

Structural Transformation in Waterfowl Hunting: Long-term Evidence from Wisconsin

Key Points

- » Waterfowl hunting participation declined from approximately 75% in 2007 to 66% in 2024.
- » However, among participating hunters, the number of days spent hunting remained stable.
- » Inflation-adjusted expenditures increased by approximately \$354 per hunter, while harvest productivity, measured as birds harvested per hunting day, increased by approximately 53%.
- » Overall, the findings suggest a transition toward a smaller, but more committed, higher-spending, and more productive (i.e., successful) population of waterfowl hunters.

Project Background

- » Declining participation in wildlife-based recreation raises concerns for hunting traditions, wildlife management, and conservation funding.
- » This study used data from surveys of Wisconsin's waterfowl hunters collected between 2007 and 2024.
- » The analysis evaluates four dimensions of hunting activity: participation, hunting effort, expenditures, and harvest productivity.

Results Summary

- » Analysis indicated much of the decline in participation is associated with changes in the demographic composition of the hunter population rather than substantial declines in participation within individual demographic groups. The study also finds little evidence that younger generations are leaving waterfowl hunting at disproportionately higher rates than older cohorts.
- » These trends have important implications for hunter recruitment and retention and the long-term sustainability of conservation funding.