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# Outdoor Activities for Today's Americans are Different than for Previous Generations<sup>1</sup>

A Research Brief in the IRIS Series<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Athens Research Group, Southern Research Station, USDA Forest Service, Athens, GA (Ken Cordell, Project Leader).

<sup>2</sup> The Internet Research Information Series (IRIS) is an internet accessible science report series covering outdoor recreation statistics (RECSTATS), the National Kids Survey (NKSSTATS), natural lands research (NATLAND), and other human-dimension and demographics research (DEMOSTATS) related to natural resources. This research is a collaborative effort between the USDA Forest Service's Southern Research Station and its Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Athens, Georgia; the University of Georgia in Athens; and the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee.

<http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/nsre/IrisReports.html>

# Outdoor Activities Today are Different

## IRIS Research Brief—Part 1

### A Key Finding from the RPA Outdoor Recreation Demand Assessment

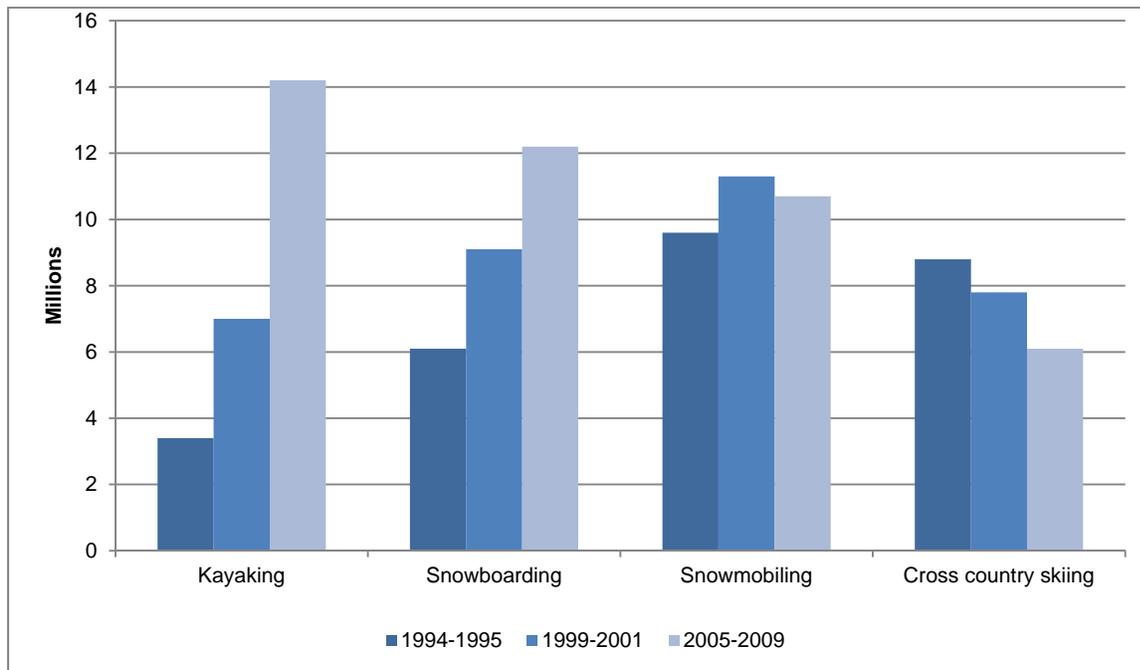
Outdoor recreation has played a prominent role in American lifestyles over the decades. But this role has evolved as the relative popularity of different outdoor activities has been shifting with each new generation. Shifts in popularity can be traced as far back as to the 1960s when the first National Recreation Survey was done. Over these 50 or so years, the number of people choosing many of the activities we have studied has grown, or remained more or less stable. For a short list of other activities, the number of people participating has actually declined. Some activities people participate in now, such as snowboarding, didn't even exist as such in earlier decades. The primary data source for the research behind this IRIS Research Brief is the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (Cordell 2012).

In a preceding IRIS Research Brief, eight key findings from the research behind the RPA assessment of outdoor recreation trends and futures were listed (<http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/NSRE/IRISRec/IRISRec26rpt.pdf>). This is Part 1 of 8 that will overview those key findings one at a time. RPA stands for Renewable Resources Planning Act which mandates that the Forest Service review the status of all forest and rangelands every 10 years. Outdoor recreation is one of the many areas covered by the Forest Service's RPA Forest and Rangelands Assessment publications (Cordell 2012). For other RPA reports covering wildlife, forest resources, rangelands, and other natural resources, visit the following site link (<http://www.fs.fed.us/research/rpa/assessment.php>).

***Primary Finding 1.--“Outdoor recreation choices by people today are noticeably different from those made by and available to previous generations of Americans.”***

The bar graph below shows only four outdoor activities, but it illustrates how rapidly outdoor activities can shift in relative positions in terms of number of people who participate in them.

The four example activities shown include kayaking, snowboarding, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. Kayaking and snowboarding were well below the participation levels of snowmobiling and cross country skiing in 1995. But by 2009, kayaking and snowboarding had taken participation positions well above snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.



**Millions of participants in four outdoor activities in three periods (1994-95, 1999-2001, and 2005-09).**

Overall, the activities emerging as most popular in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in terms of number of people participating, were walking for pleasure, family gatherings outdoors, gardening or landscaping, viewing/photographing natural scenery, visiting outdoor nature centers, and attending outdoor sports events. Following these activities in popularity were sightseeing, picnicking, viewing/photographing flowers and trees, driving for pleasure, viewing/photographing wildlife, and visiting historic sites. All of these activities have shown growth in number of participants in the past decade. In terms of growth rate (percentage growth), activities oriented toward viewing and photographing nature (scenery, flowers/trees and wildlife) have been among the fastest growing of all activities. As earlier noted, some activities have actually been on the decline. Examples include downhill skiing, inline or rollerblade skating, snowmobiling, ice skating, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and windsurfing.

## **Literature Cited**

Cordell, H. Ken. 2012. Outdoor recreation trends and futures: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment. Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-150. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 167 p.

Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC). 1962. Outdoor recreation for America. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. 246 p.