

WHERE IS DEMAND FOR SPORTFISHING THE GREATEST?

OHIO'S REPORT



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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.

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
- **Columbus 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

Ohio 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 rural and small towns. Although, in 2024 nearly 2/3rds of anglers live in metropolitan core and 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	49.9%	0.3%	1.0%
Metropolitan commuting	14.4%	-2.5%	-2.5%
Micropolitan/Small cities/Suburbs	22.2%	-1.4%	-1.0%
Small Town	5.2%	0.8%	2.2%
Rural	8.1%	6.4%	-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 Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati (column A). Naturally these cities also hold more of the state's population generally (column D).

Across the decade from 2015 to 2024, the angler population was contracting in these top ten cities even when overall population has shown growth in some (column B & E). From 2019 through 2024, angler numbers dropped between a low of 5.7% to a high of 22.4% in each of these top ten cities (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)**
Columbus	4.9%	-6.0%	-7.6%	7.4%	8.5%
Cleveland	3.1%	-22.3%	-22.4%	6.2%	-3.3%
Dayton	2.7%	-14.3%	-11.2%	4.1%	1.8%
Cincinnati	2.6%	-12.5%	-5.7%	6.9%	2.7%
Akron	1.9%	-25.3%	-21.0%	2.2%	-2.7%
Toledo	1.9%	-16.7%	-9.9%	2.5%	-4.2%
Canton	1.3%	-24.7%	-19.6%	1.2%	-3.2%
Mansfield	1.1%	-22.7%	-22.0%	0.8%	2.6%
Hamilton	0.9%	-15.8%	-12.9%	1.2%	4.4%
Lima	0.9%	-11.0%	-8.7%	0.7%	-3.8%

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.

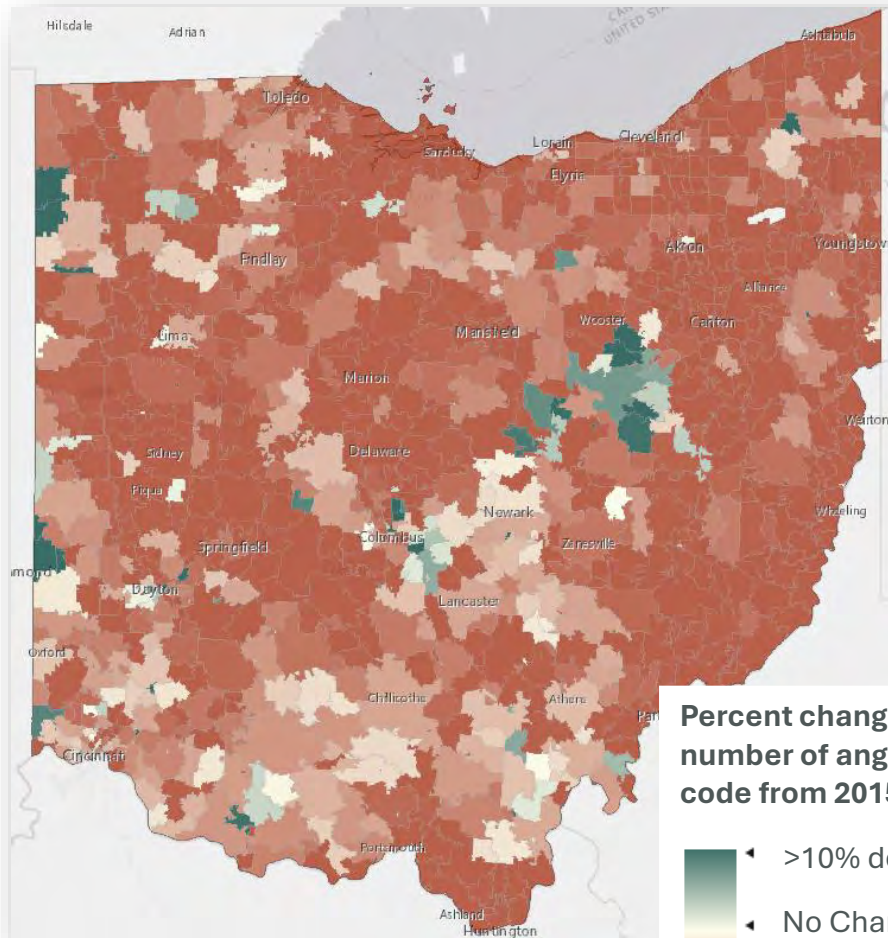
*Represents the top ten cities across the angling population in the state.

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

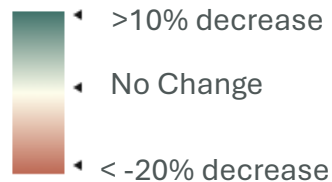
RESULTS: ANGLER CHANGE BY CITY

These two maps broaden the geographical scope. The decline in angler population has not been solely a rural or urban issue. While more rural areas do tend to experience greater declines, these maps make it evident that almost all towns and cities across the state have experienced contraction in their angler populations.

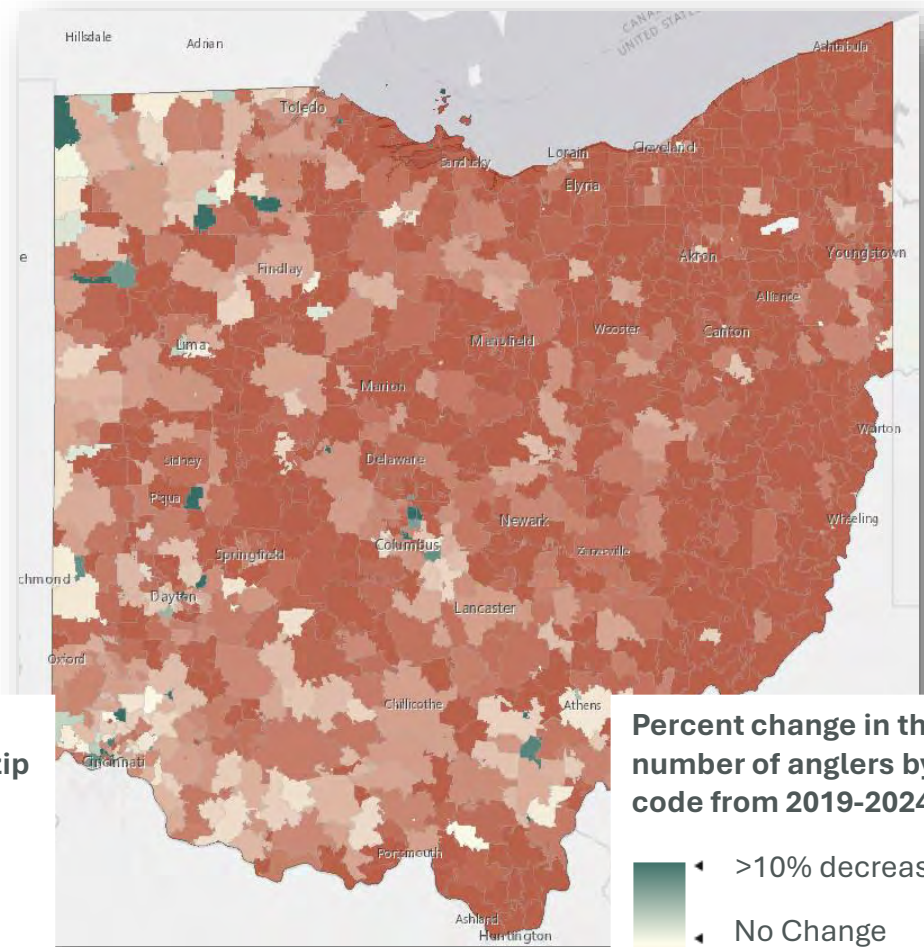
**Ten-year timeframe
(2015 through 2024)**



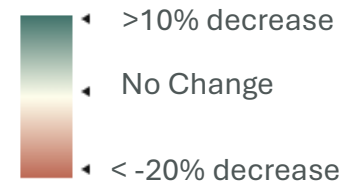
**Percent change in the
number of anglers by zip
code from 2015-2024**



**Five-year timeframe
(2019 through 2024)**



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



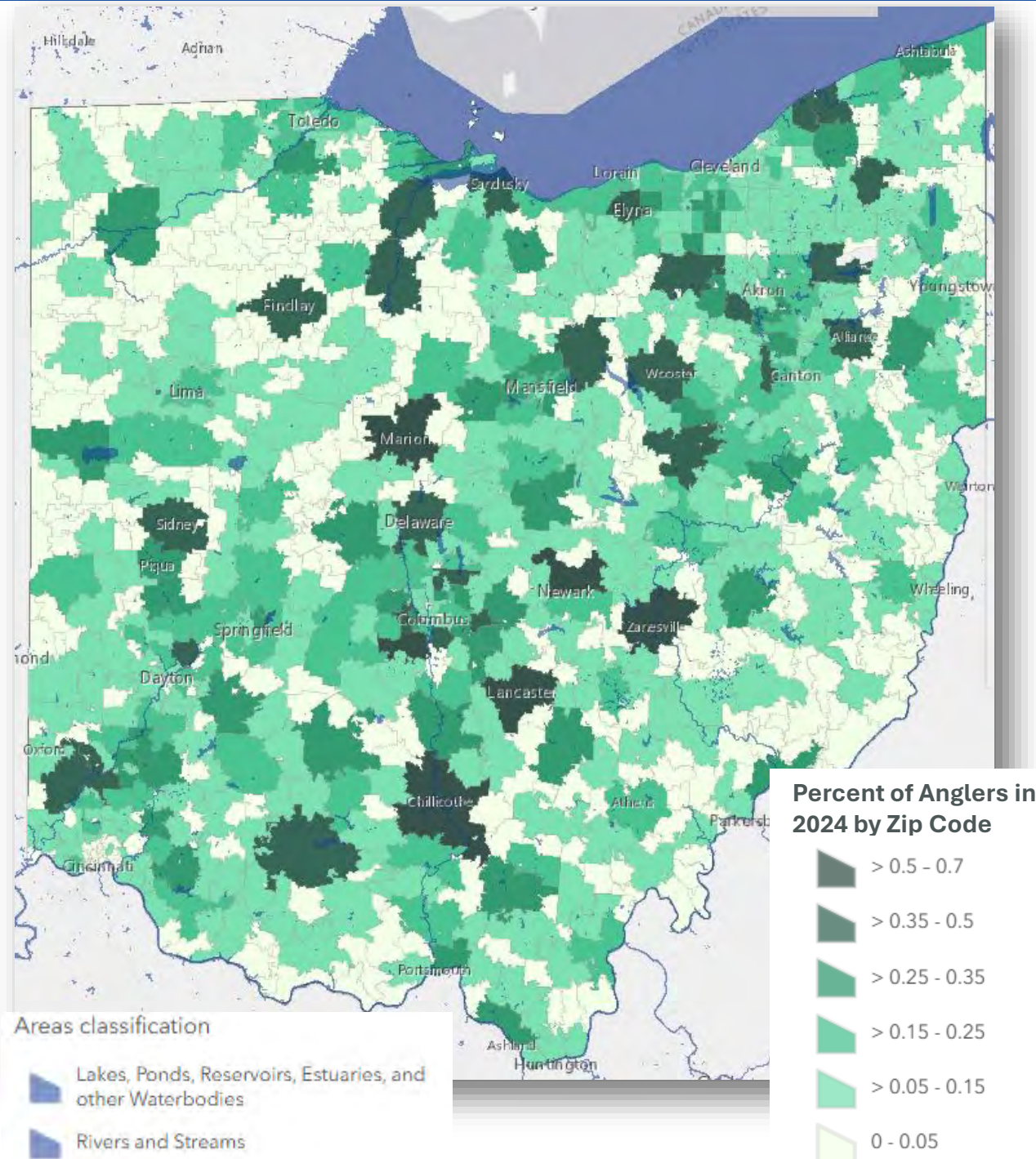
Note: To a certain extent the percent change in license holders reflects a variability in license records due to incomplete data for Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in earlier years.

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.

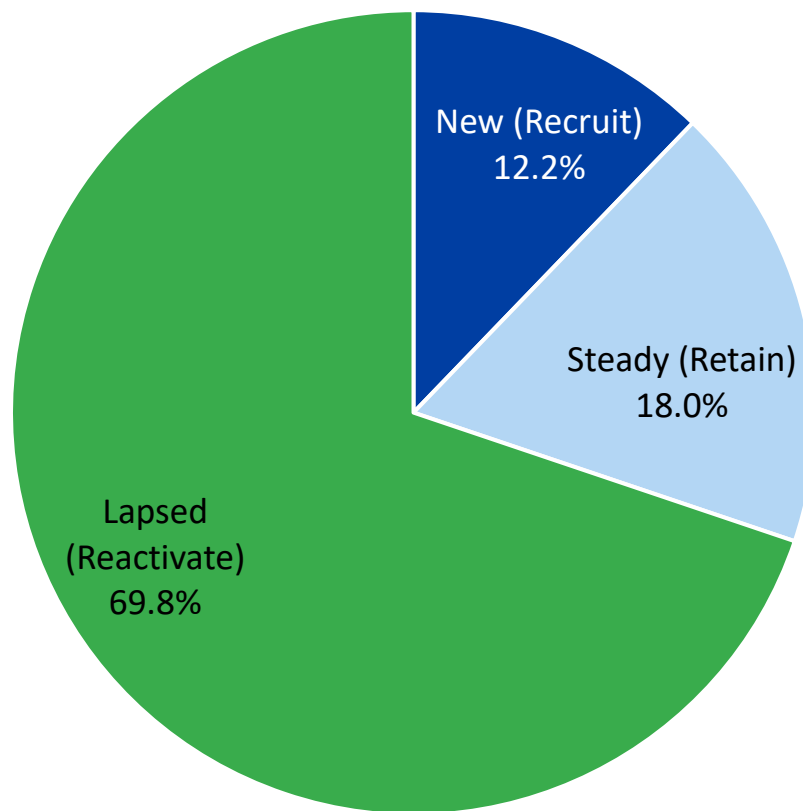
Many anglers reside in urban areas where fishing access is less abundant.

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.



RESULTS: ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

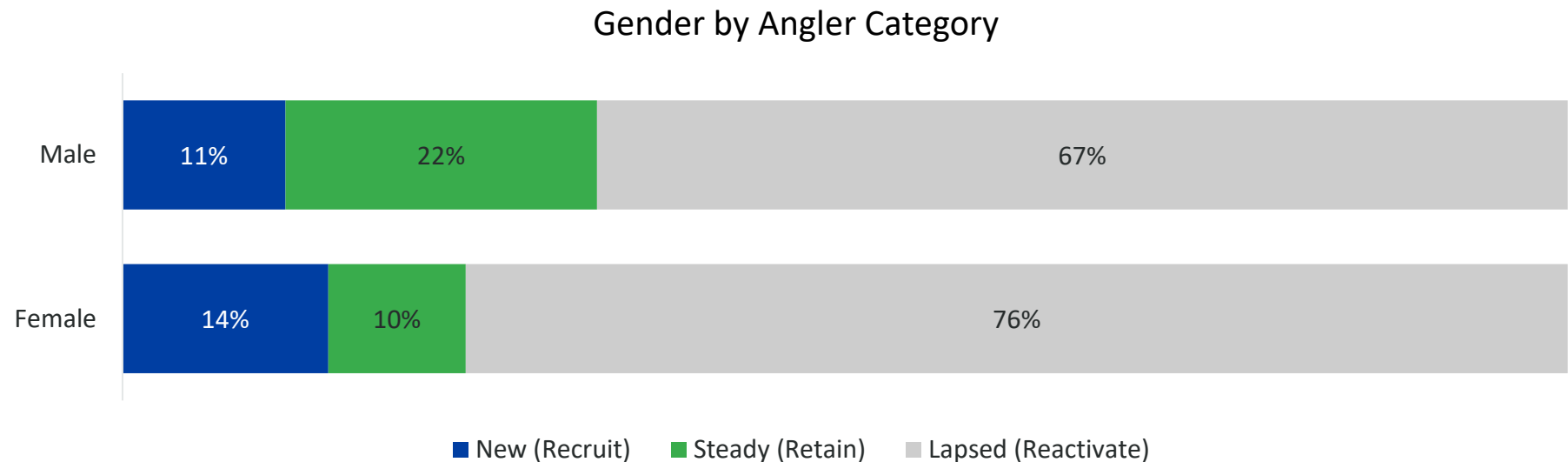
A total of 1.9 million anglers were classified into one of the R3 three categories. Over 2/3 of Ohio's angler population is lapsed, meaning they didn't purchase a license in 2023 or 2024 despite having purchased in previous years. This represents a significant opportunity to re-engage with the angling 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, Ohio'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 slightly higher proportional rate than male.

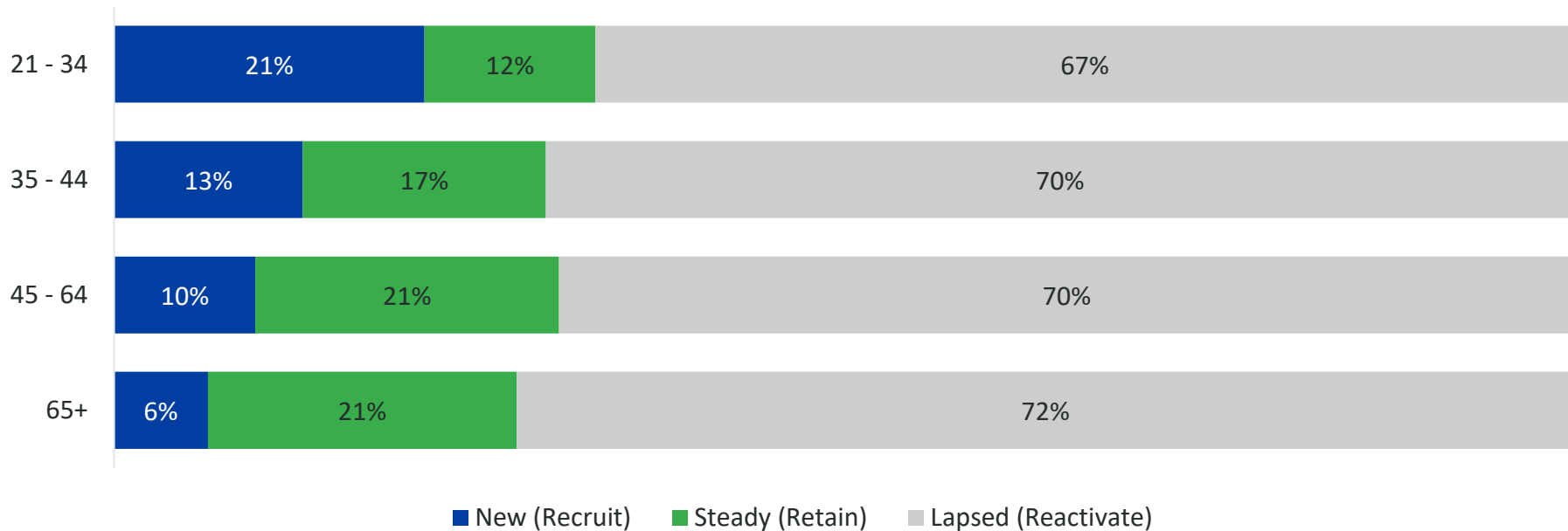
This pattern presents a potential R3 opportunity for Ohio. With recruitment of female anglers is gaining momentum, retention remains a critical challenge. Targeted strategies that reduce barriers and support early experiences, such as women-focused fishing programs and mentorship opportunities, could improve retention outcomes and help keep women on the water.



RESULTS: AGE BY ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

Most steady anglers are in the 45+ age range; likely, this is because adults in this age range are no longer caretaking young children and may be retired, hence they have more time available for recreation. The lapsed angler category is relatively equal across all age categories. Suggesting that reactivation efforts for Ohio may be the most effective way to increase participation in the sport. These reactivation efforts messaging should vary based on the age group, as re-entering the sport may be drastically different for a 30-year-old vs a 60-year-old.

Age by Angler Category

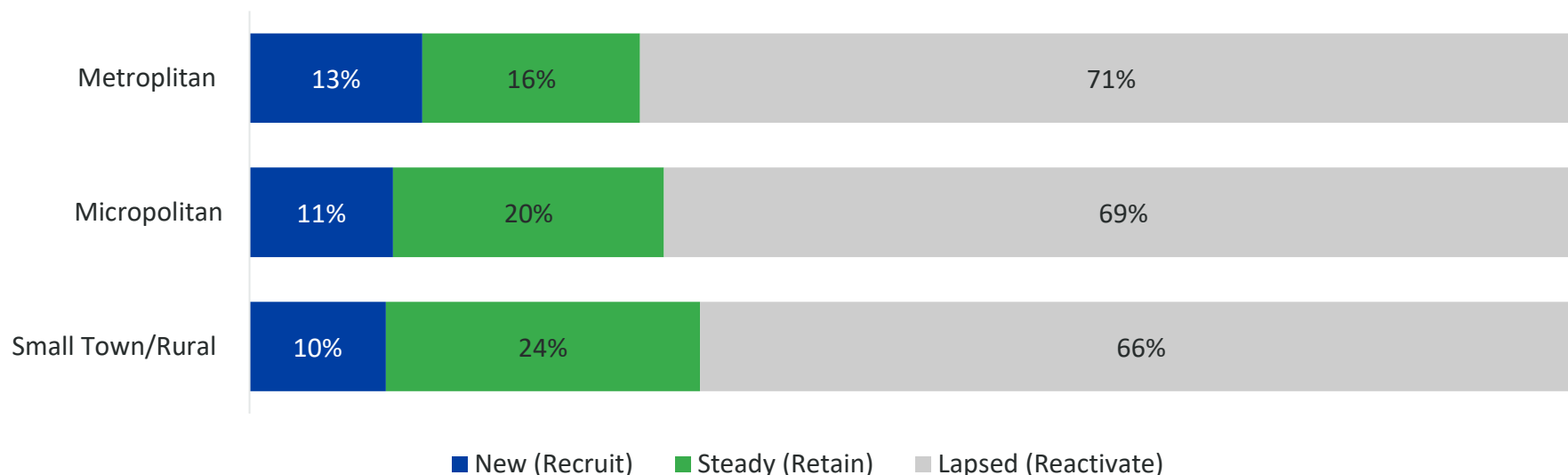


Note: The R3 category system applies age restrictions to ensure multi-year behavior is captured. For example, anglers categorized as “New” in 2025 must be at least 21, which helps exclude individuals who were previously fishing but only recently required a license due to the minimum age requirement of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

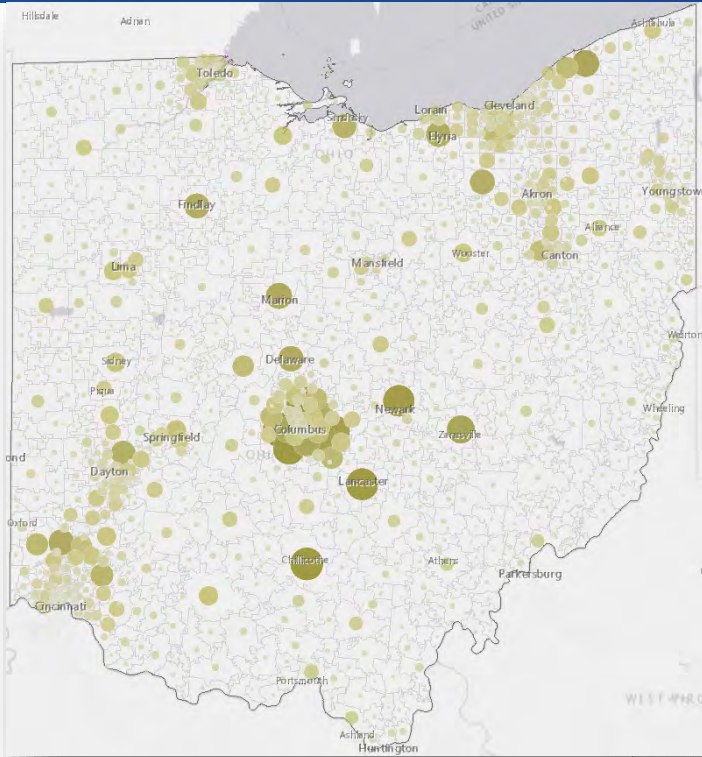
RESULTS: URBANIZATION BY ANGLER R3 CATEGORY

Anglers living in small town and rural areas are more likely to be steady participants (24%), while those residing in metropolitan areas are slightly more likely to be either new (13%) or lapsed (71%) anglers. This pattern suggests that urban residents are entering fishing but are less likely to continue participation. From an R3 perspective, urban areas represent an opportunity: targeted efforts that support early experiences and reduce barriers for metropolitan anglers could improve retention, while reactivation campaigns in cities could recover a substantial share of lapsed anglers.

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

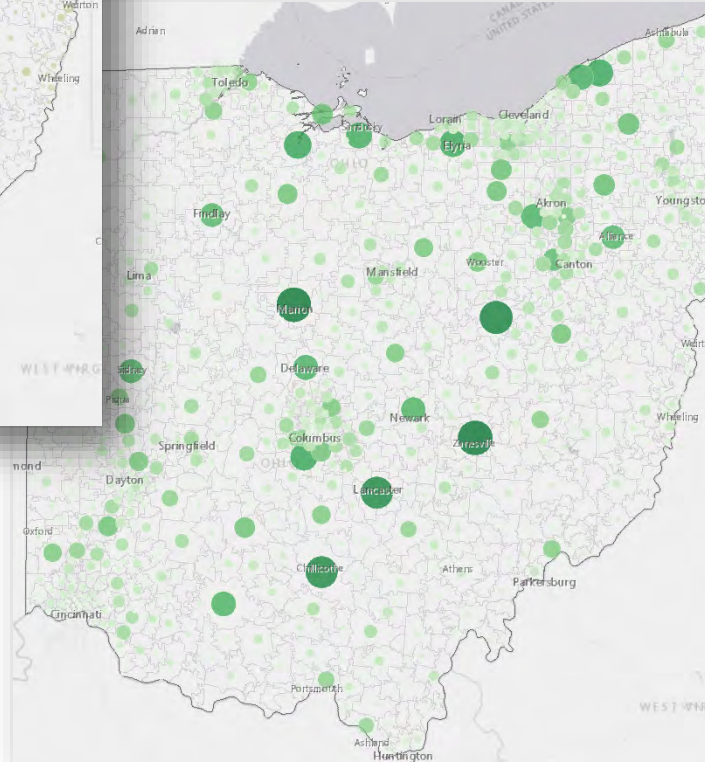


RESULTS: ANGLER R3 CATEGORY BY ZIP CODE

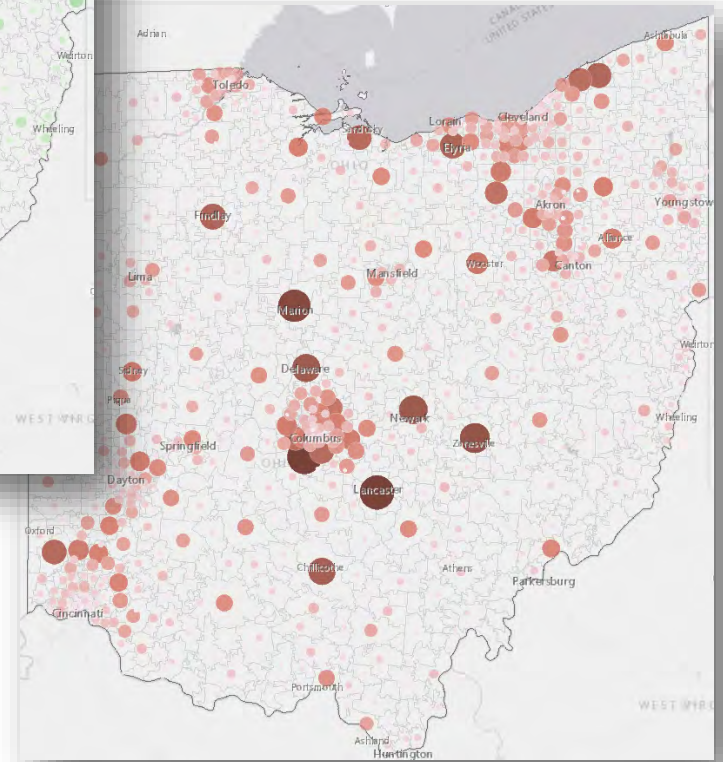


New anglers (Recruit)

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



Steady anglers (Retain)



Lapsed anglers (Reactivate)

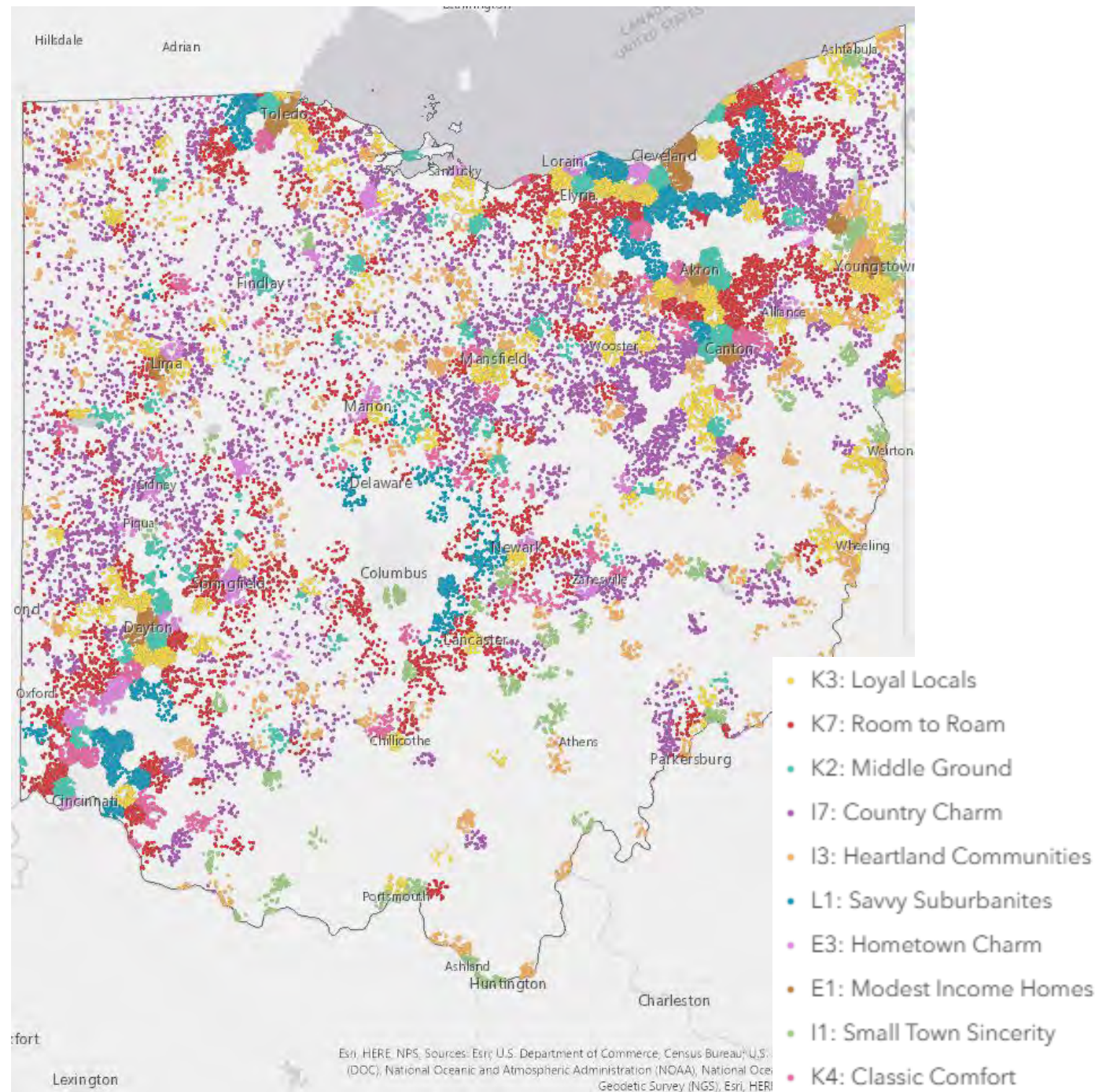
Ultimately, this project is meant to help guide state efforts to find potential new anglers, identify areas where demand for access might be growing, initiate marketing campaigns that focus on those areas, and inform the location of new sportfishing access. Mapping license holders within each R3 category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

Maps developed using a representative sample of all license holders.

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 Ohio has a rich mix of communities.



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RESULTS: TOP TAPESTRY SEGMENTS BY CITY

The Loyal Locals segment made up the highest percentage of anglers in 2024, followed closely by Room to Roam, Country Charm, and Middle Ground segments. There is, however, a decreasing participation from all but the Middle Ground segment. Targeted messaging to the segments experiencing organic growth could support the continued increase in participation from these groups, especially considering the significant growth from Modest Income Homes. The next page shares more about the Middle Ground segment.

Tapestry Code	Name*	Percent of Anglers in 2024***	Angler Percent Change (2015 -2024)***	Angler Percent Change (2019 – 2024)***	Percent of Total Population (2025)
K3	Loyal Locals	10.7%	-0.6%	-1.0%	7.7%
K7	Room to Roam**	9.9%	-9.6%	-10.0%	8.7%
I7	Country Charm	9.3%	-13.9%	-16.2%	5.9%
K2	Middle Ground**	9.3%	4.2%	4.6%	7.0%
I3	Heartland Communities**	6.7%	-10.7%	-11.6%	5.6%
E3	Hometown Charm	5.5%	3.0%	9.8%	4.9%
L1	Savvy Suburbanites**	5.4%	4.0%	3.1%	5.7%
E1	Modest Income Homes	4.5%	10.4%	14.4%	3.2%
I1	Small Town Sincerity**	4.1%	-3.3%	-0.7%	2.7%
I4	Rooted Rural	3.9%	-15.1%	-14.9%	2.8%

**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.*

CASE STUDY: MIDDLE GROUND SEGMENT

Typical communities that fit the Middle Ground Tapestry Segment and are described as:



Tapestry Segment K2 Middle Ground

9.3% of OH anglers*
7.0% of OH population

- Suburban neighborhoods that are slightly younger than U.S. average
- Tend to consist of married couples, cohabitating couples, and single-person households
- Tend to shop at discount grocery chains and frequent fast-food restaurants
- Use social media as well as newspapers and magazines
- Recreational interests often include professional and college sports, fishing, and gardening
- Vacations are typically taken to nearby states, especially those offering beaches or sightseeing opportunities

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

- Fishing as a way to **spend time with children**. Research has shown that people take their kids fishing at a young age because their parents did the same.
- Facilitate opportunities for **social connection** with friends and other couples.
- Use the emails in Iowa's license system to connect with anglers and create custom messages that connect people with the information on the agency's website, from the interactive lake fishing map to reports and forecast.
- Work with Ohio State University **to message to students about the great fishing** in the Columbus area.

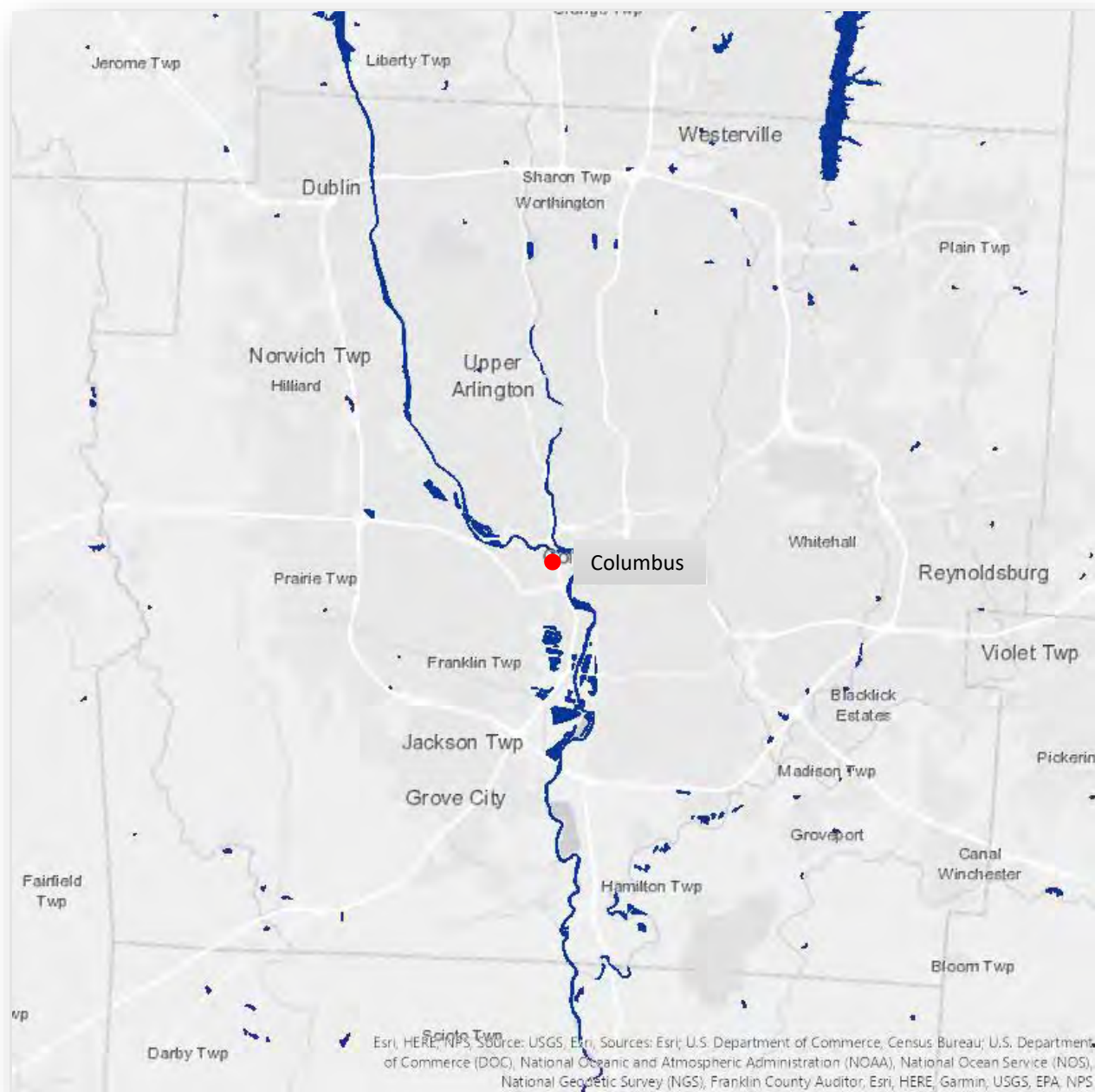
*Estimates reflect the 2024 population

Data provided by ESRI's Segment Infographics Dashboard.

CASE STUDY: COLUMBUS

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 Columbus and surrounding area as a case study.



Esri, HERE, NPS, Source: USGS, Esri, 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 Geodetic Survey (NGS), Franklin County Auditor, Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS



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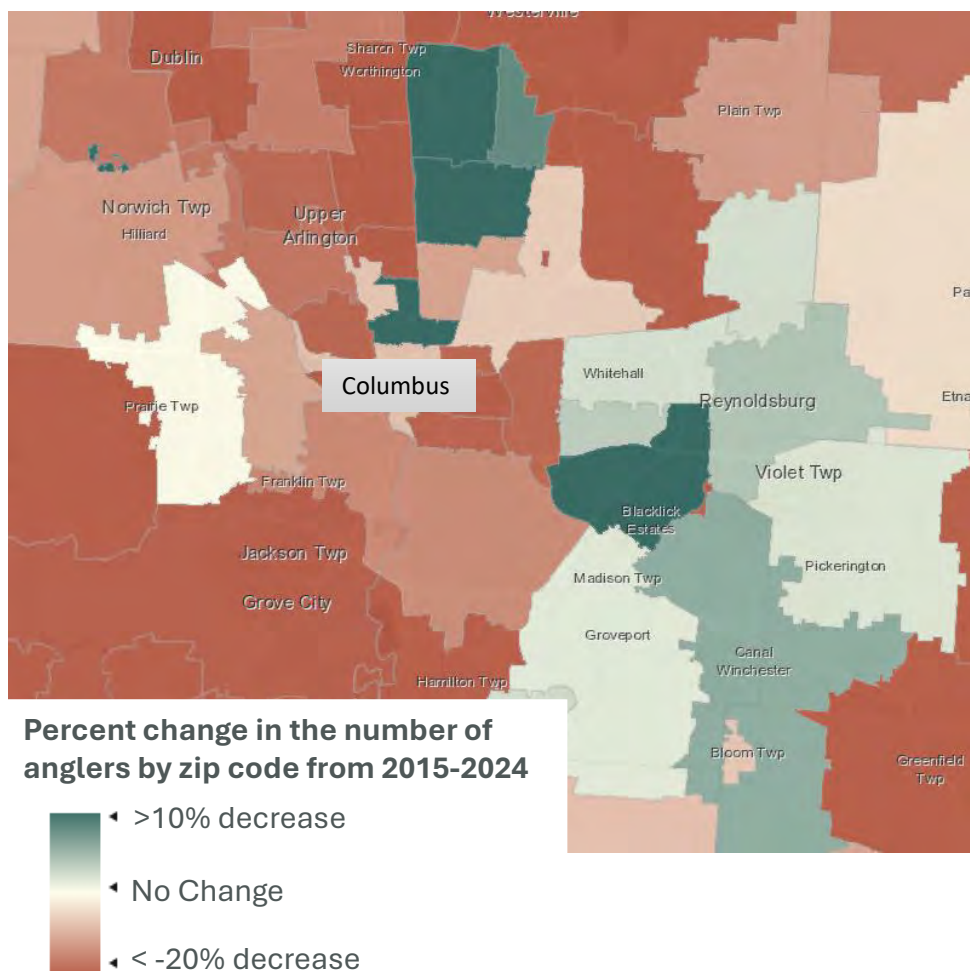


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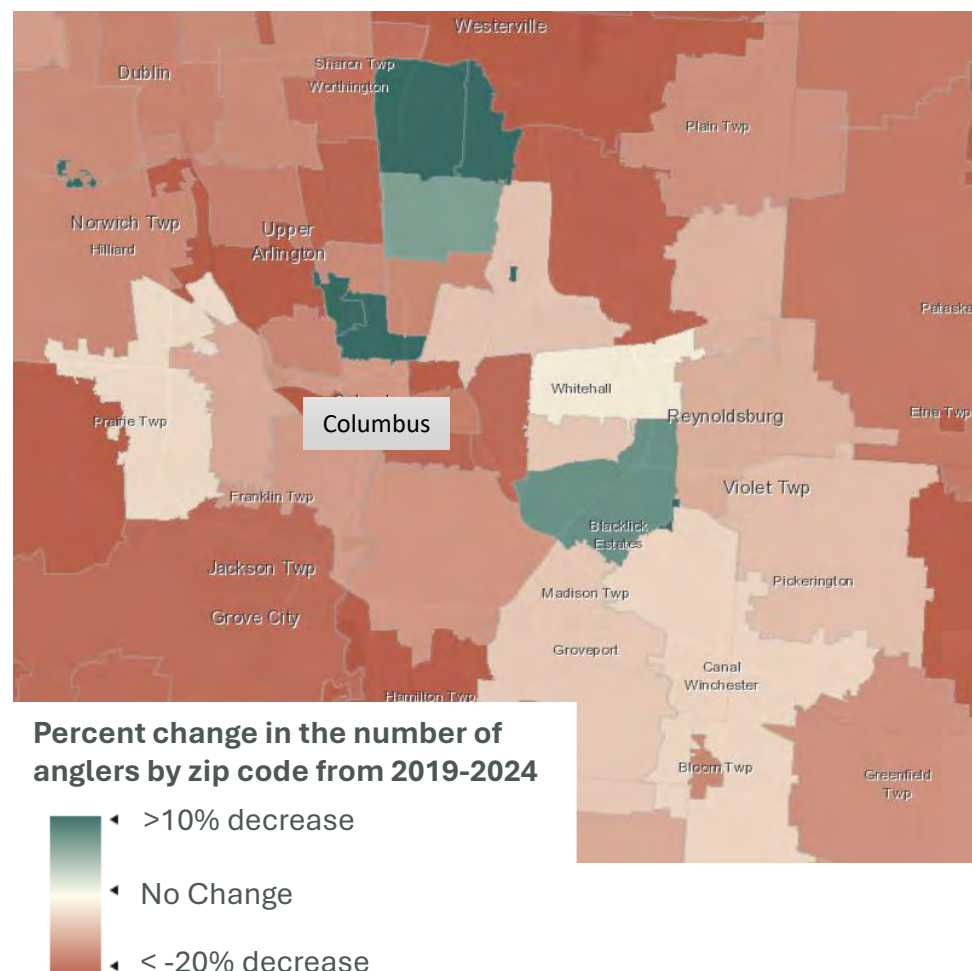
CASE STUDY: COLUMBUS ANGLER CHANGE

Over the last decade, Columbus and the surrounding area experienced some of the strongest contraction of angler numbers. While some of its suburbs and neighboring communities exhibited growth, potentially as a result of proximal fishing opportunities.

**Ten-year timeframe
(2015 through 2024)**



**Five-year timeframe
(2019 through 2024)**



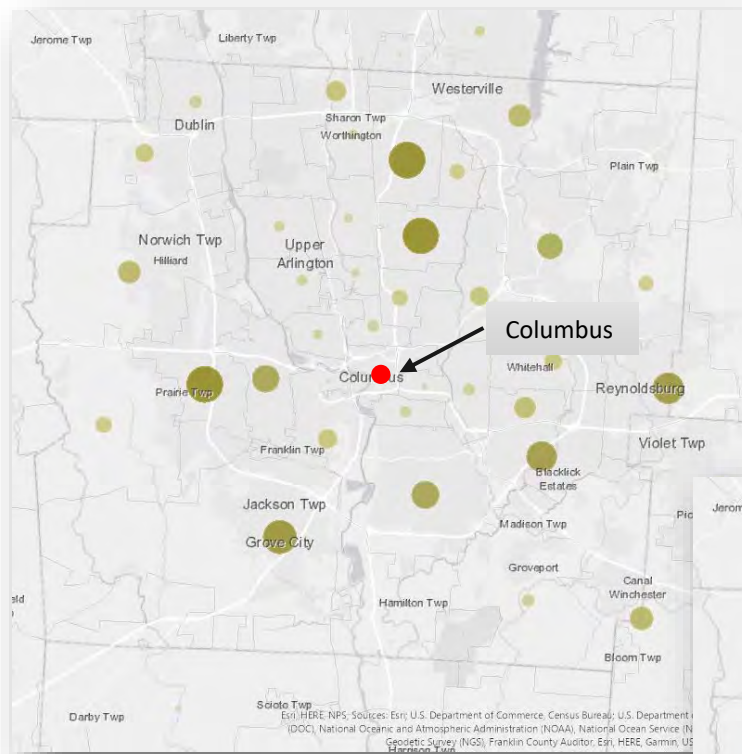
Note: To a certain extent the percent change in license holders reflects a variability in license records due to incomplete data for Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in earlier years.

CASE STUDY: ANGLERS BY R3 CATEGORY

Although Columbus 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 Columbus.

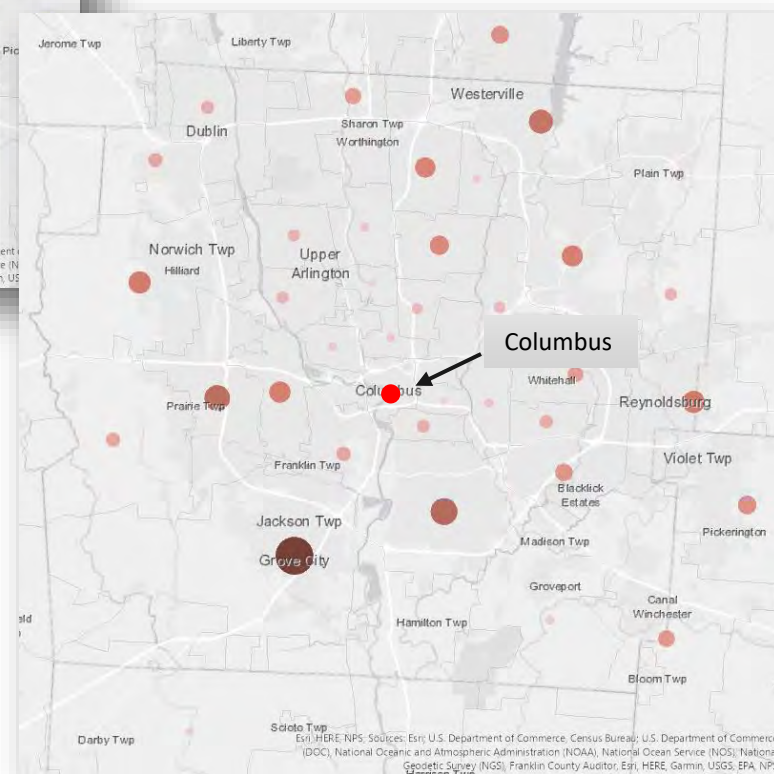
Both groups are in the same geographic areas, notably outside the city, either within easy commuting distance or in the city suburbs.



New anglers (Recruit)

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.



Lapsed anglers (Reactive)

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 southeast of the Columbus metro area fit the 'Flourishing Families' profile.



Maps developed using a representative sample of all license holders.

RESULTS: CORE SEGMENTS SUMMARIES, TOP 4 (2)

Typical communities that fit the Flourishing Families Tapestry Segment and are described as:



Tapestry Segment H1 Flourishing Families

3.7% of OH anglers*
3.5% of OH population

HIGHLIGHTS

- Mostly in lower-density, rapidly growing suburbs
- Median age of 39; mainly large families with children
- Often employed in professional roles and earn middle-tier incomes
- Pickup trucks and SUVs are common vehicle choices
- Often play board games, read books, and travel domestically

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Emphasize the health benefits** of spending time outdoors as a family
- Highlight opportunities **to pair fishing with other travel** and other attractions that would be good for the whole family
- Facilitate **fishing trip planning by connecting people with the information** on the agency's website, from the interactive lake fishing map to reports and forecast.
- Marketing materials should **emphasize family trips**

*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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