

# Retaining Newly Recruited and Reactivated VT Anglers with Social Media Influencers



Having Ambassadors from diverse backgrounds can resonate with new anglers and allow them to see themselves in the activity.

## PARTNERS



## SUPPORT

Enlisting local, community-based anglers to act as Vermont Fishing Ambassadors turned out to be a great way to reach new audiences in an authentic, organic manner, and increase awareness of and motivate folks to enjoy our diverse fishing opportunities – Eric Palmer, VTFWD Director of Fisheries

## OVERVIEW

Vermont Fish & Wildlife (VTFWD) implemented as an effort to retain new and reactivated anglers that began fishing or returned to fishing in Vermont during the Covid pandemic. A network of local active anglers was recruited as Social Media Fishing Influencers and were asked to create and share engaging and informative fishing content on their personal social media channels. These efforts were designed to increase awareness of Vermont fishing opportunities, motivate anglers to fish more often, provide advice on gear, techniques, and local fishing information, and show that angling is accessible and available to everyone. Efforts were made to recruit Vermont-based Influencers that represented a diversity of demographics including underrepresented segments such as women and ethnic minorities.

Recruiting local, community-based Influencers that represent a diversity of demographics, fishing interests, and techniques can promote and increase the exposure of local angling opportunities and places to fish close to home to support new anglers and foster ongoing participation. Posts by Influencers can help bridge the gap between the department’s existing network of followers and the influencer’s local communities through grassroots, community level outreach and education.

## RESULTS

- 17 Influencers recruited
- 10 males, 7 females representing Caucasian, Hispanic, Indigenous American, and African American demographics
- Creation and distribution of over 60 #FishVermont branded hats and shirts prominently displayed on social media and YouTube videos
- Over 100 organic, community-based fishing posts made on Facebook and Instagram
- 160 volunteer hours generated as in-kind match
- Photo and video media assets generated for the department fishing media library featuring recruited Influencers
  - 185 Vermont-specific fishing images featuring a diversity of angler demographics, techniques, and fishing opportunities
  - Over 30 hours of video footage shot
  - 5 completed “How To Fish” YouTube videos (editing and review still in progress), with more shoots planned for this fall
- 48 volunteer hours by Influencers assisting department fisheries staff to conduct fish population surveys, and disseminating this information to their followers on their own social media channels



An Ambassador showing off a nice northern pike while wearing a #FishVermont shirt

## BENEFITS

This program has great potential by using avid community-based anglers as Ambassadors. Real, authentic Vermont anglers who are enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge, expertise and passion for fishing can benefit angler recruitment and retention by increasing awareness of fishing opportunities through posting locally based fishing content on social media outside of official VTFWD channels. This grows fishing participation by motivating new anglers, increasing awareness of fishing opportunities, and encouraging repetition and continued engagement. Ambassadors with diverse demographics can also affect recruitment and retention. Motivational content posted by under-represented demographics may resonate more with anglers of similar backgrounds by allowing them to relate to and “see themselves” participating in posted fishing content. By having Ambassadors participate in VTFWD fisheries field surveys, information and education can be provided to the public through their posts that helps them understand VTFWD work and how it provides fishing opportunities. Also, having Ambassadors help generate Vermont-based media assets is also valuable for future outreach efforts.

## METHODOLOGY

1. Influencers were found through social media hashtag searches and VTFWD staff suggestions. Anglers were recruited who were passionate, creative, engaging, and represented a diversity of demographics and angling interests.
2. They were given unique #FishVermont hats and shirts and asked to post about fishing events (Free Fishing Day, season openers) and encouraged to create and post organic content to increase awareness of fishing opportunities and motivate anglers
3. They helped VTFWD on fisheries surveys, informing them on how VTFWD’s work provides fishing opportunities. Their posts provided community-level outreach & education.
4. Influencers participated in photo shoots with VTFWD staff to build VT-specific photographic and video fishing media assets used for department outreach efforts
5. Influencers with species or technique-specific skills worked with VTFWD staff to film segments for the department “How To Fish” YouTube video series.



#FishVermont hats and shirts provided to Ambassadors to increase awareness of Vermont fishing in Social Media posts.

## LESSONS LEARNED & FUTURE PLANS

1. Similar projects in the future should consider using the term “Fishing Ambassador” instead of “Influencer”, as many anglers approached to be part of the program indicated they were uncomfortable with the term Influencer and viewed it negatively.
2. To ensure quality social media post content and frequency, State program managers need to invest sufficient time to stay connected and engaged with Ambassadors. This must be balanced with providing enough freedom to create organic, authentic content.
3. Better methodologies are needed to monitor post reach and impressions, or track and measure overall results the program had on fishing participation.
4. More effort is needed to find active Vermont anglers from traditionally underrepresented groups and ethnicities with a strong social media presence.
5. In a future program VTFWD would like to recruit new and inexperienced anglers as Ambassadors, targeting active outdoors people with a large social media following that mountain bike, hike, camp, paddle etc., but do not necessarily fish. Their social media followers may be more open to and interested in fishing if they were made aware of the activity and its qualities. These inexperienced Ambassadors would document their experience and progress learning how to fish on their social media channels.

## CONTACT INFO

Shawn Good  
VT Dept. Fish & Wildlife  
802-786-3863  
[Shawn.good@vermont.gov](mailto:Shawn.good@vermont.gov)

