

New Mexico Angler Satisfaction Report

2025-2026 License Year



Fisheries Management Division
New Mexico Department of Wildlife



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Cover Photo

San Juan River tailwater Brown Trout.

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Introduction

The New Mexico Department of Wildlife 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 methods and results from the 2026 survey that covered the 2025-26 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 8 to May 11, 2026. An email was sent to 20,000 anglers that purchased a fishing license in the 2025-26 license year (April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026). Two additional email invitations were sent after the original invitation (e.g., 7 days and 15 days post) as a reminder to enhance response rate. During the 2025-26 license year, 282,864 fishing license were sold but only 187,456 (66.2%) 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 14,530 (72.7%) resident and 5,470 (27.3%) non-resident anglers.

Table 1. Fishing license types showing percentage of total sold in 2025-26 license year and sample size of each license type for resident and nonresident anglers.

License type	Total (%)	Resident (n)	Nonresident (n)
Annual Fishing License	34.6	5,841	1,078
Game Hunting and Fishing License	17.4	3,480	0
1-Day Fishing License	15.1	900	2,116
5-Day Fishing License	10.3	86	1,969
Senior 70 and Over Fishing License	7.0	1,392	0
Junior Fishing License	6.9	1,078	307
Senior Fishing License	2.8	555	0
Junior Game Hunting and Fishing License	2.2	437	0
Senior Game Hunting and Fishing License	1.4	287	0
Disabled Veteran Game Hunt and Fish	0.9	191	0
Disabled Fishing License	0.9	191	0
Disabled Game Hunting and Fishing License	0.4	85	0
Free Foster Family Fishing License	0.0	7	0

The survey included 24 questions, with 19 questions focused on fishing in New Mexico and the final five questions being demographic. Seven of the questions were focused on the San Juan River tailwater trout fishery. Three new questions were included to determine the use of live sonar by New Mexico anglers. 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 863 licensed anglers, a 4.3% response rate. Response rate by residency was similar to the initial sample, 76.8% were resident licensed anglers and 23.2% were licensed non-resident anglers. Approximately 46% of the responses were received within the first seven days of the initial invitation and response rates significantly declined 72 hours after the first reminder was sent.

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. Of the 863 respondents, 13.9% 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 12.6% (Figure 1).

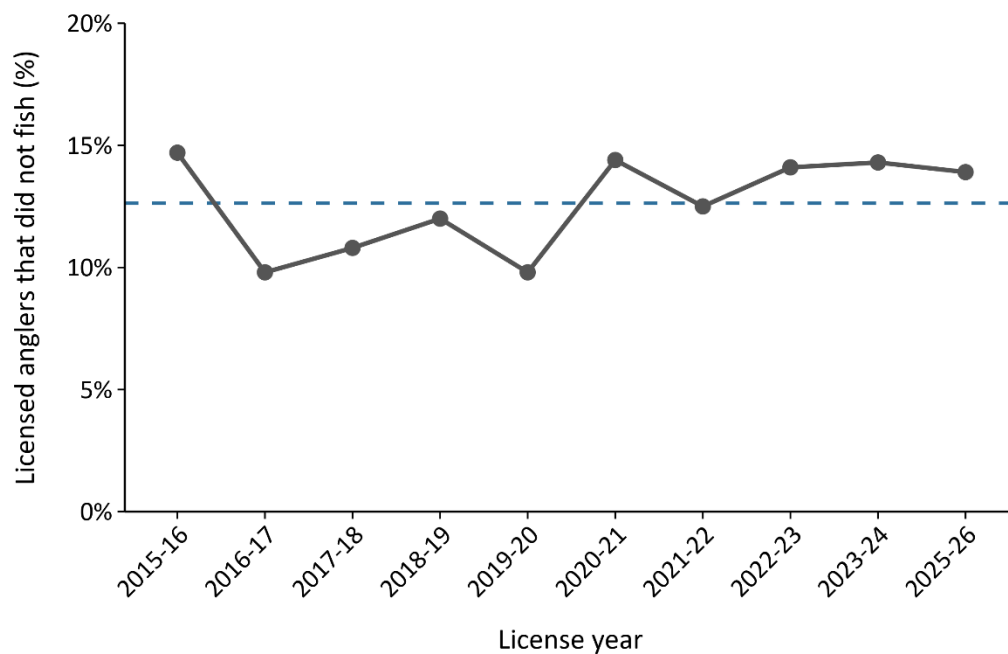


Figure 1. Percentage of anglers that reported that they did not fish during 2015-16 to 2025-26 license years (black line and circles) and the ten-license-year average (blue dashed line).

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 ($n = 743$), results showed a wide range of days fished, from 1 to 250 with a mean of 17.2 ± 1.2 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 2025-26 license year, most non-resident anglers fished 5 days or less while more than 50% of residents fished 6 days or more (Figure 3).

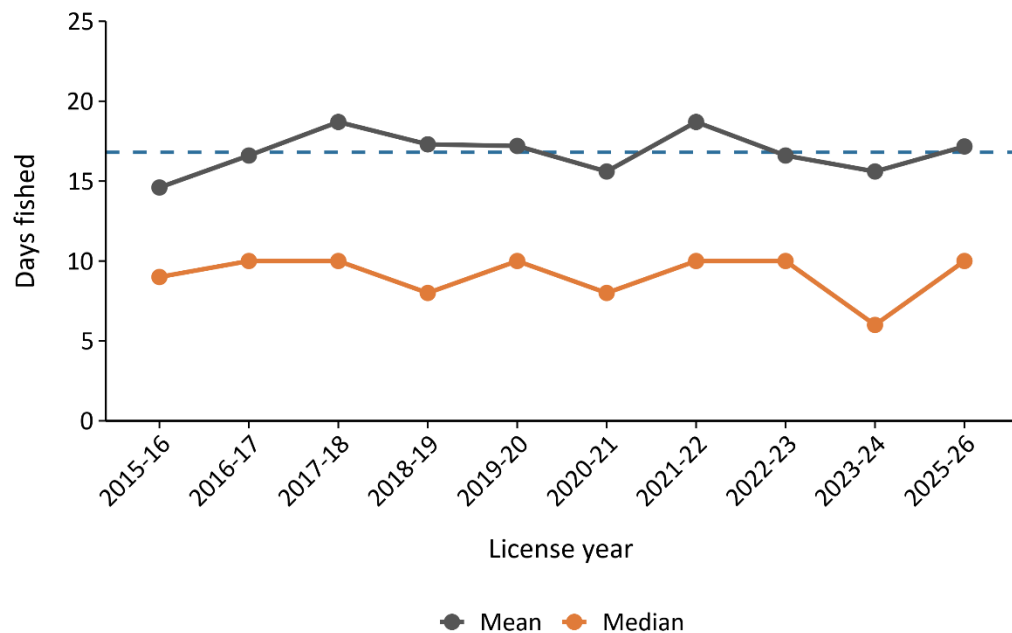


Figure 2. Average (black line and points) by license year, median (orange line and points), and 10-license-year average (blue dashed line) days fished by anglers that indicated they fish one or more days in New Mexico during the 2015-16 to 2025-26 license years.

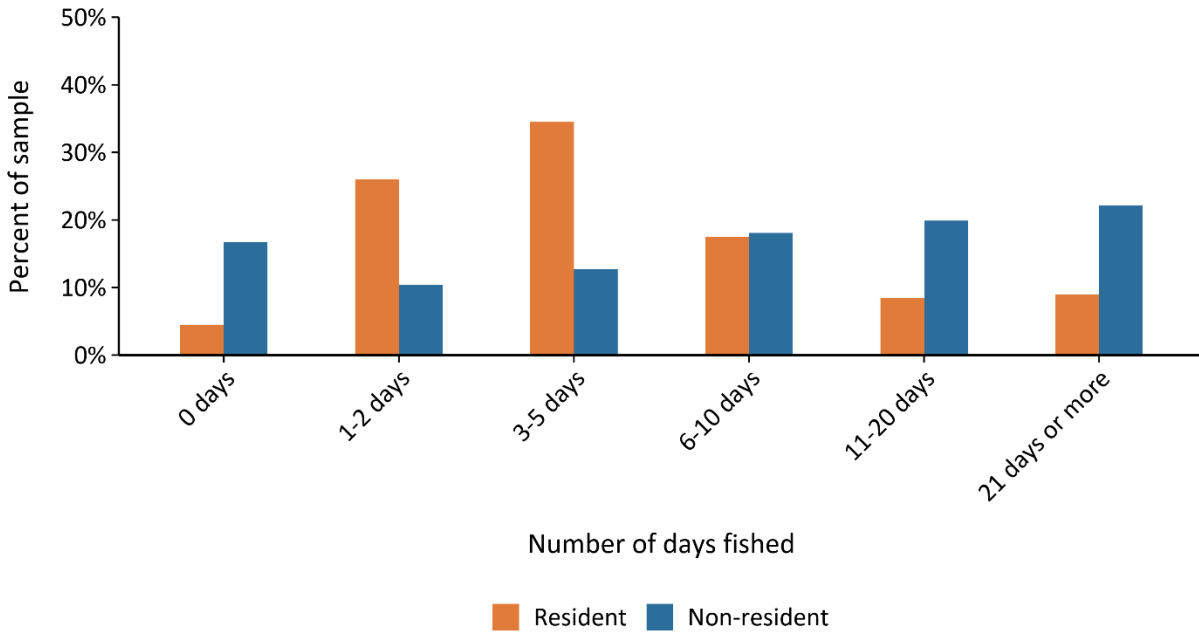


Figure 3. Number of days fished during the 2025-26 license year by resident and non-resident anglers.

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 (90.0%) 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 2025-26 license year. Like past years, non-residents continue to be more satisfied. About 77.5% of non-resident anglers gave a rating of 4 or 5, while only 62.4% of resident anglers gave the same rating. Also, dissatisfaction rate for non-resident anglers was 5.8% and 12.0% for resident anglers (Figure 5).

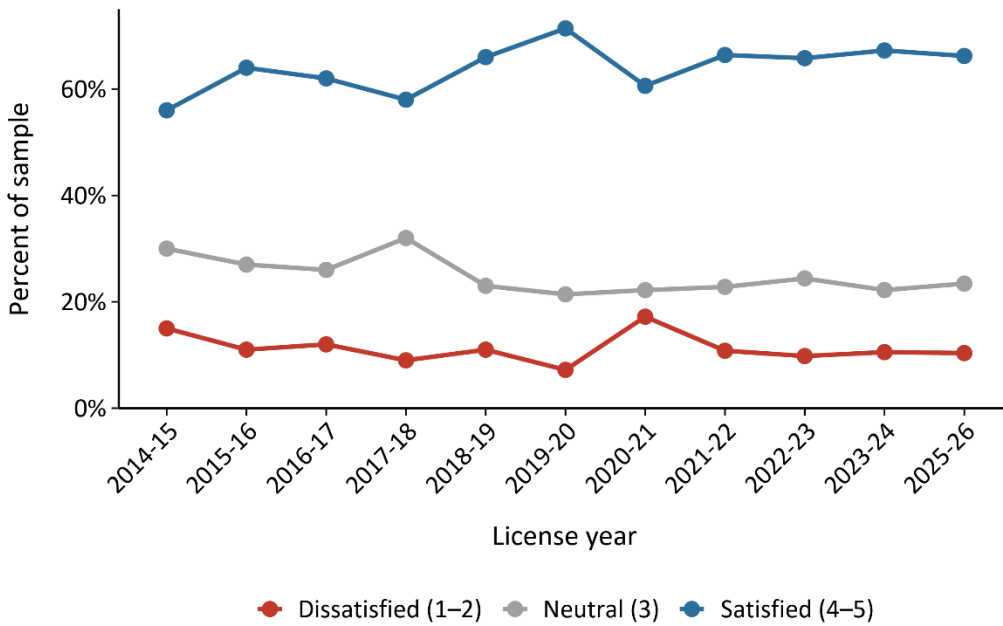


Figure 4. Overall satisfaction rating of anglers surveyed from the 2014-15 to 2025-26 license years. A rating of 1 was “not satisfied at all” and a rating of 5 was “very satisfied”.

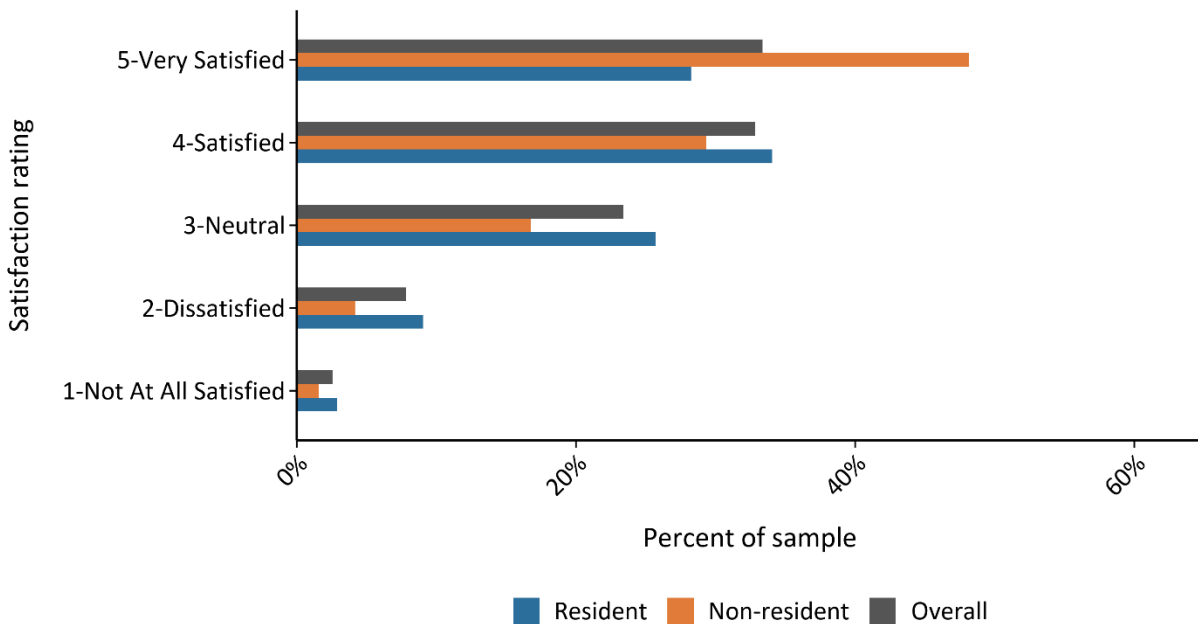


Figure 5. Satisfaction rate of resident and non-resident anglers during the 2025-26 license year.

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. Respondents could choose up to three categories for the satisfaction reasoning they gave. The top three reasons for anglers who indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” included the number of fish caught, size of fish caught, and little crowding when fishing (Figure 6). Anglers who indicated they were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” indicated the reason was because of the number of fish they caught, low water levels or stream flows, and the size of the fish they caught.

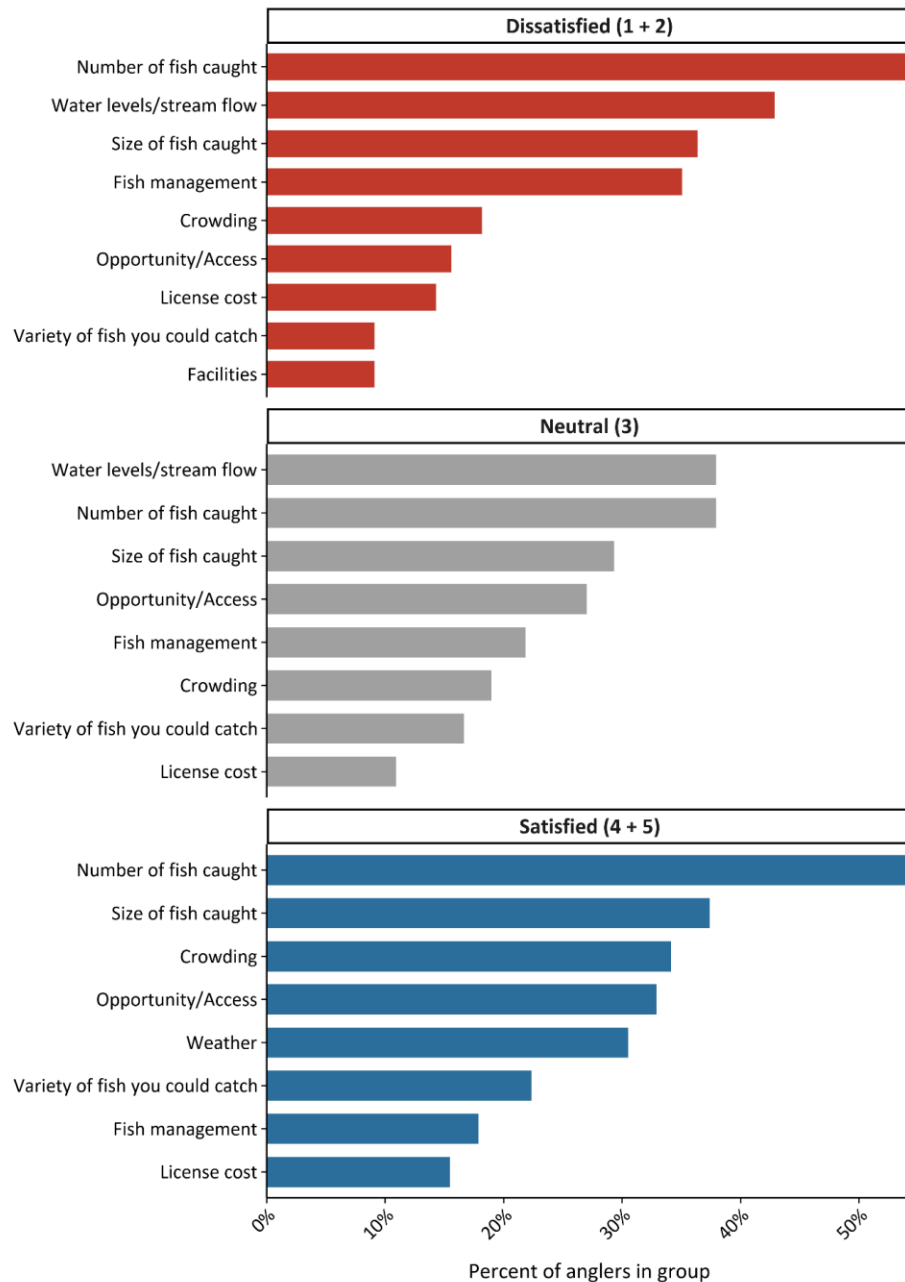


Figure 6. Angler reasons for their reported satisfaction rate during the 2025-26 license year.

Question 5. When fishing in New Mexico over the past 12 months, what types of waters did you fish?

To determine where anglers in New Mexico fished, respondents were asked the frequency in which they fished different water types. Both resident and non-resident anglers showed a similar pattern, more frequently fishing lakes or reservoirs and creeks, streams, or rivers compared to local/community ponds, remote/walk-in lakes, or drains/ditches (Figure 7). However, residents more frequently fished lakes or reservoirs in the state while non-residents more frequently fished creeks, streams and rivers. Drains or ditches were least frequently fished by both resident and non-resident anglers.

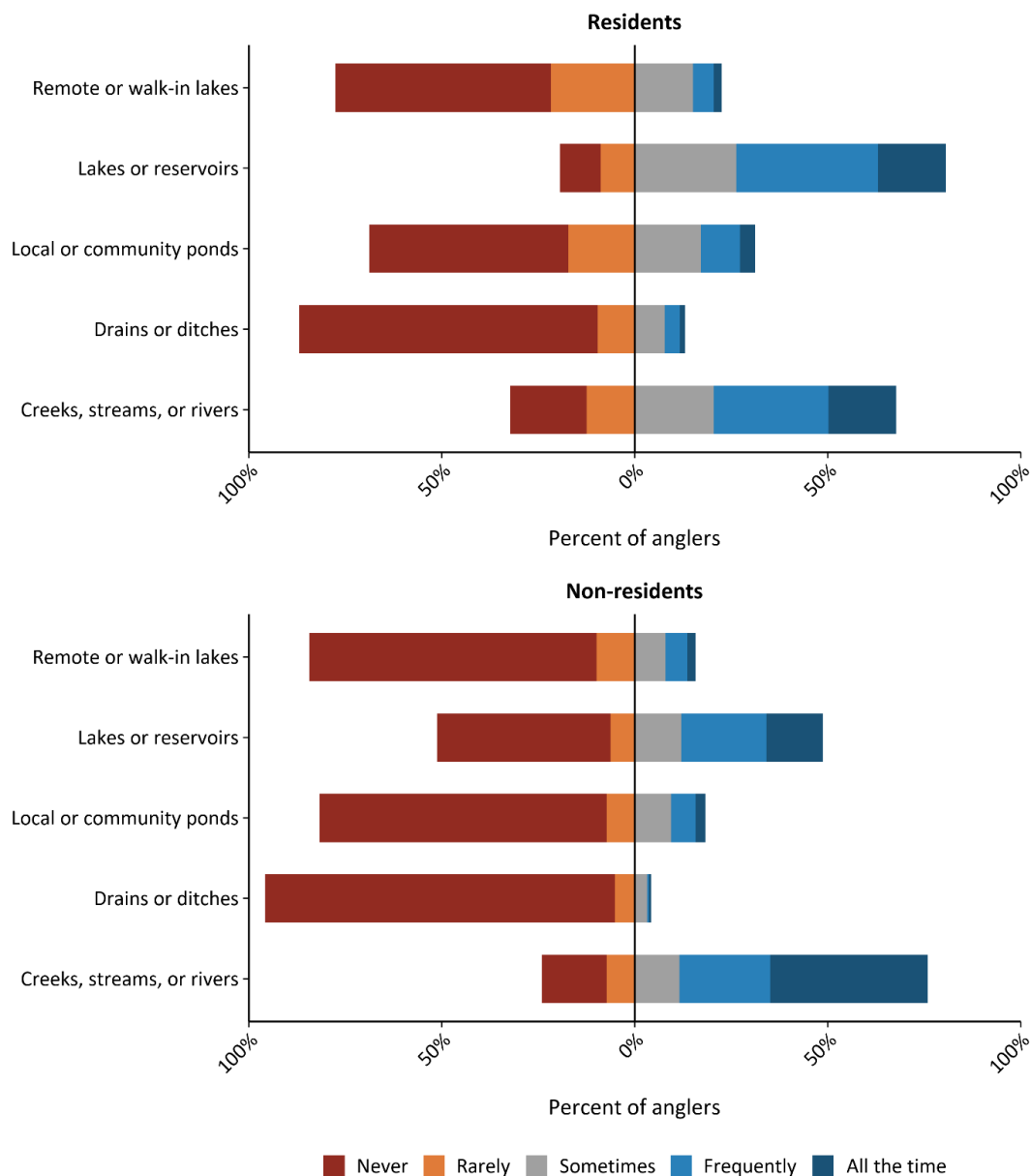


Figure 7. Frequency of water types fished in New Mexico by resident (top) and non-resident (bottom) anglers.

Question 6. Which of the following species or groups of species do you most prefer to fish for in New Mexico (may select up to 4)?

Anglers were asked which species or groups of species they prefer to fish for in New Mexico and were allowed to select up to four. The top three preferred species or groups of species were all coldwater species with the highest percentages being stocked Rainbow Trout, wild trout (Brown and Brook trout), and native trout (Rio Grande Cutthroat and Gila trout). The most preferred warmwater species included catfish, black bass (Largemouth, Smallmouth, and Spotted bass), and Walleye. The low preference for Striped Bass, tiger muskie, and hybrid striped bass (wipers) may be due to the lack of fishing opportunities for those species. Non-resident anglers preferred to fish for wild trout and native trout species at a higher percentage than resident anglers.

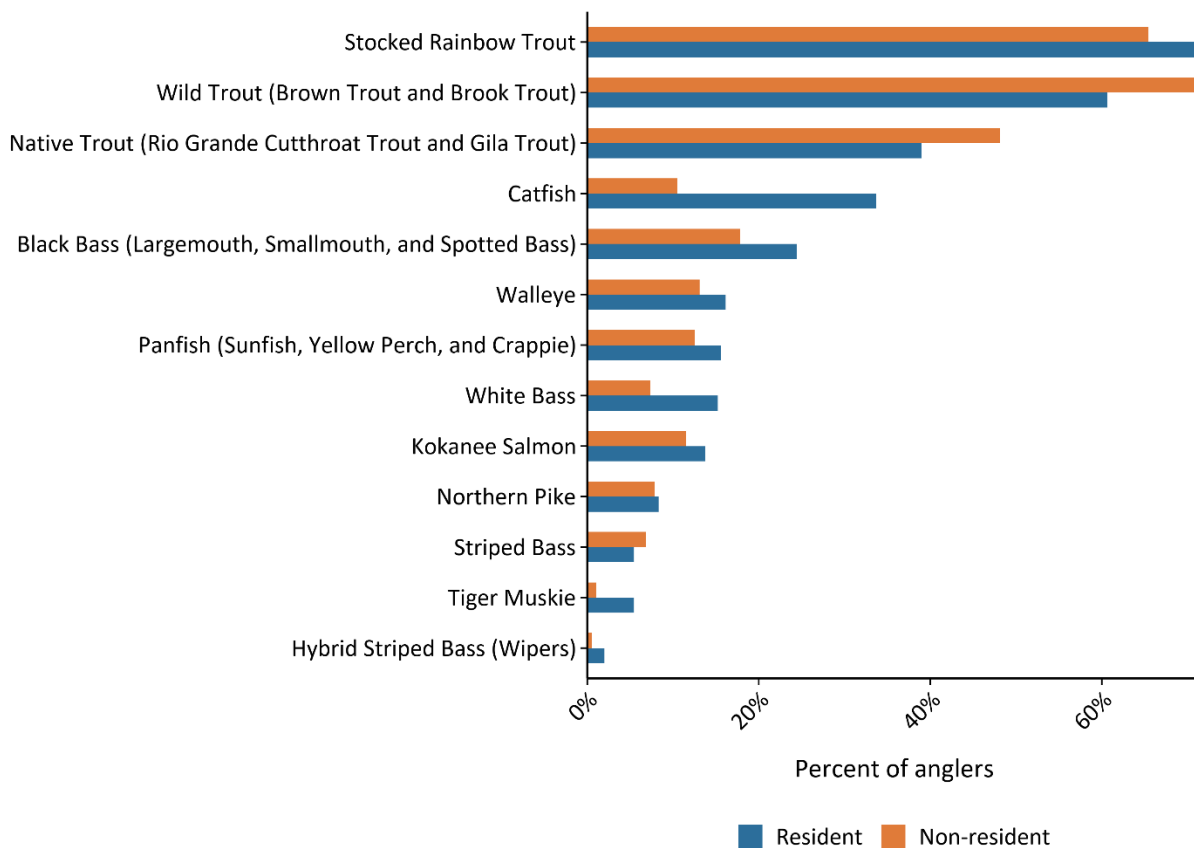


Figure 8. Species or groups of species preferred to fish for by resident and non-resident anglers in New Mexico.

Question 7. What species or groups of species would you prefer to have more fishing opportunities for in New Mexico (may select up to 3)?

Anglers were next asked which species or groups of species they would prefer to have more fishing opportunities for in New Mexico and could select up to three answers. Coldwater species were again the top answers, similar to preference. However, wild trout (Brown and Brook trout) were now the top preferred group of species for additional fishing opportunities. Black bass (Largemouth, Smallmouth, and Spotted bass) were the top warmwater species group that anglers preferred to have more fishing opportunities for.

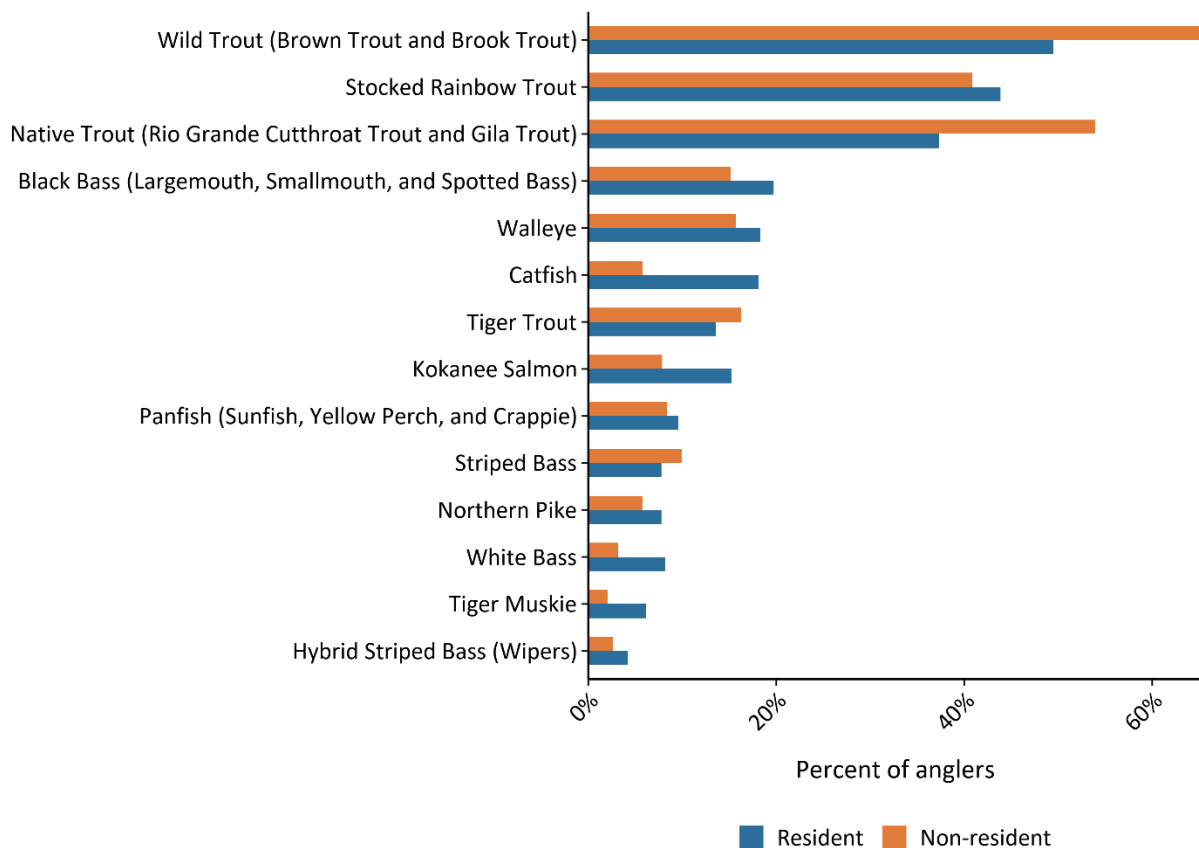


Figure 9. Species or groups of species that anglers in New Mexico would like to have more opportunities to fish for.

Question 8. Of the following statements which comes closest to your personal view? (Catch-and-release vs. catch-and-keep)

This question was asked to determine if anglers prefer to practice catch-and-release or keep most of the fish they catch. During this survey, most (65.4%) anglers indicated they prefer to release

most of the fish they catch. Over the last ten license years, percentage of anglers who prefer to practice catch and release angling has remained largely static at around 65% (Figure 10).

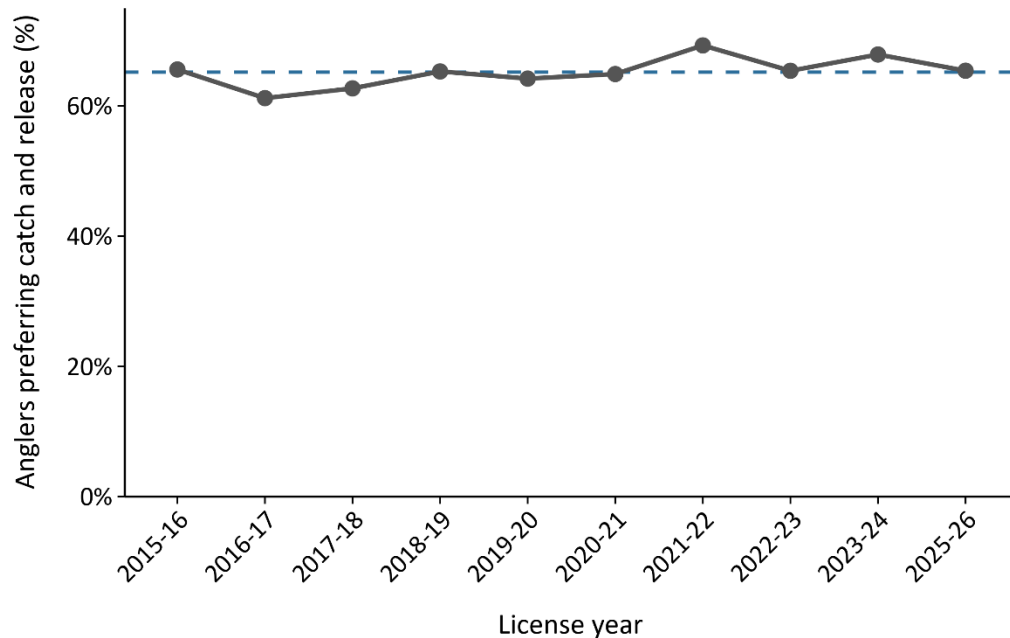


Figure 10. Percentage of anglers that indicated they release most of the fish they catch. The dashed line indicates the 10-year average.

Question 9. 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 (62.7%) anglers indicated they chose their fishing location based on where they will “catch lots of fish”. Over the past 10 license years, the percentage of anglers who prefer to choose their fishing location based on where they will catch lots of fish has remained around 62%.

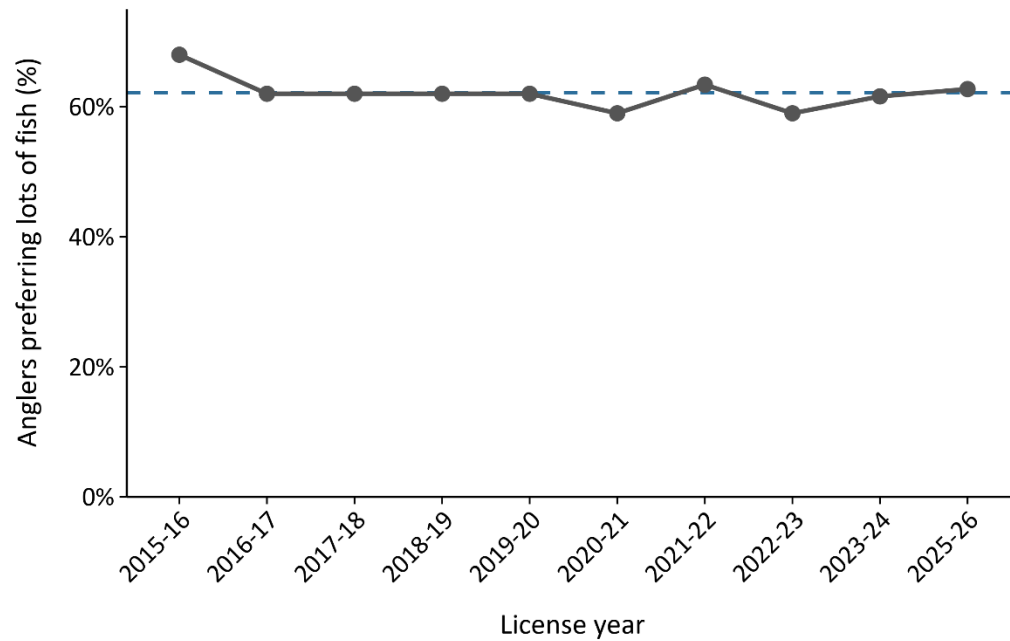


Figure 11. Percentage of anglers who indicated that they select their fishing location based on where they will “catch lots of fish”. The dashed line indicates the 10-year average.

Question 10. Did you fish the San Juan River tailwater fishery within the past 12 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 11 to 16. About 19.9% of anglers indicated they fished the San Juan River tailwater fishery within the past 12 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 12). Anglers who did fish the San Juan River fished it an average of 7 days in the past 12 months, with a range of 1 to 180 days (Table 2). Non-resident anglers fish on average 3 days fewer than resident anglers.

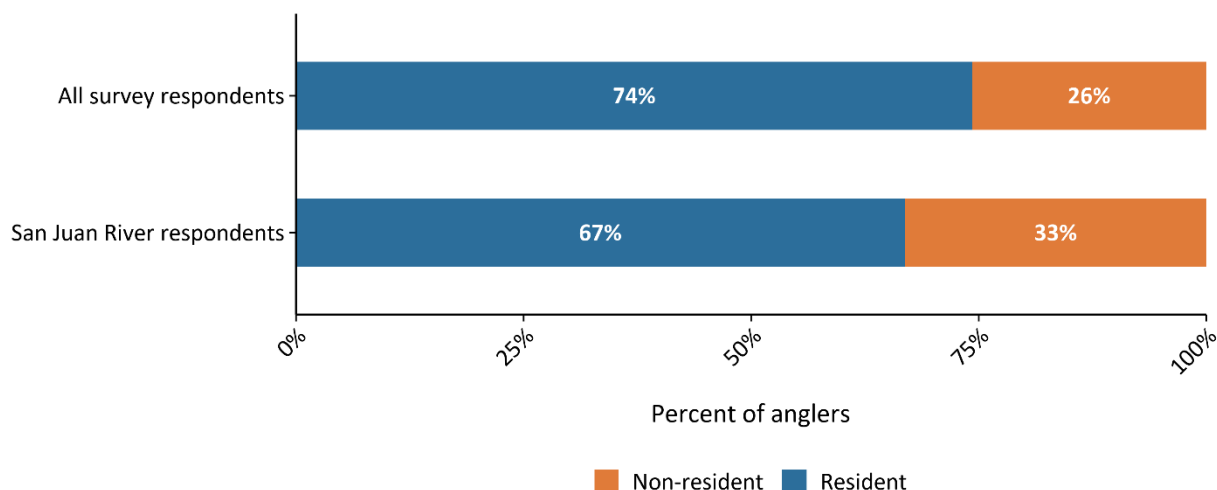


Figure 12. Resident status of survey respondents that fished the San Juan River and all survey respondents who fished in New Mexico during the 2025-26 license year.

Table 2. Days fished on the San Juan River by resident, non-resident, and all anglers during the 2025-26 license year.

Respondents	N	Minimum days	Mean days	Maximum days
Resident	99	1	8.9	180
Non-resident	49	1	4.3	22
All	148	1	7.4	180

Question 11. Did you fish with a professional guide on the San Juan River?

Most (62.8%) San Juan River anglers indicated they did not fish with a professional guide. New Mexico residents primarily fish without a guide on every trip (73.7%), however nonresidents primarily fished with a guide on some trips (22.4%) or on every trip (36.7%). About half that fished with a guide stated they fished with a guide on every visit (Figure 13).

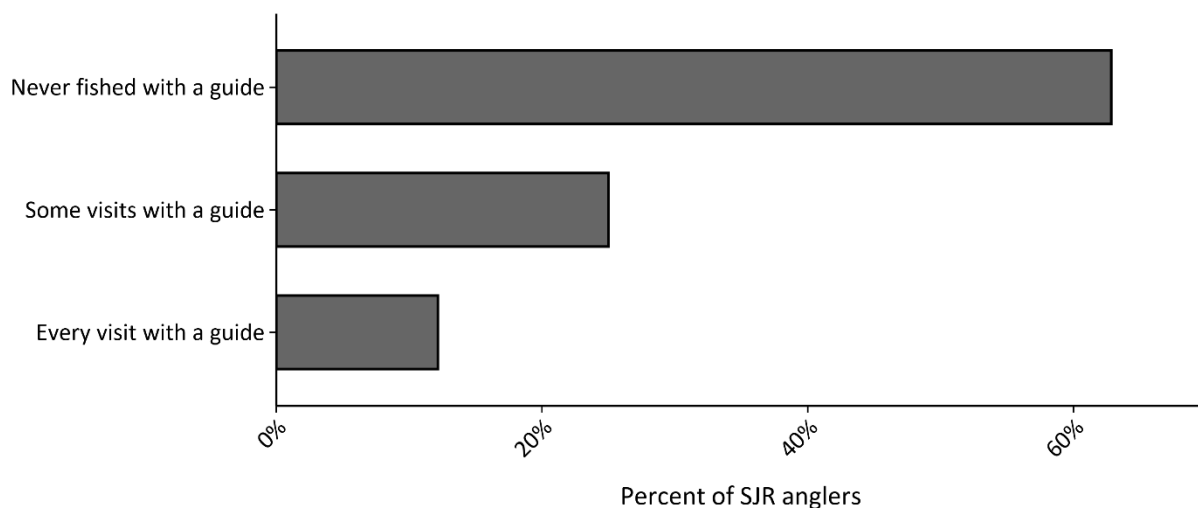


Figure 13. Percentage of anglers that fished with and without a professional guide on the San Juan River tailwater fishery during the 2025-26 license year.

Questions 12-14. How often did you fish different sections of the San Juan River?

Anglers who responded that they fished the San Juan River, were asked about the frequency they fished different sections of the river. The Special Trout Water, from the dam downstream to Crusher Hole Day Use Area, was fished more frequently than any other section of the river (Figure 14). The lower section of the tailwater from the Rainbow Lodge boat ramp downstream to the Hammond Tract Wildlife Management Area was fished the least frequently.

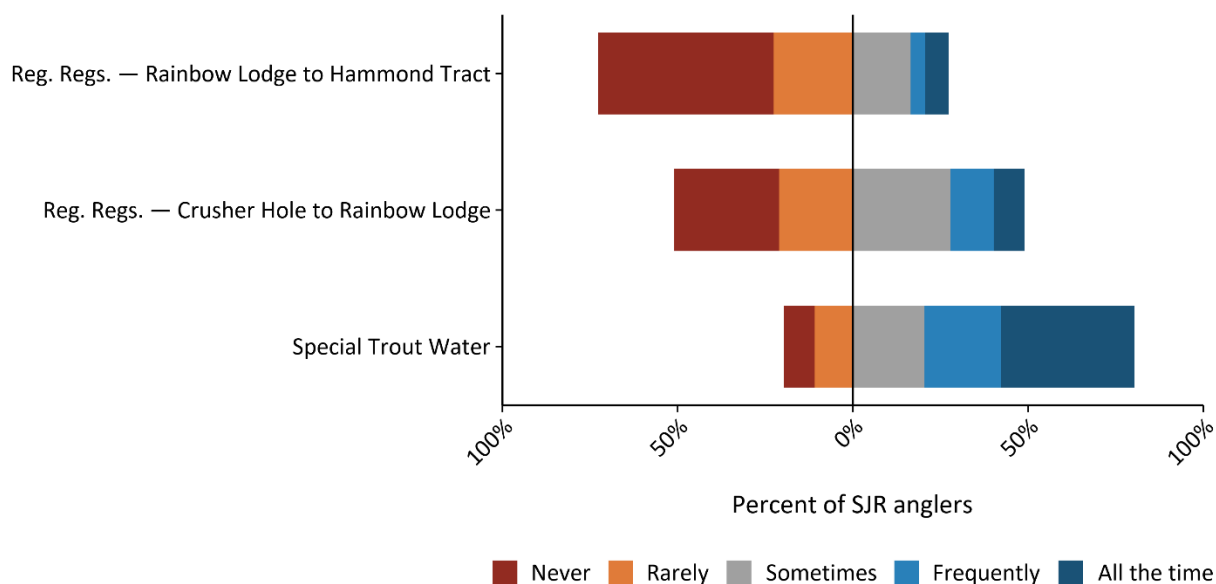


Figure 14. Frequency of how often anglers who fished the San Juan River fish different sections of the tailwater.

Question 15. Did you catch any fish from the San Juan River during the past 12 months?

Of the 148 respondents that fish the San Juan River in the past 12 months, 140 (94.5%) indicated that they had caught fish.

Question 16. How many total of each trout species did you catch during the past 12 months (Rainbow and Brown trout)?

Most (94.5%) of the anglers who fished the San Juan River in the past 12 months caught fish, with the majority of fish caught being Rainbow Trout. Mean number of Rainbow Trout (25.8 ± 5.0) caught per angler was significantly higher than the mean number of Brown Trout (10.6 ± 2.0) caught per angler (Figure 15). Most anglers reported catching ten or less Brown Trout during the past 12 months (Figure 16).

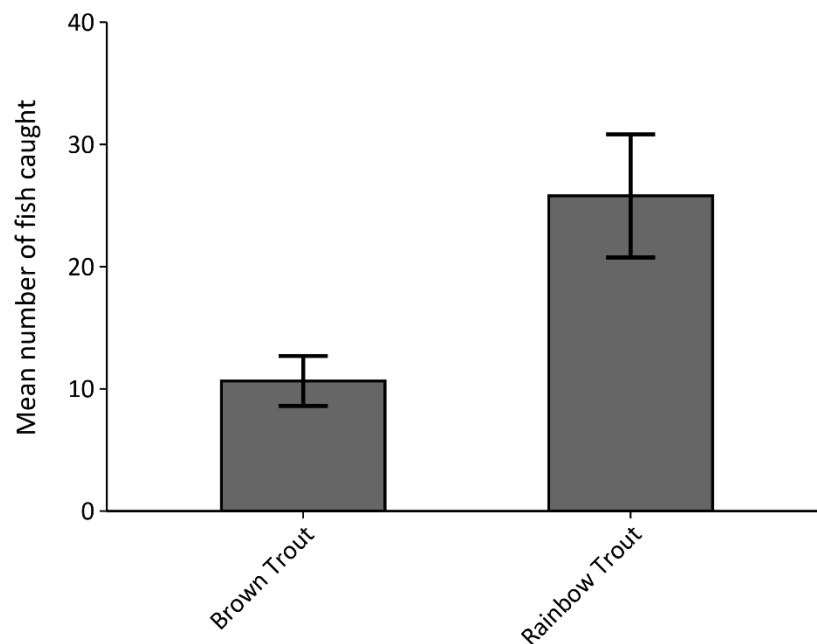


Figure 15. Mean number of Rainbow and Brown trout caught per angler the past 12 months from the San Juan River during the 2025-26 license year.

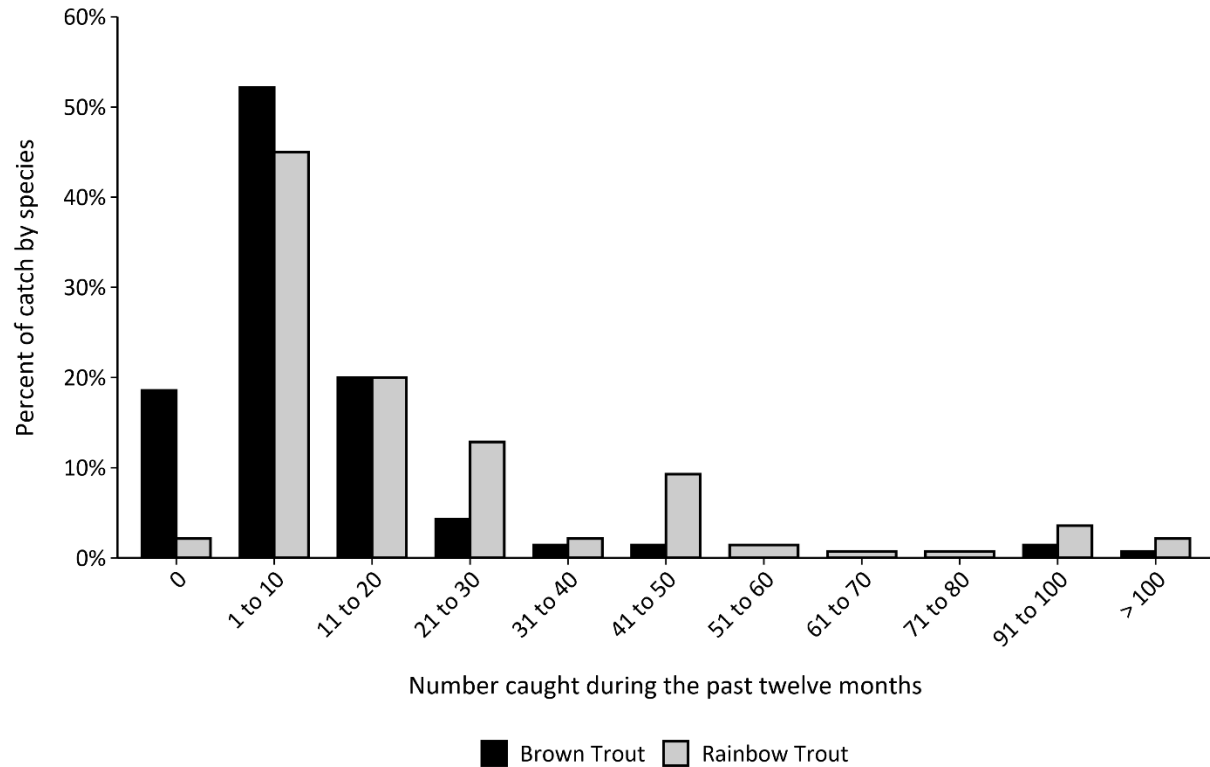


Figure 16. Relative frequency of Rainbow and Brown trout caught by anglers fishing the San Juan River during the 2025-26 license year.

Question 17. Did you fish in New Mexico using front facing/live sonar during the past 12 months?

To assess the adoption of new fishing technology by anglers in New Mexico, this question asked anglers if they used front facing/live sonar when fishing in New Mexico during the 2025-26 license year. Only 5.2% of anglers who fished New Mexico in the past 12 months used front facing/live sonar. Most anglers who did use live sonar were New Mexico residents (71.8%; Figure 17).

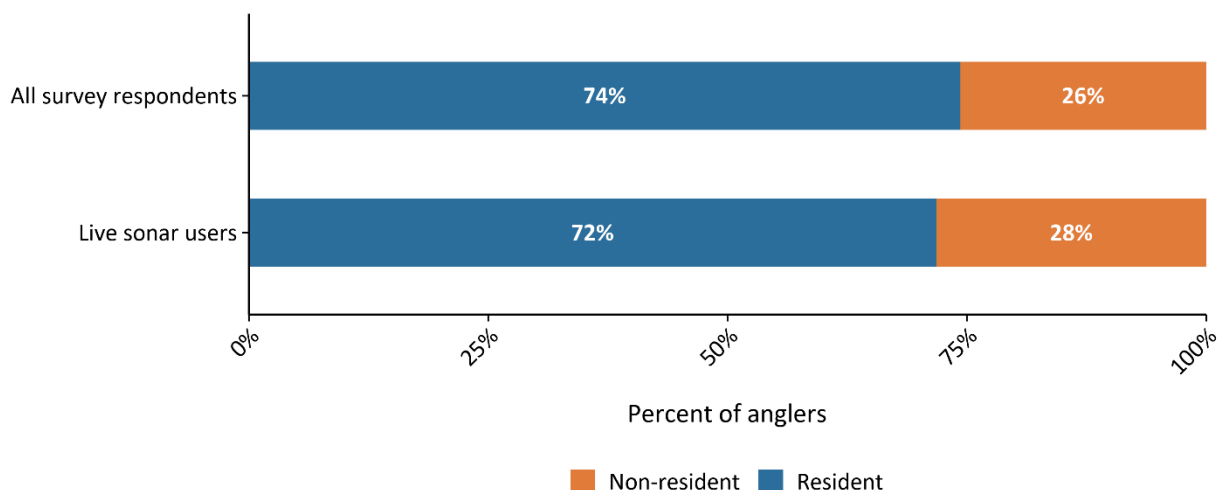


Figure 17. Resident status of survey respondents that used live sonar to fish in New Mexico and all survey respondents who fished in New Mexico during the 2025-26 license year.

Question 18. What species did you target with front facing/live sonar when fishing in New Mexico during the past 12 months (select all that apply)?

Anglers who reported using live sonar were asked two follow up questions. The first question asked what species they targeted while using live sonar. Most anglers reported targeting Black Bass (Largemouth, Smallmouth, and Spotted bass) followed by trout (Figure 18). Anglers also reported targeting kokanee, Northern Pike, and Yellow Perch when fishing using live sonar.

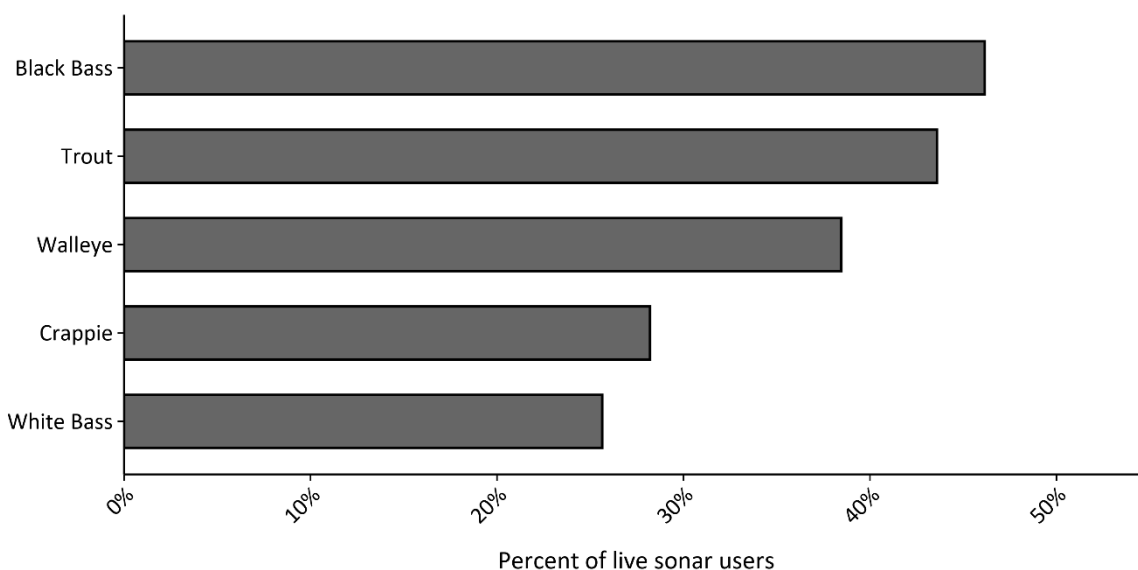


Figure 18. Species targeted by anglers in New Mexico who used live sonar to fish during the 2025-26 license year.

Question 19. Did the use of front facing/live sonar increase the catch rates of the species you targeted?

There was a near even split in the percentage of anglers who used live sonar for fishing who reported that its use increased (52.6%) their catch of targeted species and those who reported no increase (47.4%).

Questions 20 to 24 were related to demographics and were optional to answer by survey participants.

Question 20. What is your gender?

Most of the survey participants identified themselves as male, representing 83.6% of the sample (Figure 19).

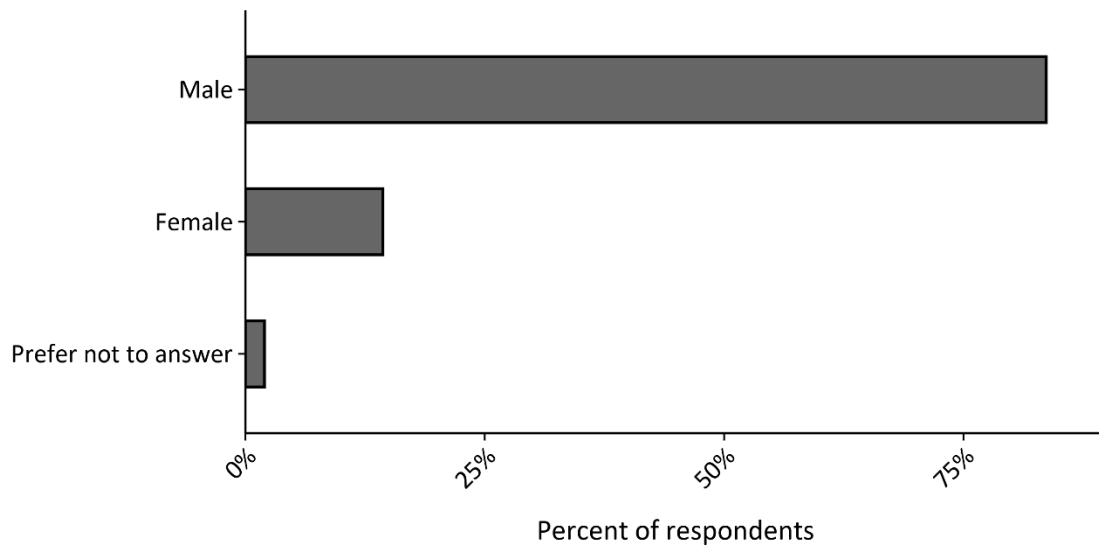


Figure 19. Gender of survey respondents.

Question 21. What is your age category?

The most represented age category was 65 years are older (37.4%), followed by age category 50 to 64 years (29.3%; Figure 20).

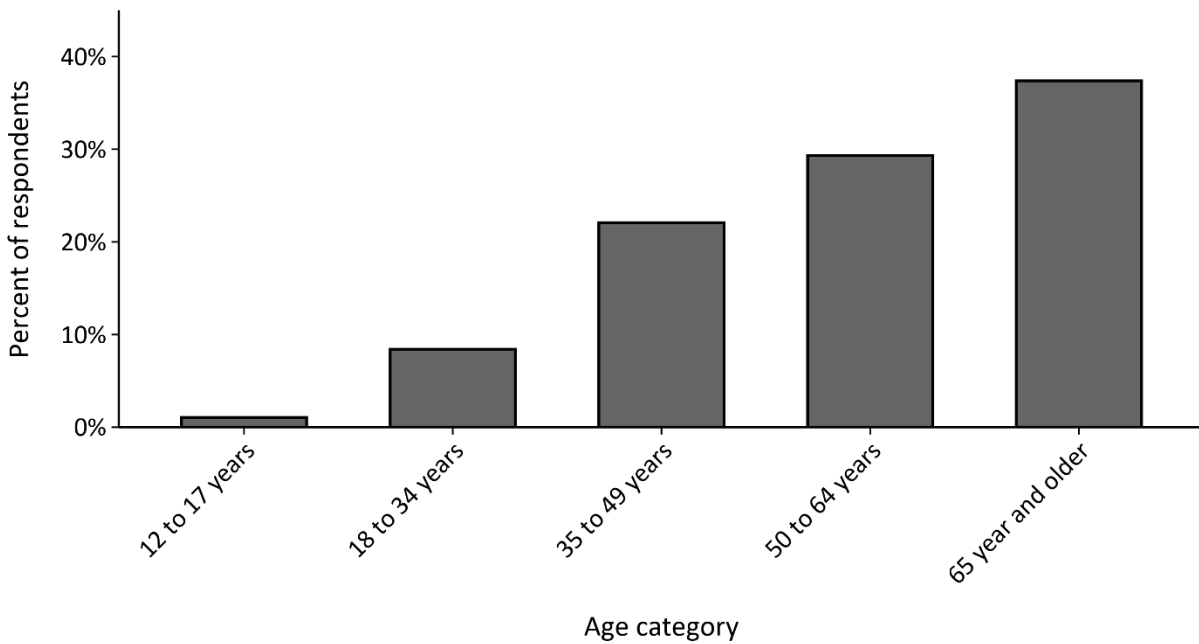


Figure 20. Age category of survey respondents.

Question 22. Do you consider yourself to be (ethnicity).

The majority of respondents identified themselves as Anglo/Caucasian (51.5%) followed by Hispanic (29.7%; Figure 21).

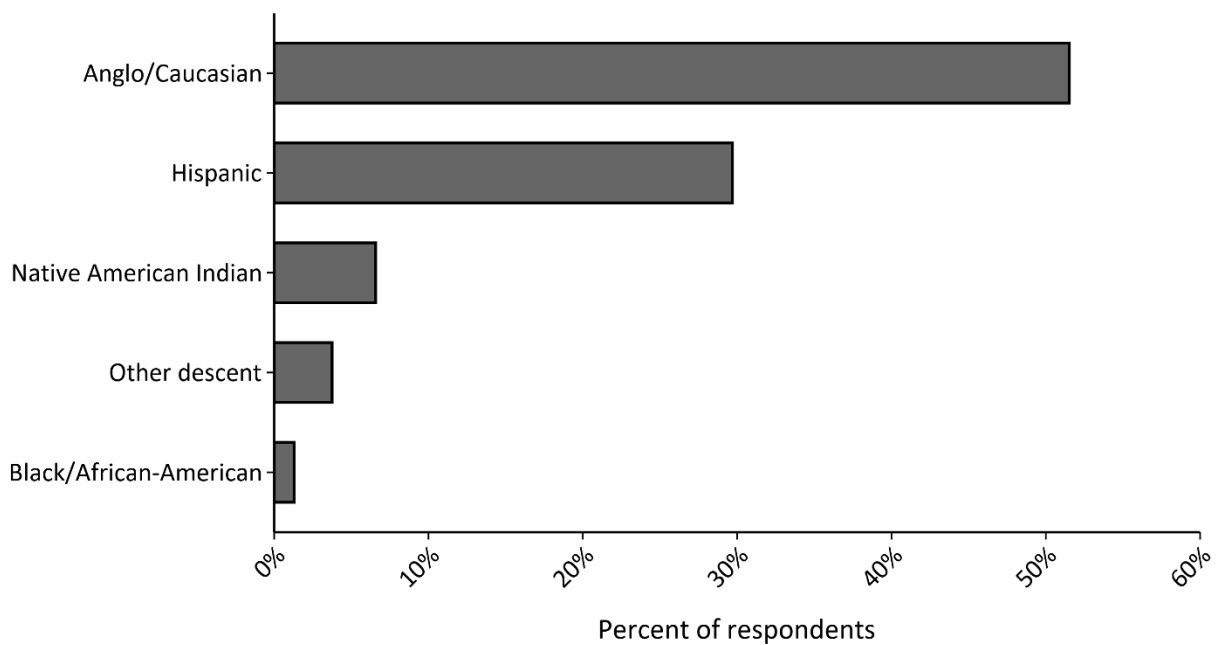


Figure 21. Ethnicity of survey respondents.

Question 23. What is the highest level of education you had the opportunity to completed?

The largest percentage of survey respondents indicated that they had completed “some college, associates degrees, or vocational certificate” (Figure 22).

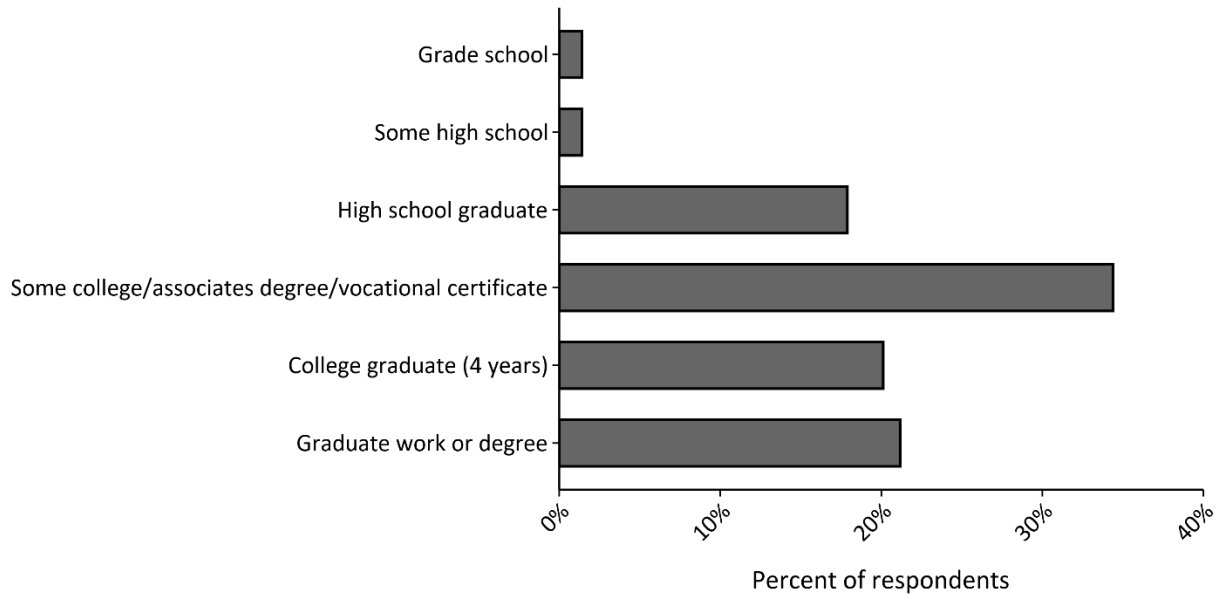


Figure 22. Highest education level of survey respondents.

Question 24. What is your zip code?

Responses were received from residents of all 33 counties in New Mexico. Responses from non-residents were received from 27 different states.

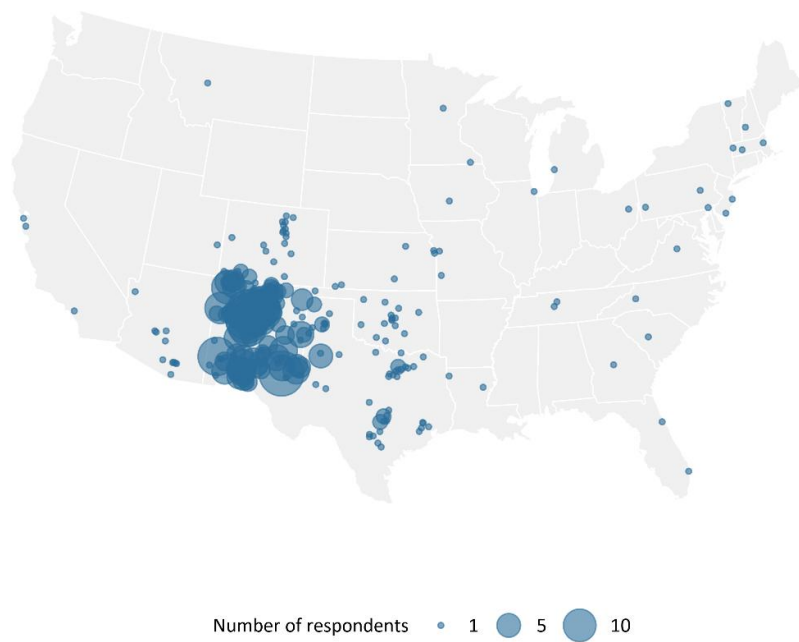


Figure 23. Location of survey participants based upon zip code.