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**DEMAND FOR NATURE-BASED
OUTDOOR RECREATION
CONTINUES ITS GROWTH AND
POPULARITY**

A RECREATION Research Report in the IRIS Series¹

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¹ The Internet Research Information Series (IRIS) is an internet accessible science report series covering outdoor recreation statistics (RECSTATS), wilderness research (WILDERNESS) 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>

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DEMAND FOR NATURE-BASED OUTDOOR RECREATION CONTINUES ITS GROWTH AND POPULARITY

There has been much in the news about reported declines in American's interest and participation in nature-based recreation. The following summarizes an analysis by the Forest Service of American's participation in nature-based outdoor recreation. The data sources cited here are the Nation's most authoritative.

1. Visitation to state parks, national parks, and other public lands is relatively stable after long-term growth in the 60s through the 80s:
 - Total visitation to state parks peaked around 2000, then decreased somewhat through to 2006. In 2007, visitation was back up over the level reported in 2001 (a 0.7% increase). (National Association of State Park Directors)
 - The highest recorded national park visitation was over 287 million in 1987. Through the 1990s, visitation dropped somewhat, but rebounded in 1998 and 1999 to that previous 1987 high. (NPS)
 - There were minor decreases in national park visitation during the 2000s, but for the most part visitation has been stable since 2001. In 2007, visitation rose by almost 3 million above the 2006 level. (NPS)
 - The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (FHWAR) reported increases in numbers of wildlife watching visitors to public parks and areas near home. In 1996 the number was 11.0 million, by 2006 this had increased to 13.3 million, a 21 percent increase. Of the 23 million people in 2006 who traveled away from home to watch wildlife, more than 80 percent visited a public area to do so. (FHWAR)

2. Many types of hunting and fishing are down in numbers participating, but bird and other wildlife watching, study and photography are up.
 - Between 1996 and 2006 there was a drop of 5.2 million anglers and of 1.5 million hunters. This national trend was reported by the Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - During this same period, however, the number of people who watch or photograph wildlife increased by 8.2 million, showing a net gain in participants in wildlife-associated recreation of 1.5 million. (FWS)

3. The Forest Service's National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) is the United States' official survey of outdoor recreation, on-going since 1960. The NSRE reports growth in nature-based outdoor recreation since 2000.
 - The NSRE reports that both the total number of Americans and the total number of days annually in which they participate in nature-based recreation are up since 2000, continuing a long-term growth trend reported in the book entitled, "Outdoor Recreation for 21st Century America". (FS)
 - The nature-based outdoor activities Americans are choosing now are different than in the past. Some forms of hunting and fishing are declining, and camping and swimming are growing more slowly now. Some other activities have declined in popularity, e.g., mountain biking, rafting, and horseback riding on trails. (FS)

- Viewing, photographing and studying nature, however, in all its forms, have grown strongly since 2000. These nature-interest activities include viewing flowers, trees, natural scenery, birds, other wildlife, fish, and visiting nature exhibits.
- Still popular and growing are visiting beaches, gathering mushrooms and berries, visiting natural areas, driving off-road vehicles, kayaking, and snowboarding
- Total number of Americans participating in nature activities is up over 3 percent since 2000, number of activity days is up almost 32 percent since 2000.