

Survey Gauges Louisiana Public Opinion on Wildlife

Conserving and protecting wildlife, natural resources and habitat, as well as enforcing fish and wildlife laws and providing hunting and fishing opportunities are seen as benefits that the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries provides state residents.

This was one of the findings in a recent survey conducted for the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to determine public opinion on fish and wildlife management issues and agency reputation and credibility in 16 states, including Louisiana.

Satisfaction with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is good, with 77 percent of Louisiana residents saying that they are very or somewhat satisfied with the department; 6 percent expressed dissatisfaction.

Asked if the department effectively balances the interests of anglers, hunters, conservation groups and the general public, 73 percent of respondents agreed. Asked if the department is doing enough to conserve Louisiana's fish and wildlife, 65 percent agreed.

However, five program areas had substantially higher importance ratings than performance ratings:

- providing educational

programs on the state's fish and wildlife

- providing opportunities for boating safety education
- restoring native fish and wildlife to the state
- conserving fish and wildlife habitat
- providing opportunities for hunting safety education.

The top-three efforts or areas of importance to citizens were conserving fish and wildlife habitat, enforcing fish and game laws and providing opportunities for boating safety education. The top-three efforts or areas that citizens said the department performed well were providing opportunities for recreational fishing, enforcing fish and game laws and managing wildlife populations.

Residents reported highly favorable contact experiences with the Wildlife and Fisheries Department. More than one third (35 percent) of survey participants had contacted the department for information or assistance, typically doing so by telephone. Most typically, residents sought information about hunting, fishing, license application or nuisance wildlife.

Most residents think the current fees for hunting and fishing licenses are about the right price. And although a majority of hunters and anglers said licenses are about

the right price, they are more likely than the general population to say that license fees are too high. However, a majority (57 percent) of residents overall agreed that the costs of managing fish and wildlife should be paid for with specific user fees, such as hunting and fishing licenses; 25 percent disagreed.

Nearly a third (29 percent) of residents consider themselves to be hunters, and more than two-fifths (43 percent) consider themselves to be anglers or fishermen. While 43 percent of residents think that Louisiana's waters are healthy, 50 percent think the waters are unhealthy. Concern was high for water quality, but habitat loss was the top-named fish and wildlife issue facing the state.

Louisianans were asked their opinion of six statements regarding land use and fish and wildlife management. The statement with which most agreed was that hunting and fishing are part of the scientific management of fish and wildlife populations (84 percent). Additionally, they showed deference for fish and wildlife habitat over human use of land: more respondents thought that the use and development of land should be restricted to protect fish and wildlife (49 percent strongly agreed) than thought either that landowners should

be allowed to develop their land regardless of its impact on wildlife (17 percent strongly agreed) or that development for new home sites should take precedence over preserving wildlife habitat (13 percent strongly agreed).

With regard to the reputation of fish and wildlife agencies, survey respondents were asked about the credibility of 11 possible sources of information on fish and wildlife. At the top of the ranking is the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, closely followed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and law enforcement officers with the LDWF.

The survey also asked residents about their participation in 20 specific outdoor activities. Those who had hunted were asked how many days they had hunted in the past year: 26 percent had hunted for less than one week and 44 percent had hunted for less than two weeks. Among the freshwater and saltwater fishermen, nearly half had fished for less than two weeks. Those who had taken wildlife viewing trips reported doing so for less than one week in the past year.

Overwhelming majorities of Louisiana residents approve of legal hunting (90 percent) and legal recreational fishing (95 percent). ❧