

AMERICAN'S PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION: Results From NSRE (With unweighted data) (Versions 1 to 13)

The emphasis of this report is on participation patterns across activities and segments of our society. Versions 1 to 13 of NSRE cover more than 50 activities, from casual walking outdoors to more challenging activities such as mountain biking and scuba diving. In this report, we describe both general types of outdoor participation and participation in land, water, and snow or ice settings (for details regarding the history and methodology of the NSRE please refer to the Foreword and Introduction sections). Version 12 of the NSRE focused only on people living in the southern Appalachians and hence data from this version is not included in this report.

General Types of Participation

Between July, 1999, and July, 2002, fifty-seven thousand eight hundred and sixty-eight (57,868) people across the U.S. were asked about their participation in twelve types of outdoor recreation (see Table 1). Each of these types represents two or more similar activities that we have chosen to summarize together. Across all people 16 years and older (i.e., 213.1 million), we estimate that 98.5 percent participated in some type of outdoor recreation during the 12 months just prior to their interview. This means that almost 210 million people age 16 or older are involved in some form of outdoor recreation. The most popular types of outdoor participation, as measured by number of people participating, include:

Individual Trail/Street/ Road Activities	90.3 percent (192.4 million participants)
Traditional Social Activities	83.4 percent (177.7 million participants)
Viewing & Photographing Activities*	80.5 percent (171.5 million participants)
Viewing & Learning Activities	72.6 percent (154.7 million participants)
Driving for Pleasure Activities	66.9 percent (142.6 million participants)
Swimming Activities	66.3 percent (141.3 million participants)

The five most popular individual activities and percent of the U.S. population participating were:

Walking	86.0 percent
Family Gathering	76.3 percent
Viewing Natural Scenery	64.4 percent
Visiting a Nature Center, Nature Trail or Zoo	61.9 percent
Picnicking	59.8 percent

For the most part, these types of activities probably owe some of their popularity to their relatively low cost, to the fact that they can be enjoyed with minimal physical exertion, and they do not require any special equipment or developed skills.

Land-Based Activities

Activities that occur primarily on land, rather than on water or snow and ice, constitute the largest category of outdoor recreational participation in the country. Trail, street, and road activities; team sport activities; backpacking and camping activities; viewing and learning activities; hunting; viewing and photographing wildlife; driving for pleasure and sightseeing; and a few social activities are discussed below as they occur primarily in land settings.

Table 1—Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in 12 types of outdoor recreational activities, 1999-2002.

Type of Outdoor Activity	Percent of Population 16 or Older	Number in Millions
Participated in any Type of Activity	98.5	209.9
Trail/Street/Road Activities	90.3	192.4
Traditional Social Activities	83.4	177.7
Viewing & Photographing Activities*	80.5	171.5
Viewing & Learning Activities	72.6	154.7
Driving for Pleasure Activities	66.9	142.6
Swimming Activities	66.3	141.3
Outdoor Adventure Activities	61.5	131.1
Boating/Floating/sailing Activities	41.3	88.0
Fishing	36.4	77.6
Snow & Ice Activities	29.2	62.2
Outdoor Team Sports	20.6	43.9
Hunting	12.9	27.5

Source: 1999-2002 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960. “*” denotes that the estimates for this category of activities were adjusted (by +1.751) to compensation for a problem with a screener question.

Trail, Street, and Road Activities: The single most popular activity in the United States is walking outdoors. An estimated 183.3 million, or 86.0 percent of the 213.1 million (noninstitutionalized) people in the U. S. walk outdoors for fun or exercise one or more times per year (Table 2). Participation can occur on neighborhood streets, in local parks, or in more remote settings such forest trails. The next most popular trail, street, and road activity is biking with more than 87.2 million participants. Of people who bike, an estimated 48.4 million biked on backcountry roads, trails, or cross country on a mountain bike.

Team sports constitute another category of participation. Team sports, including baseball, football, and soccer, are participated in at least once annually by almost 44 million people.

Backpacking and camping are some of the most traditional forms of outdoor recreation. An estimated 24.5 million people 16 or older went backpacking at least once last year. Furthermore an estimated 62 million people camped at developed sites, while 38.4 million people chose to camp at primitive sites. Developed camping includes staying overnight near roads in developed campgrounds such as those provided on National Forests or National Parks, and especially those in State Parks. Primitive camping, on the other hand, includes staying overnight in more primitive settings lacking most of the amenities of a developed campground. For most primitive camping, one must carry water and provide all camping facilities, such as a table.

Table 2—Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in land-resource-based outdoor activities, 1999-2002.

Activity	Percent of Population 16 and Older	Number in Millions
Trail/Street/Road Activities		
Bicycling	40.9	87.2
Mountain Biking	22.7	48.4
Walking	86.0	183.3
Horse Riding & Equestrian	10.9	23.2
Hiking	34.7	73.9
Team Sport Activities		
Softball, Soccer, Baseball etc	20.6	43.9
Backpacking & Camping Activities		
Backpacking	11.5	24.5
Developed Camping	29.1	62.0
Primitive Camping	18.0	38.4
Visit a Wilderness or Primitive Area	36.1	76.9
Gather Mushrooms, Berries or Other Natural Products	32.7	69.7
Viewing & Learning Activities		
Visiting a Nature Center, Nature Trail or Zoo	61.9	131.9
Visiting a prehistoric or Archaeological Site	22.7	48.4
Visit a Historic Site	51.7	110.2

Activity	Percent of Population 16 and Older	Number in Millions
Viewing & Photographing Activities		
Bird-Watching	36.0	76.7
Viewing Other Wildlife	49.3	105.1
Viewing Wildflowers & Natural Vegetation	48.4	103.1
Viewing Natural Scenery	64.4	137.2
Hunting		
Big Game	10.1	21.5
Small Game	8.4	17.9
Waterfowl	2.8	6.0
Driving for Pleasure & Sightseeing		
Sightseeing	57.0	122.5
Driving for Pleasure Through Natural Scenery	57.1	121.7
Off-Road 4-Wheel Driving, ATV or Motorcycle	19.2	40.9
Traditional Social Activities		
Family Gathering	76.3	162.6
Picnicking	59.8	127.4

Source: 1999-2002 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960.

Viewing and learning activities, such as visiting nature centers, nature trails, zoo's and other outdoor-oriented education facilities are popular in the United States. An estimated 131.9 million people visited nature centers or trails last year, and a further 48.4 million people visited a prehistoric or archaeological site, such as Pueblo ruins or some of the Native American mounds in the eastern part of the country. Learning about nature, the natural environment, our culture and history is a significant reason for outdoor recreation in America, if participation estimates are any evidence.

Viewing and photographing activities, such as birdwatching, viewing wildlife (such as bears, deers, etc), viewing wildflowers and natural vegetation or scenery are also popular activities in the United States. An estimated 137.2 million people took the time last year to stop and observe the natural scenery around them. Over 105 million people also took the time to view wildlife or wildflowers, while 76.7 million people viewed birds.

Hunting: Three types of hunting are listed in Table 2, big game, small game and migratory birds. An estimated 21.5 million people hunt big game species, including deer,

turkey, elk and other large birds or mammals. Some 17.9 million people hunt small game species, including squirrels, rabbits, and other small mammals. Six million hunt migratory birds, primarily ducks and geese.

Driving for pleasure and sightseeing activities are very popular outdoor recreation pastimes for many people in the United States. Over 122 million people spent time last year sightseeing or driving through natural scenery for pleasure. Over 40 million people also enjoyed off-road driving using 4-wheel vehicles, ATV's or motorcycles.

Traditional Activities: Traditional activities include picnicking and family gatherings. More than half of the 213.1 million people 16 or older in the U.S. participate in picnicking. This experience can be as casual as a single person taking lunch in the nearby local park, or as elaborate as a gourmet spread of cheeses, wines, pickles, and breads among friends in the countryside. Often associated with picnicking are family gatherings outdoors. Throughout this country group shelters and multiple family sites have been developed to facilitate this very popular activity—162.6 million, 76.3 percent of the population. Family gatherings frequently involve annual or periodic reunions of relatives. Almost always they involve cooking outside, covered dishes brought from home, and sharing of memories.

Water-Based Activities

Boating and floating, fishing and swimming activities are the types of water-based activities summarized in Table 3.

Boating: The most popular boating activity is motor boating with 60.5 million participants, or 28.4 percent of the population 16 and older. Associated with motor boating is water skiing, in which almost 19 million people participate. Jet skiing is another form of engine-powered boating. Jet skiing is a relatively new activity brought about by jet water propulsion technology that has been marketed for less than 20 years. Its popularity has resulted in 20.7 million participants already.

Wind-powered boating (including sailboarding and windsurfing) is less popular than motorized forms of boating. Almost thirteen million people sail and 1.7 million sailboard or windsurf. Sailing usually requires large bodies of water with stretches that are not limited by low bridges or shallow water. Along with sailboarding and windsurfing, sailing a boat requires a relatively high amount of skill.

Muscle-powered boating and floating activities include canoeing, kayaking, rowing and floating or rafting. Nearly twenty-four million people canoed last year, while 9.0 million kayaked. Kayaks are favored typically because of their maneuverability in steering a course through rapids, and a significant industry has developed to facilitate kayaking, rafting and other floating on whitewater or other fast-moving streams. Some outfitters have also begun renting tubes for floating less dangerous stretches of rivers. This form of recreation outfitting seems to be growing rapidly as an estimated 22.8 million people floated or rafted last year.

Fishing occurs in lakes, streams, and oceans. The type of water determines, in large part, the species sought and thus the type of fishing pursued. Of the 77.6 million people in the U. S. who fish, 68.0 million fish in fresh water. Among those who fish in fresh water, most, about 53 million fish in warm water, a category of water bodies that includes most lakes, reservoirs, large rivers and ponds. Bass, crappie, and other species are the most familiar and sought after. Almost 31 million people aged 16 and older fish for cold water species, such as trout and northern pike. A special category of coldwater fishing is anadromous fishing for migratory species such as salmon. Just over nine million people fish for anadromous species. A further 21.9 million people fish in salt water including oceans (from shore and by boat), ocean inlets and sounds, tidal estuaries, and inland saltwater lakes.

Table 3—Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in water-resource-based outdoor activities, 1999-2002.

Activity	Percent of Population 16 and Older	Number in Millions
Boating/Floating/Sailing		
Sailing	6.0	12.8
Canoeing	11.2	23.9
Kayaking	4.2	9.0
Rowing	4.7	10.0
Motor-Boating	28.4	60.5
Water Skiing	8.8	18.8
Jet skiing	9.7	20.7
Floating, Rafting	10.7	22.8
Sailboarding/Windsurfing	0.8	1.7
Surfing	1.5	3.2
Fishing		
Freshwater	31.9	68.0
Coldwater	14.4	30.7
Warmwater	24.9	53.1
Saltwater	10.3	21.9
Migratory Ocean-to-Freshwater	4.3	9.2
Swimming		
Swimming/Lake, River, Ocean	46.5	99.1
Swimming in Freshwater	28.6	60.9

Activity	Percent of Population 16 and Older	Number in Millions
Swimming in Saltwater	24.6	52.4
Snorkeling	7.5	16.0
Scuba	2.0	4.3
Visit a Beach	44.5	94.8
Visit a Waterside	29.3	62.4

Source: 1999-2002 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960.

Swimming: Of the 141.3 million people who participate in some form of swimming activity, over 996 million spend some portion of their swimming in “natural” waters such as streams, lakes, ponds and oceans. An estimated 16 million people go snorkeling, and just over 4 million scuba dive one or more times over the course of a year. An estimated 94.84 million people also visited a beach during the last year, while over 62.4 million visited a waterside area (other than a beach).

Snow-And-Ice-Based Activities

Downhill skiing, snowboarding, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling are the four types of snow and ice activities presented in Table 4.

Table 4–Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in snow and ice-resource-based activities, 1999-2002.

Activity	Percent of Population 16 and Older	Number in Millions
Snow and Ice Activities		
Downhill Skiing	9.5	20.2
Snowboarding	4.3	9.2
Cross Country Skiing	5.1	10.9
Snowmobiling	6.3	13.4

Source: 1999-2002 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960.

Of the 62.29 million who participate in some form of snow and ice activity(ies), 20.2 million downhill ski, 10.9 million cross country ski, and 9.2 million snowboard downhill. Snowboarding has grown in popularity and become an established winter activity over the last five years. Similarly, snowmobiling is also becoming an established winter activity as an estimated 13.4 million people snowmobiled in the last year.

Comment

This is the fifth NSRE report to be produced. This report reflects and confirms the same findings of the first 4 reports, that outdoor recreation is still a basic part of the American lifestyle. As a matter of lifestyle, traditional land, water, snow, and ice settings are still very much in demand as places for casual activities such as walking, picnicking, family gatherings, sightseeing, and visiting nature centers or nature trails.