



OVERVIEW

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's (NCWRC) goal with the First Catch Center (FCC) program is to bring fishing directly to people, helping raise awareness of the abundant opportunities across the state, and particularly in urban areas.

“The biggest thing the FCC does is break down barriers” said NCWRC’s Angler Engagement Coordinator Matthew Rieger. “It cuts down travel distance for people to try fishing and it brings the equipment right to them. A lot of people aren’t aware of the fishing we have in urban areas, so getting the trailer to a location like that lets people know this opportunity is in their backyards.”

The trailer is housed in Raleigh, in the center of the state. Rieger is the lead for the FCC program, and works with engagement and enforcement staff across North Carolina’s 9 districts.



PARTNERSHIPS

Working with their agency’s ADA Coordinator, the FCC has participated in several Adaptive Recreation Expos as well, which helps people with disabilities find opportunities to kayak, bike, fish, hunt, and otherwise enjoy the outdoors. Since partnering with community groups who support accessible fishing access, the FCC has been equipped with adaptive fishing gear, and NCWRC makes tools like track wheelchairs available.

“For those who want to support anglers and people with disabilities, I would recommend doing research on equipment like different wheelchair holders, grasping tools, things of that nature. Then work with an ADA coordinator or somebody who is connected with these community groups to find new opportunities.”

NCWRC also works with the YMCA, Rotary Club, and the Waccamaw Siouan Indian Tribe, among others.

First Catch Centers North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION FOCUS

Empowering repeat visitors to become volunteers is a key way to retain (and recruit) more anglers, says Rieger. “If somebody comes to multiple programs, the desire is obviously there. It’s not difficult to teach somebody how to become a volunteer, and once they become one they go fishing all the time. It also opens up different niches of fishing – our volunteers specialize in basic fishing, bass, catfish, fly fishing, and more. And the volunteers create their own community as well – a seasoned volunteer will invite out a new angler, forming a new relationship that doesn’t depend on any event.”

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

There is high demand for the FCC but not enough availability on popular weekend dates. NCWRC has successfully utilized online scheduling platform Jotform to help interested third parties find available dates so high-priority events can be secured well in advance.

In addition, in a state as geographically large as North Carolina physically moving the trailer to different locations can pose a challenge. NCWRC would like to bring more trailers online in the future to serve regional markets more efficiently.



TRAINING PARTNERS TO USE THE FCC

Rieger says that showcasing the FCC to potential partners has been the best way to market the program. “You can tell somebody about it 10 times and they forget about it. But if you have somebody walk through it, they see it, they feel it, and you can see their excitement.”

NCWRC focuses on train-the-trainer style introductions to the FCC so local partners, volunteers, and district supervisors can confidently use the trailer. “I offer training for teaching kids and adults at the basic level, with PowerPoints, handouts, shadowing opportunities, and hands-on experiences for all the staff.” This training gives partners who use the trailer a sense of ownership and confidence that empowers them to bring in their communities to try fishing for the first time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Matthew Rieger | Angler Engagement Coordinator
matthew.rieger@ncwildlife.org

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