

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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CHARACTER OF HUNTING AND FISHING IN UNITED STATES IS CHANGING, SURVEY INDICATES

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel P. Reed, who heads the Department's programs for fish, wildlife and parks, reported today that the Nation's environmental problems are affecting the character of hunting and fishing in America, making these recreations less accessible and more expensive.

His report was based on survey findings released by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service. The survey indicates, among other things, that a greater proportion of hunting and fishing is occurring on preserves belonging to clubs and commercial operators.

The basic data was collected and projections made by the Census Bureau, which interviewed a representative nationwide sample of almost 9,000 individuals who identified themselves as hunters or fishermen. The Fish and Wildlife Service is comparing the results with earlier surveys conducted in 1955, 1960, and 1965. Publication of the new findings on sport fishing and hunting trends will be available from the U.S. Government Printing Office later in the year.

The survey indicates two serious problems, Assistant Secretary Reed said: "First, the supply of available land and the demand for it are getting badly out of balance. Even if the percentage of people who fish and hunt remains the same, preserving existing areas will not provide enough land, so restoring polluted waters and wetlands must become a priority. To do so will require a far greater percentage of the sportsmen's dollar to go toward this goal."

The second problem, Reed pointed out, is that money spent for licenses, duck stamps and other permits, which provide for habitat preservation and restoration and wildlife management, is the smallest percentage of fishing and hunting expenses.

"Sportsmen must be willing to pay as much for habitat through licenses and special taxes as they do for privilege fees and transportation. If not, they will find the rivers empty of fish, the skies empty of birds and the hills empty of game," the Assistant Secretary advised.

The new data show a gradual but steady growth in the number of fishermen, although the popularity of hunting appears not to be on the rise. The 1970 figure of 14,336,000 hunters is down 301,000 from the 1960 total. In the same 10-year period, the number of fishermen jumped from 25,323,000 to 33,158,000.

A decline in hunting is reported in the small game category. Big game hunters increased slightly each five years, and there was a larger increase in waterfowl hunters, possibly because favorable duck nesting habitat conditions sent large populations of birds down the flyways in 1970, compared to 1965.

Some of the findings indicate that the hunting and fishing pastimes, which generally require open spaces away from congested areas, appear relatively inaccessible to the Nation's growing urban populations. Only 13.3 percent of persons living in large cities hunted or fished in 1970. The percentage for small city and suburban residents was 21.1, for town and rural area citizens 28.5. As expected, hunting and fishing were most popular in the mountain States of the West and least popular in the heavily populated Middle Atlantic States.

Other survey results indicate that sportsmen now are traveling farther in pursuit of hunting and fishing locations, are staying longer when they get there, and are being met with expenses that are greater than ever before.

Hunters and fishermen logged almost 38 billion automobile passenger miles in 1970, a 24 percent increase above 1965, yet their numbers grew only about 10 percent during the same time. This may lend support to the theory that the individual who once dangled bait in city ponds or streams has now been deprived of his recreation--because of urban water pollution and the expense of traveling to better fishing holes.

Fisherman and hunter expenditures increased almost 70 percent between 1965 and 1970--from \$4,046,440,000 to \$6,826,571,000.

Aside from generally rising prices and tastes, the sportsman is experiencing many other new expenses. For example, more landowners now are requiring that "privilege fees" be paid for the right to enter their land to fish or hunt. Also, there are more private fishing and hunting preserves where a charge is normally made for fish or game taken.

Expenditures for items such as guide fees and boat launching fees almost doubled in the past five years, and expenditures for sportsman's clubs, including dues, almost tripled. Equipment rentals, an insignificant category five years earlier, came to \$122,100,000 in 1970.

Total expenditures for fees have increased almost 50 fold in 15 years, amounting to \$3.3 million in 1955 compared to \$164 million in 1970. These expenses, of course, are in addition to fees paid to the States for regular hunting and fishing licenses, the costs of which have risen only moderately, on the average, over this same period.

Part of these increases are explained by longer stays in the field--a new trend also documented in the data. Many other expenditures, therefore, are larger--food, lodging, alcoholic beverages, for instance.

Nevertheless, despite rising costs and other obstacles, 23.4 percent of the United States population 12 years of age or older hunted or fished in 1970--36.6 percent of the men and 11.5 percent of the women. Women exhibited greater interest in fishing: only 1.1 percent of them engaged in hunting.

It is indisputable that hunting and fishing are still a big industry of significant importance economically--a multi-billion dollar pastime for those who engage in these recreations, and who appear willing to spend more to do so.

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