

TEXAS FISHING

Appreciating Nature Through Sport

Photo courtesy Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. © 2004

Whether it's the plop of a cork at the end of a cane pole line or the flicking arch of a fly cast, there is something about fishing that transcends time, place and equipment. With every fishing experience, Texans have to make an effort to go out into nature to enjoy lakes, rivers, streams, bays or the Gulf of Mexico. Yet once situated on a bank, in a boat or midstream, each angler uses his or her own experiences, hunches and techniques to place his or her line in just the right spot. Fishing encompasses absolute mystery – Are we in the right place? Was that a tug? What have I got? – that often turns into a contest of skills and wills.

People often fish in a group, but the act of fishing is an individual experience, a sport of patient waiting that provides time to reflect on the connections between man and nature. Anglers recognize that ample and healthy waters lead to abundant water life, which leads to an enriched human condition. This sparks the realization that there must be an ongoing commitment, not only to land and water stewardship, but also to greater accessibility, so that succeeding generations can come to share the experience. Many Texans believe that fishing is one of the most gratifying sports and actively seek to share in its benefits. As they do, they add incredible economic value to our nation and state.

THE VALUE OF FISHING

Recent surveys show that each year, **2,373 million Texas citizens and out-of-state anglers generate \$4,563 billion in total economic impact.** This includes **\$2,183 billion in retail sales** and **\$311,539 million in state and federal taxes, which support 41,313 jobs***. These expenditures and jobs benefit a wide spectrum of Texas' economy, from large sporting goods retail chains to small bait shops and result from the sales of everything from hotel rooms to hooks, lines and sinkers.

CASTING A NET FOR FUTURE ANGLERS

But there's a problem on the horizon. While young Texans who have had a chance to fish have a very high approval of the sport and often carry it over to adulthood, our culture is becoming more urbanized, and the number of young Texans who have tried fishing is falling. (Even though Texas has an economic output of \$4.5 billion from fishing, putting us third among the states, total fishing licenses have decreased by 10% since 1984.**) The problem of lower participation is particularly evident among our minority youth, when it is these Texans who are most in need of the benefits and enjoyment that fishing can bring. Doesn't it make sense to invest a small share of our collective capital to improve and expand fishing opportunities for this segment of our population? Particularly when the cost of doing so is insignificant compared to the alternatives, including a never-realized sense of the meaning of nature and the need for conservation.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

With an hour or so before a meeting in Athens, I decided to visit the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center to see the new world record blue catfish named Splash. After watching a classroom of youngsters admire that incredible fish, I wandered out on the fishing pond deck. There, an elderly gentleman was pushing a boy in a wheelchair to a railing. After helping the boy up, the grandfather handed him a small rod and reel. Then the older man gently held the boy's shoulder as he cast. "I try to take off early from work during the noon hour to bring him out here, once a week or so," he said. "I help him balance. He does the rest."

Life is an act of balancing. The outdoors and conservation, including fishing, gives balance to our lives. Shouldn't we all be part of that gentle hand, giving young people the opportunity to have life-balancing experiences in nature? It's from those experiences that they will learn to love Texas and build a strong American conservation ethic.

George Bristol, President, Texas Coalition for Conservation

* The 2001 Economic Benefits of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife Watching in Texas, Southwick Associates, Inc., March 2003

** Figures supplied by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

*** Sportfishing in America – Values of Our Traditional Pastime, American Sportfishing Association, Southwick Associates, Inc., 2002

IN NATURE: NATIONAL FISHING FACTS***

44.3 MILLION ANGLERS
\$41.5 BILLION RETAIL SALES
\$116 BILLION IN OVERALL
ECONOMIC OUTPUT
\$7.3 BILLION STATE AND
FEDERAL TAXES
1,068,046 JOBS



If you would like more information about conservation in Texas, contact the Texas Coalition for Conservation at txcoalition@aol.com, fax (512) 349-2439, or phone (512) 349-2449.