



People and Fish: Angling Ethics, Fisheries Management, and Folkways

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Why Provide Learning Activities about People and Fish?

Although other types of learning activities related to sportfishing may have more “glitzy” appeal, there is no topic more important to the future of our fisheries resources than how people interact with those resources! If our goal is to help youth develop into responsible anglers who really care for aquatic resources, then we need to help them understand how people are interrelated with the resource. Some fisheries professionals call this area of study the “human dimensions” of fisheries.

What is Fisheries Management?

Fisheries management includes the processes used in decision making about fish populations, their aquatic environments and the people who interact with fish and aquatic systems. Fisheries managers make decisions about people, as much as they make decisions about the ecology of the systems they manage.

So, where does the angler fit into this scenario? Because anglers are among the most important “customers” of fisheries management agencies, they have an important say in fisheries goals. Anglers provide input into fisheries management in a variety of ways (through committees, through monitoring the resource over time in their observations while fishing, as in the lesson “Keeping a Fishing Field Journal,” etc.). In fact, over 90% of most state budgets for fisheries managers comes from anglers who purchase fishing licenses and equipment (paying the federal excise tax which goes into the Sportfish Restoration Act funds).

In addition to considering anglers in fisheries management, agencies need to consider a wide range of other “stakeholders” -- people or groups who impact the aquatic resource or have a vested interest in the resource. For instance, people who live within a watershed have a great effect on the water quality there, and those who recreate on a waterway (e.g., canoeists, boaters, etc.) may come into conflict with anglers or other users. Thus, on a daily basis, fisheries managers must work to understand complex issues. They work to understand fish populations (as

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in the lesson “Estimating Fish Populations”), then they work with various individuals and groups to decide how to allocate the resource held “in common” or in the public trust--for the public (as in the lesson “The Commons Dilemma”). Fisheries professionals use information gathered from fish population studies and public surveys to set specific regulations for the purpose of protecting and enhancing fisheries and to help people enjoy fishing success (as demonstrated in the lesson “Fishing For Regs.”). To help youth learn more about fisheries managers and others who have work related to fisheries, you can use the activity “Fisheries and Fishing Related Careers.” While teaching from the fisheries management section of the curriculum, consider inviting local or regional resource people such as fisheries managers, private-sector resource people (bait and tackle retailers, fishing guides, charter captains) and others to “bring alive” your learning experiences and to expose youth to many role models!

Why is Teaching About Angling Ethics Important?

Our goal is more than to produce additional anglers through education. Instead, we hope to help young people develop into ethical anglers, who make decisions carefully and give back to the aquatic resource. Ethics provide a system of guidelines for governing an individual’s behavior--guiding and enabling each person to know and choose the most right thing to do in situations, which provide ethical challenges. Ethics are driven internally; they are not based on laws, mandates, regulations, or enforcement. Ethics are guidelines you use when no one else is around! And encouraging ethical “competence and fitness” will help us ensure the future quality of both the fisheries resource and the fishing experience. (For more information, see the section entitled “An Introduction to Teaching Angling Ethics.”)

Teaching about ethical decision making is a challenge! One rule of thumb is to approach ethics development in small doses (not in lengthy preaching, or lecturing)! Toward this end, several activities in this curriculum section provide realistic activities to engage youth in thinking about ethical dilemmas and decisions. Many of these activities can be done while your group is out fishing or on other learning experiences. Activities which will help you, as the leader, include: “Take Home Your Limit of Litter,” which allows youth to observe the results of others’ unethical behavior and to take action, and “Angling Ethics Lesson”--which has two parts: “Know Your Code” helps youth develop their own code of ethics within a supportive community of peers, and take ownership of this code, and “Angling Dilemma Exercises” present real-life scenarios youth might encounter while fishing.

What are Fishing Folkways?

Another important way to understand how people relate to fisheries resources is to learn about their traditions and tradition-bearers. This area is considered the study of “folklife” or “folkways”--or “anthropology in your own back yard.” Folklife is the study of traditions that are passed on from person to person in a folk group in an informal way, by word of mouth or by example. Folklife isn’t only something that people had in the past (e.g., history of fisheries), but it is also the current traditions continued and modified for today. We all have traditions, and we all belong to many folk groups. Traditions are easily studied within your own community, and can provide an interesting way for youth to understand their own fishing heritage and the heritage in their communities, to learn specific skills from a tradition-bearer, or even to understand the roots and dilemmas of current controversies tied closely to peoples’ lifeways. A few activities in this curriculum (developed by a folklife specialist), help you lead learning experiences in this area: “Museum in a Tackle Box,” “Fishing For Stories,” “If Tackle Could Talk, Oh What (BIG FISH) Tales It Would Tell,” and “Regional Fish Foodways.” In addition, “Making Fish Prints” is

an activity based on a traditional Japanese art-form. Be sure to think about local or regional tradition-bearers you could invite to interact with your youth to enhance their learning!

Summary of Activities Included in this Section

This section of the 4-H Sportfishing Curriculum includes activities grouped into three areas: angling ethics, fisheries management, and fishing folkways. The leader may choose to do some of these activities, or all of them; and, these lessons can be done in any order! Have fun!