

Executive Summary

Wildlife and Environmental Attitudes of South Dakota Citizens – 2012

This survey of South Dakota citizens' wildlife and environmental attitudes was conducted in 2012 in conjunction with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks' (SDGFP) revision of the South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan (WAP). The WAP was first approved in 2006 and SDGFP made a commitment to review and revise the plan five years following its approval. This survey, in part, addresses the eighth essential element in the WAP, *'each state's provisions to provide public participation in the development, revisions, and implementation of its strategy'*. The purpose of the survey was to identify trends as well as mapping current environmental attitudes, providing a better understanding of South Dakota citizens.

The mail survey questionnaire (11 by 8½ booklets) was developed with input from SDGFP staff and survey results were analyzed by South Dakota State University. Two versions of the questionnaire were developed to maximize the number of questions asked while minimizing the overall length of the survey. Initial sample size was 2,400 randomly selected South Dakota citizens (94 addresses were undeliverable) and 1,138 usable questionnaires (49%) were returned. A total of 45 questions measured an array of wildlife and environmental attitudes and 12 items measured people's Wildlife Value Orientations, plus questions measured people's participation in hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing and a few demographic variables.

Results

In general, most South Dakota residents have positive attitudes towards wildlife and are supportive of efforts to maintain quality habitat for wildlife. The importance of wildlife is best summarized by the results showing that 80% of South Dakota residents reported fish and wildlife contributes to a high "quality of life" and only about 1% reporting that fish and wildlife detracts from their "quality of life" in South Dakota. However, there can be some controversy when it comes to issues involving specific wildlife species. For example, this survey measured a greater level of disagreement regarding issues involving specific wildlife species, such as, prairie dogs, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, bats, river otters, and ospreys.

Controversy surrounding some species of wildlife generally stems from different opinions on how wildlife should be viewed/treated/managed. These differences are best

summarized by the Wildlife Value Orientation (WVO) scale, which measures a general core value people have towards wildlife. The WVO scale measures peoples' wildlife values along a continuum of utilitarian values at one end and mutualist values at the other end and classifies people into four groups (Utilitarian, Mutualist, Pluralist, and Distanced) (Figure 1). Pluralists can hold both value orientations and their attitude towards a specific issue is dependent upon the given situation, while people with a distanced orientation do not hold either orientation. Utilitarians value wildlife primarily for their use or benefit to humans while mutualists view all wildlife as deserving of rights and caring. Such contrasting viewpoints can create controversial issues involving a range of wildlife species and management actions. The potential for conflict is also supported by the split in peoples' attitudes regarding the degree to which wildlife management decisions should favor game animals/fish or rare wildlife species. In general, most South Dakota residents (54%) favored a "balanced approach" on wildlife management decisions regarding game animals/fish versus rare wildlife species with the remaining residents about evenly split between favoring game/fish and rare wildlife species.

The value of the WVO scale lies in its potential to predict how people may respond to various wildlife issues. Utilitarians will generally be supportive of actions that allow use of wildlife classified as game and control of species deemed as harmful to humans, their property, or valued game species. Mutualists will generally be opposed to any management actions that are harmful to any wildlife species. Thus, the WVO of South Dakota residents measured in this survey can be used to estimate attitudes towards wildlife issues not measured by this survey. South Dakotans' WVO have not change much since last measured in 2004 (Figure 2) and most of the wildlife and environmental attitudes also have remained relatively stable over the past decade.

Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Viewing. Most South Dakotans have fished (87%) or hunted (60%) at least sometime in their lives, and almost half (49%) reported they have taken trips sometime in their lifetime for which fish and wildlife viewing was the primary purpose of the trip. Overall, 91% of South Dakota residents have participated in some combination of these activities (Figure 3). Participation in one or more of these activities increased peoples' appreciation for wildlife and also increased the likelihood of holding stronger opinions on various wildlife management issues.

UTILITARIAN (53.6%). Believe that wildlife should be used and managed primarily for human benefit. Individuals with a strong utilitarian orientation are more likely to prioritize human well-being over wildlife in their attitudes and behaviors. They are also more likely to find justification for treatment of wildlife in utilitarian terms and to rate actions that result in death or harm to wildlife as being acceptable.

MUTUALIST (15.3%). View wildlife as capable of living in relationships of trust with humans, as if part of an extended family, and deserving of rights and caring. Those with a strong mutualism orientation are less likely to support actions resulting in death or harm to wildlife, more likely to engage in welfare-enhancing behaviors for individual wildlife (e.g., feeding), and more likely to view wildlife in human terms (e.g., Bambi).

PLURALIST (20.9%). Hold both a mutualism and a utilitarian value orientation toward wildlife. Which of the orientations plays a role is dependent upon the given situation. For certain issues, Pluralists are likely to respond in a manner similar to that of Utilitarians, whereas for other issues they may behave more like Mutualists.

DISTANCED (10.2%). Do not hold either a utilitarian or a mutualism orientation. As their label suggests, they tend to be less interested in wildlife and wildlife related issues. The Distanced type is also more likely than the other value types to express fear, or concern for safety, while in the outdoors due to the possibility of negative encounters with wildlife (e.g., risk of being attacked or contracting a disease).

Figure 1. Descriptions of the four wildlife value orientations (measured in 2012 for SD residents).

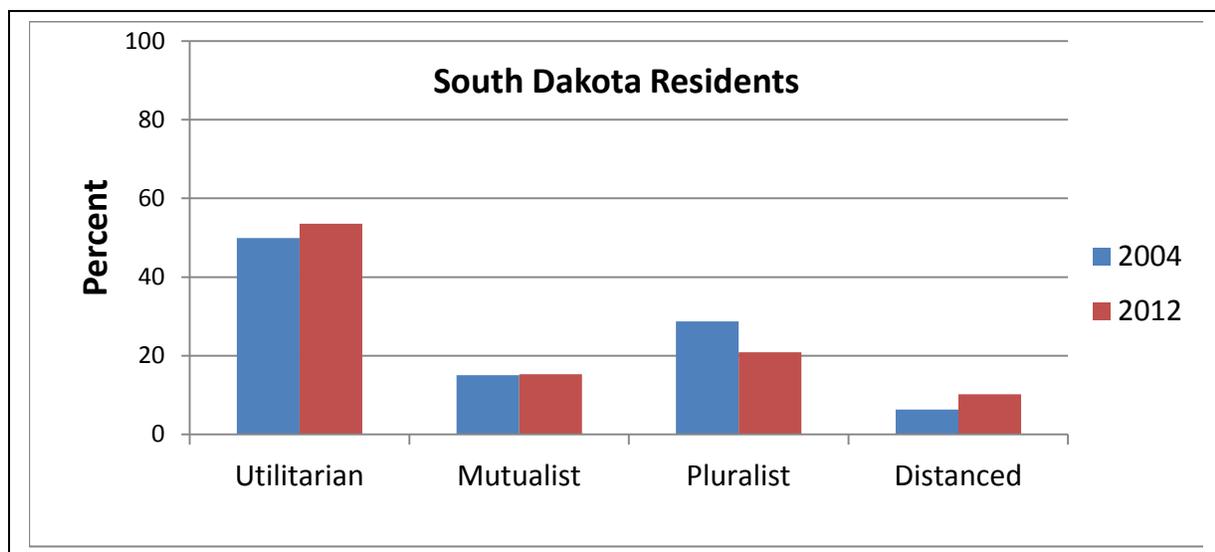


Figure 2. South Dakota residents' wildlife value orientations measured in 2004 and 2012.

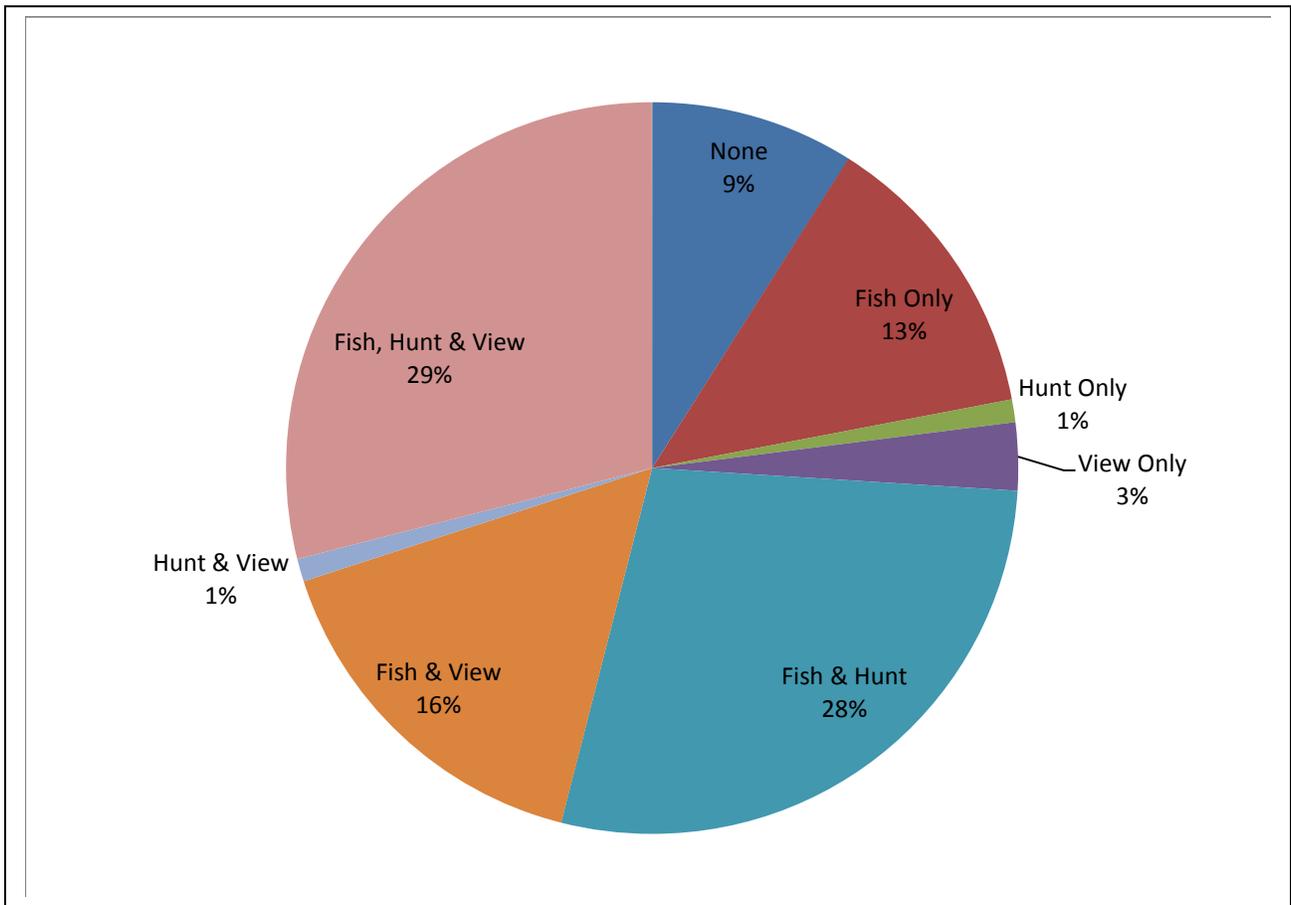


Figure 3. Participation in fishing, hunting and/or wildlife viewing trips by South Dakotans sometime during their lifetime (measured in 2012).

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