

2020/2021 Angler Survey Joelle Ernst, Central Office Fisheries

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Participation in recreational fishing increased 9% nationwide in 2020 (Outdoor Foundation et al. 2021) conceivably due to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. Social gatherings such as sporting events, concerts and other activities involving social gatherings were not available, compelling people to get outdoors for safe, enjoyable experiences. Compared to 2019, fishing license sales in New York increased 10% in 2020. DEC seized this opportunity to reach out to first-time fishing license buyers to learn more about their motivations, habits, and likelihood to continue fishing, potentially using the information gained as a retention tool to keep them engaged in the sport.

To gain a better understanding of new angler motivations and determine where resources to retain anglers are best committed, DEC developed a web-based survey using Alchemer® and sent it via a DEC Delivers email to over 76,000 New York residents that purchased a fishing license for the first-time in 2020. The survey was active from December 30, 2021 – January 14, 2022 and included a brief summary of the survey purpose. The survey instrument included the following five questions:

1. What was your primary motivation to go fishing in 2020?
 - I had extra time
 - To provide food for me/my family
 - To get outdoors
 - To try a new activity
 - A friend/family member encouraged me to go
2. How many days did you go fishing in 2020?
 - 1-5
 - 6-10
 - More than 10
 - None, I purchased a license but did not fish
3. Which of the following best describes most of your fishing outings?
 - I fished alone
 - I fished with a friend(s)
 - I fished with family
 - I fished as part of a work outing or group retreat
4. How likely are you to continue fishing?
 - Highly Unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Not Sure
 - Likely
 - Definitely
5. Which of the following would encourage you to take up or continue fishing?
 - More access to fishing education resources (i.e., in-person clinics, online fishing instruction/materials, publications, etc.)
 - More information on fishing opportunities and where to fish
 - More opportunities for shoreline fishing
 - Simplified fishing regulations
 - A fishing buddy/mentor

DEC received 2,800 survey responses, 2,598 (93%) of which were fully completed surveys. Only the results from the completed surveys were used for analysis.

Almost half of the respondents (48%) indicated that their primary motivation to go fishing was to get outdoors. Despite it being the second highest motivator, only 23% indicated that it was because a friend/family member encouraged them to go.

Interestingly, the majority responded that they either fished “1-5 days” (30%) or “more than 10 days” (39%) in 2020, indicating that they fished casually or seriously. Only 21% responded that they fished “6-10 days.” 10% of respondents purchased a license but did not fish.

When asked about group dynamics for most of their outings, almost half (48%) of the anglers fished with family. The percentage of respondents that fished alone or with a friend were about the same, 25% and 27%, respectively. A very small portion (0.4%) of the respondents indicated that they fished as part of an organized group outing.

For the question “How likely are you to continue fishing?” results were overwhelmingly favorable towards a higher likelihood that respondents would continue fishing, with 85% indicating they were likely to (29%) or would definitely (56%) continue. Collectively, about 15% responded that they were unsure, unlikely, or highly unlikely to continue.

Receiving information on fishing opportunities/where to fish and having more opportunities for shoreline fishing were the most favorable responses when asked what would encourage them to take up or continue fishing. Having simplified fishing regulations ranked slightly lower than the aforementioned options. Having a fishing buddy and having access to fishing education resources received the lowest number of responses (Figure 1).

The results of this survey suggest that getting out fishing with family was a popular outdoor pursuit in 2020 for first time anglers. A majority of respondents indicated an interest in continuing in the sport, suggesting that there is value in focusing effort on retention of beginning anglers. The results of this survey suggest that retention efforts are best focused on improving our outreach on fishing opportunities, particularly shoreline opportunities for families.

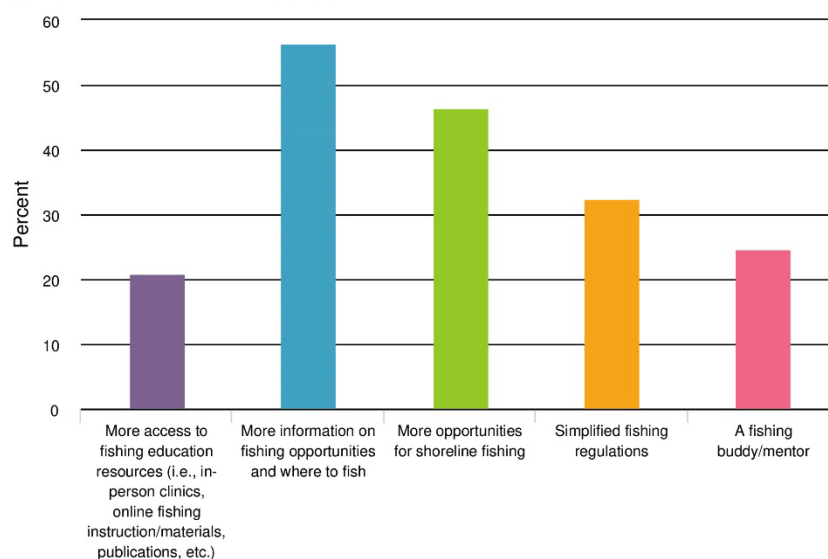


Figure 1. The percentage of responses for resources respondents felt would be helpful to continue fishing.