



# SUMMER FUN INDEX

Counting the  
ways we enjoy  
clean water

SUMMER 2015



## THE SUMMER FUN INDEX: Counting the Ways We Enjoy Clean Water

**John Rumpler, Environment America Research & Policy Center**



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The findings of the Summer Fun Index are based on publicly available data from state and federal agencies. The authors are responsible for any analytical errors but can make no warranty for the accuracy of the underlying data. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of our funders or those who provided review.

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Written by John Rumpler,  
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## The 2015 Summer Fun Index

Clean water is at the heart of summertime fun for millions of Americans. We swim at a favorite beach, fish in a nearby creek, sail or kayak on the bay, or simply hike along a beautiful lake or stream. In short, the summer reminds us that America's waterways are vital to our quality of life. We should be doing everything we can to protect them.

As the summer draws to a close, Environment America Research & Policy Center's second annual Summer Fun Index provides a numerical snapshot of people engaging in water activities. And this year, we have a special reason to celebrate: on August 28th, the Environmental Protection Agency's new Clean Water Rule goes into effect—helping to ensure that all our waters are safe for swimming and fishing by restoring Clean Water Act protections to thousands of waterways across the country.

## Findings

Across 28 states surveyed, there were 486,838,192 visitors to state and national parks<sup>1</sup> with waterways. In

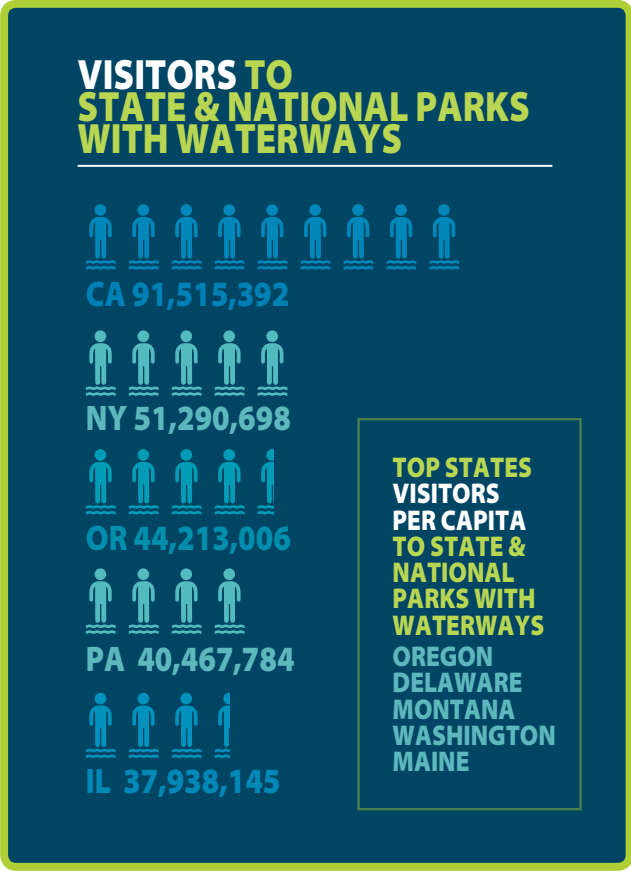
addition, we found nearly 2,000 summer camps where the next generation of young American children is learning to swim, fish, sail, or paddle a boat. Moreover, the latest data show 16,953,565 Americans have licenses to fish and 7,863,337 registered boats in these states alone.

State & national parks* with waterways	2,201
Visitors to state & national parks* with waterways	486,838,192
Summer camps offering water activities	1,975
Licensed fishers	16,953,565
Registered boats	7,863,337

\* For purposes of this report "national parks" includes a variety of types of national park units.

Of course, not all these clean water activities are equally distributed. Some states are clear leaders in offering certain types of summer fun activities.

From the placid lakes of upstate New York to the Colorado River flowing through the Grand Canyon



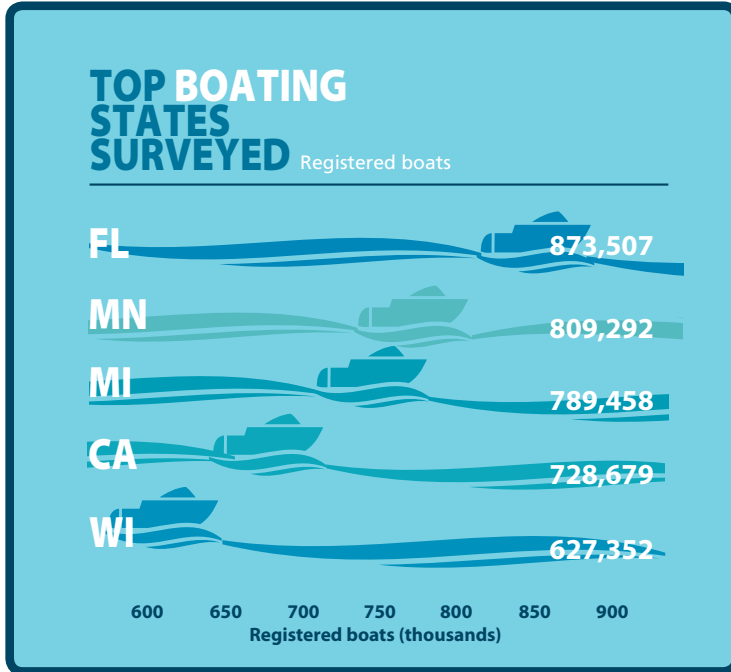
**Recreational fishing** is an iconic American pastime. There are even organizations devoted to particular types of fishing. Across the nation, the five states with the greatest number of licensed fishers are California, Texas, Minnesota, Florida, and Wisconsin. On a per capita basis, states of the northwest—Alaska, Wyoming, Montana, Minnesota, and Idaho—dominate the realm of the rod and reel. Of course, the fishing is always better when the water is clean and the fish are safe to eat.

**Sailing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, rowing, waterskiing and more**—perhaps nothing speaks to the diverse ways in which we seek fun on the water as the myriad activities involving watercraft of one kind or another. Nationally, the top five states for registered boats are Florida, Minnesota, Michigan, California, and Wisconsin. On a per capita basis, Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Carolina, Maine, and Michigan win the boating regatta. Of course the number of boats is just one measure of how much we love to be out on the water. Researchers at the Outdoor Foundation and Coleman Company, Inc. calculated that kayakers made 99.9 million outings and canoers dipped their paddles in the water 74.1 million times in 2012 alone.<sup>2</sup>

to the roaring surf of the California coast, millions of Americans flock to state and national parks with waterways every year. Here we show the five states surveyed with the most visitors to parks with water—both numerically and on a per capita basis.

**Summer camps** offer many children a chance to experience new water activities—paddling a canoe, rafting down a river, or learning to swim. California, New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Wisconsin are the states with the most summer camps offering water activities of those surveyed. On a per capita basis, however, the smaller states of New England dominate the summer camp scene—with Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island all among the top five.





Clean Water Act protection has been essential for the restoration of countless waterways across the United States, and the Act remains a critical tool for confronting several of today’s major threats to our waterways—including runoff pollution from development and the direct dumping of pollution from industrial facilities and sewage treatment plants.

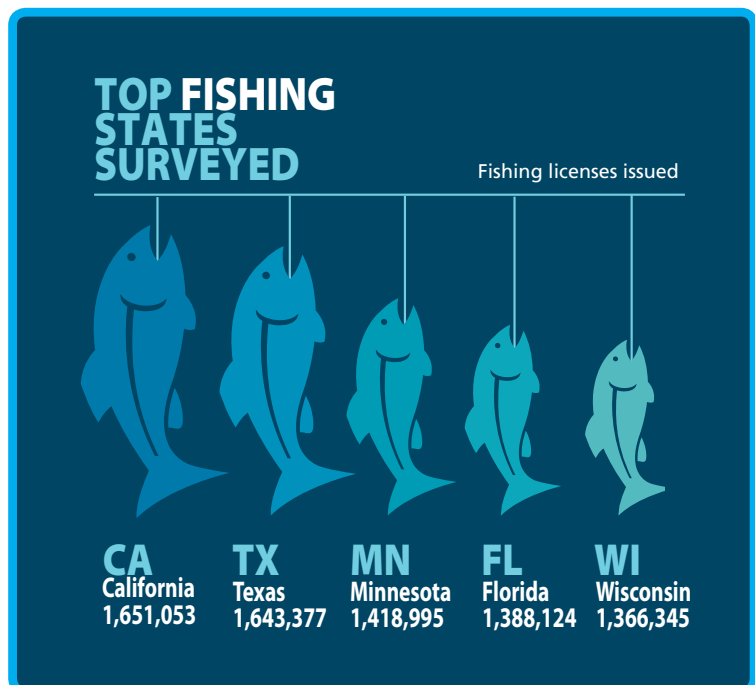
However, these waterways are only as clean as the water that flows into them, and therefore the EPA’s Clean Water Rule closes loopholes and further protects streams, tributaries, and other connected waterways that feed the water sources that Americans so avidly use.

All of these summer fun activities—swimming, fishing, and boating—depend on clean water. Yet without adequate protection, our waters become plagued by pollution. Pathogens and bacteria make our beaches unsafe for swimming. Toxics make fish unsafe for eating. Algal blooms threaten our health and dead zones strip the life from our vibrant waterways. So if we want to enjoy fun on the water next summer and beyond, we’ll need to take decisive action to protect clean water from polluters.

On May 27th, the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers finalized the Clean Water Rule which restores the Act’s protections to thousands of waterways across the nation. This new Clean Water Rule will go into effect on August 28th—a terrific way to end the summer.

## Policy Recommendations

Every year, millions of Americans enjoy their summer fun in and around our rivers, lakes, bays, and streams. That might help explain why Congress declared that all of our waterways should be safe for fishing and swimming when it passed the Clean Water Act in 1972.



In addition, state and federal enforcement of clean water laws must be strengthened in several ways, including:

- Requiring that all facilities that threaten our waters with pollution—including factory farms—are issued permits with stringent, enforceable standards sufficient to protect our rivers, lakes, and streams;
- Enforcing the law with penalties swift, certain, and severe enough that it no longer pays to pollute;
- Rejecting applications to pave over or otherwise degrade our wetlands, which provide vital wildlife habitat and filter out pollutants;
- Establishing numeric pollution limits and enforceable clean up plans for all waters too polluted for swimming, fishing, or supporting fish and wildlife;
- Protecting pristine waters with special Clean Water Act designations that bar new sources of pollution; and
- Ensuring that communities have the tools and the resources to prevent runoff pollution and end sewage overflows.

With these measures, we can ensure that our waters are safe for swimming, fishing, and boating next summer and for generations to come.

## Methodology

To derive the number of national parks with waterways in each state, we referred to the state lists available on the National Park Service website (<http://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm>). Based on the brief summary of each national park and additional Internet research, we determined whether there was a lake, river, stream, wetland, or beach located in each park.

We compiled lists for each state and counted up the parks with waterways. We did not include national trails because they cross through multiple states and we did not want to count them multiple times for each state. We also did not include historical sites, memorials, or monuments if the main reason for attendance involved historical or cultural experiences. For example, we did not count homes of past presidents even if there was a stream running through the property.

To calculate the number of visitors to each national park with a waterway, we referred to the Visitor Use Statistics available on the National Park service website (<https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/>). We looked up the 2014 visitor data for each park on our list and added the values to get the total national park visitors per state. Our values underestimate the total visitor numbers because the data was not available for each of the parks on our list.

To derive the number of state parks with waterways, we referred to each state's respective parks division website. We read through the summaries of each state park to determine whether there was a lake, river, stream, wetland, or beach located within the park. We compiled lists for each state and counted up the parks with waterways. We counted parks with water activities, like fishing and boating, available. We anticipate our numbers are slight underestimates because it was difficult to determine which parks had hiking trails along streams or scenic views of water bodies or other ways to enjoy our waters. We took the sum of this value and the number of national parks per state to get the combined total of state and national parks per state.

Very few state park divisions have visitor data available online. Thus, to calculate state park visitor numbers we had to contact the respective state parks divisions to request the 2014 park-by-park visitor data. We added up the values for all of the parks on our state lists to get the total number of state park visitors. Our values underestimate the total visitor numbers because the data was not available for each of the state parks on

our lists. We were unable to get park visitor data for Hawaii, Massachusetts, and Ohio. We took the sum of this value and the number of national park visitors to get the combined total of state and national park visitors per state.

To derive the number of summer camps offering water activities in each state, we referred to the My Summer Camps website (<http://www.mysummercamps.com/>). We performed statewide searches of camps using the different activity filters including canoeing, kayaking, sailing, surfing, fishing, etc. We compiled lists of camps for each state and counted them up to get the total number of summer camps with water activities. We were careful not to double count camps unless they had multiple locations within the state.

The number of registered boats per state was taken from the U.S. Coast Guard's 2014 Recreational Boating Statistics report ([http://www.uscgboating.org/statistics/accident\\_statistics.php](http://www.uscgboating.org/statistics/accident_statistics.php)). Table 38 provides recreational vessel registration data by state. Many states on this table only require motorboats and sail

boats to be registered. Thus our data underestimates the number of canoes, kayaks, and other non-motorized recreational boats per state.

The number of paid fishing license holders per state was taken from the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Fishing License Report (<http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/LicenseInfo/Fishing.htm>). We had to contact the agency in order to get the 2014 report.

## Notes

1. For purposes of this report "national parks" includes a variety of types of national park units.
2. The Outdoor Foundation and Coleman Company, Inc. *2013 Special Report on Paddlesports* <http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.americancanoe.org/resource/resmgr/General-documents/ResearchPaddlesports2013.pdf>

# Virginia Summer Fun Index

In Virginia, summer fun means swimming, fishing, boating, or just relaxing by the water. Here's how people enjoy Virginia's rivers, streams and other waterways, by the numbers.

State & national parks* with waterways	38
Visitors to state & national parks* with waterways	12,539,304
Summer camps offering water activities	57
Licensed fishers	563,647
Registered boats	236,521

*\* For these purposes, "national parks" include various types of national park units.*

***"Virginia, where we row, has beautiful rivers."***

***Tom O'Rourke, executive director and head coach of River City Crew, a non-profit youth rowing program.***

***<https://www.facebook.com/EnvironmentVirginia/videos/920780807965851/>***

Photo by Rob Shank

