Charter Boat Fishermen on the Texas Coast

by
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Sea Grant College Program

Texas A&M University

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PREFACE

This report presents part of a larger, more detailed study of the charter fishing industry on the Texas Gulf coast. The larger study, sponsored by the Texas A&M University Sea Grant College Program and supervised by Dr. Robert Ditton of the Texas A&M Department of Recreation and Parks, addressed the following research objectives: (1) to inventory Texas charter boat operators; (2) to describe their activity, business structure and profitability; (3) to identify and describe customers of the industry (charter boat fishermen); (4) to evaluate the industry's financial status; and (5) to measure the industry's regional and local economic importance. This report deals with the research method and data derived for the third objective above.

Beneficiaries of the study include fishery managers, sport fishing-related organizations, fishery researchers, charter operators and community leaders. Because of the larger study's comprehensiveness and technical orientation, this report has been prepared specifically to provide charter operators with information relative to understanding their clientele, marketing their services, and providing a better experience for their customers.

This report is intended to reflect practicality and readability rather than a detailed presentation and discussion of methods and findings.

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INTRODUCTION

The fastest growing industries in America are tourism and outdoor-related recreation. Of all the forms of outdoor recreation available to Americans today, those which take place at or near the nation's shores are the most popular. This kind of appeal is not surprising when one considers that more than half of the United States' population lives within 50 miles of the coastline, a zone accounting for only eight percent of the total U.S. land area.[1] In Texas and Florida, for example, additional desires for coastal recreation are noticeable as northern residents migrate south seeking permanent or seasonal residence in warm, southern Gulf coast climates.

As the population shifts toward coastal regions, the south in particular, the demand for water-oriented recreation is growing rapidly. Among the most popular is sport fishing. Almost ten million people annually enjoy some form of saltwater fishing.[2] In the western Gulf (Texas and Louisiana), there are nearly one million saltwater anglers.[3] In Texas alone there is a definite trend toward increased saltwater fishing as many more residents now are devoting more of their fishing time to saltwater environments.[4] Because of increased leisure time and greater affluence, especially in the large urban centers of the state such as Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin and San Antonio, more and more Texas residents are heading for the coast to take advantage of the excellent fishing opportunities in the coastal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

While the demand for saltwater fishing continues to grow in Texas' coastal waters, the shoreline itself is a finite recreational resource. Most boating access facilities are becoming more congested, and many of the existing facilities were not designed to accommodate the larger boats of Gulf fishermen. Facilities such as marinas, which cater to fishermen with larger craft, have reached their capacity to accommodate additional boat-owning fishermen desiring access to the Gulf.

In light of the ever-increasing competition for coastal resources by commercial, industrial, residential and environmental interests, the possibility of new recreational boating facilities seems highly unlikely. The limitations of shoreline space with access to that space will continually leave sport fishermen with insufficient facilities to access the sport fishing resources of the Gulf.

To resolve the problems of increasing demand and limited supply, and to more efficiently utilize coastal resources, charter boat operations can play a significant role in providing access to Gulf fishing for resident and tourist fishermen.

The advantages of chartering a boat are becoming obvious to many saltwater anglers. Chartering a boat is very practical for some anglers, especially those who fish only occasionally, because there is no need for personal investment in owning a boat. Chartering a boat also eliminates storage, towing and maintenance concerns, and the convenience of having everything provided by the charter service makes charter fishing very attractive. For those who are unfamiliar with Gulf coast waters, a charter service provides a skilled guide who is knowledgeable with the area. When the high cost of maintaining a boat is considered, the desirability of owning a personal boat diminishes, and the idea of chartering a boat becomes attractive.

The potential role of charter fishing on the Texas coast as a profitable business endeavor has not been recognized to any significant extent. To prosper and to make this potential realized, information is needed. Charter operators need to know more about fishermen who charter a boat to go fishing (charter fishermen) if they are to initiate investment in a charter business, maximize profits, and provide for the needs and satisfactions of their customers to maintain a steady clientele. Industries arise to meet market needs, and their success or failure is dependent upon how well they understand their markets and fulfill those needs. Information from charter fishermen who have gone charter fishing from Texas coastal communities can provide existing and potential operators with a basic understanding of the market, and an assessment of whether clientele needs are being met.

This report is intended to provide an information base to aid operators in understanding the specific characteristics of their clientele and also to provide some basic information about the type of experience they desire. Just as major manufacturing firms utilize market research to determine who their customers are and what those customers want, expect, and are willing to pay, so should any private entrepreneur in the recreation business have similar information about his customers if he is to be successful and establish his place in the coastal zone.

OBTAINING THE DATA NECESSARY FOR THIS REPORT

To obtain information about Texas charter fishermen, it was necessary first to find out who these people are and to ask them various questions about themselves, their charter fishing activity, their reasons for participating in charter fishing, and their general opinions about charter fishing experiences.

Because all charter fishermen are not conveniently available to be studied, a list of names and addresses of these anglers was obtained from charter boat operators along the Texas coast, for the purpose of sending out a mail-questionnaire survey. Initially, charter operators had to be identified so names of their customers could be obtained. In total, 88 operators were identified at five locations on the coast: Freeport, Port O'Connor, Rockport, Port Aransas and South Padre Island. Because of the large number of operators identified, it was determined that not all operators would be contacted for names of customers. Therefore, 44 operators were contacted to obtain names of fishermen who in turn would provide information to represent all charter fishermen. In gathering names of charter fishermen, it was important to ensure that a sufficient number of names was obtained from operators at each of the five coastal locations to represent accurately all Texas charter fishermen, as well as those who utilized each particular location. Ultimately, 418 questionnaires were mailed to Texas charter fishermen, including residents and non-residents of Texas; the 191 completed questionnaires which were returned provide information utilized in this report. This 46-percent response to the survey is adequate to provide an understanding of and to generalize about all Texas charter fishermen.

RESULTS

Results of the survey are divided into four main sections in this report: (1) the socio-demographic characteristics of charter fishermen; (2) data about their participation in charter fishing; (3) reasons for participating in charter fishing; and (4) opinions fishermen have about their charter fishing experiences.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

From the viewpoint of the private entrepreneur, socio-demographic data which provide a basic description of charter fishermen are essential in considering an initial or continued investment in the charter fishing business. To justify his investment, the charter operator needs not only data on his projected costs, but also data on the extent of the market, its composition and distribution. To expand his business, the charter operator needs to know who his potential customers might be, or what sector of the population most likely might charter a boat to go fishing.

To develop a profile of charter fishermen, survey respondents were asked to provide certain items of personal information, including place of residence, age, income and occupation.

Place of Residence

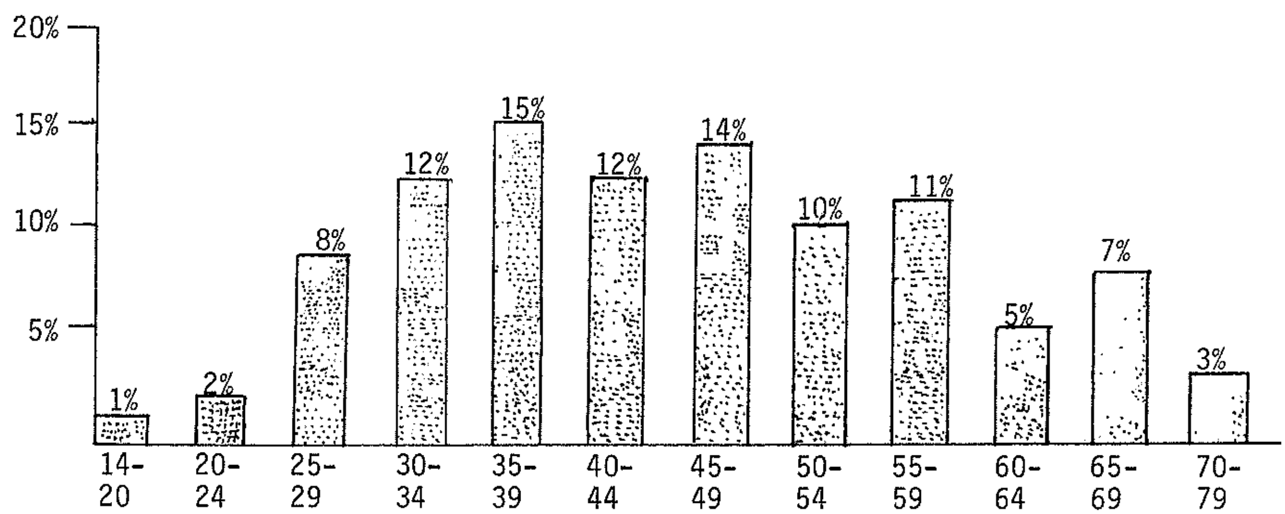
Charter fishing on the Texas coast is an activity pursued by few non-Texas residents; only two percent of all respondents were from out-of-state. The majority of charter fishermen (64 percent) resided in the four largest urban centers of the state: Dallas-Fort Worth (23 percent), Houston (21 percent), San Antonio (14 percent), and Austin (6 percent).

Excluding Harris County where Houston is located, only 4 percent of the charter fishermen surveyed resided in the counties bordering the Gulf of Mexico. The remaining 30 percent resided primarily in the east-central region of the state.

Age

Figure 1 shows that no particular age group best describes the Texas charter fisherman. Most charter fishermen (74 percent) were between 30 and 59 years of age. The average age was 45 years. The youngest person responding to the survey was 14 years of age and the oldest was 79.

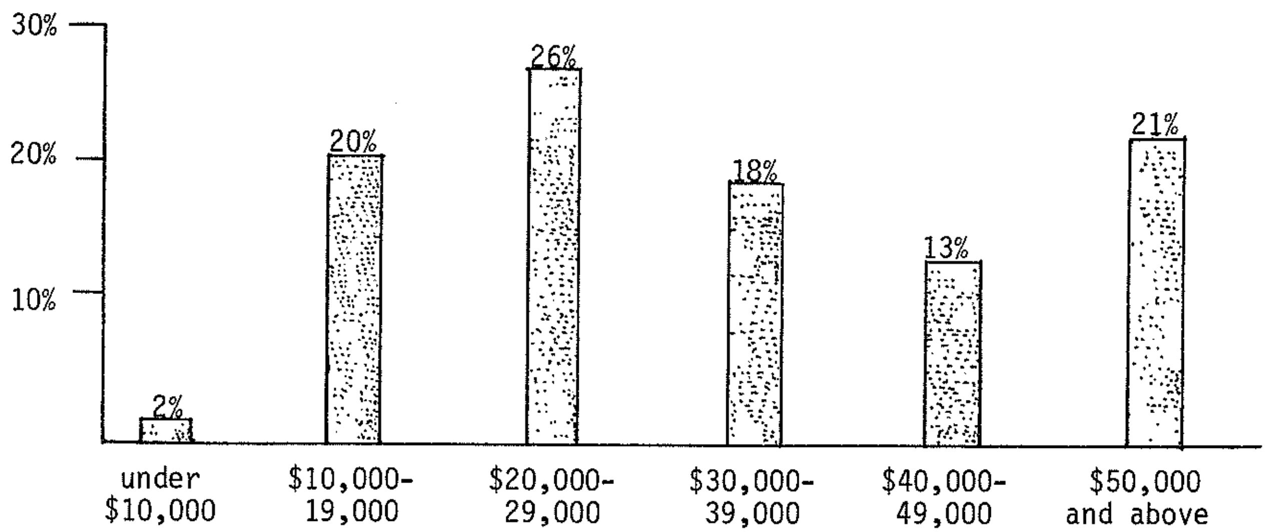
Figure 1: Age of Texas charter fishermen



Income and Occupation

Charter fishermen have considerably higher than average incomes; 78 percent of those surveyed had incomes above $20,000 per year, and 21 percent had incomes above $50,000 per year (Figure 2). The average income for all charter fishermen was approximately $33,000. With such high incomes, it is not surprising that charter fishermen come from high status, white collar occupations. Medical doctors, business executives, sales representatives, technical engineers, business owners and managers, and general contractors were common occupations.

Figure 2: Percent of Texas charter fishermen in each income category



FISHING CHARACTERISTICS

The use of socio-demographic characteristics, such as place of residence, age, income and occupation, are helpful in assessing characteristics which provide a basic description of those persons who go charter fishing. However, a better understanding of the charter fisherman can be gained by examining the fishermen's participation in this specialized sport fishing activity. This section will provide information about charter fishermen's fishing background; the types of charter fishing groups and their socio-demographic characteristics; whether they prefer to charter fish in coastal bays or the deep, open-water Gulf; and the amount of time they spend on a charter fishing trip. Each of the five charter fishing locations on the coast then will be discussed separately for each of the participation variables mentioned previously.

Sport Fishing Backgrounds and Participation

All charter fishermen surveyed had sport fishing backgrounds, and nearly all (92 percent) were introduced to sport fishing in freshwater environments. Most charter fishermen (80 percent) had their first fishing experience before they were 12 years of age.

Charter fishermen varied considerably in the number of times they went fishing during the year: 50 percent went fishing only six times or less during 1976; 32 percent went fishing between six and 20 times, and 18 percent made more than 20 outings during the year. The average number of outings for the entire group of charter fishermen was 13.2 trips; of these, 3.2 were charter fishing trips. Fifty-seven percent of all charter trips taken were to coastal bays between the mainland and the barrier islands. The remaining 43 percent were trips beyond the barrier islands to the deep-water Gulf. Most charter trips (54 percent) involved one day of fishing. The remaining 46 percent of all charters taken were trips in which the party fished more than one day before returning home. Seventy-two percent of all charter fishermen always returned to the same coastal community for charter fishing.

The total amount of time devoted to fishing has remained about the same for all the fishermen studied. Fifty-three percent indicated that time devoted to fishing has stayed about the same over the years since they began fishing. Twenty-four percent indicated that their participation in fishing has increased, and 23 percent indicated a decrease in participation since they began fishing.

Although overall fishing time has remained somewhat constant for all the fishermen (those increasing nearly equal to those decreasing), the location--freshwater or saltwater--has changed significantly. Nearly 17 percent now are devoting time previously spent fishing in freshwater to saltwater fishing.

Types of Charter Fishing Groups

One way to characterize participation in charter fishing is to examine and describe the relationships of the persons in the charter fishing groups. The survey revealed that charter fishing groups were one of five types: family members, colleagues from work, friends not associated with work, businessmen entertaining their clients, or combinations of these four group types. Table 1 presents the general breakdown of charter fishing group types. Family groups were the most prevalent group type among all charter fishing groups. Of the groups composed of multiple combinations of relationships (28 percent), family members were present in 66 percent.

Table 1: Composition of Charter Fishing Groups

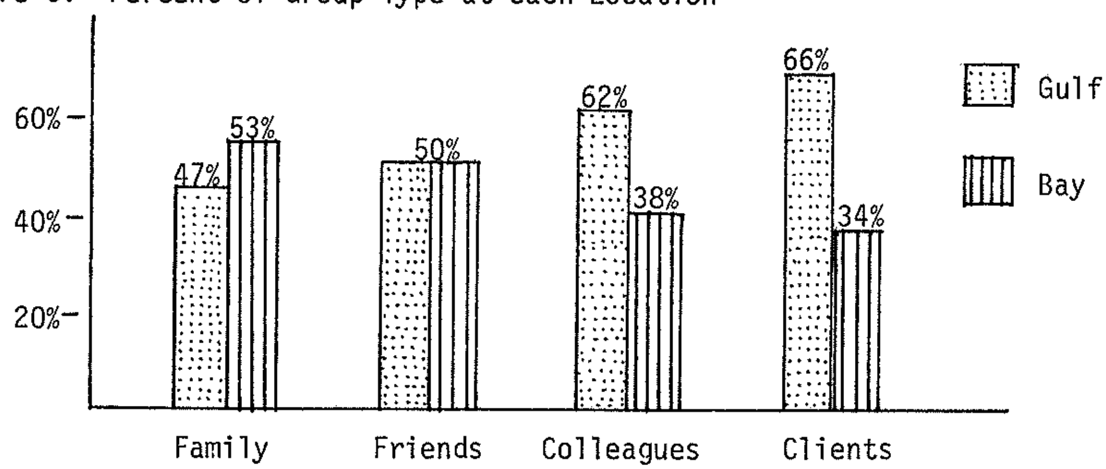
Group Type	Percent of Groups of this Type
Family member only	27
Friends from work (colleagues)	13
Other friends	21
Businessmen entertaining clients	11
Combinations of the above	28
	100

Comparisons Between Fishing Group Types

Comparisons between fishing group types reveal some similarities as well as some striking differences. For comparison purposes, groups were analyzed in terms of the type of fishing (coastal bays or the deep-water Gulf) they participated in during their most recent charter trip, the number of charter trips taken during 1976, the size of the group during their most recent trip, and the age and income of the respondent from each respective group.

Work-related groups (friends from work or business clients) differed somewhat from the family or nonwork-related friendship groups in terms of the type of fishing they pursued (Figure 3). Generally, work-related groups can be characterized as being primarily Gulf fishermen. Nonwork-related groups (family and friendship groups) fished in both the Gulf and coastal bays with nearly equal representation at both locations.

Figure 3: Percent of Group Type at each Location



In terms of the frequency with which each particular group went charter fishing in 1976, little overall difference exists between groups. Table 2 shows the frequency, in percent of total group, of the number of charter trips taken by each group and the mean number of trips taken by each group.

Table 2: Percentage of charter trips taken by each group type during 1976.

	Number of charter trips				Percent	Average number
	1	2-3	4-5	6 or more	Total	of trips*
Family	25%	45%	17%	13%	100%	3.5
Friends	25%	39%	17%	19%	100%	3.6
Colleagues	35%	43%	8%	14%	100%	3.8
Clients	32%	38%	8%	22%	100%	4.4

* The average number of trips reported here is slightly more than the average 3.2 trips reported earlier because respondents may have been members of a different group type on a previous trip.

Depending on group type, the size of the charter fishing party showed some variation. Generally, business client groups were the largest, followed by work-related friendship groups, nonwork-related friendship groups, and family groups. Groups of six, the maximum number that can be taken on a charter boat, were most common among the work-related groups. Smaller groups were characteristic of the nonwork-related groups (family and friends). Table 3 shows the distribution of group size and the mean group size for each of the four group types.

Age comparisons for each group revealed little difference between groups. The average age for each group type was nearly equal (Table 4). Even though the average ages were nearly equal for each group type, the

Table 3: Distribution of group size for each group type in percent of total group

	Group Size 2	3	4	5	6	Total Percent	Average group size
Family	12%	21%	31%	13%	23%	100%	4.1
Friends	8%	16%	35%	16%	25%	100%	4.3
Colleagues	9%	10%	24%	14%	43%	100%	4.7
Clients	5%	5%	29%	22%	39%	100%	4.9

business client group was significantly different within the age categories shown in Table 4. The 35-54 age category was represented by more of the business client group than any of the others. In addition, the youngest age category, 35 years or less, accounted for only 10 percent of the business client groups, considerably less than any of the other three groups in this age category.

Table 4: Age distribution for each group type

	Age Class under 35	35-54	over 54	Total Percent	Average age
Family	21%	51%	28%	100	46
Friends	27%	48%	25%	100	45
Colleagues	22%	55%	23%	100	45
Clients	10%	66%	24%	100	46

Respondent income was the final variable used to compare the four group types. As with the age comparison, the family, work-related friendship, and nonwork-related friendship groups were similar in the comparison of income. However, the business client group again showed considerable difference when compared to the other three group types. The average income of respondents entertaining business clients was $41,000. Only 2 percent of the respondents entertaining business clients had annual incomes of less than $20,000. In fact, 54 percent of this business client group had incomes greater than $40,000 and of this 54 percent, 36 percent had incomes greater than $50,000. Table 5 provides the data used for comparison.

Table 5: Income distribution by percent of each group type

	Income (x 1000)			Total	Average
	under $20	$20-39	over $40	Percent	Income
Family	24%	47%	29%	100	$32
Friends	30%	36%	34%	100	$32
Colleagues	22%	49%	29%	100	$31
Clients	2%	44%	54%	100	$41

To summarize the preceding discussion which compares the four group types participating in charter fishing on the Texas coast during 1976, the following statements can be made:

1) Work-related groups (groups in which business clients were entertained or work-related friendship groups) were more prevalent in the deep-water Gulf than in the coastal bays.

2) Family groups and nonwork-related friendship groups cannot be characterized as being primarily Gulf or bay fishermen, but rather were distributed somewhat evenly over both locations.

3) Work-related groups participated in slightly more charter fishing trips than either the family groups or the nonwork-related friendship groups.

4) In terms of the number of persons in each charter fishing party, work-related groups generally were larger than non-work-related groups.

5) The average age for each group type was virtually the same.

6) The majority of business client groups were in the 35-54 age bracket.

7) Groups in which business clients were involved were characterized by having considerably higher incomes.

Comparison of Participation at Five Charter Fishing Locations

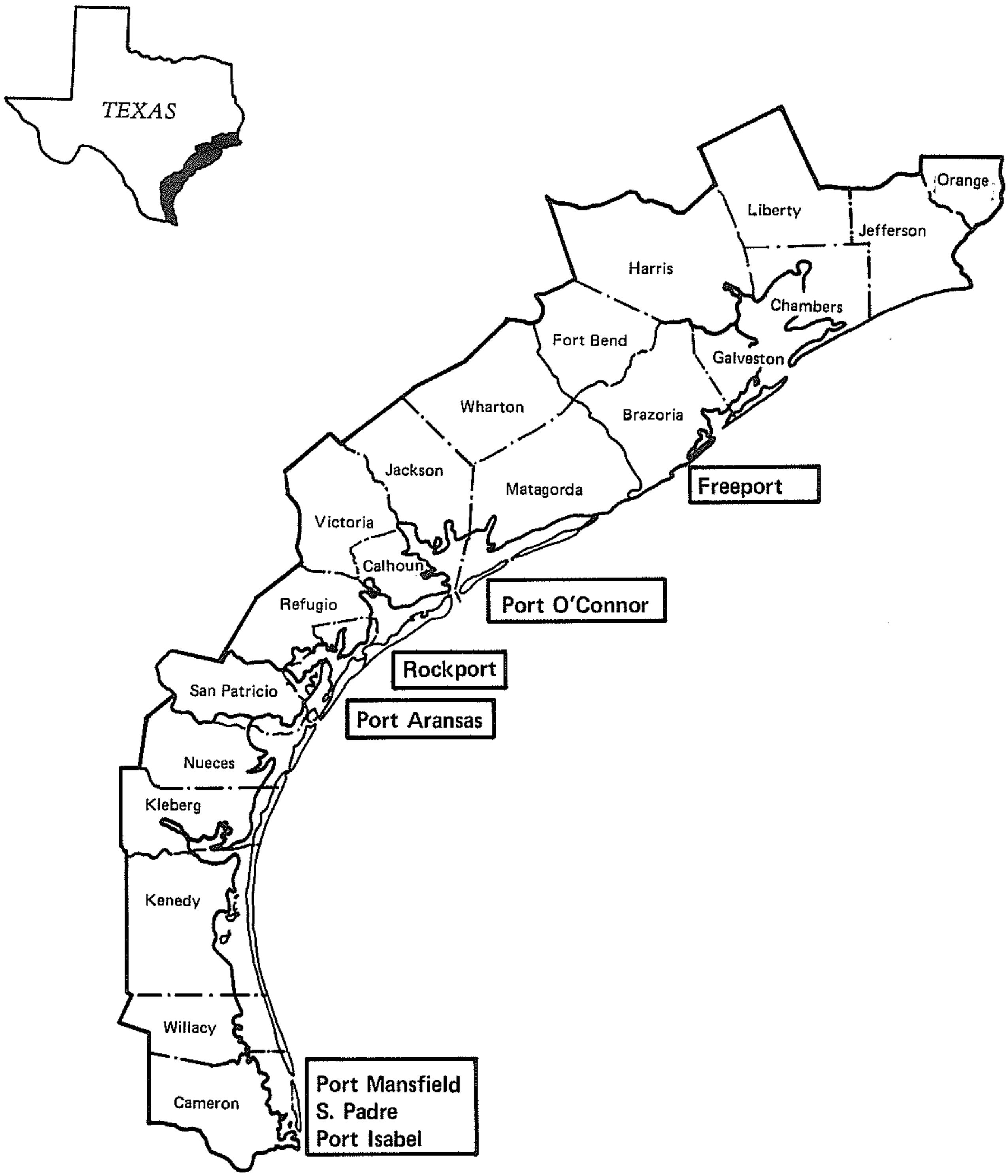
The five charter fishing centers identified on the Texas coast are separated by significant distance (Figure 4). This relative isolation provides a convenient basis for analyzing each location to describe further subgroups of the population and their participation.

In terms of the number of persons who utilized a particular location, Port Aransas is the state's major charter fishing center. Port O'Connor received the least amount of charter fishing customers. However, Port O'Connor charter fishermen can be considered the most avid, because they made more charter trips per person during the year than did fishermen at any of the other locations. Port Aransas' charter fishermen, on the other hand, made the fewest charter trips per person during the year.

The majority of all charter fishermen reside in the state's four largest urban areas: Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, San Antonio and Austin. Houston residents utilized all five charter fishing locations. Freeport and Port O'Connor drew customers primarily from Houston. Dallas-Fort Worth residents are represented heavily at Rockport, Port Aransas and South Padre. Port Aransas and South Padre also drew heavily from San Antonio. Austin residents were represented at all locations except Freeport.

Opportunities for fishing the open-water Gulf are most abundant at

Figure 4: Location of Charter Fishing Communities in Texas



Freeport and Port Aransas. Rockport and Port O'Connor are primarily bay fishing areas, whereas South Padre provides equal opportunities for either Gulf or bay fishing.

Freeport attracts primarily work-related fishing groups. Rockport, Port Aransas and South Padre attract primarily nonwork-related groups. Little difference exists in group type participation at Port O'Connor.

South Padre was the only charter fishing location where a difference was noted between group type and type of fishing. At South Padre, family and work-related groups primarily fished the Gulf, while non-work-related friendship groups primarily fished bay areas.

The average number of days spent in any coastal community by all charter fishermen was 3.8 days. Freeport fishermen stayed the least amount of time and South Padre fishermen the most. At Port O'Connor, business client groups stayed in the community for the longest period of time. At Port Aransas and South Padre, family groups stayed the longest. Little difference was found between length-of-stay in a community and the type of charter fishing (bay or Gulf).

Most of Freeport's and Port Aransas' customers made only one charter trip during 1976. On the other hand, the majority of fishermen who utilized the South Padre or Rockport locations made more than one trip from these two locations during the year. As stated previously, Port O'Connor charter fishermen made more charter trips per person from that location than did fishermen at any of the other charter fishing communities along the coast.

WHAT CHARTER FISHERMEN LOOK FOR IN A FISHING EXPERIENCE

As part of the survey questionnaire, charter fishermen were given a list of various reasons why people might go charter fishing. For each of the items, the respondent was asked to rate the importance of each item as a factor contributing to the success of his charter fishing trip. The importance of each item was rated on a scale from one to six (not at all important to extremely important). The rating scheme is shown below:

not at all important	slightly important	somewhat important	moderately important	very important	extremely important
1	2	3	4	5	6

The purpose of this procedure was to arrive at an importance rating for all charter fishermen surveyed. To simplify the presentation of responses, those individuals who gave ratings of not at all important or slightly important are grouped together. In the same fashion, somewhat important or moderately important responses are grouped together, as are very important and extremely important. Responses are reported in Table 6, and the items are rank-ordered according to the percentage of respondents who rated these twenty-four items as very/extremely important.

Table 6 indicates that many things influenced a decision to go charter fishing. The list also represents motives of charter fishing which contribute to the overall success of a charter fishing trip. Other things are involved in addition to catching fish; having fun, having a chance to relax, being with friends and enjoying the tranquility of nature ranked high, as do other aspects unrelated to catching fish. Note that several of the catch-related items appear near the bottom of the list.

Table 6: Reasons why people go charter fishing

Reasons (rank-ordered according to importance)	Importance: not at all/ slightly	somewhat/ moderate	very/ extremely
To have fun	2.8%	17.4%	79.8%
For relaxation	12.4%	31.6%	56.0%
To be with friends	12.9%	33.7%	53.3%
Tranquility and peace of nature	14.0%	37.7%	48.3%
To catch fish	13.0%	43.5%	43.5%
Have an outdoor experience	23.3%	37.5%	39.2%
To relieve tensions	26.3%	34.9%	38.8%
To escape pressures of work	25.8%	36.7%	37.3%
For excitement	28.0%	35.4%	36.6%
To catch a big fish	32.4%	38.1%	29.6%
Unique fishing experience	26.8%	44.6%	28.6%
For challenging game fish	35.3%	36.4%	28.3%
Convenient means to go fishing	39.3%	33.7%	27.0%
For adventure	36.4%	38.1%	25.6%
To be with people of similar interests	31.1%	43.5%	25.4%
To escape demands of family life	52.0%	25.7%	22.3%
To be on the ocean	41.7%	37.1%	21.2%
Scenic quality of coast	38.9%	41.2%	20.0%
Assurance of a catch	48.9%	31.8%	19.4%
Learn to be a better fisherman	44.2%	37.3%	18.4%
To catch a lot of fish	47.1%	35.8%	17.0%
To eat fish	45.4%	39.6%	14.9%
To maintain business relationships	71.4%	14.9%	13.8%
To catch a trophy fish	63.0%	24.3%	12.7%

All of these items listed were provided for the respondent, and in effect he was "forced" to rate each one. Therefore, some importance had to be assigned to each and possibly the respondent was unaware that his responses would be compared one against the other. In addition, it is certainly possible that the respondent may have had other reasons for charter fishing not found on the list provided. Realizing this possibility, the charter fishermen also were asked, with an open-ended question, to express in general terms their primary reasons for going charter fishing. All the responses to this question were listed, and those responses which were identical or similar were grouped into categories and rank-ordered according to the percentage and number of respondents who indicated each item. The complete list of responses is provided in Table 7.

By comparing the list in Table 6 with the list in Table 7, it can be seen that many of the same items appear in somewhat the same order. However, when the respondents were given the opportunity to provide their own reasons, some new items of importance appeared. Clearly, the idea of convenience and the guide service provided are important considerations of many charter fishermen which were not reflected in the list provided. Note that responses related to catching fish were not particularly popular reasons for charter fishing or having a successful trip.

Would people go fishing if they thought they wouldn't catch anything? Surely some charter customers would be dissatisfied if they caught nothing, and possibly the charter captain would receive the blame. However, the above findings tend to indicate that most persons

Table 7: Reasons for charter fishing

Reason	Percent citing this reason	Number citing this reason
Convenience: more practical than owning boat because no personal investment, maintenance, clean-up, worries, or towing because everything is provided	12.7%	35
Guide service: fishing with a captain who is skilled, knows where the fish are and is familiar with the area, someone to learn fishing skills from	11.3%	31
To have fun, enjoyment, pleasure	10.2%	28
To experience the ocean, its tranquility and beauty	7.6%	21
Assurance of catching fish	7.3%	20
To entertain business clients, maintain customer relations	6.9%	19
Relaxation	6.5%	18
To catch challenging trophy fish	5.5%	15
To get away from normal routines of daily life	5.0%	15
Own no boat to experience deep water fishing	4.4%	12
To be with friends	4.4%	12
To be with family	3.3%	9
To experience a different type of fishing than usual	3.3%	9
Enjoy the excitement of deep sea fishing	2.9%	8
Enjoy the large boat and the boat ride	2.5%	7
To enjoy the coastal area	1.8%	5
To get away from the pressures of work	1.5%	4
To catch many fish	1.5%	4
Enjoy eating the fish caught	1.5%	4
	100.1%	275

consider the charter fishing experience more than just catching fish, and their charter trips are successful without catching fish as long as some of the other expectations are met or provided by the charter service. Perhaps the most important aspect related to catching fish is not so much the actual catching of a fish, but rather, simply knowing that fish are there and could possibly be caught. Many operators believe that their customers are only interested in catching a lot of big fish. In fact, they are interested in the catch, but much more as well.

OPINIONS OF CHARTER FISHERMEN ABOUT THEIR TRIP AND THE CHARTER OPERATOR

The findings and discussion presented in the previous section provide some insights into important aspects of charter fishing that make for a satisfying experience for the charter customer. Presumably, these aspects are being provided by the charter operator. However, there are no data with which to measure the degree to which each of the important items is being provided, or whether those things considered important by the charter fishermen are being experienced. Nevertheless, many customers are satisfied, although some have had unsatisfactory experiences.

To provide an understanding of how the customer felt about his or her fishing trip, respondents were asked to comment about any aspect of their trip or their charter captain if they so wished. Thirty-six of the 191 respondents surveyed volunteered comments which may be of interest to the operators. Comments were complimentary as well as critical. All comments are listed below. All of the complimentary comments reflect favorably on the charter operator and the service he provides. Most of the complaints expressed concern for the poor condition of some boats and seemingly unqualified operators. These critical comments are important to operators, especially if fishermen select a new operator or a different area of charter fishing as a result of conditions which an operator may be able to remedy.

Complimentary comments

- we have almost always had exceptionally good charter crews and look forward to future trips.
- the charter captain was excellent.
- enjoyment depends on good boat and friendly captain.
- I appreciate a captain and crew that do not drink.
- charter fishing is outstanding at Port Aransas and Rockport.
- have had some nice trips at Rockport. We always catch fish and the guides are nice. The price is steep but worth it.
- enjoyed the well-qualified crews and pleasant captain.
- I have fished both the Atlantic and Pacific, and the Texas coast is the best.
- the captain was especially considerate to my family. We have used the same captain for many years.
- I find the family-owned boats most enjoyable. These people love their work and are working for themselves.
- I admire the captain who puts safety before profit.
- my captain gives me an education in safety, offshore fishing techniques, navigation, and an enjoyable experience in Gulf waters - he has become a friend.
- I particularly like a captain who is more concerned with his customers having an enjoyable trip than with how many fish they catch.
- we enjoy our charter boat captain and look forward to fishing with him every year.

Suggestions/complaints

- I dislike paying too much and not being able to fish where I want.
- much of the equipment was in very poor condition.
- the motor quit in the middle of the trip and we were offered no refund.
- charter boats need inspections for dependability of equipment such as batteries, etc.
- some charter captains are not experienced enough.
- it is becoming more difficult to find qualified charter captains.
- charter trips are becoming very expensive.
- the boat seemed quite unseaworthy. The captain was negligent about safety and was poorly equipped - I will never go with him again.
- not all charter operators have customers in their best interest.
- I find it difficult to find charter boat captains that make fishing an adventure. It seems that they are more interested in expediting a chore and getting back to the dock.
- I was dissatisfied at seeing captain throw trash overboard.
- one boat captain should not criticize the operation of another.
- the captain was unqualified.
- I was appalled at the poor condition of the boat.
- boats and equipment should be better maintained and cleaned once in a while.
- some of the charter captains seem to be interested in collecting their fees only and not in ensuring that the fishermen have an enjoyable trip.
- my experience with Texas Gulf Coast fishing has been that lodging is very poor, is too far from the docks, and there is not enough available. The coast is dirty and smells.
- the boat broke down and spoiled the trip. The captain even insisted we pay the fees anyway.
- it is very important that we not only enjoy fishing but that we also protect and preserve the fish.

- many guides turn out to be boat taxi drivers and are of little assistance to the fisherman. "I got you here - do your best" seems to be the attitude of too many charter boat operators.

- would love to fish more often but it's a little too expensive.

- I wish the cost was less.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings presented in this report can benefit the charter operator both in terms of his business success and in terms of establishing his role in the coastal zone.

Facts and figures which describe and identify consumers (charter fishermen) enable a charter operator to focus his advertising efforts on identified segments of the sport fishing market. Descriptions of charter fishermen are useful to operators in predicting the type of people who are most likely to utilize their charter service. Together, identification of market areas and descriptions of fishermen within these markets provide information important to expanding the number of clientele served. For example, it has been pointed out that a significant number of charter fishermen are businessmen entertaining their clients, or employers treating employees to a charter fishing experience. It was also pointed out that these groups charter more frequently (since the expense is probably on the charter fisherman's company), and generally prefer Gulf fishing, which by the way is more profitable to a charter boat operator than bay fishing. In addition, these work-related groups have considerably higher incomes than the other group types, and it can be reasonably assumed that their ability to spend more money may generate proportionately more income for a charter operator.

A charter operator can utilize these findings to his advantage and possibly focus his advertising efforts on this more lucrative segment of the market. An operator may even consider hiring himself out to a corporation for the exclusive use of their sales executives and clients. In addition, an operator who has business contacts may find it easy to attract a clientele of sales people, or he may utilize a direct mail campaign to various businesses and corporations informing the salesmen and executives of the advantages charter fishing has as a sales tool. This approach has worked for several of Wisconsin's Lake Michigan charter boat operators. In a study of Wisconsin charter boat operators, the researcher found that businessmen charter frequently because they consider the activity a good opportunity to do business with clients in a very relaxing setting. As one salesman surveyed by the researcher stated: "When I've got my clients out in the middle of the lake, they find it very relaxing, and I have a captive audience in a mood which is more receptive of my products."[5] The identification of Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Austin as prime market areas provides an operator with specific locations to focus his marketing efforts.

Marketing efforts aimed at a particular segment of the population also benefit the customer as well as the operator. If a charter operator knows the type of fishing group in advance of the charter trip, and has understanding of the reasons why people go charter fishing, he could strive to meet those particular needs. As was pointed out, many things other than catching fish are important, and the little "extras" that an operator can provide may help to make the trip more satisfying to the customer. Continued customer satisfaction is the key to developing a good reputation and maintaining the clientele necessary for a successful business.

In a more comprehensive study of charter fishing in Texas, it was estimated that charter fishermen spent $4,208,932 during 1976 in the five charter fishing communities along the coast.[6] This figure indicates that charter fishing is of significant importance to the economy of the individual coastal communities. This knowledge of economic impact is of great importance to charter operators in making their case in regulatory matters, establishing their significance in the coastal zone, and receiving needed support from the local communities.

Advantages of charter operations should be realized by coastal communities. Charter operations provide fishing opportunities for a great number of fishermen and require much less coastal land resource than would be required if every fisherman had to utilize his own boat. Expenditures for charter fishing fees provide income to the charter operator who reinvests his money within the community and surrounding area. Charter fishermen also spend a considerable amount of money for lodging, eating and various other services available within the coastal community.[7] Costs to a community for providing charter fishing are much less than the costs of providing launching, docking and parking facilities for the growing number of individuals owning their own boats.

Charter fishermen spent the least amount of time at Freeport and only slightly more time at Port O'Connor. Reasons for this are poorly understood, but perhaps the lack of support facilities such as motels, restaurants, and additional community activities deter people from spending more time in these areas. This lack of support facilities may deter some people (family groups, for example) from charter fishing at these communities at all. However, it is important to realize that the character of a particular community may be an important factor contributing to the type of charter fishing experience provided and in turn the type of charter fishermen who utilize a location. Thus, the character of a community may appeal to various sectors of the market. For example, the fishermen who utilize Port O'Connor were found to be the most avid fishermen in terms of the number of charter trips each person took during the year. It is reasonable to assume that these "serious" fishermen may select Port O'Connor because the location does not attract those groups who fish infrequently and who possibly are less serious about their fishing. Freeport, for example, has established a clientele of charter fishing businessmen. Perhaps the lack of support facilities at this location is an attraction to these groups who utilize the charter operations primarily for "business." On the other hand, the South Padre location, where support facilities are well-developed, attracts primarily family and friendship groups who remain in the community several days but who charter fish infrequently.

The important point of this discussion is that the charter fishing communities along the Texas coast, because of their present level of development, provide a diversity of experiences for the charter fishing population. Development in communities such as Freeport or Port O'Connor could sacrifice the fishing markets presently established in these areas.

For years, private interests, such as the charter industry, have viewed state fishery agencies solely as regulatory bodies, and as such the relationships between private interests and public agencies have been far from cooperative. The interdependence of these two sectors has not been realized to any significant extent by either party. Regardless of what the past has shown, the potential for mutual benefit exists. For example, the liberty ship artificial reef program in Texas is envisioned to create a highly productive artificial environment for many desirable species of fish which may attract numerous saltwater anglers. The benefits generated from such a state program can only be realized if these resources are made accessible. In light of the current limited access to such resources, the role of the charter industry is apparent. When such private/public interrelationships are realized, the role of the charter industry will be given more favorable attention by regulatory agencies.

With limited opportunities to access the Gulf's sport fishery, the role of charter fishing is significant. First, it provides a convenient means of access to offshore areas which might otherwise be inaccessible to many people. Second, it facilitates access for a substantial number of fishermen while consuming far less coastal land resources than would be required if provisions were made for launching, docking, storage and parking for each individual fisherman who otherwise would have no alternative but to acquire his own means of access. Third, it provides a substantial economic contribution to coastal communities. Further, in several communities it may be the primary base for economic dependence, both in terms of direct expenditure by charter fishermen and in terms of related tourism expenditure.

The future development and/or regulation of this specialized form of sport fishing will depend on decisions which the charter operators can collectively influence if they possess the information needed to make the arguments that reflect the importance of their industry.

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