

# Biennial Report on the Status of Hunter, Trapper, and Angler Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3)

## *The Sporting Heritage Council* 2018



The newly constructed shooting range at Mud Lake Wildlife Area in Columbia County is a great example of Pittman-Robertson funding used to support Wisconsin hunting and shooting sports enthusiasts.

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# **Executive Summary**

We are pleased to submit the Biennial Report on the status of Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) of Wisconsin hunters, trappers and anglers.

2011 Wisconsin Act 11 created the Sporting Heritage Council and directed us to send a report to the Governor, the chairperson of the Natural Resources Board and the chief clerks of the Legislature every two years to update them on the current status of the statewide efforts to recruit new hunters, trappers and anglers, retain those that are currently hunting, fishing and trapping, and reactivate those whose participation has lapsed.

In the past two years, the Sporting Heritage Council (Council) facilitated the implementation of the new Angler R3 grant in addition to continuing the Hunter Recruitment Development Training, and Education grant and the Shooting Range grant. These grants are designed to increase participation in angling, hunting, and shooting sports. While the Angler R3 grant is currently in the process of reviewing its first applicants the Hunter RDT&E and Shooting Range grants awarded nearly \$521,000 to Wisconsin organizations in the past two years. The Council has facilitated and promoted maintaining Wisconsin's outdoor heritage by reaching out to new and non-traditional audiences, guiding DNR programs and providing ideas and input.

## **Hunting**

Hunter numbers have been predicted to decline over time and that prediction has been realized. Deer hunter numbers in license years 2012, 2013, and 2015 were above the predicted number; but these numbers fell to the predicted level in license years 2016 and 2017. The Council provided support and critique to DNR staff implementing various R3 actions and is carefully tracking hunter participation trends.

## **Trapping**

With barriers to recruitment and retention that are on the higher end of the spectrum, it can be predicted that trappers will experience similar declines to hunters. The 19,161 resident trapping licenses sold in Wisconsin in 2018 represents a 7% decline when compared to the 20-year average.

While the Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program would like to find ways to curb this decline further, it is no doubt the selfless dedication of the volunteer instructor force that has kept the decline modest.

## **Angling**

Wisconsin has a rich fishing tradition due to the abundance of outstanding lakes, rivers and streams. Today 1.2 million anglers purchase licenses and spend over 21 million days fishing each year in Wisconsin. Marketing to reduce "churn" and increase purchase avidity may be a valid strategy to maintain angler numbers. Wisconsin Fishing license sales peaked 30 years ago in the late 1980s. While our overall population level has continued to increase since then, the number of anglers has remained fairly stable.

## **National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan: Strategies for Recruiting, Retaining and Reactivating Hunting and Shooting Sports Participants**

The Council for the Advancement of Hunting and the Shooting Sports approved the National R3 Plan in 2016. WDNR staff played an integral role in developing and completing this plan and will continue to integrate it into R3 efforts here. The Sporting Heritage Council received frequent updates and provided review of the plan content and direction, fully supporting the need and implementation.

Partnerships among the stakeholder community, in conjunction with an integrated framework to identify needed strategies and effectiveness measures, are key to stabilizing and increasing hunting and shooting sports participants. This coordination of local and national efforts under a unified plan clarify where R3 initiatives are

needed and what resources are required to support those efforts. Additionally, the national plan provides guidance and structure for partnerships that can effectively meet the needs of new audiences who will ultimately inherit our nation’s hunting and shooting sports heritage. Finally, this coordinated national strategy provides direction on how the conservation community will need to address the challenges of the future—how we build a pathway leading to a lifelong participant and how we facilitate institutionalizing the process to becoming a hunter.

The purpose of the National Hunting and Shooting Sports Action Plan (Plan) is to identify, coordinate, and focus resources available for R3 at local and national levels. Implementing the recommendations contained in this plan will help ensure that the hunting and shooting sports heritage of the United States will persist. If not, the future of these traditions and the natural resources they conserve will fall into uncertainty. In 2017 and 2018, Wisconsin DNR began implementing the National Plan by forming an integrated R3 Team in the Bureau of Law Enforcement (Figure 1).

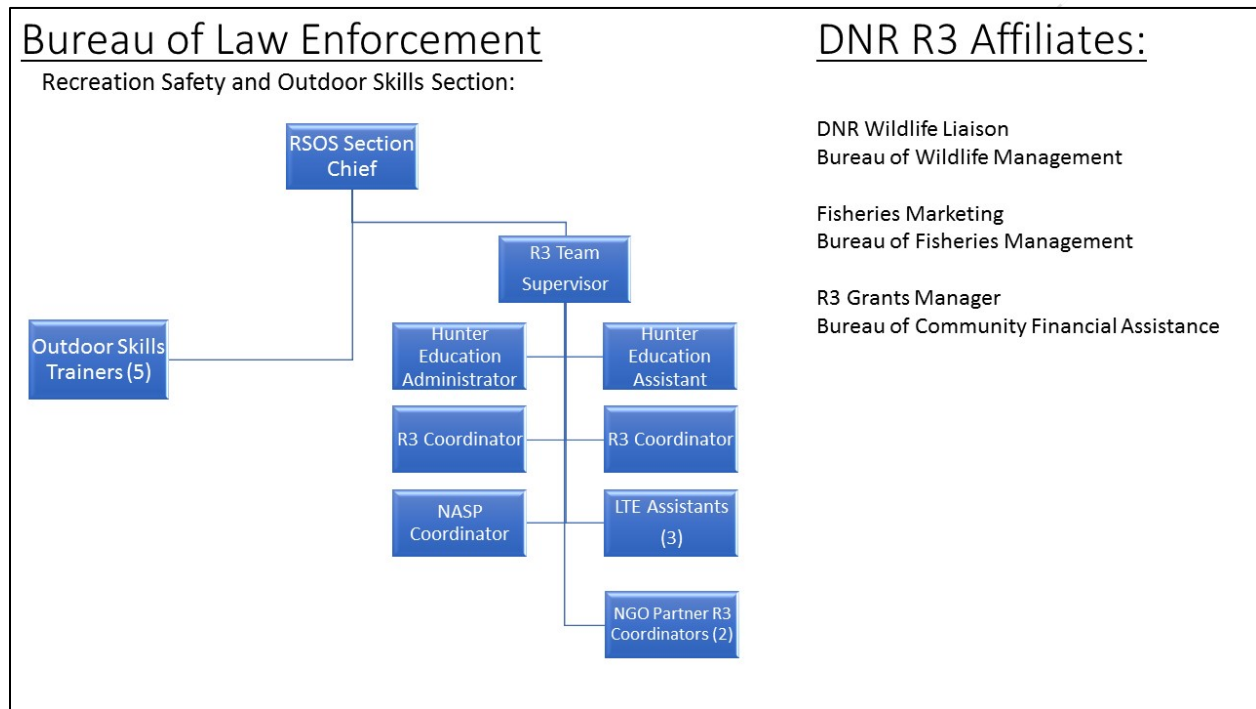


Figure 1. Bureau of Law Enforcement Recreation Safety and Outdoor Skills Section Team Structure and R3 affiliates.

# Hunting and Shooting Sports Participation

## Background

Hunting provides essential components necessary for long-term and effective natural resource conservation including providing a mechanism to manage wildlife populations, funding for management, and a valuable connection to the natural world in an increasingly urbanized society. However, the total number of hunters (residents and non-residents with any hunting license) Wisconsin DNR reported to the federal government has declined from 770,000 in 2000 to about 700,800 in 2017.

In response to identifying these trends, WDNR has implemented several actions to build capacity for enhancing participation in hunting through the Hunting and Shooting Sports Coordinator. Several pilot efforts and programs are being integrated and evaluated to optimize impact and measure results. In response, DNR efforts will pivot to focus on those that are effective at increasing hunter, angler and trapper participation.

## Hunter Numbers at Projected Level

For the first time in six years, the overall number of deer hunting licenses (gun, bow, and cross bow) sold has dropped below the long-term average (*Figure 2.*). The rate of decline in licenses sold in FY2018 is similar to the rate of decline in FY2017 and will need to be monitored in future years.

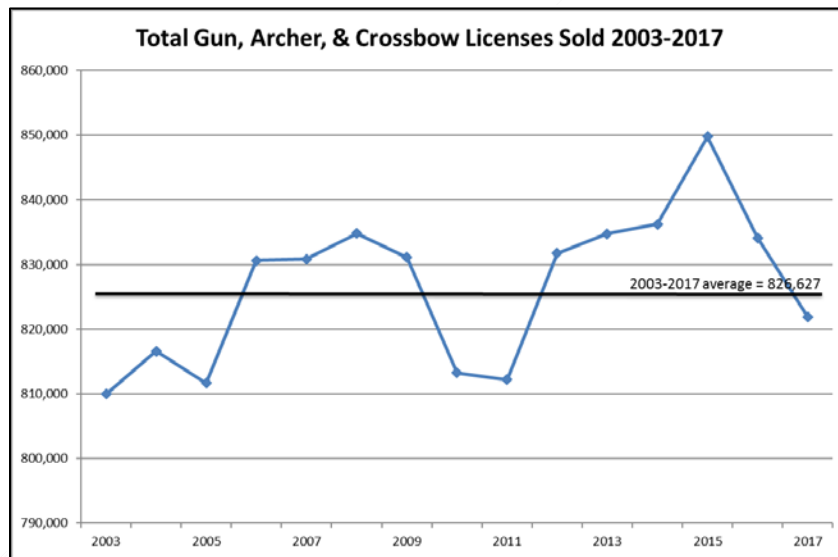


Figure 2. Total and average Gun, Archer, and Crossbow licenses sold from 2003 to 2017.

Hunter numbers have been predicted to decline over time and hunter numbers in license year 2017 (FY2018) were below the predicted number (*Figure 3.*). There are a whole host of variables that influence hunter numbers including demographics, societal changes, economics, socio-economic status and our efforts. As we collect more information in the years to come we will be able to further evaluate the connection between our efforts and the number of hunters.

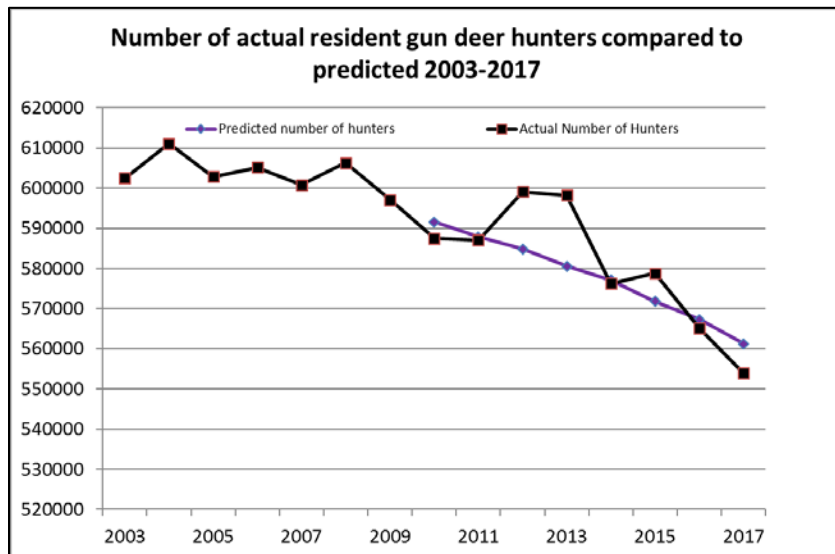


Figure 3. Number of actual resident gun deer hunters compared to predicted amounts from 2003 to 2017.

## Hunter Recruitment and Retention



### **DNR and Partner Hunt for Food Programs**

We are continuing to focus on recruiting more adult novice hunters and becoming more effective at targeting new hunters from diverse audiences. We believe recruiting new adult hunters is critical for several reasons: First, interest in gathering their own food leads many adults to want to try hunting. Second, adults are independent and have decision making authority in their lives. They don't need any support in the form of waking up early, staying up late or packing a lunch. Once they know what they are doing, they can go hunt on their own. Third, they have money and they are willing to pay to learn. Finally, many will have kids of their own soon. If we pass on the opportunity to train interested young adults to hunt, training their children to hunt will become increasingly difficult.

Food continues to be a driving motivation for novice hunters and anglers, especially among millennials. When offered, classes fill rapidly and new food-motivated hunting websites—such as *locavore.guide* and *modernhunters.com*—continue to appear on a regular basis. Our R3 group administered 6 *new* Hunt for Food courses in during FY2018 along with several Fishing for Dinner programs. This brings the statewide total of Hunt for Food classes to 15 with more than 200 novice hunters reached this year. These new classes had between 4 and 17 participants each.

New programs in the Madison area included one each for pheasant, rabbits, and squirrels. These programs were coordinated as joint efforts with our NGO partners, Pheasants Forever and the National Wild Turkey Federation and were offered to turkey and deer Hunt for Food participants to give them additional opportunities to advance their skills, consistent with the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model. In partnership with the Wisconsin Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, additional opportunity for deer hunting was offered through a Learn to

Bowhunt pilot program. Pilot programs in other parts of the state included a turkey Hunt for Food in Viroqua and Learn to Hunt with Dogs near Stevens Point. These new programs were well-received by participants and will be offered again in FY2019.

These new programs and information will provide a good foundation for future growth. Interest among students and instructors remains strong, with additional deer programs planned for Horicon Marsh, Bong Recreation Area, Baraboo, Whitewater, Stevens Point, Rhinelander, Menomonie, Amery and Viroqua in FY2018; as well as Hunt for Food with Dogs and Panfish for Dinner in the Madison area. The Council endorses the continued expansion and evaluation of this novel recruitment technique.

### **Mentor Training Seminars**

In efforts to meet the need for additional Hunt for Food mentors, Wisconsin DNR worked to provide state liability insurance to individuals who complete a mentor training in Wisconsin. DNR worked with Pheasants Forever's Hunting Heritage Coordinator to plan the Mentor Training curriculum, which includes segments on:

- The Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model
- North American Model of Wildlife Conservation
- Mentoring Strategy
- Adult Learning Principles
- Tips for Mentoring Women

Two pilot trainings were offered in Wisconsin in FY2018. Based on participant feedback, we will adapt the program to be available as an online course with a required in-person discussion section.

### **Learn to Hunt Female Participation**

In FY2018, female participation in this category dropped slightly to 26.1% from 28.5% in FY2017. This is a continued decline from a high of 31% in FY 2015. This level of female participation in the Learn to Hunt program remains significantly higher than the 15% level from several years ago. The percentage of *total* female hunters has remained consistent at 11% for the past 2 years, up from 10% in 2015. The Hunting and Shooting Sports Program will continue to pursue growth in both areas.

### **Mentored Hunting**

The State of Wisconsin eliminated the minimum hunting age in March 2018. Previously, only individuals age 10 and older were allowed to purchase a hunting license. The elimination of minimum hunting age does not change Wisconsin's mentored hunting law, which has been in place since September 1, 2009. Anyone may hunt in Wisconsin without first completing a hunter education course if he or she is accompanied by a licensed hunter (mentor), hunts within arm's reach of the mentor, and follows other program rules. This one-on-one opportunity gives first-time hunters a chance to try hunting in a safe situation and enables veteran hunters to pass on their knowledge and passion for the outdoors.

Mentored hunting licenses were purchased by 28,901 individuals in 2018 (11,345 adults and 17,556 children). This number increased slightly from 28,000 mentored licenses in FY2017, but still lower than highs around 30,000 in 2015 and 2016.

### **(New) First Time License Buyers**

Beginning in 2012, the department offered deep discounts in license prices to first time buyers and returning buyers and sought to track participation. The number of first-time gun deer license sales declined 3.3% last year. Female license buyers increased slightly from 31% in 2016 to just over 34% in 2017. Adult first time license buyers comprised 65.7% of the total, an increase of about 3% from 2016.

In FY2018, DNR also surveyed purchasers of Wisconsin's discounted gun-deer hunting license ("first-time buyer" license). The primary objective was to track whether promotion of the program was correlated with increases in customer awareness. A secondary objective was to provide a snapshot into an emerging segment of hunters who are being recruited into the activity as adults ("adult-onset hunters").

Key findings of the study included:

1. Awareness of the discount program remains relatively low at time of purchase; and decreased from 28% to 22% between 2015 and 2016, despite an increase in media promotion leading up to the 2016 gun-deer hunting season.
2. Most buyers of the \$5.00 gun-deer hunting license, including those who were aware of the discount prior to their decision to purchase, said they would have purchased a license at the full price (\$24.00) anyway.
3. 18 to 29-year-old women make up the largest segment of first-time buyers.
4. Among new deer hunters, women were more likely to come from a hunting family than were men, and they were more likely to hunt with family members whereas as new, male hunters tended to hunt with friends.
5. The most influential determinant in recruiting new adult participants was an invitation from an existing hunter.

### **Email Marketing Pilot**

In fall 2017, the Office of Applied Science assisted the Bureau of Law Enforcement with a study to assess the potential impact of email messaging on hunter retention and reactivation. The study was modelled after efforts commissioned by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation in Georgia, which found small but significant gains in participation and revenue among new anglers who received up to four email reminders to purchase a fishing license. We extended this research by testing this approach not only on new license buyers, but also on lapsed license buyers, and by applying it to the distinct social and cultural environment of Wisconsin deer hunters.

Key findings of the study included:

1. We found no measurable effect of any messaging on purchases of deer licenses by hunters who bought their first license in 2016.
2. For lapsed hunters there was a statistically significant increase in license purchasing behavior among hunters who received an email reminder.
  - a. The positive effect of messaging was greater for formerly avid hunters than for less experienced hunters.
  - b. The positive effect of messaging on license purchases was greatest for hunters who had lapsed within the last two years, suggesting that the greatest benefit for email reminders is to reduce churn in license sales and retain current hunters.
3. While the overall return on messaging efforts is small, there is a minimal investment in staff time and resources to send email reminders.
4. Corroborating findings from the Georgia study, no significant benefit was found from including additional "newsletter" content.

### **Evaluating our Efforts**

We continue to collaborate with a graduate student to evaluate the recruitment and retention rates of participants in DNR Hunter R3 programs using mark-recapture survival analysis. Results (*Figure 4.*) will be submitted for publication in FY2019.



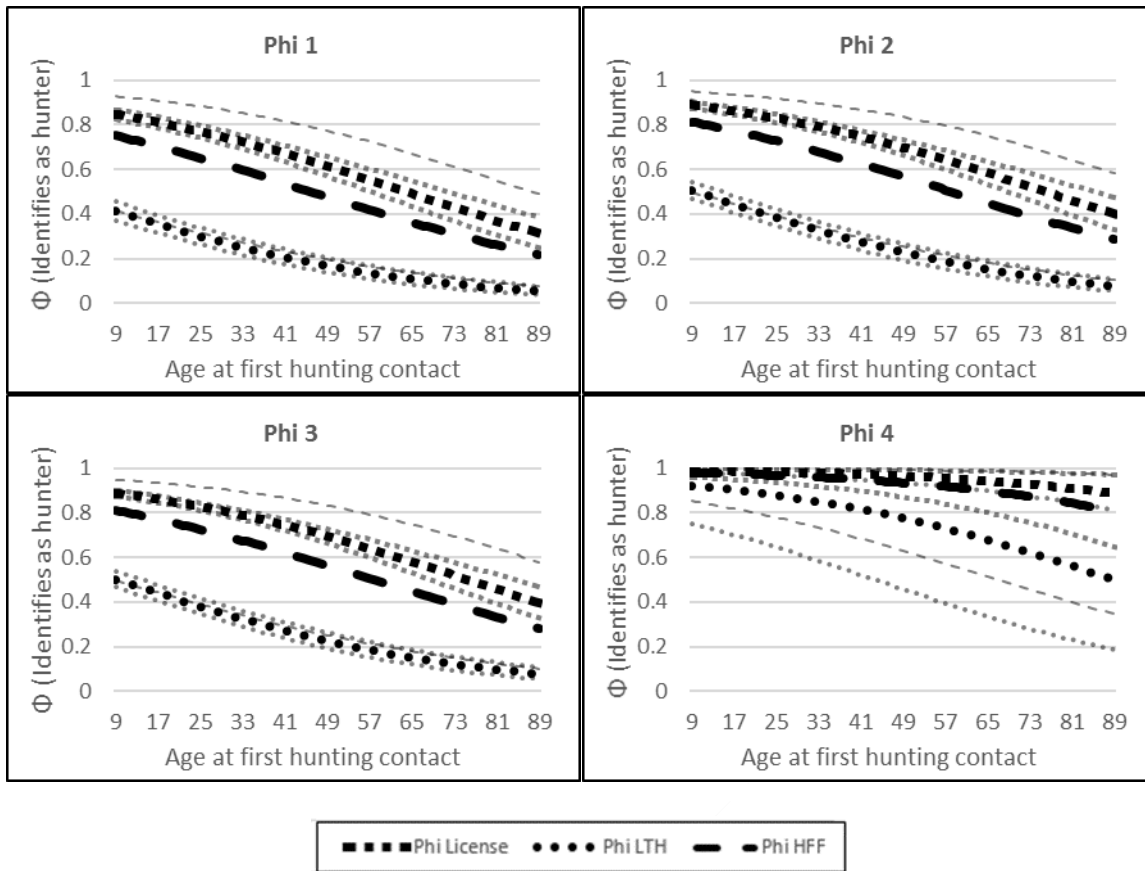


Figure 4. Survival estimates for first-time hunters of varying ages in 2011-2015; grouped by contact type (LTH, Hunt for Food, or License buyers). Square dots = License buyers; Round dots = LTH participants; Dashed line = HFF participants.

LTH participants have significantly lower survival rates than license purchasers (confidence intervals do not overlap). The real estimate for the LTH participants is much lower than the real estimate for HFF participants; but the confidence intervals overlap for these two groups. Survival rates decline similarly for all contact types as age at first contact increases.

### Hunter Development Grant

To focus hunter training, development and education programs on adults, females and families, DNR developed the Hunter Development Grant in 2014. There is a great need for strategic, tested programs and results on which to base future program priorities. The grant program also focuses on developing and testing various programs' effectiveness.

The department made \$250,000 available and increased the maximum award from \$10,000 to \$25,000 this biennium for grants to partners and stakeholders. We awarded \$223,000 in projects submitted in FY2018 (Table 1). The total requested amount was just over \$269,000. Several projects were offered partial funding because the reviewers believed the proposed activities may be helpful but required more partners and/or were slightly off target of the main priorities—but worthy of a trial.

Table 1. 2017 Hunter Recruitment, Development, Training, and Education Grant recommendations.

Applicant	Title	Amount Requested	Recommended Funding
Outdoor Heritage Center	Mark LaBarbera/Dan Small	\$25,000	\$15,000
Why Hunt? Building an Online Community	Aldo Leopold Foundation	\$25,000	\$25,000
Mentor Recruitment and Training for LTH Programs	UW Stevens Point	\$24,900	\$24,900
Discover Mediaworks	Hunter Foodie Lifestyle	\$25,000	\$25,000
Hunt for Food, LLC	Learn to Hunt for Food	\$10,320	\$10,300
Hunter Safety and Learn to Hunt in Leopold Country	Aldo Leopold Foundation	\$15,400	\$15,400
Learn to Hunt for Food Mentor Incentive	Brad Hasheider	\$4,410	\$4,410
Outdoors Access for All	Access Ability Wisconsin	\$16,463	\$10,000
Pheasants Forever	Hunt for Food	\$25,000	\$21,100
Introduction to Hunting Inspiring Guest Speakers	Aldo Leopold Foundation	\$20,600	\$10,300
Learn to Bowhunt	WI Backcountry Hunters and Anglers	\$13,043	\$13,043
Explore Bowhunting	Chad Frase	\$24,907	\$10,000
NWTF/DNR Hunt for Food Gear Sets	National Wild Turkey Federation	\$25,000	\$20,000
Let's Go Hunting MKE	Inner City Sportsmen's Club Wisconsin River Chapter	\$5,025	\$5,025
Hunt for Food with Dogs	NAVHDA	\$8,400	\$8,400
UW Eau Claire Hunt Club	New Hunter Training	\$4,850	\$4,850
Totals		\$269,800	\$222,748

## Communications and Outreach

To raise current and potential customer awareness of the hunting and shooting sports opportunities in Wisconsin, we purchased 45 radio spots aired on over 50 stations statewide, print advertising ran statewide in the general news media and the hunting/angling specific paper and we ran radio communications directly to current hunters and anglers ran on the Dan Small Outdoors radio and podcasts. We conducted digital outreach to recruit hunters as mentors with links to our web page. Again, we sponsored Wisconsin Foodie, a public television food show that included an episode on duck hunting. Finally, we conducted an email marketing pilot study and realized an increase in retention in hunters and anglers as a result.

## Wisconsin NASP program update

Within the R3 Team, a NASP coordinator is responsible for coordination and administering youth and adult archery education and programs including the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), the Explore Bowhunting and Explore Archery education programs and the Scholastic 3D Archery (S3DA) program.

The Wisconsin NASP program has grown to include close to 900 schools across the state (Figure 5). The National Archery in the Schools Program certification is also used with Park and Recreation, Archery club and shop youth programs and at several youth camps across the state. It is widely recognized around the world as one of the best beginner archery programs available.

The Explore Bowhunting and Bowfishing curriculum was offered at Park and Recreation Department and state park education facilities across the state as a way to get kids and families engaged in the outdoors and into the sport of archery and bowhunting. Programs were offered through Future Farmers of America classes, during PE classes and as part of lifetime skills and other High School programs. It has also been included in many youth camps and programs as a way to expand their youth archery activities.

The Scholastic 3D Archery program began with three clubs forming in Wisconsin and two S3DA certification classes conducted. It has since grown to 17 clubs and 5 school teams. Students involved with the NASP program have shown a huge interest in continuing their archery interest with the S3DA program and grow their interest in bowhunting and competitive archery into college and for the rest of their lives. Events have been offered all over the state along with many opportunities for the kids and families involved to be part of the WI Learn to Hunt & Hunt For Food programs.

While the program is focused on youth from 8-18 years of age, many of the parents and other family members have either gotten started in archery, or have been re-engaged by their kids' interest, making this a true family program and a direct pathway to the outdoors and hunting.

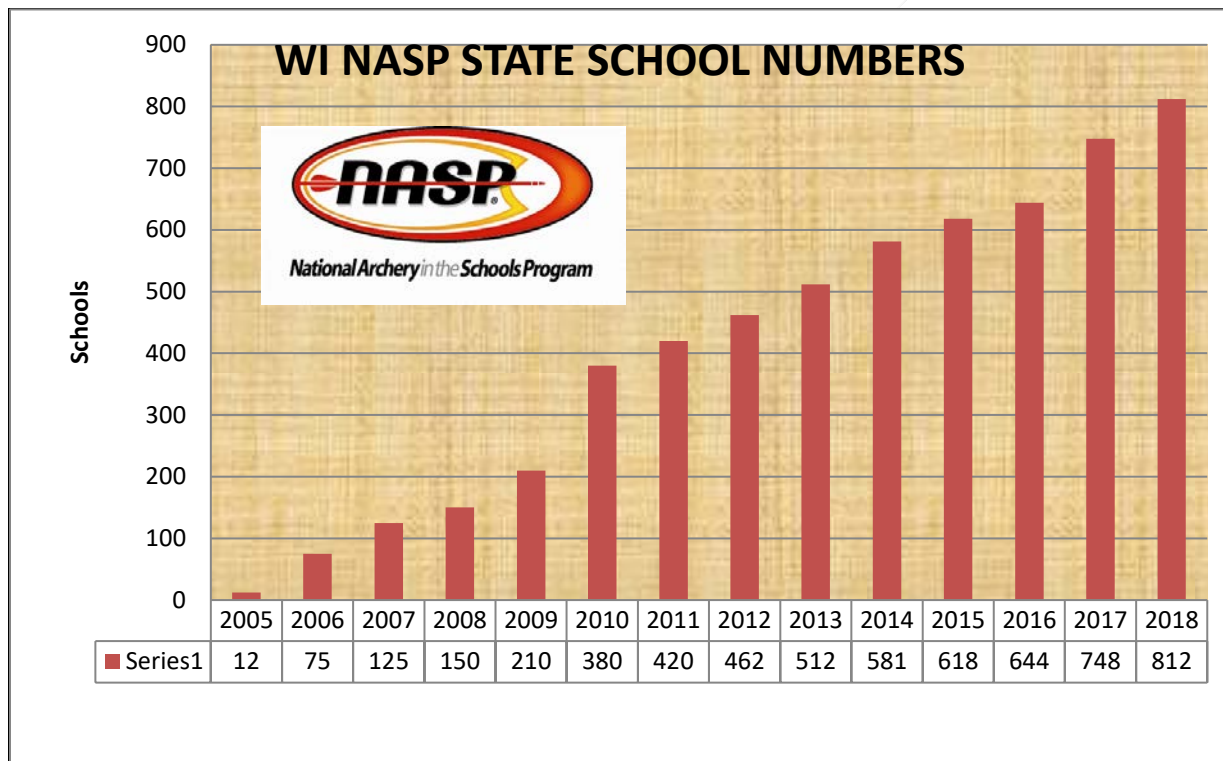


Figure 5. Number of Wisconsin schools offering the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) by year.

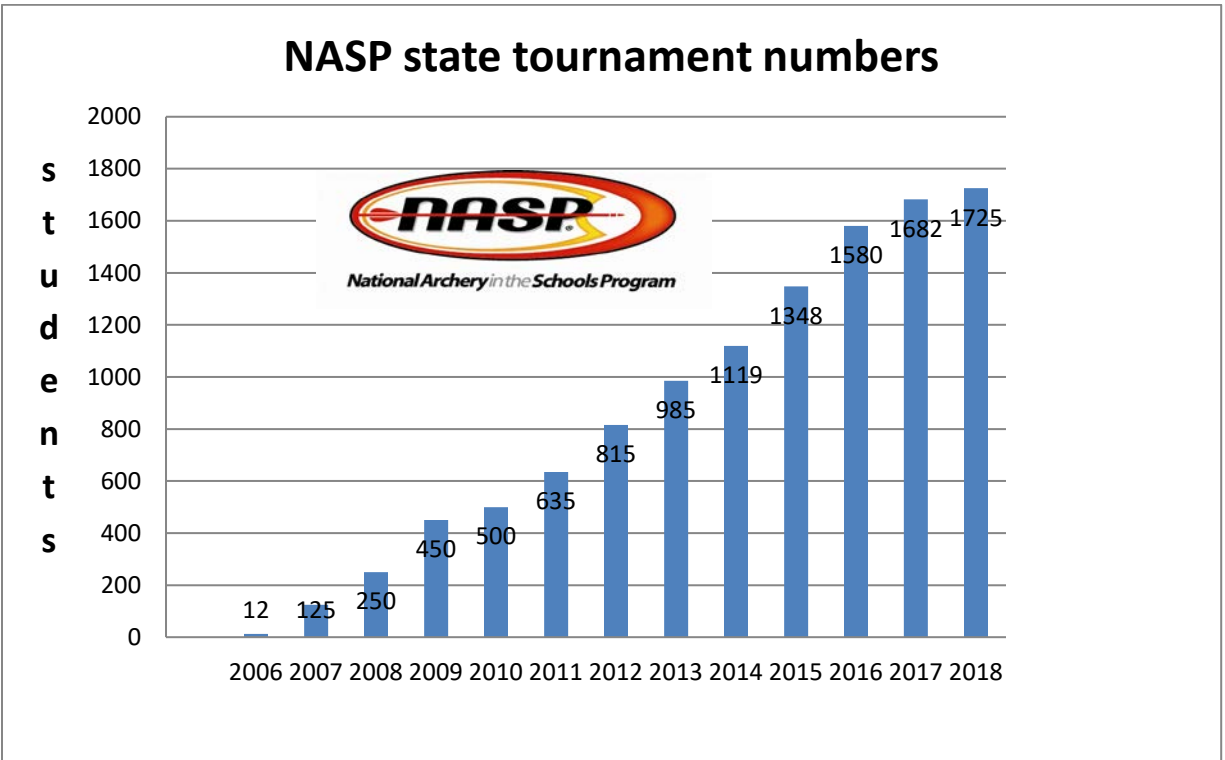


Figure 6. Number of students attending the Wisconsin National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) State Tournament by year.



The WI NASP state tournament participation increased to well over 1700 students in 2018 (Figure 6). The NASP/IBO round, where kids shoot life-sized 3D animals with the NASP scoring rings on them, saw an incredible jump in participation. Schools across the state were exposed to the NASP/IBO targets through a loaner program offered by the WDNR in exchange for the teachers collecting their students WDNR specific customer ID numbers, which in-turn allows us to track participation numbers and those becoming new or returning license buyers. The NASP/IBO program allows kids and families to

learn about arrow placement and increase their interest in learning to bow hunt while allowing them to also shoot competitive rounds of archery at life-sized animal targets. This increases the likelihood that they will continue into the sport of target archery, and eventually bowhunting.

### Wisconsin Explore Bowhunting Update

The Explore Bowhunting curriculum continues to grow in Wisconsin. Schools, Park and Recreation programs, youth camps and archery shops and clubs have used the EB/EBF curriculum to teach kids and families about the sport of bowhunting and bowfishing. Many of these groups follow the classroom or camp experience up with an actual hunting or bowfishing opportunity. Currently we have two very experienced groups offering Bowfishing camps and programs as part of our WI NASP and WI S3DA programs. Allowing kids and parents the opportunity to climb onto a raised platform and shoot down into a tank of water at life-sized, moving, rough fish targets.

Several State park and Educational facilities along with many Park and Recreation programs were offered. Course materials and tools, including student handbooks were provided to each program.

Using the EB/EBF curriculum we are able to provide a better experience for our Learn to Bowhunt participants and families, increasing the likelihood of them continuing to bow hunt in the future



### **Explore Archery Program**

Programs wishing to add the Explore Archery materials to their programs must first register their program with USA Archery. Curriculum materials are then made available to them, at no charge through the DNR. Groups running these programs ranged from after- school programs, to Park and Recreation departments to YMCA camps. Explore Archery provides another pathway to the outdoors and archery using larger variety of equipment and curriculum materials. Explore Archery programs also allow students to use their skills and earn progressive awards as they increase their interest in, and proficiency of a variety of archery equipment.



### **Scholastic 3D Archery Update**

The Scholastic 3D Archery program was unveiled in January of 2015 in Wisconsin. In 2018 there were 14 WI S3DA clubs and 4 school teams across the state. Our WI S3DA membership grew from just over 30 to well over 300 in 3 short years. Archers and families have the opportunity to travel to events across the state, competing with others in their age and equipment classes. Participation at these events has also increased the interest in new clubs and shops starting programs as they see new families involved in the sport. This has also lead to increased equipment hunting licenses sales.

## Target Ranges

### **McMiller Range Repairs**

The McMiller Range continues to bring in strong revenues through heavy use by the public. Implementation of the McMiller Strategic Plan began in FY2018 with meetings to initiate the construction of a new building to serve as a storage shed and workshop. New HVAC was also installed in the clubhouse. Additional repairs outlined in the strategic plan will continue into FY2019.

### **Public Shooting Range Development: Columbia County Public Shooting Range**

Construction on the range was completed in June 2018. The range opened to the public in early FY2019. Total project cost was \$420,000.



### **Public Shooting Range Maintenance**

Maintenance activities were undertaken at four public shooting ranges throughout the state for a total of over \$400,000. These proposed upgrades include providing handicapped access, re-builds and many other maintenance projects. Specific public ranges with FY2018 projects are Wautoma, Boulder Junction, Caywood, Peshtigo and Yellowstone.

### **Private Range Projects**

Since the advent of the department's new private range grant program in 2013, the Council has supported the allocation of approximately \$1 million in Pittman-Robertson funds to projects to assist local rod and gun clubs manage and improve their ranges. In 2017, a total of 17 private ranges applied for \$1 million dollars in grants under the Shooting Range Grant Development program. Of these, 13 ranges were approved to proceed with various projects and upgrade including lighting to allow safe shooting at night, rebuilding compromised skeet houses, construction of shooting sheds, purchasing additional machinery and rebuilding berms. Grant monies allocated were \$359,000.

Table 2: Shooting Range Grant Applications and awards.

Applicant	Total Project Cost	Requested Fund	Recommended Fund
<b><u>Private Ranges</u></b>			
Boxhorn GC	48708	24354	24354
Boy Scouts 624	3799	1899	1899
Hope R&G	46084	17038	17038
Hudson R&G	470000	205000	50000
North Bristol	215178	104500	50000
Peninsula GC	100000	50000	50000
Peshtigo GC	94960	47480	19775
South Shore Trap Team	7725.76	2455	0
Sauk Prairie	48500	24250	10000
Waunakee GC	12808	6404	6404
Wausau Skeet and Trap	82800	41400	20700
Westby Rod & Gun Club Inc.	17700	8850	8850
Westshore Sports club	60000	20000	20000
Woods and Meadows	76322	38161	19080
Totals Private Ranges	\$1,284,585	\$591,791	\$298,100

## **Federal Omnibus Legislation**

Two important bills were introduced in 2016 that we continue to monitor and support. The Sportsmen’s Heritage and Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Act, introduced in 2016 and sponsored by CSC Co-Chairs Representatives Rob Wittman (VA) and Tim Walz (MN), remains on the table. This SHARE Act includes the Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act. This could increase from 75% to 90% the amount of federal cost sharing available for shooting range development projects.

H.R.4818 was introduced in the US Congress in 2016. Titled “Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act of 2016” this bill proposes an amendment to the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to make it one of the purposes of the Act to extend financial and technical assistance to the states for the promotion of hunting and recreational shooting.

1. The bill also prescribes a formula for the allocation of funds apportioned to a state that may be used for any activity or project to recruit or retain hunters and recreational shooters.
2. Amounts apportioned to the states from any taxes on pistols, revolvers, bows, and arrows may be used for hunter recruitment and recreational shooter recruitment.
3. The funds apportioned to a state for wildlife restoration management may be used for related public relations.
4. If a state has not used all of the tax revenues apportioned to it for firearm and bow hunter education and safety program grants, it may use its remaining apportioned funds for the enhancement of hunter recruitment and recreational shooter recruitment.
5. Up to \$5 million of the revenues covered into wildlife restoration fund in the Treasury from any tax imposed for a fiscal year on the sale of certain bows, arrows, and archery equipment shall be available to the Department of the Interior exclusively for making hunter recruitment and recreational shooter recruitment grants that promote a national hunting and shooting sport recruitment program, including related communication and outreach activities.

Other omnibus legislation includes:

1. Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council Advisory Committee Act, 2017 (HR2591)
  - a. Promotes opportunities to expand hunting and shooting and allows programs to recruit and retain new hunters and shooters.
2. Sportsmen’s Act, 2017 (S733)
  - a. Facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting opportunities on Federal land.

## **Trapping Recruitment and Retention**

### **Background**

Trapping and the use of fur is woven into the history of Wisconsin. Though the fur market is not near as prevalent today as it was when trading posts began springing up here, trapping remains an important wildlife management and research tool steeped in cultural significance.

Trapping has come a long way in the past 30 years. Known as the “BMP era,” this period is defined by the Best Management Practices for trapping developed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Capture devices and methods have not only improved due to these efforts but the ability to communicate the humaneness of trapping with a separated public has become simpler.

Trapping is an important wildlife management tool that can be used to reduce human – wildlife nuisance issues, promote biodiversity and help people connect with the natural world. Carefully regulated to ensure healthy populations are sustained, seasons and quotas are set using the best available science.

By partnering with trappers, DNR researchers have been able to learn a lot about some of our most elusive species like bobcats. Dozens of bobcats have been collared with the help of Wisconsin trappers providing important home range, habitat use and mortality data on an animal that is difficult to monitor.

A survey conducted by Responsive Management for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in 2015 estimated that there are just over 170,000 licensed trappers in the USA. Wisconsin consistently ranks in the top couple states in terms of licensed trappers. In the 2018 license year 19,161 people purchased resident trapping licenses in Wisconsin (Figure 7). Despite the popularity of trapping in Wisconsin, the number of participants still pales in comparison to hunters and anglers.

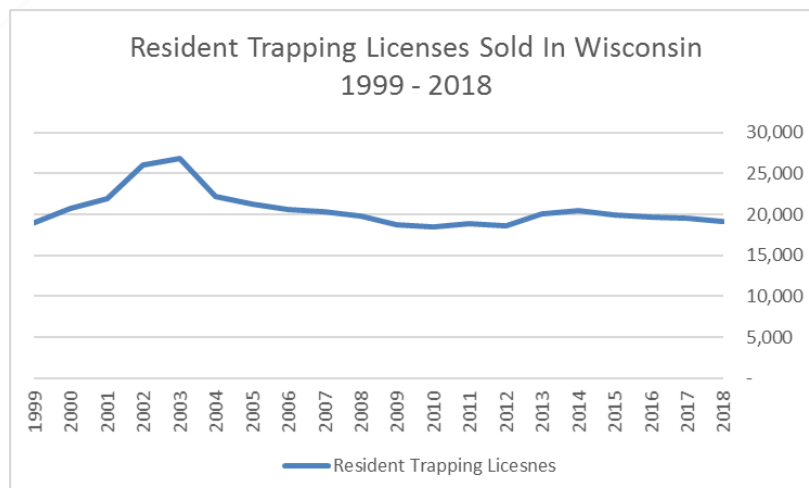


Figure 7. Resident Trapping Licenses Sold in WI 1999-2018.



## Trapper Recruitment and Retention

Trapping is on the high end of the spectrum in terms of both time and equipment needed among the outdoor pursuits. Couple that with a fur market that has largely been in a decline and the future of trapping seems far from certain. In 2018 there were 19,161 resident trapping licenses purchased which is 7% below the 20-year average.

The Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program aims to curb the decline with a hands-on education course designed to give students the skills they need to be successful trapping on their own while also introducing them to a network of trapping contacts.

Since trapper education is mandatory for all new trappers, we can use graduates to measure recruitment. In 2018 there were 1,125 students who completed trapper education in Wisconsin. Trapper education graduates may use their certificate as their first year's trapping license. In 2018 the 1,125 graduates made up about 5.5 percent of the 20,286 licensed trappers\* (Figure 8).

\*20,286 comes from the 19,161 resident trapping license holders plus the 1,125 graduates. Not included are Conservation Patrons holders.

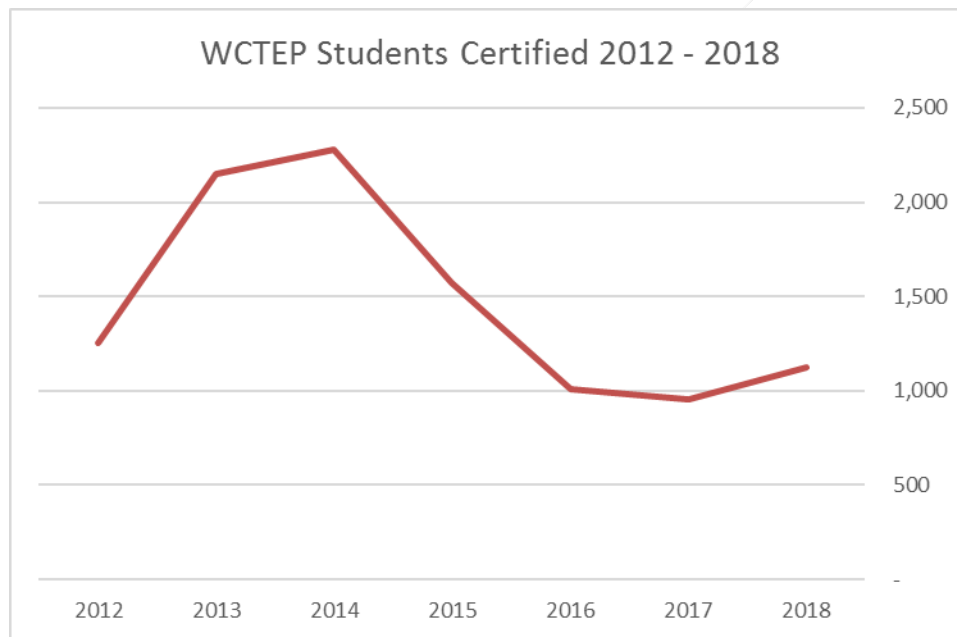


Figure 8. Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Course Graduates 2012-2018.

## Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program

Trapper education in Wisconsin is a cooperative effort between the WDNR and the Wisconsin Trappers Association that began in 1982. The course has been shaped over the years to help give novice trappers enough skills to be successful on their own while focusing on ethics to help ensure the sustainability of trapping. Since trapper education became mandatory in 1992, Wisconsin routinely graduates more trapper education students than other reporting states.

The Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program now offers three course options to potential students. The traditional in-person course has been by far the most popular and preferred option, but the correspondence course allows students to complete the coursework through the mail and the new online course can be done over the web. Both the correspondence course and online course will require passing a field test-out with a certified instructor prior to receiving certification.

## **Fur Schools**

The Wisconsin DNR Furbearer program and the Trapper Education program hold Fur Schools for current and future wildlife professionals. Fur Schools may be taken for trapper education certification and cover all aspects of a trapper education class with more hands-on fur handling and a focus on furbearer research and management.

There is a Wildlife Fur School for DNR employees and other natural resources professionals held each year. This is a great

opportunity for staff to learn about trapping in a way that could help them answer questions they may receive on the job. This program has been well received and usually fills up fast with around 25 participants. The Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education program helps hold similar Wildlife Fur Schools in New York, Idaho and Kentucky and University fur schools in Wisconsin for future natural resources professionals by targeting students in the field.



## **Future Trappers of Wisconsin**

The Future Trappers of Wisconsin is a youth organization hosted by the Wisconsin Trappers Association aimed at teaching kids about trapping and the outdoors. The trapper education department provides educational materials and helps administer the annual youth trapping camp. Each summer the Future Trappers of Wisconsin hold a youth trapping camp at Trees for Tomorrow in Eagle River. Students learn about wildlife, trapping and survival skills. They run a small trapline on a nearby property, put up some fur and even build some sifters and weasel boxes. The campers leave with trapper education certification and a nice haul of trapping equipment to get started.



## **Youth Supervised and Mentored Trapping**

Starting with the 2018 license year, there are youth supervised and mentored trapping options available for folks wanting to give trapping a shot before taking trapper education.

Youth under 16 may trap before taking trapper education and without a license under the supervision of a licensed trapper. Youth may trap for the limited draw species of bobcat, fisher and river otter under the youth supervised trapping rules if they successfully draw a permit or are transferred one. Without needing a license, it is difficult to track how many youth are using the supervised trapping option.

People aged 16 and over that want to try their hand at trapping before becoming certified may purchase a Mentored trapping license for \$10. This allows them to trap under the supervision of a licensed trapper before taking trapper education. People can only purchase the mentored trapping license twice in their

lifetime and may not trap the limited draw species with this license. If someone 16 or over draws a bobcat, fisher or otter permit they will need to take trapper education and purchase a trapping license in order to trap for these species. In the first year offered (2018), 39 Wisconsinites purchased the Mentored Trapping license.

US Trapping statistics: <https://www.fishwildlife.org//afwa-inspires/furbearer-management>

## **Angling Recruitment and Retention**

Angler R3 comprises Fishing for Dinner, the newly created Angler R3 Grant, and the Angler Education Program. Angler Education, in turn, has several components that support Fishing for Dinner and broader R3 goals.

### **Angler R3 Grant**

*Objective:* Establish an Angler R3 grant program and encourage potential partner organization to apply and grow the community of anglers. Write guidance and notify public via the web and mailing lists.

*Results:* Eleven grant applications were received and ten were reviewed for consideration. Reviewers will be helping applicants to succeed with their programs regarding compliance with the guidance, acceptable protocols and federal eligibility.

### **Fishing for Dinner**

*Objective:* Engage potential anglers by offering Fishing for Dinner classes statewide to reach a diverse group of participants who will purchase fishing licenses after attending classes and join the community of anglers for the long-term. Exhibit and conduct demos at events, fairs and trade shows where young adults gather to learn about sustainable lifestyle practices, such as eating locally. Collect contact information on potential partners and participants to follow-up with people who express interest.

*Results:* With our partners, we conducted five multi-session classes; two in Milwaukee by the Urban Ecology Center and three experimental weekend classes in Door (one) and Vernon (two) counties. The classes served 35 people; of those, 16 participants had already purchased licenses in 2017-2018 and 19 benefited from the educational license waiver. Registration for the weekend format was disappointing at first with only six participants at the two summer weekend classes. Our revised format for a spring weekend class at the Driftless Folk School improved attendance, with 12 participants and 9 on a waiting list.



Classes cover basic fishing skills, where to fish, an overview of the Public Trust Doctrine, effective responses to threats to sustainability, safe and ethical harvest practices and cooking the catch. Partners include local chefs, culinary arts instructors, anglers, social service organizations and members of the sustainable and local foods community to encourage young adults to fish.

We have begun tracking license-buying habits of past class participants. The results show an uptick in license sales from this relatively small sample size for participating in the following year. Many members of our target audience are in transient life stages with their education plans and early career moves, which take them out of state. After multiple years have passed, license purchasing rate begin to normalize to pre-participation levels. These trends may indicate a need to continue individual post-program involvement.

Next steps will be to continue to 1.) track license purchasing habits of participants using their customer service numbers. 2.) engage partners willing to go beyond the one-day event to replicate this model statewide if we are to see more than a few dozen participants each year, and 3.) hold training sessions for willing partners, similarly to how angler education instructors were previously trained.

Participant license-buying habits and trends are below (Figure 9.). Actual numbers and the percentages of participants purchasing fishing licenses are in Table 3. Trends show that there is a 5.9% average increase in fishing licenses purchased the year after a Fishing for Dinner class compared to the year prior. More data needs to be collected to determine long-term effects.

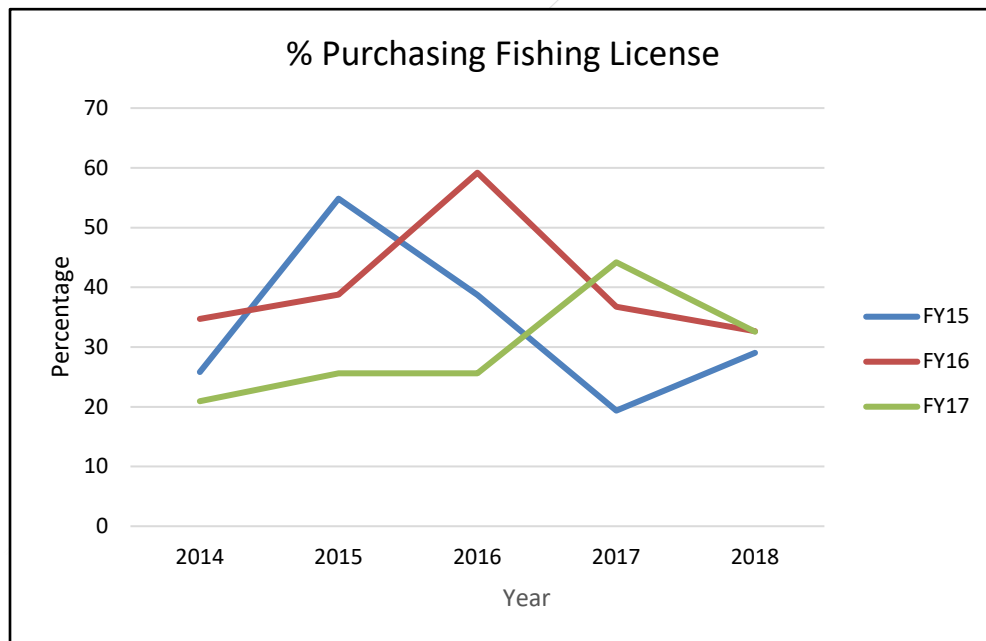


Figure 9. Percentages of Fishing for Dinner participants that bought fishing licenses each year from 2014-2018. Each line represents the fiscal year where participants attended a Fishing for Dinner class.

Table 3. Total participants and percentages that purchased fishing licenses based on the fiscal years they attended a Fishing for Dinner class.

Fiscal Year	Total Participants	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
FY15 participants	31	8	17	12	6	9
FY15 % purchased		25.8	54.8	38.7	19.4	29.0
FY16 participants	49	17	19	29	18	16
FY16 % Purchased		34.7	38.8	59.2	36.7	32.7
FY17 participants	43	9	11	11	19	14
FY17 % Purchased		20.9	25.6	25.6	44.2	32.6

A tabletop display was also exhibited at six venues over the course of eight days in 2017: Canoeopia; Pulaski Park in Milwaukee with Sixteenth Street Community Health Center; Harbor Fest at the School of Freshwater Sciences; Robyn Migliorini’s talk, “Giving Hunting a Shot,” at the Discovery Center – UW-Madison; Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies conference in Milwaukee and Fisheries Management’s statewide meeting. Fishing for Dinner events have been held in Dane, Washington, Milwaukee, Door and Vernon counties.

### Angler Education Instructor Training and Activity

*Objective:* Train a minimum of 5 facilitators per year to lead and conduct angler education instructor training and certification workshops in their communities. Improve Angler Education Instructor training workshops with an emphasis on increasing instructor networking through local fishing, conservation clubs, and youth organizations to reach new audiences. Evaluate and survey instructors and program participants to determine long-term involvement, effectiveness and needs. Support efforts of certified and non-certified volunteers to deliver angler education programming and fishing clinics. Encourage instructors and others to plan Free Fishing Weekend events that target adults. Purchase supplies and services for workshops and supporting volunteer efforts.

*Results:* Much of the proposed work directly related to instructor training was deferred during the transition of the Angler Education Program from the Bureau of Fisheries to the newly created R3 Team in the Bureau of Law Enforcement. In total, 4 new instructors were trained and certified at 1 training workshop in St. Germain held by lead instructor, Jackie Scharfenberg. We received 3 or 4 other requests for Angler Education Instructor training but did not hold workshops due to logistical challenges during the transition time. Contact information was kept for possible, future workshops.

Based on reports, 20 instructors served 788 youth and 311 adults for a total of 1,099 people. More than half of the youth were served by the Headwaters Musky Club. Warehouse inventory reports indicate that 7 groups ordered 165 Junior Angler booklets. The 20 instructors provided 92 sessions over the course of 22 programs. Almost all



programs were multiple sessions, which suggests repeat attendance by participants and aligns with our goals to have more long-term involvement in programs for those interested in fishing.

## **Fishing in the Neighborhood**

*Objective:* Community organizations will be carefully selected to serve as Fishing in the Neighborhood (FiN) host sites and involve interested fisheries biologists. FiN'terns will be hired by the Angler R3 Program, trained and supervised to optimize their success in reaching diverse audiences, including people of license-buying age. Emphasize recruitment of bilingual candidates to bridge language barriers and improve compliance with regulations and adherence to the fish health advisory.



*Results:* A FiN season begins in May of one fiscal year when the interns, or FiN'terns, are trained, and ends in August of the next. This review reflects the efforts launched in 2017-2018 and still underway in the current fiscal year, 2018-2019.

We maintained three FiN sites with three previous partnerships (Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary, Urban Ecology Center and Wehr Nature Center) and added one new partner at the Madison School Community Recreation (MSCR). The FiN'tern program continued to utilize college job boards to recruit many of this year's enthusiastic FiN'terns. All FiN'terns were assigned to assist at pre-planned Free Fishing Weekend events as an introduction; Potawatowic State Park, Urban Ecology Center, and three parks in Madison. The FiN'terns reported an

approximate total of 2532 participant at their programs (participation numbers from the Free Fishing Weekend events that they assisted at are not included in this total). There were weekly events held by the FiN'terns such as the Fishing Club sessions and Saturday family fishing adventures at the Urban Ecology Center and summer enrichment programs with the Edison school and the Boys & Girls Club in Green Bay. At the Wehr Nature Center, the FiN'terns worked with a YMCA camp, Scouts, and provided programming at the park beer gardens. The Madison team worked with the Vera Court Neighborhood Center, Goodman Community Center and utilized MSCR's pontoon boats for family fishing outings. The Milwaukee FiN'terns assisted at an introductory Fishing for Dinner outreach event hosted by 16<sup>th</sup> Street Community Health Center, which serves Milwaukee's Latino community.

The FiN'terns reported good relationships with their on-site supervisors at host sites and valued the field experience with DNR and USFWS staff. Madison FiN'terns worked with regional fisheries staff from Fitchburg on a more limited basis compared to the three crews based along Lake Michigan. Some FiN'terns expressed that setting up more opportunities with already established group, such as schools and clubs, might yield better turn-out at events. They also noted that children that were associated with a group were more engaged and cooperative in the learning process. Others also suggested we work to increase brand recognition to improve numbers. For all reported FiN'tern programs, youth and adult breakdown was approximately at 90% youth and 10% adults. Unsolicited comments from local organizations that were served, in cooperation with our partners, were glowing about the FiN'terns' program delivery and positive attitudes. FiN events have been held in Brown, Dane, Milwaukee and Waukesha counties.

## **License Waivers**

*Objective:* Provide educational Learn to Fish license waivers to novice anglers that are part of an organized group participating in an approved program, either the DNR's Angler Education Program, Fishing for Dinner or one of their own design. Audiences are teenagers and adults.

*Results:* Provided Learn to Fish educational license waiver to 12 groups, including 7 high schools and 5 Fishing for Dinner classes. The waiver allowed teachers and group leaders to introduce 271 older teens and 43 adults of all ages to fishing, as part of an extended angler education or Fishing for Dinner class, either the DNR's or one of an organizers' design. License waivers have been used in events in Columbia, Kewaunee, Milwaukee, Ozaukee and Racine counties.

## **Tackle Loaner Program**

*Objective:* Stock loaner sites with basic fishing equipment. Provide with specialty items to sites where there is staff interest and expertise to make proper use of it, as budget allows. Supply loaner sites with non-lead sinkers and instruct site managers to purchase non-lead sinkers when they need to make replacements on short notice, outside of the main distribution period. At least 1/3 of the sites that desire help with maintenance will receive it through volunteer recruitment.

*Results:* We currently have 60 tackle loaner sites statewide with all reporting. Reports indicate that 7229 individuals from 79 families and 133 different groups used gear. 996 days of fishing was logged among them - in many cases the groups shared gear. Parks served mainly family groups and individuals. Our service centers tend to serve larger groups from organizations and schools. The number of families could also be higher than reported since many sites noted only if the borrowers were campers or visitors and didn't distinguish if they were families. Six sites reported no use; we will transfer gear from sites where use is low to more active sites.

In the past, the field was given latitude to make site-specific purchases that enhanced their local efforts, beyond what was available from Central Office, but realignment caused some confusion regarding budget codes and local site management responsibilities. Without an LTE on board during the transition to help make bulk purchases and distribute to various sites, loaner sites were not served as well as in the past. Relatedly, Central Office made small purchases as necessary for FiN sites and Fishing for Dinner.

## **Free Fishing Weekend**

*Objective:* Provide opportunities for children and families to engage in fishing together in collaboration with a wide range of Wisconsin communities. With an emphasis on community engagement, the Free Fishing Weekends are a catalyst for families and social groups to plan future fishing trips and will encourage people to fish at their local waters or explore other waters of the state.

*Results:* Two Free Fishing Weekends were held in FY2018 across the state. We held a summer event and a winter event. For the summer weekend in June, we provided materials and publicity for 24 events (another 3 were private); 22 events reported attendance figures totaling 4549 participants. Most reporting sites collect data on age breakdown which shows that of the 3558 reported, 1949 were young kids and 1609 were of license-buying age: (103) 16-18 and (1359) adults with kids and (147) adults without kids. Based on the expected attendance listed on the event proposals from the 2 non-reporting event sponsors, it is reasonable to estimate that another 207 people (93 youth and 114 adults) participated in Summer Free Fishing Weekend events. Our FiN'terns assisted at 6 of the events, including 2 held aboard MSCR pontoon boats. The winter Free Fishing Weekend is still slow to catch on, perhaps due to past years' experience of variable ice conditions and because it is an important weekend for fundraising events for several partners who host clinics at the June Free Fishing Weekend. The winter events scheduled were held at 8 locations, attracting 762 participants with a breakdown of 302 adults and 460 youth.

## Angler Recruitment and Retention in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has a tremendously rich fishing tradition due to the abundance of outstanding lakes, rivers and streams in and around the state. Early television programs like *American Sportsmen*, and numerous magazines such as *Field and Stream* reinforced the lure of the outdoors within millions of baby-boomers across the US. Since the 1960s these baby-boomers and their parents, and in the earlier years their grandparents, consistently bought their fishing licenses and over time helped build the current \$2.27 billion per year fishing related tourism industry supporting 21,500 jobs in Wisconsin. Today 1.25 million anglers purchase licenses and spend 21.3 million days fishing each year in Wisconsin. Tourism is the #3 industry in the state and fishing is a big part of the tourism business.

Wisconsin Fishing license sales peaked 30 years ago in the late 1980s, while our overall population level has continued to increase over the same time period (*Figure 10.*) Detailed analyses of Wisconsin fishing license sales indicate that while the diminishing numbers of baby-boomers and other older anglers generally consistently purchase their fishing licenses, younger anglers ages 16 to 30 are not. Research (Southwick Associates, 2010) has shown that current, lapsed, and former anglers have many other things competing for their time, and that health and age is a significant factor contributing to not going fishing for former and lapsed anglers.

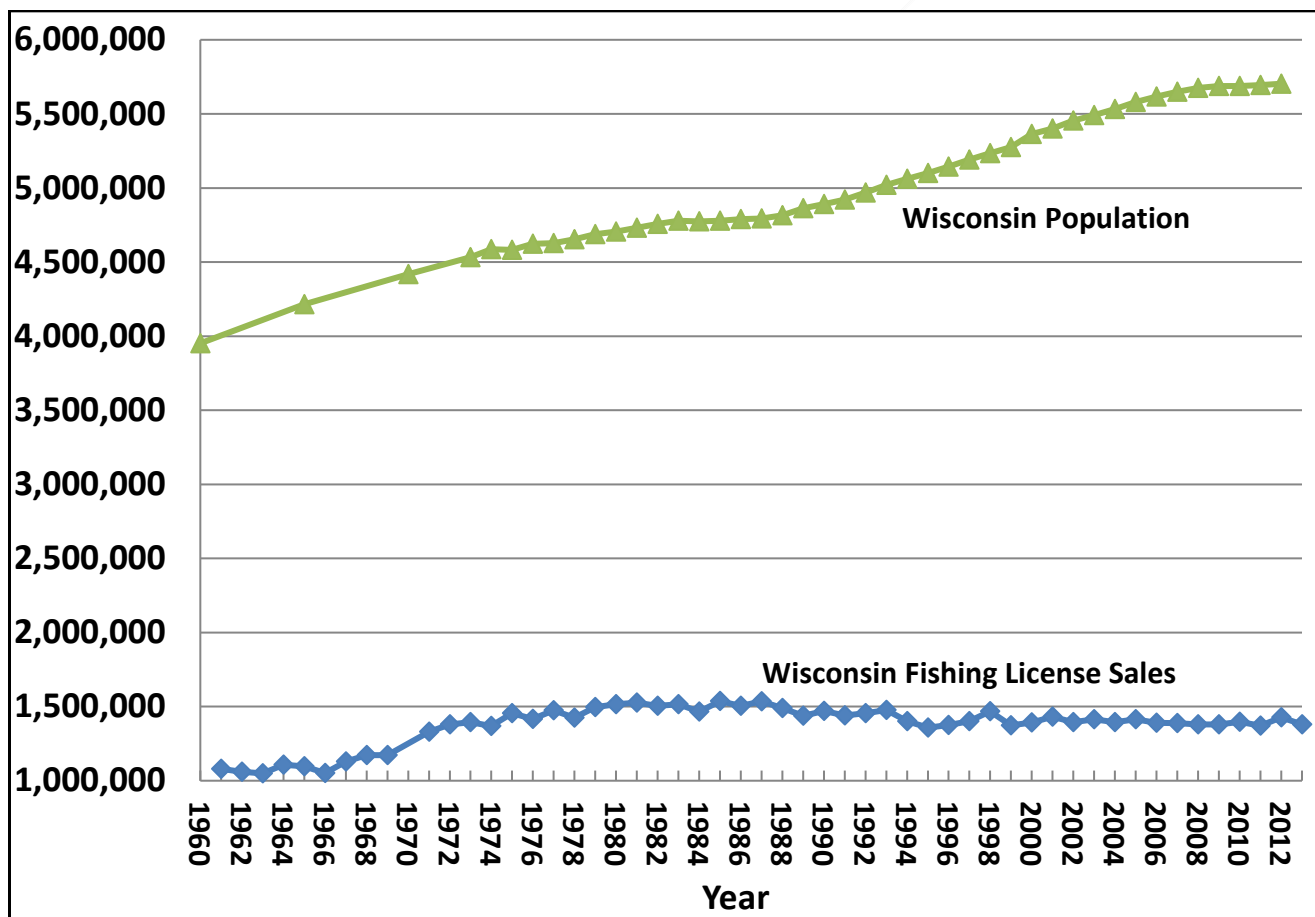


Figure 10. Wisconsin fishing license sales.

In summary, older anglers who have been the backbone of license sales for decades are getting older and may likely continue to drop away from fishing, and younger anglers and potential anglers have many other things that compete more successfully for their time. These factors, and likely others, contribute to a trend in fishing license sales in Wisconsin, and probably in many states.



## **Sporting Heritage Council Members 2018**

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Tony Grabski (Deer)  
Mark LaBarbera (Game Birds)  
Robert Haase (Angling)  
Mike Rogers (Bear)  
Scott Zimmerman (Furbearer)  
Bill Torhorst (Governor's appointee)  
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Sen. Bob Wirch  
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Rep. Nick Milroy  
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