SENATE FISH AND GAME
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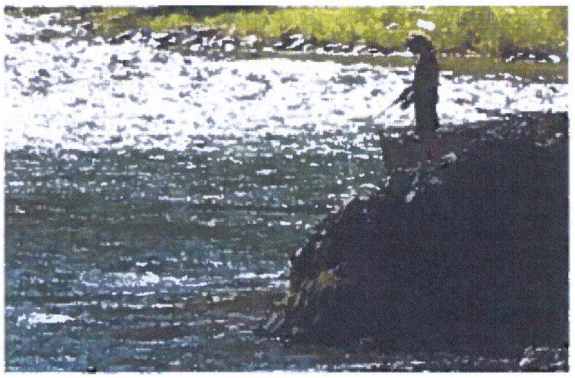
OUTDOORS

# Census: More people fishing, fewer hunting in Montana



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BILLINGS GAZETTE

BILLINGS – Although the number of anglers rose in Montana between 2006 and 2011, the number of hunters has declined, while Wyoming saw increases on both fronts, according to a comparison of data from U.S. Census Bureau surveys.

The Census Bureau released its 2011 state-specific data to the public last week. Across the nation, the survey showed a growing interest in outdoor activities like hunting, fishing and wildlife watching. Between 2006 and 2011, there was an 11 percent increase in the number of anglers and a 9 percent rise in hunters nationwide. An estimated 38 percent of the population – more than 91.1 million people age 16 and older – enjoyed outdoor activities related to fishing, hunting and wildlife watching.

The numbers could reflect a nation deciding to invest in outdoor-based traditional family activities closer to home as the economy slipped into a recession. They could also reflect an increasing push by wildlife agencies, gear manufacturers, television shows and nonprofit groups to engage children at a younger age through free programs and activities in the wake of studies that have shown a disconnect between many children and their natural surroundings.

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**Still, the numbers remain relatively small as a percentage** of the entire U.S. population. The survey found 14 percent of the U.S. population fished, while only 6 percent hunted. The Mountain region, which includes Montana and Wyoming, had participation rates of only 15 percent in fishing and 6 percent in hunting.

Wildlife watching was the most popular activity, with 29 percent of U.S. residents saying they took part, although the survey showed no increase in the popularity of the activity.

The biggest states naturally recorded the largest participation rates, with Texas boasting the most hunters and anglers at 1.1 million and 2.4 million, respectively. Florida had the most resident and nonresident anglers – 3.1 million. As a percentage of the population, South Dakota – with 21 percent – had the highest participation rate of residents in hunting. Wyoming ranked third with an 18 percent participation rate.

Among anglers, it was no surprise that Alaska, with its popular salmon runs and ocean

fishing, had the highest resident participation rate -- 40 percent, while Idaho and Montana tied for fifth place with 25 percent.

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**Looking at the details, Montana showed an increase in the number** of resident anglers from 179,000 in 2006 to 185,000 in 2011. But the number of resident hunters fell sharply from 145,000 in 2006 to 104,000 in 2011. Nonresident hunters in Montana fell less steeply, dropping from 50,000 in 2006 to 46,000 in 2011.

"There's no doubt that there has been a downward trend and 2011 was down across the board for license buyers," said Tom Palmer of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Palmer said there were a number of factors driving down participation in hunting in Montana last year, including a bad weather year that severely reduced some game animal numbers, a slow economy and new legislation that hiked the price of licenses for out-of-state hunters.

In Wyoming there was an increase in resident anglers, climbing from 96,000 in 2006 to 110,000 in 2011, but the state also saw an increase in resident hunters, up from 52,000 in 2006 to 76,000 in 2011.

Nationally, the survey revealed just how big wildlife, hunting and angling businesses are to states and the country as a whole. Wildlife-related recreation expenditures totaled $137.5 billion in 2011, $86.9 billion for just hunting and fishing. The average U.S. hunter spent more than $2,400 and the average angler dropped more than $1,200.

In Montana in 2011, total wildlife-associated expenditures amounted to $1.4 billion and in Wyoming added up to $1.14 billion.