
Recreation & Tourism Statistics Update



Update Report No. 10
June, 2005



Retirees Participation in Outdoor Activities: Retirees 65 and older remain active in many activities well into their senior years¹

The Population 65 or Older in the U.S.

Just under 35 million Americans, or about 1 of every 8 people (12.4 percent), were 65 years or older at the time of the 2000 Census. Over 90 percent of these older Americans are retired; almost all are retired by age 75. Women outnumber men among retired older adults, especially among those over age 85. The population of older and retired Americans grew by nearly 3.8 million between 1990 and 2000, a 12-percent increase. This was slightly slower growth than the total U. S. population rate of 13.2 percent. The number of people age 85 and older, however, grew at the considerably faster rate of 38 percent. The-65-and-older population is projected by the Bureau of Census to continue to grow by an astonishing 147 percent between 2000 and 2050. This amount of growth would bring this age group up to 21 percent of the U. S. population. Florida had the largest proportion of its population 65 years or older in 2000, 17.6 percent. This was followed closely by Pennsylvania (15.6 percent) and West Virginia (15.3 percent).

Outdoor Activities of Retirees

The lengthy table below shows percentages of the U. S. population participating in a number of outdoor activities. Retirees are broken into 3 age groups, 65-74, 75-84, and 85 and older. In addition to these age groups, also shown for comparison are participation percentages for people under 65 years old. Data are from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE). The NSRE survey was run

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continuously from early 2000 to fall 2004. General population participation trends across these few years were the subject of an earlier *Recreation Statistics Update* (go to <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/trends/recupdates.html>). Retirees are the focus of this *Update*. The full listing of *Updates* can be found at the above address.

A number of important trends can be seen in the table below. First, across all the activities listed, with but one exception, the percentage of retirees who participate in an activity is less than for people under age 65. That exception is gardening and landscaping for pleasure. In fact, retirees generally are more active in gardening than are younger people. Second, with just a few exceptions among activities, participation percentage falls from age 65 to age 85 and over. For the more passive activities, such as walking, family gatherings outdoors, sightseeing and viewing/photographing wildlife and flowers, the decrease with age is gradual. With the more physically demanding activities, such as swimming, hiking and mountain biking, the decrease in percentage participating is precipitous with increasing age. Third, some percentage of even the oldest of retirees participate across most activities, regardless of how physically demanding they are. Visiting a wilderness area, visiting a farm, fishing and backpacking are examples. And fourth, some activities remain popular regardless of age, such as walking, family gatherings, gardening/landscaping, driving for pleasure, picnicking, attending outdoor concerts/plays, and viewing/photographing birds, wildlife and flowers. As the retiree population grows in future years, accessible opportunities for these age-persistent popular activities should be accommodated.

Percentage of population participating by outdoor activity and age group

Activity (Sample size in parenthesis)	Age 16-64 (68,320)	Age 65-74 (7,473)	Age 75-84 (3,652)	Age 85+ (559)
Walk for pleasure	83.6	80.0	73.3	74.9
Family gathering	76.4	67.2	60.4	53.7
Gardening or landscaping for pleasure	63.6	76.5	67.3	60.0
View/photograph natural scenery	63.3	52.7	41.4	33.2
Visit nature centers, etc.	60.8	40.7	29.2	21.6
Driving for pleasure	56.3	50.4	38.6	31.9
Picnicking	56.0	49.1	40.5	36.3
Sightseeing	53.5	49.5	39.8	30.1
Visit historic Sites	48.4	36.4	26.2	20.5
View/photograph other wildlife	47.7	38.2	28.6	22.2
View/photograph wildflowers, trees, etc.	46.2	44.3	36.0	30.0
Visit a beach	47.1	26.5	17.3	9.8
Swimming in lakes, streams, etc.	47.5	18.6	9.0	6.3
Swimming in an outdoor pool	46.8	19.2	11.6	9.1

Activity (Sample size in parenthesis)	Age 16-64 (68,320)	Age 65-74 (7,473)	Age 75-84 (3,652)	Age 85+ (559)
Attend outdoor concerts, plays, etc.	42.7	30.8	25.5	37.0
Bicycling	43.7	19.9	12.3	6.1
Yard games, e.g., horseshoes	43.5	19.3	10.6	10.0
Boating (any type)	41.0	20.8	11.5	8.9
Visit a wilderness or primitive area	36.4	20.3	12.3	11.0
Day hiking	36.0	20.1	13.1	9.8
View/photograph birds	32.0	37.3	32.6	29.9
Freshwater fishing	32.8	20.6	12.8	7.0
Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.	30.5	21.9	16.3	12.3
Visit a farm or agricultural setting	29.2	21.3	16.6	17.5
Snow/ice activities (any type)	31.3	6.6	2.5	1.9
Developed camping	29.6	15.3	8.3	3.4
Visit other waterside (besides beach)	28.4	14.4	7.7	5.5
View/photograph fish	27.0	17.7	11.0	9.4
Motorboating	27.3	16.2	8.5	6.2
Warmwater fishing	25.0	15.7	8.8	5.3
Mountain biking	24.1	5.7	2.0	1.0
Visit prehistoric/archeological sites	22.2	14.8	10.5	8.8
Drive off-road	22.1	8.2	3.7	3.5
Boat tours or excursions	20.1	16.4	12.4	8.4
Primitive camping	18.7	6.0	3.3	1.6
Sledding	17.8	3.7	0.7	0.6
Coldwater fishing	14.9	7.5	5.0	3.9
Hunting (any type)	12.8	7.6	4.0	3.0
Rafting	12.6	2.4	0.8	0.4
Saltwater fishing	11.4	6.8	3.3	4.5
Backpacking	12.0	2.4	0.9	1.3
Canoeing	11.4	3.8	1.5	1.0
Horseback riding (any type)	11.1	2.6	1.1	1.3
Use personal watercraft	11.4	1.7	0.7	0.5
Big game hunting	10.1	6.2	3.0	1.2
Downhill skiing	9.9	1.4	0.5	0.5

Activity (Sample size in parenthesis)	Age 16-64 (68,320)	Age 65-74 (7,473)	Age 75-84 (3,652)	Age 85+ (559)
Waterskiing	9.8	1.0	0.2	0.1
Horseback riding on trails	9.2	2.1	0.5	1.1
Ice skating outdoors	9.4	1.6	0.4	1.4
Small Game hunting	8.3	3.7	2.1	2.0
Snorkeling	7.9	2.1	0.7	0.5
Mountain climbing	7.2	2.0	1.5	1.0
Snowmobiling	6.9	1.6	0.5	0.1
Sailing	5.7	2.9	1.8	0.5
Snowboarding	6.1	0.2	0.1	0.0
Rock climbing	5.2	0.7	0.7	0.0
Rowing	5.0	2.2	1.1	1.9
Caving	5.0	0.9	0.5	0.0
Anadromous fishing	4.7	2.2	1.1	0.9
Cross country skiing	4.4	1.7	0.8	0.0
Kayaking	4.5	1.1	0.4	0.3
Snowshoeing	3.1	1.7	0.4	0.0
Ice fishing	3.1	1.1	0.8	0.0
Migratory bird hunting	2.7	1.0	0.7	0.3
Scuba diving	2.2	0.5	0.2	0.0
Orienteering	2.0	0.4	0.2	1.1
Surfing	2.1	0.1	0.1	0.0
Windsurfing	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.2

Source: National Survey on Recreation and the Environment. A Partnership between the USDA Forest Service, USDC National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the University of Tennessee and the University of Georgia.

This Recreation Statistics Update Report is based on recent data that updates the estimated participation statistics reported in *Outdoor Recreation for 21st Century America*, published by Venture Publishing, College Station, PA. Copies of *Outdoor Recreation for 21st Century America* may be obtained from Venture Publishing at their website (<http://www.venturepublish.com>) or telephone at 1-814-234-4561. This update is based on research information generated for the Forest Service's 2005 Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Assessment Update Report. To see more of our research, please visit our website (<http://www.srs.fs.fed.us/trends>).