

Tournaments: A Mechanism for Raising Research Money

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Recreational fishing is fast becoming a leading contender for disposable income in the United States. A recent US Fish & Wildlife Service survey reports sportfishing is now the nation's number two recreational pastime with the number of participants increasing by more than 100% over the last decade.

As the number of fishermen increases, it is only natural that the number of local, national and international fishing tournaments increase as well. Most fishing communities or organizations hold more than one tournament per year. Many contests are not one time events; rather, they are held seasonally in an effort to entice specific anglers to catch specific species at specific times of the year. Examples might be the tuna matches held in the Bahamas in May-June, white marlin tournaments in Venezuela during September and sailfish events in Cozumel, Mexico, during the early Spring. Each of these countries or areas hosts additional tournaments throughout the year.

With the increased number of fishermen and fishing tournaments, revenues collected by these tournaments also increase. Many tournaments raise only enough money to support the goods and services provided by the tournament. Cash balances are normally liquidated after the expense of trophies and operating costs. In some cases, however, individual tournament committees have encouraged fishing and marine-related or dependent corporations to underwrite the fixed costs of many tournaments. For example, a hotel or marina may provide free dockage for tournament participants in exchange for promotional consideration. Tackle manufacturers often donate trophies, thus eliminating acquisition of those items by the tournament committee. Local distilleries are usually willing to host a dockside cocktail party or awards dinner ceremony.

In many cases tournaments are held within tournaments. Winners of several Bahamian matches, for example, will compete in a final "shoot-out" held later in the year. Sponsors are provided a second opportunity to contribute with the inducement of increased media exposure, resulting in increased angler awareness of the sponsors' products. Sponsors, therefore, are focusing on precisely those markets which generate the most sales for their companies. The tournament committee also benefits by having a "captured" sponsor who will

donate twice for the same purpose.

With reduced operating costs, tournament committees may now take advantage of excess capital, raised through entry fees (usually in the neighborhood of \$250 - \$5,000 per angler or team) and allocate it for non-tournament activities. Often funds are earmarked for environmental projects, such as the construction of artificial reefs and fish aggregating devices or for research purposes. Recently, a U.S.-based tournament donated \$10,000 to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) for applied research on billfish stocks. Another billfish tournament in Key West, Florida, provided an additional \$5,000 from its cash reserve fund as did a recreational constituency group, the Florida Conservation Association. It is extremely important to note that, although the money to fund the science was raised on the US mainland, the majority of the field work will take place in the Caribbean. None of the field science will be performed in U.S. waters.

Another fund raising mechanism, other than the use of a percentage of entry fees, is to extract a percentage from a calcutta or betting pool, organized by the anglers themselves. Although such events are not always within the strictest interpretation of the law, they do occur in most competitive events. Taking a percentage of these monies "off the top," also provides opportunities to fund special interest projects.

In review, if tournaments are to be used as fund raising events for research or other purposes, tournament committees should set a working or operating budget and attempt to acquire individual or corporate sponsorship to pay for the majority of the fixed expenses identified within that budget. Guidelines as to how any capital surpluses will be spent should be agreed upon, prior to the inception of tournament fund raising activities. Often, creation of a separate committee is helpful to deal with this issue. Not only will such arrangements inspire confidence and appear attractive to prospective donors and sponsors, but they will ensure that monies are spent for the purposes for which they were raised.

After several successful seasons of tournament fund raising are "under the belt" and the results of successful research or environmental projects have been assessed, experience shows sponsors will be eager and willing to continue to donate goods, services and money to such worthwhile events.