

## Fishing in the Community: a North Carolina Solution

*“Sure I want to take my kids fishing, but where can we go?”*

*“I’d love to start fishing again – I just don’t know how to go about it.”*

*“Well, fishing’s great recreation, but who has the time to go all the way out in the country?”*

Heard these sentiments before? So has the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. In fact, queries and comments like these are exactly what prompted the agency’s statewide response to what has been a vexing national phenomenon over the past decade – anglers drifting away from their sport.

In North Carolina, the solution was to bring fishing to the people.

Creating a successful program turned out to be a complex process, but in the end was made possible by funds generated by anglers and boaters themselves.

While the Commission conducts fisheries management and research on a number of reservoirs and lakes, it doesn’t have the fiscal capacity to build new lakes near towns and cities as a way to attract new anglers or draw old ones back. What it does have, however, is access to funds that can help make better use of the resources at hand. In 1992, the Commission partnered with municipalities to establish an innovative program to do just that.

The Community Fishing Program (CFP) now provides angling opportunities to residents of small towns and big cities, from the mountains in the west through the piedmont and down to the coastal plain. More than 40 ponds and lakes – and one stream – have been designated Community Fishing Program sites. These waters are intensively managed to assure good chances for angling success. From April through September, they are stocked monthly with catchable-size catfish.

Many of the sites were enhanced by the addition of fishing piers that provide ready access for anglers with physical disabilities. Sites feature solar-powered fish feeders to keep the fish in a biting mood, and some even have fish attractors to help congregate fish for anglers.

The program is an excellent example of how the Sport Fish Restoration fund – derived from special excise tax monies collected on fishing tackle and motorboat fuel – supports “win/win” recreational fishing opportunities. Put simply, such programs give back to the anglers and boaters who contribute to the SFR fund each time they purchase the equipment and fuel that are essential to their outdoor pursuits.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission cooperates with local governments to operate CFP sites. Seventy-five percent of operating costs are funded by the commission through Sport Fish restoration money, while local governments provide the remaining 25 percent along with the fishing sites. Because most are conveniently located in city- or county-owned parks, other recreational opportunities are often nearby. These sites are especially appealing to young families seeking enjoyable and economical outdoor recreation.

But what about fishing tackle? This is a need the Commission has also addressed. A companion to the CFP is the state’s popular Fishing Tackle Loaner Program, which encourages first-time and novice anglers to borrow rods and reels free of charge. The program seeks to introduce North Carolinians, particularly children, to fishing. It also encourages novice anglers to continue developing their fishing skills.

The Fishing Tackle Loaner Program operates like a library. Anglers register at participating parks to receive a tackle loaner ID card that allows them to check out a free rod and reel. Another bonus feature of the program? First-time participants under 16 receive a free mini-tackle box, complete with lures, hooks, bobbers, sinkers and a stringer, when they return their loaner rod and reel.

The Fishing Tackle Loaner Program and Community Fishing Program are two imaginative and innovative uses of the Sport Fish Restoration fund – and both are helping recruit a whole new generation of North Carolina anglers.