



Human Dimensions of Wildlife

An International Journal

ISSN: 1087-1209 (Print) 1533-158X (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uhdw20>

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To cite this article: Craig Miller (2003) Use of the Internet Among Illinois Hunters: Defining the Market, *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 8:4, 307-308, DOI: [10.1080/716100424](https://doi.org/10.1080/716100424)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/716100424>



Published online: 02 Feb 2011.



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Findings Abstract

Use of the Internet Among Illinois Hunters: Defining the Market

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State wildlife agencies often look to the Internet as a means of providing hunters and other constituents with access to agency services and information. To examine hunter use of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Internet site, questions concerning use and types of information sought were included on three separate surveys in Illinois: 2000–01 Illinois hunter harvest survey ($n=2,142$, response rate=74%), 2001–02 Illinois hunter harvest survey ($n=1,906$, response rate=66%), and 2003 Illinois deer hunter survey ($n=2,683$, response rate=79%).

Internet use by hunters ranged from 20% among hunters in the 2000–01 hunter harvest survey to 34% among hunters in the 2001–02 study. Most frequent use of the Internet was to find information on equipment (73%), hunting regulations in Illinois (57%), places to hunt in Illinois (46%), to print permit applications (29%), and to find information on Chronic Wasting Disease (20%). Only 7% used the IDNR Internet site to buy licenses.

The 2001–02 Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey contained more detailed data on Internet use. Bivariate correlations showed use of the Internet was significantly ($p<0.001$) related to age ($R^2=-0.31$), years of hunting experience ($R^2=-0.27$), income ($R^2=0.248$), and membership in hunting organizations ($R^2=0.18$). A logistic regression profiled Internet users (Yes/No) by demographics (age and income), years of hunting experience, and membership in hunting organizations. The logistic model indicated that Internet use differed by age, years of hunting experience, income, and membership in hunting organizations (Table 1). Internet users tended to be younger hunters with higher incomes and fewer years of hunting experience, and who held membership in hunting organizations.

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TABLE 1 Results of Logistic Regression Model for Internet Use Among Illinois Hunters

Variable	χ^2	df	p-value	Exp(β)	Phi
Age	188.54	3	<0.0001	0.96	0.318
Years hunting experience	146.20	3	<0.0001	0.99	0.281
Income	121.17	3	<0.0001	1.29	0.276
Membership in hunting organizations	59.12	1	<0.0001	2.04	0.179

Findings of this study indicate Internet use is higher among younger hunters; however, this hunter cohort is the least represented among hunter populations in many states. For example, less than 6% of Illinois hunters are 20 years of age or less (C. A. Miller, unpublished data). If state wildlife agencies are going to depend on Internet use for sale of licenses or permits, or as a means of distributing information to hunters, this method appears to appeal to a disproportionate segment of the hunting population. State agencies need to be aware of the use of the Internet among hunters in their respective states and understand market segmentation for using the Internet as a means to serve their hunters.