

# What Is a Fishing Derby?

A fishing derby is an invitation to go fishing. It provides a convenient fishing opportunity for the more than 44 million anglers in the United States, as well as an opportunity for first-time anglers to experience the sport! A fishing derby is fun—for the participants and the people conducting it—and creates just the situation needed to expose a non-angler to the basics and fun of fishing or to rekindle the interest of “used-to-be” anglers.

A fishing derby is an organized, large group event where participants fish and are actively involved in fishing-related activities. Although the related activities may be for education, public relations, or even fundraising, the focus of every fishing derby is the chance for young people and adults to fish in a group setting under controlled conditions at a place that provides a positive, quality experience. Unlike a tournament or fishing rodeo, where the emphasis is usually on competition and profit, a fishing derby places emphasis on the individual participants and their exposure to fisheries resources and the sport of fishing.

Research conducted by the American Sportfishing Association (formerly called the American Fishing Tackle Manufacturers Association) indicates that 57 percent of anglers began fishing before age 10, and 88 percent began before age 20. Most fishing derbies are youth-oriented events or at least encourage youth participation. They attract the people who will be the anglers of the future.

Because these anglers are stakeholders in fisheries and aquatic resources and support conservation of these resources, building and maintaining a strong angler constituency is important to maintaining and enhancing valuable fishery resources. Fishing derbies can be an important part of a fishery program and can achieve several significant goals.

Fishing derbies are excellent family activities and are conducive to participation by the increasing number of single-parent families. It is important to get a child excited about fishing, but it is also important to get the parent or adult excited about fishing and about fishing as a family activity. Fishing opportunities greatly increase when a parent or an adult is interested in fishing and wants to take a child fishing.

Fishing derbies are a good way to attract attention to fishery resources and fishing opportunities. This is most apparent in towns and cities throughout the country that are developing community (urban) fisheries programs. With proper fish, habitat, and water quality management, once overlooked or unusable waters can provide excellent fishing opportunities within walking distance from home. A fishing derby not only announces these opportunities but also attracts attention to the process that converted an unusable resource, or possibly even an unhealthy and unsafe site, into a safe and enjoyable recreational resource.

A fishing derby can be an educational event. It can inform a “captive” audience that shares at least one common factor—they came to fish. Certainly, educational presentations must be short and simple, but several topics can be introduced for a few minutes each. When appropriate information is properly presented, a large number of people will take the message home. Most importantly, a fishing derby can be a positive way to attract young people to stay with organized youth sportfishing programs such as Mississippi 4-H Youth Sportfishing!

Getting people interested in fishing and educating people about fishery and aquatic resources are closely related. People who have a stake in the resource (in this case, fishing) are more interested in the future of fishery and aquatic resources and, therefore, more receptive to learning about them. This relationship between recreational participation and education pays long-term dividends. Even for non-anglers, having fishing opportunities in a nearby lake or a stream tends to make citizens more environmentally aware and more compliant with regulations designed to protect the environment.

Although fishing derbies can accomplish several goals, the immediate success of a fishing derby is measured by participation—was the attendance as good as was expected, and did the people—the participants and those conducting the event—have fun? Another goal, especially for youngsters, is to have each child catch at least one fish, because often it will be his or her first fish. For older people, instruction on casting, knots, sportsmanship, angler ethics, and similar topics may be more important goals.

We would like to make it clear at the outset that this publication pertains to events that restrict fishing to the lake or riverbank. Even if vessels are allowed on the water being fished, it is advisable to allow only bank fishing. This restriction allows more participation per acre of water and results in a safer and more controlled event. Some obvious reasons for restricting fishing to bank fishing include congestion at launching ramps, the added hazard of people in boats, the nearness of rescue staff and emergency facilities, conflicts between on-water and bank anglers, and communication with anglers on the water.

## Youth Sportfishing

The 4-H Youth Sportfishing Program provides opportunities for young people to be involved in club-based mentor relationships with adult volunteer leaders. These relationships nurture the development of critical life skills through long-term involvement and commitment to fishing, fishing-related activities, and aquatic resource stewardship. 4-H Youth Sportfishing provides resources and activities for young people from all walks of life.

If you are planning a fishing derby and are not already involved in a 4-H Youth Sportfishing club, be sure to request information from your local MSU Extension office.

## For More Information

Additional information about planning and conducting fishing derbies is available in the Extension fishing derby series of publications:

[P3769 Planning and Organizing a Fishing Derby](#)

[P3666 Selecting a Site for a Fishing Derby](#)

[P3771 Facilities Required for a Fishing Derby](#)

[P3772 Publicizing and Promoting a Fishing Derby](#)

[P3773 A Basis for Competition in Fishing Derbies](#)

[P2219 Operations and Procedures for a Fishing Derby](#)

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### Publication 3769 (POD-10-24)

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Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. ANGUS L. CATCHOT JR., Director