

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING SPORTFISHING PARTICIPATION IN NEW YORK’S GREAT LAKES REGION

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by
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Introduction

The number of individuals involved in sportfishing between the ages of 18 and 44 is projected to decline by 8% or 32,049 anglers by 2005 (Connelly et al. 1999b). In order to offset this decline, New York Sea Grant conducted research to identify the social and psychological factors that influence sportfishing participation. Through mail surveys and telephone interviews, male and female anglers between the ages of 18 and 44 were studied to identify the factors influencing their participation during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Following completion of the study, NY Sea Grant organized two focus group sessions in March 2002 for individuals involved with sportfishing (e.g., state agency personnel, sportfishing-related business owners, tourism promoters). These sessions, co-sponsored by the Lake Ontario Sportfishing Promotion Council, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, were designed to obtain feedback about the interpretation of study results and to identify strategies, based on the results, for increasing participation in fishing by female and male children, adolescents, and adults. A mailing list of 119 invitees was developed with the assistance of the workshop co-sponsors. State and county agency staff, local officials, and business owners involved in sportfishing were invited to attend.

The sessions were each comprised of two parts: a presentation of the results of the fishing participation study and a focus group session designed to obtain input concerning potential sportfishing management and promotion strategies. Feedback concerning interpretation of the results was requested during the presentation of the study results. The focus group session was designed to identify strategies for increasing fishing participation by male and female children, adolescents, and adults. In order to guide the discussion, session attendees were each given four question sheets: one concerning children, one about adolescents, and the remaining two concerning adult males and females. Attendees were asked to write their ideas for increasing fishing participation on the sheets. A ten-minute period of time was allotted for completing each sheet. Following the completion of the sheets, attendees were invited to share their ideas about increasing fishing participation. The sheets were collected at the end of both sessions and the ideas were compiled.

Session participants were also asked to complete a workshop evaluation. The evaluation was designed to identify the usefulness of the sessions to attendees and to obtain basic demographic information about attendees. The data from the evaluations were summarized.

This report provides the results of the workshops. Strategies developed during the workshops for increasing sportfishing participation are included for children, adolescents, and male and female adults. National programs focused on increasing sportfishing participation are also identified.

Attendee Characteristics Thirty-one individuals total attended the two workshops out of 119 invitees. Of these attendees, 23 (74%) responded to the workshop evaluation. The demographics of the workshop attendees reveal that 10 (43%) of the respondents owned businesses related to sportfishing (e.g., charter boat or fishing guide services, bait and tackle shops, lodgings). The remaining respondents were state agency employees (22%), tourism promotion agency staff (22%), or individuals in sportfishing-related fields (13%). Respondents indicated that they had worked in occupations related to sportfishing an average of 22.6 years, and ranged in sportfishing-related work experience from 3.5 to 45 years. From workshop sign-in lists, it was determined

that 23% of the session attendees were female and 77% were male.

Existing National Programs
workshops,
used nationally for

In addition to the new strategies identified in the workshop attendees identified several programs increasing fishing participation. Other national programs were identified following the workshops. Six programs currently in use in the United States are listed below.

- **Water Works Wonders Campaign.** This promotional campaign is sponsored by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. The campaign is directed at increasing fishing participation in the United States. Ads are targeted to market groups such as women and children (Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation 2002). Information about the campaign can be obtained from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation website (www.rbff-education.org).
- **Kids All-American Fishing Derby.** This national series of fishing derbies for children is sponsored by local organizations, governmental agencies, and the WalMart Corporation (WalMart Kids All-American Fishing Derby 2002). Information about the program can be obtained from the Kids All-American Fishing Derby website (www.fishingworld.com/kids-fishing).
- **Camp Fishing Initiative.** Sponsored by the Future Fisherman Foundation, this initiative works to coordinate the efforts of organizations interested in helping youth camps obtain fishing equipment, training for instructors, and videos and manuals about fishing (Future Fisherman Foundation 2002). Information can be obtained on the Future Fisherman Foundation website (www.futurefisherman.org).
- **Fishing Tackle Loaner Program.** The Future Fisherman Foundation created this equipment loaning program to make fishing equipment more accessible. In cooperation with local organizations and government agencies, the program has created over 550 loaner sites across the United States (Future Fisherman Foundation 2002). Information can be obtained on the Future Fisherman Foundation website (www.futurefisherman.org).
- **Hooked on Fishing – Not on Drugs Program.** Sponsored by the Future Fisherman Foundation, this program focuses on three goals: improving fishing skills and other benefits from fishing, educating youths about aquatic ecology and conservation, and keeping kids drug free. Partnerships between government agencies and local organizations are developed to create programs across the United States (Future Fisherman Foundation 2002). Information can be obtained on the Future Fisherman Foundation website (www.futurefisherman.org).

- **Wonderful Outdoor World Program (WOW).** WOW focuses on teaching outdoor skills, such as camping and fishing, to inner-city youths. The program is used in many states in the United States, and is sponsored by government agencies such as the USDI Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, and USDI National Park Service, and by private organizations and corporations such as the Student Conservation Association and the Walt Disney Company (USDI Bureau of Land Management 2002). Information can be obtained about the program on the USDI Bureau of Land Management website (www.blm.gov/ess/pubwow.htm).

Focus Group

obtain ideas from

The focus group sessions were designed to

Session Results

attendees concerning strategies for offsetting projected declines in fishing participation beyond those used in existing programs. Attendees were asked to identify strategies for increasing fishing participation by children, adolescents, and female and male adults. The responses to each focus group session question are included below in random order. The number of responses to each item is in parentheses.

Question 1: How can we increase participation in fishing by both girls and boys during childhood?

- Expand or establish mentoring programs. Programs could be organized by existing youth organizations (e.g., Big Brother/Big Sister, YMCA) and would take place after school or during weekends. The expansion of existing programs such as the Sportfishing and Aquatic Resources Education Program (SAREP) should be considered. (5 responses)
- Establish a Fishing Superstars Program. Promote fishing by having kids see their “heroes” fish. Heroes can include famous TV personalities from kids shows, sports stars, and other individuals popular with children. (2 responses)
- Increase and improve fishing access.
 - Work with state agencies and local organizations to establish new state-owned shoreline access areas through fee-simple purchase or by obtaining easements from private property owners. Offer property owners incentives for permitting easements. (4 responses)
 - Establish access sites in urban areas as a priority. (3 responses)
 - Improve habitat at access sites to improve panfishing opportunities. (1 response)
 - Promote existing access areas. (3 responses)
- Encourage the Girl Scouts and other organizations for girls to incorporate fishing into their activities and badge requirements. (4 responses)

- Focus on the development of fishing skills in children.
 - Educate parents about fishing and environmental ethics through seminars, news releases, and publications so that they can educate their children. Educational efforts should focus on teaching children the skills needed to fish, identifying suitable locations for teaching children, and traditional and alternative bait and lure choices. (1 response)
 - Create a fishing/outdoor skills curriculum for schools. The curriculum would be used during physical education classes, and would include lessons on casting, other outdoor skills, and “leave no trace” outdoor recreation practices. (4 responses)

- Encourage family-based fishing events and activities.
 - Hold fishing demonstrations at hatcheries, parks, etc... and promote these demonstrations to families. (3 responses)
 - Include a parent-child category in fishing derbies. (1 response)
 - Organize free fishing derbies for kids during the summer months. (1 response)

- Encourage family fishing by modifying licensing regulations.
 - Change regulations that require a fishing license for adults who are teaching children to fish but are not themselves fishing. Current regulations make it illegal for adults to help children cast or reel in fish without a license and may discourage non-fishing parents from bringing their children fishing. (2 responses)
 - Provide more “no license” fishing days during the summer. The single no-license weekend currently used could be altered to one no-license day per month during June, July, and August (e.g., the first Sunday of every summer month could be called “No license Sunday”).

- Promote fishing as a family experience.
 - Create an “I Love NY” promotional campaign focused on family fishing activities. (3 responses)
 - Utilize more family photos in fishing magazines and tourism promotion guides. (3 responses)

- Encourage corporations to provide family fishing incentives, such as free cameras for taking pictures of first-time fishing experiences or free film rebates for sending in pictures of the first fish caught by children. Tie this effort into the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s “First Fish” campaign. (1 response)

Question 2: How can we maintain or encourage fishing participation during adolescence?

- Promote fishing experiences that enable teens to “take charge.” For

example, organize a National “Take an adult fishing” Day. (1 response)

- Create teen activities that are social in nature and linked with fishing.
 - Organize a teen outdoors camp. (1 response)
 - Offer teen fishing contests. (2 responses)
 - Encourage teens to share fishing stories through online chat rooms and organizational mechanisms. (1 response)
- Promote fishing by having teens see their “heroes” fish. Heroes could include famous actors/actresses, sports stars, and musicians. (2 responses)
- Focus on the fishing skill development of adolescents.
 - Establish fishing teams at school similar to other sports teams. (6 responses)
 - Create a fishing/outdoor skills curriculum for schools. The curriculum would involve time during gym classes. (4 responses)
- Encourage businesses to offer incentives for families with adolescents to fish. For example, permit adolescents to participate in guided fishing trips for free with paid adult trips.
- Promote positive fishing trip stories for families with teens through the news media and stories by outdoor writers. (2 responses)

Question 3: How can we increase participation in fishing by adult females?

- Develop promotional campaigns designed for women.
 - Increase involvement by communities in New York in the Water Works Wonders Campaign to promote fishing to women. (1 response)
 - Promote the elegance and artistic side of fly fishing to women. (2 responses)
 - Provide information and news releases to outdoor writers about trends in female fishing activity. (1 response)
 - Promote fishing in magazines typically promoted to women (e.g., *Country Living*, *Better Homes and Gardens*) rather than in traditional fishing magazines. (1 response)
- Encourage businesses to target female angler markets.
 - Encourage business owners to offer shorter-duration charters for women. (1 response)
 - Encourage outdoor gear suppliers to develop fishing gear and clothing designed for women. (3 responses)
 - Encourage business owners to create “couples” promotions. For example, fishing guides could offer females free guide services if they come with a paying male. (1 response)
- Create a Women’s Fishing Website. This website could be housed at

county tourism or fishing derby websites to help generate discussion between women concerning fishing. (2 responses)

- Create events designed to encourage more women to fish and to build their fishing skills.
 - Offer women and fishing seminars designed to attract more women into the sport. Partner with local business owners and agencies to sponsor the seminars. Female instructors should lead the seminars. (2 responses)
 - Continue and expand “Outdoors Woman” weekends currently sponsored by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. (1 response)
 - Organize fish cook-offs as part of local fishing derbies. (1 response)
 - Offer a “couples” category in fishing derbies. (2 responses)
 - Organize women’s fishing derbies that encourage women to fish with their children and friends, and provide opportunities for social interaction during the derbies. (3 responses)
 - Encourage church groups and other clubs to offer outdoor retreat weekends for women and couples. (2 responses)

Question 4: How can we increase participation in fishing by adult males?

- Develop promotional campaigns designed to increase participation by male anglers.
 - Continue to distribute positive information about fishing through media press releases. (1 response)
 - Develop promotional campaigns such as “Bring a friend fishing” and “Bring a spouse fishing.” (4 responses)
- Increase stocking if and where possible, and promote through media news releases. (2 responses)
- Create additional catch-and-release only fishing areas to improve catch rates. Promote these areas as high catch rate areas. (1 response)

Conclusion

Through carefully planned promotional and educational strategies, as well as increased access, fishing participation can once again increase in New York State. Strategies should take into account differences in participation between males and females at each life stage. Cultural and racial differences, although not part of this study, also influence fishing participation and need to be considered.

The comprehensive list of strategies to increase fishing participation included in this report will require the efforts of public schools, not-for-profit organizations, private businesses and corporations, and

all levels of government. It is recommended that existing organizations and agencies work together to identify strategies that they can implement. Promotional groups such as tourism promotion agencies and the Lake Ontario Sportfishing Promotion Council are best suited for implementing the marketing and promotion strategies identified in this report. Where possible, these groups should partner with existing national programs. State agencies should implement management-related strategies such as changes in licensing, improvements in fishing access, and special fishing days (e.g., “no license” fishing days). Educational strategies listed should be the focus of groups such as New York Sea Grant and the Cornell Cooperative Extension. Some of these strategies include educating parents about how to teach their children to fish and creating an outdoor recreation curriculum for schools. Through partnership development and implementation of strategies, increases in fishing participation are possible in the future.

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