

# Americans' preferences for outdoor recreation changing

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The USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station (SRS) recently published a national study, *Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures*, showing that Americans' current choices for outdoor recreation differ noticeably from those made by previous generations of Americans.

Participation in "traditional" activities such as hunting and fishing has flattened or declined while participation in activities that involve viewing and photographing nature is growing. Because of the continued importance of public lands for outdoor recreation, study findings have direct implications for how these lands are managed in the future.

"Our research shows that not only are more Americans participating in outdoor recreation, the number of times they participated in many of the outdoor activities surveyed has grown," said author and lead researcher Ken Cordell, SRS pioneering scientist and one of the foremost authorities on recreational trends in the United States.

Cordell prepared the report as part of the 2010 Resources Planning Act (RPA) Assessment. The Forest and Rangeland RPA of 1974 mandates a periodic assessment of the conditions and trends related to the Nation's [renewable resources](#). *Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures* provides an extensive and detailed overview of outdoor recreation participation, regional variation in participation, and differences in participation by [demographic groups](#). The report emphasizes nature-based outdoor recreation and the natural amenities driving these activities.

"Trends in nature-based and other outdoor recreation have far-reaching implications, especially for how we manage public lands," said Cordell. "This report offers the only public agency-sponsored long range forecasting of recreation demand for the United States."

The study showed a discernible growth in nature-based activities—those defined as taking place in natural settings or involving directly some element of nature—from 2000 to 2009. Among types of nature-based recreation, motorized off-road and snow activities grew until about 2005, but ended the decade at about the same level as 2000. The trend in [hunting](#), fishing, and backcountry activities remained relatively flat and various forms of skiing, including snowboarding, declined during this period. The clear growth area was within the overall group of activities oriented towards viewing and photographing nature.

In addition to describing trends in outdoor recreation in the United States, the report provides descriptions of [outdoor recreation](#) activities on public and private lands, with projections of participation out to 2060.

"The study shows that public lands continue to be highly important for the recreational opportunities they offer, with again, a growth in nature-based recreation, especially viewing, photographing, or otherwise appreciating nature," said Cordell. "Continuous assessment and adaptations to the management of public lands is essential as changes emerge in the future. Orienting overnight and day-use sites on [public lands](#) to emphasize nature viewing, photography and study would seem to be an appropriate strategy."

The report includes invited papers from a wide range of recreation and social scientists that add context to tables and figures by focusing on specific issues and perspectives on: trends in wildlife-related recreation; recreation patterns across demographic, region-of-country, and natural

setting strata; youth time and activities outdoors, and recreational use of public and private properties.

**More information:** Access and/or download the full report at [www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/40453](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/40453)

Provided by USDA Forest Service

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