

# Results from a National Survey of Wildlife Viewers in the United States: Supporting a Growing Audience

Kelley Langhans,  
Ashley Dayer & Emily Sinkular



# Presentation Overview

1. Background on wildlife viewers
2. Survey of wildlife viewers
  - a. Wildlife viewing preferences
  - b. Communication preferences
3. Implementing recommendations with a Community of Practice
4. Future research and next steps





## **What is Wildlife Viewing?**

**“Closely observing, feeding, and photographing wildlife; visiting parks or natural areas to observe, feed, or photograph wildlife; and maintaining plantings and natural areas for the benefit of wildlife.”**

(U.S. DOI et al. 2018)

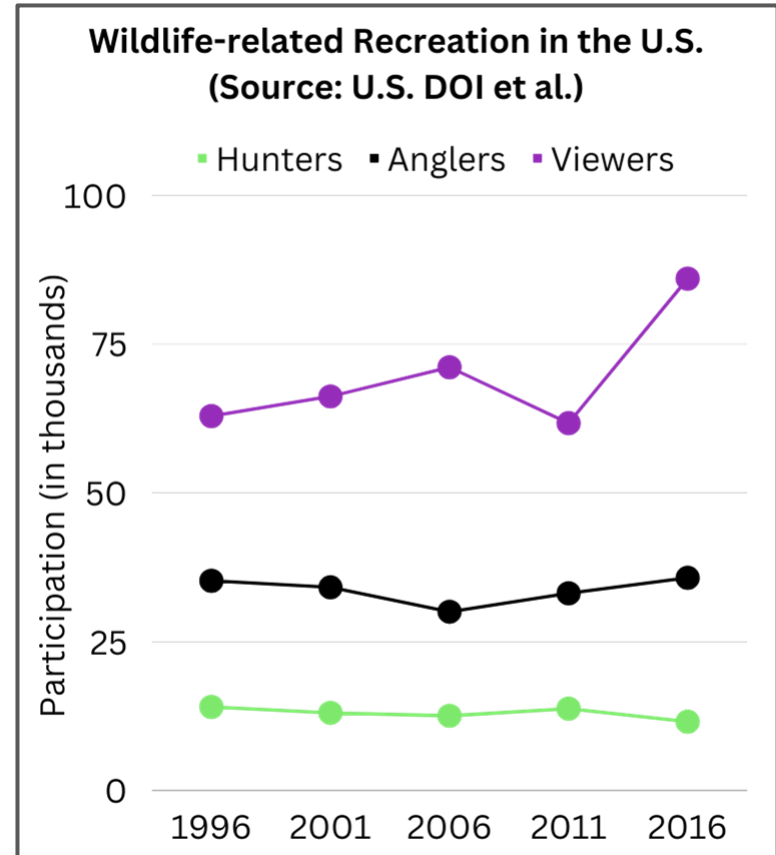
# Importance of studying wildlife viewers

More than **1/3 of the adult population** view wildlife

U.S. DOI reported **14.3 million additional viewers between 2011 and 2016**, increasing the national participation rate to 34%

**Hunting rates** declined or remained stable during the same period

Viewers are **difficult for agencies to reach**; we **lack information** about them



# Why do state agencies want to study wildlife viewers?

Viewers **growing in number** & potential influence

Viewers **difficult for agencies to reach**

**Lack of information** on viewers' thoughts, preferences, behaviors

**Better serve & communicate** with viewers & other underserved groups

Connect viewers to mechanisms to **contribute financially**



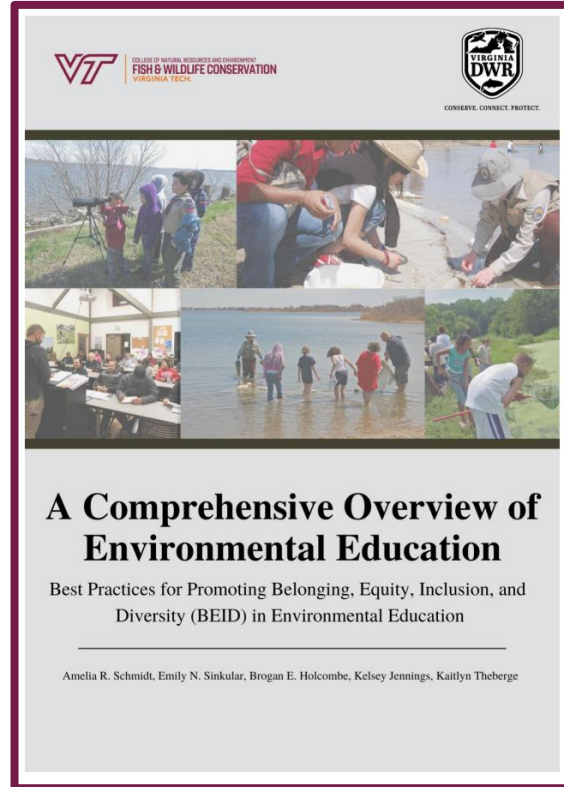
# Learn more about wildlife viewing and outreach



## Multi-State Wildlife Viewing Study

### Literature Review

Emily N. Sinkular, Kelsey K. Jennings, and Ashley A. Dayer







**Phase 1:  
Survey of Wildlife  
Viewers**



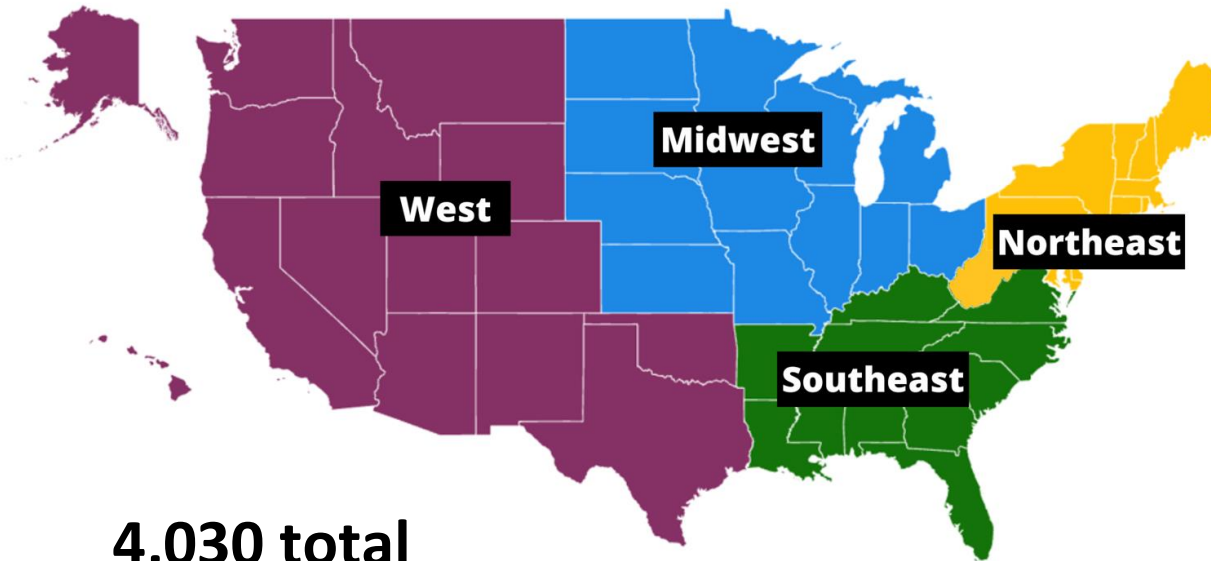
## Paint a picture of wildlife viewers

1. Who are wildlife viewers?
1. How do they view wildlife?
1. What do they want?

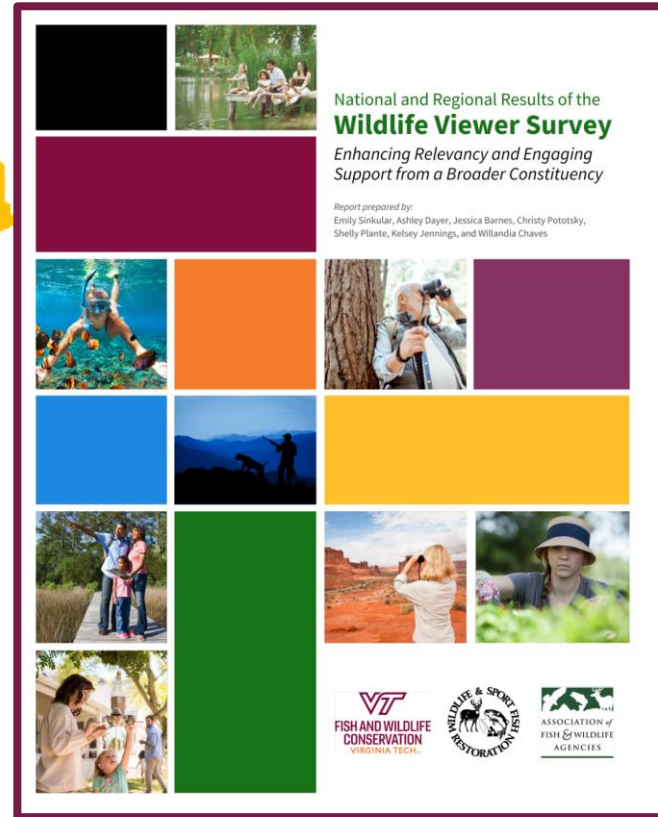




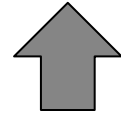
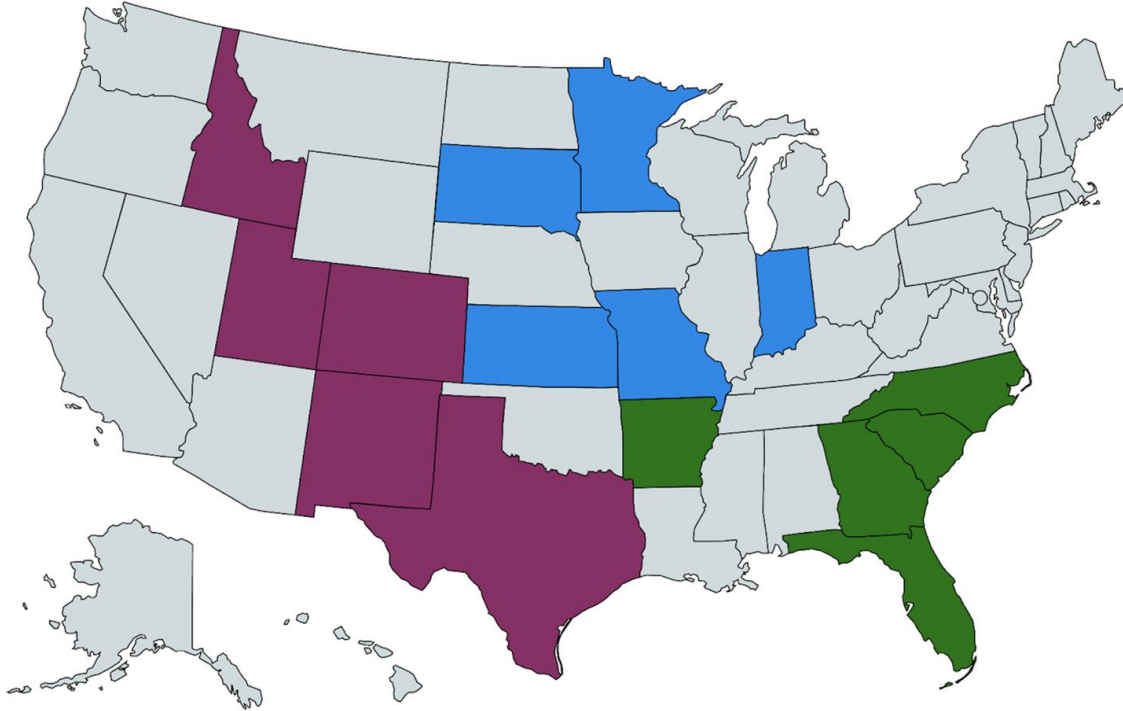
# Nationwide survey of wildlife viewers



4,030 total  
respondents



# 15 state-specific surveys of wildlife viewers



**Search for  
your state  
report here!**



## Phase 1: Results

## Paint a picture of wildlife viewers

1. Who are wildlife viewers?

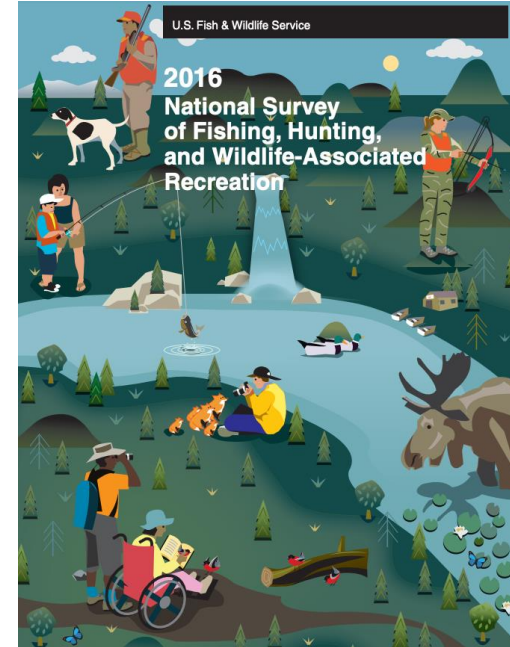
1. How do they view wildlife?

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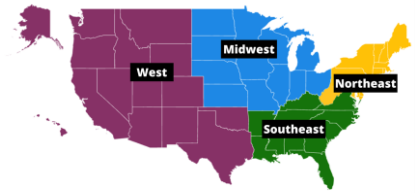


# Demographics: Survey quotas

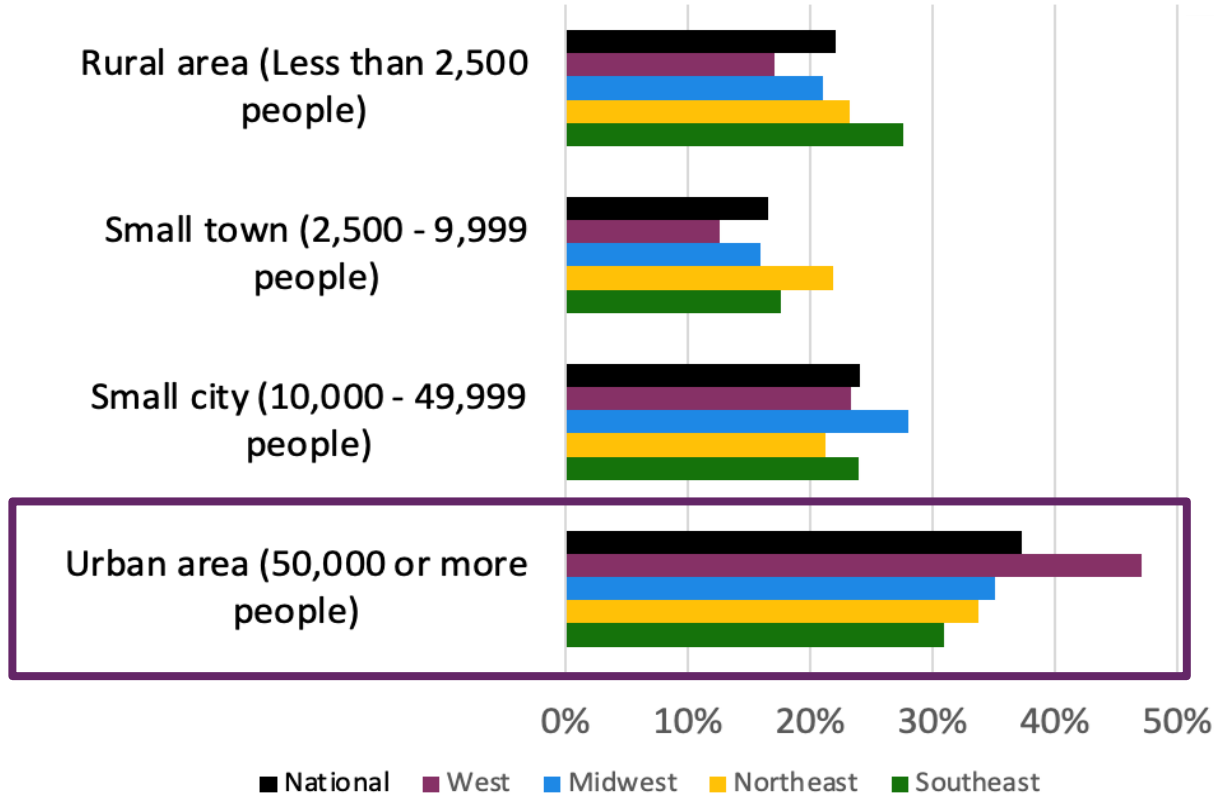
<b>Gender</b>	59% male, 41% female
<b>Age</b>	18-34: 22%
	35-54: 33%
	55+: 45%
<b>Education</b>	High school diploma or less: 39%
	Some college: 23%
	Bachelor's or graduate: 38%



# Demographics: Residential location



( $p < .001$ )





## Demographics: Race and ethnicity



**18%**

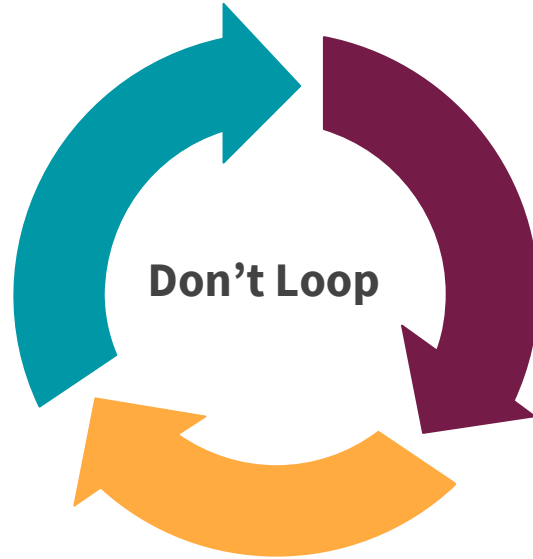
Of respondents  
were Black,  
Indigenous or  
people of color  
(BIPOC)



**38%**

# Why are there fewer BIPOC wildlife viewers?

“If you **don’t** meet others who are engaged in a particular activity...



...the odds are you will **not take interest** in that activity yourself.”

# Demographics: Accessibility challenges

*“The **difficulties** someone experiences in interacting with or while using the physical or social environment while trying to engage in a meaningful activity (such as **wildlife viewing**). This may be a result of a **mobility challenge**, blindness or low **vision**, intellectual or **developmental disabilities** (including Autism), mental illness, being **Deaf** or Hard of Hearing, or other **health concerns**.”*

*(Birdability, 2021)*



## Demographics: Accessibility challenges



Of respondents experience somewhat, quite a bit, or a great deal of accessibility challenges while participating in wildlife viewing

# Wildlife viewers are also conservationists



**54%**

Clean up trash  
or litter



**34%**

Purchase environmentally  
friendly products



**34%**

Civic engagement

## Paint a picture of wildlife viewers

### 1. Who are wildlife viewers?

*Urbanites, less diverse, accessibility challenges, conservationists*

### 1. How do they view wildlife?

### 1. What do they want?





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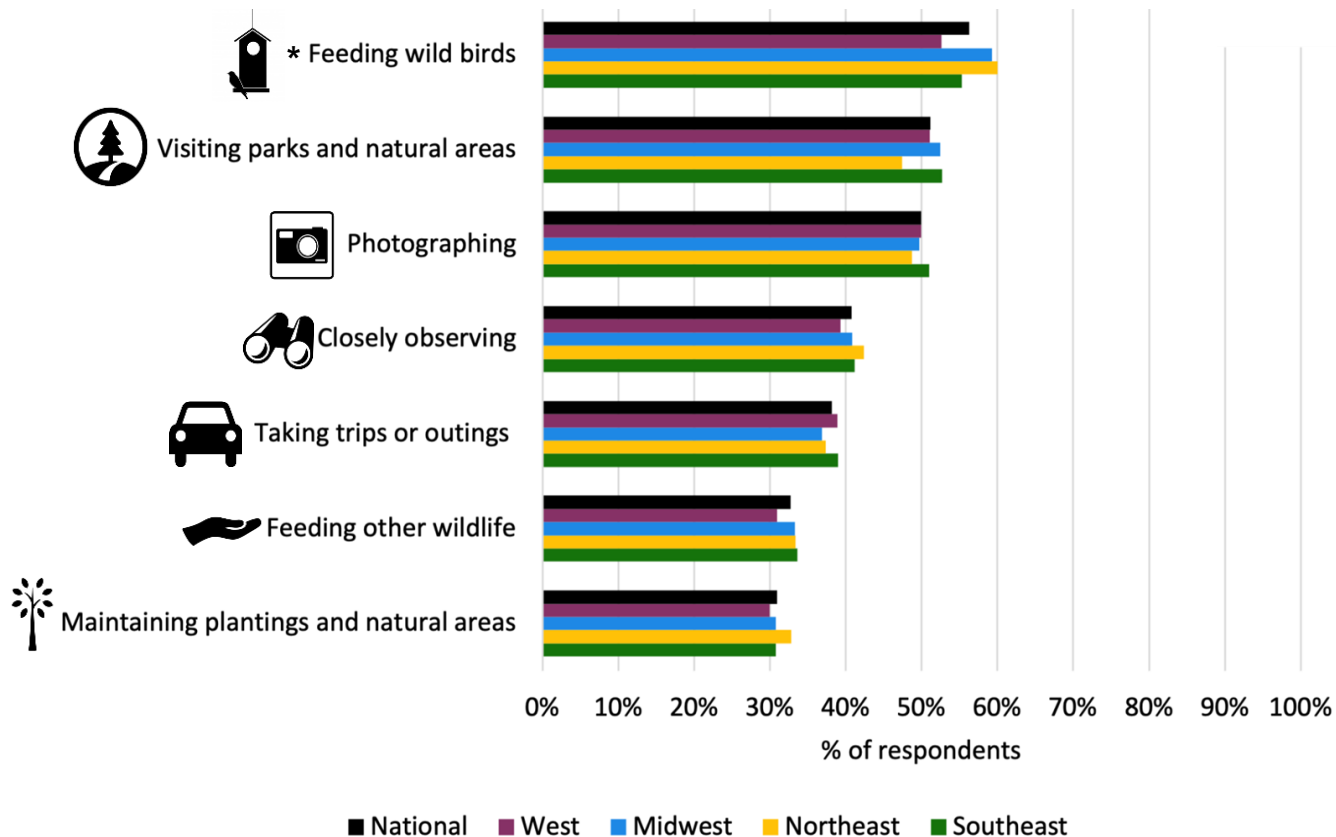
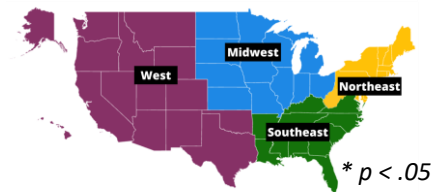


## Types of wildlife viewed

79% 68% 41% 34% 34% 29% 27%



# Participation in wildlife viewing activities

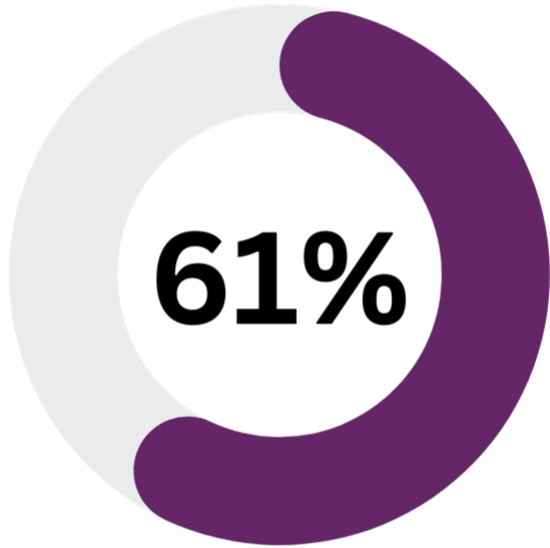


## Wildlife viewing location



The majority of respondents viewed wildlife around their **home or property (75%)** followed by **state managed areas (52%)** and **locally-managed areas (51%)**.

## Wildlife viewing skill level



Of respondents self-rated their skill level as *beginner* or *novice*

# Paint a picture of wildlife viewers

## 1. Who are wildlife viewers?

*Urbanites, less diverse, accessibility challenges, conservationists*

## 1. How do they view wildlife?

*Mammals & birds, bird feeding & visiting parks, around the home, beginners*

## 1. What do they want?





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## Wildlife viewers want information



**41%**

**More info on  
state wildlife**



**40%**

**More info  
about where  
to see  
wildlife**



**35%**

**Access to  
more places  
to view  
wildlife**



**28%**

**More info  
about where  
to view  
where there  
is no hunting**



**28%**

**More info  
about how to  
view**

## Wildlife viewers want programming

- Programs to **improve** their wildlife viewing **skills** (24%)
- More opportunities for **youth** (23%)
- More **wildlife viewing events** (22%)
- **Programs to interact** with other wildlife viewers (20%)



## Wildlife viewers want information through...



**50%**

**State agency  
website**



**49%**

**Printed  
Materials**



**46%**

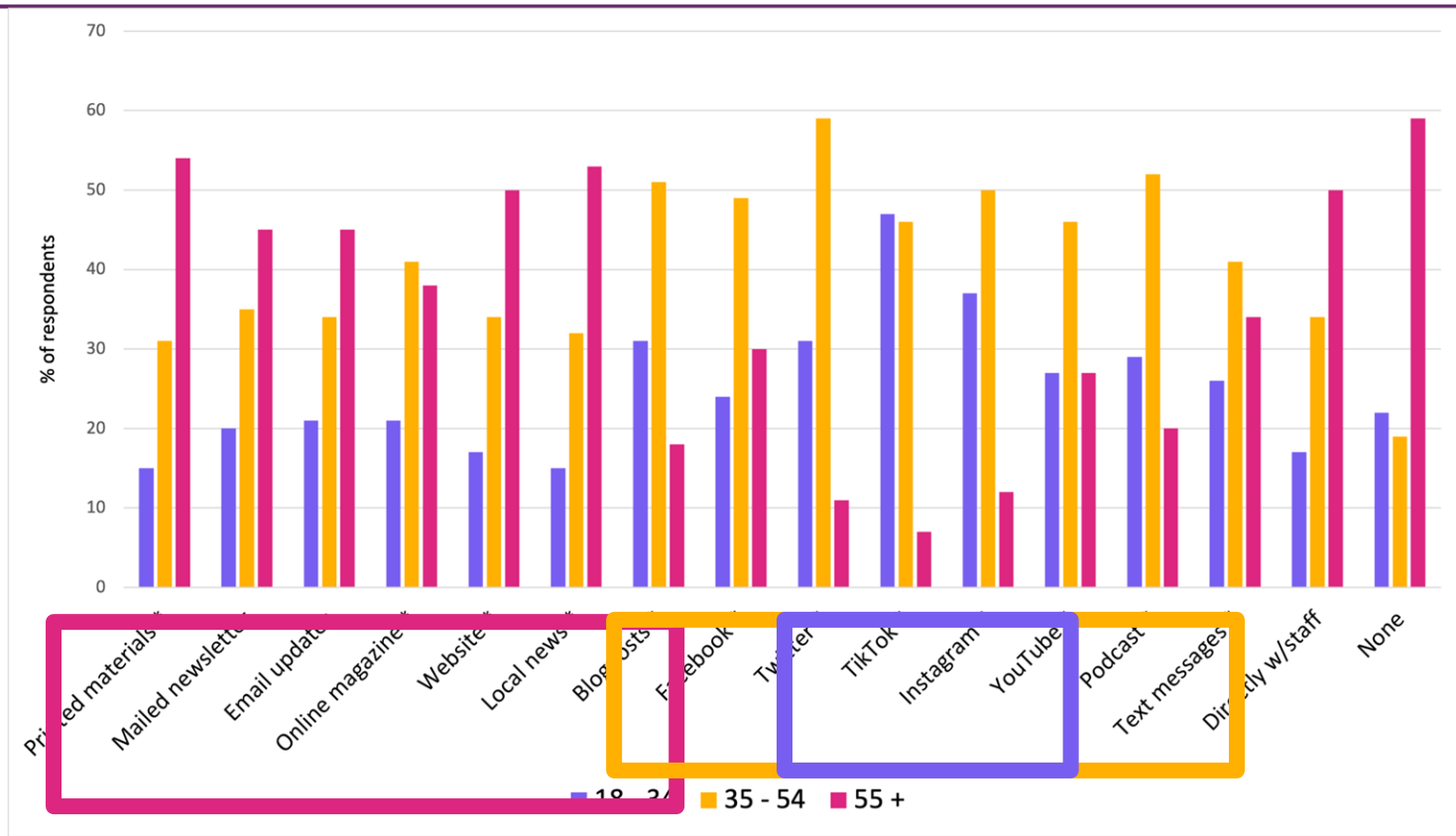
**Email**



**38%**

**Facebook**

# Preferred methods of communication, by age



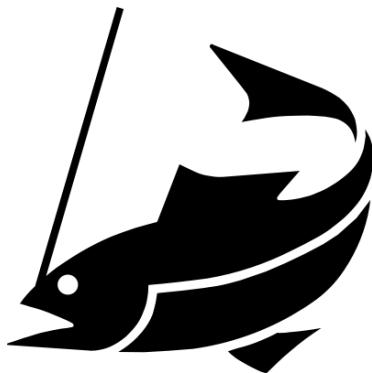
# Wildlife viewers are also interested in supporting state agencies financially

Lands access pass, permit,  
or entrance fee



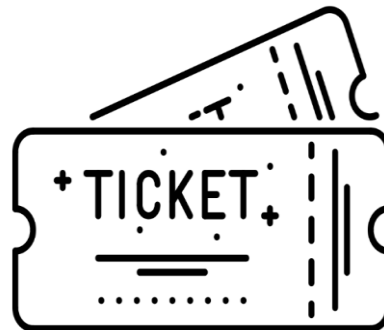
**55%**

Fishing license



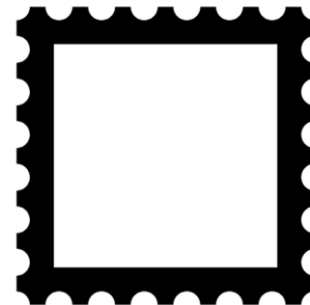
**55%**

Fees for a program  
or event



**47%**

Conservation or  
habitat stamp



**47%**

*moderately, very, or extremely likely to purchase*



# Wildlife viewers are also interested in supporting state agencies financially

Tangible products



52%

Conservation lottery  
ticket



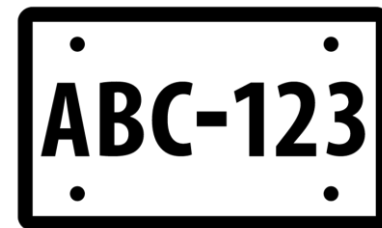
50%

State income tax donation  
OR direct donation



44%

Conservation  
license plate



44%

*moderately, very, or extremely likely to purchase*

# Paint a picture of wildlife viewers

## 1. Who are wildlife viewers?

*Urbanites, less diverse, accessibility challenges, conservationists*

## 1. How do they view wildlife?

*Mammals & birds, bird feeding & visiting parks, around the home, beginners*

## 1. What do they want?

*Information, programming & places to view; communicate through websites, print, email, facebook, and ways to support*

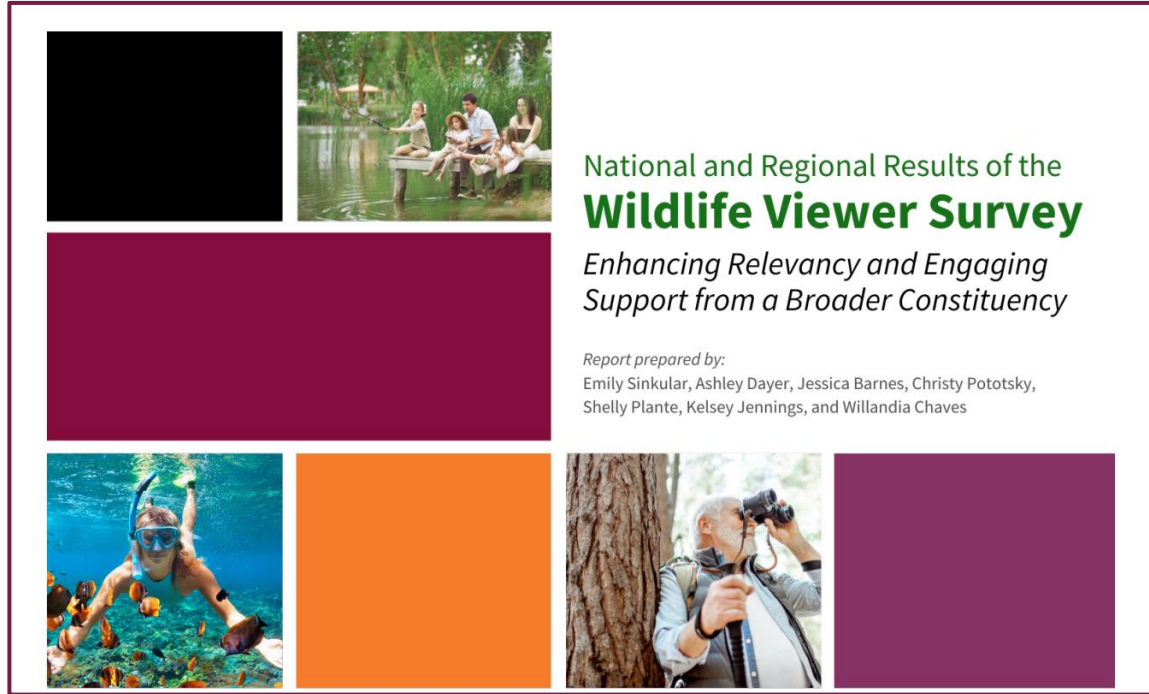


## 5 recommendations

- 1) **Develop programs for and engage with wildlife viewers**
- 2) **Broaden constituency** to wildlife viewers
- 3) Develop opportunities for **viewers to financially support agencies**
- 4) Support agencies in **implementing results**
- 5) Conduct **future research**



# Want to learn more about wildlife viewers?



Access a copy of the report  
here!



**Phase 2:**  
**Wildlife Viewing**  
**Community of**  
**Practice**





## Why a CoP for wildlife viewing?

**State agency staff** stated that they would greatly **benefit from dedicated, structured support** for implementing new projects based on survey recommendations and access to a central source of inspiring case studies.



CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

# Wildlife Viewing CoP



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH &  
WILDLIFE**



**VT**  
**FISH AND WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION**  
VIRGINIA TECH™



# Goals of the Wildlife Viewing Community of Practice

1.

Develop & implement research-based **plans** to support wildlife viewing projects

2.

Create an environment of **shared learning** among agencies and with researchers at Virginia Tech

3.

Access **more information** about wildlife viewing efforts

4.

Address barriers to **wildlife viewing** within agencies





**How does the  
Community of Practice  
work?**

# Community of Practice Activities

- Monthly meetings with project-specific breakout groups
- One in-person planning workshop
- Developing wildlife viewing plans from template, based on survey of viewers
- Peer & researcher insights for plan implementation and evaluation
- Sharing challenges & lessons learned



# Learning new ways to approach wildlife viewing

- Using human dimensions data
- Strategic program planning
- Line of logic models
- Evaluation metrics



## Community of Practice: Member Projects

- Update **agency website** to provide **more information** to wildlife viewers
- Evaluate **current attendance** to birding programs and modify future programming
- Develop a **wildlife viewing stamp** to raise funds for conservation
- Develop **programs** targeted toward **increasing diversity** in wildlife viewers
- And more!







**Projects to connect to  
wildlife viewers**

# Arizona Case Study: Wildlife Viewing Program



- Self-funded model for viewing
- Educates public
  - Wildlife viewing ethics
- Shows viewers willing to support agency
- Supported by new and old constituents

# South Carolina Case Study: BIPOC Community Engagement

- **2015:** SCDNR began Community Engagement
- Hired **Hispanic Outreach Coordinator**
  - **Bilingual** resources
  - Outreach strategies
- **2021:** Initial phases of similar strategy to reach **Black population**



Photos: Nature Hike at Wateree River Heritage Preserve and Wildlife Management Area, March 2019 (Photo by Keya Jackson)

## Florida Case Study: Online store front



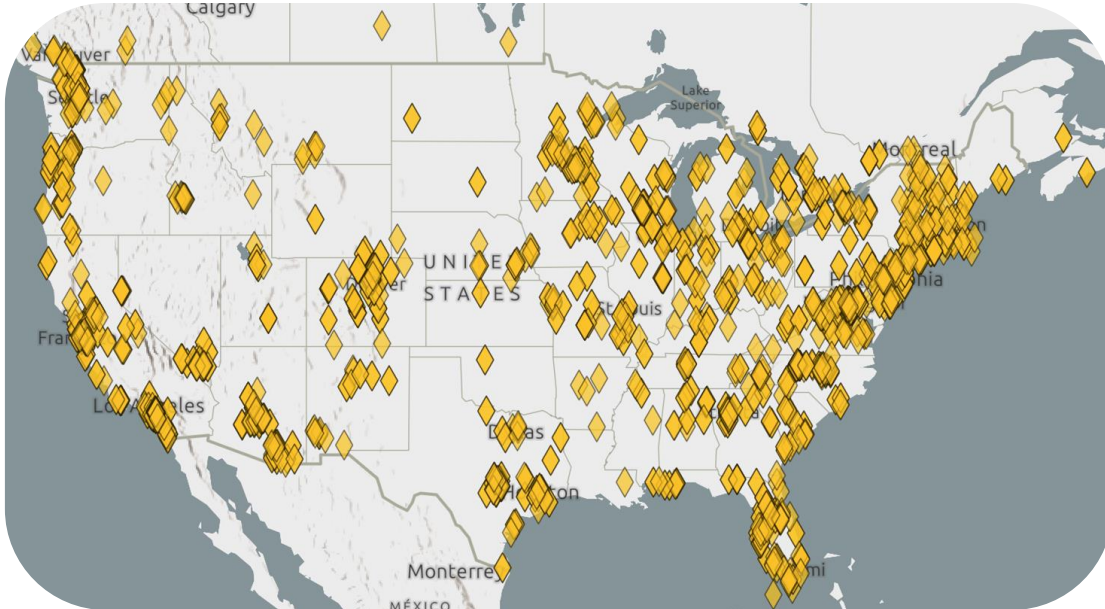
- Expand brand awareness
- Provides income for program materials
- Affordable options for beginners
  - Entry-level binoculars at retail price



## Case Study: Promote inclusivity through connecting with local viewing and disability groups



Access the Birdability Map  
of accessible trails here!



## What's next?

Finish plans  
and begin  
**implementing**  
**projects**

Finish  
**evaluation** of  
projects

Launch  
**website &**  
**storymap**



# WILDLIFE VIEWING & NATURE TOURISM ACADEMY



ASSOCIATION *of*  
FISH & WILDLIFE  
AGENCIES

**FEBRUARY 19-23, 2024  
DUCK, NORTH CAROLINA**



**Join fellow Wildlife Viewing & Nature Tourism Professionals!**  
**February 19-23, 2024 | Duck, North Carolina**

## Phase 3 Multi-State Grant

Increase accessibility of wildlife viewing through conducting focus groups of wildlife viewers nationwide and hosting co-production workshops with agencies to review results and recommendations



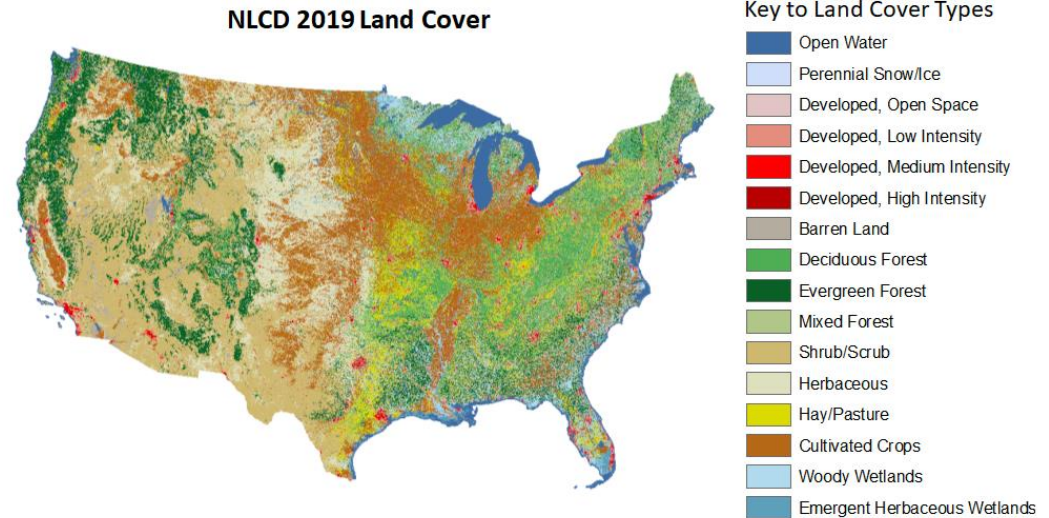
# Ongoing analysis

## Analysis in 2023:

- Rural/Urban viewers
- Accessibility Challenges

## Potential analysis:

- Income level
- Specialization
- Age



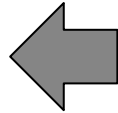
## Presentation recap

- **Wildlife viewers are growing**, and state agencies want to connect with this new contingency
- Our national survey revealed that wildlife viewers consider themselves **beginners** and want **more information** from state agencies
- We're facilitating a **community of practice** to support state agencies in taking action to better connect with wildlife viewers









Access a copy  
of the report  
here!



# Thank you!

- Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group
- CoP Participants
- USFWS Wildlife & Sport Fish Restoration
- Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

## Questions?

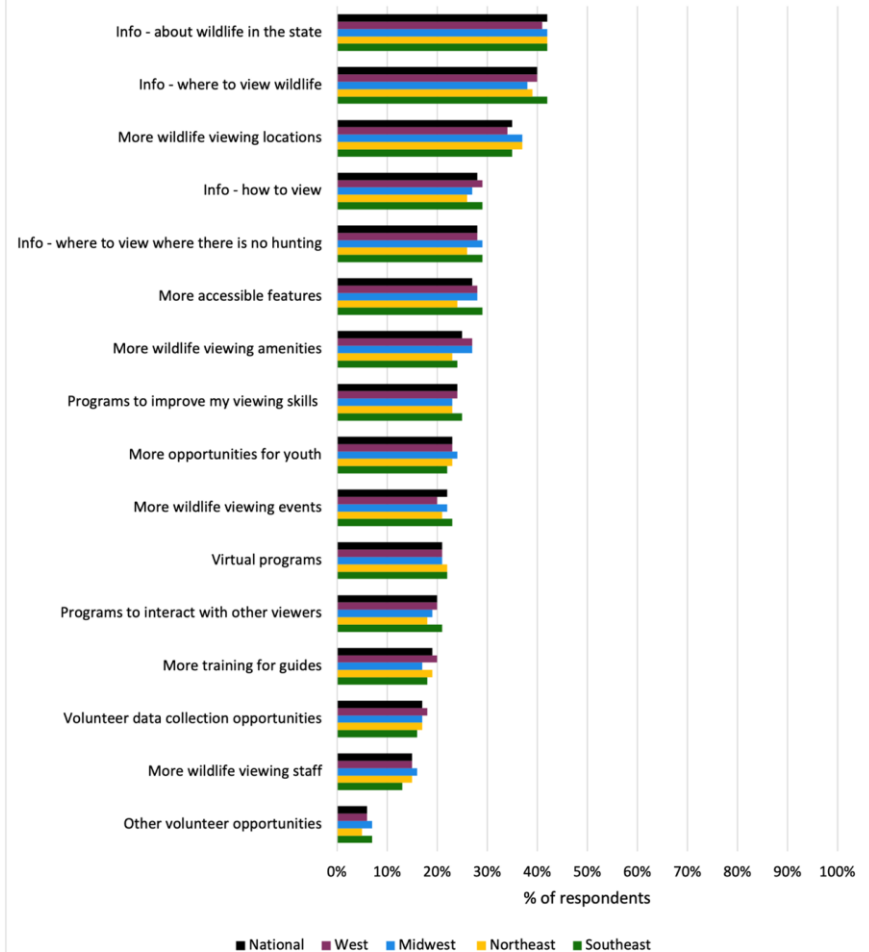
[dayer@vt.edu](mailto:dayer@vt.edu)

[langhans@vt.edu](mailto:langhans@vt.edu)

[sinkular@vt.edu](mailto:sinkular@vt.edu)



Which of the following programs or services from your state agency would better support your wildlife viewing activities?



**So, what do wildlife  
viewers want?**

