

WHERE IS DEMAND FOR SPORTFISHING THE GREATEST?

MISSISSIPPI'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.



**AMERICAN
SPORTFISHING
ASSOCIATION**



In a continuous cycle, some 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, reactivate lapsed anglers, identify convenient access points, and initiate marketing campaigns that focus on those areas and type of anglers.

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 customer 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.



AMERICAN
SPORTFISHING
ASSOCIATION



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

APPROACH: ANGLER LICENSE DATA & R3 CATEOGRY

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
- **Gulf Port/Biloxi 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

Mississippi has experienced minimal geographical shifts in its angler population along the urban-rural continuum over the past decade. Angler participation in metropolitan core saw the largest decline, while rural saw the largest increase. Currently, over 45% of anglers live in metropolitan core or commuting areas. Therefore, increasing access and awareness of fishing opportunities in urban areas could have an outsized effect on angler participation.

Urban-Rural Classification of Resident License Holder Address			
Urban-Rural	Percent of Angling Population (10-year average)	Angler Percent Change (2015 – 2024)	Angler Percent Change (2019 – 2024)
Metropolitan core	25.7%	-3.0%	1.4%
Metropolitan commuting	19.4%	1.6%	0.4%
Micropolitan/Small cities/Suburbs	27.3%	-0.4%	-0.1%
Small Town	7.0%	1.3%	-1.7%
Rural	20.4%	2.1%	-1.3%

**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 Brandon, followed closely by Gulfport, Biloxi, and Ocean Springs (column A). These cities do not reflect those with the largest proportions of population, however (column D).

Across the decade from 2015 to 2024 (column B), the angler population in the majority of these top ten cities was declining even when overall population has shown growth in most (column B & E). From 2019 through 2024, the angler population grew in all top ten cities with the exception of Jackson (column C).

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)**
Brandon	3.1%	-8.2%	7.2%	2.7%	7.4%
Gulfport	2.8%	-9.1%	13.1%	3.3%	8.1%
Biloxi	2.2%	-17.7%	3.1%	2.2%	2.7%
Ocean Springs	2.0%	-2.5%	11.4%	1.5%	9.5%
Madison	1.9%	-6.6%	4.9%	1.7%	26.4%
Hattiesburg	1.8%	-11.5%	5.3%	3.0%	0.9%
Lucedale	1.8%	4.6%	7.3%	1.0%	5.5%
Jackson	1.6%	-25.6%	-5.6%	5.0%	-15.2%
Meridian	1.5%	-8.2%	5.5%	2.0%	-11.6%
Vancleave	1.4%	-4.6%	3.6%	0.7%	9.8%

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.

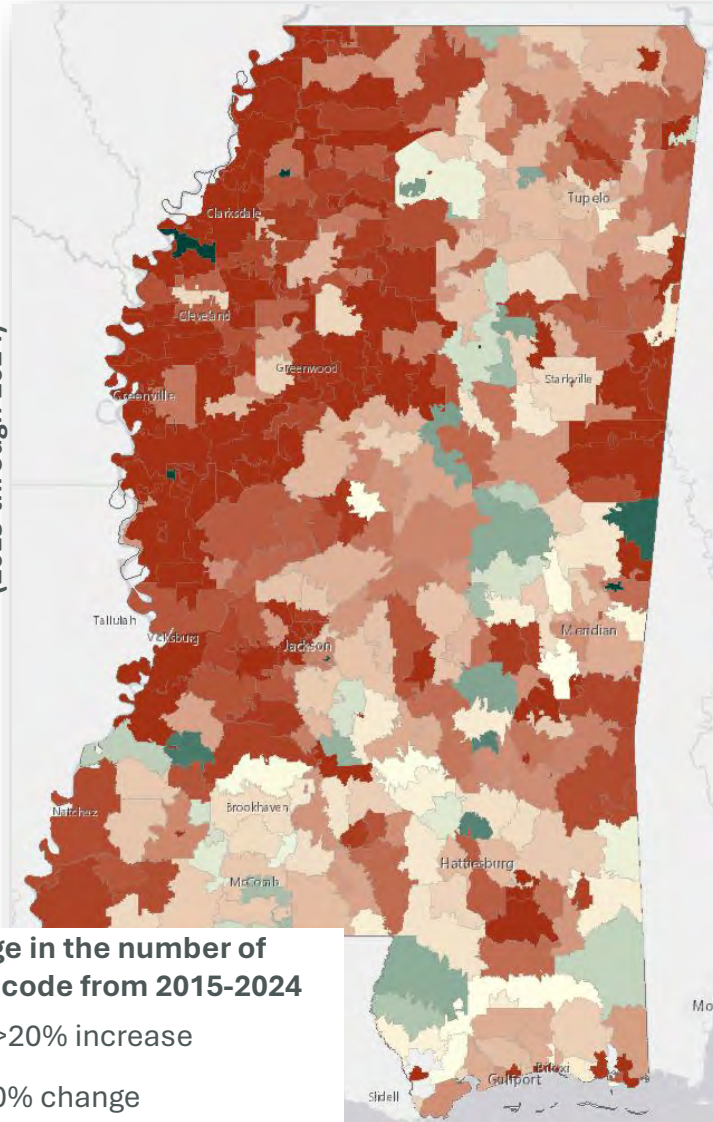
*Represents the top ten cities across the angling population in the state.

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

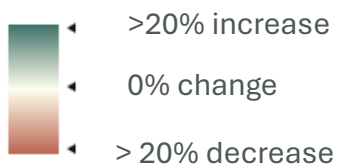
RESULTS: ANGLER CHANGE BY CITY

These two maps broaden the geographical scope. Over the last 10 years, the areas with greater decline of the angler population are cities along the Mississippi River. In the last 5 years, those same areas did not experience the same level of growth the eastern portion of the state experienced.

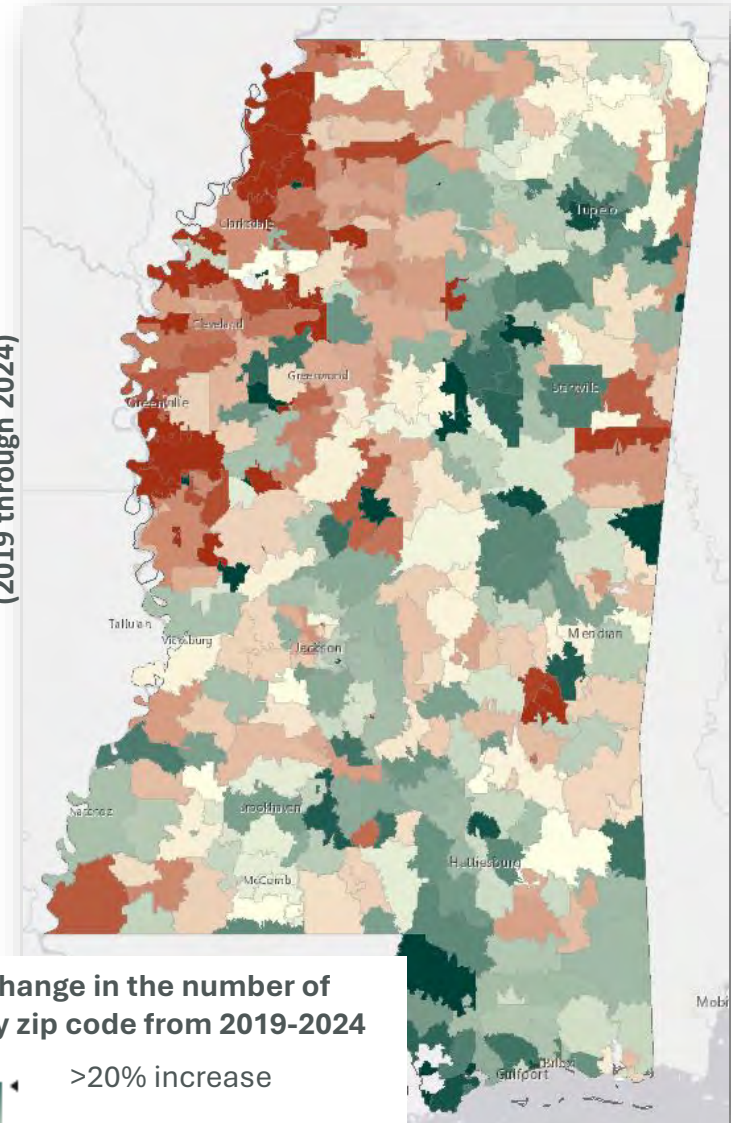
Ten-year timeframe
(2015 through 2024)



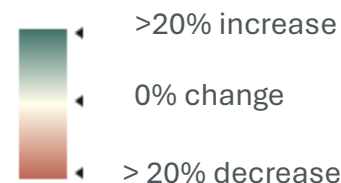
Percent change in the number of anglers by zip code from 2015-2024



Five-year timeframe
(2019 through 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.

RESULTS: ANGLERS & FISHING OPPORTUNITY

Decision drivers to try or return to fishing may not be the presence of opportunity. They may instead be access, awareness, crowding, or the perceived ease of trying something new.

Many anglers reside in coastal areas where fishing access is abundant.

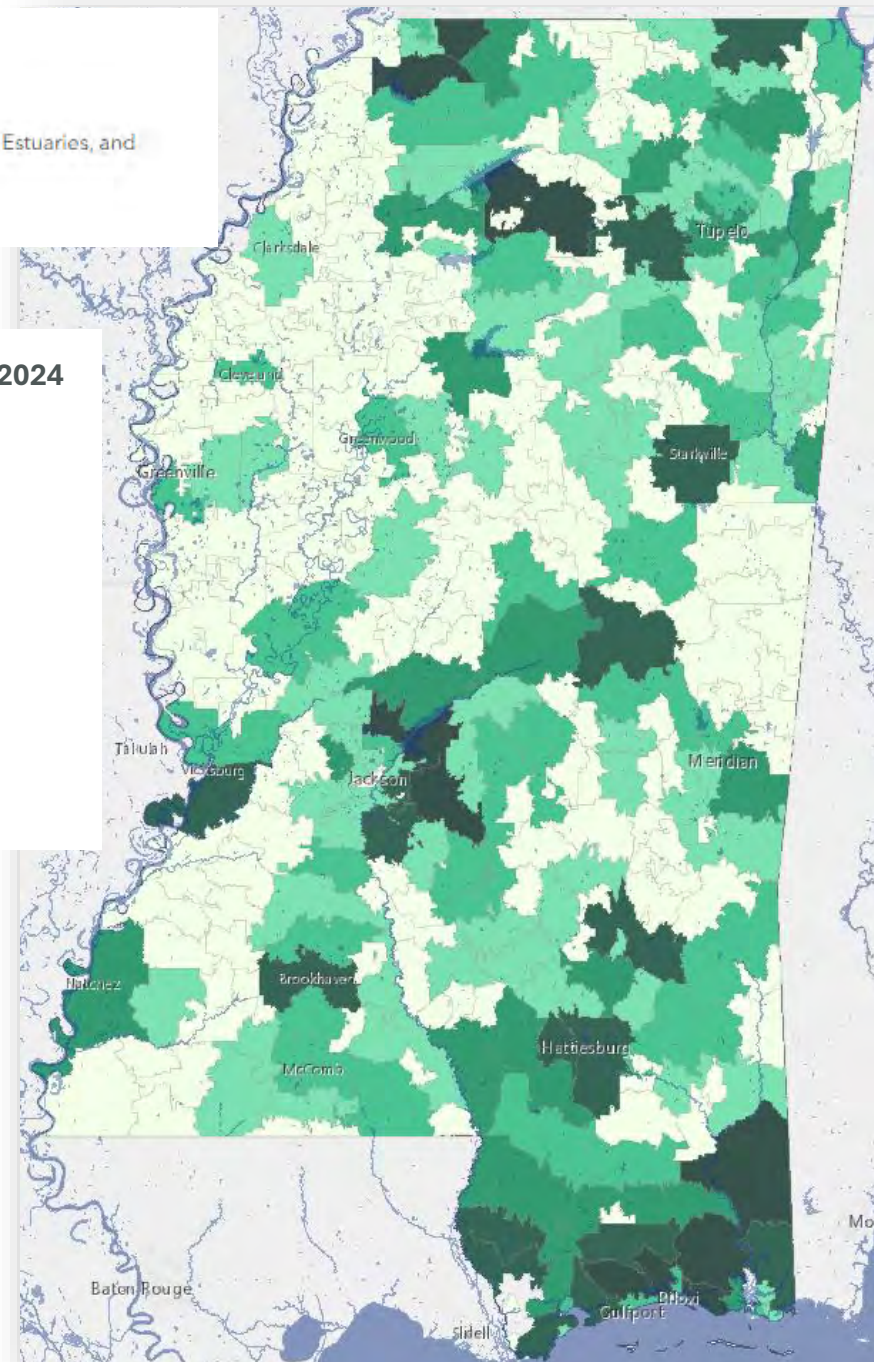
Improving access to and awareness of local fishing opportunities, particularly in urban areas, can help to support the existing angling community, and the initial learning phases someone needs to try fishing.

Waterbodies

Areas classification

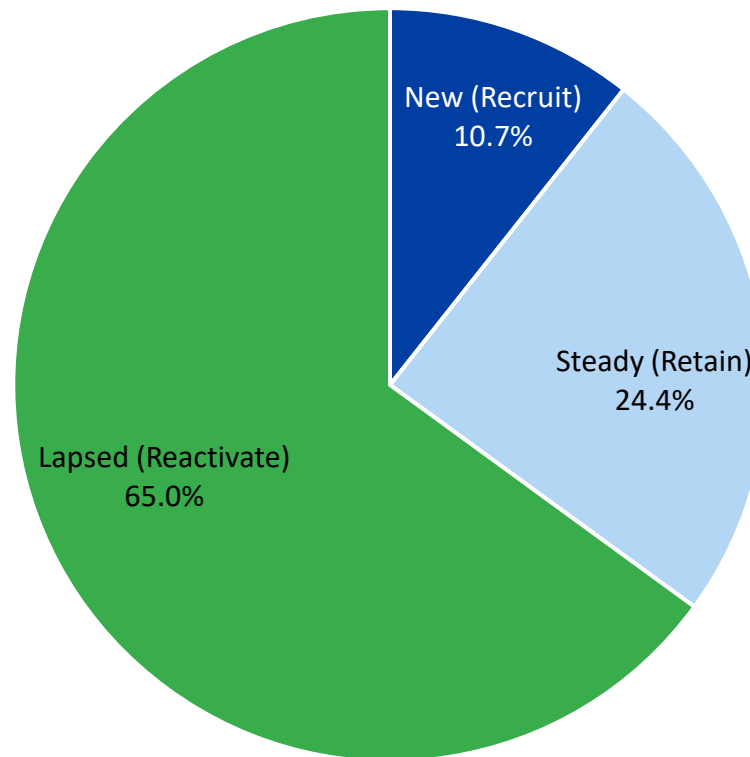
- Lakes, Ponds, Reservoirs, Estuaries, and other Waterbodies
- Rivers and Streams

Percent of Anglers in 2024 by Zip Code



RESULTS: ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

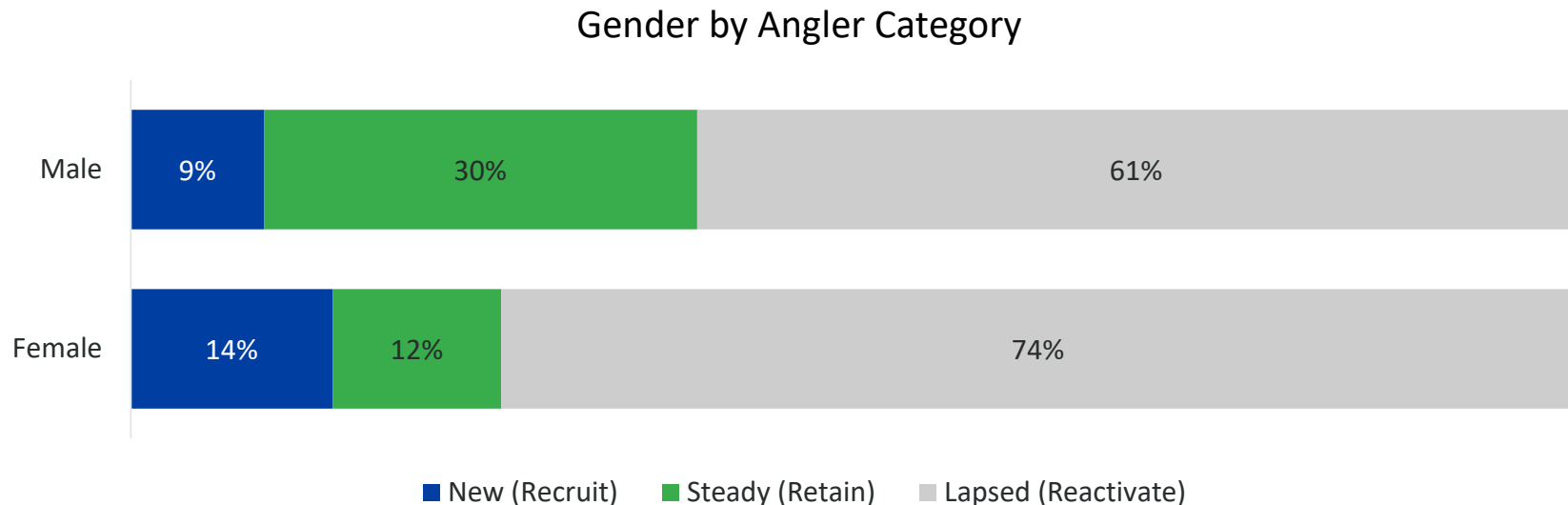
A total of 590,000 anglers were classified into one of the R3 three categories. Almost 2/3 of Mississippi's angler population is lapsed, meaning they didn't purchase a license in 2023 or 2024 despite having purchased in previous years. This represents a significant opportunity to re-engage with the angling 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, Mississippi's angler population over the last decade is predominantly male, with men comprising roughly two and half times as many anglers as women. Female anglers are more likely than males to lapse. At the same time, in recent years females are entering fishing at a higher proportional rate than males.

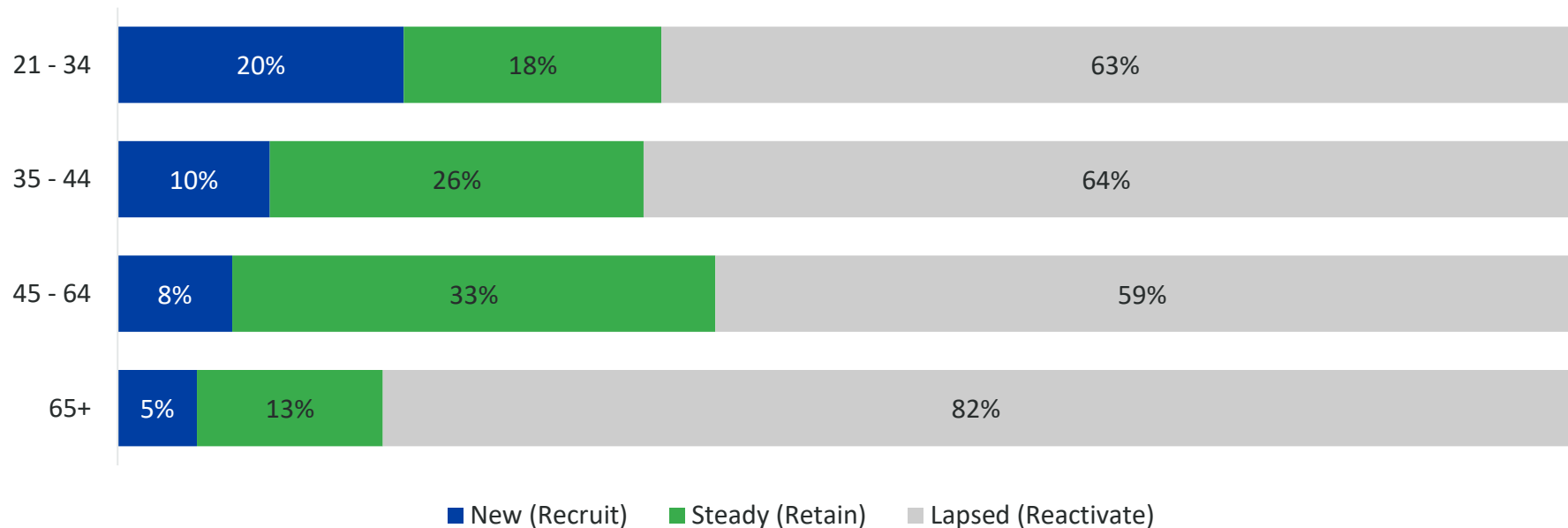
This pattern presents a R3 opportunity for Mississippi. While recruitment of female anglers is gaining momentum, retention remains a critical challenge. Targeted strategies that reduce barriers and support early experiences, such as women-focused fishing programs and mentorship opportunities, could significantly improve retention outcomes and strengthen long-term participation by keeping women on the water.



RESULTS: AGE BY ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

Most steady anglers are in the 45-64 age range; likely, this is because adults in this age range are no longer caretaking young children and they have more time available for recreation. The lapsed angler category has the highest percentage of 65+ year olds, but this may reflect that you are no longer required to buy a license in Mississippi when you are 65 or older.

Age by Angler Category

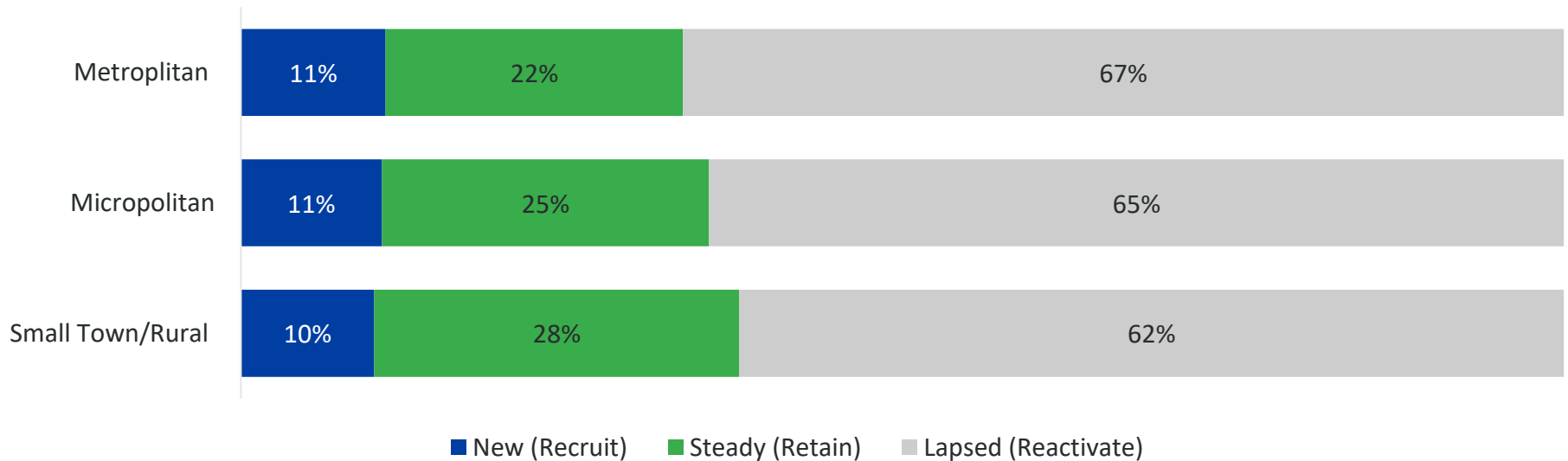


Note: The R3 category system applies age restrictions to ensure multi-year behavior is captured. For example, anglers categorized as “New” in 2025 must be at least 21, which helps exclude individuals who were previously fishing but only recently required a license due to the minimum age requirement of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

RESULTS: URBANIZATION BY ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

Generally, anglers residing in rural areas are slightly more likely to be steady. New and lapsed anglers are slightly more likely found in major cities.

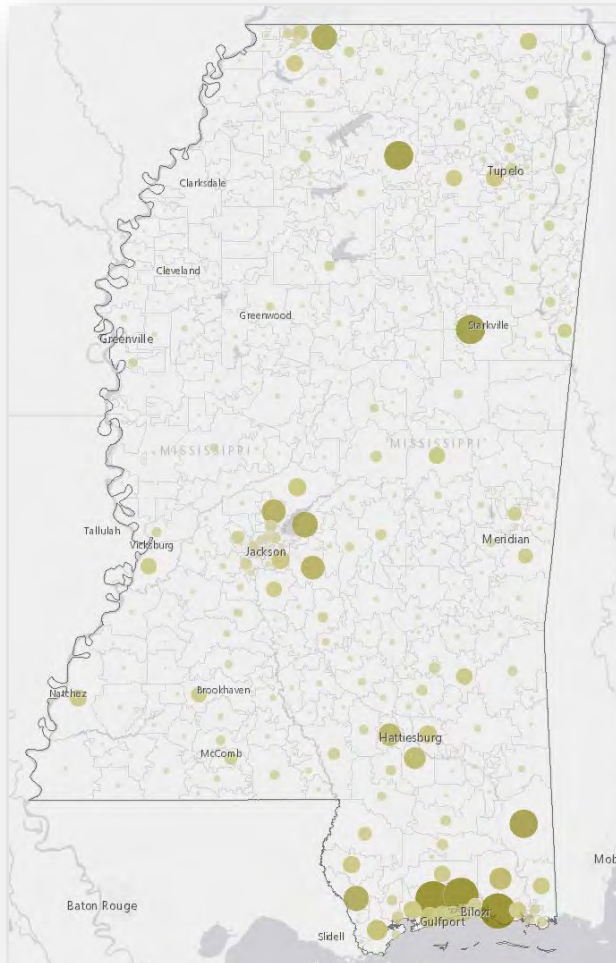
Urban-Rural Classification of Resident License Holder Address by R3 Category



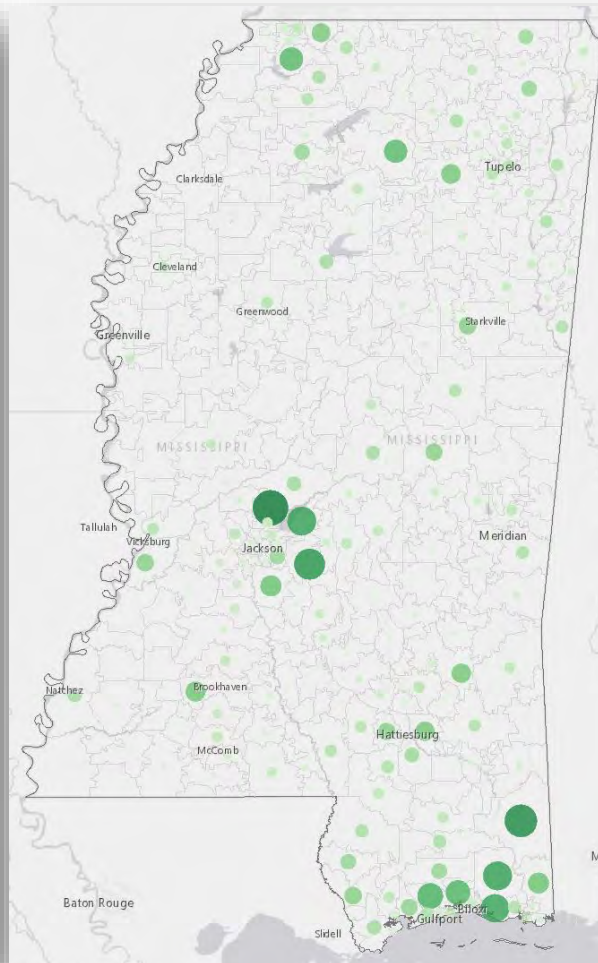
RESULTS: ANGLER CATEGORY BY ZIP CODE

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 and lapsed anglers are slightly more likely to reside outside of rural areas.

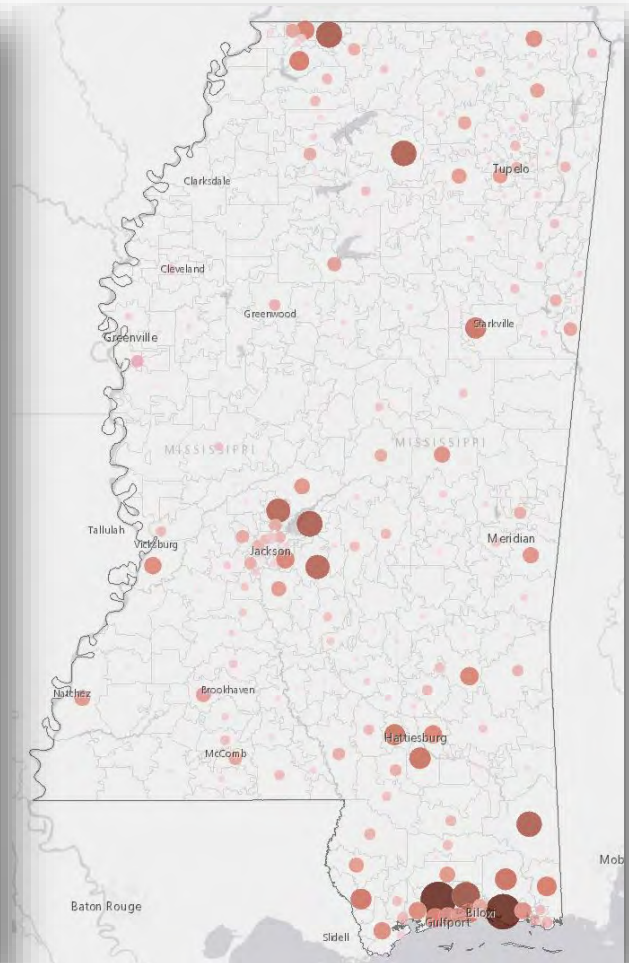
New anglers (Recruit)



Steady anglers (Retain)



Lapsed anglers (Reactivate)



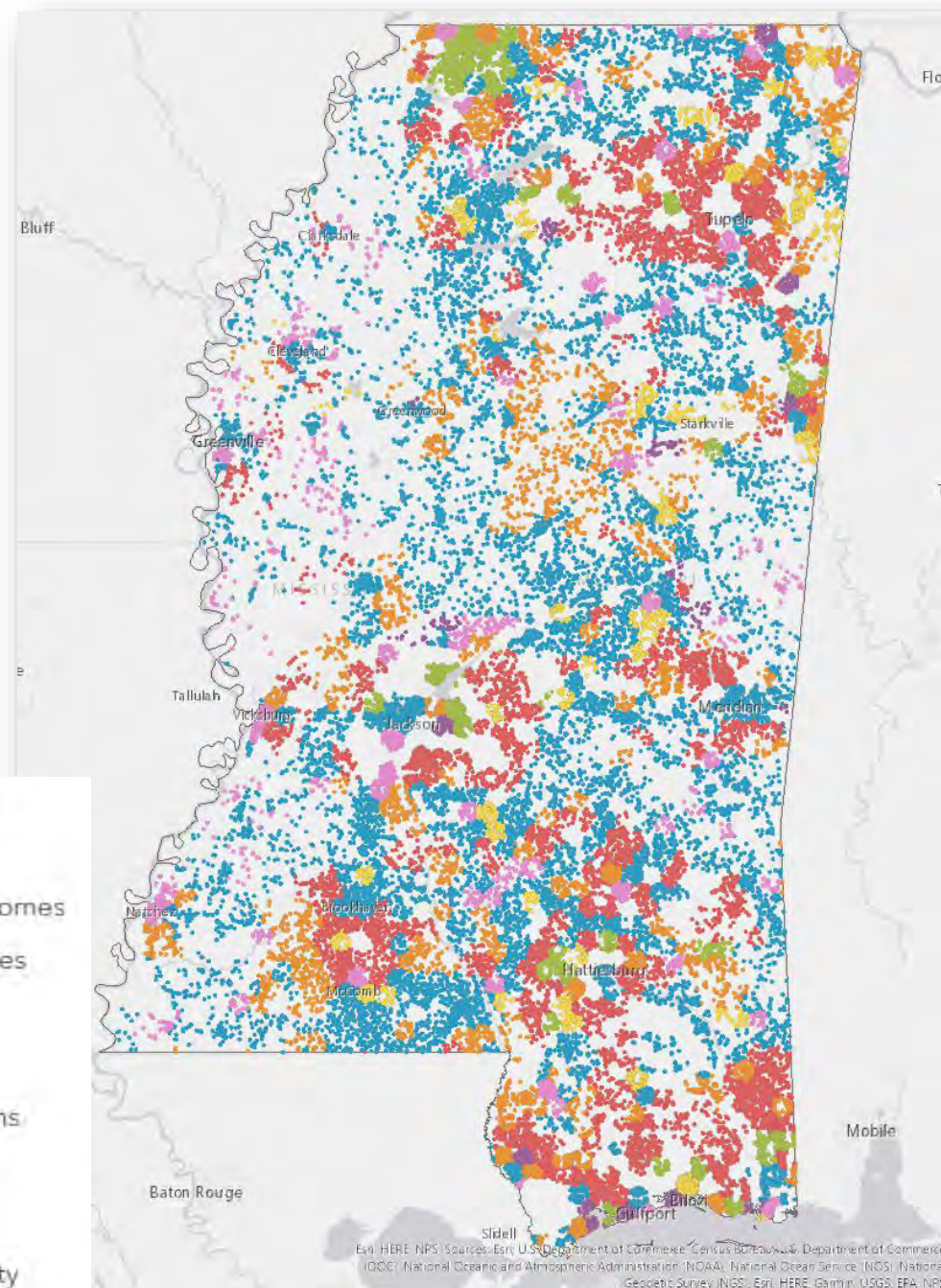
*Maps developed using a representative sample of all license holders.
Dots are sized according to total number of anglers in the indicated angler category in that zip code.*

RESULTS: 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. The results show Mississippi has a rich mix of communities.

- I6: Southern Satellites
- I2: Scenic Byways
- E1: Modest Income Homes
- H1: Flourishing Families
- I4: Rooted Rural
- K3: Loyal Locals
- C4: Family Foundations
- K4: Classic Comfort
- E5: Rural Versatility
- I1: Small Town Sincerity



Esri, HERE, NPS, Sources: Esri, U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Ocean Service (NOS), National Geographic Society (NGS), Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS



AMERICAN
SPORTFISHING
ASSOCIATION



Map developed using a representative sample of all license holders.

RESULTS: TOP TAPESTRY SEGMENTS BY CITY

The Southern Satellites segment made up the highest percentage of anglers in 2024, followed closely by Scenic Byways, Modest Income Homes, and Flourishing Families segments. However, there is decreasing participation from all but the Modest Income Homes segment. Targeted messaging to the segments experiencing organic growth could support the continued increase in participation from these groups, especially considering the significant growth within that segment and others, such as Loyal Locals. The next page shares more about the Modest Income Homes segment.

Tapestry Code	Name*	Percent of Anglers in 2024***	Angler Percent Change (2015 -2024)***	Angler Percent Change (2019 – 2024)***	Percent of Total Population (2025)
I6	Southern Satellites**	17.9%	-6.7%	-7.1%	11.6%
I2	Scenic Byways	17.2%	-4.3%	-8.8%	13.9%
E1	Modest Income Homes	10.2%	13.5%	13.2%	9.4%
H1	Flourishing Families	7.3%	-0.3%	-1.9%	6.0%
I4	Rooted Rural	6.7%	-6.3%	-7.1%	6.1%
K3	Loyal Locals	4.7%	10.5%	16.5%	3.8%
C4	Family Foundations	4.6%	1.1%	8.8%	5.4%
E5	Rural Versatility	4.4%	0.0%	1.2%	4.6%
K4	Classic Comfort	4.1%	4.9%	8.2%	3.5%
I1	Small Town Sincerity**	2.9%	0.3%	5.0%	2.9%

**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: MODEST INCOME 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 E1 Modest Income Homes	10.2% of MS anglers* 9.4% of MS population
• Most residents live in and around urban centers and in the suburbs • Households consist of married couples without children; single-parent female-headed households; or single individuals living alone • Tend to shop at discount supermarkets and store • Watch TV using cable or streaming services, follow professional basketball games, and read magazines for news and entertainment • Use their cell phones for accessing news and entertainment as well as connecting with family and friends and using digital payment services		

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

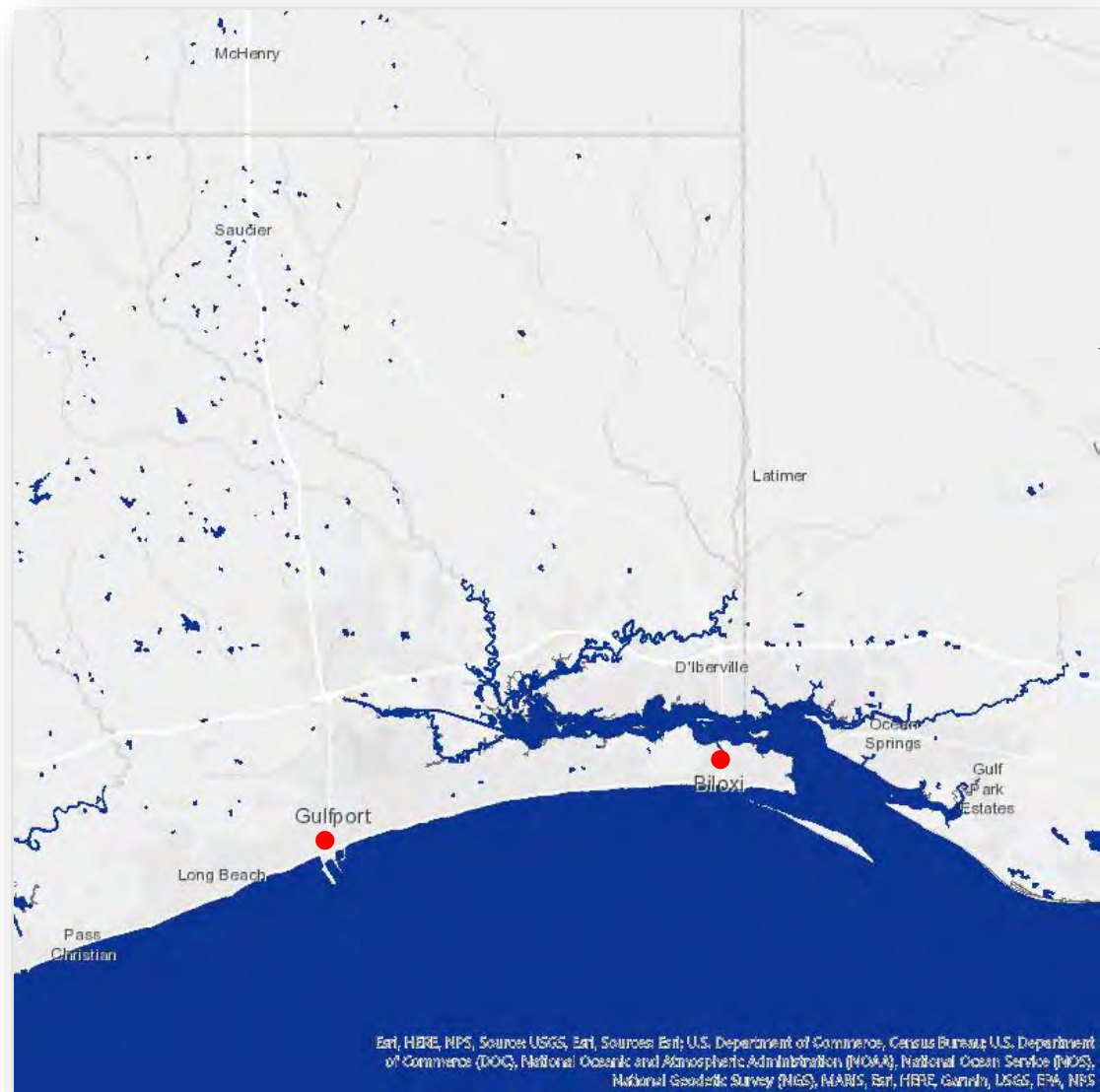
- **Advertise idyllic locations** with opportunities to camp, hunt, and fish in proximity
- **Highlight the abundance and affordability** of fishing areas in urban and suburban areas.
- **Facilitate opportunities for connection** through social media to share favorite species, techniques, and memorable catches.

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

CASE STUDY: GULFPORT/BILOXI

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.

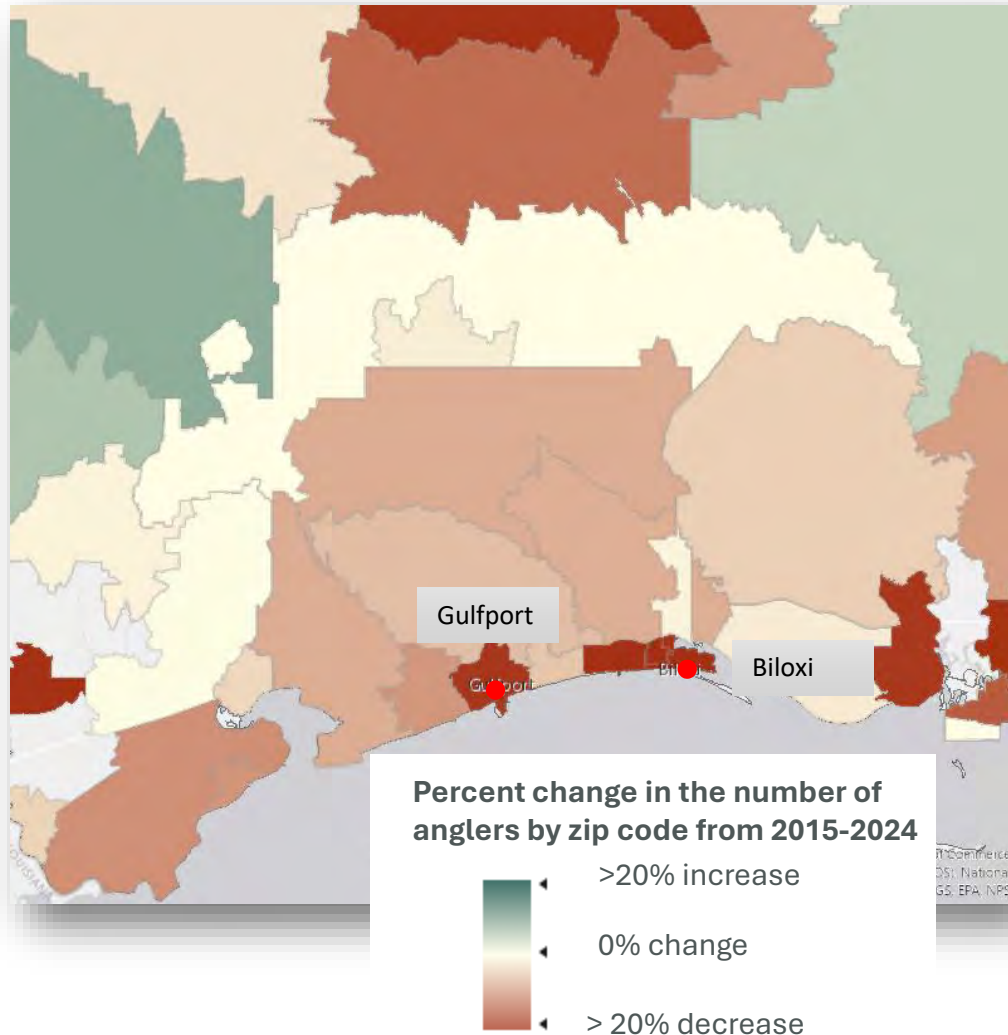
We are using the Gulfport/Biloxi and surrounding area as a case study.



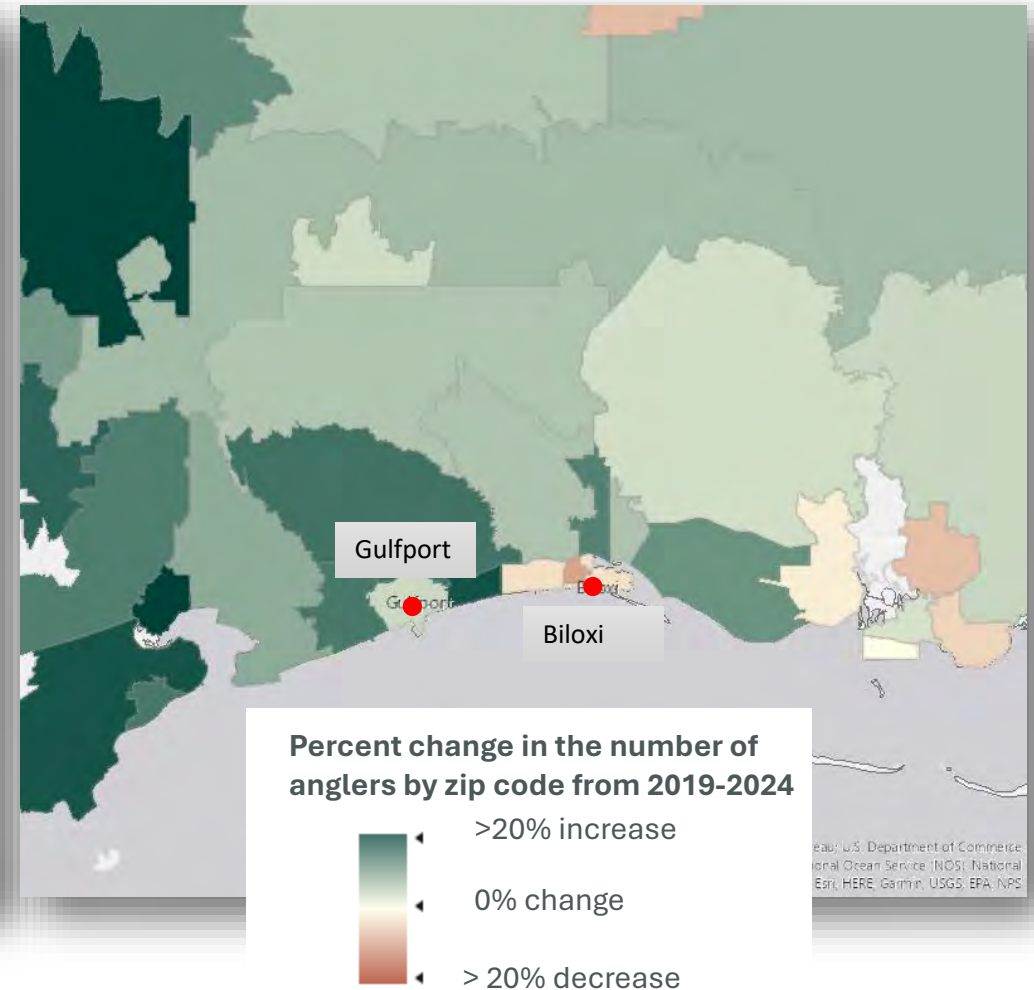
CASE STUDY: GULFPORT/BILOXI ANGLER CHANGE

Over the last decade, Gulfport/Biloxi and the surrounding area experienced some the strong contraction of the angler population. Although in the last five years the angler population has increased, potentially from recruited and reactivated anglers taking up fishing during the pandemic.

Ten-year timeframe



Five-year timeframe



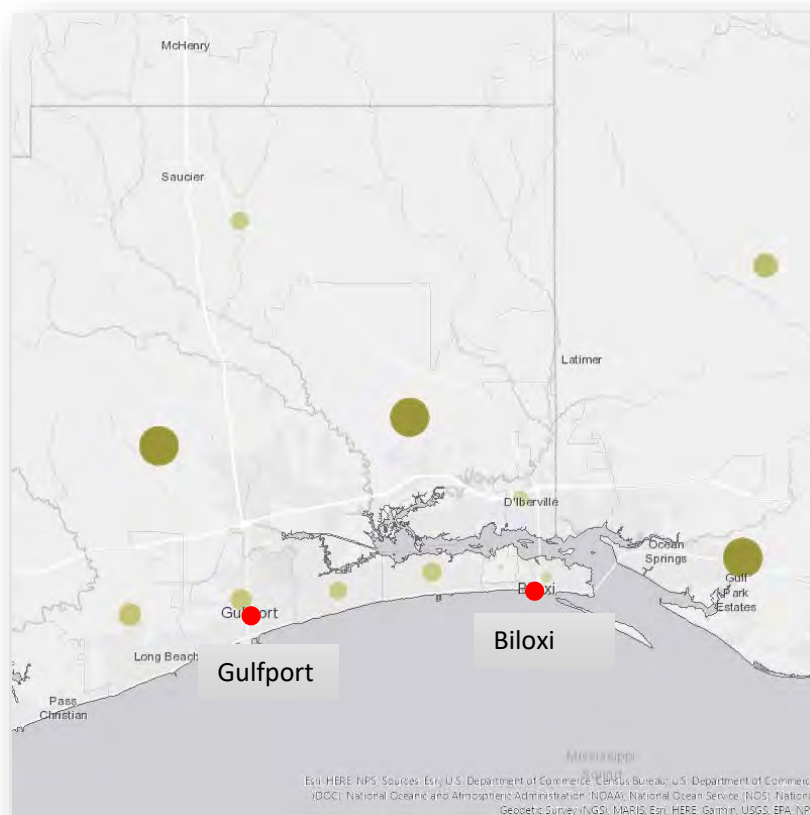
Note: To a certain extent the percent change in license holders reflects a variability in license records due to incomplete data for Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in earlier years.

CASE STUDY: ANGLERS BY R3 CATEGORY

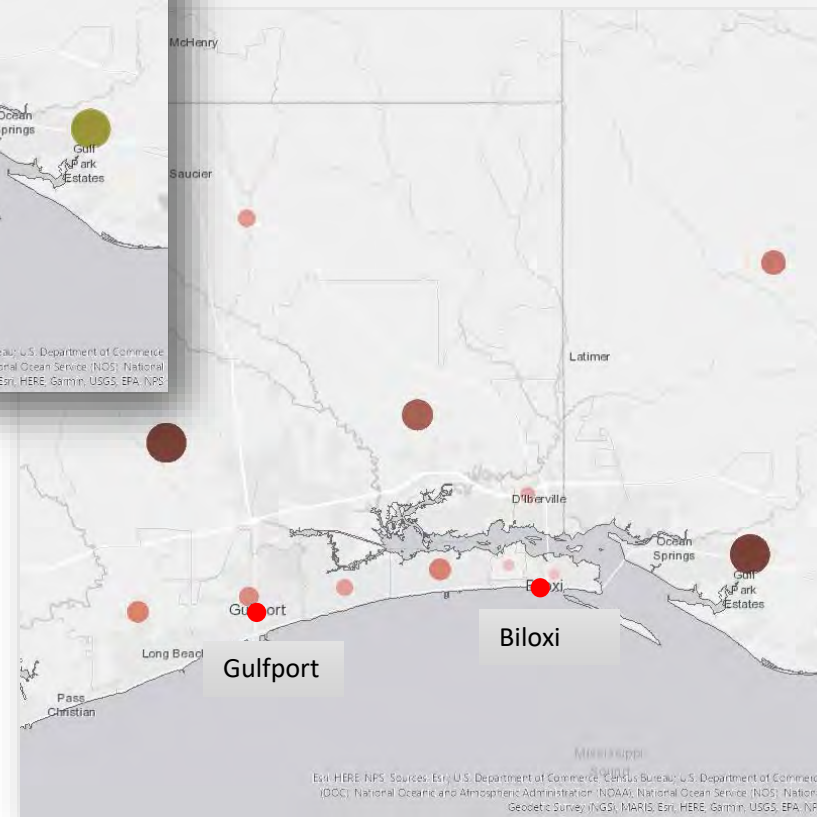
Although Gulfport/Biloxi has a strong population of steady anglers, we see there are opportunities with other populations.

By zooming in closer, we see there are large numbers of new and lapsed anglers in and around the Gulfport/Biloxi area.

These anglers were in the same geographic areas, notably north of the area.



New anglers (Retain)



Lapsed anglers (Reactivate)

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

Maps developed using a representative sample of all license holders.

CASE STUDY: ANGLER TAPESTRY SEGMENTS

Tapestry segments for both new and lapsed anglers have a high degree of similarities.

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 east of Gulfport and Biloxi area fit the 'Loyal Locals' profile.



New angler tapestries (Recruit)

Lapsed angler tapestries (Reactivate)

Maps developed using a representative sample of all license holders.

CASE STUDY: LOYAL LOCALS SEGMENT

Typical communities that fit the Loyal Locals Tapestry Segment and are described as:



Tapestry Segment K3
Loyal Locals

4.7% of MS anglers*
3.8% of MS population

- Many are in suburbs of small metropolitan and micropolitan areas as well as small and remote towns
- Predominately 65 years and older and many are widowed or married without children living at home
- Often visit large retail establishments for food and home supplies
- Tends to stick to the same foods, stores, and brands; often buy American-made products and domestic vehicles
- Television is a primary source for both news and entertainment, including programs related to hunting and sports
- Use social media to follow groups and stay in touch with friends and family

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

- Emphasize **the health benefits of consuming freshly caught fish** and spending time outdoors.
- Promote areas that are **nearby and accessible**.
- Facilitate opportunities for **social connection** with friends and family.
- Market **fishing opportunities on television**, particularly during hunting and sporting programming.

*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.



This Project was funded by a Multistate Conservation Grant (F24AP00087) from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and jointly administered with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.



**AMERICAN
SPORTFISHING
ASSOCIATION**

