



The New Anglers: Who Are They? Why Did They Try? Will They Continue?

Report three of six in a series

Executive Summary

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Not many activities offer as many opportunities for tranquil relaxation or exhilarating surges of adrenaline, but both types of experiences have about equal appeal when it comes to fishing. This and other motivational factors are illuminated in this third report in a series examining sportfishing “churn,” a term that refers to anglers’ transitioning in and out of the sport from year to year.

Produced for the American Sportfishing Association by Southwick Associates and Responsive Management, sheds new light on anglers’ fishing habits and loyalty to the sport. This latest installment focuses on those new to the sport or trying it again after a long hiatus with detailed looks at demographic groups among recruited anglers versus retained ones. It also examines motivational and other factors influencing people’s decisions to fish.

As the first report in the series uncovered, the overall number of fishing participants remains quite stable from year to year, at around 33 million, but not because most anglers are avid. Rather it’s because about the same number of people joins and leaves the angling population each year. With recruited and reactivated anglers make up more than 40 percent of all fishing license holders in any given year, there’s huge potential to grow participation, tackle sales and angler-generated conservation funding if those millions of newcomers keep fishing year to year.

Younger, female, urban dwellers are more likely to be among the ranks of newly recruited anglers compared to retained anglers, who are much more likely to be male, rural residents, and over 35 years of age. Yet over the long term, there has been limited shift in the overall angler population towards those newcomer demographics due to the higher churn rates among them.

More than 80 percent of recruited anglers reported having fished previously in their lives, typically when they were quite young. They are frequently prompted to fish by family and friends, who also serve as their most common source of fishing information and instruction. These and other findings related to motivational factors tend to reassert previous research from the American Sportfishing Association and Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation. However, this report reveals significant differences between new anglers’ intentions and their actions; while the vast majority think they will fish every year, only a small proportion actually do. Other highlights include:

- **Women make up one-third of new anglers.** When it comes to recruited anglers, 65 percent are male and 35 percent are female. However, only 18 percent of retained anglers are female.

- **Newcomers are younger.** More than one-half of recruited anglers are under age 35, compared to 28 percent of retained anglers. Conversely, only 12 percent of recruited anglers are between the ages of 55 and 64, compared to 22 percent of retained anglers.
- **Recruited anglers tend to live in more populous communities.** The largest portion of recruited anglers, about 47 percent, lives in suburban neighborhoods. However, the proportion of recruited anglers between the ages of 18-24 years is greatest in rural areas while the proportion of recruited anglers between the ages of 25-34 years is greatest in urban areas.
- **Recreational togetherness is a strong appeal.** The top three reasons people fish are to spend time with family and friends, to relax, and for the sport or recreation. For new recruits, the opportunity for relaxation is a strong driver while avid anglers tend to be in it for the excitement.
- **Age of introduction matters.** More than 80 percent of recruited anglers in the survey year reported it was not the first year they'd ever fished. Among those, more than a third tried the sport when they were five years old or younger. In fact, more than half of anglers who fish year after year say they first started fishing when they were five years old or younger.

These findings are based on a comprehensive examination of state fishing license data covering a 10-year period, from 2004-2013, and a five-year period, from 2009- 2013, for 12 states (CO, FL, GA, ME, MI, MN, MS, MT, NH, NY, UT, and WI) to provide a regionally and nationally representative portrait of anglers. Some additional data comes from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation* from 2001-2011. More information on ESRI's Tapestry™ segmentation, also used in compiling this report, is provided in this report and available at <http://doc.arcgis.com/en/esri-demographics/data/tapestry-segmentation.htm>.

