

Growth in Open Water

The Open Water and Long Distance Committees are working on a number of opportunities that have the ability to positively impact our growth in the area of open water swimming. The creation of a national one-event (OEVT) membership for open water is one such option.

Open Water One Event Strategy

There are two generally stated goals that exist for using the OEVT:

- 1) increase the size of events
- 2) convert OEVT individuals to full membership

Increase Event Size

Using the OEVT to help increase participation and financial viability in sanctioned open water events.

USMS sanctions around 100 open water events and our average event has 140 participants.

Increasing the size of our open water events has several positive benefits:

- 1) more revenue for the host
- 2) more revenue available to spend on event safety
- 3) successful events provide motivation for the host to offer more events

Using the OEVT to help increase event size gives non-members exposure to USMS. While it is likely the non-member will not join that year, it creates the possibility they will join in future years.

The more events we offer, the greater the value exists for someone who only wants to do open water swims. Successful events may lead to more events, which may lead to increased membership. In a peer NGB, USA Triathlon, their rapid growth happened at the same time they rapidly increased the number of sanctioned events.

Membership

There has been little direct success shown by using the OEVT to grow membership. LMSC's that have tried writing to the OEVT user encouraging them to join have yielded low results. Offering discounts or credit for the fee paid have also yielded limited results.

Looking at this from the OEVT user's perspective, this is not surprising. The OEVT user pays the fee because they want to participate in a USMS event. The majority of OEVTs are used for open water events taking place during summer or early fall months. Our membership year ends Oct 31st. Thus, there is limited time left in the membership year and low motivation to purchase a membership during the year they compete under the OEVT membership.

Logically and factually, there is no support that the OEVT will help grow membership in the year that it is used. We do not have a way to track if membership is affected in future years. The decision should hinge on whether we want to provide event directors with a tool that can help them grow their events.

Threats

It has been often stated that the usage of the OEVT will hurt membership growth. In an attempt to evaluate this risk we looked at the LMSC's that use the OEVT membership. In 2009 there were 1520 OEVT's sold. In 2010, there were 1982 sold. 83% of the OEVT's are used by 12 LMSC's.

	OEVT's used	Growth 2008 - 2010
Arizona	647	27%
Colorado	199	-4%
Florida	197	10%
Georgia	43	28%
Gulf	97	17%
Hawaii	154	27%
Niagara	103	3%
Pacific Northwest	330	2%
Potomac Valley	496	26%
South Carolina	102	27%
Virginia	110	13%
Wisconsin	439	6%

During the same two-year period evaluated, the growth of USMS was 14%. Some LMSC's performed above this average, others below. However, there is no clear evidence in recent years that use of the OEVT limits membership growth. In fact, Arizona and Potomac Valley were the largest consumers of OEVT's used for open water events and both experienced very high growth rates.