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Use of AR-platform Firearms for Hunting Shows Significant Increase

As the modularity, versatility, accessibility, and in many cases affordability, of AR-platform rifles has become more widely recognized over the past decade, so too has the popularity of the platform grown for hunting.

That's the gist of new research from the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation (OSCF) that indicates 41 percent of respondents used an AR for hunting. That's a marked increase from the 25 percent who hunted with ARs the last time a similar question was asked, back in 2014.

Of course, ARs have become much more prevalent over the past decade, as customers recognize the broad capabilities of the platform, from personal defense to competition to hunting, and as more ARs are available on gun-store racks.

The increase in field deployment of ARs, sometimes called Modern Sporting Rifles (MSRs), over the past decade correlates with a spike in production. From 2014 to 2020, the share of ARs in the total number of firearms manufactured in the U.S. rose from 11 percent to 23.4 percent. Today, ARs are the most popular style of rifle produced in the U.S.

The new research into hunters' preferences for ARs, released by OSCF, is entitled "Proliferation of Hunting with AR-Platform / Modern Sporting Rifles." The survey and corresponding report was conducted for OSCF by the outdoor industry research firm Responsive Management.

While the survey found rising use of ARs for various hunting purposes, researchers also teased out a number of other practices, perceptions, and ambitions related to the firearm type, which is often denounced in mainstream media and has been banned in some states and municipalities as an "assault rifle" or "assault-style weapon." Over 500 self-identified hunters over age 18 participated in the survey, which was balanced both demographically and geographically to include a diversity of responses.

Among the more interesting results of the survey is that nearly half of respondents say their favorite hunting firearm is a traditional rifle, defined as a rifle that's not an AR. Another quarter prefer shotguns. But fully 17 percent of hunters prefer AR-platform rifles for hunting. Those respondents who said they hunt with an AR are dedicated to the platform.



Nearly a quarter of hunters who hunt with an AR have been doing so for 6 to 10 years; another 57 percent have been doing it for the past 5 years.

About 80 percent of AR hunters use their firearm to hunt large game, defined as deer or elk. That's a significant increase from the 57 percent registered in 2014. Thirty-one percent say their preferred quarry is small-game, defined as rabbits and squirrels. That's on par with the 2014 survey.

The survey further asked respondents their main reason for using an MSR for hunting. Over a third cited ease of shooting, while another 31 percent said their main reason was accuracy. Reliability and light weight were the next-highest reasons for hunting with an AR.

Surveyors asked a forward-looking question of those respondents who have not yet hunted with an AR: "If it was legal to do so in your state, how likely would it be that you would hunt with an AR-platform rifle?" Just over half of hunters (51 percent) indicated being very or somewhat likely to hunt with an AR, which indicates that the market penetration for the platform hasn't peaked among hunters.

"It was not surprising to learn that hunting with AR-platform / Modern Sporting Rifles is on the rise," says Jim Curcuruto, executive director of Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation. "I was surprised, however, to see that more than 50 percent of hunters that are not currently using AR-platform rifles to hunt with, responded that they are likely to try hunting with these versatile rifles in the future."

The entire survey, including methodology and data analysis, is available at the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation [website](#). The Proliferation of Hunting with AR-Platform/Modern Sporting Rifles survey was funded by a Multistate Conservation Grant jointly managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

About the Outdoor Industry Communication Council (OICC):

Formed around the commitment to educate all Americans about the origins of conservation funding in America, the Outdoor Industry Communication Council (OICC) is managed by Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation (OSCF) and Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). OICC works with outdoor writers to develop informative content that is available to all outdoor organizations and media at no cost. A primary goal of the OICC is to better inform and promote the positive contributions that wildlife agencies, industry manufacturers, NGO's and end users such as hunters, anglers, trappers and target shooters make to conservation. Outdoor organizations interested in conservation are welcome to use any OICC content to expand the reach of messages created by the OICC. To become a member of the



Outdoor Industry Communication Council, contact Jim Curcuruto of OSCF (203) 450-7202 jim@stewardsofconservation.org or Jon Gassett of WMI at (502) 330-9025 jgassett@wildlifemgt.org. There are no costs involved to become a member of the OICC. Members may utilize OICC materials as they see fit with no restrictions. For additional information visit <https://www.outdoorstewards.org/outdoor-industry-communication-council-oicc/>

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