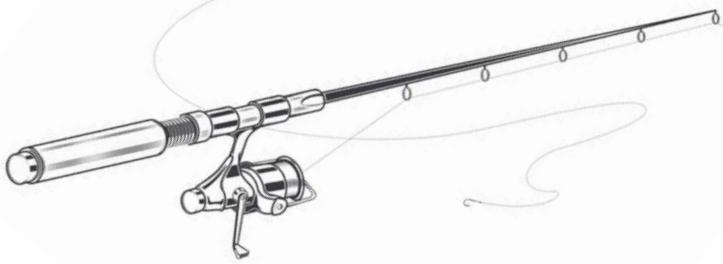
Selecting a Site for a Fishing Derby

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



If the water supports or can be improved to support fish, you have one of the major ingredients for a fishery and a fishing derby. Access, safety, crowd control, and the fish are also important for a successful fishing derby.

Access

The water must have enough fishing bank with access to fishable water to handle the crowd. Approximately 1 mile of suitable shoreline is a minimum length for 1,000 anglers. More space is needed for anglers in ponds smaller than 10 acres and in streams and rivers to minimize lines tangling. When opposite shorelines are closer than 80 feet, fishing should be restricted to only one shore. Low marsh areas, bluffs, and heavy vegetation on the shoreline or in the water hinder access and should be excluded from the "usable" shoreline. Also, large areas of water less than 2 feet deep extending out from the pond bank are not desirable fishing areas and should be excluded from usable shoreline.

All movement throughout the area should be on foot. All obstructions to pedestrians should be removed or clearly marked.

Fishing sites and pathways to fishing sites must be accessible by disabled people; the fishing sites should be universally accessible. Remember that disabilities include not only physical disabilities that limit mobility, but also mental, visual, and hearing impairment. It may be necessary to reserve suitable areas for fishing by disabled individuals only.

Sufficient vehicle parking must be available. Avoid sites where parking will adversely affect local property owners. A field can be converted into a parking area. Signs may be needed to indicate no parking areas and to direct people to proper parking areas. It may be necessary to have parking attendants ensure that vehicles are parked properly. Traffic patterns may be difficult or interfere with normal traffic flow; notify the appropriate police or traffic control authorities.

Safety

Restricting participants to bank fishing increases safety but does not guarantee a safe fishing derby. Railings or fences should be installed on fishing piers or at fishing areas on the banks next to deep water. These railings or fences should be high enough to be effective but should not interfere with fishing by anglers in wheelchairs. The load capacity of fishing piers should not be exceeded. Be sure there are no dangerous bank areas, such as an undercut bank. A steep or rocky bank should have provisions for safe passage to the water's edge. Do not allow wading.

The participants should be able to walk from place to place without crossing roadways, and no fishing should be allowed from roadways. All vehicles should be parked away from participants. Any activities involving the use of vehicles should be completed before the derby begins.

Proper medical facilities should be available. Legal aspects will vary among localities and should be explored. There is always the possibility of an injury, and that possibility increases as anglers get more crowded. Serious medical emergencies can result from hot or cold weather. People helping to conduct the derby should be skilled in perceiving medical or safety problems before they happen and in taking the proper actions if necessary. Radio communications may be necessary if the event is held on a large lake or anglers are fishing a long stretch of river or stream.

Crowd Control

The site should be arranged so participants all pass through a registration area (for additional information, see MSU Extension Publication 2219 *Operations and Procedures for a Fishing Derby*) before going to the fishing area. Similarly, at the end of the fishing period, all participants should be able to return quickly to the registration area. Crowd control is more difficult on a river or a long, narrow lake. Pedestrian bridges may be necessary to allow participants to return from the opposite bank of a stream to the registration area. Radio communications may be necessary for large events.

The Fish

Catching fish is important to a successful fishing derby. Fish are more easily caught on some days than others, and the derby organizer has little control over "good days" and "bad days." However, the proper combination of habitat, fish populations, and schedule can affect the likelihood of catching fish. Avoid sites where fish are likely to be concentrated outside of casting range by bank anglers; for example, a pond with broad expanses of shallow water near shore and a large area of deep water outside of casting range could be a poor site.

Different species of fish have different catchabilities because of inherent behavioral characteristics (such as wariness, preferred foods, and preferred habitats). Fish that prefer shallow shoreline areas that can be caught on a variety of baits and that are considered "easy" to catch are good choices for fishing derbies. In general, small fish (relative to the size attained by the species) are more easily caught than larger fish. Hybrid sunfish are aggressive and, hence, vulnerable to angling. Catchability generally increases with population density. Waters containing large populations of "rough" or "underutilized" fish such as carp, goldfish, or bullheads can be ideal for fishing derbies because these fish are often abundant and easily caught on a variety of baits. A fish community containing a diversity of fish that can be caught by simple angling methods is preferable to a fish community in which each species requires a specialized angling technique. The regional fishery biologist can provide good information about whether a particular lake or stream has fish populations easily caught by novice anglers.

The season the fishing derby is held also affects catchability of the fish. Events targeting warm water fish (such as bass, sunfish, carp, and catfish) should be held when water temperature is 70–80°F; these fish are less active at lower temperatures and tend to occupy deeper water (usually out of casting range) at warmer water temperatures. Events targeting trout should be held when water temperature is 45–60°F. In general, catch rates of fish will be higher in the early morning for derbies held in mid-spring through early summer in warm climates. Local anglers and fishery biologists can provide advice about the best dates and time of day to schedule a fishing derby at a particular site.

The Fishing Site

Although the lake must be large enough to accommodate the expected crowd, small lakes or ponds are better than large lakes. Fish are more accessible to bank anglers in a small pond and are more easily attracted to the shoreline by baiting than in a large pond.

Conducting a fishing derby in a pond is preferable to conducting the event in flowing water (a river or a stream). In flowing water, current causes lines to tangle, rain can cause large fluctuations in discharge and water turbidity, and anglers wading (even though wading should not be allowed) upstream affect the fishing downstream. Anglers fishing in streams will tend to be more spread out and farther away from the registration area than anglers fishing in a pond. However, in some areas, anglers prefer to fish in streams; in other areas, a stream or river may be the only site available for a fishing derby. If the derby is held on a stream or a river, select one with slow current and schedule the event to coincide with a period of low and stable water discharge conditions.

For More Information

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

IS1590 *What Is a Fishing Derby?*
IS1591 *Planning and Organizing a Fishing Derby*
IS1593 *Facilities Required for a Fishing Derby*
IS1594 *Publicizing and Promoting a Fishing Derby*
IS1595 *A Basis for Competition in Fishing Derbies*
P2219 *Operations and Procedures for a Fishing Derby*

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