

For Immediate Release

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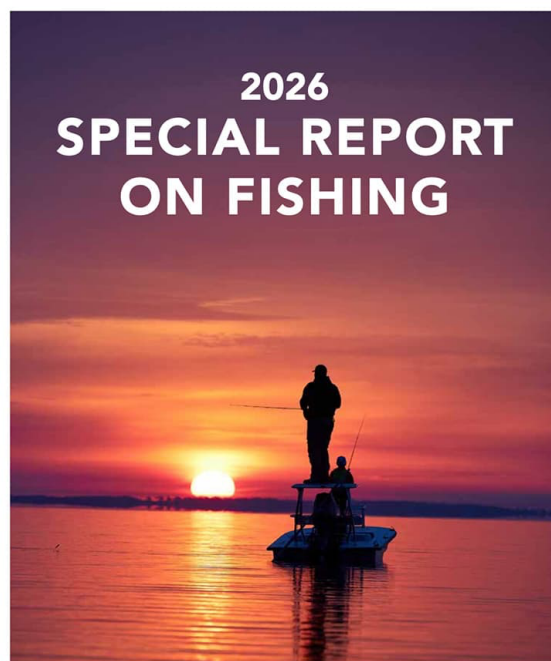
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American Sportfishing Association

2026 Special Report on Fishing Shows First Decline in Fishing Participation Since 2021

Concerns around churn, fishing participation persist while long term trends remain positive



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ALEXANDRIA, VA – July 29, 2026 – The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) announced the results of the **2026 Special Report on Fishing**. In total, 57 million Americans, roughly 18% of the U.S. population, went fishing in 2025. While up nearly 25% from a decade ago, total participation is down from 57.9 million in 2024 – the first year-over-year decrease since 2021.

"In 2025, fishing continued to bring Americans together, connecting people to the outdoors, sustaining families and strengthening the communities and economies that depend on it," **said ASA President and CEO, Glenn Hughes.** "While trendline data still shows growth in the past decade, keeping anglers engaged in fishing continues to be a struggle, with 19 million people dropping from the sport in 2025 – the highest rate of 'churn' on record."

According to the report, catching fish was not the only reason Americans went fishing. They also fished to enjoy nature, escape everyday stress and spend time with family and friends. Conversely, dissatisfaction with time on the water stemmed from crowded fishing spots and the discomfort of being outdoors, not catching fish, unclear waters, and the cost of gear.

While these barriers undoubtedly contribute to the decline in participation and high churn rate, the abrupt pause in early 2025 of federal funding authorized under the Dingell-Johnson Act's National Outreach and Communications Program that supports introductory fishing programs, angler recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) campaigns, and fishing specific marketing efforts left many new or returning anglers without access to critical resources needed to get on the water.

Through fishing license sales and the [excise tax on sportfishing equipment](#) authorized by the previously mentioned Dingell-Johnson Act, anglers and boaters fund most fisheries conservation and waterways access efforts nationwide. Since 1950, [Dingell-Johnson has generated more than \\$12 billion for fisheries conservation](#), and sportfishing manufacturers proudly pay the 10% excise tax to support the resources our industry depends on.

"Bringing new folks into our community and slowing the churn rate are top priorities for ASA and the entire sportfishing industry," **added Hughes.**

"Decreased participation doesn't just result in lower tackle sales, it also leads to reduced public access, fewer fish stocked in lakes and rivers, less habitat improvement projects and so much more. As competition from technology and other activities for time and resources grows, investments in angler recruitment and retention has never been more important."

Even with 2025's setbacks, the opportunities for sustained growth in recreational fishing are unmistakable. Millions of new anglers tried fishing for the first time in 2025, youth participation remains the strongest predictor of lifelong involvement, and Black, Hispanic and female participation continued to grow.

ADDITIONAL KEY FINDINGS

- **Total fishing outings grew** by 3 percent to 918 million in 2025.
- 3 million Americans **tried fishing for the first time** in 2025, representing 11 percent of total participants, up from 9 percent in 2024.
- 6 million Americans ages 6 and over went **freshwater fishing** in 2025, holding steady for the fourth consecutive year.
- **Saltwater fishing** reached a record 15.5 million, up 400,000 from the year prior and the fourth consecutive record high.
- **Fly fishing** decreased slightly in 2025 to 7.9 million, still representing nearly 2 million more fly anglers vs. a decade earlier.
- **Youth participation** (ages 6-12) is down slightly in 2025, however participation among ages 13-17 rose from 5.2 million to 5.4 million, and the participation rate ticked up from 24 percent to 25 percent.
- Nearly 6 million **Black Americans** fished in 2025, the highest number since tracking began in 2007 and an increase of 400,000 from the prior year.
- **Hispanic anglers** doubled over the past decade, climbing from 3.4 million in 2015 to an all-time high of 6.9 million in 2025.
- **Female participation** dipped slightly in 2025 to 21.1 million, however the long-term trajectory remains strong as female anglers grew by 5.4 million (a 34% increase) over the past decade.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SPORTFISHING INDUSTRY

Special Report data shows 10% of Americans overall (and 15% of kids) who did not fish, thought about going fishing. Eighty-six percent of current fishing participants fished before the age of 12, emphasizing the **critical importance of youth participation**.

Despite the report showing 19 million lapsed anglers from 2024-25, 99% of those who fished in 2025 expect to fish in 2026. Angler churn has been worsening over the last several years, underscoring the **growing importance of customer engagement and loyalty programs**. Earlier this year, ASA's Fish America Foundation announced its [inaugural R3 grant program](#) to tackle recruitment, retention and reactivation of anglers by working with fishing tackle retailers, manufacturers and non-profits to support programs that can be replicated and scaled to the benefit of the entire industry.

The Special Report on Fishing is the most comprehensive research on fishing participation, providing an annual assessment of angler demographics, participation trends and motivations from more than 18,000 respondents. ASA partnered with the Outdoor Industry Association to produce this long-running research report which had previously been supported by the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation for 18 years. The 2026 report was initially shared at the ICAST 2026 State of the Industry Breakfast on July 15 to more than 700 industry professionals.

[**Click here to read the full report and download the 2026 infographic**](#)

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*The [**American Sportfishing Association**](#) (ASA) is the sportfishing industry's trade association committed to representing the interests of the sportfishing and boating industries as well as the entire sportfishing community. We give the industry and anglers a unified voice when emerging laws and policies could significantly affect sportfishing business or sportfishing itself. ASA invests in long-term ventures to ensure the industry will remain strong and prosperous, as well as safeguard and promote the enduring economic, conservation and social values of sportfishing in America. ASA also gives America's 57 million anglers a voice in policy decisions that affect their ability to sustainably fish on our nation's waterways through [**Keep America Fishing**](#), our national angler advocacy campaign. America's anglers generate more than \$50 billion in retail sales with a \$230.5 billion impact on the nation's economy creating employment for 1.1 million people.*
