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NATIONAL 4-H SPORTFISHING PROGRAM

Catherine A. Elliott

University of Maine Cooperative Extension, 5755 Nutting Hall, Orono, ME

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Continuing Education for Adults and Youth

Editor's Note: Six papers were presented in the continuing education concurrent session, and three were submitted for publication in the proceedings.

The following titles were presented in the session but not submitted for publication:

Will Cohen, Texas A & M University—Wildlife Mini-grants: a Concept Paper

Jim Pease, Iowa State University—Building Coalitions for Environmental Education

Edwin Jones, North Carolina State University—Status of the Wildlife Habitat Judging Program

NATIONAL 4-H SPORTFISHING PROGRAM

CATHERINE A. ELLIOTT, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, 5755 Nutting Hall, Orono, ME 04469-5755

In May I went to the Cornell Biological Field Station with nine volunteers from Maine to attend the pilot training for the National 4-H Sportfishing Program. While I was there, Ron Howard, chair of the program development committee, asked if I was coming to this meeting, and if so, would I speak about the sportfishing program. In the euphoria of the moment, I said yes, then immediately began to wonder why I had said yes.

Although I live more than 50 miles from here, I am giving this talk without slides and I haven't been fishing for over 25 years, so I hardly qualify as an expert!

At the opening session of this conference we heard Holly Davis give us her very eloquent perspectives—in John's Munn's words, her song. That reminded me of the two young people who spoke in New York about how their experiences with New York's sportfishing program has affected them and changed their lives—had given them their song. Then I realized that I really have two messages today—one is about 4-H Sportfishing, the other is about helping young people find their song. And even as adults we can learn a new song. When it comes to fishing, I am still just humming, but I am working on it.

Until early April, I had no intention of going to New York the first week of May. We have a 4-H specialist whose first love is fishing; he had made all the arrangements, assembled the team, was ready to go, and then decided to retire! A faculty member was needed to go along with the van load of volunteers. Fish are wildlife, right? I can assure you that I was not even humming at that point!

During, and before, this time, I was working on writing part of Maine's next Plan of Work. In writing the situation statement for the Environmental Quality Issue, I came across some of the research that has looked at the life-changing influences and events that have led people to becoming active conservationists. Two factors consistently surface: time spent in a "beautiful" outdoor place, usually over an extended period of time; and the

influence of a caring adult. Hearing Holly's story, and those of the two young men in New York, reminded me of that research, and brought the realization that we all have the potential for doing magic—for being that adult, for being the influence that changes the course of a young person's life. It's not just about teaching a child to fish, or name trees, or understand ecology, it's the magic in helping a child find their song. The 4-H Sportfishing Program is the newest of our tools for doing magic. Along with Ron Howard, the members of the program development team include Shari Dann, Bruce Matthews, Andy Martin, Sharon Rushton, Lonnie Nelson, George Babey, Jim Miller, and Allen Smith. My apologies to anyone I missed! There have been many other folks involved in writing the curriculum, which is currently about 3 inches thick. The final version is due out this fall. The major sponsor of the program is the American Sportfishing Association (ASA). You may also be familiar with their educational arm, the Future Fisherman Foundation that sponsors the program Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs. ASA is providing the resources and expertise, 4-H is providing the structure, delivery method, and access to kids, as well as considerable expertise. The program, unlike most other youth fishing programs, is designed to be a long-term, mentor-based, and community-based program. The New York workshop, for the northeast region, will be followed by one in Michigan, June 8-14, 1997, for the northcentral region, then a third in 1998 for the south central region, and a fourth in 1999 in the west. For information about the Michigan workshop, contact Shari Dann.

During the 5-day workshop, two team members attended sessions in one of five skill areas. Aquatic Ecology and Biology included topics such as food webs, cycles, adaptations, habitats, management, fish biology, limnology, oceanography, and careers. Tackle Crafting involved learning about hooks, knots, jigs, spinners, plugs, spoons, flies, creels, and rods, and how to build and

maintain them. Woodworking and sewing projects are also included, and everyone had fun making fish prints.

Angling Skills covered factors related to successfully getting kids fishing, as well as spin-casting, spinning, bait-casting, and fly-casting skills. Both salt and freshwater skills were included, and even some ice fishing skills for folks in more northern climes. Where to fish and what to fish for were followed by how to handle and prepare your catch.

Ethics and Fisheries Management covered laws, ethics, and the gray areas in between. Population estimates, catch rates, fisheries and watershed management, historical, cultural, and social perspectives, and economics were some additional topics. Last, but not least, the Team Coordinators learned about all the things that go into a successful program, from effective leading, teaching, and coaching for different learning styles, to planning a program and doing fund raising. Working effectively with volunteers was another important topic, as were recognition and rewards, and program evaluation. All team members got to try their hand at being teachers during a peer teaching session.

Each team, from the 11 states attending, was also challenged to develop an implementation plan to help guide us upon our return to our states. Team meetings

weren't always my favorite part of the day, but we did get our work done and have a plan that included training more trainers, and doing a workshop for volunteers next spring.

As you can well imagine, we didn't work all the time! Fishing Olympics (how fast can you tie a clinch knot blindfolded?), opportunities to try out fishing rods and reels, a banquet, awards for everyone, and an auction provided a fun way to get to know folks from other states. All in all a very busy week, a great learning and teaching experience.

So, by the end of the week, I was beginning to hum a little. I had had a fly casting lesson and I had tied three flies—all firsts for me. I had decided that not being an expert will actually work in my favor as we get this program going in Maine—it's easier to ask questions when you aren't expected to have any of the answers! Although I don't have expertise in fishing, I do have a great team of volunteers to work with, a great curriculum (that will be in final form and on my desk this fall, right Ron?), and a belief that I, and you, can make a difference in the life of a child.

I encourage you all to get involved, in whatever way you feel comfortable, and maybe even push yourselves a little. You might just learn a few new words to your song. And best of all? It's fun!!