

Cooperative is the Cornerstone of Extension Education

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Proceedings, 11th Triennial National Wildlife & Fisheries
Extension Specialists Conference,
October 14-18, 2006, Big Sky, MT

Cooperation is the key to making Extension education work, both from an implementation and funding perspective. We can all cite many examples of this in our many programs, and thus the name of many of state Extension agencies. This example is one of cooperative funding with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to implement a joint Conservation Education Program.

The concept grew from a very successful joint program with the Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences Extension Program and the Texas 4-H Program. H. T. Davison, a colleague of mine in the 4-H office, pondered how we might change the direction of use of firearms and hunting after watching the “Guns of Autumn” in 1975. Our conclusion was to take a small program (.22 rifle competition) and expand it to include shotgun sports. This was attractive to kids, volunteers, and industry sponsors and grew into a huge program that involved 10,000 kids each year in various shooting programs. It was used as a national model, which many Extension programs in the United States are still using today.

After the Shooting Sports program had successfully expanded, we wanted to add a broader based conservation, hunting, and fishing program to this effort. We had marketed this concept as a Texas Field and Stream Program. For a variety of reasons, this concept did not gain the same popularity as the Shooting Sports Program did.

When the Wallop-Breaux funding bill passed in 1984, I went to my colleague H. T. Davison and said this bill indicates that 10% of this Sport Fishing Restoration Act can be spent by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for cooperative education programs. We developed a proposal for a cooperative project with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for a Texas Field and Stream Program. They liked the concept as we presented it, but said they had several big projects that they had to complete before they could fund this. The chief of fisheries, Robert Kemp, called his staff people in, and we discussed a strategy to make this work. One of those staff people was Nick Carter.

Wallop-Breaux funds were never used to fund this project, but several years later I approached Steve Hall with Parks and Wildlife with this same concept. Because they were not able to utilize all of their Pittman-Robertson and Dingle-Johnson funds that Texas was allocated, he thought they could contract with Texas Cooperative Extension Service with those funds, and we could establish a cooperative Conservation Education Program. With the help of Nick Carter, who had retired and come back to help Texas Parks and Wildlife Department with their PR and DJ funds administration, we were able to convince U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that this was a legitimate expenditure of these funds.

Once this was accomplished, Texas Cooperative Extension Service was to contract for \$250,000 a year for the Conservation Education Program. The program was staffed with 3 masters-level Extension Associates who operated the program, which included both hunting and fishing aspects of the program. These 3 associates supported many efforts that the existing wildlife and fisheries specialist conducted, and we were able to use the expertise of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists to conduct educational programming. This was later expanded to include a cooperative program with the 1890 institution at Prairie View A & M University.

This program is still in existence today, though it has been reduced in funding due to changes in program direction at Parks and Wildlife Department. However, it has been a successful effort to provide much-needed conservation education with limited resources in game and fish agencies and Cooperative Extension.