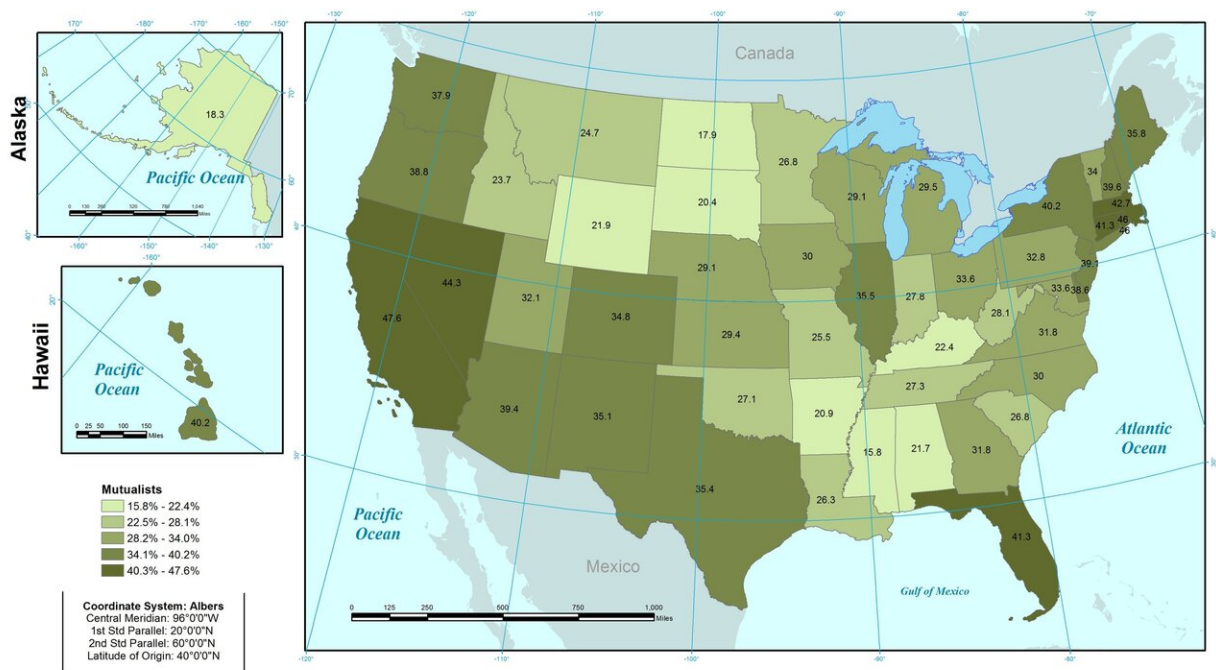


Study: Americans' beliefs about wildlife management are changing

April 25 2019, by Mary Guiden



From 2004 to 2018, researchers found that Western states had a 4.7 percent increase in mutualists. Credit: America's Wildlife Values research team

Abundant and healthy wildlife populations are a cultural and ecological treasure in the United States. Over time, however, the decisions about how agencies manage wildlife have become highly contested: How should managers handle human-wildlife conflict, endangered species

restoration and predator control?

A new 50-state study on America's Wildlife Values—the largest and first of its kind—led by researchers at Colorado State University and The Ohio State University describes individuals' values toward wildlife across states.

Researchers found large declines over time in several states for the group of people defined as traditionalists, or those who believe animals should be used for purposes that benefit humans, like hunting and [medical research](#).

Mutualists, on the other hand, believe that animals deserve the same rights as humans. They view animals as companions and part of their social networks, and project human traits onto animals.

"What's surprising is that the decline in traditionalists in some states is happening at a really rapid pace," said Michael Manfredo, one of the study's lead investigators and head of the Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources at CSU.

Researchers also surveyed fish and wildlife agency leaders and staff from 30 states for this project. While diversity continues to grow across the United States, the wildlife profession is dominated by [white males](#): 91 percent of agency respondents identified as white and 72 percent identified as male.

Implications for wildlife managers

The study's findings have implications for wildlife managers who want to engage more diverse state residents in conservation and management efforts. Results from the research show that 50 percent of Hispanic residents and 43 percent of Asians identified as mutualists, compared to

32 percent of Whites, and both groups have half as many traditionalists.

Hispanics and Asians are far less likely than Whites to have ever hunted or fished, according to study data.

The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2045, current minority populations will outnumber white, non-Hispanic populations.

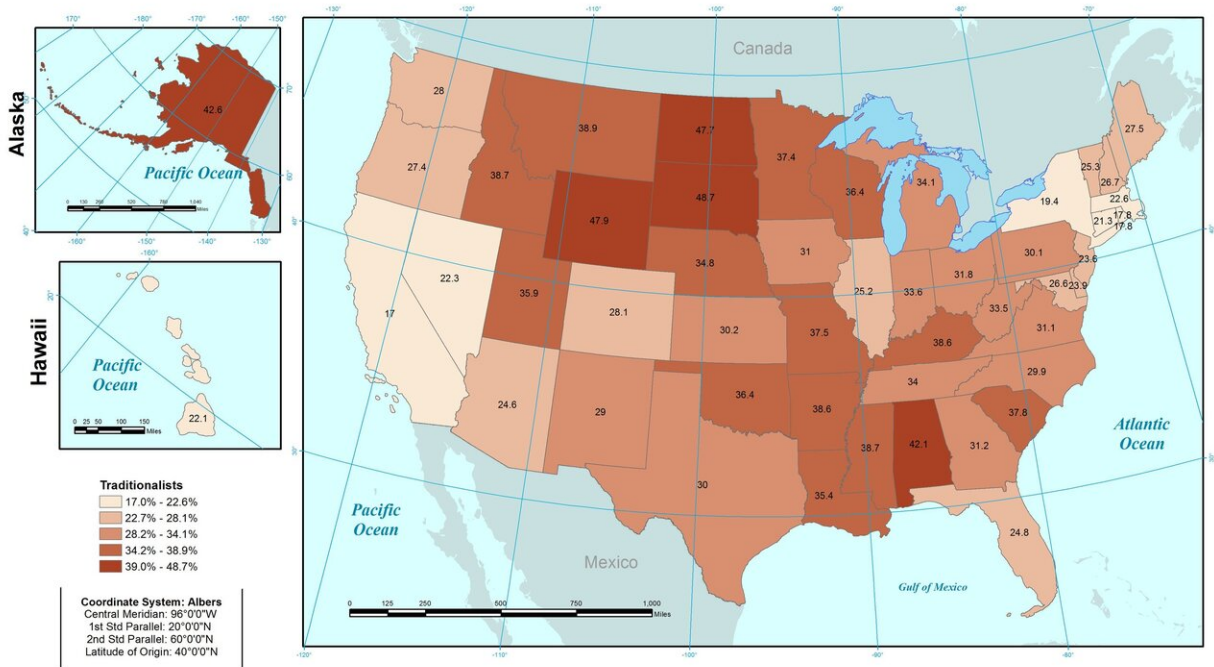
As minority populations continue to grow, wildlife agencies will need to engage with them and work together on fish and wildlife management.

Ed Carter, president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and executive director of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, said the study's findings will help state agencies as they interact with traditional partners as well as the rapidly-changing demographics across a wide range of interests and organizations.

"State fish and wildlife agencies have conserved, restored, and sustainably managed many species of fish, wildlife and habitats for hunting and fishing for well over 100 years," he said.

While often associated with species pursued by anglers and hunters, the restoration success stories for imperiled species among wildlife agencies are wide-ranging, Carter noted.

"There is no single pathway to create broader relevancy for state fish and wildlife agencies. This study will help agencies identify and challenge internal assumptions about who 'the public' is and what 'the public' wants or believes."



From 2004 to 2018, California had a decline in traditionalists from 28 to 18 percent, while North Dakota stayed constant over the same timeframe. Credit: America's Wildlife Values research team

Fewer people believe animals exist for humans' benefit

Findings from this project build on three sources of data: 2004 data on public values from the 19-state Wildlife Values in the West study, 2018 data on public values from a random sample of nearly 45,000 people in 50 states, and 2018 data on fish and wildlife agency culture from 30 states.

From 2004 to 2018, researchers found that, overall, Western states had a 5.7 percent decrease in traditionalists and a 4.7 percent increase in mutualists. But results varied considerably by state: California had a

decline in traditionalists from 28 to 18 percent, while North Dakota stayed constant over the same timeframe.

Across the U.S., traditionalists make up 28 percent of the population, and mutualists make up 35 percent of the population. (Learn more about the four wildlife value orientation types:

<https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/wildlifevalues/home-page/what-are-value-orientations/>)

The 2018 survey on public values included questions on high-profile predator conflict issues, including lethal removal of coyotes, bears and wolves in different scenarios.

On the question of whether coyotes who kill pets should be lethally removed, nearly 60 percent of residents in North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Mississippi and Alabama agreed, while only about 30 percent of residents in California, Arizona, Nevada, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut thought the animal should be killed.

Modernization is driving changes in values

The research team said that the decline in the traditionalist group is occurring due to modernization, which is linked to people obtaining higher levels of income, moving to more urban areas, and achieving higher levels of education.

"As income, education and urbanization increase, we see people adopting a more modernized lifestyle, resulting in less direct experience with wildlife," explained Tara Teel, one of the lead investigators and a professor at CSU.

"People aren't as likely to interact with wildlife in their day-to-day lives," she added. "Instead, they learn about these animals in indirect ways, by

seeing them on television or social media, where animals may be depicted as more human-like. This helps shape a new way of thinking about wildlife and wildlife-related issues""

Manfredo said that these values are established at a very young age and are slow to change, which makes these findings so interesting. For so much of human history, values provided stability across generations. But the remarkable changes of the past century have produced a rapid cultural shift.

Intergenerational value change is also accompanied by changes in immigration rates across states. "That's likely what's happening in some of the states that are showing change at a very high rate," Manfredo said.

The research team found that when a traditionalist orientation is more common among people in a state, there is greater support for private property rights over protecting endangered fish and wildlife and prioritizing economic growth over environmental protection.

Traditionalist-heavy states also have greater proportions of hunters and anglers. The opposite is true for states with high numbers of mutualists.

"Our work suggests that the value shift is due to changing societal conditions," said Alia Dietsch, one of the study's co-investigators and an assistant professor at The Ohio State University. "To help [wildlife](#) conservation and management efforts remain relevant, it will be important to continue to monitor these changes into the future."

Provided by Colorado State University

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