

WHERE IS DEMAND FOR SPORTFISHING THE GREATEST?

MAINE'S REPORT



This Project was funded by a Multistate Conservation Grant (F25AP00181-00) from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and jointly administered with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.



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In a continuous cycle, people take up fishing while others quit. Simultaneously, people move from place to place, transforming communities in the process. As these changes occur, demand for sportfishing access also shifts across communities. Insight from this research will provide state R3 programs and their partners a valuable tool to find potential new anglers, identify convenient access points, and initiate marketing campaigns that focus on those areas.

Identifying areas where **unmet fishing demand is currently greatest** and **access points are most needed**, while also **characterizing communities** where anglers live to provide geographically specific marketing strategies uses three key approaches:

- **Resident angler license purchase data:** Fishing license sales of any type from 2015 through 2024 were provided and explored in two ways. The first, through a 10-year and 5-year look-back period. The second, through an R3-based purchase/demographic profile, with additional details provided on the next slide. All customers who met the study's age requirement, holding any type of licenses, from one-day to annual, were considered.
- **Mapping and Tapestry™ lifestyle data:** To gain a spatial perspective about purchase profiles, the address data from a representative sample of the license records were mapped using ArcGIS tools available through ESRI and each address was assigned a Tapestry™ lifestyle segment. ESRI's Tapestry Segmentation identifies 67 distinctive markets in the US based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics to provide an accurate, comprehensive profile of communities.
- **Waterbody locations and access:** To explore what angler access and fishing opportunities exist within the state, another layer of information was added to the maps: mapped waterbodies from the U.S. Geological Survey. By using this data in combination with the state's fish & wildlife agency's fishing information, it was possible to investigate how fishing opportunity might align with angler population density.



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ANGLER LICENSE DATA & R3 CATEGORY

The ten-year purchase history data enabled an exploration of the angling population within the state beyond a simple license holder distribution. Each license holder was categorized in a way that aligned with R3 efforts and placed into one of three categories based on their license purchase history during the last decade. Results specific to R3 categories are reflective of a random sample of 120,000 anglers, split evenly amongst the three categories.

Angler R3 Categories	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
New (Recruit)	No purchases								At least 1 purchase	
Steady (Retain)	At least 2 purchases					At least 1 purchase			At least 1 purchase	
Lapsed (Reactivate)	No purchases			No more than 2 purchases					No purchases	
	At least 5 purchases								No purchases	

Notes:

- Categories were designed to be mutually exclusive and conceptualized to develop actionable recommendations for state fish and wildlife agencies. As such, some anglers did not fall within a category, including many one-time license purchasers or anglers not requiring the purchase of a license due age restrictions (e.g., youth or seniors). Age restrictions were applied to ensure accurate classification: anglers in “New” category must be 21 or older to exclude first-time youth license buyers, while “Steady” and “Lapsed” anglers must be at least 25 years or older.
- The license data used for this study was collected from states, cleaned and processed so that the remaining data sample consisted of resident anglers who had purchased at least one fishing license during the 10-year timeframe. Missing data fields for personal identifying information resulted in a license holder being removed from the final sample.

Results are organized into three sections in this report:

- **Anglers by city:** License holder population distribution across the state
- **Anglers by R3 category:** Categorized license holder population distribution and characteristics by age, gender, urbanization, and Tapestry segment
- **Augusta Case Study:** License holder population distribution in the focal area and R3 category by Tapestry segment

A companion workbook with detailed tables is also provided separately.

RESULTS: ANGLERS BY CITY

Maine has experienced geographical shifts in its angler population along the urban-rural continuum over the past decade, with an increasing share of licensed anglers residing in metropolitan core areas. However less than a fifth of anglers live in metropolitan core areas. Majority of anglers reside in rural areas, followed by metropolitan commuting. Therefore, increasing access and awareness of fishing opportunities in both urban and rural areas could have an outsized effect on angler participation.

Urban-Rural Classification of Resident License Holder Address			
Urban-Rural Classification*	Percent of Angling Population (10-year average)	Angler Percent Change (2015 – 2024)	Angler Percent Change (2019 – 2024)
Metropolitan core	18.5%	6.1%	4.6%
Metropolitan commuting	24.8%	0.9%	-0.6%
Micropolitan/Small cities/Suburbs	16.3%	-1.7%	-2.2%
Small Town	7.4%	-4.9%	-1.7%
Rural	32.8%	-1.7%	-0.5%

**To designate a location as metropolitan, micropolitan, and small town/rural, the latest processed census data from 2020 was leveraged and aggregated from ten categories to five for reporting purposes, Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes - Documentation | Economic Research Service.*

RESULTS: ANGLERS BY CITY

Reflected in the table are the top ten cities with the largest proportion of licensed anglers in 2024. The highest percentage of anglers in the state are found in Bangor but followed fairly closely by the other top nine cities (column A). Naturally these areas also hold more of the state's population generally (column D).

Across the decade from 2015 to 2024, overall populations have grown (column E), while angler license holder numbers has declined over roughly the same time frame (column B).

City Name*	A Percent of all anglers in 2024	B Angler Percent Change (2015 - 2024)	C Angler Percent Change (2019 - 2024)	D Percent of Total Population (2024)	E Total Population Percent Change (2015-2024)**
Bangor	2.6%	-9.8%	-8.0%	3.2%	-0.3%
Augusta	1.9%	-14.1%	-8.8%	1.9%	3.7%
Portland	1.8%	-6.2%	-1.6%	4.8%	3.6%
Lewiston	1.6%	-10.8%	-7.1%	2.7%	5.4%
Waterville	1.6%	-13.8%	-14.6%	2.0%	5.8%
Windham	1.4%	-10.9%	-7.3%	1.4%	9.9%
Auburn	1.4%	-7.4%	-7.6%	1.8%	7.4%
Biddeford	1.2%	-5.1%	-6.8%	1.8%	7.3%
Ellsworth	1.2%	-3.1%	-11.0%	1.0%	10.4%
Gorham	1.1%	-8.1%	-12.4%	1.3%	8.7%

Note: To a certain extent the percent change in license holders reflects a variability in license records due to incomplete data for Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in earlier years. Additionally, percent changes may be exaggerated in cities with small angler populations, where even minor changes can produce large percentage shifts. Interpret results alongside each cities' overall share of anglers.

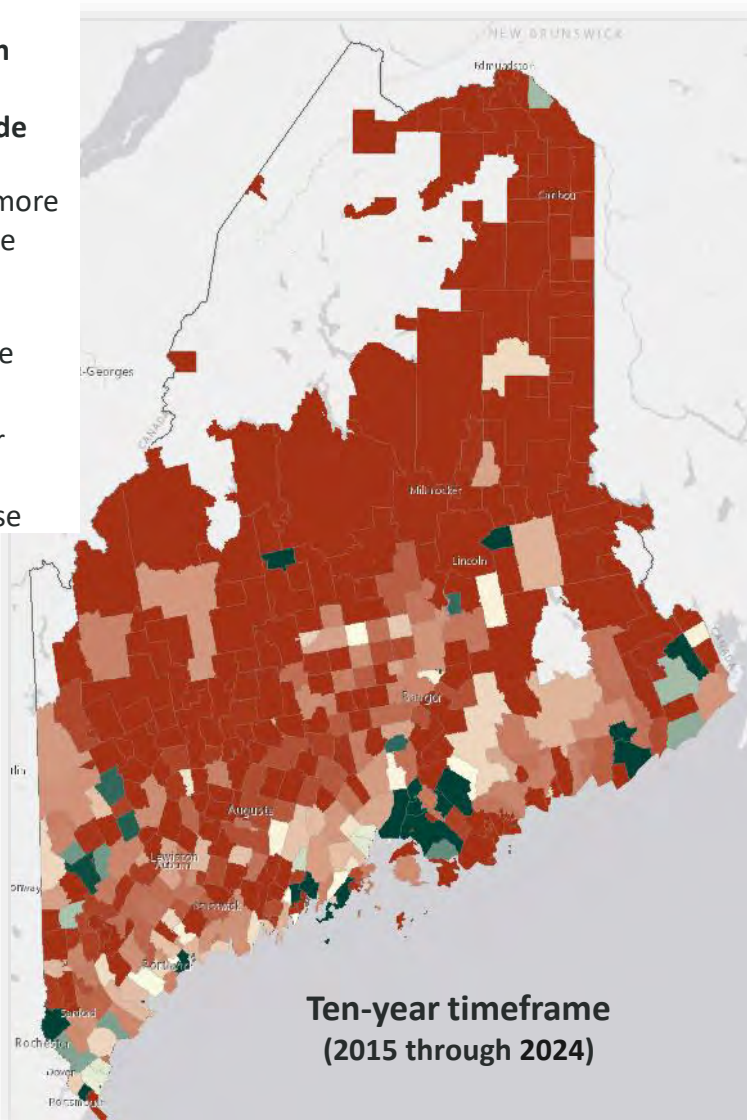
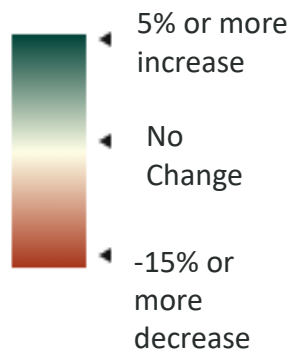
*Represents the top ten cities across the angling population in the state.

**Population data provided by the Census American Community Survey (ACS).

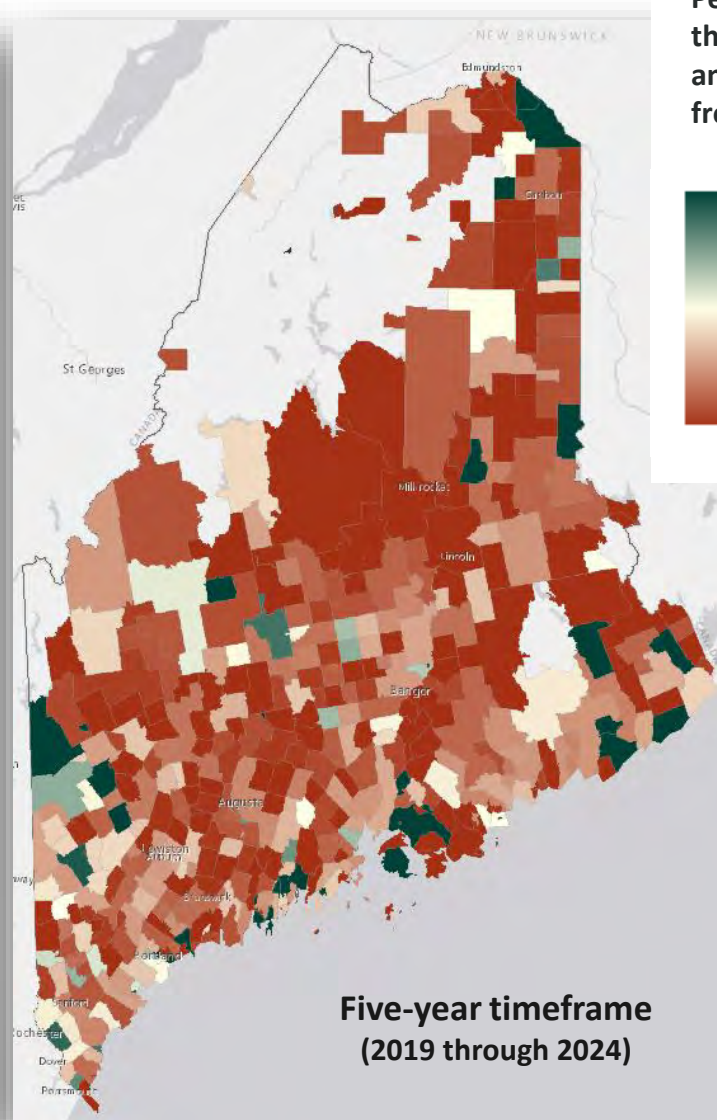
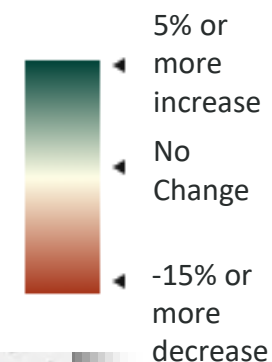
RESULTS: ANGLER CHANGE BY CITY

These two maps broaden the geographical scope. Over the last 10 years, the areas with the smallest percent decline in anglers are coastal cities. In the last 5 years, however, Maine experienced decline but to a lesser extent in anglers across most areas. The exception being Augusta, home the state's capital. Readers who would like to open interactive versions of any maps in this report can do so with this state-specific story map ([ME StoryMap](#)).

Percent change in
the number of
anglers by zip code
from 2015-2024



Percent change in
the number of
anglers by zip code
from 2019-2024



Note: To a certain extent the percent change in license holders reflects a variability in license records due to incomplete data for Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in earlier years.



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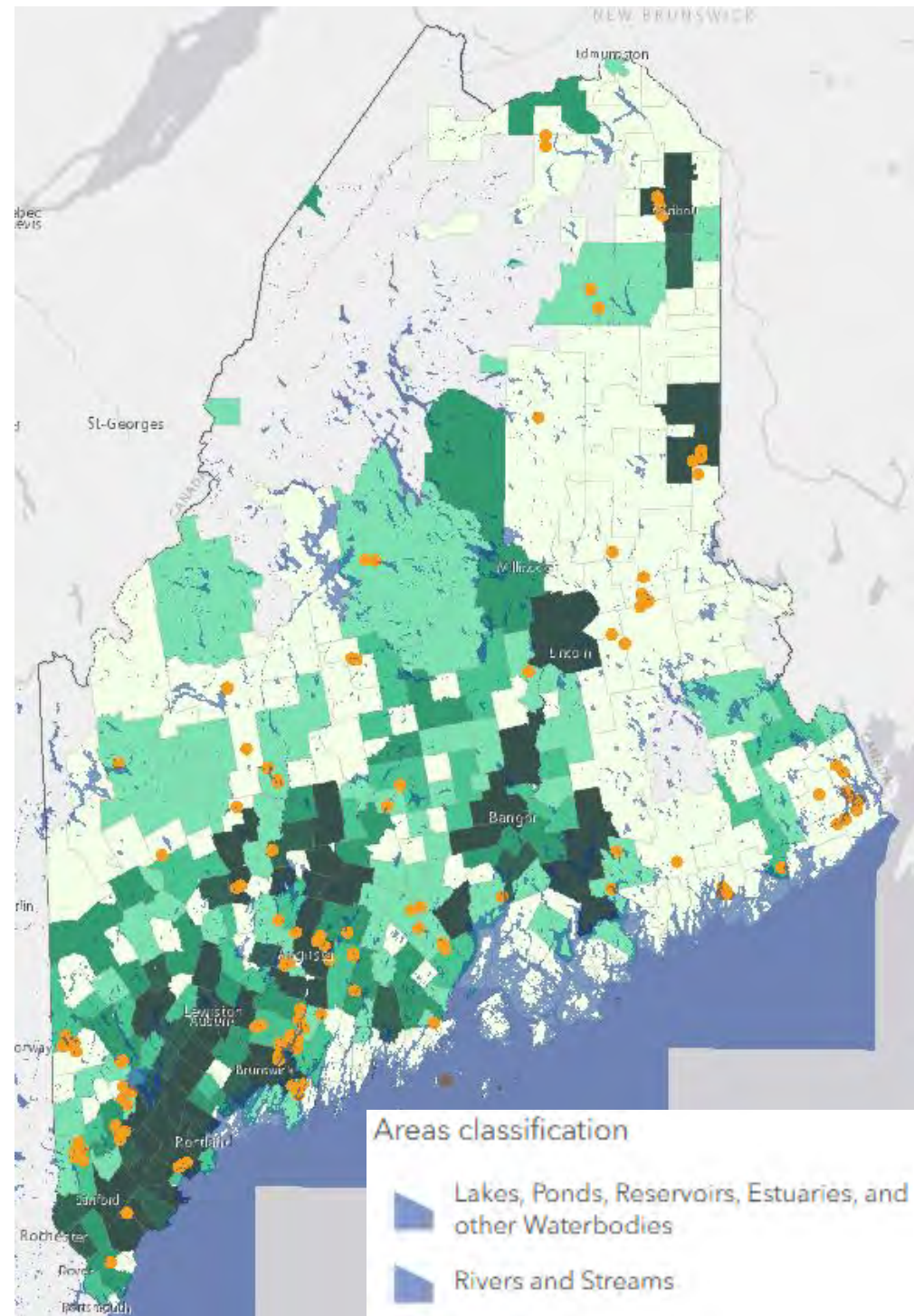
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RESULTS: ANGLERS & FISHING OPPORTUNITY

The decision to try or return to fishing may not be driven by the presence of opportunity. Decision drivers may instead be access, awareness, crowding, or the perceived ease of trying something new. Each orange dot indicates the location of either a wildlife management area (WMA) or a public boat ramp.

Maine's angler population correlates with population centers (Portland, Augusta, Bangor). Improving access to and awareness of local fishing opportunities, particularly in urban areas, can help to support the existing angling community and the initial learning phases someone needs to try fishing.

Percent of Anglers in 2024 by Zip Code



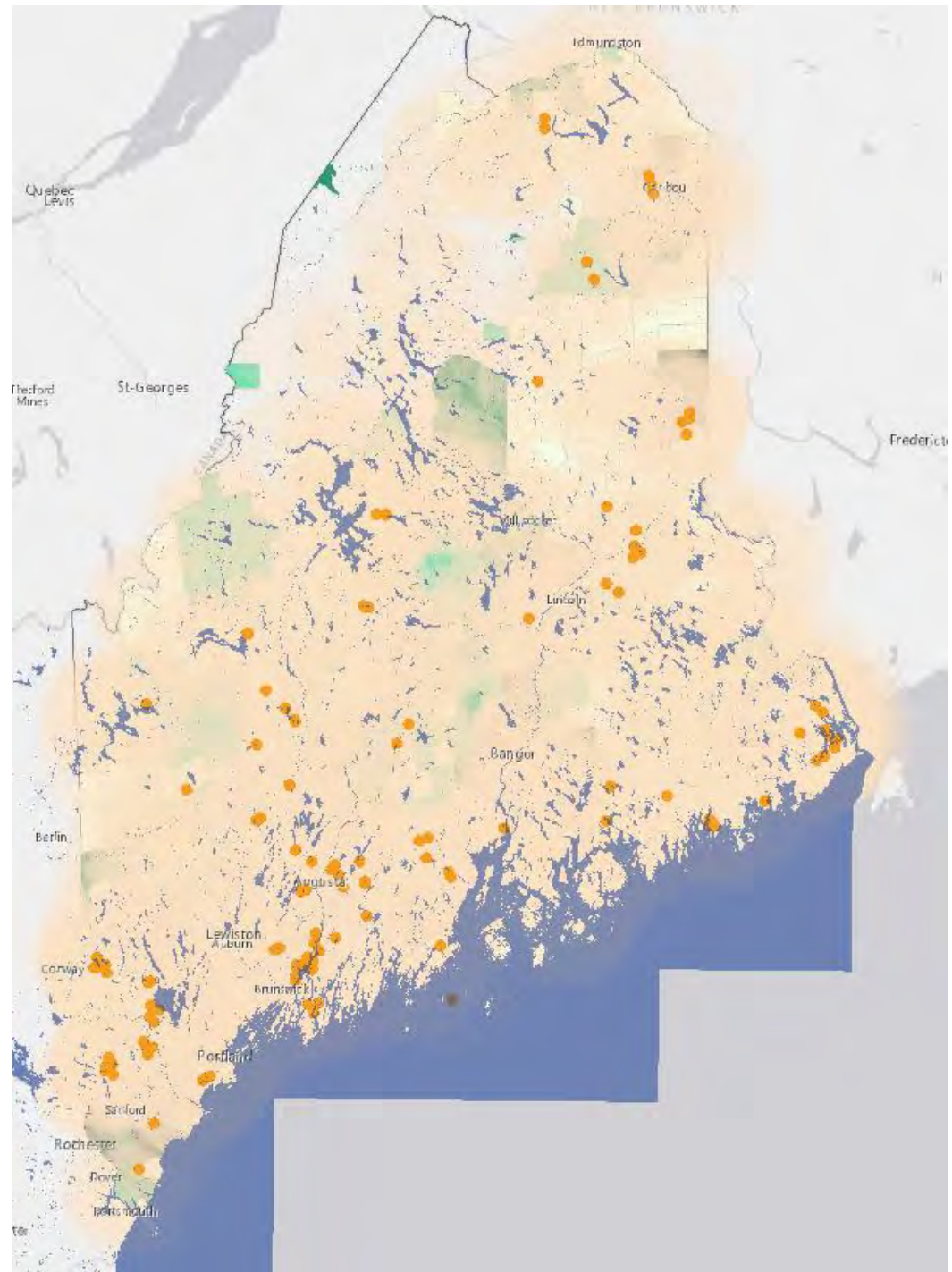
RESULTS: ANGLERS & FISHING OPPORTUNITY (ACCESS)

Many outdoor activities compete for limited recreational time. Travel distance to outdoor recreational activities influences the chosen activity. In Maine, 2/3rds of its resident anglers have more than 15 fishing access sites within 15 miles of their home location.

Access point →
15-mile straight line buffer →

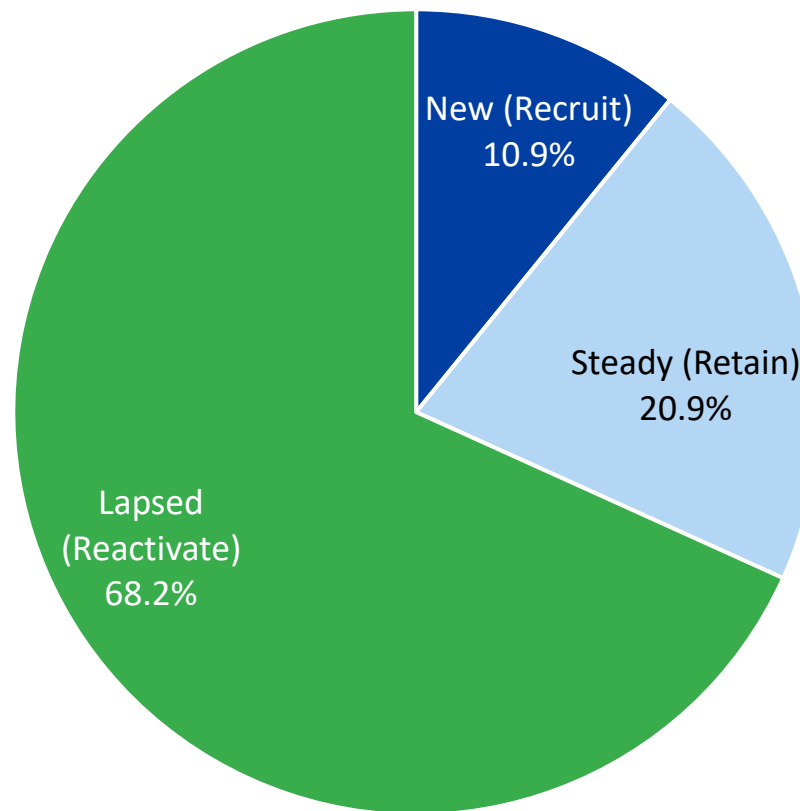
Number of Public Access Sites Within 15 miles of Angler	Percent of Anglers
None	0.0%
1 to 5	4.1%
6 to 10	10.3%
11 to 15	19.3%
More than 15	66.2%

Wherever possible, efforts to create fishing access in areas with no current access would likely increase the interest of residents, thereby recruiting more anglers.



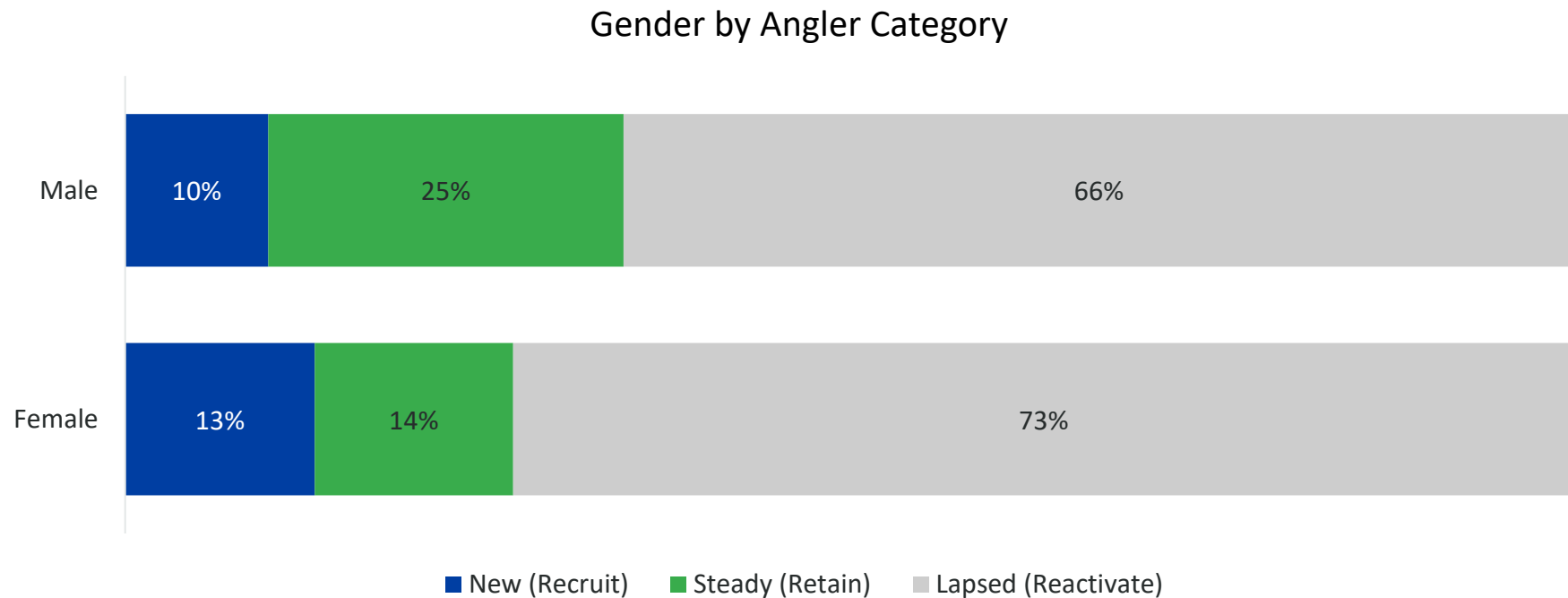
RESULTS: ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

More than 420,000 anglers were classified into one of the three R3 categories. Over half of Maine's angler population is lapsed, meaning they didn't purchase a license in 2023 or 2024 despite having purchased in previous years. This represents a significant opportunity to re-engage with the angling population in the state. In the next pages, we'll explore the gender, age, urban-rural, and geographic specifics of these angler categories.



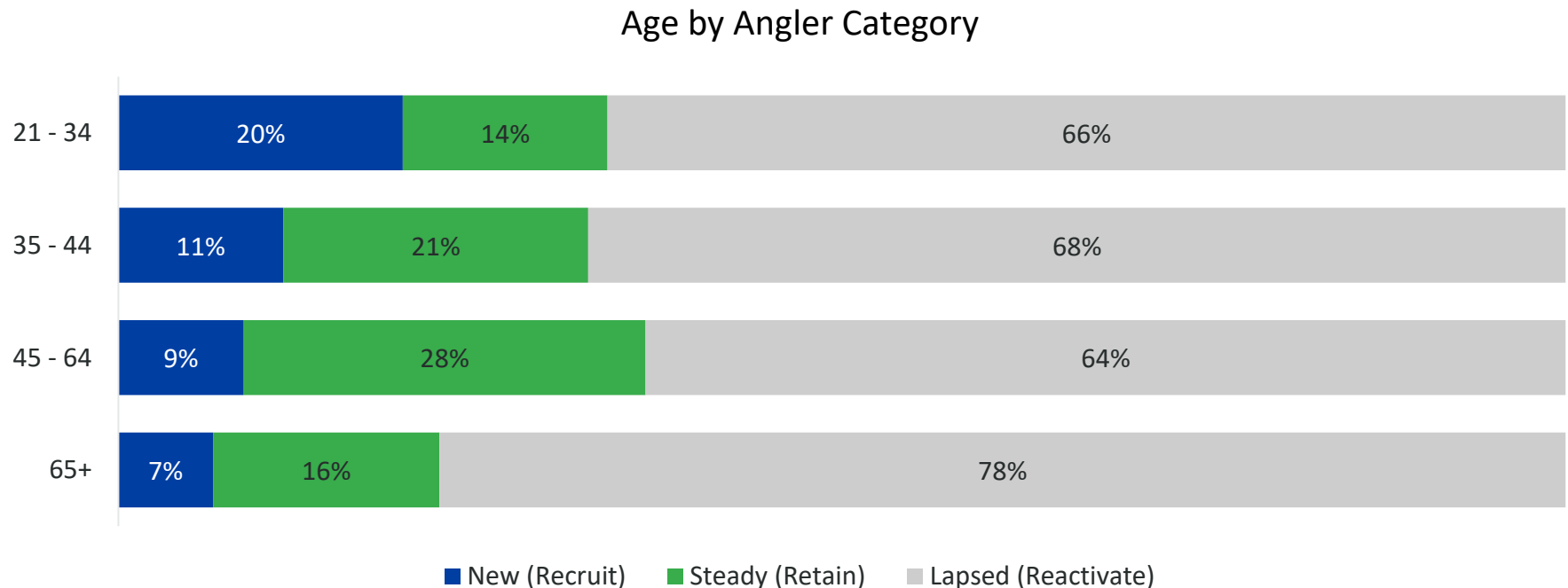
RESULTS: GENDER BY ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

Like many states, Maine's angler population over the last decade is predominantly male, with men comprising roughly two times as many anglers as women. Proportionally, male anglers make up a large share of steady anglers while female anglers are more likely to be lapsed. In recent years females are entering fishing at a slightly higher rate than males, accounting for a larger share of new anglers. Maine should prioritize reactivating anglers of both genders and improve retention among female anglers.



RESULTS: AGE BY ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

Maine's most steady anglers are in the 45-64 age range, likely because adults in this age range are no longer caretaking young children and they have more time available for recreation. Younger adults aged 21 – 34 are more likely to be new anglers or lapsed, while older anglers aged 65+ are most likely to be lapsed. R3 efforts should focus on retention support for young anglers and reactivating strategies for lapsed anglers of all age groups.

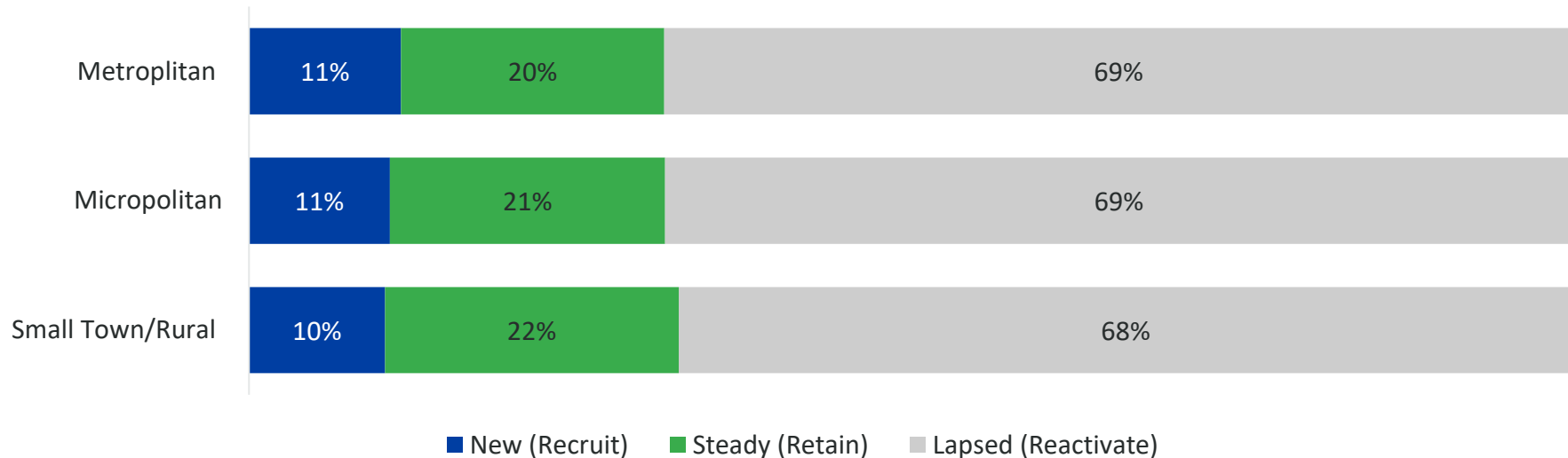


Note: The R3 category system applies age restrictions to ensure multi-year behavior is captured. For example, anglers categorized as “New” in 2025 must be at least 21, which helps exclude individuals who were previously fishing but only recently required a license due to the minimum age requirement of 16.

RESULTS: URBANIZATION BY ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

In Maine, urban–rural classification does not meaningfully influence whether anglers are new, steady, or lapsed. This indicates that R3 strategies can be applied consistently statewide rather than tailored by urbanization level.

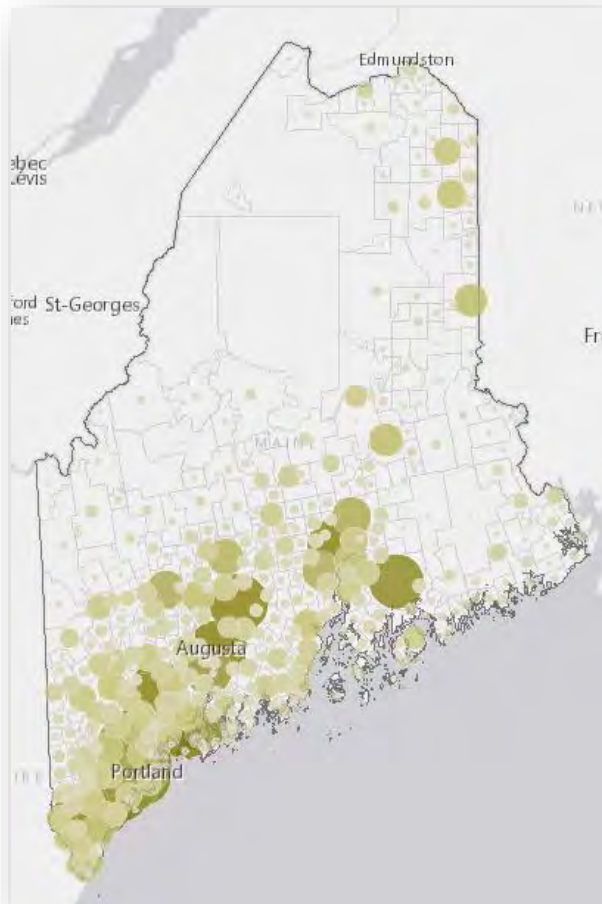
Urban-Rural Classification of Resident License Holder Address by R3 Category



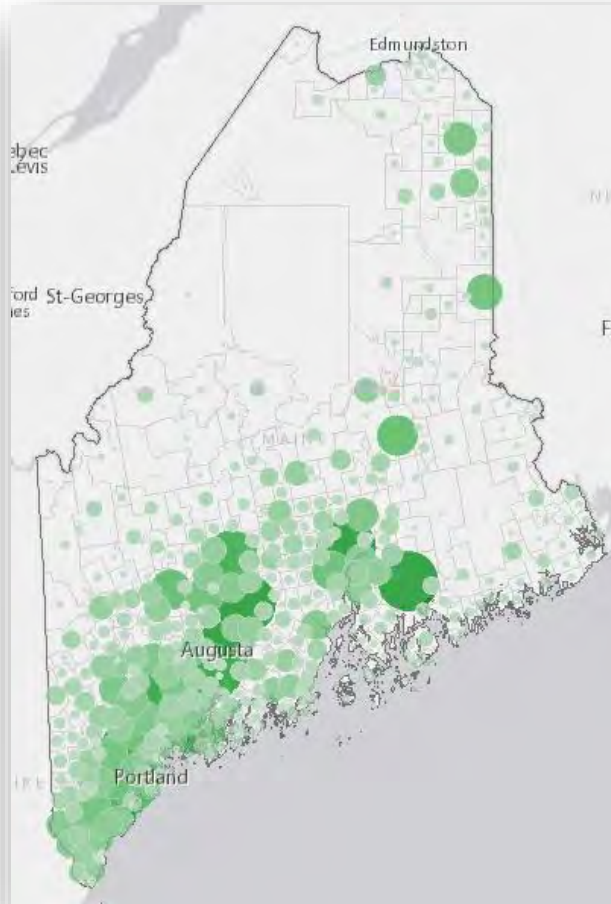
RESULTS: ANGLER R3 CATEGORY BY ZIP CODE

Ultimately, this project is meant to help guide state efforts to find potential new anglers, identify areas where demand for access might be growing, initiate marketing campaigns that focus on those areas, and inform the location of new sportfishing access. Mapping license holders within each R3 category reinforces the finding that new or lapsed anglers are proportionally less likely to reside inside Maine's more rural areas.

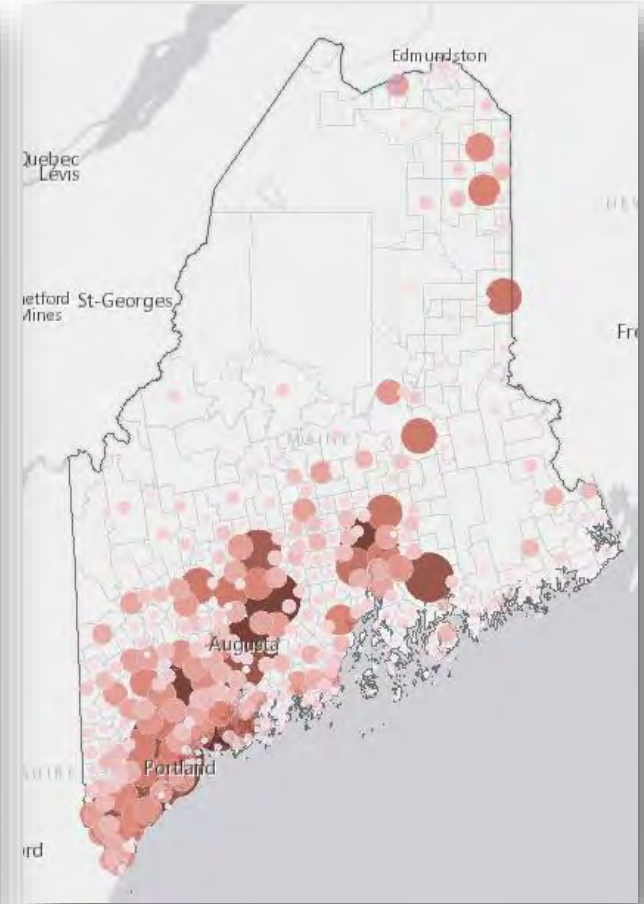
New anglers (Recruit)



Steady anglers (Retain)



Lapsed anglers (Reactivate)



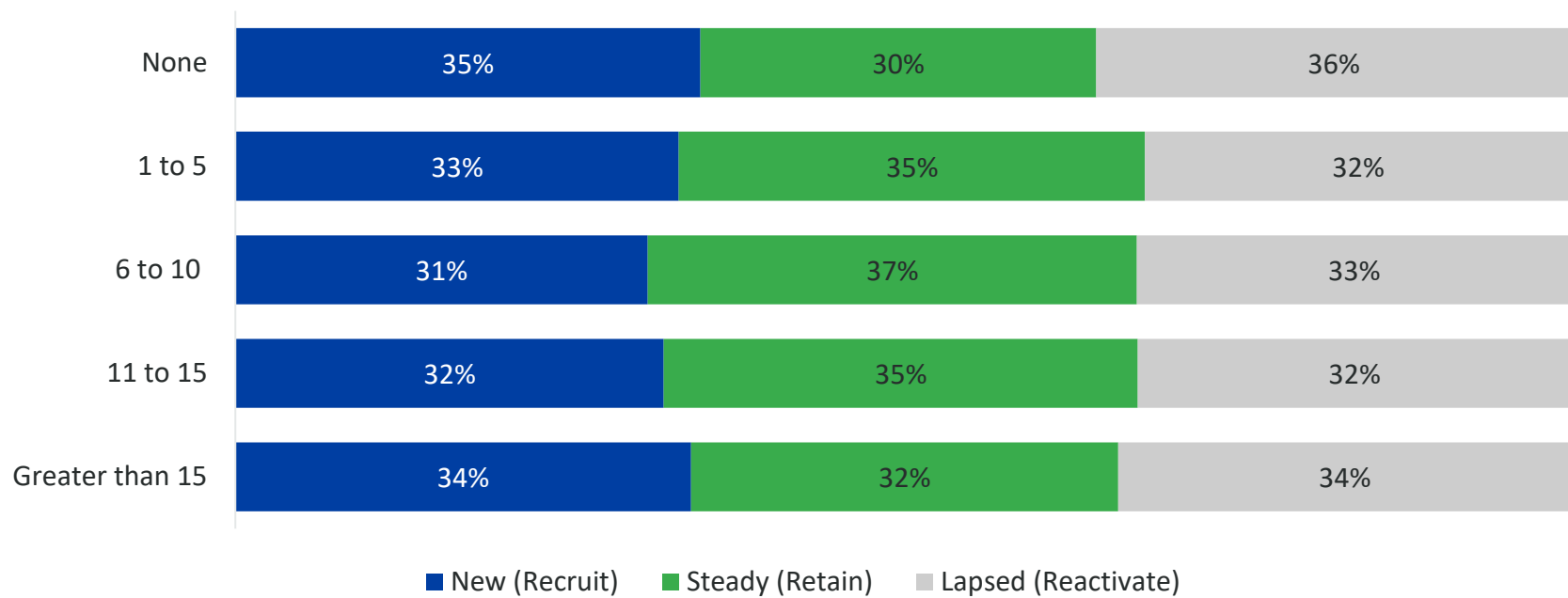
Maps are developed using a representative sample of all license holders.

Dots are sized according to total number of anglers in the indicated angler category in that zip code.

RESULTS: ANGLER R3 CATEGORY & ACCESS POINTS

The quantity of access points seems to have a limited effect on R3 categories. Decision drivers to try or return to fishing may not be the presence of opportunity. They may instead be awareness or even crowding. Quality of the access point and the fish and wildlife habitat at the site cannot be measured through these data but surely are part of the decision to fish at a site or not.

Number of Available Access Points within 15 mile buffer by Angler Category



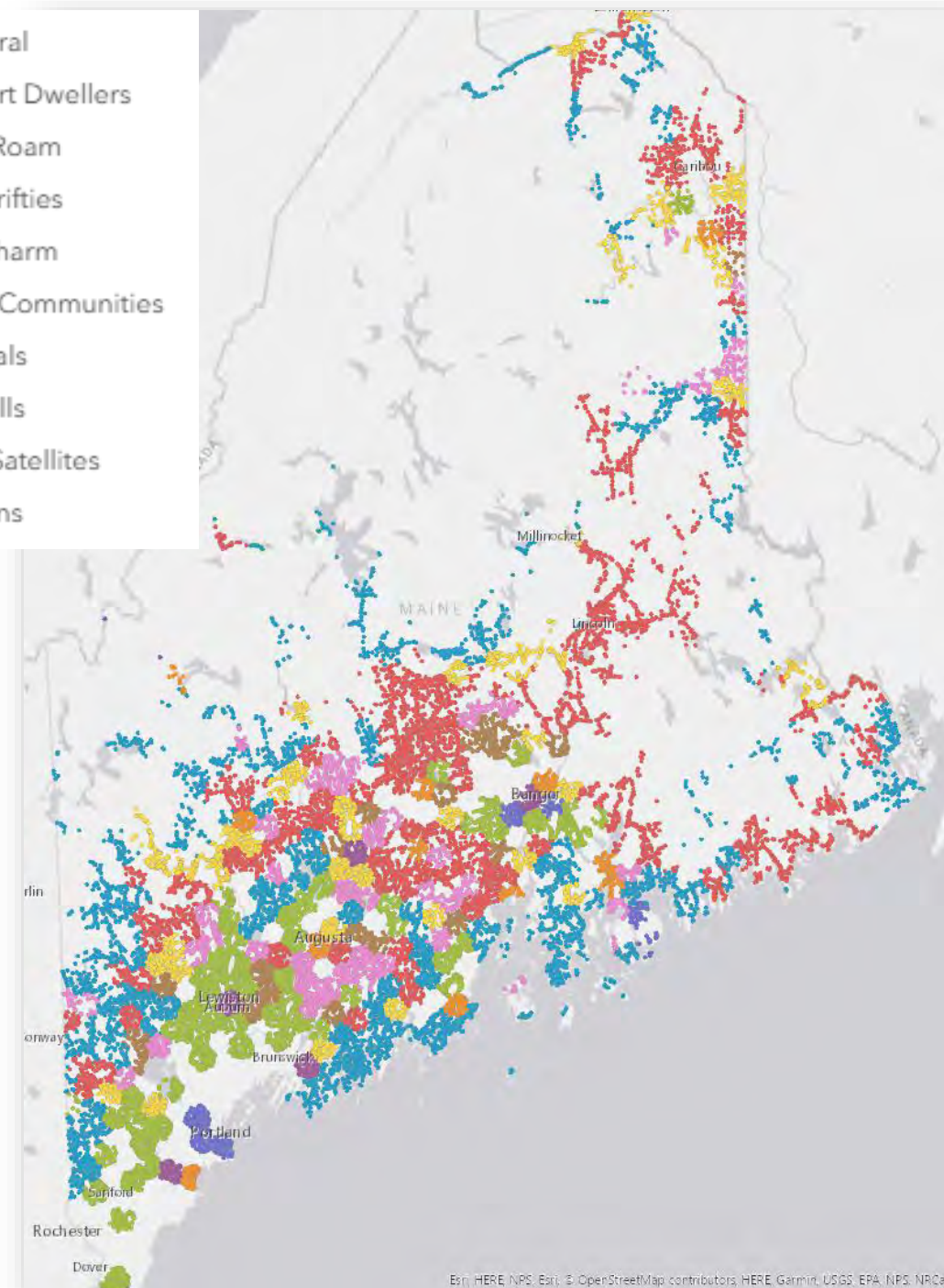
RESULTS: TOP ANGLER TAPESTRY SEGMENTS

Significant lifestyle differences can exist between two people of the same age, gender, and income. Lifestyle analyses help describe a state's angler population, including their current stages in life, their recreational and hobby preferences, financial status, purchasing, entertainment preferences, and more.

The top ten Tapestry segments are mapped here. Areas without a Tapestry segment displayed signify the presence of Tapestry communities with smaller populations within the angler community and/or the overall state population.

The results show Maine has a rich mix of communities.

- I4: Rooted Rural
- I5: Rural Resort Dwellers
- K7: Room to Roam
- C1: Single Thrifties
- I7: Country Charm
- I3: Heartland Communities
- K3: Loyal Locals
- K1: Legacy Hills
- I6: Southern Satellites
- K6: City Greens



Map developed using a representative sample of all license holders.



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Esri | HERE | NPS | Esri | OpenStreetMap contributors | HERE | Garmin | USGS | EPA | NPS | NRCan

RESULTS: TOP TAPESTRY SEGMENTS BY CITY

The Rooted Rural segment made up the highest percentage of anglers in 2024, followed closely by Rural Resort Dwellers and Room to Roam segments. Across all three, there is decreasing participation. The Single Thrifties segment over indexes within the angler population relative to total population and has shown substantive growth over the last decade. Targeted messaging to the segments experiencing organic growth could support the continued increase in participation from these groups. The next page shares more about the Single Thrifties segment.

Tapestry Code	Name*	Percent of Anglers in 2024***	Angler Percent Change (2015 -2024)***	Angler Percent Change (2019 – 2024)***	Percent of Total Population (2025)
I4	Rooted Rural	14.5%	-6.7%	-6.4%	9.9%
I5	Rural Resort Dwellers	12.3%	-5.2%	-4.3%	9.3%
K7	Room to Roam**	12.1%	-4.5%	-6.8%	9.8%
C1	Single Thrifties	5.7%	18.1%	15.1%	2.7%
I7	Country Charm	5.2%	-5.7%	-10.9%	5.3%
K3	Loyal Locals	4.7%	0.0%	1.5%	3.2%
I3	Heartland Communities**	4.6%	-10.7%	-5.2%	5.4%
I6	Southern Satellites**	4.3%	-5.7%	-4.2%	4.3%
K1	Legacy Hills	4.3%	13.9%	13.6%	3.2%
K6	City Greens**	3.7%	17.4%	21.7%	6.0%

**Tapestry Segmentation information can be found in the state companion workbook and via ESRI's Segment Infographics Dashboard.*

*** = segment enjoys outdoor activities*

****Tables developed using a representative sample of all license holders.*

RESULTS: SINGLE THRIFTIES TAPESTRY SEGMENT

The Tapestry segmentation process paints a picture of the type of community an angler lives in and identifies their most likely habits and preferences. For example:

	Tapestry Segment C1 Single Thrifties	5.7% of ME anglers* 2.7% of ME population
• Live in or near large and midsize metropolitan areas • Predominately in their 20s and 30s with households comprising singles, couples without children, and nonfamily members • Neighborhoods experience moderate growth and high mobility; notable portion are recent immigrants • Short commutes with many carpooling, biking, or walking to work • Shop for deals nearby, prioritizing generic brands over brand-name foods if they are less expensive • Likely to own a smartphone and purchase TVs and gaming systems • Follow professional sports on radio and television, and social media use is prevalent • Tend to cook meals at home as well as frequent fast food restaurants		

With these insights, R3 messaging topics that would best resonate are:

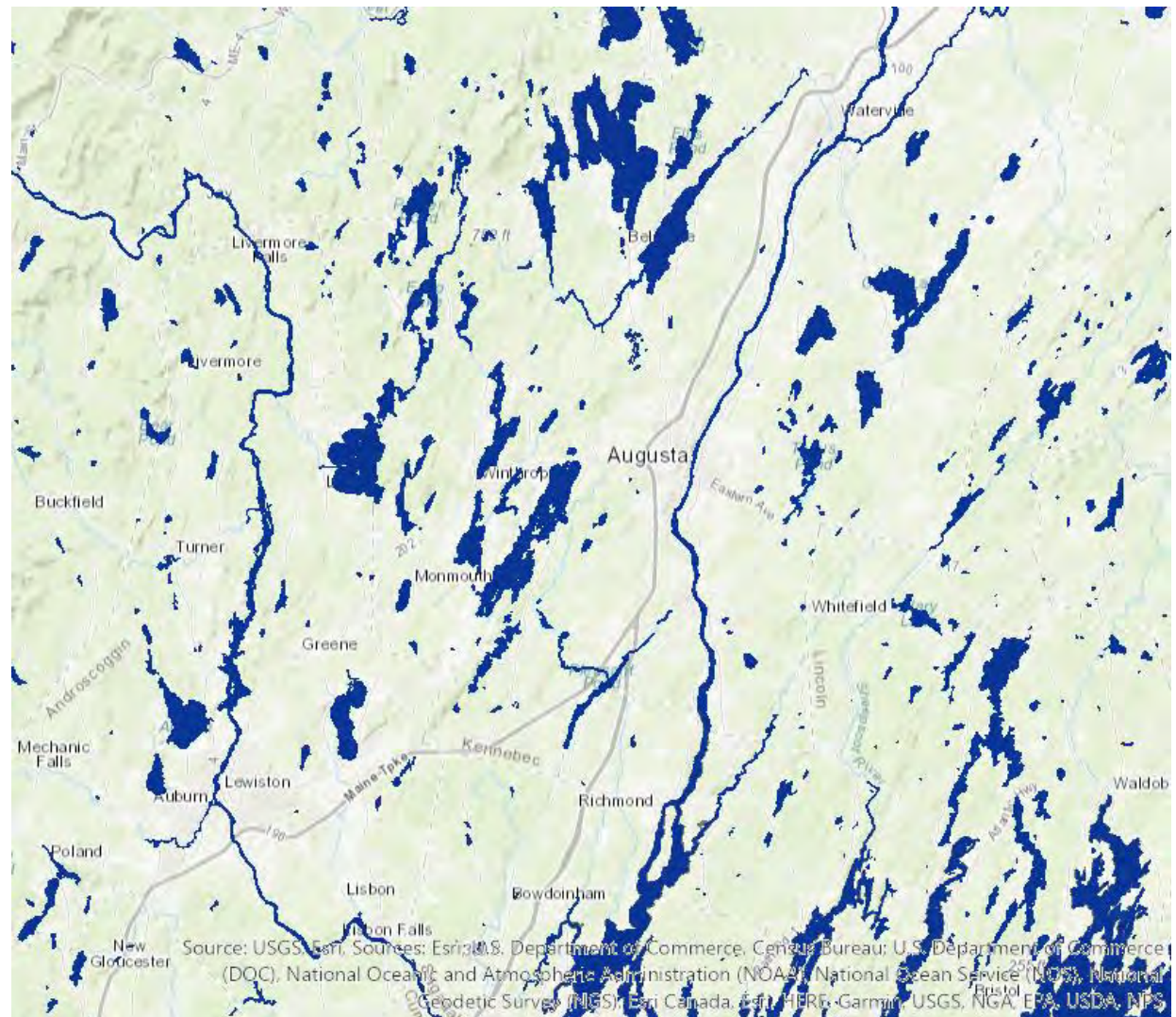
- Identify fishing as a way to **source ingredients for fresh home-cooked** meals
- Highlighting the **affordability** of a fishing license and a local family fishing trip

*Estimates reflect the 2024 population
Data provided by ESRI's Segment Infographics Dashboard.

CASE STUDY: AUGUSTA

Agencies frequently reach out to their angler population to encourage license renewals. However, fishing as an outdoor recreational activity competes with a host of other outdoor activities. The results presented in this section can be used to identify the ideal mix of communication strategies which could be used to recruit, retain, and reactivate anglers within the state or targeted areas.

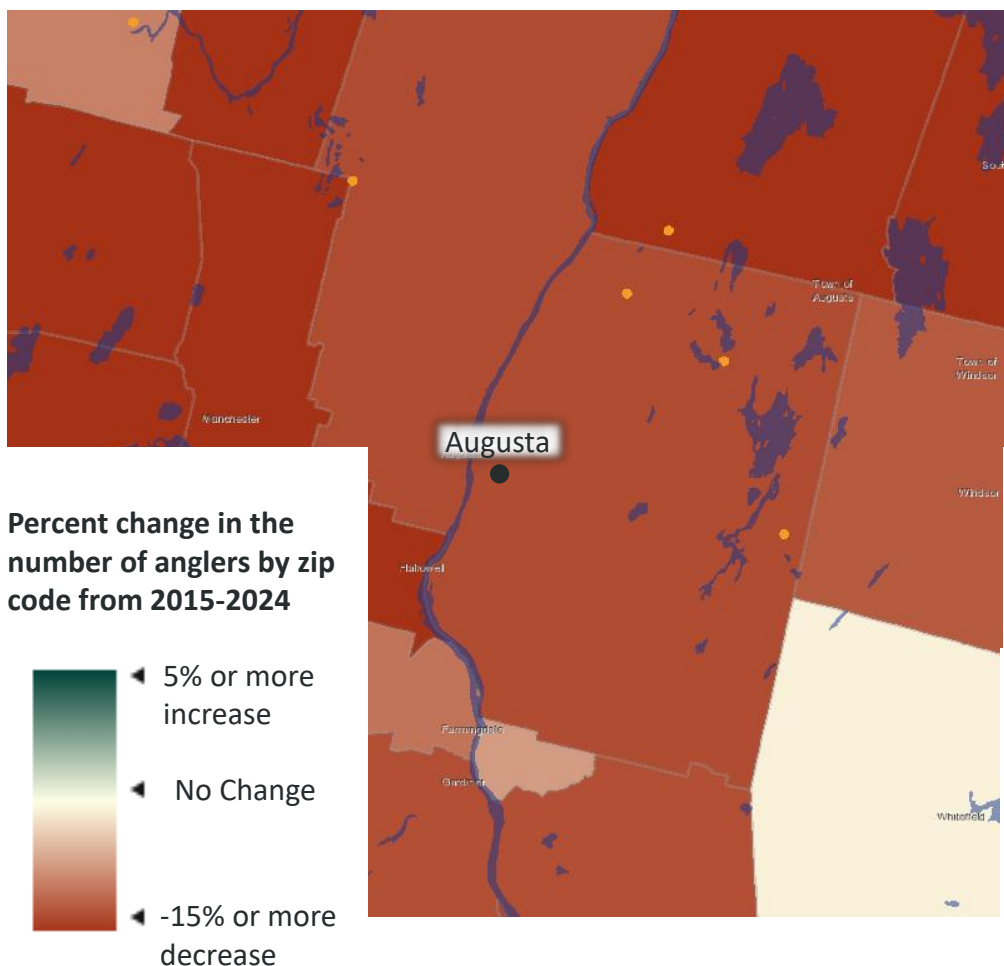
We are using Augusta and the surrounding area as a case study.



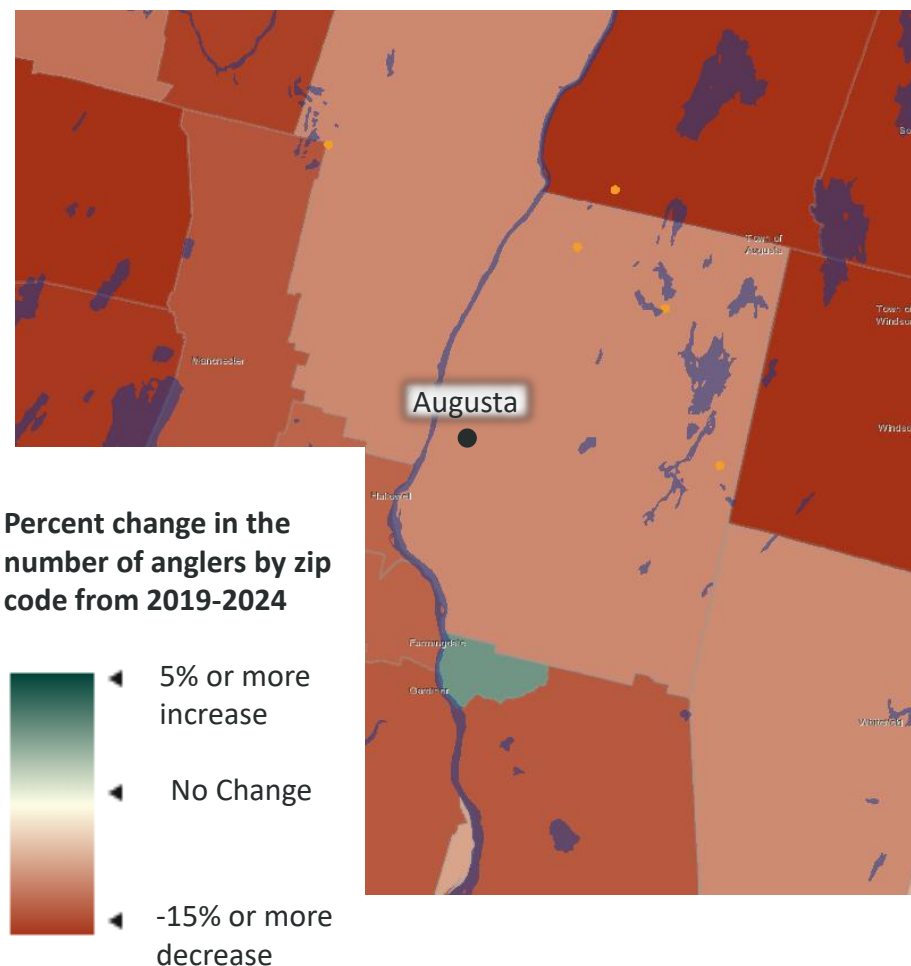
CASE STUDY: AUGUSTA ANGLER CHANGE

Over the last decade, Augusta and the surrounding areas experienced some of the strongest declines, including the period post COVID-19 pandemic. This occurred despite being rich in fishing opportunities, as seen on the previous page.

Ten-year timeframe



Five-year timeframe



Note: To a certain extent the percent change in license holders reflects a variability in license records due to incomplete data for Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in earlier years.

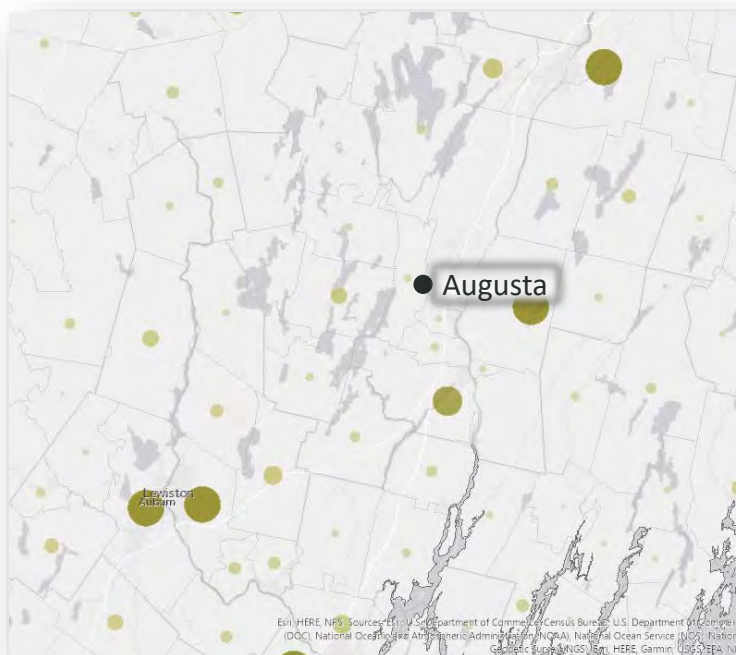
CASE STUDY: ANGLERS BY R3 CATEGORY

Although the Augusta area has a strong population of steady anglers, we see there are opportunities with other populations.

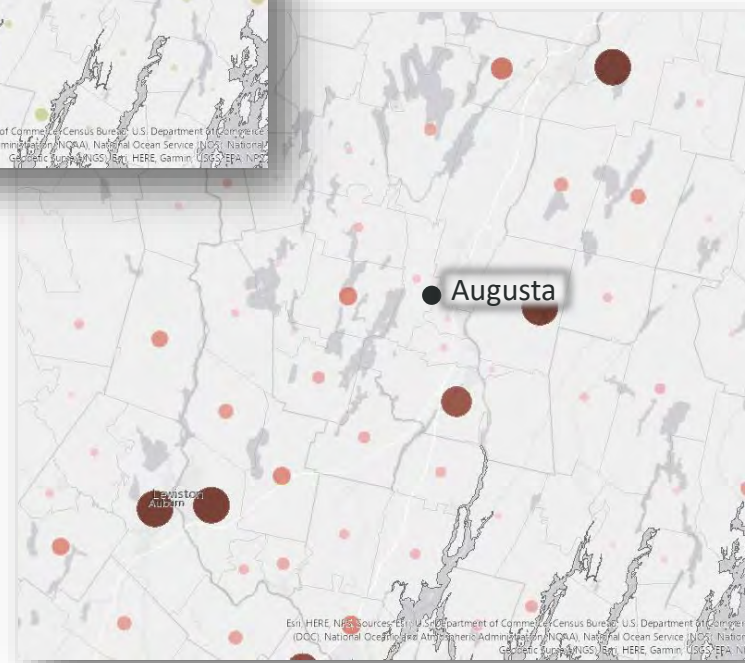
By zooming in closer, we see there are a number of new and lapsed anglers in and around Augusta.

These anglers reside in a corridor between Augusta and Maine's coastal communities.

Dots are sized according to total number of anglers in the indicated angler category in that zip code.



**New anglers
(Recruit)**



**Lapsed anglers
(Reactivate)**

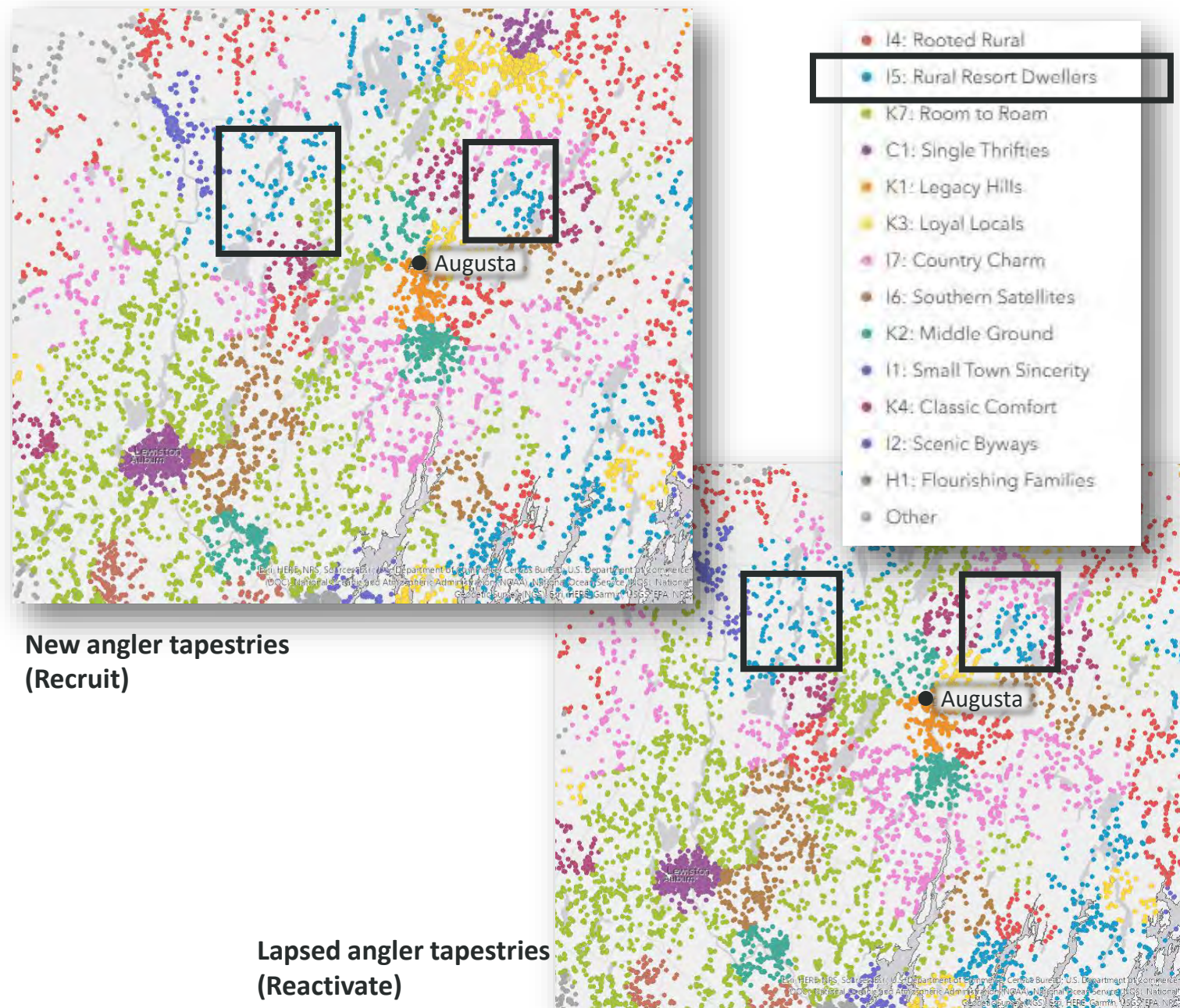
Maps developed using a representative sample of all license holders.

CASE STUDY: ANGLER TAPESTRY SEGMENTS

Tapestry segments for both new and lapsed anglers are shown in these two maps. A high degree of similarities is present across these two groups.

This can be advantageous for marketing efforts because common themes to reengage or spur interest in fishing can be employed across both groups.

For example, communities throughout the Augusta area fit the 'Rural Resort Dwellers' profile. The description of their profile is included on the next page.



CASE STUDY: RURAL RESORT DWELLERS SEGMENT

Typical communities that fit the Rural Resort Dwellers Tapestry Segment and are described as:



Tapestry Segment I5

Rural Resort Dwellers

12.3% of ME anglers*

9.3% of ME population

- Located outside city boundaries, in low density areas; landscape is characterized by open spaces and undeveloped lands
- Primarily married or widowed older adults; many are approaching retirement or are retired
- Tend to purchase pickup trucks and favor American brands for both their work needs and leisure activities, such as fishing and hunting
- Connectivity can be limited; households depend on satellite for TV and internet, and many maintain a landline
- Maintain their vehicles, gardens, and homes themselves

With these insights, R3 messaging topics that would best resonate are:

- Emphasize the **health benefits** of spending time outdoors
- Promote fishing as a way to **unplug from work**
- Encourage them to **pair fishing with other activities** like birdwatching
- Provide recipes to facilitate **cooking fresh-caught fish**

*Estimates reflect the 2024 population

Data provided by ESRI's Segment Infographics Dashboard.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENGAGE ANGLERS

Even if fishing is someone's preferred outdoor activity, it faces stiff competition. Other activities perceived to be easier compete for our time. Outlined below are key recommendations and supporting research to help agencies position fishing as a preferred choice among anglers balancing competing demands on their time.

- **Fishing information should be in one easy to find place.** More than anything, anglers go to the agency website for information. Easy to understand regulations, area fishing maps and nearby fishing opportunities should be readily available. Include boat launches, shore fishing opportunities, and nearby available services, like parks and restaurants.
- **Make fishing trip planning easy.** Helping anglers with planning can recapture lapsed anglers and facilitate participation for new and steady anglers. Pairing fishing with other activities (especially with kids or grandkids) is a great marketing strategy.
- **Put educational material on the state agency website.** New anglers come back when they catch fish. But, they may lack or feel intimidated by the specialized knowledge and equipment required. Prior research has shown state agency websites are the preferred media platform to locate instructional materials ([ASA and Southwick Associates 2025](#)). Agencies should also be active on YouTube.
- **Focus on anglers where they live with marketing materials that truly resonate.** By using Tapestry™ data, marketing and communications teams can identify exactly who they're talking to and the best media channel for people in that area.
- **Additional research resources include:**
 - 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.
 - Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation and Ipsos (2024). *Psychology of Churn: Understanding Fishing & Boating Attrition*. Funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service F23AC00806 as part of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - American Sportfishing Association and Southwick Associates (2020). *Angler Personas: Understanding Anglers' Motivations*. Funded by Multi-State Conservation Grant F19AP00114 as part of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation and Responsive Management (2019). *Actionable Strategies for Angler Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation*. Funded by Multi-State Conservation Grant F18AP00165 as part of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



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