

## **Responsive Management**<sup>™</sup>

Specializing in Survey Research on Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Issues

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## Is the Economic Downturn Helping Hunting and Fishing Participation?

RECENT NEWS REPORTS have stated that, despite the poor economy, participation in hunting and fishing is on the rise. However, a study conducted in 2008 by

Responsive Management suggests that participation is increasing *because of* the economic downturn, not in spite of it.

Although many factors can affect license sales, in states that have experienced an increase some officials and sportsmen think that the economic slump is the reason (2, 4, 5). A recent report by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) and the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) states that fishing participation, as measured by license sales, increased in 2009 when compared to 2008.

As part of a new quarterly fishing license national sales index published monthly by the RBFF

and ASA, Southwick Associates, which analyzed the data, found a 7.7% increase in the number of licenses sold year-to-date as of September 1, 2009, compared to the same time period in 2008. RBFF President and CEO Frank Peterson said that the reasons for the increase range from "a slow economy, which may allow people more time to engage in outdoor activities, to recreational fishing being a lower cost alternative to other forms of recreation" (1, 6).

There is statistical support for this view. In 2008, Responsive Management and the Georgia Department

of Natural Resources, under a Hunting Heritage Partnership grant from the National Shooting Sports Foundation, conducted a two-phase study to identify

and explore in detail the factors behind three discrete increases in hunting license sales over the past two decades (8). After reaching a peak in 1982, sales of hunting licenses across the United States declined steadily, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Federal Aid data. However, since 1990 there have been three notable exceptions to this overall national decline, in 1992, 1999, and 2004.

To attempt to determine the cause of these increases, Responsive Management analyzed potential internal and external factors that might have affected hunting license sales. The analysis was run on each of the 50 states individually, as well as on the nation as a whole. A total

of 43 external variables were examined, including average monthly temperature, consumer prices, Dow Jones Industrial Averages, median income, new housing starts, housing and population densities, and population by age groups.

Of the 43 variables analyzed, there were only two statistically significant factors that were negatively associated with hunting license sales on the national level: the percentage of the population between the ages of 65 and 69, and increases in new housing starts. In other words, (a) the greater the proportion

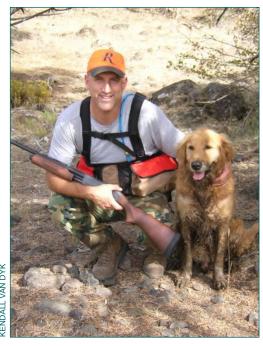


of the population between the ages of 65 and 69, the more likely it is that there will be a decline in hunting license sales; and (b) the higher the rate of housing starts, the more likely it is that there will be a decline in hunting license sales.

The age factor is easily explained: as people age, they are less likely to participate in hunting or have a need to purchase a license; the decline in hunting with increasing age has been documented in numerous participation studies. The significance of the housing starts factor is not so clear; the data simply show that hunting license sales have declined in times of rapid growth in housing starts.

One reason might be the number of hunters who work in construction and related trades. In a 2007 nationwide survey of hunters conducted by Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (9), the top occupational category for employed hunters was "construction / carpentry /

plumbing / electrical / craftsman," a category that strongly relates to the work required for new housing construction. Thus, in times of increased housing starts, it may be that a substantial number of hunters will have less free time to go hunting as they devote more time to work.



"[W]ork obligations" is one of the most common reasons cited by hunters for not hunting or not hunting more often.

In addition, "work obligations" is one of the most common reasons cited by hunters for not hunting or not hunting more often. In two separate surveys of active and inactive hunters conducted in 1995 by Responsive Management (7) and in 2008 by Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (10), "work obligations" was among the top reasons that took away from hunters' enjoyment of hunting or caused them not to hunt.

The housing starts finding in the Responsive Management study has been discussed in several newspaper articles and columns over the past year (2, 4, 5, 11) and has been cited by at least one state official regarding recent license sales increases (2). However, one question remains: In hard economic times, in addition to having more time to hunt in general, do hunters increasingly turn to hunting to put food on the table? Some hunters who have been interviewed indicate that this is a motivating factor for them, and others say it is not (3, 11). More research is needed to explore this

hypothesis. None of the other economic indicators in the 2008 Responsive Management study showed a significant correlation to hunting license sales, which could suggest that the increase in license sales is related to time available to hunt rather than to economic reasons such as hunting for meat.

## Sources

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## Variables Examined in Relation to Hunting License Sales Increases and Decreases

Only 2 of the 43 variables examined in a study conducted by Responsive Management in 2008 showed a statistically significant negative correlation with hunting license sales.

Just as important as significance in this study is nonsignificance: Of the nine economic variables examined, all but one had no statistically significant correlation to hunting license sales. This indicates that something unique to the lone statistically significant economic variable (housing starts) must be behind the correlation, as opposed to more general effects of the economic downturn.

All of the variables examined in the study are listed below. Those that showed a statistically significant negative correlation with hunting license sales are highlighted.



Consumer prices

Consumer Price Index

**Dow Jones** 

**Industrial Averages** 

Housing

Median income

NASDAQ year averages

New housing starts

Producer prices

Standard & Poor year averages

The New York Stock Exchange

Total density of housing

per square mile

Total density of hunters per square mile

Total density of people per square mile

Total precipitation

American Indian and Alaskan Natives populations

Asian/Pacific Islander population

Average monthly temperature

Changes in Black population

Changes in White population

Female population

General population

Hispanic population

Male population

Non-Hispanic population

Square miles

Population ages 0 to 4

Population ages

5 to 9

Population ages

10 to 14

Population ages

15 to 19

Population ages

20 to 24

Population ages 25 to 29

Population ages

Population ages

30 to 34

35 to 39

Population ages 40 to 44

Population ages 45 to 49

Population ages 50 to 54

Population ages

55 to 59

Population ages 60 to 64

Population ages 65 to 69

Population ages 70 to 74

Population ages 75 to 79

Population ages 80 to 84

Population ages 85 and above

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