



U.S. Angler Population: Who Comes and Who Goes

Report one of six in a series

Executive Summary

When it comes to sportfishing “churn”—anglers transitioning in and out of the sport from year to year—there’s good news and bad news, and both are surprising. The bad news is anglers are not nearly as avid as we like to think. The good news is there’s far more low-hanging fruit than we realize when it comes to growing the sport. These and other findings are explained in this report which is first in a series from the American Sportfishing Association by Southwick Associates that sheds greater light on anglers’ fishing habits and loyalty to the sport.

Overall fishing participation is relatively stable from year to year, annually hovering around 33 million people over the age of 16, easily giving the impression that anglers are consistently taking part in the sport.¹ Looking below the surface, however, the pool of individual anglers actually fluctuates greatly—about the same number of people joins and leaves the angling population each year. Not surprisingly, the study showed those most likely to come and go are female anglers, those between the ages of 18 and 24 years, and residents of urban communities. Other highlights include:

- **Die-hard anglers are a small group:** Out of the pool of roughly 33 million people who fish each year¹, only four percent of the licensed anglers purchase a fishing license every year (10 out of 10 years). The largest proportion of anglers—49 percent—purchases a license only one out of 10 years. Almost as many—47 percent—purchase a license in more than one year but lapse in between purchases.
- **Participation fluctuates greatly year-to-year:** Close to half of all licensed anglers (46%) do not renew their licenses in any given year. The typical angler buys a license about three out of every 10 years throughout their fishing lifetime. For resident license holders, 41 percent do not renew, while 63 percent of non-residents do not renew.
- **“R3” numbers:** Retained anglers, those who purchased a license in a given year and the previous one, are about 52 percent of the angling population. Recruited anglers, those who bought a license in a given year but not in at least five of the preceding years, are about 28 percent. The number of reactivated anglers is about 18 percent, with two percent of records unidentifiable. These are anglers who bought a license in a given year and at least one of the previous five years, but not the immediate preceding year.

¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, [2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation](http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/NatSurveyIndex.htm). 2013. <http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/NatSurveyIndex.htm>. Arlington, VA

- **Female anglers lapse more:** In recent years, the growing number of female anglers has received a great deal of attention, but the churn rate for women is still about 13 percent higher than the rate for men.

- **Younger anglers lapse more:** Annual churn rates are lowest, about 39 percent, among the 55-64 age group and are highest, about 55 percent, among anglers 18-24 years of age.

- **Urban residents lapse more:** The churn rate among residents of urban communities, who make up about 10 percent of the angling population, is about 13 percent higher than those anglers living in rural communities and about seven percent higher than those living in suburban communities.

To produce these insights, 10 years of fishing license data covering 2004 to 2013 were compiled and studied for 12 states (CO, FL, GA, ME, MI, MN, MS, MT, NH, NY, UT, and WI) to provide regionally and nationally representative portraits of anglers for this and future reports in the series.

