fishing in all areas of the state; 17,000 miles of warm water stream fishing; excellent state, federal and private campgrounds, resorts, boat docks and access to the water. All we needed were additional fishermen.

In late 1977, we began to promote fishing in Tennessee, both in-state and out-of-state. We concentrated our first efforts on fall fishing. In addition to our normal news releases, monthly promotional releases, including photographs, were sent to selected northern outdoor writers, magazines, newspapers, radio and TV stations, etc., detailing where to go and what to fish for. Two release lists were established: an advance list of magazine writers and others requiring lengthy lead time; and an immediate list of newspaper writers, etc., that only need a one month lead time.

Another technique we utilized was to send a uniformed wildlife officer to selected travel shows in northern states. These officers worked with the Department of Tourist Development in the Tennessee booth, and took large mounted fish, photo albums of fish, lists of state records and fishing pamphlets with them.

This proved to be outstandingly successful for many reasons. In the first place, a uniform attracts a crowd, and increases the veracity of what the wearer says. People with specific interest in hunting and fishing knew instantly who to ask for information. Few other states had any sort of uniformed representative.

Another reason why this was successful is that Tennessee is already a major destination for southbound travelers, as well as for tourists passing through to other states such as Florida. Most of the people who stopped by the Tennessee booth at the travel shows had already been to Tennessee, but few had ever considered doing any fishing while they were there. With very little encouragement, many were convinced to include a fishing pole with their luggage the next time through. Some were convinced that fishing was reason enough to visit Tennessee.

A third reason is that no one knows more about Tennessee's outdoor attractions than TWRA representatives. The other people who helped staff Tennessee's booth knew about standard tourist attractions such as Opryland, Gatlinburg and Beale Street, but they knew very little about the natural resources that Tennessee has to offer. They were highly complimentary of our officers' knowledge, dedication and stamina.

Another program that we adopted to encourage fishing in Tennessee is to bring in out-of-state outdoor writers and outdoor TV show producers and set up fishing trips for them. We have just completed 3 fishing segments on smallmouth fishing, catfishing, and striped bass fishing for the nationally televised Sports Afield show, produced by Glenn Lau, with plans to do several more segments next spring. We have also hosted producers of outdoor TV and radio shows from Canada, Ohio and Arkansas.

Another species' management plan which indicated a greater supply than demand was the whitetailed deer. Tennessee's deer herd is mushrooming, and we anticipated a problem in the near future in recruiting enough deer hunters to harvest a sufficient number of animals. We included some deer hunting information in our promotional releases,

emphasizing the liberal bag limits in west Tennessee. In doing so, we sparked the interest of 3 writers to come to Tennessee to deer hunt.

One of these writers was Dr. Roger Latham (now deceased) of the Pittsburg Press. He wrote a very glowing article on deer hunting in Tennessee in November, 1978, and we are still getting calls and letters resulting from that article. There are over 1 million deer hunters in Pennsylvania, and over 1%, or 10,000 of these hunters have called or written my office for more information on deer hunting in Tennessee. And they all plan on bringing 2 or more people with them when hunting season opens November 17.

When word of this reached Tennessee's deer hunting public, they panicked. Lawsuits were threatened, legislation was introduced, and public protest meetings were organized. The end result of all this is that the non-resident deer license was increased by the legislature from \$7.80 to \$30.30; we were severely restricted in the material that we could send to inquiries; we agreed to first try to move Tennessee hunters into deer rich areas before we brought in outsiders (that is, only in-state deer promotional work will be done); and we have self-restricted our out-of-state publicity to fishing until we can evaluate the full impact of the non-resident hunters that we have already stimulated into coming to Tennessee.

RESULTS

It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of any I&E program, but promotional campaigns to increase the number of hunters and fishermen is an exception. All that you have to do is compare the number of licenses sold 1 year to the number sold the previous year. Of course, other variables can affect license sales such as weather, economic conditions, species abundance, etc., and these must be considered in evaluating the success or failure of the program. And some activities may not pay dividends for several years. But even so, it is still one of the easiest I&E activities to evaluate.

It is too early to tell completely what economic impact our promotional activities in Tennessee will have, but early license sales figures are encouraging. In July 1979, we sold 21,400 more resident hunting and fishing combination licenses than we did in July 1978, for an increase of \$160,500. In July 1979, the sale of all licenses was up 30,400 over July 1978, for a total increase of \$182,500. License sales at the receptionist's desk in the main office of TWRA for just the first quarter of 1979-80 are up 171% over the total of licenses sales for all of 1978-79. And the financial impact of the non-resident deer hunters won't be known until January 1980. So you can see that there is a tremendous potential for increasing the operating budget of an agency simply by marketing hunting and fishing. Much of this increase may be attributed to other causes, but undoubtedly some of this increase is a result of our promotional efforts.

DISCUSSION

Should you decide to promote deer hunting and fishing in your state as a method of balancing the budget, here are a few things that we learned in Tennessee. We made some mistakes, but we made a few correct decisions as well. Hopefully, you will be able to take what we learned, see if it applies to your situation, and expand upon it.

1. The decision to treat hunting and fishing as marketable commodities must come from the top. All administrators of the agency should be involved in the decision. A good time to do this is during the planning process, or during the annual budget process.
2. All agency employees must understand and support this decision. If your agency is having trouble balancing the budget, and if you have communicated this internally, it will be much easier to gain rank and file support for this decision, especially if they know that the difference could be their jobs.
3. Be sure to carefully analyze your resident sportsmen so that you can anticipate their reactions to this promotion. This is a very volatile subject, and it could backfire. I mentioned earlier that to promote hunting and fishing in your state will require a heretical shift in thinking by I&E people and their bosses. But there is a third constituency whose attitude will be even harder to change, and these people are the hard core hunters and fishermen who have been pursuing their favorite sport in their favorite spot for years, and are not willing to share. Before any promoting of hunting and fishing is attempted, you must carefully analyze the various groups that comprise the hard core hunters and fishermen, determine how they might react to your efforts, and proceed accordingly. You should be

able to find some group willing to accommodate additional participants, especially if they realize that by sharing, they are helping to maintain the self-sufficiency of the state fish and wildlife agency.

4. Don't neglect either in-state or out-of-state promotional efforts, as both will lead to increased license sales.
5. Depending upon the activity you choose to promote, the rate of return from your efforts will vary. In Tennessee, warm water fishing promotions have only been moderately successful, even though we are constantly working to publicize it. But the long-term gains should be substantial. In contrast, deer hunting promotion has possibly been too successful, even though we only sent out two out-of-state releases. Big game hunters are highly mobile, and will not hesitate to drive thousands of miles, and spend hundreds of dollars. If you choose to promote non-resident deer hunting, concentrate your efforts on states where the yearly bag limit is one. The better hunters in these states soon limit out, and their deer hunting is over for the year unless they find another state in which to hunt.
6. Work with your state tourism department. They know where your tourists are coming from, and where they are going. Since the majority of tourists in the south are summer and winter vacationers, the tourist industry is looking for items that promote spring and fall tourism. Fishing and hunting are naturals.
7. Send a uniformed representative to out-of-state Travel Shows. The benefits of this are enormous.
8. Contact national and regional television producers such as Glen Lau Productions, etc. They are always looking for unusual story ideas.
9. Encourage out-of-state writers to come into your state at your expense, but be selective. Be sure of their credentials and audience, and that they write on what you choose. If they want to write on something else, that's fine, but they must understand beforehand that they will do it at their expense.
10. Send out regular publicity packets to selected members of Outdoor Writers Association of America, commercial state and regional newspapers and magazines in locations you have identified as your market areas.
11. Work with private organizations that are interested in promoting hunting and fishing, such as the American Fishing Tackle Manufacturers Association (AFTMA) and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). AFTMA has initiated a nationwide campaign to stimulate fishing, and has created a youth's fishing education program which could easily be incorporated by various states.
12. Continually evaluate the results of your promotional campaign, and send regular notices of these results to your agency head and other administrators.

CONCLUSION

There are many benefits to the agency which promotes hunting and fishing in a sound, planned manner. The obvious result is a healthier budget, one which allows administrators to focus on resource and people management, rather than fiscal management. Information and Education sections benefit by demonstrating to administrators the value of a properly funded and staffed I&E operation. And the resident hunters and fishermen benefit by having a state agency with some money to improve the future of their wild-life resources.

But there are other benefits of promoting hunting and fishing as marketable commodities. For one, the more people who hunt and fish, the less anti-hunting and anti-fishing sentiment there will be. Also, everyone converted to hunting and fishing is a potential ally in maintaining water quality, proper land use development, and other key resource issues. The economy of local areas, and even an entire state, can be improved by stimulating hunting and fishing related tourism, providing jobs, tax revenue and business, far in excess of the money brought in by license sales.

Promotion and marketing of hunting and fishing should not be considered as cures to financial woes. These are simply methods to increase the revenue side of the ledger sheet. As long as inflation remains uncontrolled and the expenditure side keeps going up and up, state wildlife agencies will have financial problems. But active promotion of a state's hunting and fishing resources should be considered as one alternative to meeting the budget crunch.