

# Richard Louv on Urban Fishing:

The discovery – or rediscovery – of urban angling may yet save fishing and our waters.

In 1985, the federal Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a survey that discovered that about 60 percent of American anglers lived in urban areas. The latest studies indicate that figure is now closer to 75 percent, despite some Americans moving to small towns and less-populated states, such as Montana. This demographic shift may be one reason why the sales of fishing licenses have lagged behind population growth in recent years. But there are some surprising benefits.

*Nation's Cities Weekly*, the journal of the National League of Cities, ran an article with this headline:

“AS URBAN FISHING CATCHES ON, PEOPLE CARE ABOUT POLLUTION”

Now there's a twist, but it's true. Ethan Rotman, of the California Department of Fish and Game, “has found a way to dramatically increase the concern of Oakland, Calif., citizens about their polluted lakes and streams—he's got them hooked on fishing,” the journal reported.

Rotman enthused: “If I had known how effective fishing would be in hooking people into environmental issues I would have done it years ago.” Rotman is the San Francisco Bay-area coordinator of Fishing in the City, a program designed to teach people how to fish and protect the health of urban waterways. Naturally, the average Oakland resident won't worry about preserving remote salmon runs. But the fish running the creeks of their back yards? They care about them, and the more they fish, the more they care about the quality of water and watershed.

Rotman has formed a coalition of clubs, tackle shops, and public private agencies to teach urban angling. Locals are given twenty hours of training in watershed issues; they pick a nearby stream or pond with their students and test pollution levels in the water.

Members of Rotary International go into classrooms to teach fishing 101.

Students get a free tackle box and head to Lake Merritt, in downtown Oakland, which was badly polluted for years but is a lot cleaner now. The kids learn about urban runoff and how untreated toxins enter lakes and streams through storm drains.

In California, the Department of Fish and Game has made a serious shift toward promoting urban, angling. In 1991, its biologists began compiling a list of potential recreational fisheries—more than lakes—within urbanized Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside counties. Half of them were stocked with trout. Similar programs were created in the Sacramento and San Francisco area. The money comes from Federal Sport Fish Restoration Program, paid by anglers as taxes in fishing tackle, motorboats, and other fishing items. California's Urban Fishing Program is exploring habitat improvement projects such as (in true West Coast style) Crappie Condos and Catfish Houses made from plastic fencing and pipe.

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Richard Louv is the author of seven books about family, nature, and community, including "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder". In his earlier book, *Fly-fishing for Sharks*, Mr. Louv touts California's urban fishing program.