

THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF SALTWATER RECREATIONAL FISHING

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Abstract: While there are numerous studies on economic benefits of saltwater fishing, there is little literature on other benefits such as social benefits. It is widely accepted that leisure, and angling are associated with social benefits, family cohesion and friendship development, yet few empirical studies exist to support these claims. Additional research that examines the relationship between recreation and leisure activities (e.g. saltwater fishing) and social benefits is needed to determine if such a relationship exists. The purpose of this project is to present the findings of a study done to determine the social benefits of saltwater fishing. Data was collected by interviewing fishermen along North Carolina beaches participating in surf fishing, charter boat fishing, and pier fishing. Discussion focuses on the extent that social benefits received through saltwater fishing compare to other recreational activities, to what extent is involvement in saltwater angling related to social benefits received, and the relationship between participation frequency in saltwater fishing and social benefits received.

Introduction

According to Driver, Brown, and Peterson (1991), "the word 'benefit' refers to a change that is viewed to be advantageous-an improvement in condition, or a gain to an individual, a group, to society, or to another entity" (p.4). In a study by Burch (1986), "a social benefit, in contrast to an economic benefit, is an outcome that results from motives that are directed to sustaining a social relationship rather than gaining profit from the relationship" (p.81). While there have been studies on the

benefits of local recreation and park services, few studies have been done on the social benefits of saltwater fishing. As noted by Brown (2002), "nearly all studies that have investigated benefits of boating and fishing have noted some type of social benefit". Examples of social or group benefits can be companionship, competition, family cohesion, time spent with friends, family, and others, social status benefits, cultural identity, and social support.

Relationships fostered during recreation and leisure activities may provide social benefits. Anglers participating in the sport of saltwater fishing are most likely participating in the activity at their own will. Kelly and Godbey (1992), define "leisure" as "a context for the development and expression of social bonding. The building of relationships of trust and sharing, essential for meaningful human life, is more than a matter of common tasks. Relationships, at any age, are expressed in common play" (pp.173-174). According to an analysis by Cheek and Burch (1976), "a significant purpose of leisure is its relation to social bonding. Any activity that supports the association of a family makes a contribution to our society". Anglers may participate in saltwater fishing to spend more time with family, friends, and others. Kelly and Godbey (1992) offer the following definition:

We engage in play that adds dimensions to relationships that make them attractive, exciting, and even fun. On the other hand, relating to others in communication and action is itself satisfying. Leisure allows for us to focus on the relationships that are important rather than what the goal or outcome of the leisure activity can provide for us (p.176).

Social benefits and leisure seem to be at least theoretically related, and there is some literature suggesting that social benefits have a relationship with freshwater fishing. However there are few studies that have investigated a relationship between social benefits and saltwater fishing. Specifically it could be argued that existing evidence supports the hypothesis that social benefits are related to fishing, yet little empirical or other evidence exists to support the hypothesis that social benefits are related to saltwater fishing.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study was to identify if there

are perceived social benefits associated with saltwater fishing. If a relationship is found between saltwater fishing and social benefits, there may be an increase in more participation of outdoor recreational activities (e.g., saltwater fishing). Specifically the following questions were explored.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived social benefits to recreational anglers participating in the sport of saltwater fishing?
2. How do the social benefits received through saltwater fishing compare to other recreational activities?
3. Do anglers who report saltwater fishing as their most important activity derive more social benefits from the activity than more casual saltwater fishing anglers?
4. Is there a correlation between how often anglers participate in saltwater fishing and the social benefits that they receive from the activity?

Review of Literature

The premise of this research is based on the proposition that there is a relationship between saltwater fishing and social benefits. However, little research has been conducted on the relationship between saltwater fishing and social benefits.

A growing number of researchers have begun to examine the social and economic benefits of saltwater fishing. Much of the initial research has focused on how saltwater fishing benefits the economy and the people associated with saltwater fishing of a particular coastal region of the United States.

According to Burch (1986), “a social benefit, in contrast to an economic benefit, is an outcome that results from motives that are directed to sustaining a social relationship rather than gaining profit from the relationship” (p.81). This study attempted to identify social benefits associated with saltwater fishing.

A social support study conducted by Auld and Case (1997); found that social interaction was a primary reason for participating in leisure activities. In the study, Auld and Case (1997) examined the differences in perceptions of leisure and non-leisure related to social exchanges of men and women

during leisure and non-leisure activities. The results of the study suggested that the social exchange theory might contribute to the understanding of why people participate in the social aspects of leisure.

According to Brown (2002), “among some groups of people, including both indigenous people and others raised particularly in coastal communities with some history of commercial fishing, fishing in a non-commercial context is not just a recreational or subsistence activity-it is a way of life and a part of the culture. In such contexts, fishing contributes to maintaining one’s self-identity” (p.21).

While each explanation of social benefits and saltwater fishing suggests a significant relationship between the two, neither seems to offer a complete picture.

Study Population

Participants in this study were anglers on the coast of North Carolina. Data was collected through a self-administered survey. Subjects were selected only if they were participating in some sort of saltwater fishing, whether on charter boats, from piers, or surf fishing from beach areas.

Participants completed the on-site survey, independently, so that survey instruments could be left on charter boats for the captain to pass out to the fishing party. However, the researcher also traveled along the beaches of North Carolina to target angler’s surf fishing and fishing from piers. Leaving surveys with charter boat captains reduced the amount of time the researcher had to spend passing out, and reading the survey questions to survey participants on the charter boat trips. A list of charter boat captains along the coast of North Carolina was obtained before the research project began. From this list, charter boat captains received an email asking if they were willing to participate in this study by passing out surveys to charter boat fishing parties.

Data Collection Instrument

The survey for this study was developed to determine the relationship between saltwater fishing and social benefits by using questions from three studies, two of which were previously administered by Ditton et. al. (1998a; 1998b) These studies looked at the social and economic

Table 1. — Perceived Social Benefits Derived from Saltwater Angling

Potential Benefit	Mean	Standard Deviation	More from fishing		More from other	
			N	%	N	%
Competition	3.23	1.36	40	51	39	49
Time away from family	2.12	1.27	14	19	61	81
Cooperation	3.65	1.05	47	61	31	40
Family Time	3.84	1.14	50	65	27	35
Heritage	3.27	1.30	31	40	47	60
Fellowship	4.13	1.06	53	67	26	33
Get to know people	4.12	.953	52	67	26	33
Hang out with friends	4.13	.966	49	62	30	38
Group participation	3.76	1.18	38	51	37	49
Away from children	2.05	1.22	14	21	53	78
In touch with friends	3.90	1.08	46	59	32	41
Keeps kids busy	2.78	1.24	25	38	40	61
Interaction skills for children	3.23	1.25	32	46	36	52

Table 2. — Benefits by Importance of Activity

Potential Benefit	Most Important Activity		2nd or 3rd Most Important		One of Many Activities		F	Sig.
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean		
Competition	43	3.70a	17	2.76b	19	2.58b	6.54	.002
Time away from family	42	2.40	17	1.59	19	1.95	2.86	.064
Cooperation	41	4.00a	17	3.35	19	3.16b	5.68	.005
Family Time	39	3.92	17	3.76	19	3.74	.214	.808
Cultural Awareness/Heritage	43	3.77a	17	2.65b	19	2.68b	.839	.001
Fellowship	43	4.35	17	3.88	19	3.84	2.17	.122
Get to know people	42	4.48a	17	3.82b	19	3.58b	8.07	.001
Hang out with friends	43	4.35	17	3.76	19	3.95	2.78	.068
Group participation	43	4.09	17	3.35	19	3.37	4.07	.021
Away from children	39	2.03	17	1.82	19	2.32	.749	.477
In touch with friends	43	4.21a	17	3.59	19	3.47b	4.27	.017
Keeps kids busy	37	2.89	17	2.71	19	2.63	.312	.733
Interaction skills for children	38	3.29	17	3.41	19	2.95	.709	.496

benefits of angling. A study done by Godbey, Graefe, and James (1992) investigated different benefits that recreation and leisure provide.

Data Analysis

The social benefits that are received by saltwater anglers was determined by having respondents state to what extent they agree or disagree (5 point Likert scale) that saltwater fishing provides them with 13 possible social benefits derived from the literature and modified to fit the purposes of this study. Descriptive statistics were used to indicate how respondents rate each of these possible benefits

In addition to stating whether or not they agree that they derive social benefits from saltwater angling, respondents were asked to rate the extent

that they receive each of the 13 benefits from saltwater angling compared to other leisure activities. Frequency statistics were used to demonstrate the comparative value of saltwater angling to other activities in providing each benefit.

Finally, analysis of variance was used to compare differences in reported benefit ratings between respondents who report that saltwater angling is their most important activity and those that report that it is not their most important activity.

Study Findings

Table 1 shows how anglers reported that that they receive a considerable number of benefits from saltwater fishing, and that other outdoor activities, not saltwater recreational fishing, accounted for

negative social issues (spending time away from their families and their children). There are also a considerable number of benefits that had a positive influence on anglers (spending time with friends, meeting new people, a feeling of cultural awareness/heritage). With these results in mind, it can be assumed that the activity of saltwater recreational fishing does have positive social benefits that attract anglers to the sport.

Table 2 shows results from the survey instrument of angler's perception of how important they feel saltwater fishing is compared, to other outdoor activities. This demonstrates that benefits such as competition, cooperation, cultural awareness/heritage, getting to know people, and keeping in touch with friends were benefits directly derived from saltwater angling more than from other outdoor activities.

Conclusions and Implications

The research has shown that anglers reported that they receive a considerable number of benefits from saltwater fishing, and that other outdoor activities, not saltwater recreational fishing, accounted for negative social issues (spending time away from their families and their children). The most beneficial aspects of this research reported by anglers include meeting new people, increasing fellowship, and spending time with friends and family. Finally, anglers who report saltwater recreational fishing as their most important outdoor activity are more likely than more casual anglers to derive increased social benefits from the activity than from other outdoor recreational activities.

These findings provide important information for both researchers and managers. First, this study demonstrates that participants in saltwater angling perceive that they are receiving social benefits from the activity. Additional research should concentrate on further defining the nature of these benefits and discovering how and why saltwater angling tends to provide them. The findings from this study also help to justify marine fisheries role as an important social institution. Clearly, marine fisheries agencies are not only managing aquatic species, but they are providing opportunities for the public to spend more time with friends and family, increase fellowship, and meet new people. Fisheries agencies can use these and other findings

to help justified continued budget support for their operations. Lastly, these findings can be used by organizations who desire to increase participation in recreational fishing and boating. By understanding the nature of social benefits that participants are gaining and seeking through saltwater angling, specific marketing and promotional efforts can target non-participants who may be likely to seek these same benefits.

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