

# New Mexico Angler Satisfaction Report

## 2024-2025 License Year



**Fisheries Management Division**  
**New Mexico Department of Game and Fish**



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#### Cover Photo

*Molly Bullard with a nice catfish from Harris Pond. October Catfishing with Molly, photography by John Bullard.*

#### Suggested Citation

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## **Introduction**

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish uses angler satisfaction as one of its measurable objectives for management success. Traditionally the Department has been tasked with maintaining an overall angler satisfaction rate of 80% regarding angler opportunity, fishing experiences, and management of sport fishing issues. In 2022, this benchmark was increased to an overall satisfaction rate of 90%. Since the 1990's, the Department has been conducting various types of polling surveys to measure angler satisfaction and determine if the objective was met. In addition to measuring angler satisfaction the survey also researches trends in angler needs, seeks input on emerging issues, and provides direction for future management decisions. Information and knowledge gained through this survey is vital to effectively manage the State's aquatic resources. This report summarizes the method used and results from the 2025 survey that covered the 2024-25 license year.

## **Methods**

The survey was conducted using web-based survey software (Snap Surveys LTD). This method involves sending an email invitation to a random stratified sample of licensed anglers. The email contains a uniform resource locator (URL) link to a questionnaire hosted on a Department owned web-server. Once participants complete the survey data is collected and compiled on the webserver.

The survey was conducted from April 9 to May 23, 2025. An email invitation was sent to 20,000 anglers that purchased a fishing license in the 2024-25 license year (April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025). Two additional email invitations were sent after the original invitation (e.g., 7 days and 15 days post) as a reminder to enhance the response rate. During the 2024-25 license year, 274,941 fishing license were purchased, but only 179,385 (65.2%) license purchases had an associated email. The survey sample was a random stratified subsample representing the different fishing license types and the percentage sold of each license type (Table 1). The sample consisted of 73.1% resident and 26.9% non-resident anglers.

Table 1. Fishing license types showing percentage of total sold in the 2024-25 license year and sample size of each license type of resident and non-resident anglers.

| License type                                 | Total (%) | Resident (n) | Non-resident (n) |
|--|-----------|--------------|------------------|
| 1-Day Fishing License                        | 14.3      | 826          | 2033             |
| 5-Day Fishing License                        | 10.3      | 81           | 1987             |
| Annual Fishing License                       | 34.7      | 5859         | 1077             |
| Disabled Veteran Game Hunt and Fish          | 0.9       | 187          | NA               |
| Free Foster Family Fishing License           | 0.0       | 8            | NA               |
| Game Hunting and Fishing License             | 18.1      | 3618         | NA               |
| Handicapped Fishing License                  | 1.0       | 202          | NA               |
| Handicapped Game Hunting and Fishing License | 0.4       | 84           | NA               |
| Junior Fishing License                       | 6.7       | 1048         | 288              |
| Junior Game Hunting and Fishing License      | 2.3       | 452          | NA               |
| Senior 70 and Over Fishing License           | 7.0       | 1398         | NA               |
| Senior Fishing License                       | 2.8       | 559          | NA               |
| Senior Game Hunting and Fishing License      | 1.5       | 293          | NA               |

The survey included 22 questions (17 fishing and 5 demographic related), most of which have been included in past surveys. Three questions related specifically to the San Juan River tailwater fishery that were first used during the 2023-24 license year survey were included again. Anglers may have been asked all or only a few questions depending on their answers to expedite the survey (e.g., if they indicated they did not fish during the license year then they were only asked the demographic questions). Most of the fishing questions were set as “must answer” whereas the demographic questions had a “prefer not to answer” option.

### **Results and Discussion**

Responses were received from 876 licensed anglers resulting in a 4.4% response rate. Response rate for residents (4.6%) was higher than non-residents (3.7%). About 44% of the responses were received within 7 days of the initial invitation and response rates significantly declined post 72 hours of the initial reminder sent 7 days after the initial invitation.

The following is a list of the questions asked during the survey and results. All confidence intervals are presented as 80% unless otherwise noted.

#### **Question 1. Did you fish in New Mexico in the past 12 months?**

This question was asked to estimate the number of anglers that purchased a fishing license but did not fish. It also expedited the survey for anglers that did not fish (i.e., if they did not fish then they were routed to only answer the demographic questions). Of the 876 respondents, 13.4% indicated that they did not fish during the past 12 months. This was lower than last license year (14.3%) but slightly above the ten-year average of 12.5% (Figure 1).

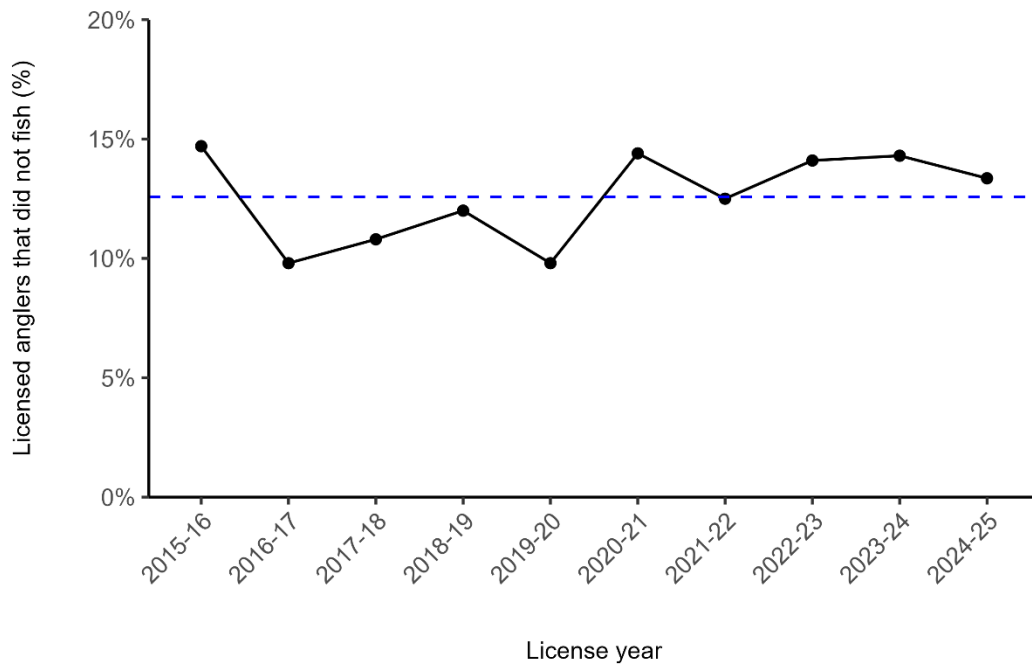


Figure 1. Percentage of anglers that reported they did not fish during the 2015-16 to 2024-25 license years (solid line and circles) and the ten-year average (dashed line).

**Question 2. How many days or parts of days did you fish in New Mexico during the past 12 months?**

When only including the anglers that indicated they fished during the past 12 months (n = 759), results showed a wide range of days fished, from 1 to 350 with a mean of  $18.8 \pm 1.3$  days and a median of 10 days. This was an increase in average days fished from last license year and above the ten-year average (Figure 2). However, there has been no significant trend over the past 10 license years in the mean number of days anglers fished. During the 2024-25 license year, most non-residents fished 5 days or less while more than 50% of residents fished 6 days or more (Figure 3).

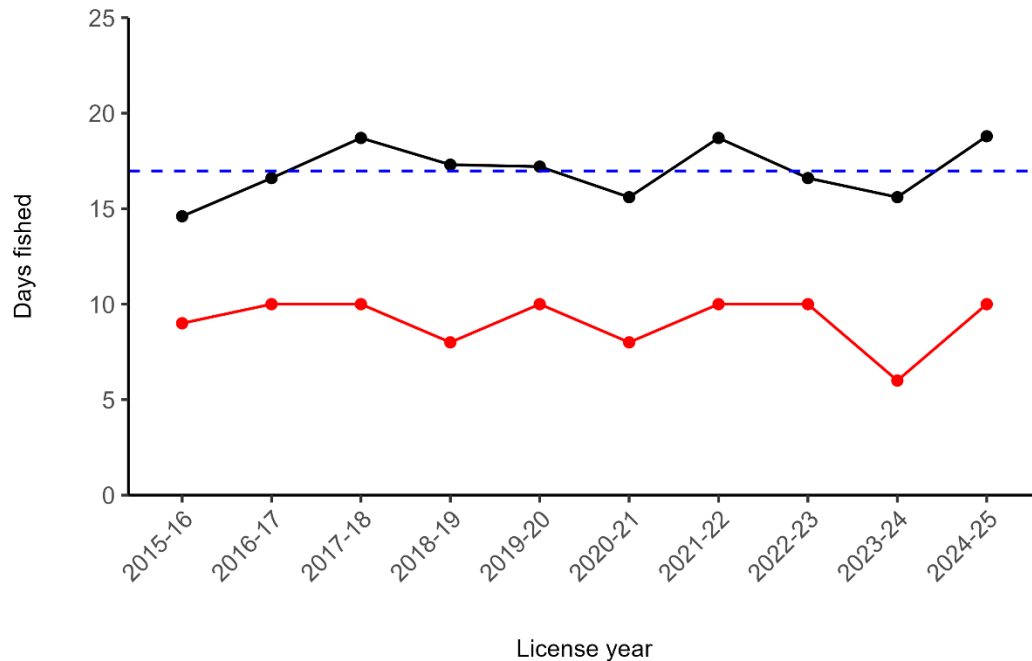


Figure 2. Average (black line and points) by license year, median (red line and points), and 10-license-year average (blue dashed line) days fished by anglers that indicated they fished one or more days in New Mexico during the 2015-16 to 2024-25 license years.

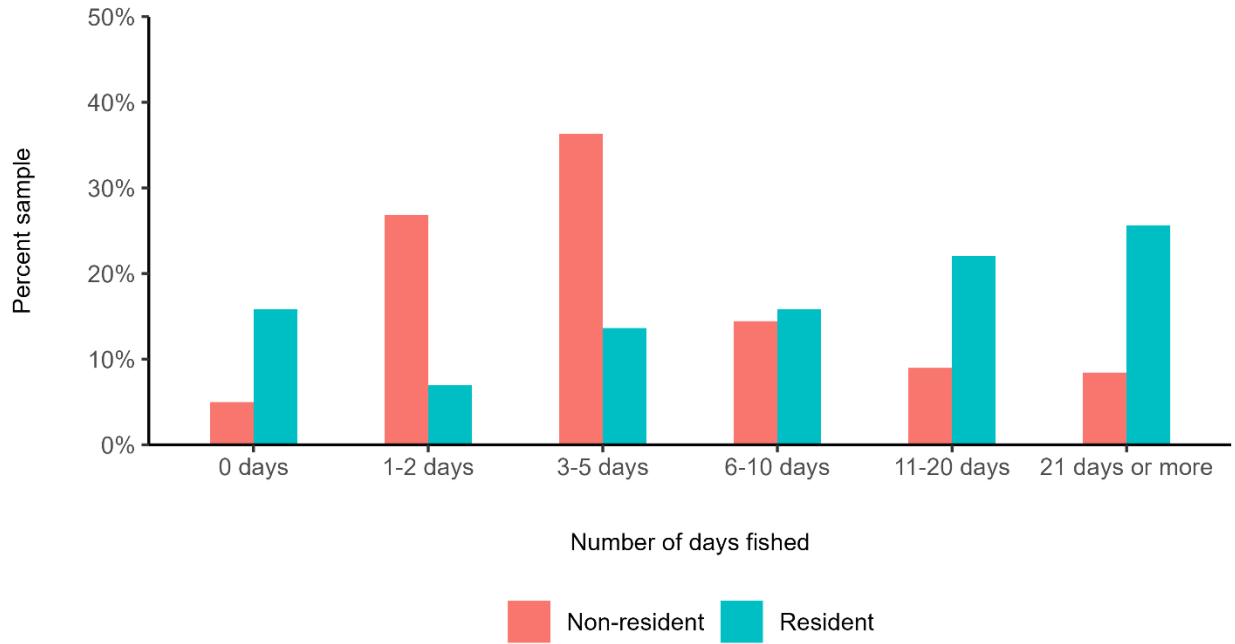


Figure 3. Number of days fished during the 2024-25 license year by resident and non-resident anglers.

**Question 3. In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with fishing in New Mexico during the past 12 months (Fishing Satisfaction Rate)?**

Anglers were asked to rate their fishing experience on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. A rating of 1 was “not at all satisfied” and a rating of 5 was “very satisfied”. Most (90.5%) anglers indicated being satisfied with their fishing experience, giving a rating of 3, 4, or 5 (Figure 4). Anglers rating fishing experience as 4 or 5 increased slightly and dissatisfaction decreased slightly compared to the 2023-24 license year. Like past years, non-residents continue to be more satisfied. About 83.1% of non-resident anglers gave a rating of 4 or 5, while only 62.5% of resident anglers gave the same rating. Also, dissatisfaction rate for non-resident was 6.7% and 10.3% for resident anglers (Figure 5).

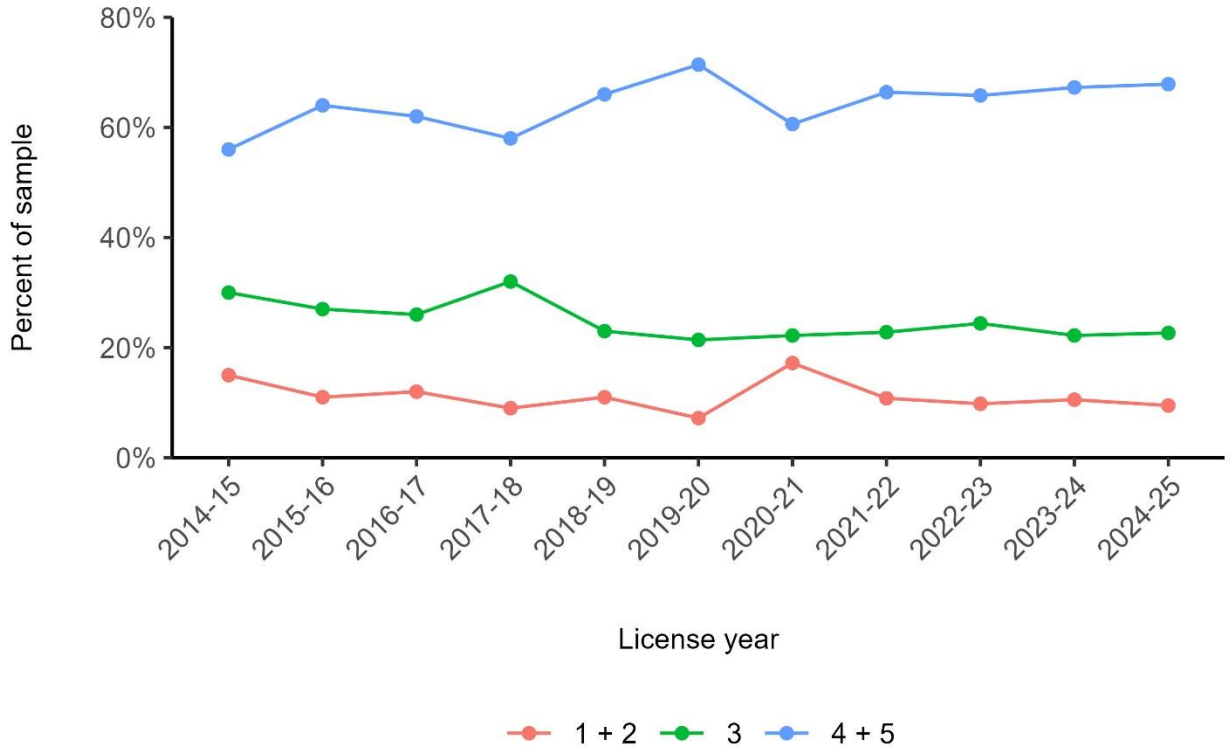


Figure 4. Overall satisfaction rating of anglers surveyed from the 2014-15 to 2024-25 license years. A rating of 1 was “not satisfied at all” and a rating of 5 was “very satisfied”.

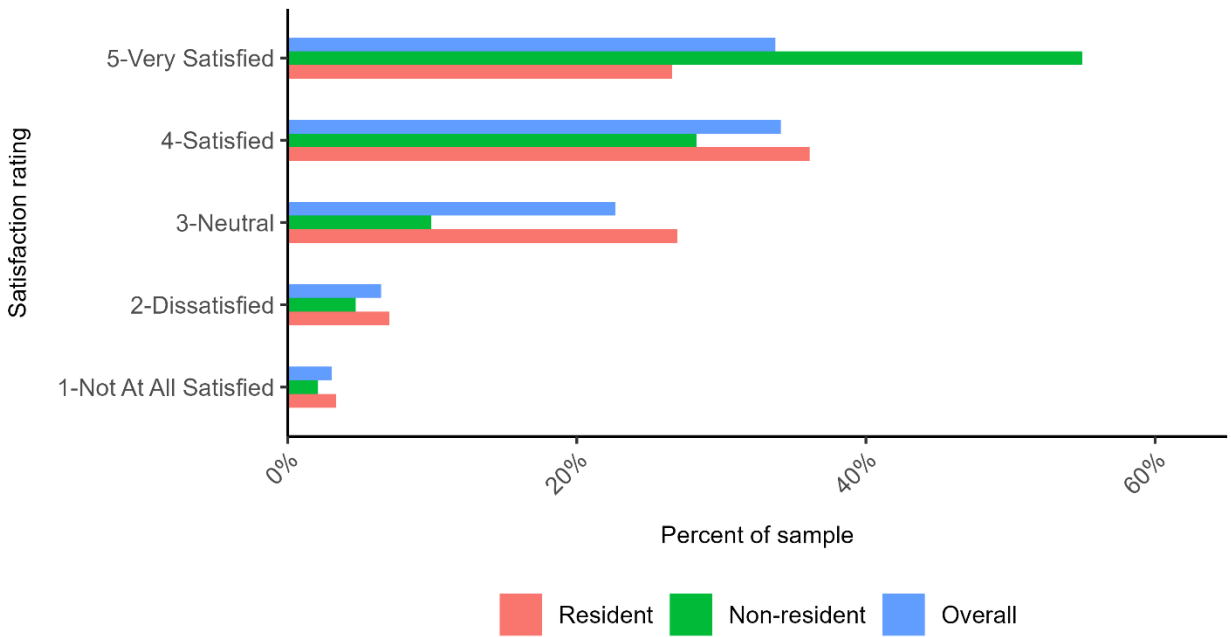


Figure 5. Satisfaction rate of resident and non-resident anglers during the 2024-25 license year.

#### Question 4. Why do you feel this way?

This was a follow up to Question 3 to identify key reasons related to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This question was optional to answer, but most respondents (74.7%) provided a reason. Even though anglers provided a wide range of reasons to support their satisfaction rate, most of the answers fit into 27 categories. “Poor catch rates” was the primary reason for dissatisfied and neutral respondents followed by “poor opportunity or access”. Alternatively, “good catch rates” was the primary reasons for satisfaction.

#### Question 5. Regarding your species preference, do you prefer to fish for cold water species like trout or salmon or do you prefer to fish for warm water species like bass or walleye?

The largest percentage of the anglers (52.0%) indicated they preferred to fish for “cold water” species such as trout and salmon. About 39.0% of anglers indicated they preferred to fish for both “cold water” and “warm water” species. Overall, these percentages have not changed significantly for several years (Figure 6). When combining anglers that indicated they preferred to fish for “cold water” species and “both” it appears that most (91.0%) of anglers fish for cold water species compared to 48% for warm water species.

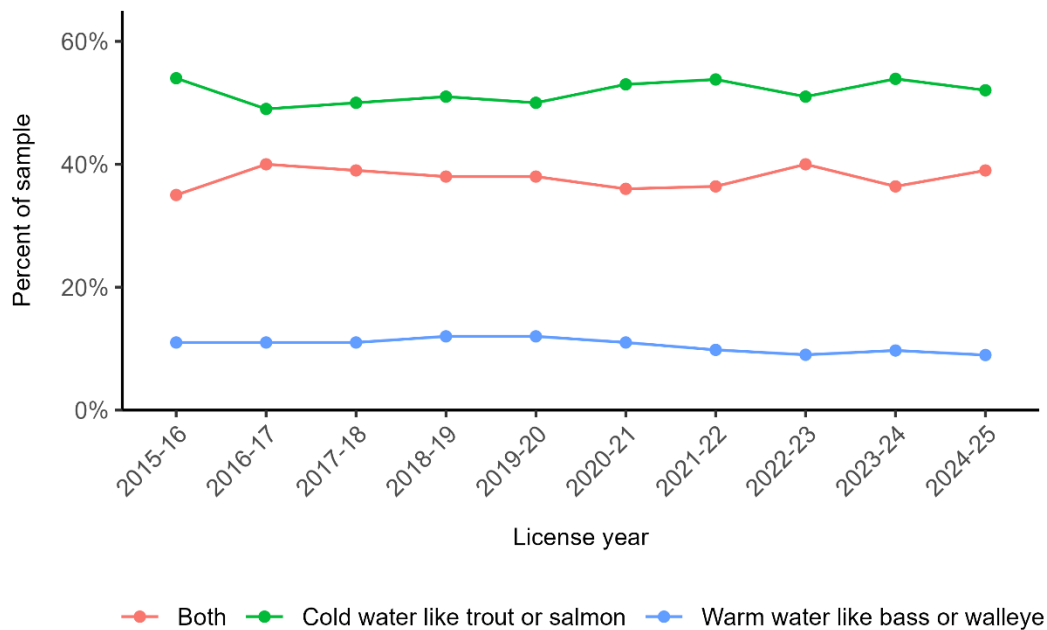


Figure 6. Fishing preference for “cold water”, “warm water”, or “both” species of surveyed anglers during the 2015-16 to 2024-25 license years.

#### Question 6. Which cold water species do you prefer to fish for in New Mexico (May select up to 3)?

Anglers were asked this question if they indicated they prefer to fish for “cold water” species or “both”. Similar to previous years, Rainbow Trout and Brown Trout continue to be the most preferred cold water species (Table 2).



Table 2. Cold water species in order of preference by anglers during the 2024-25 license year.

| Species         | Percent preferred* |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Rainbow Trout   | 88.0               |
| Brown Trout     | 69.6               |
| Cutthroat Trout | 39.2               |
| Brook Trout     | 21.9               |
| Kokanee         | 12.7               |
| Lake Trout      | 12.2               |
| Gila Trout      | 10.1               |

\*percentages do not add to 100% because this is a multiple choice question

**Question 7. Of the following statements, which comes closest to your personal view when fishing for cold water species? (Stocked vs. wild fish)**

This question was asked if anglers indicated they fished for “cold water” species or “both”. The purpose of this question was to identify if anglers chose their fishing location where they expected to catch stocked cold water fish or wild fish. The percentage of anglers indicating they chose their fishing location where they expected to catch wild fish (50.4%) was the same as those indicating they chose their fishing location where they expected to catch stocked fish (49.6%). Although there has been a small increasing trend since the 2015-16 license year in the percentage of anglers selecting fishing locations based on catching wild trout, the percentage has been mostly an even split over this time (Figure 7).

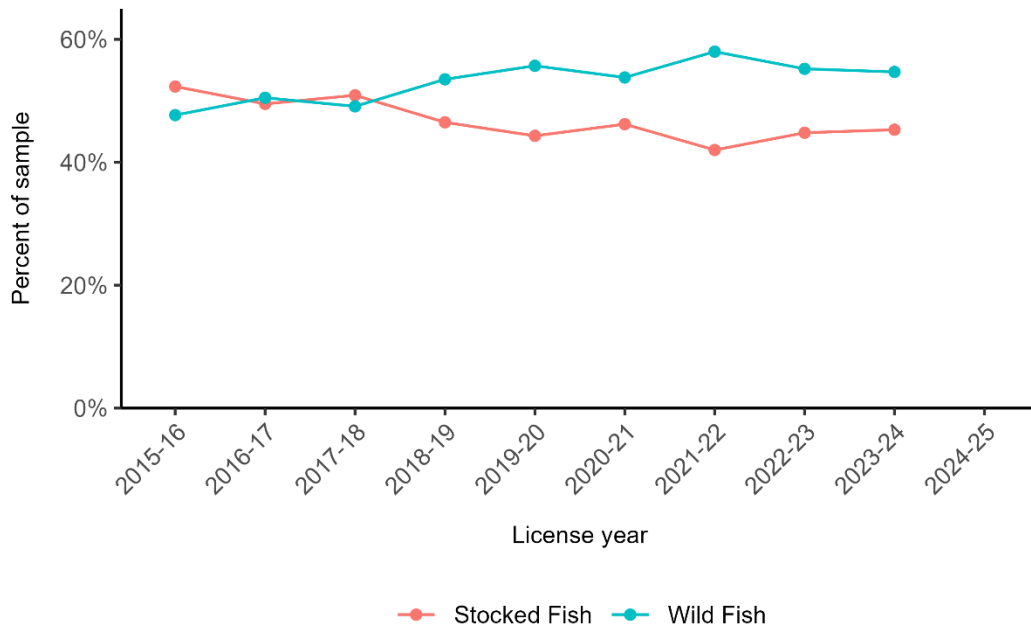


Figure 7. Percentage of cold water anglers that indicated they chose their fishing location where they expect to catch wild fish versus stocked fish from 2015-16 to 2024-25 license years.

**Question 8. Which warm water species do you prefer to fish for in New Mexico (May select up to 3)?**

Anglers were asked this question if they fished for “warm water” species or “both”. When comparing results to past surveys there were slight percentage changes for each species, but Largemouth Bass continues to be the most popular warm water species followed by catfish and Walleye (Table 3). Spotted Bass and Yellow Perch continue to be the least popular warm water species.

Table 3. Warm water species in order of preference by anglers during the 2024-25 license year.

| Species          | Percent preferred* |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Largemouth Bass  | 59.9               |
| Catfish          | 45.3               |
| Walleye          | 42.3               |
| Smallmouth Bass  | 31.3               |
| Crappie          | 26.4               |
| White Bass       | 22.0               |
| Northern Pike    | 15.4               |
| Tiger Muskie     | 12.4               |
| Bluegill/Sunfish | 11.0               |
| Striped Bass     | 10.4               |
| Yellow Perch     | 3.3                |
| Spotted Bass     | 2.75               |

\*percentages do not add to 100% because this is a multiple choice question

**Question 9. Of the following statements which comes closest to your personal view? (Catch-and-release vs. catch-and-keep)**

This question was to determine if anglers prefer to practice catch-and-release or keep most of the fish they catch. During this survey, most (69.0%) anglers indicated they prefer to release most of the fish they catch. Over the last ten license years, there has been a slight increasing trend in the percentage of anglers that prefer to practice catch-and-release (Figure 8).

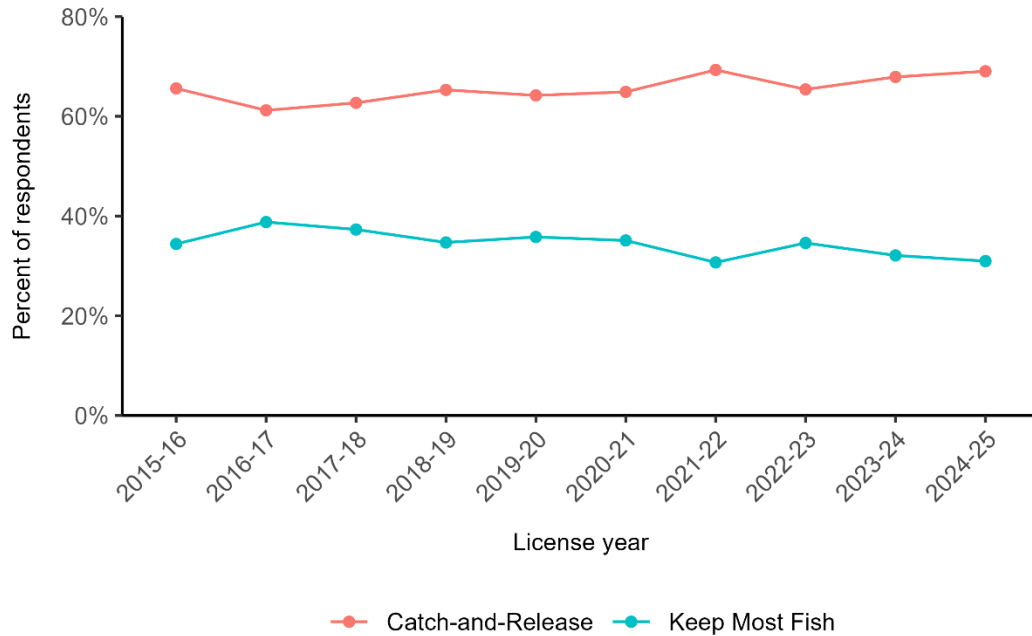


Figure 8. Percentage of anglers that indicated they keep most of the fish they catch and anglers that indicated they release most of the fish they catch from

**Question 10. Of the following statements which comes closest to your personal view? (Lots of fish vs. one or two large fish)**

This question was asked to determine if anglers chose fishing locations based upon where they will “catch lots of fish” or “one or two larger fish”. Most (61.0%) anglers indicated they chose their fishing location based on where they will “catch lots of fish”.

**Question 11. Did you fish the San Juan River tailwater fishery within the past twelve months?**

This was a question asked beginning in the 2023-24 license year as part of a focused management effort on the San Juan River. It was also used to identify San Juan River anglers for follow up Questions 12 to 14. About 20.8% of anglers indicated they fished the San Juan River tailwater fishery within the past twelve months. When comparing the number of respondents that indicated they fished the San Juan River and zip codes of respondents, there is a higher percentage of non-resident anglers that fish the San Juan River compared to other waters statewide (Figure 9).

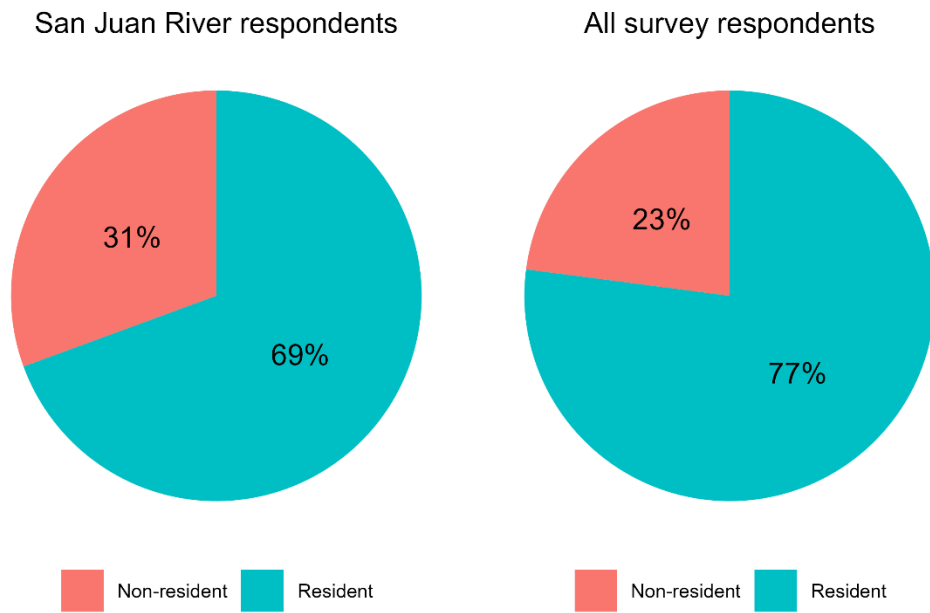


Figure 9. Resident status of survey respondents that fish the San Juan River (left) and all survey respondents who fished in New Mexico during the 2024-25 license year.

**Question 12. Did you fish with a professional guide on the San Juan River?**

Most (66.1%) San Juan River anglers indicated they did not fish with a professional guide. About half that fished with a guide stated they fished with a guide on every visit (Figure 10).

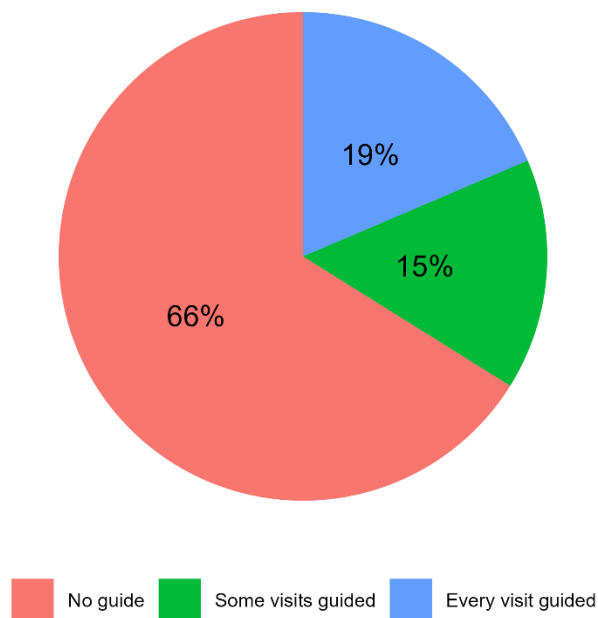


Figure 10. Percentage of anglers that fished with and without a professional guide on the San Juan River tailwater fishery during the 2024-25 license year.

**Question 13. Did you catch any fish from the San Juan River that past twelve months?**

Most (89.6%) anglers indicated that they caught fish from the San Juan River the past twelve months. When comparing guide and catch data, anglers that fished with a guide were more likely to catch fish (Table 5).

Table 5. Percentage of San Juan River anglers that caught fish compared to anglers that fished with and without a professional guide during the 2024-25 license year.

| Fished with a professional guide? | Caught fish (%) |      |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------|
|                                   | Yes             | No   |
| No guide                          | 85.1            | 14.9 |
| Some visits guided                | 96.4            | 3.6  |
| Every visit guided                | 100.0           | 0.0  |

**Question 14. How many total of each trout species did you catch during the past twelve months (Rainbow and Brown trout)?**

Most (78.6%) of the reported catch was Rainbow Trout. Mean number of Rainbow Trout ( $42.2 \pm 11.3$ ) caught per angler was significantly higher than the mean number of Brown Trout ( $13.4 \pm 2.5$ ) caught per angler (Figure 11). Most anglers reported catching ten or less Brown Trout during the past twelve months (Figure 12).

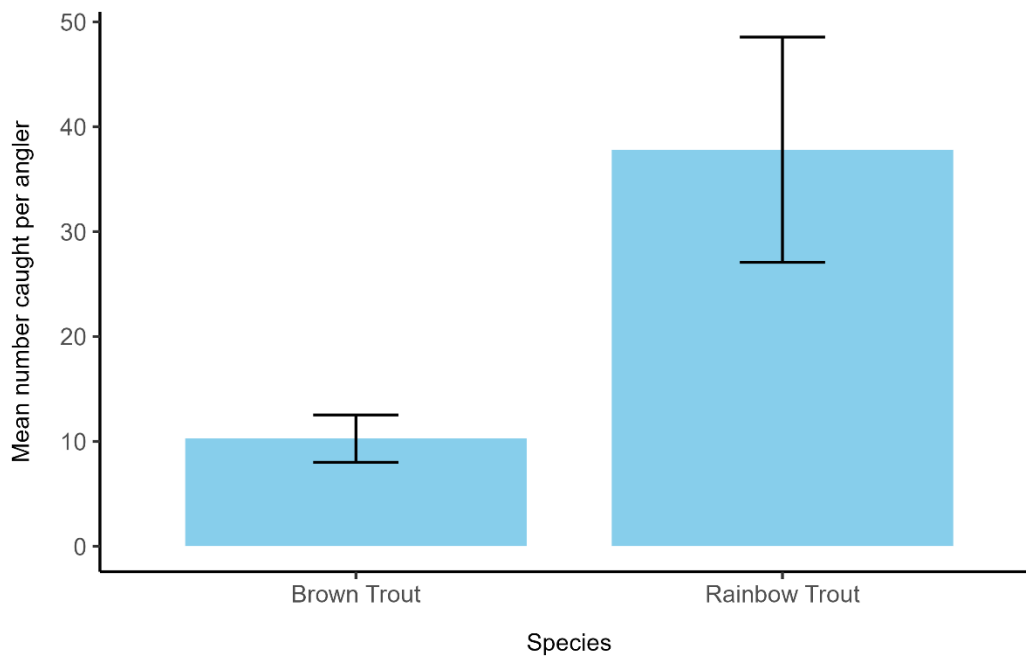


Figure 11. Mean number of Rainbow and Brown trout caught per angler the past twelve months from the San Juan River during the 2024-25 license year.

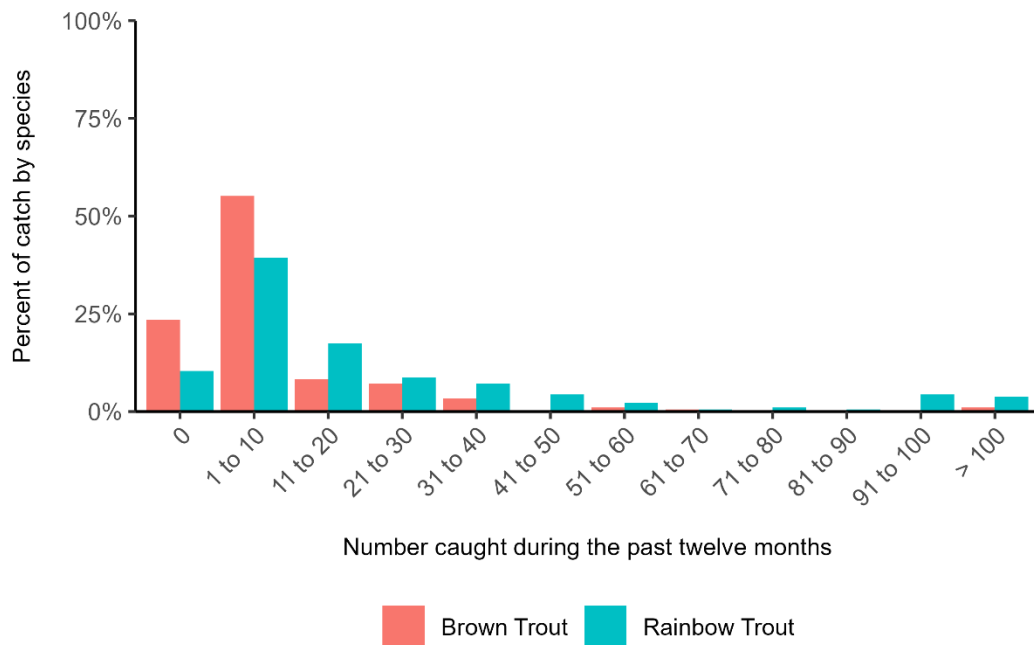


Figure 12. Relative frequency of Rainbow and Brown trout caught by San Juan River anglers during the 2024-25 license year.

**Question 15. Do you use live bait when fishing?**

Only 28.5% of anglers indicated they do not use live bait when fishing. This is similar to the ten-year mean of 29.9%, and the percentage has remained largely unchanged over the past several years (Figure 13).

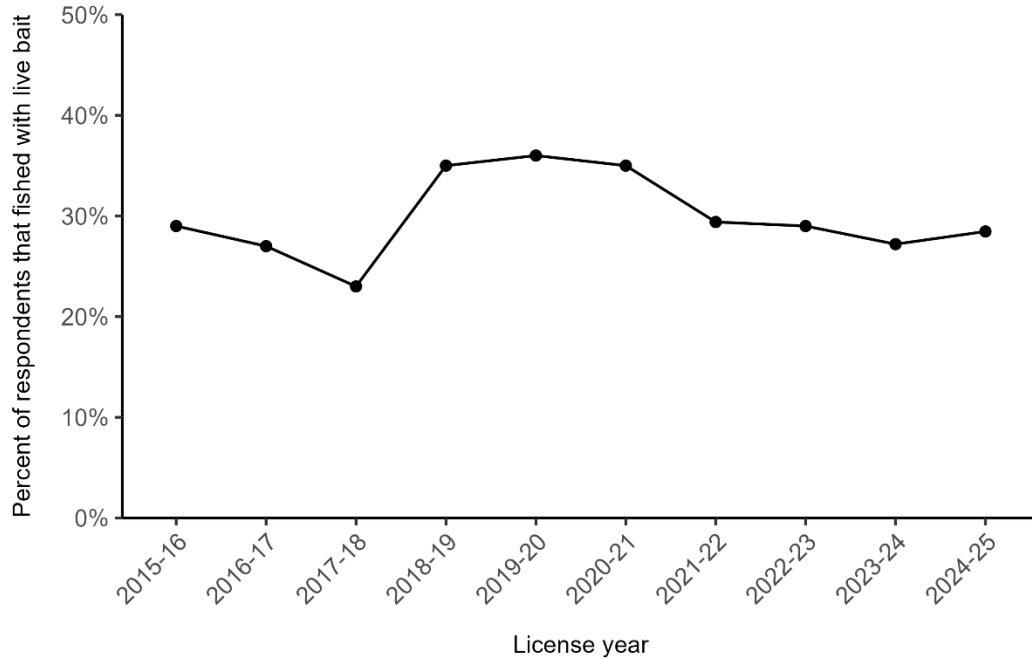


Figure 13. Percentage of anglers that indicated they used live bait while fishing during the 2015-16 to 2024-25 license years.

**Question 16. What types of live bait do you use when fishing?**

This was a follow up question to Question 15 for the 28.5% of anglers that indicated they use live bait when fishing. Similar to past surveys, “earthworms/night crawlers” were by far the most popular live bait used and “Water dogs/salamander larvae” continue to be the least popular (Figure 14). About 3.0% of anglers indicated an “other” live bait. Other live baits mentioned included cicadas, Bluegill, horseflies, and hellgrammites.

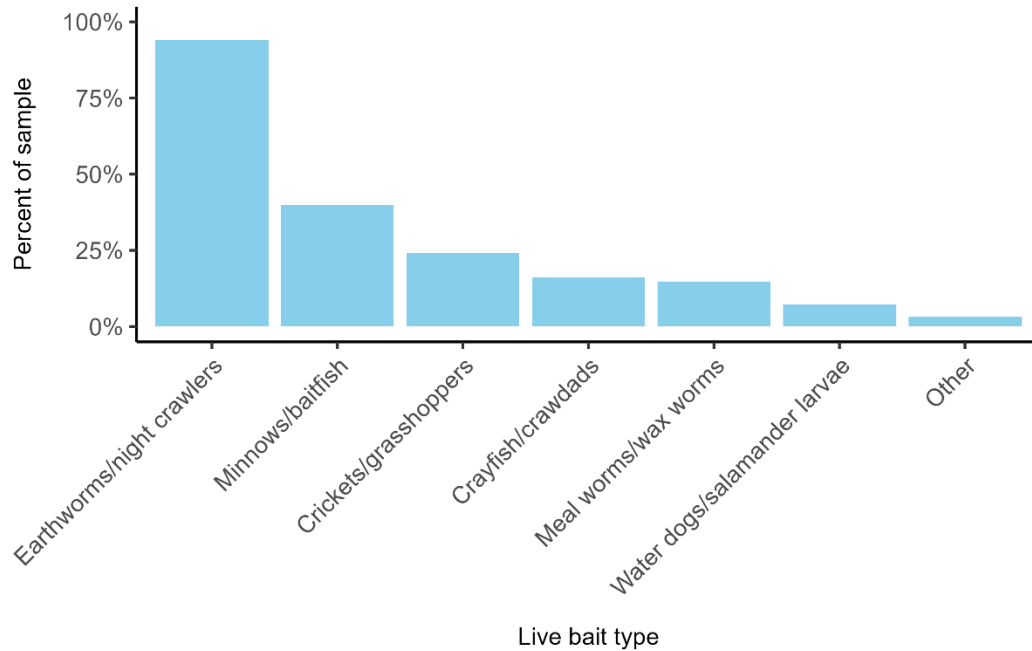


Figure 14. Types and percentage of live bait used by anglers during the 2024-25 license year. Note: percentages do not equal 100 since this is a multiple response question.

**Question 17. In what major river drainage do you use live bait in when fishing?**

The Rio Grande drainage continues to receive the most (56.3%) live bait use according to anglers surveyed (Figure 15). Live bait use was lowest in the Gila and San Francisco drainage.

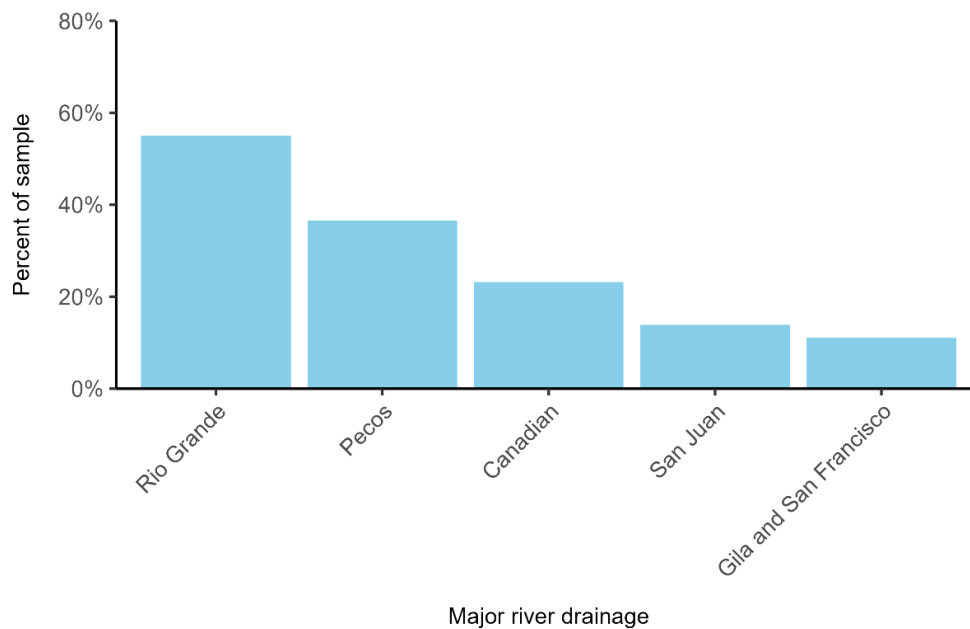


Figure 15. Live bait use by major river drainage during the 2024-25 license year. Note: percentages do not sum to 100 since this is a multiple response question.



Questions 18 to 20 were related to demographics and were optional to answer by survey participants.

**Question 18. What is your gender?**

Most of the survey participants identified themselves as male, representing 89.1% of the sample (Figure 16). Based on 2024-25 license purchasing data, about 24.0% of fishing license buyers were female which matched the percentage of females in the survey invitee pool. Similar to past surveys, female license buyers seem to be underrepresented in the survey as only 9.6% of respondents identify themselves as female.

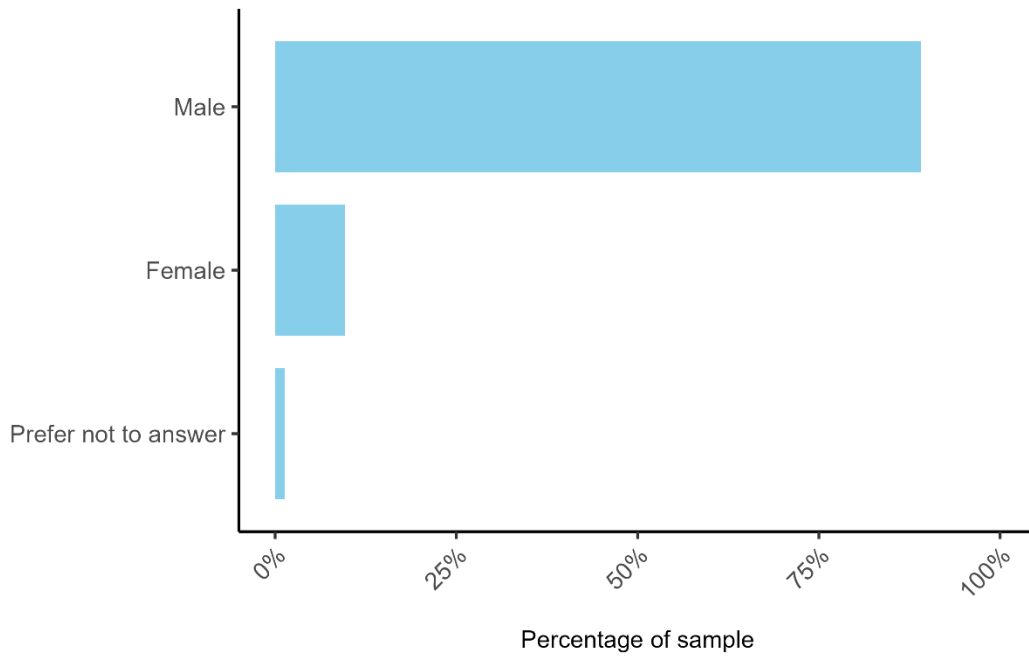


Figure 16. Gender of survey respondents.

**Question 19. What is your age category?**

The largest age category was 65 years and older, representing 39.4% of the sample, followed by age category 50 to 64 years (Figure 17).

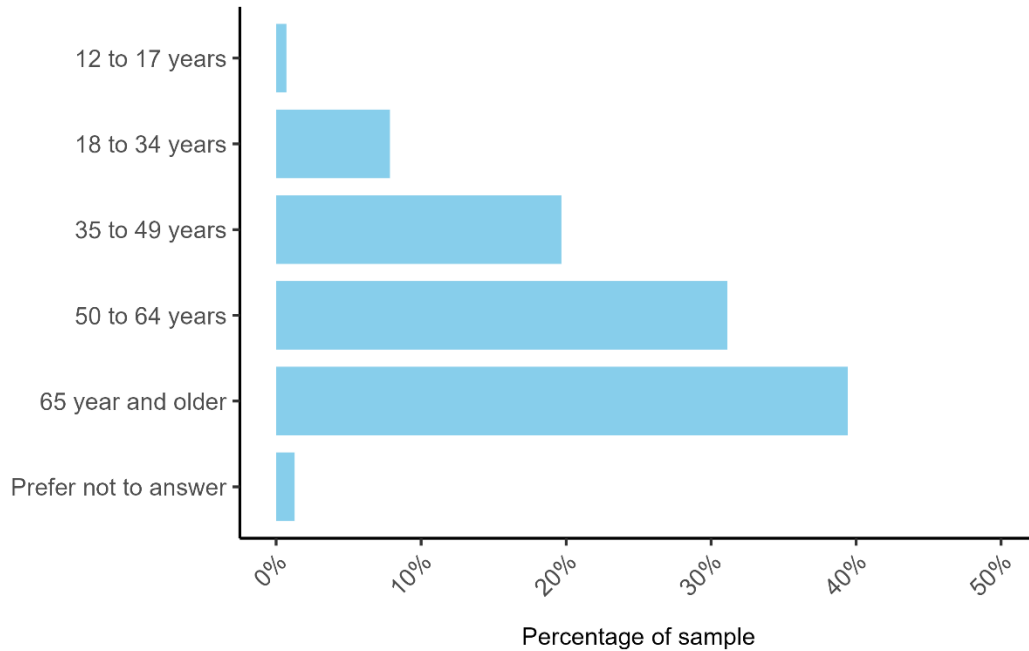


Figure 17. Age category of survey respondents.

**Question 20. Do you consider yourself to be (ethnicity):**

Most of the participants consider themselves Anglo/Caucasian representing 52.9% of the sample (Figure 18).

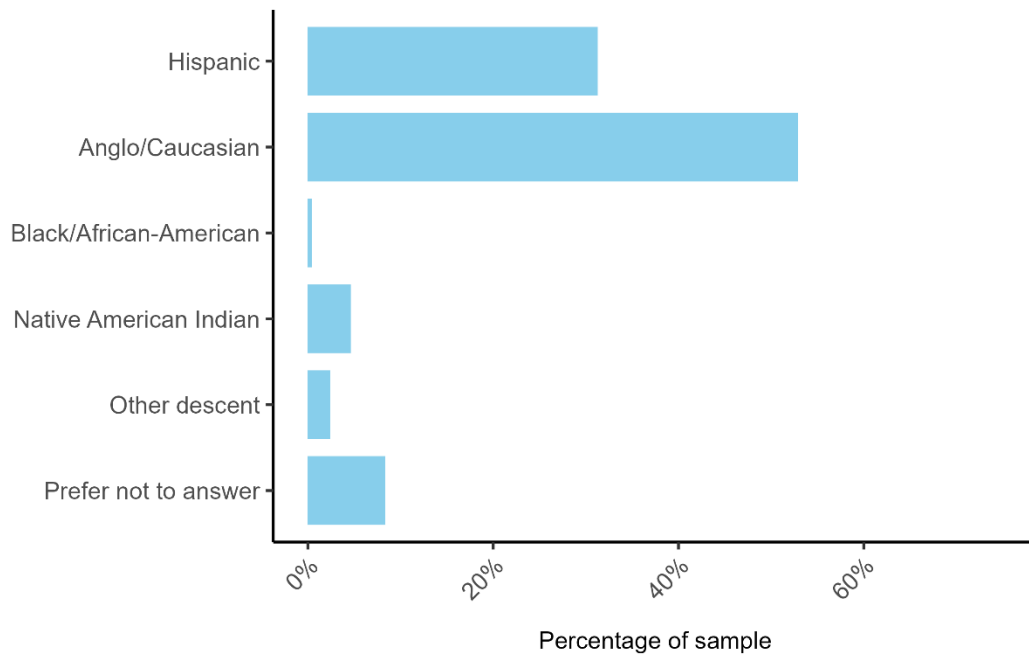


Figure 18. Ethnicity of survey respondents.

**Question 21. What is the highest level of education you have had the opportunity to complete?**

The largest percentage of participants indicated completing “some college/associates degree/vocational certificate” representing 35.6% of the sample. Participants that indicated “grade school” was the smallest percentage (Figure 19).

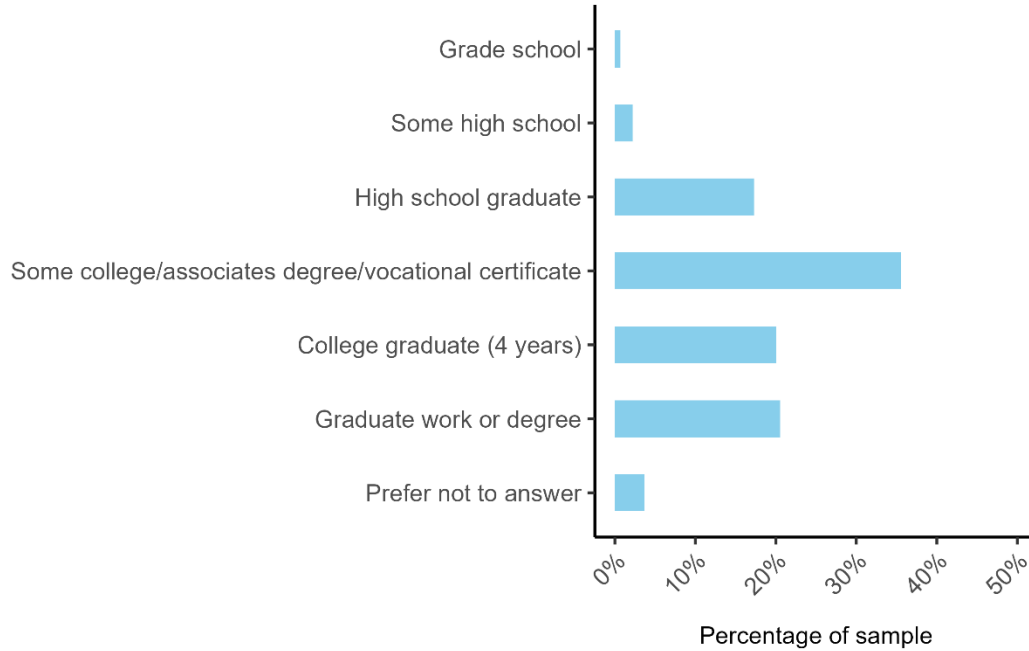


Figure 19. Highest education level of survey respondents.

**Question 22. What is the zip code of your residence?**

Survey participants represented 336 different zip codes and 32 different states (Figure 20). One hundred and sixty nine of the 426 (39.6%) New Mexico zip codes were represented.

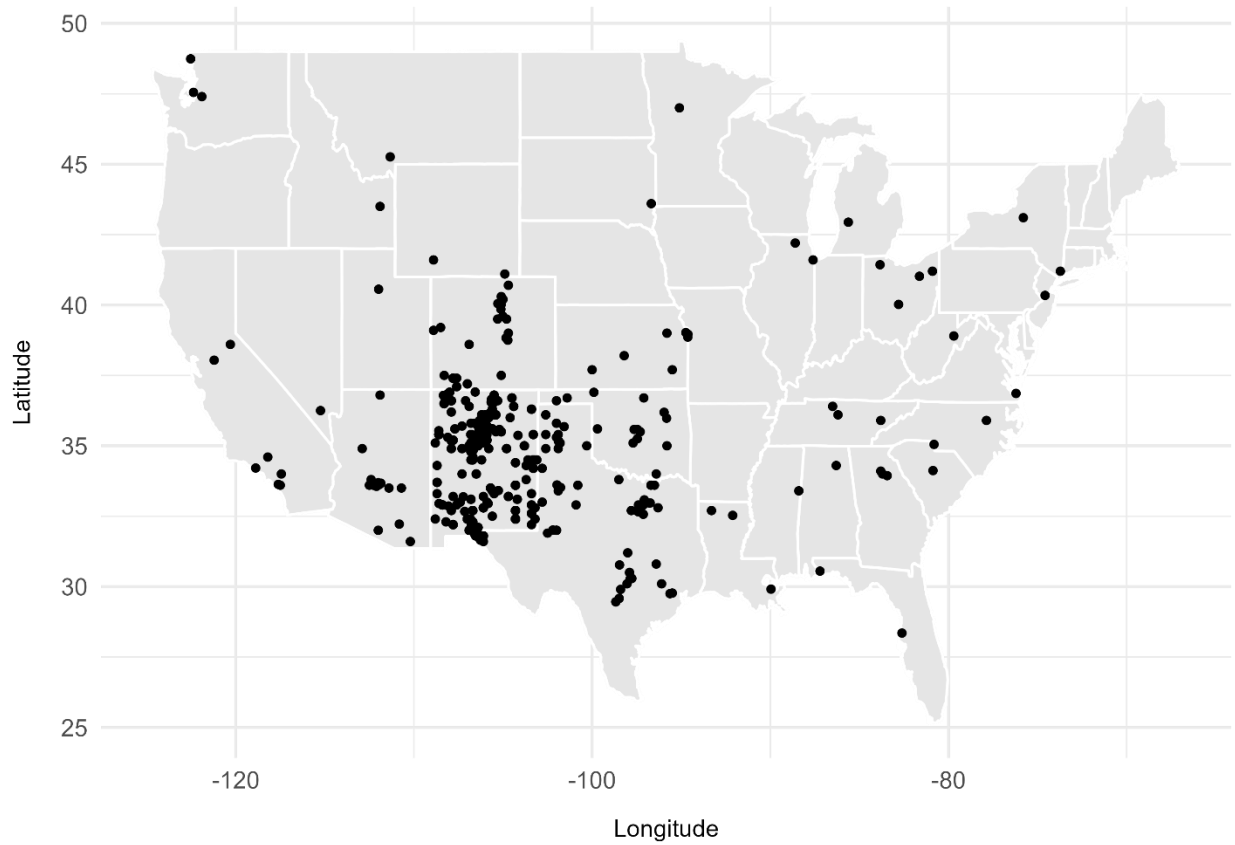


Figure 20. Location of survey participants based upon zip code. Note: one respondent from Alaska is not displayed.