

Sport Fish Restoration Project Awards Program 2013
Fishing and Basic Boating Skills Camp Pilot and Expansion
Project Category: Aquatic Education

Need: It is widely recognized that today's youth are moving further and further away from nature and the outdoors, spending large blocks of time indoors with digital media and electronic devices. Through this project, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) plans to alter this trend. FWC has piloted and is expanding Fishing and Basic Boating Skills Camps (Fish Camp), for youth ages 9-15, throughout Florida. Fish Camp uniquely combines the teaching and practical application of basic and advanced angling skills with basic boating skills. A fisheries biologist provides a sampling and anatomy demonstration and a law enforcement officer provides a boating safety demonstration. The ultimate goal of Fish Camp is to establish individuals as life-long anglers and stewards of aquatic and fisheries resources.

Objectives: 1) Utilize partnerships to establish at least one Fish Camp in each of Florida's 67 counties. 2) Increase Fish Camp participation to 6,700 youth annually by 2022. 3) Annually secure start-up funding for three to six new camp locations. 4) Utilize six performance measures to determine success of each individual Fish Camp location, and the cumulative project.

Procedures: Utilizing Sport Fish Restoration (SFR; grant F-49) supported FWC staff, a Fish Camp Start-up Template was developed that included a curriculum, budget, business plan, and outline of the requirements of FWC and our potential cooperators. Through a broad communications strategy incorporating traditional and social media, trade/industry publications, personal networks, and a presentation at the 2009 annual meeting of the Florida Recreation and Parks Association, potential partners have been, and continue to be, recruited to incorporate Fish Camp into their local facilities and activities using the Template. Staff pursues access to funding generated by donations to FWC for youth hunting and fishing education programs; using these dollars, FWC assists cooperators with startup costs for new locations that implement the Template. Following a train-the-trainer philosophy, FWC staff provide training and materials to cooperator staff, further leveraging SFR funding. The continuing evaluation will: 1) Utilize pre-, post-, and follow-up evaluation tools that measure campers' increase(s) in environmental concern, fishing skill, fishing interest, fishing intention, ability to fish without the assistance of others, and long-term participation. 2) Review Florida fishing license sales records for previous Fish Camp participants over 16 years of age. 3) Conduct mail or phone follow-up survey of Fish Camp participants five to six years after individual locations start camps.

Evaluation of Results and Benefits: A pilot Fish Camp program was conducted during the summers of 2000 through 2006 at FWC's Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center. Results from a 2007 evaluation, of this pilot Fish Camp, were presented to colleagues at the 2008 Annual American Fisheries Society meeting in Ottawa, Canada and the 2008 Aquatic Resources Education Association (AREA) National Conference in Corpus Christi, Texas. In these presentations FWC demonstrated the success of the pilot.

Over 93% of campers with no previous fishing experience continued to fish each year after their first Fish Camp. Among campers that showed fishing activity before Fish Camp, nearly two-thirds increased their fishing activity following camp. Analyses of survey questions that evaluated the change in fishing skill level, fishing interest, and intention to fish more often, showed highly significant positive relationships between both fishing interest and intention to fish and increased fishing skill level. This demonstrated that the Fish Camp program successfully recruited new anglers into the sport and for campers with some fishing experience, the program helped to further establish fishing as a valued leisure activity, thus increasing participation and retention. To evaluate if the Fish Camp program passed on a "conservation stewardship ethic," campers were asked how important nine aquatic concern statements were, such as, helping take care of places in your area where aquatic plants and fish live, and helping protect aquatic habitats and resources. Campers rated all nine aquatic concern statements as more important to them than a comparison group of similar aged youth that had participated in an in-school fishing program.

After reviewing the 2007 evaluation results, the pilot program was developed into the Fish Camp Template and marketed across the state to potential state, county, municipal, NGO, and citizen group cooperators. Approximately \$18,000 in annual funding has been secured from donations contributed by licensed anglers and hunters. This funding source has been used to establish 15 camp locations at rural and urban sites across the state in cooperation with state agencies, county parks and recreation and city leisure services departments, YMCAs, and other not for profit organizations.

Searches of Florida's fishing license records at the end of 2009 (N=251) and 2012 (N=407) showed that approximately 54 percent of previous Fish Camp participants 16 years of age or older had purchased their fishing license. Over the past four years the project's impact has increased from two locations with the potential to reach 80 children, to currently being offered in 15 locations across the state with a potential to reach 900 children. Additional growth is expected through existing sites adding spring and winter break opportunities to traditional summer programs. Further potential growth is being pursued through incorporating locations that contain a saltwater fishing focus. The Fishing and Basic Boating Skills Camp expansion approach and success was presented to colleagues at the 2012 AREA National Conference in Phoenix, Arizona.

FWC cooperators continue to assist with staffing, provide consumables for each week of camp, and maintain the locations. With their assistance, coupled with the continued support from hunters and anglers through voluntary donations and the SFR program, longevity of the project appears secure. With the many positive aspects of this project, related to angler recruitment, retention, and stewardship, we will continue to promote the Start-up Template statewide, regionally and across the nation.