

General Fisheries Session

Fishing—An American Tradition at a Decisive Point: An Introduction

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Abstract: Traditionally family and/or friends spent time together in the outdoors fishing. It was healthy, provided fine table fare, and provided a catalyst for communication. Good conservationists emerged from their understanding of the natural world, and anglers have been leaders. Anglers paid, and continued to pay, for conservation through license fees and excise taxes. The natural affinity between fishing and the traditional family experience provided a steady pool of new angling recruits. No marketing was required. Today the trend is quite different from that traditional experience. Fishing participation growth has ceased. Anglers and professional fisheries managers must continue investing time, money, and energy in aquatic resource conservation. We must market and promote fishing within the culture of our citizenry.

Pro. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 51:18-19

Marketing sportfishing stimulates many and varied opinions even within the sportfishing industry. Why is there growing concern about participation in sportfishing? The evidence includes the national survey which reflected a slight decline in overall fishing participation between 1991 and 1996. While this decline may not have been statistically significant, it is the only time span since the national survey began in 1955 which has not reflected a robust increase in fishing participation. According to certified numbers from the states, there were fewer license holders in 1997 than 5 years prior in 31 states. Compared to 1996, that number has declined in 34 states. The bottom line is that we are losing customers and constituents.

These trends should be troublesome to all of us. To state the obvious up front, maintaining and increasing sportfishing participation will sell more fishing tackle; our manufacturing members obviously see that as a desirable outcome. Clearly, that would also continue to generate increased cash flow into the Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund for fisheries research and management as well as improved access. Combined, Wallop-Breaux excise taxes and fishing license sales provides some \$800 million annually for aquatic resource conservation work.

But there is so much more at stake besides financial resources for all the partners. Fishing is a healthy outdoor activity, provides fine table fare, cuts across generational interests and capabilities and thereby affords an exceptional vehicle for plain old talk,

angling connects people to responsible use of healthy natural resources which, in turn, is one avenue for developing new conservationists.

We must continue and even expand our investments in healthy and attractive fisheries. We have so much more to do and the fishery above all else establishes the basic foundation for current and future sportfishing activities. The question has become—can we risk continuing to do business as usual, which includes the investment of an estimated \$1 billion per year in resource protection, and witness the continued gradual marginalization of sportfishing in the American culture?

From many quarters the answer seems to be no. We cannot stand by. Having agreed that we must act, the question becomes through what mechanism. Our community is fortunate in that the industry, the states, and the federal government have crafted and nurtured a strong partnership over the last nearly 50 years which we all know as the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program through which the Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund dollars flow.

Congress amended the Wallop-Breaux legislation in 1992 and added outreach as a fundable purpose. They identified outreach as encompassing the following activities:

Development, publication, and distribution of print, audio, and visual materials for and about the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, particularly on the program's accomplishments.

Promotion of sound ethics programs.

Cooperative programs with the sport fishing industry.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has developed regulations which faithfully embody the congressional intent which states in part "Outreach is an eligible activity under the provision for public use of and benefits from fish and wildlife resources" and "Outreach activities that provide opportunities for public use, understanding, and awareness of fish and wildlife restoration are encouraged."

Under eligible activities it lists: "Developing cooperative programs with industry and other partners relating to use, conservation, and restoration of aquatic systems."

The states, through the International Association of Fish and Wildlife's Grants-In-Aid Committee, developed priority focus areas to guide the 1999 administrative grants process. The top ranking topic (most desired) was "Projects that provide innovative approaches to introducing people to hunting and fishing, including emphasis on families."

The following presenters will explore the nature and extent of our challenge. Mark Duda will give us a perspective on what is going from a cultural and demographic perspective. Then 2 industry representatives, Gary Dollahon and John Storm, will provide their perspectives. Steve Quinn will explore the role and possible contribution of targeted media messages to our changing constituent base. Dennis Mackee of Florida, and Joe Janisch from Arizona, both affiliated with state agencies, will tell us what is going on in their states. They happen to be from 2 states that have given this topic the greatest amount of consideration and activity. Bruce Shupp will describe a major developing community response to the challenge to market the sport of fishing.