

Outdoor Recreation Participation Trends in Texas



Photo courtesy of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department



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Outdoor recreation is a popular pastime in Texas. With its wide open spaces and varied terrain, Texas has some of the best outdoor recreation activities in the country. Texas is also the second most populated state in the nation, with 23 million people, and the population is growing and becoming more diverse (U.S. Census, 2008). This population growth increases the competition for our outdoor recreation resources. It is important to be aware of baseline data in outdoor recreation, nationally and at home, so planners and resource managers can better understand both existing demand and probable future trends.



Photo courtesy of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

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Data in this publication are taken from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) conducted by the U.S. Forest Service. The purpose of the NSRE study is to describe participation by Americans in outdoor recreation activities. The study examines recreation participation, youth participation in outdoor activities, national forest and wilderness values, public land management, environmental opinions and attitudes, and socio-demographic information. To collect the data, researchers randomly contact people by phone. Those who are at least 16 years old are asked to take part in a phone survey. Respondents are asked if they have participated in an outdoor activity in the last 12 months. NSRE data are used by U.S. Forest Service personnel, state planners, academics, the outdoor recreation industry, advocacy groups and others.

Table 1 shows data collected during two periods of time, 2000–2001 and 2005–2008. Walking for pleasure (83.7 percent), family gathering

(71.4 percent), and viewing/photographing natural scenery (63 percent) were the top outdoor activities for Americans during both time periods. The most dramatic increases were in activities related to wildlife watching. Participation in driving for pleasure, sightseeing, and picnicking appears to be on the decline. Family gatherings and visiting nature centers have also experienced slight declines in the last few years. This trend may become even more pronounced as energy prices remain high and pleasure drives become costlier.

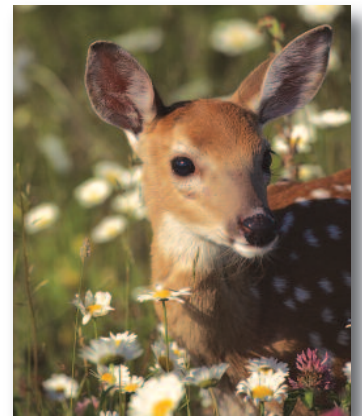
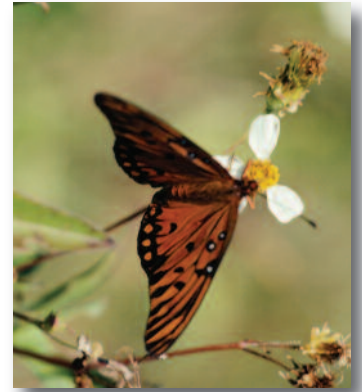


Table 1. Outdoor Recreation Participation in the United States, 2000–2001 vs. 2005–2008

ACTIVITY	2005-2008 % n=19,186	2000-2001 % n=37,867	Difference %
Walking for pleasure	83.7	83.1	0.6
Family gathering	71.4	73.6	-2.2
Viewing/photographing natural scenery	63	60.4	2.6
Visiting nature centers, etc.	55	57.4	-2.4
Sightseeing	49	52.1	-3.1
Viewing/photographing wildflowers, trees, etc.	51.3	43.6	7.7
Picnicking	50.2	53.9	-2.7
Viewing/photographing other wildlife	49.7	44.7	5.0
Driving for pleasure	48.1	51.5	-3.4
Swimming in an outdoor pool	42.1	40.5	1.6

(NSRE, 2008)

Table 2 shows the same data for Texas residents from 2000–2001 and 2005–2008. Clearly, outdoor recreation is popular statewide. Participation in most outdoor activities has increased, especially for sightseeing (+ 8.9 percent) and viewing/photographing wildflowers, trees, etc. (+ 8.9 percent). However, participation in picnicking (-9.9 percent), family gatherings (-2.2 percent), and visiting historic sites (-1.4 percent) declined. Despite the changes in participation rates, the activity ranking was fairly consistent for the two time periods.



Table 2. Outdoor Recreation Participation in Texas, 2005–2008 vs. 2000–2001

ACTIVITY	2005-2008 %	2000-2001 %	Difference %
Walking for pleasure	83.7	77.8	5.9
Family gathering	67.9	69.9	-2
Viewing/photographing natural scenery	58.3	54.4	4.9
Sightseeing	54.9	46.0	8.9
Viewing/photographing wildflowers, trees, etc.	52.5	43.6	8.9
Driving for pleasure	49.0	45.8	3.2
Visiting nature centers, etc.	49.6	53.4	3.8
Viewing/photographing other wildlife	47.3	40.0	7.3
Visiting historic sites	39.0	40.4	-1.4
Picnicking	38.9	48.8	-9.9
Bicycling	38.3	34.7	3.6
Gathering mushrooms, berries, etc.	32.5	25.3	7.2
Viewing/photographing birds	28.5	28.7	-0.2
Visiting a farm or agricultural setting	27.8	22.1	5.7
Viewing/photographing fish	27.6	22.5	5.1

(NSRE, 2008)

Table 3. Comparing the Ten Most Popular Outdoor Recreation Activities in Texas and the U.S., 2005–2008.

ACTIVITY	Texas %	USA %	Difference %
Walking for pleasure	83.7	83.7	0
Family gathering	67.9	71.4	-3.5
Gardening or landscaping for pleasure	63.1	66.7	-3.6
Viewing/photographing natural scenery	58.3	63.0	-4.7
Sightseeing	54.9	49.0	4.1
Viewing/photographing wildflowers, trees, etc.	52.5	51.3	1.2
Visiting nature centers, etc.	49.6	55.0	-5.4
Yard games, e.g., horseshoes	49.1	40.0	9.1
Driving for pleasure	49.0	48.1	0.9
Viewing/photographing other wildlife	47.3	49.7	2.4

(NSRE, 2008)

There are many similarities between the latest national data and that of Texas (**Table 3**). There are also several differences; for instance, yard games (such as horseshoes), sightseeing, and viewing/photographing wildlife are more popular in Texas than in the U.S as a whole. On the other hand, Texans tend to be less active in visiting nature centers, visiting/photographing natural scenery, family gatherings, and gardening/landscaping. Overall, Texans are actively engaged in using the state’s natural resources for recreation.



Photo courtesy of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Although the NSRE data do not include specific reasons for increases or decreases in various

outdoor activities, either nationally or in Texas, the information can be used to further analyze outdoor recreation market share, which helps better explain consumer behavior. The ability to monitor trends over time helps all segments of the industry, from programming activities to equipment sales. For example, Texas Parks and Wildlife managers can use the participation data to help them develop public recreation opportunities in the future, such as increasing the number of trails. In the private sector, nature tourism operators can use the data to help them capture market share for wildlife watching and other specific activities on their land. Non-profit group or advocacy organizations may use the information to help shape policy decisions about recreation opportunities.

From a research perspective, it is important to know if and how managers are using secondary data in their planning efforts. Secondary data is

usually cheaper and can be much easier to access and analyze than primary data. On the other hand, secondary data have some limitations because the questionnaire items are already chosen and may lack the specificity needed. Future investigation should scrutinize the use and value of secondary data in the field of parks and recreation. Those who might produce or use these studies need to know more about their

level of effectiveness and even how they might be combined with other datasets such as the U.S. census. Managers and researchers interested in using secondary data are encouraged to contact key individuals at outdoor recreation companies, agencies or organizations to ask targeted questions about the research procedures used.

For details about other types of secondary data, contact the authors.

For more information about the

National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE), visit

<http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/trends/Nsre/nsre2.html>



Acknowledgements

*Thanks to the Center for Socioeconomic Research and Education
at Texas A & M University
for assistance with data access and analysis.*



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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward G. Smith, Director, the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas A&M System.