OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER
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Fishing, Hunting and Trapping in New York State

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Executive Summary

New York offers a wide variety of sporting opportunities for the almost two million men and women who hunt, fish and trap in the State. More than 90 percent of New Yorkers who engage in these activities participate in fishing or in both hunting and fishing, while 9 percent participate in hunting exclusively. Consumer spending on these sporting activities totaled more than $5 billion in 2011 (the last year for which such figures are available). Nearly $1.9 billion was for trip-related purchases including transportation, food and lodging.

The revenue generated from the sale of licenses and permits for hunting and fishing, which totaled nearly $50 million in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2012-13, supports important fish and wildlife programs. Over the past five fiscal years, spending by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) from the State's Conservation Fund for fish and wildlife programs averaged $44.3 million annually. In addition, two key federal programs provide grant support to State fish and wildlife programs. Over the past five years, federal Wildlife Restoration grants to New York State and Sport Fish Restoration grants have averaged a combined total of more than $24 million annually.

Fishing and hunting generate economic activity in communities across the State, with the benefit deriving from both residents and those who travel from elsewhere to take advantage of the Empire State's sporting options. Nonresidents generated 20 percent of the revenue collected from license fees in the 2012-13 license year, one indication of the State's attractiveness as a sporting destination.

Hunting and fishing enthusiasts who are drawn to New York's splendid natural environment contribute to essential wildlife programs when they purchase licenses and permits. In addition, New Yorkers and nonresidents who fish and hunt generate billions of dollars in economic activity each year, supporting local businesses and jobs across the State.

Fishing, Hunting and Trapping in New York State

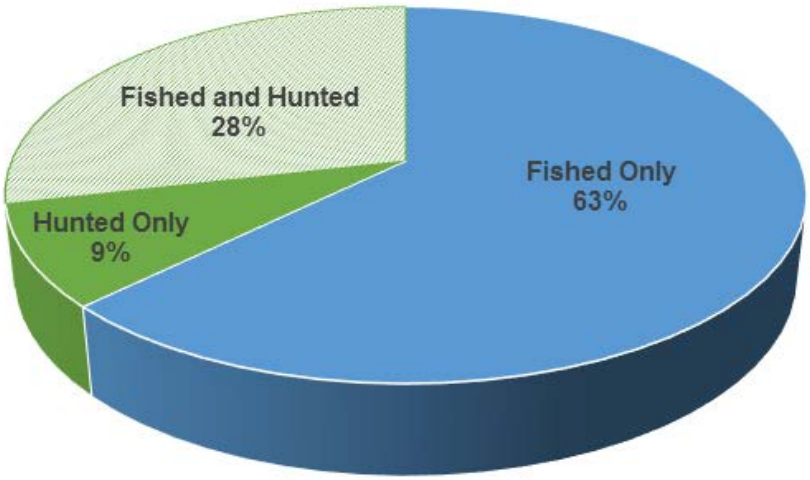
With more than 7,500 lakes and ponds, 70,000 miles of rivers, streams and coastline, and millions of acres of forest and open space, New York is home to world-class

opportunities for fishing, hunting and trapping.[1] New York ranked third in the nation with nearly two million residents who engaged in hunting and fishing in 2011. This number, behind only Texas and Florida, comprised 5.3 percent of the national total.[2] Approximately 13 percent of the State's population aged 16 and over participated in these activities. Alaska ranked first for the number of residents who hunt or fish as a share of its population, at 45 percent. Wyoming and Minnesota ranked second and third in this category, each with more than a third of their populations participating in hunting and fishing.

As shown in Figure 1, approximately two-thirds of the hunting and fishing population in New York engage in fishing only, and 9 percent limit their activity to hunting. While a third of the population are hunters, over three-quarters of the hunters also participate in fishing.

Figure 1

Distribution of New York's Fishing and Hunting Population



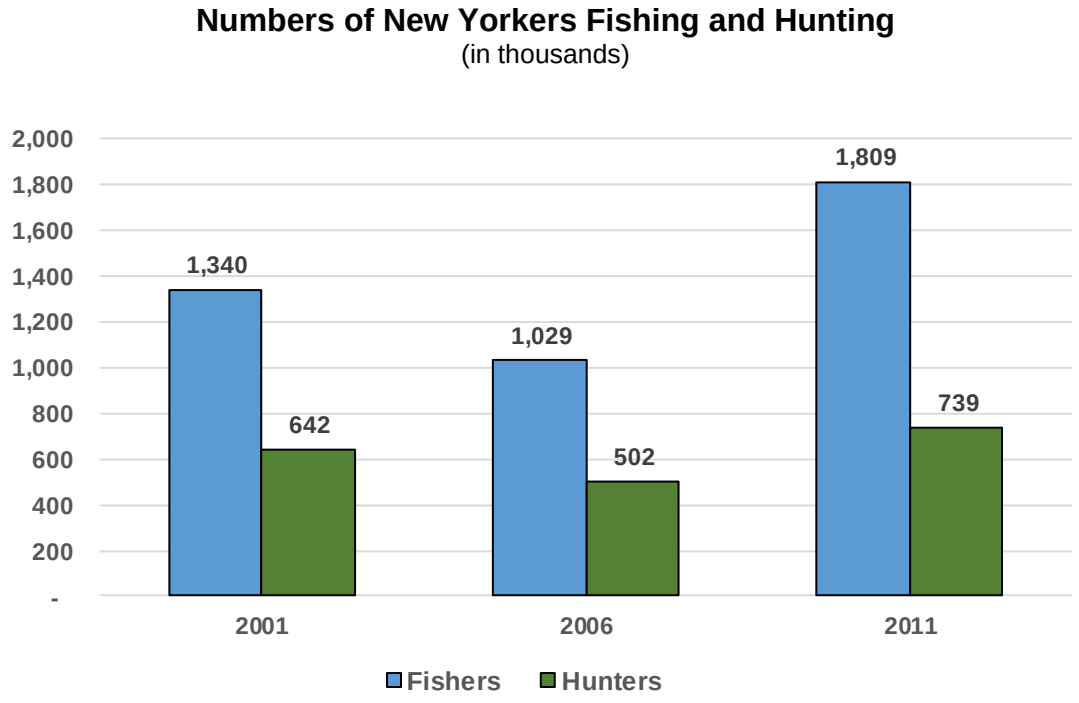
Sources: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau; data for 2011

From 2001 to 2011, there were significant increases in the number of New York residents who hunted or fished. As shown in Figure 2, the largest increase was in the number of people fishing, a jump of 35 percent over the decade despite a decline from 2001 to 2006.

[1] For the purposes of this report, trapping licenses are included in the figures for hunting licenses.

[2] Data for this report is drawn primarily from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Census Bureau's National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (most recently 2011) and supplemented by data from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Figure 2



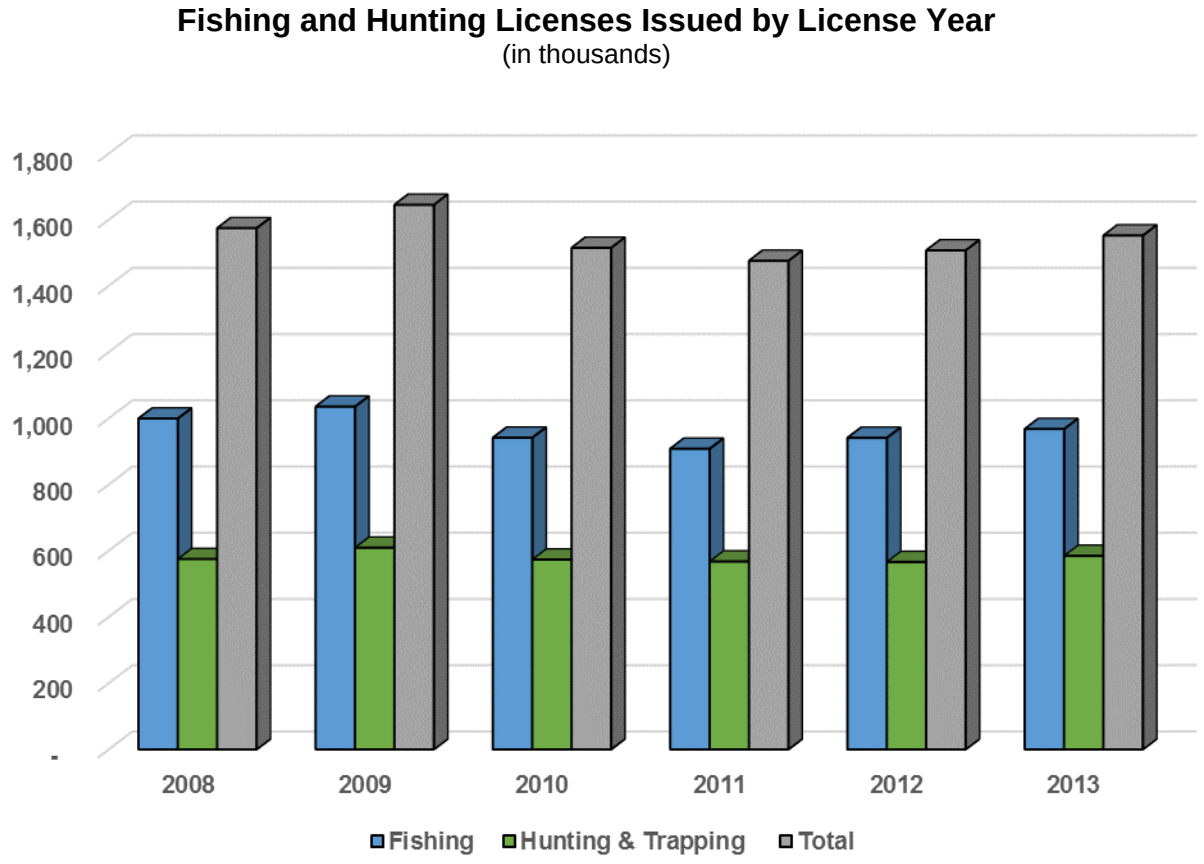
Sources: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau.

Fishing and Hunting Licenses in New York

A person who wants to hunt, fish or trap in New York is required to obtain the necessary licenses or permits from the State to do so. Hunting licenses vary depending upon the type of game to be hunted as well as the type of weapon, including rifles, bows, crossbows, and muzzleloaders. The vast majority of these licenses are for rifles and other firearms. Fishing licenses and registrations vary depending upon factors including the duration of the license and whether it is for freshwater or saltwater purposes. Hunting licenses are available for a season, while those for fishing may be for one day, seven days, or a full year. For both activities, lifetime licenses are available for New Yorkers only.

Figure 3 shows the total number of hunting and fishing licenses issued for the license years 2008 through 2013. As indicated, there was an increase in the number of licenses issued in 2009. This may have been due, in part, to an increase in license fees to take effect in 2010 which led to a large number of lifetime licenses being sold ahead of the fee increase. As an indication of how sporting activities bring dollars into New York, approximately 9 percent of licenses issued in the 2012-13 season went to out-of-state residents. Some 20 percent of total license fees were paid by such nonresidents, whose licenses are more expensive than those for residents.

Figure 3



Source: Department of Environmental Conservation.

Hunting and fishing licenses and permits are issued in every county of the State, including the five counties of New York City. As shown in Figure 4, Erie County ranked first in the State for total sales of fishing and hunting licenses during the 2012-13 season, issuing over 120,000 licenses and permits.[3] Erie County was also first in sales of hunting licenses.

Oswego County, with diverse fishing options including fly-fishing for salmon in rivers and streams, as well as charter fishing on Lake Ontario, ranked first in the sales of fishing licenses. Suffolk County and New York City ranked fourth and fifth in the State for the sale of fishing licenses. This ranking is primarily due to the large number of recreational marine fishing registrations issued in these areas, which allow for saltwater fishing in the coastal waters of the State as well as for the fishing of migratory saltwater fish in the Delaware, Hudson, and Mohawk Rivers.

[3] The numbers of licenses and permits are not proxies for the number of hunters and fishers, as an individual may hold more than one permit or license.

Figure 4

Top Ten New York Counties for License Sales

County	Total Licenses	Hunting	Fishing
Erie	120,139	59,379	36,975
Monroe	82,932	38,301	30,405
Orange	69,193	24,205	35,648
Suffolk	66,427	24,140	35,186
Oswego	64,852	18,828	38,037
Onondaga	60,547	24,682	24,673
Albany	53,077	16,845	28,083
Jefferson	50,223	19,686	21,670
Chautauqua	48,012	25,404	14,134
Oneida	46,503	22,191	14,293

Source: Department of Environmental Conservation.
Note: The sum of hunting and fishing licenses does not equal total licenses as total licenses include the sales of combination hunting/fishing licenses.

The number of resident licenses and permits sold within a county, as a proportion of the population, indicates the prevalence of hunting and fishing within the county. Figure 5 shows the top ten New York counties for hunting and fishing licenses sold as a percentage of total population. The "All Licenses" column reflects sales to both residents and nonresidents.

Figure 5

Top Ten New York Counties for Hunting and Fishing Licenses Sold as a Proportion of the Population

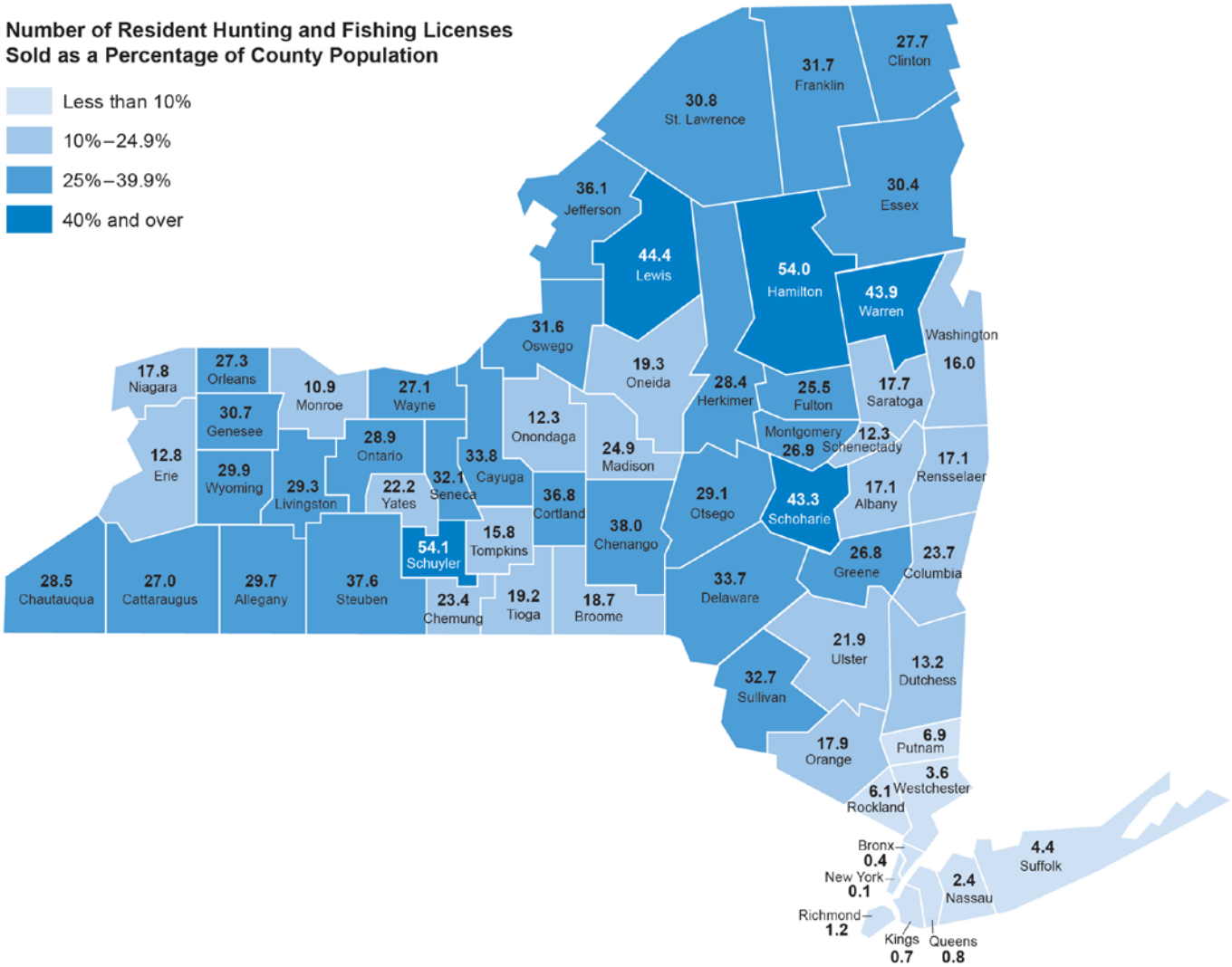
County	All Licenses	Resident Licenses
Hamilton	84.1%	54.0%
Schuyler	60.9%	54.1%
Oswego	53.2%	31.6%
Warren	52.7%	43.9%
Lewis	46.2%	44.4%
Schoharie	45.2%	43.3%
Jefferson	42.5%	36.1%
Steuben	41.3%	37.6%
Chenango	40.3%	38.0%
Cortland	39.8%	36.8%

Source: Department of Environmental Conservation.

While Hamilton County is the least populated county in the State, the total number of licenses sold in Hamilton County was equal to over 84 percent of its population. More than a third of all licenses issued in the county were to out-of-state residents. Figure 6 shows the number of resident hunting and fishing licenses sold as a proportion of each county's population.

Figure 6

Hunting and Fishing Licenses Sold as a Proportion of the Population by County



Source: Department of Environmental Conservation.

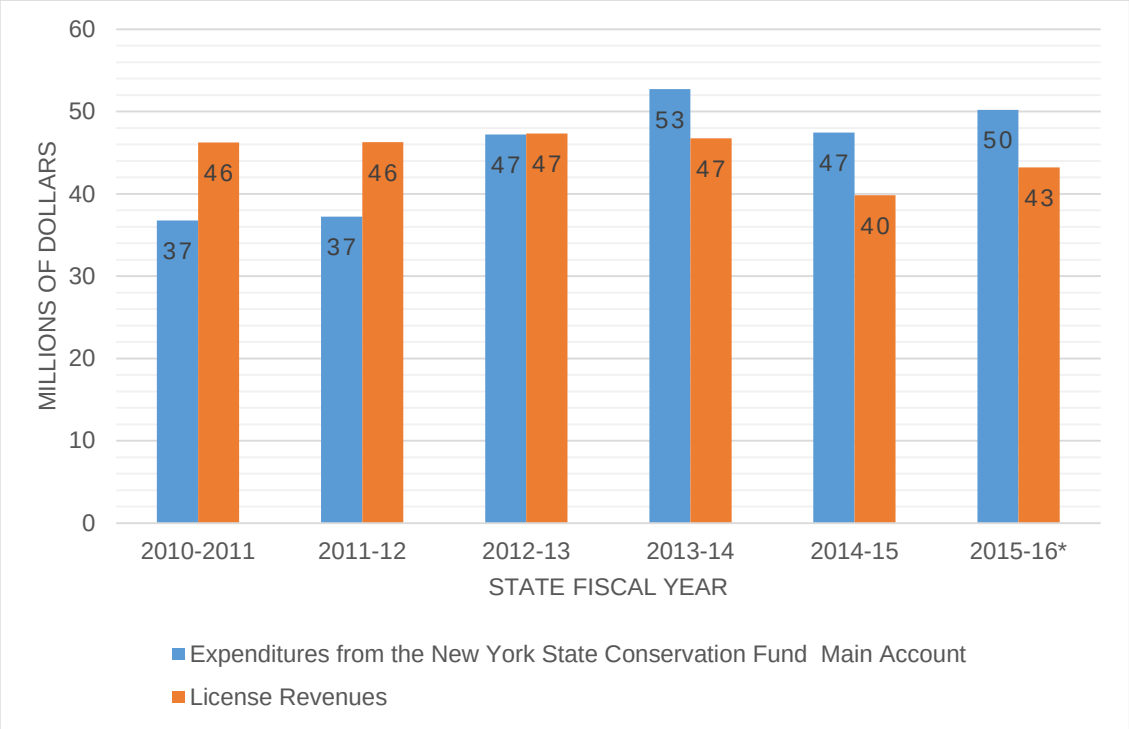
Revenue from Fishing and Hunting Activities

Payments for licenses to hunt and fish, as well as expenditures made for equipment used in hunting and fishing, are significant sources of funding for fish and wildlife programs in New York State.

Fees charged for annual and short-term recreational licenses to hunt and fish are deposited in the Main Account of the New York State Conservation Fund. For State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2012-13, approximately $47.3 million was collected.[4] As shown in Figure 7, from SFY 2010-11 to SFY 2014-15, expenditures from this account for DEC programs related to fish and wildlife averaged $44.3 million annually, while license fee revenue averaged $45.3 annually. For SFY 2015-16, the Division of the Budget estimates such revenue and expenditures at $43.2 million and $50.2 million, respectively.

Figure 7

Conservation Fund: License Revenue and Fish and Wildlife Program Spending



* Estimates for expenditures and revenues from the Division of the Budget.
Sources: Office of the New York State Comptroller and the Division of the Budget.

[4] This total does not include revenues from the sale of lifetime licenses, which are not deposited in the Main Account of the New York State Conservation Fund. In SFY 2012-13 the combined revenues for both the annual, short term and lifetime licenses was $49.9 million.

These expenditures support programs to manage fish and wildlife populations targeted by people who hunt and fish. The Conservation Fund Main Account supports the operation of the State's 12 fish hatcheries, the assessment of game fish and animal populations, the creation of fishing access sites and the enforcement of fish and game laws. These funds also support a comprehensive range of programs important for the management of non-game fish and animal species, such as the protection of endangered species, protection of wetlands, wildlife pathology, biodiversity mapping and assessment of threats to aquatic habitats.

The majority of Conservation Fund expenditures support the activities of the DEC Division of Fish and Wildlife, which has primary responsibility for managing the State's fish and wildlife populations. In addition, a portion of the State's Environmental Conservation Officer force has been supported with spending from the Conservation Fund.[5]

Lifetime license revenue is deposited in the Conservation Fund Fish and Game Trust Account, which had a balance of $56.8 million as of March 31, 2015. This revenue is required to be deposited into the Fund's Trust Account for investment. Only the annual earnings are available for transfer to the Main Account in support of current activities. In fact, if the earnings are not transferred in the year earned, they automatically become part of the Trust Account principal and cannot be transferred in subsequent years. In addition, the SFY 2015-16 Enacted Budget provided for the annual deposit in a new Habitat Conservation and Access Account of up to $1.5 million in revenues resulting from the sale of lifetime licenses to hunt, fish or trap.

Two programs established by federal law and administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service provide grant support to State fish and wildlife programs. The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950 authorized federal appropriations from trust funds established to receive revenues generated by federally imposed taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, boats and fuel purchased for boating.[6]

Under these programs, revenues credited during the prior fiscal year are distributed to states according to a formula based on state land area and the number of hunting or fishing license holders. Among other eligibility requirements, states must enact legislation prohibiting the diversion of revenues from state hunting and fishing license fees for any purpose other than administration of the state fish and wildlife agency.

As shown in Figure 8, in the federal fiscal years 2011 through 2015, Wildlife Restoration grants to New York State have averaged $15.4 million annually and Sport Fish Restoration grants have averaged $8.7 million annually. As with the State's Conservation Fund, the federal grants support a variety of fish and wildlife programs.

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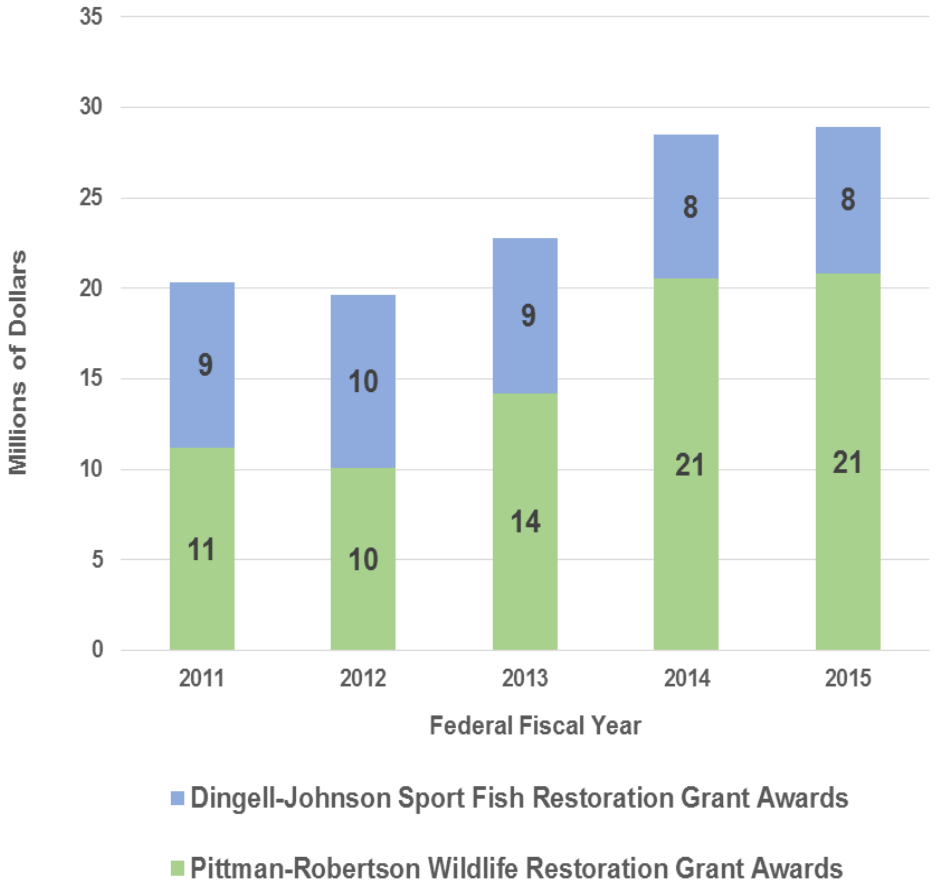
[5] See the Office of the State Comptroller's October 2013 audit, Conservation Fund - Sources and Uses of Funds, Department of Environmental Conservation, available at http://osc.state.ny.us/audits/allaudits/093014/12s134.pdf.
[6] For more information, see http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/.

Figure 8

Federal Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Grant Awards to New York State



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Economic Impact of Hunting and Fishing in New York

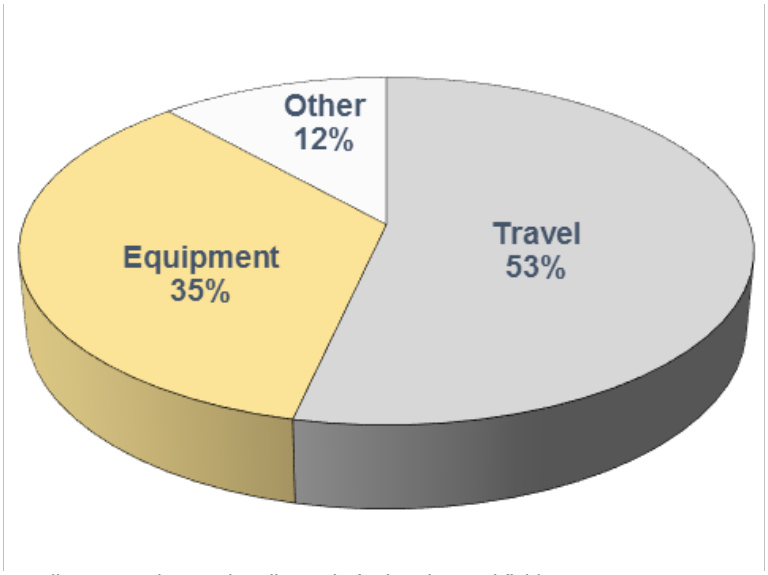
New York's economy benefits not only from residents who hunt and fish in the State, but also from the influx of large numbers of people from other states who travel to New York to take advantage of the State's sporting opportunities. Besides purchases of equipment and licenses for hunting and fishing, expenditures for food and lodging add to the economic impact.

In 2011, spending on hunting- and fishing-related activities totaled over $5 billion in New York, 5.6 percent of the total expenditures by hunters and fishermen nationwide. Nearly $1.9 billion was for trip-related purchases including transportation, food and lodging. Such expenditures, which rank the State second in the nation, play important roles in local economies in many rural parts of Upstate New York, as well as some communities on Long Island.

As shown in Figure 9, travel (including transportation, food, and lodging) was the largest expenditure category in such spending, comprising over half of the total, while equipment represented over a third. Other expenditures, accounting for approximately 12 percent of total spending, were for items such as hunting and fishing licenses as well as membership dues and magazine subscriptions.

Figure 9

Composition of Fishing and Hunting Expenditures in New York



Note: Expenditures are those primarily made for hunting and fishing purposes.
Sources: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau, data from 2011.

Conclusion

With its extraordinary range of lakes and ponds, miles of rivers, streams, and coastline, and millions of acres of forest and open space, New York provides a wide variety of opportunities for hunting and fishing enthusiasts. Those who participate in these activities contribute to government revenues that pay for essential wildlife programs when they purchase licenses and permits.

In addition, New Yorkers and nonresidents who fish and hunt generate billions of dollars in economic activity each year, helping to support local businesses and jobs across the State. Hunting, fishing and related outdoor activities add significantly to the quality of life for many New Yorkers, as well as boosting the State's economy.

Appendix

Total Hunting and Fishing Licenses by County

County	Hunting	Fishing	Combination	Total Licenses
Albany	16,845	28,083	8,149	53,077
Allegany	10,156	1,857	3,188	15,201
Bronx	827	4,653	263	5,743
Broome	19,693	12,312	8,302	40,307
Cattaraugus	14,526	3,571	4,905	23,002
Cayuga	14,526	8,730	5,544	28,800
Chautauqua	25,404	14,134	8,474	48,012
Chemung	11,600	5,690	4,629	21,919
Chenango	12,519	3,216	4,473	20,208
Clinton	8,520	10,271	5,170	23,961
Columbia	6,303	6,602	2,720	15,625
Cortland	11,183	4,373	4,071	19,627
Delaware	9,488	5,405	3,512	18,405
Dutchess	13,147	21,473	5,561	40,181
Erie	59,379	36,975	23,785	120,139
Essex	5,501	6,856	3,061	15,418
Franklin	7,811	6,708	4,050	18,569
Fulton	6,877	4,418	3,166	14,461
Genesee	11,633	3,681	3,621	18,935
Greene	4,810	6,759	2,031	13,600
Hamilton	901	2,523	626	4,050
Herkimer	10,774	4,220	4,283	19,277
Jefferson	19,686	21,670	8,867	50,223
Kings	2,418	13,783	591	16,792
Lewis	7,521	1,834	3,157	12,512
Livingston	12,357	3,275	3,869	19,501
Madison	10,272	4,411	3,936	18,619
Monroe	38,301	30,405	14,226	82,932
Montgomery	5,453	6,010	2,398	13,861
Nassau	13,203	15,691	3,838	32,732
New York	3	999	6	1,008
Niagara	19,447	16,777	6,956	43,180
Oneida	22,191	14,293	10,019	46,503
Onondaga	24,682	24,673	11,192	60,547
Ontario	17,541	8,656	6,343	32,540
Orange	24,205	35,648	9,340	69,193
Orleans	6,850	7,122	2,465	16,437
Oswego	18,828	38,037	7,987	64,852
Otsego	10,867	4,424	3,929	19,220
Putnam	2,585	3,597	1,087	7,269
Queens	6,006	11,688	1,455	19,149
Rensselaer	9,122	14,354	4,739	28,215
Richmond	1,929	3,244	552	5,725
Rockland	6,808	14,036	2,516	23,360
Saratoga	12,739	20,719	6,579	40,037
Schenectady	4,933	11,748	2,513	19,194
Schoharie	7,929	3,729	2,983	14,641
Schuyler	5,246	4,069	1,917	11,232
Seneca	6,434	2,881	2,489	11,804
St. Lawrence	17,309	12,353	8,974	38,636
Steuben	25,325	6,946	8,598	40,869
Suffolk	24,140	35,186	7,101	66,427
Sullivan	9,534	15,425	4,084	29,043
Tioga	6,857	1,553	2,429	10,839
Tompkins	8,450	5,121	3,387	16,958
Ulster	12,979	22,209	5,686	40,874
Warren	9,288	20,013	5,255	34,556
Washington	6,198	2,169	2,788	11,155
Wayne	13,666	8,562	4,831	27,059
Westchester	11,226	20,226	4,195	35,647
Wyoming	8,501	1,524	2,701	12,726
Yates	3,277	1,768	1,407	6,452

Source: Department of Environmental Conservation, data from 2012-13 license year.

Prepared by the Office of Budget and Policy Analysis

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