

Rationale: Mentored Youth Trout Day in Pennsylvania

Overview: A pilot program will be tested on selected waters in the 18 county, early-opening day zone. This pilot will serve as a test of providing a one-day fishing opportunity for mentored youth, prior to the traditional opening day of trout season in this region.

Rationale: Mentored youth hunting programs and special youth hunts have been instituted across the U.S. in recent years in an effort to stem the decline in license sales. These special hunts allow youth to harvest everything from squirrels and ducks to trophy bucks in advance of the general opener. The Pennsylvania Game Commission established early youth opening days or hunts in the mid-to-late 1990's.

Most often, parents are the source of both instruction and serve as mentors to young anglers and hunters. It's this premise on which youth hunts and mentored hunting programs are based (DJ Case & Associates, 2007) (Responsive Management, 2011) (Responsive Management and Southwick Associates, 2012).

Mentored opportunities differ from educational programs significantly in that mentored experiences extend beyond the instructional period. Mentors plan and discuss the trip with the apprentice before, during and after. An instructor would only have contact with the young angler during the presentation.

It's important to note than when referring to mentors in the context of this proposal, we are not connecting a young angler with a mentor who may be a stranger. Mentors are those adults already playing a role with young anglers and most often include parents, grandparents or other close family friends. These individuals play key roles in apprenticeship experiences (Decker, 1986).

Special opportunities provide trial experiences for new participants, and provide important apprenticeship experiences for more experienced youth. It's these apprenticeship experiences that prove to be most influential in terms of later participation in hunting and fishing (Decker, 1986) (Responsive Management, 2011). Further, the role of family members in avidity, recruitment and retention of hunters and anglers is also well documented. Participation rates of children and young adults are closely related to the participation of parents. (US Fish and Wildlife Service , 2007) (Duda M.D., 2010). The role of a mentor is that of long term development and socialization. An instructor can teach someone to fish, while a mentor helps them become an angler (Duda M.D., 2010). That is, while proper instruction is important, it's doesn't guarantee adoption. This is especially true if a mentor or other social support is absent.

Benefits of these mentored experiences also extend to the parents or mentors. A 2007 survey of Pennsylvania's trout anglers showed that 98% of those surveyed would go trout fishing more if asked by a child (Responsive Management, 2008). Of that number, 84% indicated that being asked by a child to take them fishing was a strong encouragement to go trout fishing more in Pennsylvania. These Pennsylvania proportions are comparable to several similar studies conducted on a national level for the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. It's this research which serves as the basis for the Take Me Fishing campaign (RBFF.org).

The same study of Pennsylvania trout anglers indicates that children are the most common companions (37%) when trout fishing. However, of all Pennsylvania trout anglers, only 34% of them had taken a child fishing in the 12 months prior to the survey. It's important to note that children are present in 43% of the trout fishing households (Responsive Management, 2008).

Special youth opportunities offer a one-two punch by engaging both youth and their parents or other mentors. These experiences replicate important steps along the natural path toward recruitment (Responsive Management, 2011) and also serve to get or keep parents and mentors engaged. That is, by taking someone fishing that adult angler is retained or re-engaged in fishing (Duda M.D., 2010). Further, these existing anglers can serve as a sales force, encouraging and recruiting other adults (Responsive Management and Southwick Associates, 2012). It's with all the above that the Commission is piloting a mentored youth trout fishing day in 2013. The Commission is providing this opportunity to serve as the nudge for parents and mentors to step forward in taking the children in their lives trout fishing.

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