

## 2022 Sport Fish Restoration Project Award – Angler R3

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**Project Need:** In an unprecedented time of uncertainty and closings in the spring of 2020, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation jumped into action to provide a ray of good news - The Outdoors Are Always Open.

The agency acted quickly to execute a plan that reminded constituents that time spent outdoors is good for both mental and physical health. Oklahomans' response to the communication plan was outstanding. Families were eager for safe things they could do together, and fishing and other outdoor activities saw a huge spike in participation. Oklahoma was a top three state in license sales growth per capita.

In 2021 the agency shifted into Operation Retention to reduce the lapse and churn rate for this cohort of new anglers. Without continued social support and reminders that fishing was fun, accessible and healthy, the agency risked losing these anglers to other activities. The agency initiated Operation Retention to lean into providing support that leads these 2020 buyers to buy again, to continue participating, and to self-identify as anglers.

**Objectives:** To retain 2020 recreational fishing license buyers as licensed customers in 2021 to contribute to Agency R3 plan. The goal was to retain 55% of unique customers who purchased fishing licenses in 2020. This will exceed the number of unique anglers retained from 2019 to 2020 by over 25,000 unique customers.

**Procedures:** ODWC's curated fishing emails, blog articles, and the Fishing Resources webpages are focused on introducing readers to good information and other resources provided in a where/how/when-to-go format. These are also paired with push notifications and other automated emails designed to "onboard" anglers with resources upon buying a fishing license. Curated emails and blog posts give content the ability to target customers no matter where they are in their journey along the R3 spectrum, and the digital/online housing of the content affords it a long lifespan and greater R3 influence than if simply used once in a video or magazine article.

In collaboration with ODWC fisheries staff a comprehensive effort began to promote urban fishing opportunities (Close to Home Fishing Areas), including targeted emails and social media ads with videos on days the ponds were stocked. These were targeted to likely anglers near these managed ponds and focused on holidays such as Father's Day and Fourth of July. Additionally in 2021, the agency was awarded a grant from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation to initiate the Vamos a Pescar program in Oklahoma City. The effort provides opportunities to Hispanic families to learn where and how to fish.

Additionally, the agency greatly expanded the Ask An Angler series on the Outdoor Oklahoma YouTube channel. These highly popular live virtual training events share information to thousands of anglers of every skill level. The format allows individuals to interact with an experienced angler and get real time answers to practical questions, helping those anglers to grow in their confidence and enthusiasm to continue on their fishing journey.

**Results:** The Operation Retention project was an outstanding success. Through careful analysis of our license data dashboard a total of 158,258 individual license holders were retained in 2021. This resulted in a retention rate of 63.5% for 2021 licensed anglers, greatly exceeding the ambitious goal of a 55% retention rate.

As new content was added to the Fishing Resource page, in 2021 the agency documented 50,000 total pageviews (163% increase year over year) and 16,000 users (25% increase YoY) with 3,300 (54% increase YoY) being new users.

**Benefits:** As Operation Retention wrapped up in late 2021, agency staff took the lessons learned during the intensive campaign to refine R3 and marketing efforts in 2022. This year, four curated fishing emails have been sent (released monthly from March - June). Each email is sent to over 620,000 targeted recipients and typically achieves a 35-percent open rate (nearly tripling the industry average). The emails paired with the ODWC Fishing Resources webpage, which often serves as the landing page link in the emails, have resulted in over 7,300 online sessions in which customers login into their profile on the agency's online license buying system, from March 1 through June 1 at the time of product evaluation. In the same timeframe, these efforts alone have captured over \$45,000 in revenue, including fishing license sales, other ODWC licenses and merchandise sales.

The agency was also recognized in 2021 as one of the states with the most growth in their R3 Scorecard according to the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation.

**Evaluation:** From a strictly data perspective Operation Retention was a proven success, but the outcomes go beyond the numbers. Through Operation Retention, three internal divisions (Fisheries, Administration and Communication and Education) came together to work on a shared goal. Without this three-legged stool the project would have been doomed to fail. Removing information silos will benefit the agency for years to come.