

Chapter 2: Outdoor Recreation Participation

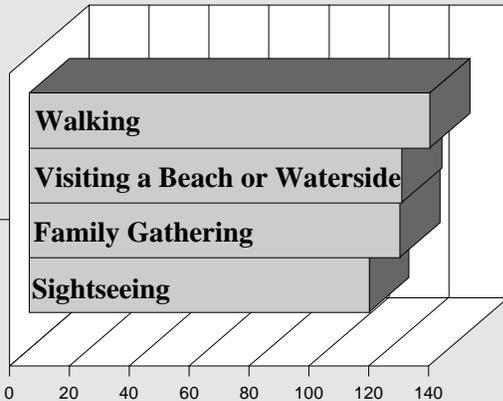


Figure 2.1—The four most popular outdoor recreation activities.

Survey results show that 94.5 percent of Americans 16 years of age or older participated in at least one of the surveyed forms of outdoor recreation in 1994.

A rising national population along with rises in rates of participation translate into growing markets for most outdoor recreation activities.

Almost 95 Percent of Americans Participate

Survey results show that 94.5 percent of Americans 16 years of age or older participated in at least one of the surveyed forms of outdoor recreation in the 12 months prior to being interviewed. That is almost 19 out of 20 people and approximately 189 million participants nationwide (fig. 2.1). Whether these activities were done for health reasons, as part of a vacation, as daily stress relief, or just for fun, it is apparent that demand for outdoor recreation is high. Percentages of interviewees who reported participation, and estimates of numbers of American participants over age 15 are shown in the table at the end of this Chapter.

Some activities, such as walking, do not require a specific setting. However, most activities either require or are enhanced by a particular environment or specific facilities. While private industry attempts to find a way to capitalize on the growing market of outdoor recreation, public agencies already have the basic resources necessary to provide for the public demand in this area. The most essential resource is, of course, land. Government agencies are responsible for much of the land that is still available for outdoor recreation activities. While most agencies do have resource oriented responsibilities other than recreation, it is viewed as important to respond to public demands for recreational use of public lands.

Results from the NSRE show that there are four activities in which over half of the population over the age of 15 participated in the year prior to the interview. Walking is the most popular single activity, with about 134 million participants. Visiting a beach or other waterside and gathering outdoors with family and friends each have about 124 million participants 16 and older; sightseeing has 113 million such participants. The high demand for such activities and the environments conducive to their enjoyment could certainly be met in part by agencies that manage land, forest, and water resources.

It is not surprising that so many report walking as an outdoor activity. Walking does not require a specific setting, it is inexpensive, and is probably the exercise most frequently recommended. For older people, in particular, it is healthful, and can be done at one's own pace. With the numbers of people in their 70's and older increasing rapidly in the United States, one can easily picture the popularity of outdoor walking continuing to increase. Opportunities to serve walkers include supplying safe, attractive trails.

Visiting a beach has long been a favorite way to spend a few hours, a whole day, or a vacation. The activity is

supported by providers (many of them public) of attractive beaches, accommodations, food services, and entertainment.

Since many people do not have the space to host large family gatherings indoors, the popularity of holding large gatherings outdoors may well increase. Public parks and forests are oftentimes available for this activity. Due to the popularity of walking, visiting a beach, and gathering with family members, public land management agencies may want to incorporate facilities for all three activities in key locations. This will ensure maximum amounts of enjoyment for a large segment of the population.

Sightseeing, of course, covers a wide range of sites and attractions. The unique natural ones that often justify a long trip are largely concentrated on public land. Tourism and travel services and facilities that make sightseeing more enjoyable are on the rise. It is difficult to picture the popularity of sightseeing as a base activity of tourism decreasing when numbers of retired people are increasing. Associated with the potential increase in the popularity of sightseeing is the potential degradation of the resource base, which will need to be addressed by the agencies responsible for their management.

Among overall activity headings, viewing activities were shown to be the outdoor pursuits that people participated in the most. Over three-quarters of the population 16 years and older (153 million people) said they participated in this type of activity at least once in 1994-95. Other major activity headings with over 100 million participants include fitness activities (137 million), social activities (136 million), outdoor spectator activities (118 million), and swimming activities (109 million). Public agencies who manage land and water resources can certainly play a major role in providing an environment for these immensely popular forms of outdoor recreation.

Traditional Outdoor Activities on Public Lands Remain Popular

The forms of outdoor recreation just mentioned probably owe some of their popularity to their relatively low cost, close proximity to urban centers, and a wide range of possible settings. A person need not spend a great deal of money or travel far to take a walk or go sightseeing. Other activities that are a little less popular are of special interest to public land managers because many of the specific settings for these activities are located in our parks, forests, and state recreation areas.

We have defined such a second tier of activities as those that attract 25 to 99 million participants per year (fig. 2.2). This list contains many activities which include hiking, camping, attending various forms of interpretive/visitor centers, boating, fishing, and so on.

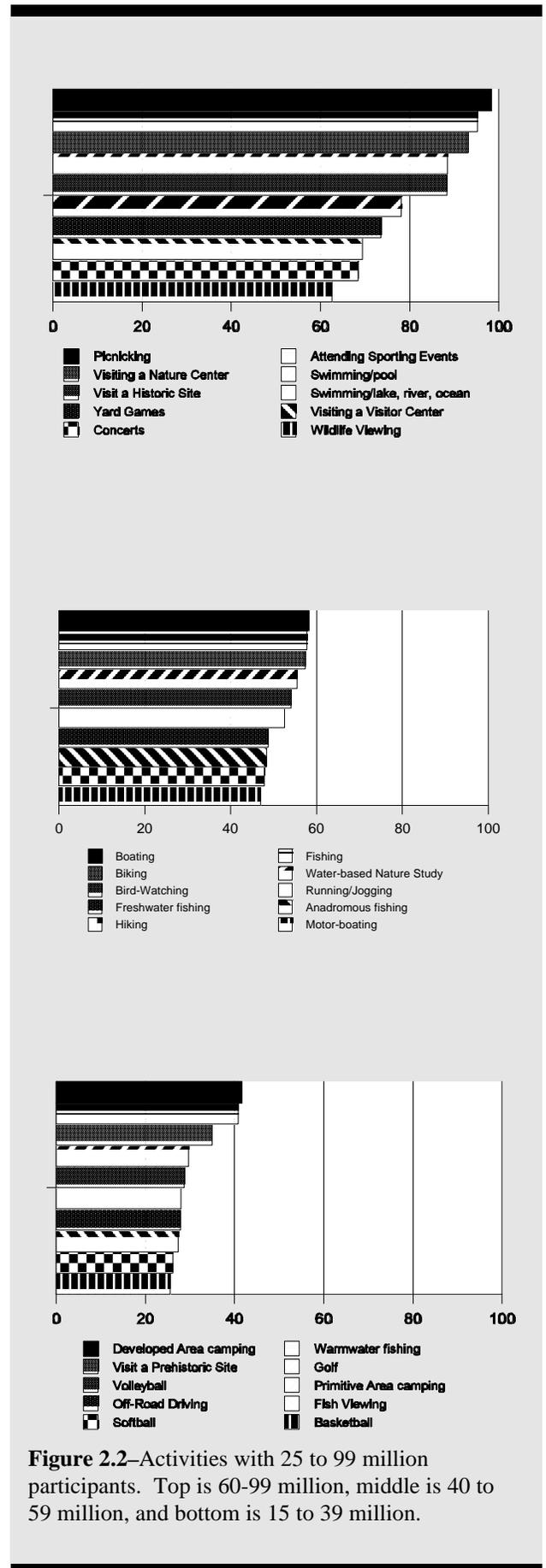


Figure 2.2—Activities with 25 to 99 million participants. Top is 60-99 million, middle is 40 to 59 million, and bottom is 15 to 39 million.

Many of these activities have low impact on the resource base and require minimal management. In the case of the more management intensive activities, a nominal fee could help offset costs and protect the resource.

Picnicking, the most popular of these activities (98 million participants), and enjoying yard games (74 million) are probably more closely associated with the first tier of activities. They are common, and can be done in a wide range of settings. Traditionally, sites for picnicking have been provided largely by public agencies and it is quite feasible for most land management agencies to provide facilities for picnicking. Yard games can be played in association with picnicking or private residences.

Some of the activities in this second tier are associated with satisfying people's curiosity about nature and things past. Attending various centers or sites is near the top of this list. Nature centers, historic sites, and visitor centers all draw more than 60 million visitors a year. Many of the facilities and sites for these activities are provided by public agencies. These facilities not only provide enjoyment in and of themselves, they often prove useful as an information resource and a starting point for other outdoor recreation activities, such as wildlife viewing (63 million), bird watching (54 million), and fish and other wildlife viewing (27 million).

There are many activities in this group that occur only in a water-based setting. Pool swimming was enjoyed by 88 million Americans over age 15 in 1994, and non-pool swimming by 78 million. The popularity of both types of swimming has remained high in recent years. People find swimming a pleasant way to relieve tension and stay fit.

Fishing and studying nature near water are other water-based activities that provide relaxation for 58 million and 55 million people, respectively. Specific types of fishing in this second group include the pursuit of freshwater, anadromous, and warmwater species.

Boating and motorboating also fall into water-based activities that draw more than 25 million participants a year. General boating was enjoyed by 58 million people and motorboating by 47 million. These activities may also be enjoyed in conjunction with other outdoor recreation activities such as fishing or water skiing.

Land-based recreation activities that may or may not require specific settings include cycling and running/jogging. There were 57 million bicyclists over age 15 in 1994. Some cyclists enjoy the special challenges that mountain biking provides, while others enjoy cycling simply to get from one place to another. The popularity of running or jogging also has been growing. In 1994, 52 million people did a bit of running.

The settings for this activity range widely from just around the neighborhood, to municipal parks, to long-distance wilderness trails. Regardless of the setting, however, the psychological as well as the physical benefits of running have undoubtedly contributed to the activity's rise in popularity.

The remaining activities in this group, hiking, developed area camping, and primitive area camping all require more specific settings generally provided by public agencies. Almost 48 million Americans over age 15 went hiking in 1994, 42 million went developed area camping, and 28 million camped in primitive areas. Hiking and primitive area camping have increased considerably in recent years, placing higher demands on existing trails and campgrounds. The recognition of these trends are necessary for land managers to reduce the impact on the resource base and mediate potential user conflicts.

Other outdoor recreation activities with more than 25 million participants include attending sporting events and concerts, golf, volleyball, off-road driving, softball, and basketball.

Specialized Activities

We have arbitrarily defined activities that attract less than 25 million participants nationwide per year as "specialized." We have assigned this term because many of the activities in this group not only require specialized settings, such as forest lands, but also specialized sporting equipment. Many kinds of activities are in this group (fig.2.3), and more undoubtedly could have been added. Many activities in this group represent new activities since the last National Recreation Survey in 1982-83, such as orienteering and rock climbing. However, traditional activities are also represented and include hunting, horseback riding, and downhill and cross-country skiing.

All of the outdoor recreation activities included in the survey represent enough people and interest to be considered important by land managers. Even windsurfing, the least popular of the listed activities, attracted more than 2 million participants a year. The demand for areas to pursue these activities does exist. Many times the popularity of an activity may be localized due to environmental or topographic conditions. Many participants will find that public land resources may be conducive to and convenient for these recreational pursuits. Again, government agencies are responsible for recognizing and reacting to public demands.

Many of the biggest management and policy challenges for land managers are associated with the recognition of, and the reaction to, these specialized activities. These challenges can be attributed to the finite resource base coupled with increasing participants, conflicts with other

activities, the degradation or exclusion of other activities by a single activity, or just the challenge of responding to a brand-new activity.

Rock climbing is a perfect example of a very specific sport creating new challenges for land management agencies. An estimated 7.4 million people have tried rock climbing in the United States. The areas in which one can climb are extremely specific and occur mostly on public land, and the issue of access is often discussed. Climbing requires extensive hands-on training and reliable equipment. Technology has made this equipment possible, with recent advancements allowing climbers to tackle new routes in areas never climbed in before. And although climbing is generally not damaging to the resource, there are many conflicts with other user groups. Liability is also an important issue due to the potential for injury. Therefore, because of the above characteristic of rock climbing and other specific activities, it is important for a land management agency to know the extent of participation, user preferences, and the growth potential of these kinds of activities.

Overall, Outdoor Recreation Participation Has Grown

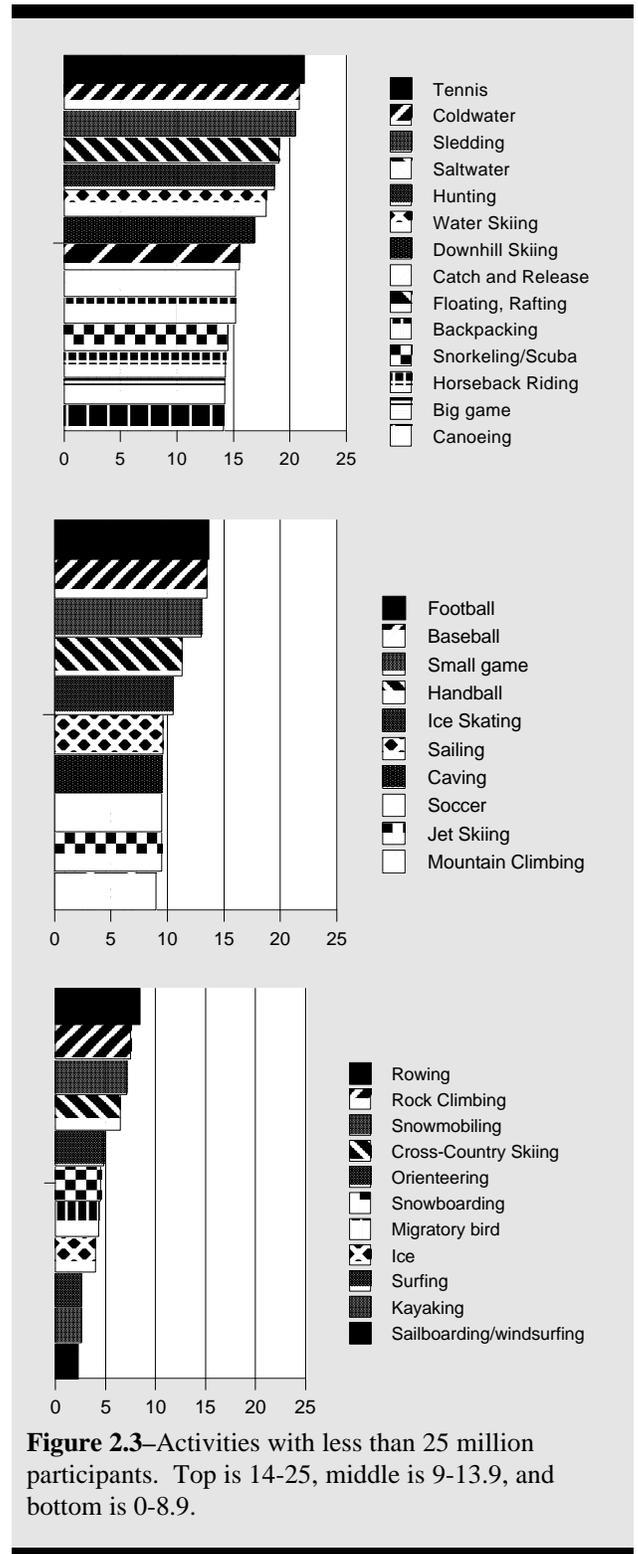
In the search for the most appropriate management policy, recent trends in participation in individual activities are extremely important. This section provides a look at changes in national participation levels for outdoor recreation activities that were measured in previous National Recreation Surveys (NRS). Thirty-one activities for which participation estimates were made in both 1982-83 and 1994-95, are compared in Table 2.1. The table shows the estimated number of participants for each survey period, as well as the percentage change in participation over the 12 year period. The percent change is indicative of the relative growth or decline in participation for a particular activity.

For 25 of the 31 activities included in both studies, there are millions more participants in the 1995 totals than there were in 1983. In addition to millions of new participants for traditional activities, there are participants for adventure activities that were rarely pursued 15 years ago such as orienteering and rock climbing.

Since 1982-83, many activities dramatically increased in popularity. Birdwatching had the largest increase, 155 percent, from 21 million to 54 million participants. Other activities with considerable growth include hiking (94 percent), backpacking (73 percent), downhill skiing (59 percent), primitive area camping (58 percent), and attending an outdoor concert (55 percent).

Between the 1982-83 NRS and the 1994-95 NSRE, the population of people 16 years and over grew by 13.4

percent from an estimated 176,653,000 in 1982 to 200,335,000 in 1995. Therefore, any activity with a percent change greater than 13.4 percent, reflects a growth in interest in these activities, as well as a growth



in the number of participants. Highlighted in bold print in Table 2.1 are 23 of these 31 activities which grew faster than the overall population. This growth in interest may indicate future growth potential. Activities which grew, but at a slower rate than the population growth rate include bicycling (2 percent), and water skiing (13 percent).

Overall, the trend for outdoor recreation participation indicates continued growth in the demand of outdoor recreation opportunities, facilities, and services. Naturally, with an increase in total population, increases in participation for most activities would be expected. A percent change in participation above the rate of population growth indicates that a higher percentage of the public is participating in an activity. This is the case for most of the activities compared between the surveys. However, even participation growth less than the rate of overall population growth means more millions of participants. This growth will result in a greater demand for areas in which to recreate outdoors. Overall population growth, along with the increasing popularity of most outdoor recreation activities, will create problems and opportunities for land and water resource managers. A greater and changing demand is going to be placed on the public's natural resources through recreation. Managers need to anticipate and react to that demand.

Activities which showed a decline in the number of participants include tennis (-29 percent), hunting (-12 percent), horseback riding (-10 percent), sailing (-9 percent), fishing (-4 percent), and ice skating (-1 percent). In terms of natural resource oriented activities, the trend seems to be for some declines in participation in consumptive activities such as hunting, while non-consumptive activity participation seems to be on the rise.

In addition to the number of participants, how often one participates in an activity is an important factor in recreation-based decision making. Some people participate in an activity only once or twice a year. Others, the enthusiasts, may participate once a week. To the managers and providers of outdoor recreational opportunities, therefore, the frequency of participation is probably more important than the simple fact that a person has done something once during the year. Table 2.2 was designed to roughly compare rates of participation in 1994-95 with those in 1982-83.

Study of Table 2.2 suggests that for people who engage in the listed activities, there has been relatively little change in amount and frequency of participation in the last 12 years. The strong similarities in responses to the two surveys strengthen our confidence in the accuracy of these surveys. They also suggest that there has been relatively little change in the ways in which people enjoy these natural resource-based activities.

Large numbers in the left column of table 2.2, which represents 1 or 2 days of activity, suggest that many people are trying the activity. Large percentages in the right column represent high percentages of participants with sufficient interest to pursue an activity for more than 25 days in a given year. Volumes of participation in the newly listed adventure activities are shown at the bottom of Table 2.2. Most of the people who engaged in these activities did not do so very often. Many apparently tried the activities once or twice a year. It remains unclear whether these participants will continue to pursue these activities only occasionally or become avid enthusiasts. The 1994-95 totals for birdwatching and nature study differ markedly from those in 1982-83. In 1994-95,

Table 2.1—Percentages and millions of Americans who participated in outdoor recreation activities in 1982 and 1994. Only activities common to both surveys are shown.

Activity	Number in 1982-83 (millions)	Number in 1994-95 (millions)	Percent Change
Bicycling	56.5	57.4	+1.6
Horseback Riding	15.9	14.3	-10.1
Golf	23.0	29.7	+29.1
Tennis	30.0	21.2	-29.3
Outdoor Team Sports	42.4	53.0	+25.0
Boating	49.5	58.1	+17.4
Sailing	10.6	9.6	-9.4
Motorboating	33.6	47.0	+39.9
Water Skiing	15.9	17.9	+12.6
Swimming/pool	76.0	88.5	+16.4
Swimming/non-pool	56.5	78.1	+38.2
Fishing	60.1	57.8	-3.8
Hunting	21.2	18.6	-12.3
Hiking	24.7	47.8	+93.5
Walking	93.6	133.7	+42.8
Running/ Jogging	45.9	52.5	+14.4
Bird Watching	21.2	54.1	+155.2
Picnicking	84.8	98.3	+15.9
Sightseeing	81.3	113.4	+39.5
Off-Road Driving	19.4	27.9	+43.8
Ice Skating	10.6	10.5	-0.9
Downhill Skiing	10.6	16.8	+58.5
Cross-Country Skiing	5.3	6.5	+22.6
Snowmobiling	5.3	7.1	+34.0
Sledding	17.7	20.5	+15.8
Camping (overall)	42.4	52.8	+24.5
Developed Area	30.0	41.5	+38.3
Primitive Area	17.7	28.0	+58.2
Backpacking	8.8	15.2	+72.7
Attending a Sports Event	70.7	95.2	+34.7
Attending an Outdoor Concert or Play	44.2	68.4	+54.7

48 percent spent only 1 or 2 days doing these things. In 1982-83, only 15 percent indicated such brief enjoyment, and 42 percent reported spending more than 25 days on these activities.

For agencies and organizations that provide opportunities for specific activities, changes in the two right columns (representing people who enjoy an activity for more than 10 days a year) are particularly important. People in those columns have participated frequently and are likely to continue to do so.

Some changes in the frequency of activity seem particularly important. In sailing, the number of people who do so once or twice a year is down, but the numbers who do so more frequently are up. These numbers probably mean that sailing is increasing in popularity. The increase in popularity of backpacking is indicated by the primitive camping. Not only have the numbers of primitive campers increased as indicated in Table 2.1. The increased percentages of people who are doing that activity more than 10 days a year. The same is true for proportion of those people who camp more than 10 days a year also has increased.

Table 2.1 shows a major increase in the number of people who enjoy downhill skiing. Table 2.2, however, suggests that the proportion of all skiers who enjoy that sport more than 10 times a year has dropped. In cross-country skiing there is a different pattern. Not only have the number of cross-country skiers risen by 24.5 percent; the proportions of people who enjoy that activity frequently also have grown.

Table 2.2—Comparison of 1982 to 1994 number of days spent in each activity.

Activity and year	1 to 2 days	3 to 10 days	11 to 25 days	More than 25 days
-----Percent of participants-----				
Bicycling				
1982	12	32	19	38
1994	14	32	19	36
Horseback riding				
1982	47	27	8	17
1994	48	26	8	18
Sailing				
1982	56	30	6	8
1994	48	33	11	7
Motorboating				
1982	33	39	17	12
1994	29	39	18	14
Pool swimming				
1982	14	38	19	29
1994	13	38	18	32
Non-pool swimming				
1982	19	42	20	19
1994	18	45	20	16

Activity and year	1 to 2 days	3 to 10 days	11 to 25 days	More than 25 days
-----Percent of participants-----				
Fishing				
1982	21	43	21	15
Freshwater fishing only				
1994	21	40	20	19
Camping and related				
Backpacking				
1982	39	47	9	6
1994	41	41	11	7
Developed camping				
1982	26	51	16	7
1994	24	52	16	8
Primitive camping				
1982	36	47	12	6
1994	30	48	15	7
Hiking				
1982	28	47	14	12
1994	29	40	16	15
Birdwatching and other nature study				
1982	15	29	14	42
1994	48	30	10	13
Off-road vehicle driving				
1982	23	39	21	17
1994	23	40	16	21
Downhill skiing				
1982	34	44	16	7
1994	33	49	13	5
Cross-country skiing				
1982	51	35	10	4
1994	36	47	11	5
Snowmobiling				
1982	40	36	14	10
1994	46	32	11	11
1994 adventure activities:				
Mtn. climbing	56	36	6	2
Rock climbing	60	30	8	2
Caving	79	18	2	0.1
Orienteering	51	37	7	5

Table 2.3.—Percent and number (millions) of U.S. population 16 years and older participating in outdoor recreation, by activity, 1994-95.

Activity	Number (millions)	Percent
Participation in any		
Outdoor Activity	94.5	189.3
Fitness	68.3	136.9
Running/Jogging	26.2	52.5
Biking	28.7	57.4
Long Distance Biking	3.2	6.4
Walking	66.7	133.7
Individual Sport Activities	22.0	44.1
Golf	14.8	29.7
Tennis	10.6	21.2
Outdoor Team Sport Activities	26.4	53.0
Baseball	6.7	13.5
Softball	13.0	26.1

Activity	Number (millions)	Percent
Football	6.8	13.6
Basketball	12.8	25.5
Soccer	4.7	9.5
Volleyball	14.3	28.7
Handball	5.6	11.3
Outdoor Spectator Activities	58.7	117.6
Concerts	34.2	68.4
Attending Sporting Events	47.5	95.2
Viewing Activities	76.2	152.6
Visiting a Nature Center	46.5	93.1
Visiting a Visitor Center	34.6	69.4
Visit a Prehistoric Site	17.4	34.9
Visit a Historic Site	44.1	88.4
Bird Watching	27.0	54.1
Wildlife Viewing	31.2	62.6
Fish Viewing	13.7	27.4
Other Wildlife Viewing	13.8	27.5
Sightseeing	56.6	113.4
Visiting a Beach or Waterside	62.1	124.4
Studying Nature near Water	27.6	55.4
Snow and Ice Activities	18.1	36.3
Ice Skating	5.3	10.5
Snowboarding	2.3	4.5
Sledding	10.2	20.5
Downhill Skiing	8.4	16.8
Cross-Country Skiing	3.3	6.5
Cross-Country Skiing on Groomed Trails	2.7	5.4
Cross-Country Skiing on Ungroomed Trails	2.8	5.7
Backcountry Cross-Country Skiing	1.9	3.7
Snowmobiling	3.6	7.1
Camping (overall)	26.4	52.8
Developed Area	20.7	41.5
RV Developed Camping	8.6	17.3
Tent Developed Camping	14.7	29.4
Primitive Area	14.0	28.0
RV Primitive Camping	3.5	7.1
Tent Primitive Camping	10.7	21.5
Other Camping	2.1	4.2
Hunting	9.3	18.6
Big Game	7.1	14.2
Small Game	6.5	13.0
Migratory Bird	2.1	4.3
Fishing	28.9	57.9
Freshwater	24.4	48.8
Saltwater	9.5	19.0
Warmwater	20.4	40.8
Coldwater	10.4	20.8
Ice	2.0	4.0
Anadromous	4.5	9.1
Catch and Release	7.7	15.5
Boating	29.0	58.1
Sailing	4.8	9.6
Canoeing	7.0	14.1

Activity	Number (millions)	Percent
Open-top Canoeing	6.8	13.5
Closed-top Canoeing	0.4	0.8
Kayaking	1.3	2.6
Rowing	4.2	8.4
Floating, Rafting	7.6	15.2
Motor-boating	23.5	47.0
Water Skiing	8.9	17.9
Jet Skiing	4.7	9.5
Sailboarding/ windsurfing	1.1	2.2
Swimming Activities	54.2	108.6
Surfing	1.3	2.6
Swimming/pool	44.2	88.5
Swimming/non-pool	39.0	78.1
Snorkeling/Scuba	7.2	14.5
Outdoor Adventure Activities	36.8	73.6
Hiking	23.9	47.8
Hiking to a Summit	8.3	16.6
Orienteering	2.4	4.8
Backpacking	7.6	15.2
Backpacking to a Summit	3.3	6.6
Mountain Climbing	4.5	9.0
Rock Climbing	3.7	7.5
Caving	4.7	9.5
Off-Road Driving	13.9	27.9
Horseback Riding	7.1	14.3
Horseback Riding on Trails	5.2	10.4
Social Activities	67.8	135.9
Yard Games	36.7	73.6
Picnicking	49.1	98.3
Family Gathering	61.8	123.8

