

PROJECT PROFILE

Project Title: “Wheelin’ Sportsmen: Let’s ALL Fish Lake Michigan Disability Fishing Recruitment Project”

Grantee Organization: National Wild Turkey Federation

Project Team: Nathan Harlan, National Wild Turkey Federation; Tom Karsten, National Wild Turkey Federation; Illana Burkhart, National Wild Turkey Federation

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Grant Amount: \$40,000

Time Frame: September 1, 2006- September 1, 2009

Focus Areas: Stewardship

Brief Project Summary: A three-year recruitment project designed to instruct people with disabilities and their families on fishing on Lake Michigan through a series of hands-on, educational fishing events at public access sites. The instruction included (1) where to locate barrier free fishing areas, (2) adapted and standard use of fishing equipment, (3) specific tactics for catching fish at the locations, and (4) the therapeutic benefits of fishing as an individual and family activity. The project also provided fishing equipment for the participants in hopes of developing long-term advocates for the wise stewardship of the Great Lakes fishery.

Project in Context

The 2000 U.S. Census identified that there are over 57 million disabled people between the ages of 16 to 64 in the United States. The 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, conducted by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, reported that just over 7 million people with disabilities participated in wildlife related recreation activities. This is 12 percent of the disabled population compared to 39 percent of the non-disabled population, 16 years of age and older who participate in wildlife related recreation activities. There are a number of reasons why this number is lower but the National Survey of Recreation and the Environment found that the lack of knowledge and opportunities were identified as common barriers.

The benefits of leisure and outdoor recreation for people with disabilities have been documented in several studies. One study, which followed participation of people with and without disabilities in an outdoor adventure program, reported positive change in relationship development, recreation skills, and quality of life (“Creating positive change through an integrated outdoor adventure program” – Therapeutic Recreation Journal, 1997). Another concluded that there were substantial indications that recreation and leisure can assist individuals in improving and maintaining physical and psychological health and well being (“A classification scheme for therapeutic recreation research grounded in the rehabilitation sciences” – Therapeutic Recreation Journal, 1996).

In Michigan, the number of people with disabilities is on the rise. According to the United States Census (2000), there are over 1.7 million individuals with disabilities in Michigan with almost 19% of all Michigan residents reporting one or more disabilities. These numbers clearly indicate the need for services for people with disabilities in Michigan. The project targeted this population of people with disabilities.

Goals of the Effort

Since lack of opportunity and knowledge are often cited as the largest barriers people with disabilities face when engaging in outdoor recreation, this project addressed both aspects. The goal was to use a series of educational fishing events as a vehicle for not only getting people with disabilities engaged in fishing as a recreational opportunity, but also to provide them with the training and knowledge of how to continue to pursue this activity on their own. Lake Michigan provides several accessible public fishing locales, and thus provided the perfect setting for the events.

Results

Over the course of three years, a series of ten events were held in Grand Haven and Muskegon. A total of 574 people with disabilities attended these events. Each year a survey was sent to the previous year's participants to measure the long-term effects and changes in behavior that may have resulted. Survey results indicated that 40% of project participants had never participated in fishing activities before the event, and 25% did not know before the event that Michigan had barrier-free public fishing access. 62% reported learning new skills and/or stewardship techniques at the events and 75% reported participating in fishing again during the twelve months following the event.

Products and Resources

No products or resources were developed as part of the grant.

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Background/Overview

1. We originally proposed to hold a series of thirty events over three years and would have twenty-five participants at each of the ten events held each year for a total of 250 participants each year. Our original thought was that more events with less participants per event would be more manageable.
2. We discovered very quickly in the first year of the project that holding ten events for only twenty-five people was not practical when seventy-seven participants pre-registered for the first one. We held four events that year and had 258 participants—more than our original target of 250. We also had a significant reduction in our staff, which further hindered our ability to properly execute ten events. Four events seemed like a much better model so we submitted a request for project modification and were granted the ability to change our project model from ten events per year to four. Four events in one geographic area proved to be a much more realistic goal.

Outcomes

3. In 2007 we held four events at Grand Haven State Park and formed a relationship with Pursuing A Dream Foundation, a local Michigan non-profit with similar goals and mission to Wheelin' Sportsmen NWTF. Participants at each of the four events came from the Grand Haven public schools special education classes. This relationship with Pursuing A Dream and the Grand Haven school system was extremely beneficial to the completion of the project as it allowed us to reach large numbers of participants who could derive a direct benefit from the events. It also allowed us to maintain contact with the participants and follow up with them twelve months later to measure the long term effects of the education received at the event.
4. We did not have an exact audience pin-pointed at the beginning of the project, but hoped to be able to reach people with disabilities on a large scale. We found that working with the school system was very beneficial as it allowed us to reach people with a wide range of disabilities. During the second year of the project we also were able to add an event in Muskegon and worked with a local independent living center to reach participants. This also proved to be beneficial as it allowed us to reach a more diverse audience.
5. This project was a great way for Wheelin' Sportsmen to strengthen the relationships of our local chapters to their communities. It also helped establish a relationship with the Grand Haven Public School system and with the non-profit group Pursuing a Dream Foundation, which assisted with the events. These events will continue in the future as a result of the GLFT allowing us to build a long-term partnership with these groups over the three year grant project period.
6. During the three –year project we followed up with participants twelve months following their attendance at an event and asked them to complete a survey measuring the success of the event, and whether or not they have continued fishing in

general, and fishing at barrier-free locations on the Great Lakes specifically, in the months since the event.

7. The most important benefit of this project, in our opinion, was the opportunity to provide the event participants with the equipment and knowledge necessary to continue fishing on the Great Lakes. Our goal was to encourage awareness of the Great Lakes fishery resources and to provide an enjoyable event for the participants, and providing them with the proper information and tools to continue to enjoy outdoor recreation (specifically fishing) as a viable recreational activity for someone with a disability.

Related Efforts

8. This project was a stand alone effort, and there were no other funders involved.
9. There has not been any spin-off work from this project, however true to our original expectations these events will continue to be held in following years without the funding from GLFT. The partners and chapters involved with helping us plan them have taken ownership of the project and plan to continue holding the fishing events each year.

Communication/Dissemination

10. There were no publications, presentations or websites created by this project. Our hope is to continue to gather data from 2009 participants and be able to put together an overall summary of each year's results. We plan to publish an article in our magazine, *Turkey Country*, announcing the completion of the project and the results that we learned from the project data. What publications, presentations, websites, and other forms of formal dissemination of the project deliverables, tools, or results are *planned or in process* beyond the efforts listed in your project profile?
11. We did not develop and products, processes or programs through this grant. However after three years of perfecting the event and developing relationships within the community we did specific ways to improve upon the events from year to year. This knowledge will be incorporated into our Best Practices Manual for holding Wheelin' Sportsmen events that is distributed to 2200 NWTf chapters throughout the year.

Reflections

12. Looking back, we were definitely too ambitious in the initial planning stages of this project. We originally planned to hold ten events per year for 25 participants at each event. When we applied for the grant we had a dedicated staff person residing in Michigan who would be the point person for planning and executing these events. During the first year, we quickly realized that we could reach more people with less resources by planning events for larger target populations. So we amended the grant agreement to reflect this reduction in number events but still maintained the target number of people reached through the grant project. Between the first and second

year of the project, our full-time staff member in Michigan left and we did not have a staff person in the local area to coordinate the events. We were able to rely upon NWTF regional directors for help, but as they split their time between several other NWTF programs they were unable to devote as much face-to-face time as our previous employee. They were able to successfully complete the project AND were able to add more events in the third year. The lesson we learned from this was that the relationships developed with volunteers are very important and we would not have been able to offer as high of quality events without the continuity of volunteer involvement.

13. I would recommend other project directors who are considering multi-year projects to invest heavily up front in developing relationships in the local community that will help you sustain the events over time and follow-up with participants. We did not foresee how much work would be required by volunteers since we are not located in the area where the grant events were being held.

Attachments

14. Results from follow-up survey sent to event participants are attached.

Participant Follow Up Survey Results for “Get Hooked on Fishing”

- 37% of respondents had never fished or been exposed to fishing before attending the event.
- Respondents listed not having fishing equipment as the primary reason they had not participated before.
- Other reasons included not thinking they would enjoy it, not having access to accessible locations, not having anyone to help them and not knowing how
- 25% of respondents did not know MI had accessible public access sites for fishing
- 100% of respondents reported having fun at the event, and 62% reported learning something new about fishing
- 75% of respondents have participated in fishing activities on their own since attending the event
- Of the respondents who have been fishing since the event, they went an average of 3.5 times.
- 25% of respondents have been fishing at accessible public sites on Lake Michigan they learned about at the event- Grand Haven and Pere Marquette
- Of the respondents who have not participated in fishing since the event, not having time was the leading factor