

Brief History of the FishAmerica Foundation

The current day FishAmerica Foundation is the result of a merging of two previously-independent foundations with a shared concern for fisheries resources:

- 1) FishAmerica, founded in 1983 and designed to support hands-on, grassroots fishery improvement projects, and;
- 2) The Sport Fishery Research Foundation (SFRF), developed in 1962 and designed to support research priorities to advance the science and management of sport fishing resources.

FishAmerica 1983-1998

The FishAmerica Foundation was formed during the July, 1983 AFTMA Trade Show (now ICAST) when Zebco, joined with other Brunswick Companies, retailers Kmart and Walmart (the dominant fishing tackle retailers at the time), and other manufacturers/retailers to develop a means for a coordinated and unified industry approach to supporting grassroots, fishery enhancement projects. These sport fishing industry leaders recognized the potential benefits to sport fish resources and subsequently the sport of fishing by providing motivated anglers/conservationists who were willing to volunteer their time and skills with necessary start-up funding. The popularity of FishAmerica grew quickly with over 300 projects funded in the first decade of existence.

FishAmerica's unique position - a program led by the sport fishing industry but funding projects vetted by fishery professionals (including state agencies) - allowed it to extend beyond traditional fishery enhancement programs by involving all sectors of the fishing community. By requiring that all projects be reviewed by state and / or federal fishery management agencies, FishAmerica encouraged anglers and government officials to work in unison toward common resource management goals.

By 1986, FishAmerica had grown beyond the administrative capabilities of a single company and, in a move to further unify the industry behind the solid results being achieved by FishAmerica, administration was moved to the Sport Fishing Institute (SFI) in Washington, DC during the fall of that year. Under this arrangement, FishAmerica continued to operate as an independent non-profit governed by an autonomous Board of Directors, but daily administration was provided by a part-time Managing Director and Grants Administrator, both of whom were employees of SFI. This move facilitated the development of partnerships with federal agencies and national conservation organizations to further leverage the resources of industry and government to provide local citizens with an expanded ability to make on-the-ground improvements to water quality and fish populations throughout the U.S. and Canada. As evidence of the benefits of this move, in 1989, FishAmerica received its first significant external funding as a participant in the SFI-sponsored "Future 21" initiative with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a program that extended through 1991.

In 1994, the sport fishing industry consolidated several previously-independent organizations under a single administrative framework named the American Sportfishing Association (ASA). The merger of the American Fishing Tackle Manufacturers' Association (based in Barrington, Illinois and principally responsible for the annual trade show, with a government affairs

representative in Washington, DC focusing on trade issues) and the Sport Fishing Institute (based in Washington D.C, and focused solely on conservation issues related to the sport fishing industry) constituted the largest and most complex part of the merger. With this merger, FishAmerica came under the purview of ASA, although it continued to operate under a separate Board of Directors but administered by ASA staff.

In 1995, the ASA and FishAmerica announced a loose affiliation between the two organizations, whereby ASA continued to provide administrative services and the newly-formed ASA Conservations Projects Committee would help to identify grassroots projects for funding. However, at this time, FishAmerica continued to maintain its separate identity and operate under an independent Board of Directors¹

Charvat-Reichert Endowment for FishAmerica

Also in 1995, FishAmerica announced the formation of the Charvat-Reichert Endowment to provide perpetual funding for the fishery enhancement grant program of FishAmerica.² The fund is named for Jack F. Reichert, former Chairman of the Board, President & CEO of Brunswick Corporation and John Charvat, former president of the Zebco Division of Brunswick and later president of Brunswick Marine, both of whom retired from the Brunswick Corporation in late 1995. Reichert was instrumental in the growth of Brunswick's recreation companies and a strong supporter of FishAmerica. Charvat founded the FishAmerica Foundation in 1983 while he was president of Zebco Corporation and served on the FishAmerica Board until his passing in 2000. Upon his passing, individuals wishing to pay tribute were asked to make donations to the Charvat-Reichert Endowment. Charvat's son, Jack Charvat, still has a keen interest in the endowment.

The initial \$100,000 installment for the Charvat-Reichert Endowment was presented by Zebco during the ICAST Trade Show in July 1995. Additional funding was pledged at this time by the Brunswick family of companies (Sea Ray, U.S. Marine, Mercury Marine, Brunswick Marine, Zebco and Brunswick Group) and through special product promotions with Kmart and Walmart stores. Together, the initial 3-year commitments totaled \$520,000. The second installment of \$150,000 from Brunswick was presented in July 1996. By 2000, the fund had reached \$700,000. The original endowment gift document stipulated that 10% of the annual investment earnings be invested in the endowment corpus with the remainder available for investment in grassroots fishery improvement projects.

The purpose of the Charvat-Reichert endowment was to provide for continued growth of the principal while using the bulk of the interest to annually fund projects beginning in 1998. The intent was to provide funding that would allow the FishAmerica Foundation to operate in perpetuity. The language used in establishing this endowment was similar to the language that defined the Research Fund of ASA (funded by the Sport Fishery Research Foundation).

The bylaws of the FishAmerica Foundation state its purpose is *....to receive and maintain a fund or funds to administer and apply the income and principal thereof for various purposes within*

¹ FishAmerica Forum newsletter of the FishAmerica Foundation, Summer 1995.

² "FishAmerica Forum" newsletter of the FishAmerica Foundation, Summer 1996.

the scope of section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code, including among other things: (1) promoting and improving conditions in fishing and related occupations; (2) increasing the fishing population, (3) reducing pollution in waterways & lakes; and (4) conservation of fish and attainment of cleaner water.

Sport Fishery Research Foundation

The Sport Fishery Research Foundation (SFRF) was founded in 1962 by Ben Hardesty, former vice president of Shakespeare Company³ and administered by SFI after 1988⁴ (later renamed the ASA Fund after 1994). The purpose of the SFRF was to support *research* into freshwater and saltwater sport fish and train personnel in fisheries science and management. Projects included a variety of socio-economic, policy, and biological topics. In 1984, SFRF received a significant donation from the trustees of the William R. Angell Foundation (Everett Hames, chairman) resulting from the sale of North Manitou Island, a 5,000-acre island in Lake Michigan to the National Park Service to become part of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park. The Angell Foundation was a large landholder of this island and following several years of lawsuits settled on a price of \$12.5 million with a portion being donated to SFRF. The SFRF engaged an advisory board consisting of SFI staff, industry representatives, and government agency personnel (e.g., NOAA Fisheries and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) to review and select project proposals for funding. A portion of the SFRF Endowment was used to establish an annual policy internship named in honor of Everett Hames (the Everett R. Hames Fisheries Policy Internship) which has morphed into the current 2-year policy fellow of the American Sportfishing Association.

FishAmerica Foundation 1998-Current Day

In 1998, FishAmerica developed a formal agreement with ASA, whereby the ASA Board of Directors became the FishAmerica Board on May 21 of that year. A Conservation Projects Committee was formed, with members appointed by the ASA chairman (as is standard for all ASA committees) to review and select projects for funding except for the Treasurer. The Treasurer of the Foundation was to be “a representative of a Brunswick Corporation Company that is an ASA member” (this requirement has since been removed). FishAmerica retained its legal standing as a separate organization under 501(c) 3 of the Internal revenue Code.⁵

Merger of SFRF into FishAmerica

In 1999, SFRF (by then, the ASA Fund) merged with the FishAmerica Foundation and transferred all assets “including a \$1 million endowment” to FishAmerica. The ASA Fund Endowment was to be segregated from FishAmerica’s Charvat-Reichert Endowment and be used to “fund only research projects of benefit to sport fish and the sport fishing industry” (see footnote 3). The ASA Fund’s Board of Directors became the new “Research Projects Committee” of FishAmerica. Of note, while FishAmerica accepted unsolicited proposals for funding hands-on conservation projects, it did not accept unsolicited proposals for research,

³ “American Sportfishing,” newsletter of ASA, May 1999.

⁴ Report and Recommendations to the FishAmerica Foundation Board on the Status and Future of the Foundation June 21, 2012.

⁵ Administrative Agreement Between the FishAmerica Foundation "Foundation" and the American Sportfishing Association "ASA", 1998.

instead relying on targeted research topics of greatest importance to the sport fishing industry. At this time, the value of the Charvat-Reichert Endowment (for grassroots fishery improvement) was approximately \$700,000 while the ASA Fund (for fishery research) was approximately \$1.1 million (footnote 3).

Federal Partnerships

The first direct FishAmerica funding partnership with the federal government came in 1991 with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service providing a \$150,000 1:1 matching grant for projects approved and administered by FishAmerica. This partnership continued for several years. In 1998, NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program began collaborating with FishAmerica by funding nine fisheries habitat restoration projects for approximately \$44,000 nationwide. By 2012, NOAA had contributed nearly \$5 million, resulting in more than \$19 million in non - federal matching funds to help communities implement coastal and marine habitat restoration projects. The partnership funded more than 270 grassroots projects in 24 coastal and Great Lakes states, restoring 7,500 acres of fisheries habitat and improving fish passage in more than 300 stream miles. The partnership was the first of its kind and is the longest running collaboration for NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program (footnote 4).

In 2001 the Foundation began cooperative projects with the northeast regional office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Foundation subsequently expanded its agreements to two other regions and completed approximately 25 projects with a leveraged value of \$2.2 million in habitat work (see footnote 4)

Administration

The FishAmerica Foundation has always been governed by a board of directors (or committee) composed of leaders in the sport fishing industry, as well as fisheries professionals (e.g., state fish chiefs, directors, and/or fisheries researchers). This mix of manufacturers, retailers, media, and fisheries professionals enabled the foundation to obtain a broad base of industry support while vetting projects based on the technical experience of fisheries professionals. Day-to-day operations were conducted through a *part time* Managing Director and part time Grants Administrator (1987-1996) and full time director 1997-2011, supplemented at times with assistance of a grants administrator. A number of Managing Directors have filled this role over the years. Initially, staff of Zebco: Gene Howard (briefly) and Jim Hubbard established the foundation and got it up and running. Once administration was transferred to SFI, part time Managing Directors were drawn from SFI staff and included Richard Christian (1988-89), Steve Philips (1989-90), Tina Berger (interim 1990), Andrew Loftus (1990-1996), and full time Tom Marshall (1997- 2002), and Joanna Laderman (2002-2011). Since then, management of the foundation has been handled by a team of staff members and outside contractual expertise.