

Sport Fishing—A Look to the Future

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When asked to address this distinguished group, I felt honored. When told that the subject of my address was to be the future of recreational fishing, I was ecstatic. Recreational or sport fishing—the terms are used interchangeably—is a hot item and the impact of its anticipated growth on the finite fishery resource base will be a major challenge to the fishery resource manager in the 1990s.

Before jumping off the edge of reality into the bottomless pit of prognostication, let me briefly tell you about the Sport Fishing Institute (SFI). Predictions are based on interpretation of data which can be subjective so you should know something about my organization.

As SFI president, I work for the sport fishing industry. That industry is made up of companies and individuals who provide goods and services to recreational fishermen. The size of companies involved range from Fortune 500 companies to “mom and pop” operations. Combined, they service 58.5 million recreational fishermen who spend about \$30 billion a year pursuing their sport. We have 235 voting members and many state fishery agencies are associate members.

SFI was formed in 1949 by progressive fishing tackle manufacturers who recognized the need to be represented by a technical fisheries staff to interface with state and federal agencies and their respective legislatures to promote recreational fishing opportunities. They knew then as they know now that the future of their industry is in the hands of the professional resource managers and that the fishery resources are common property managed by government (federal and state) for the public good. To implement the SFI program, the SFI founding fathers hired experi-

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enced resource professionals. The industry wanted dialogue with government so their needs would be known and addressed.

In the past 39 years, SFI has retained its goal to provide more recreational fishing opportunities but it has broadened its voting membership beyond the fishing tackle industry. Now, the voting membership represents, in addition to tackle manufacturers, the boating industry, consumer outdoor shows, the trade and popular press, automotive industry, the petroleum industry, and others.

It is important as resource managers for you to know that there is an industry which depends on the decisions you make. It has been the role of the SFI staff to make the industry aware of the limitations of the resource and the need for private and public investment to ensure that the renewable common property resource can meet the increasing demand of the fishing public. I think it can be safely said that the recreational fishing industry and the recreational fisherman, the angler, share a common goal of having more fishing opportunities.

Sport Fishing Projection for the Southeast United States

Sport fishing is expected to grow dramatically over the next 40 years. In 1985, sport fisherman ≥ 16 years of age fished almost 1 billion days. There were 58,599,000 sport fishermen ≥ 16 years of age in this country in 1985. We expect that by the year 2025 there will be 73,874,000 sport fisherman ≥ 16 years of age. This represents an increase of 26.1% in the number of participants. The number of days of sport fishing is expected to increase at a similar rate.

To generate these statistics, the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (U.S. Fish and Wildl. Serv. unpubl. data, Washington, D.C., 1985) was used, examining the participation rates of sport fishermen and women in each of the 50 states. In particular, estimates of the participation of residents of each state, by 6 different age groups, between men and women and whites and non-whites were made. This level of disaggregation was necessary to account for the differences in participation between people of different ages, sex, and race.

Next, population forecasts were obtained to the year 2025 for each age, sex, and race group within each of the 50 states. We multiplied the forecasts for each socio-demographic group by their participation level in 1985 to project their level of sport fishing participation to the year 2025.

These forecasts are for each state. Therefore, it is possible to look specifically at the expected change in participation in those states represented by the Southern Division of American Fisheries Society. In 1985, residents aged ≥ 16 of states in the Southern Division fished 401,218,000 days (Table 1). By the year 2000, we expect that number to increase to 474,998,000, an 18.4% increase. By the year 2025, we expect sport fishing participation by residents aged ≥ 16 of the states in the Southern Division to increase to 539,888,000 days (Table 1). This is an increase of 34.6% over 1985 levels and a projected increase of 13.7% between the years 2000 and 2025.

Table 1. Number of days individuals (≥ 16 years of age) participate in sport fishing in the Southeastern United States.^a

State	1985	2000	2025
Alabama	21,786,000	23,521,017	26,041,507
Arkansas	17,088,000	19,387,907	23,109,715
Florida	72,222,000	96,840,481	116,177,503
Georgia	31,472,000	39,334,753	44,970,532
Kentucky	20,062,000	21,034,297	22,039,500
Louisiana	27,526,000	30,014,930	33,612,348
Maryland	13,750,000	15,528,386	16,672,598
Mississippi	15,876,000	17,263,680	19,454,682
North Carolina	28,888,000	34,205,920	39,351,617
Oklahoma	20,849,000	23,423,755	25,436,069
South Carolina	18,024,000	20,917,753	23,775,187
Tennessee	23,206,000	24,953,751	27,163,049
Texas	59,751,000	73,601,681	84,471,815
Virginia	21,725,000	26,142,292	28,454,690
West Virginia	8,993,000	8,827,176	9,156,731
Total	401,218,000	474,997,779	539,887,543

^aForecasts based on the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (U.S. Fish and Wildl. Serv., unpubl. data, Washington, D.C., 1985).

Recreational Fishing is a Hot Item

Obviously, to assess the future of recreational fishing, we have to look at its past and present. At the present time, recreational fishing is a "hot" item. As evidence:

—Fishing second favorite participatory activity in 1985 (Gallup Poll, press release, Princeton, N.J.).

—Of the U.S. population aged ≥ 6 , 58,599,000 went fishing in 1985. This represents 27% of the relevant population.

—Sport fishermen age ≥ 16 spent \$28.2 billion to go fishing in 1985.

—Sport fishermen aged ≥ 16 spent 976 million days fishing on 870 million trips in 1985. Of these, 84% were in freshwater and 16% were in saltwater. Of the 822 million days spent fishing in freshwater, 46 million days were spent on the Great Lakes.

—The link between fishing and boating is a strong one. Industry surveys tell us that 42% of boat and motor sales are fishing related.

The current high interest in recreational fishing has spurred increased governmental response to carry out its stewardship responsibilities. As examples:

—Passage of the Wallop-Breaux Amendments to the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act. The Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund created by the amended legislation approaches \$200 million per year.

—Presidential proclamations for National Fishing Week (NFW). NFW, the first full week of June each year, is rapidly becoming a time to "showcase" recreational fishery programs created by the resource professional.

—Federal agencies with fishery responsibilities are reexamining their programs and elevating recreational fisheries as an objective. A great example is the U.S. Forest Service Rise to the Future program. The Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, and Fish and the Wildlife Service are following suit.

—The National Recreational Fisheries Policy, to which 65 agencies and organizations have become signatories, clearly spells out the importance of recreational fisheries and provides sound common objectives for the signers to follow in managing the recreational fisheries of the United States.

All of this is happening because there is tremendous interest, energy and demand expressed by anglers. As resource managers, you should capitalize on that movement. You need to identify new and innovative programs that will meet the growing demand for recreational fishing opportunities. Although fishing participation continues to increase, the rate of increase has slowed considerably over the rates of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. The rate has slowed but the numbers are staggering: 58.5 million anglers and growing!

Providing for Increased Demand

Where should we be focusing our attention in order to provide and protect our constituents' opportunities to engage in healthful, enjoyable fishing activities? There are 3 traditional ways to increase angling opportunities: create new fishing waters, direct fishermen to underfished waters and intensively managing existing waters.

Lake construction offers a clear cut way to provide new opportunities. From 1960 to 1970, 97,000 ha of new waters were created each year. During the 1980–85 period, only 16,000 ha were added each year. At its present rate, new waters will not provide significant additional fishing opportunities.

Underutilized waters offer a quick fix. SFI has been urging governmental agencies that have fishable aquatic resources under their control to make them more accessible to the public. This would include fishing on wildlife refuges, military reservations, Indian lands, forest lands, and all other public lands.

Intensive management is costly but effective. Intensive management to increase productivity and yield is labor intensive requiring the skill and innovation of professional fishery managers.

There is a fourth, nontraditional method to provide additional fishing opportunities: change the expectations of the fisherman. This can best be characterized as developing conservation and behavioral ethics which focus on the sport of fishing rather than the harvest of fish.

We need to focus on catching more fish and harvesting less; we need to advance ethical behavior to enhance the recreation provided by the finite fishery resources. We need to focus on the sport more and less on the harvest. In addition to looking at the conservation ethic, we must acknowledge the impact of behavior on the sport of fishing. This includes vandalism, trespassing, littering, angling regulation abuse, crowding, and waste of fish.

How do we address problems of such magnitude? We can begin with youth education and portraying ethical behavior and conservation in all elements of mass media. It can not be accomplished overnight but the time to start is at hand. This must be a joint effort between the resource managers and the industry.

An important place to start is by strengthening the relationship between the angler and governmental agencies charged with stewardship responsibility. Better, more direct dialogue (2-way communications) between the agencies and the public they serve should be developed. Public opinion surveys to determine what the angling public wants and expects are in order. We support and encourage hands-on fishery projects where angling groups (with agency guidance and approval) provide sweat-equity to increase angling opportunities. Such activities develop a strong rapport between government agencies and the organized fishing public.

The FishAmerica Foundation, using private funds contributed by the sport fishing industry, has been fostering such a program. In the past 4 years, the FishAmerica Foundation has provided \$760,000 for 141 hands-on projects in 35 states and 5 Canadian provinces. These projects, small and local in nature, develop a strong relationship among the angler, resource agency, and the fishery. Such programs must be expanded.

Who is Going to Pay the Bill?

Doing the many things I have mentioned as needs for future expansion of recreational fishing will require increased expenditures. Presently, the bulk of dollars invested in recreational fishery programs come directly from the angler through user-pay schemes. Collectively, about \$315 million are provided by license and stamp fees and another \$180 million from the Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund which is also derived from the angler/boater. Investment of this nearly \$0.5 billion annually is a pittance considering it is driving expenditures approaching \$30 billion. The benefits from our fishery resource are shared with a broader spectrum of society than anglers alone, they should shoulder a proportionate share of the cost.

We need to expand and diversify financial resources to undertake the fishery resource expansion and protection that is demanded by the fishing public.

Our fisheries support an enormous and diverse business community. Currently, little financial support is forthcoming from the local, state, and federal coffers to undertake the essential management necessary to enhance our nation's public fisheries. Out of all the tax dollars generated by the \$30 billion a year recreational fishing industry, very little is returned to the resource.

Based on a 1986-87 survey of state fish and game agencies conducted by SFI, out of the \$549 million available for fisheries to the 44 responding states, only 14% came from general appropriations. This reflects that out of every \$1,000 of economic activity resulting from the recreational fishery, only approximately \$3.00 in general tax revenues reaches the state game and fish agencies which are responsible for sustaining the fishery. This is surely inadequate. Funding of the recreational

fishery upon which so many depend, must be shouldered by a broader constituency than the angler/boater.

Dominant Issues in the 90s

There are 2 areas that will predominate recreational fishing issues in the 1990s—urban fishing and marine recreational fishing.

Urban fisheries represent a relatively new and unique demand on resource managers. In the 1990s, there will be a greater focus on urban fishing. Urban problems provide the ultimate test of true multidisciplinary integrated fishery management. While keen expertise in fishery biology may be helpful, it may be of only passing consequence for unraveling many urban fishery management problems. Successful programs will be those guided by innovative administrators, ones not constrained by traditional biological solutions. Techniques from the sociological and economic disciplines will be of paramount importance.

The issues that drive an increased interest in urban fisheries include:

—The growth in leisure time has been reversed and the current trend is towards shorter, but more frequent recreational trips.

—Americans continue to concentrate in urban areas and along the coasts, including the Great Lakes.

—The principally urban American population is becoming increasingly concerned over environmental quality and quality of life, including growing interest in exercise, fitness, and the out-of-doors.

—Society is increasingly demanding equal access to quality experiences for low income, minority, and disabled Americans.

Marine recreational fishing is predicted to grow at a faster rate than freshwater fishing. In the marine environment, finfish stocks are being exploited at or above sustained yield levels. There simply is no room for expanding the harvest of our near-shore finfish resources. A growing army of marine anglers want their rightful share of marine fisheries. They do not accept that the commercial fishing industry has a superior right to the common property fish resource. It is recognized that the per capita consumption of seafood will increase from its present 7 kg to nearly 11.3 kg in the mid 1990s. Where will the billions of pounds of fish come from to satisfy that need? The only answers are from imports or through aquaculture.

We must escalate our involvement in socio-economic debates on optimizing public benefits from use of marine fisheries and stimulate and support alternative industries to satisfy the growing American taste for quality seafood—that industry is aquaculture.

The perturbations on the marine environment must be reversed—look what is happening out there:

—Our coastal and marine environments are subject to frightening forces of destruction from development.

—28% of estuaries are contaminated by nonpoint pollution.

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—Wetland losses average 185,000 ha annually.

—Since March 1986, about 10 million tons of wet sludge processed by New York and New Jersey municipal sewage treatment plants have been dumped at site 106.

—Between 1940 and 1980, the number of Americans living within 80 km of the coast increased from 42 million to 89 million. It has been projected that within a very few years, this will increase to 75% of the U.S. population.

—On the Texas Gulf coast one day last September, volunteers collected 307 tons of litter, two-thirds of which was plastic.

Summary

Recreational fishing is a highly sought after recreational pursuit among Americans of all ages. It is the most frequently selected recreational activity of all that depends upon a renewable public resource. Today, evidence points to growing problems with our public fisheries. The problems associated with recreational angling can only be overcome with the dawning of a broadened recognition of the need and fundamental values inherent in maximizing public benefits from our fishery resources. Increasing the financial and policy support for what has become an undercapitalized machine, increasingly incapable of meeting the public's demands, is an absolute necessity.