

Project Abstract Summary

This Project Abstract Summary form must be submitted or the application will be considered incomplete. Ensure the Project Abstract field succinctly describes the project in plain language that the public can understand and use without the full proposal. Use 4,000 characters or less. Do not include personally identifiable, sensitive or proprietary information. Refer to Agency instructions for any additional Project Abstract field requirements. If the application is funded, your project abstract information (as submitted) will be made available to public websites and/or databases including USAspending.gov.

Funding Opportunity Number

F-FWS-WSFR-23-001

CFDA(s)

15.628

Applicant Name

SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project

The Public's Perceived Importance and View of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Project Abstract

According to previous iterations of the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife- Associated Recreation, most state residents do not fish, hunt, boat, or participate in other related activities. Despite this fact, fish and wildlife agencies ("states") are charged with managing natural resources for the benefit of all residents, which often proves difficult.

Purpose: The primary purpose of this project is to gain an understanding of state fish and wildlife agency relevance to traditionally under-served audiences, as described above. The benefits include helping states implement efforts that lead to increased public engagement and support regarding conservation. The purpose is not primarily to convert these audiences into anglers, hunters, or boaters, but to help states adapt their approaches, programs, messaging, and outreach to better connect with the full range of existing communities and individuals regarding conservation. This project is modeled after a similar effort piloted by the South Carolina DNR with Southwick Associates' assistance. A second benefit will be the creation of a process template, including questionnaires, that can be implemented in other states and regions, thus providing a way to compare results and responsive approaches across states. This also results in cost savings for states replicating this effort. Finally, the results will provide a baseline to measure shifts in public awareness and perceptions of state agencies and a means to evaluate efforts to boost relevancy. A third benefit will be identification of the extent of past fishing, hunting and boating participation among nontraditional audiences, and interest in future participation, and whether these experiences and interests influence their perceptions of state agencies.

Work progress and methods will be carefully evaluated by Southwick Associates using detailed, defined milestones that are monitored in weekly team meetings. Draft results are also put through an internal review process, with critiques provided by analysts not previously engaged in the project. The results of the distribution process will be evaluated and included in the final performance report. Besides sharing results directly with each participating state, Southwick Associates will also share the results with relevant AFWA committees, either in-person at the March AFWA meeting and/or directly with each committee chair. Committees with an interest in public outreach and communications will be engaged, especially the Education, Outreach and Diversity Committee, to assist in effectively communicating results to audiences traditionally not well-engaged in fish and wildlife management or conservation issues. Results and the project report will be announced in NGO newsletters including SEAFWA, Southwick Associates, and the R3 Clearinghouse plus webinars to be held on behalf of SEAFWA open to all states. To increase use and longevity, results will be posted to the SEAFWA and Southwick Associates' websites and offered to the AFWA website. All postings will include links to the summary and technical reports. The technical report will provide all information necessary, including survey questionnaires, for other regional associations to replicate the effort. For this project, leadership of fish and wildlife agencies will gain key insights into how their agencies are perceived by both traditional and non-traditional stakeholders. This will allow them to design communication strategies, messaging, and programs that are relevant to all residents. States' outreach staff will receive insights on the ideal online, social media, and traditional media plus messaging to reach specific under-served audiences. Finally, there is an opportunity for directors to engage their state legislatures on important conservation issues that may fall outside traditional hunting and fishing activities, thereby building more broad-based support for conservation funding.