

Science You Can Use *in 5 minutes*

Bucking the trend: Understanding women's growing participation in hunting in the Mountain-Prairie region

For decades, national participation in hunting has been on the decline. One population of hunters, however, is bucking the trend: Women. Studies on women in hunting often focus on barriers to participation, such as lack of leisure time, lack of experience, and lack of role models. But despite those barriers, women's participation has been increasing. In 2022 an estimated 3 million women represented 22 percent of all hunters, more than double the number from 2016. Given this upward trend, there are still many unanswered questions about what motivates women to participate in hunting.

Rocky Mountain Research Station scientists collaborated with researchers from South Dakota State University to shed new light on women's decision making in hunting and explore the roles which community-led efforts, like gear libraries and peer support networks, play in bolstering women's participation. Co-led by Rocky Mountain Research Station research social scientist Lauren Redmore, the research team gathered information from participants at women's educational outdoor events in South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. The team used qualitative research methods,

including semi-structured interviews and a three-day community of practice. The study's results identified the top five decision categories for women when they are thinking about hunting: gear selection, tradeoffs with household responsibilities, hunting partners; hunting land access, and general preplanning. Having the right gear was mentioned as a top consideration by 70 percent of the participants, from durability to safety to fit. On the topic of access, one upland bird hunter mentioned, "Public land has been something that I relied on my entire hunting experience. Public land has been a great resource that does not require me to approach strangers for access." Another hunter, who was also a mother, discussed the difficulty of finding flexible, trusted childcare. In addition to evaluating these decision categories individually, Redmore and her colleagues



There are opportunities for land managers to support instructional and training efforts. These collaborative efforts can help hunters access a range of private, State, and Federal lands. During an instruction session at Grouse Camp, two women deploy bear spray at a model. Forest Service photo.

also examined how women navigated decision making across these categories, especially when faced with compounding barriers to participation. They found that participants often navigated challenging decisions with support from the wider hunting community. In many cases, they were turning to other women hunters or women's educational programs where they learned effective strategies that enabled them to fully engage.

Recognizing the value of formal educational programs to strengthen women's participation in outdoor recreation—particularly hunting—the research team sought to identify the range of programs and opportunities for women looking to develop their outdoor skills. The team documented and created an [interactive social systems map](#) of the many available formal educational programs in the region that offer women the opportunity to build skills in the outdoors in community with other women. This work, supported by additional forthcoming research, indicates that community-based efforts may effectively bolster women's participation in hunting, with potential implications for the continuation of an important American tradition.



It is known that peer-support networks and gear libraries are useful tools to support women hunters. Agencies and organizations can play a role in supporting this growing population. Forest Service photo.

Management Considerations

- By understanding the factors that women think about when deciding to participate in hunting, land and wildlife managers are better equipped to encourage women's participation in hunting.
- Land managers can help bolster hunting participation by collaborating with organizations and outfitters and guides offering educational programs, like [Her Upland](#) or [Uncharted Outdoorswomen](#), and other opportunities aimed at developing women's skills and confidence in the outdoors.
- Land managers can support instructional, and training efforts intended to help hunters access a range of private, State, and Federal lands.
- State agencies and outdoor recreation and conservation organizations may play an active role in supporting women hunters by facilitating access to peer support networks and gear libraries, such as those featured in the interactive social systems map of women's hunting and fishing groups, in addition to more traditional outreach and educational approaches.

Further Reading

Jackson, H.N.; Redmore, L.; Cheek, C.A.; Cheek, J. Z. 2026. [To hunt or not to hunt: Is it that simple for female hunters?](#) Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism. 53: 101012.

Redmore, L.; Isensee, S.; Stafford, J.D.; Cheek, J.Z. 2026. [Engaging adult R3 outdoor educational program design to strengthen participation in hunting and fishing.](#) Human Dimensions of Wildlife.

Featured Scientists

[Lauren Redmore](#) is a Research Social Scientist at the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute where she studies community-based conservation and the cultural relationships that people have with land.

[Olga Helmy](#) is the author of this Science You Can Use.



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