

Dept of Fish and Wildlife Comments on 2016 USFWS Nation Survey

- The National Survey Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife has been conducted by the US Census Bureau for the USFWS, every five years, since 1955.
- The 2016 National Survey is *national-only* and *did not* include state level reports. State reports were dropped in 2016 because sample size reductions in 2006 and 2011 had resulted in a number of questionable estimates with high margins of error. These problems were particularly acute for small states. For instance, the 2011 survey estimated Vermont had 207,000 resident and nonresident anglers, plus or minus 78,000. The actual number was 110,000.
- To provide agencies with state-level data, the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) contracted with a private vendor to provide participation and expenditure data. The methodology varied considerably from the National Survey.
- The results of the alternate survey were wildly different from what had been reported in previous National Surveys. For instance, it estimated Vermont had 895,000 resident and non-resident wildlife watchers. As a reminder, Vermont only has 624,000 people. It also estimated Vermont hunters spent \$351 million dollars. Our hunters have always led the way in wildlife-related recreation spending. However, this is double what the National Survey estimated in 2006 and almost \$60 million more than estimated in 2011.
- Due to the questionable results, AFWA advised state directors/commissioners that it would not release the 50-state surveys and would leave it up to individual states to decide if they wanted to use the survey or not.
- The 2016 National Survey is still considered a sound and useful resource for mapping long-term national trends. However, it is of limited use to the Department without state-specific information since national trends cannot necessarily be applied to Vermont.

1) Because of Vermont's population size relative to total U.S. population, very few Vermont residents were included in the National survey. Trends and participation rates are more likely to be reflective of larger, more urban states.

2) The 2001, 2006 and 2011 National Surveys consistently showed Vermont at the top or second to the top among all states when it came to total wildlife-related participation rates. In short, we already had high participation rates, including wildlife-watching. As a result, it is unlikely that wildlife watching in Vermont increased a further 20%, as reported nationwide in the 2016 National Survey.

3) Our licenses sales data underscore the differences in participation rates. The 2016 National Survey reports a national fishing participation is 14%; it is 23% in Vermont. The national hunting participation rate is 4%; it is 13% in Vermont.