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Florida Still Reigns Supreme--as Fishing Capital of the World

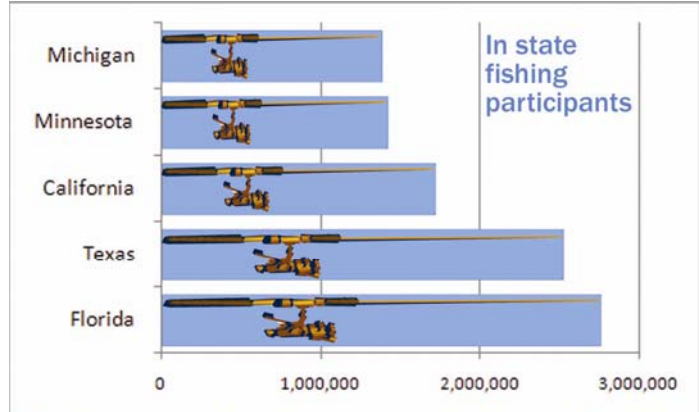
By: Bob Wattendorf, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (*Note: Includes January 2008 Updates to the ASA Sportfishing in America Report*)

Florida cannot be beat as the No. 1 place to cast a line, pitch a lure or land a lunker. No tall fisher's tale here — this title has been earned, according to a survey by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Every five years the Census Bureau conducts the “National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.” This survey is the gold standard for comparing outdoor recreational activities between the states. Once again it proves that Florida is the number one fishing destination, according to the 2006 results.

The facts tell where anglers go for the best fishing opportunities. Florida provided 46.3 million days of recreational fishing in 2006 versus 41.1 million days in Texas, the second highest state. Of fishing days spent in Florida, 4.8 million days were by tourists (nonresidents), while Wisconsin, the second highest state for tourist days, provided 3.8 million days. In terms of nonresident anglers, Florida is also number one with 885,000, versus No. 2 North Carolina with less than half that at 395,000.

But the story does not end there. Overall Florida again ranked first in number of fishing participants age 16 and older with 2.77 million. Runner-up Texas had 2.53 million participants. However, in 2001 Florida had 3.10 million anglers, so there has been a decline of approximately 11 percent over five years according to these estimates.

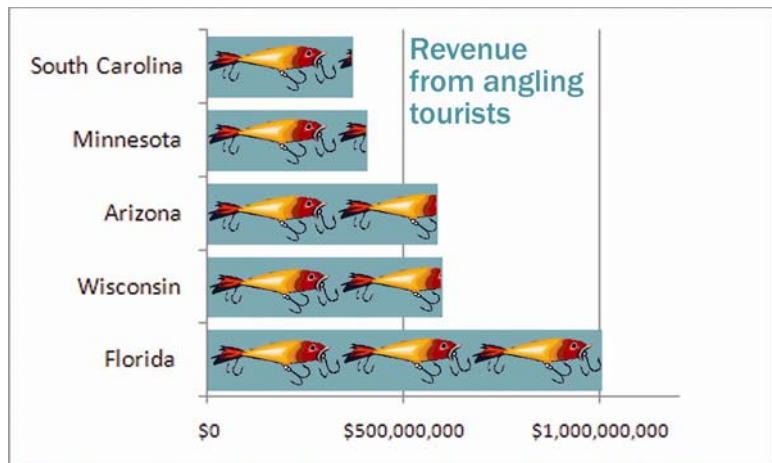


The latest national survey again shows Florida has more anglers than any other state.

The full survey - and additional reports and earlier surveys - can be downloaded at: <http://federalasst.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html>

If you look at the decline as a percentage of the population, which has been rapidly increasing, the percent decline is a little more dramatic. In 2001, national rates were 16 percent and in Florida 17 percent of the population fished. Those rates dropped to 13 percent nationally and to 14 percent in the Sunshine State in 2006. On the positive side, the number of fishing days per angler has increased nationally, with the average angler fishing 17 days out of the year in 2006.

Anglers in Florida spent \$4.4 billion in 2006, allowing Florida to claim another No. 1 spot as the place where anglers spend the most money. The Lone-Star State was second best with \$3.4 billion spent on fishing. Recreational fishing dollars helped to support 75,736 jobs in Florida, again making it No. 1, with Texas trailing behind with 51,691 jobs. This economic trend is great news for Florida partially because state and local taxes from the sale of fishing-related goods and services generated \$443 million for general funds, and an economic impact of \$7.5 billion.



The latest national survey also shows Florida receives many more angler tourism dollars than any other state.

In spite of the national estimates of fishing participation for all U.S. anglers (does not include foreign anglers) over 16 years of age decreasing, actual fishing license sales for both freshwater and saltwater have increased in Florida. From 2001-02, with 1,070,577 licenses sold to 2006-07 with 1,188,092, there was an increase of 11 percent in the sale of saltwater licenses. Freshwater license sales increased, from 587,413 sold in 2001-02 to 630,078 in 2006-07, showing an increase of 7 percent. Although not enough to keep pace with the population increase, it is certainly better than competing states.

In calendar year 2006, the National Survey estimated 2.77 million anglers fished in Florida, and during fiscal year 2006-07 (July 1 to June 30), 1.55 million fishing licenses were sold. This discrepancy is partially the result of seniors (age 65 and older), resident saltwater shoreline anglers and several other groups, including those fishing from licensed saltwater piers or charter boats, being exempt from licensing.

No one can dispute the facts and figures. Florida remains the Fishing Capital of the World because of great resources and responsible management. With a huge variety of fish, fishing waters and fishing styles to choose from, along with year-round fishing weather, there is little doubt that Florida will remain the place to go fishing. You can help ensure a vibrant future with high quality, sustainable and safe fishing opportunities by being an ethical angler, mentoring a youth or friend and keeping your license current.

Additional information and relevant links are also posted on our Frequently Answered Questions page at www.MyFWC.com/fishing/faqs. Click on "What is the value of Florida's Fisheries?"

Instant licenses are available online at MyFWC.com/License or by calling 1-888-FISH-FLORIDA (347-4356)

Visit MyFWC.com/Fishing/Updates for more FishBuster columns.