

WHY ANGLERS QUIT AND HOW CAN WE IMPROVE RETENTION RATES



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Less than half of licensed anglers renew their fishing license each year.*

To identify how to boost angler retention rates, we must answer:

- 01 *Why do many anglers quit?*
- 02 *What do they do in the years they do not fish and why?*
- 03 *How can we encourage anglers to keep fishing?*

Major findings and recommendations summarized in this report are based on a detailed assessment of lapsed anglers conducted in 2024 combined with other recent research. Lapsed anglers were identified for the survey through state fishing license data from 24 states.

Visit www.ASAfishing.org for the full 37-page report for detailed results and methods.

These results reflect anglers 18 years and older.

** source: [Hunting and Fishing License Data Dashboard](#)*

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Understanding why anglers often quit fishing is aided by knowing **why they originally started fishing**.

Previous research (ASA 2020; RBFF 2024) shows top motivations and benefits of fishing include:

- Fun/excitement
- Relaxation
- To socialize with others
- To be outdoors

Anglers don't seek all these but want to achieve **one or more** when fishing.



WHY DO ANGLERS QUIT FISHING?

Lapsed anglers do not dislike fishing, but they perceive other activities as providing greater recreational benefits (fun, relaxation, social, and/or outdoor experiences).

Often, other recreational activities are chosen if they are seen as:

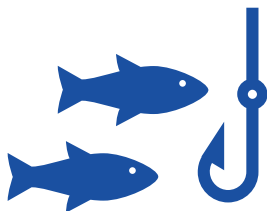
- **easier** to learn,
- more **convenient**, or
- preferred by **family and friends**.

“ Lack of basic fishing skills, not knowing where to fish, and not having someone to fish remain critical problems. ”

Beginning adult anglers are less enthusiastic and quicker to quit in favor of other activities.



Promoting the social and fun benefits of fishing are key for ***recruiting*** new anglers.



Ensuring new anglers **successfully catch fish** may be critical for ***retaining*** them.

By finally catching fish, some discover and embrace the thrills unique to fishing.

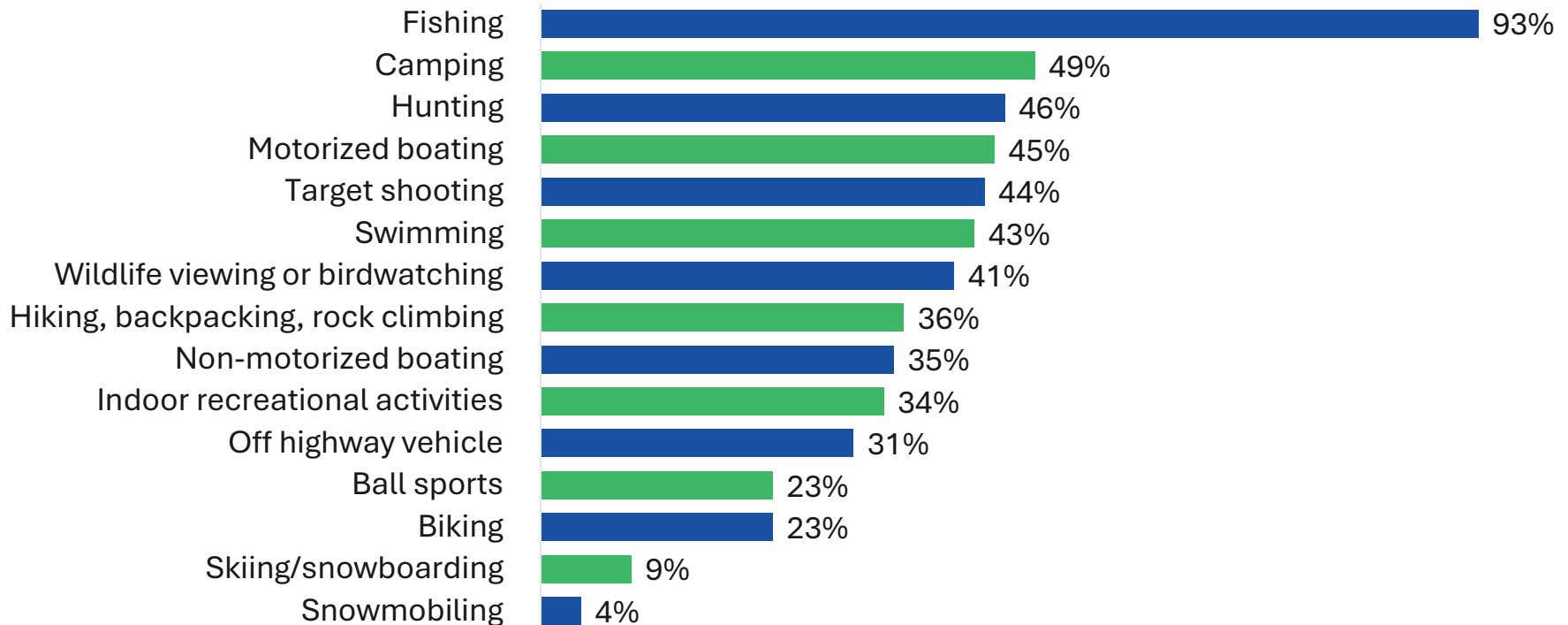
Fishing can require specialized knowledge and equipment not available to beginners. Fishing with an experienced angler or obtaining input and support from experts is critical to winning new anglers.

WHAT COMPETES FOR ANGLERS' ATTENTION?

Other outdoor activities are fishing's primary competition.

Indoor recreational activities, including video games, shopping, and cooking, ranked **10 out of 15** in tested competing activities.

Engaged in most enjoyable activity in the last two years



SPECIFIC BARRIERS

Travel distance, not knowing where to fish, and not having someone to fish with are greater barriers for lapsed anglers under 34 years old versus older anglers.

Females ranked fishing as being **more difficult to learn and more expensive** compared to other recreational activities.

Many lapsed anglers report fishing is still their top preferred activity, even in the years they do not fish. **Initiatives focused on angler retention and reactivation, done properly, are encouraged.**



RECOMMENDATIONS: RETAINING ANGLERS



Take them fishing!

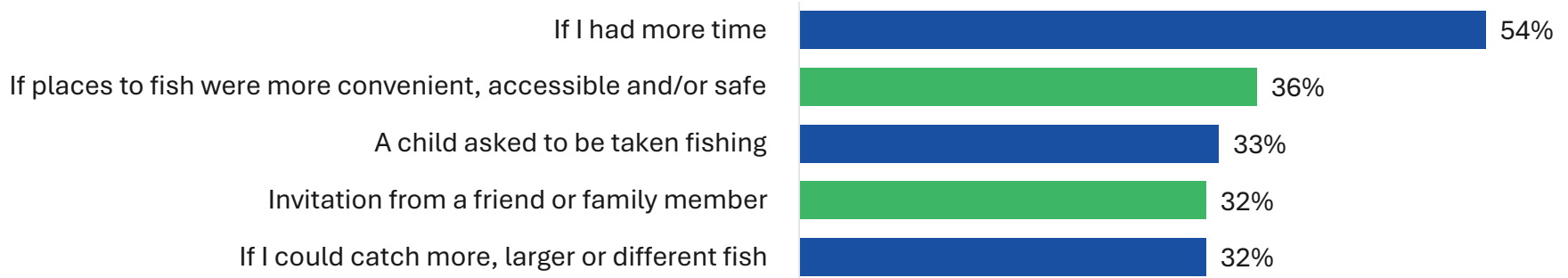
Help new and lapsed anglers know where, when, and how to fish locally – in-person whenever possible.



When it is not possible to match new or lapsed anglers with other anglers:

- Develop fishing programs/promotions to encourage people to attend with friends and family.
- Take fishing education efforts where friends and social networks already exist (e.g., schools, scouts, camps).
- Provide information that helps them succeed in catching fish.

Top 5 Things That Would Encourage People to Continue Fishing



RECOMMENDATIONS: RETAINING ANGLERS



Though motivations to fish vary, an overarching motivation is to catch a fish.

Experiencing the thrill of catching a fish may be key to *recruiting* new anglers.

As anglers gain experience, the desire to catch many or trophy fish increases. Helping them learn how to catch more and/or larger fish may be key in *retaining* anglers.



Partner with local tackle retailers!

They are a *top trusted source* of local fishing information and support. Tackle retailers trust state agencies (RBFF and SA 2024) and *half* report they are open to partnering with state agencies.



Help friends make plans to fish with friends:

- Use of RBFF's tested, science-based marketing materials and services is highly encouraged.
- Read the full technical report for possible ideas for improving your specific efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS: PROGRAMS & PROMOS

For those who do not have a fishing mentor, offer hands-on fishing programs.

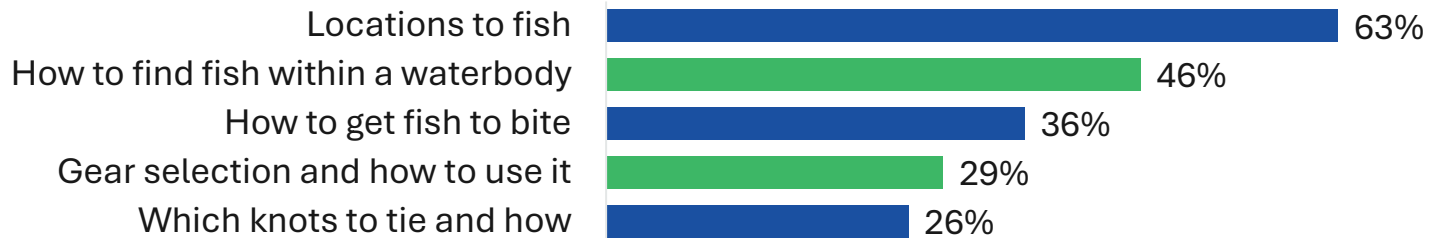
- Small groups of 2-9 people are preferred by lapsed and novice anglers.
- Males are more likely to accept virtual on-demand classes.

A report on the relative merits of online vs in-person R3 education programs is available from Sportsmen's Alliance/MAFWA research.

Top education topics noted by lapsed anglers include where and how to fish locally.

- Novices want info on gear selection and how to clean and cook fish.
- Females were more likely to want lessons on knots.

Top 5 Education Topics



Preferred media platforms include state fish agency websites and YouTube.

- Provide promotions and instructional materials through these resources.
- Make online navigation to desired information easy.
- Keep the website up to date.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

American Sportfishing Association and Southwick Associates (2025). *Why Anglers Quit and How Can We Improve Retention Rates*. Funded by Multi-State Conservation Grant F24AP00087 as part of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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