



# PATHS TO PARTICIPATION

*How to help hunters and target shooters try  
new shooting sports activities.*



## Overview

The purpose of this project is to help improve hunting and shooting sports marketing efforts by describing how current hunters and shooters can be encouraged to try other shooting activities. To achieve this, a custom survey was fielded through NSSF partner organizations from June 2017 to August 2017. Qualified survey respondents were those who participated in hunting or recreational shooting at least once within the past three years. Qualified respondents were then asked questions about their introduction and evolution through various hunting and shooting activities. Previous and current activities, as well as activities they would be interested in trying, were all evaluated. All individuals in this analysis were at least moderately interested in the addressed activity, as determined by a survey question.

The sample for this study included individuals recruited by NSSF partner organizations. The results are not representative of the population of hunters and shooters, but rather the constituency of NSSF's partner organizations. The results are not meant to be representative of all hunters and shooters, but instead were designed to support hunter and shooter *retention* efforts by explaining interest levels in new shooting sports activities and how to best help current hunters and shooters try new activities.

As a result, these results do not focus on how to recruit new, first time participants to the hunting and shooting sports, but instead focus on how to encourage our current customers to try new activities.

## Introduction

As is normal, people frequently take on new recreational activities and drop others. As the shooting sports industry, the concern is our customers might drop shooting sports completely. The purpose of this study was to identify opportunities and tactics to encourage current customers to try new forms of hunting and shooting activities.

Hunters generally want to try new hunting activities that are not readily available in their home region. For example, the biggest interest for pig hunting comes from the Midwest while the greatest interest in elk and waterfowl hunting is in the South. While this makes sense, given the costs associated with travel, interest still exists in hunting different species or trying new methods close to home. For target shooting, there is little difference across the regions. Overall, the greatest interest in trying new shooting activities lies within the South and the Midwest. The many types of hunting and shooting activities available to promote are presented within this report.

There are a few hunting and shooting activities where the majority want to try it for the first time, such as target shooting with a crossbow or pig hunting. Accessibility, time and knowing how to get started are some of the most common hurdles we need to help our customers overcome. For those that want to hunt, it's difficult to find convenient and affordable lands, while target shooters often have trouble finding a local range offering the activities they are interested in trying. Both shooters and hunters hesitate in buying equipment needed for new activities before they try the sport. These and other issues are also outlined within this report.

This report presents a wealth of information. Recognizing most hunting and shooting sports programs and organizations focus on specific types of activities, after some brief overall insights, details are presented for specific types of hunting and shooting sports.

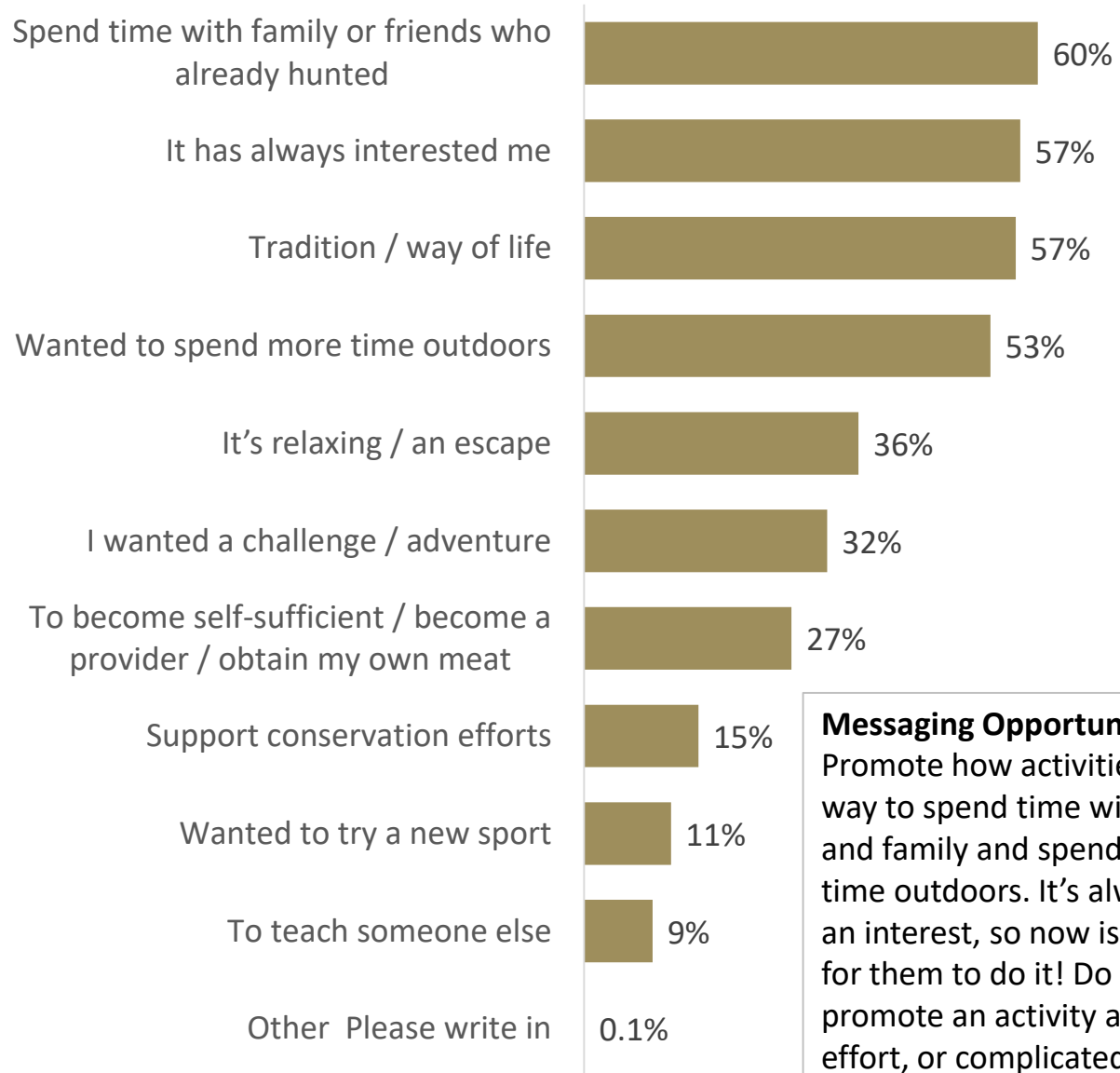
## Introduction

Key takeaways regarding how to help hunters and target shooters try new activities:

- **Create easy access** – Create mobile apps and online tools to help them find places to hunt or local shooting ranges, make reservations, rent equipment, etc. In addition, create beginner apps or voice-activated assistants, like Google Assistant or Amazon's Alexa that answer questions, such as what to do with their harvest, where to rent equipment, how to aim and shoot, as well as advanced level apps on perfecting their skills. Provide equipment rentals, hunting guides and group shooting / hunting events or programs that allow them to try the sport.
- **Be simplistic / convenient** – Promote how it can fit in their busy schedules, such as “way to spend time with family,” and “spend more time outdoors” and offer more close-to-home experiences. The easier an activity appears, the more simple and convenient it becomes.
- **Influence through their friends and peers** – Hunting and shooting are social activities. Very few will participate if they do not see their friends or others like themselves participating. Leverage non-professionals' hunting and shooting videos, photos and stories through social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube), blogs, magazines and share through television programs. Encourage friends to connect at the field or at the range.
- **Promote unique experiences** – Collaborate with cross-industry retailers, organizations and manufacturers to create events or experiences that current customers will want to make time for.
- **Educate through augmented reality / video** – To give a lasting impression on what it's like to experience new hunting and shooting activities, simulate the experience at outdoor retailers, state fairs or other outdoor events where current customers gather, or showcase professionals hunting or shooting via online video on YouTube.

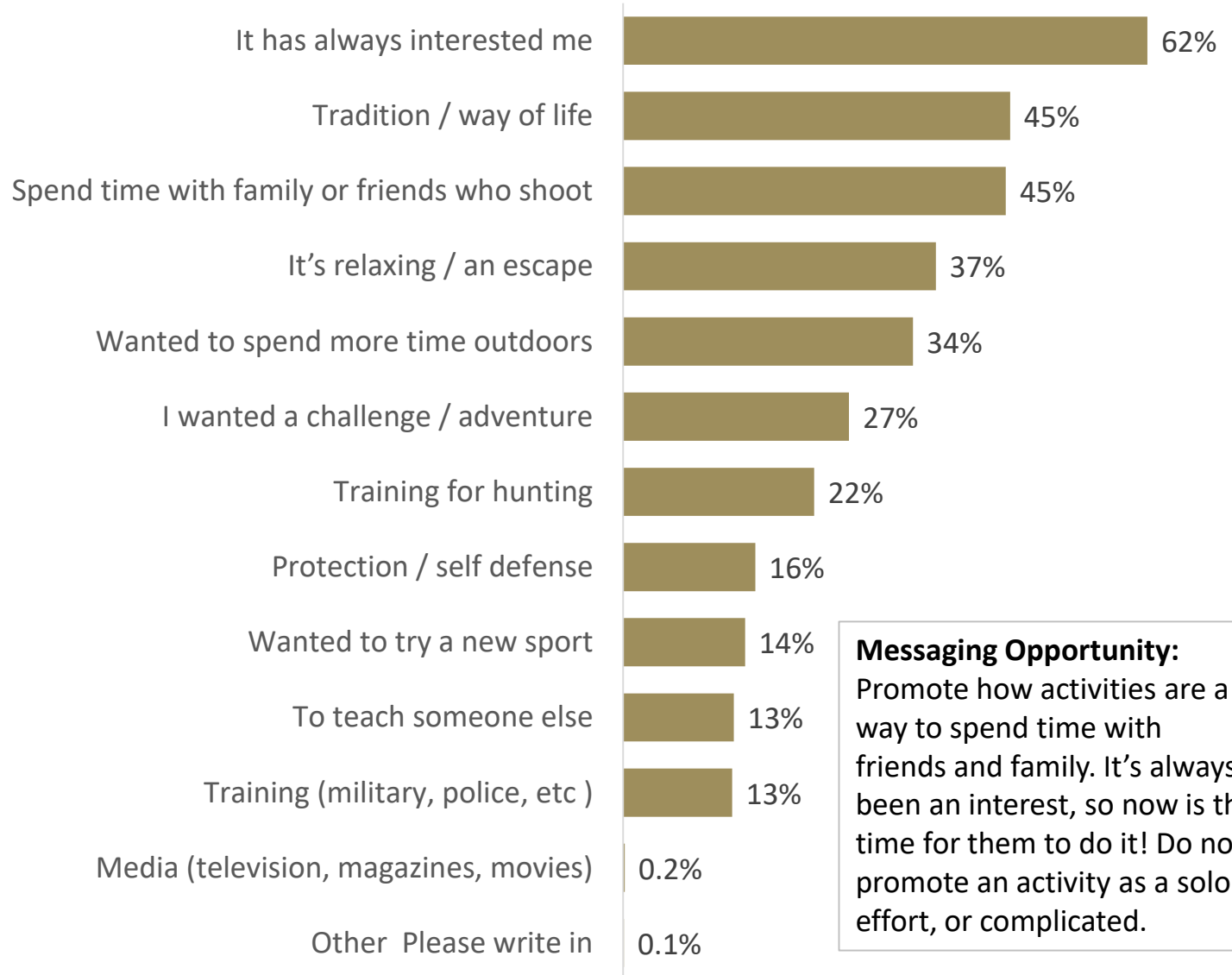
**Thank you for your interest in helping advance hunting and shooting sports.**

## MOTIVATIONS TO START HUNTING (any type of species)



**Messaging Opportunity:**  
Promote how activities are a way to spend time with friends and family and spend more time outdoors. It's always been an interest, so now is the time for them to do it! Do not promote an activity as a solo effort, or complicated.

## MOTIVATIONS TO START TARGET SHOOTING (any type of new shooting activity)





# Modern Sporting Rifle Target Shooting

*A look at how to help those interested,  
but have not tried the sport.*

## **OVERVIEW – Moving People Into Modern Sporting Rifle**

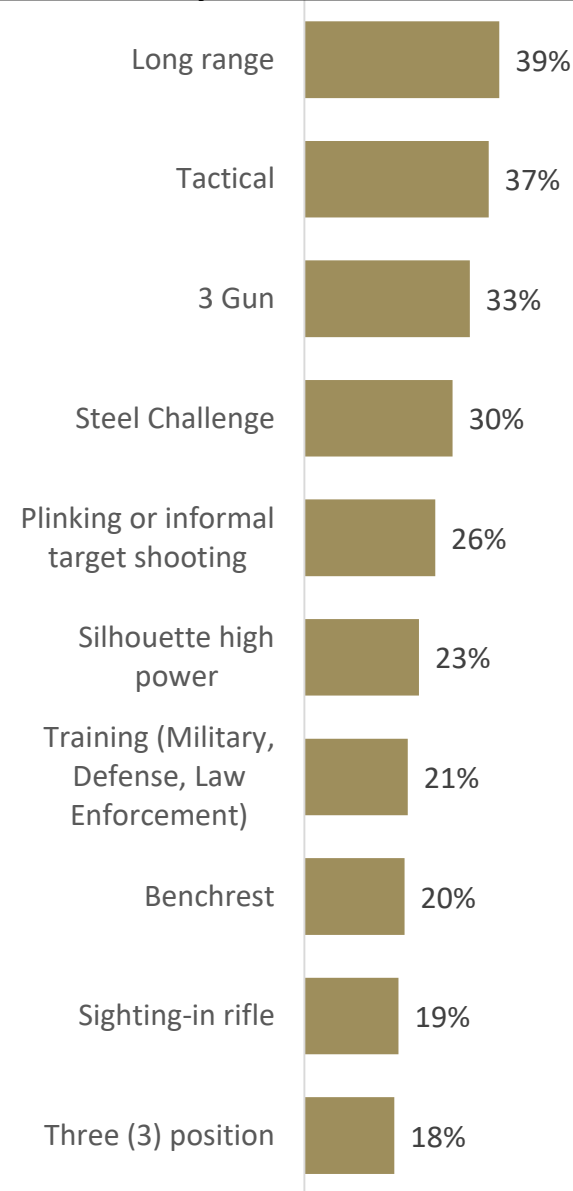
A significant amount of target shooters want to get back into shooting a modern sporting rifle (MSR). Two-thirds (69%) of shooters say their father introduced them to the sport and 81% started with plinking / informal target shooting. After starting out with a traditional rimfire rifle, 35% of them went plinking with a MSR and 26% of them went sighting-in with a MSR in the past three years.

Forty percent of respondents who use an MSR hunt big game, especially deer. They were first introduced to small game hunting by their father and their first firearm was a shotgun. They are interested in target shooting with their MSR.

Access is the biggest problem for those who want to try or get back into MSR. Hunters and shooters either don't own this firearm or they can't find a local range that offers the activities that they are interested in. Not having enough time, the expense and not knowing how to get started are also challenges. Opportunities may be to offer rentals, promote the convenience and benefits of local shooting opportunities, as well as educate them on how to get involved.

Local ranges have an opportunity to expand via rentals or activities or generate more awareness via television, magazines and newsletters. In addition, programs hosted by state agencies and outdoor retailers can also inspire them to shoot an MSR.

### **Activities they want to do with a MSR**

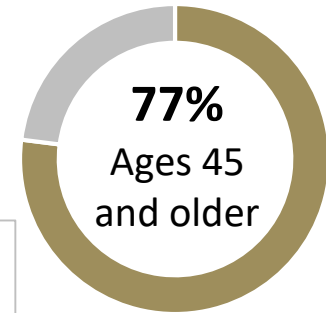
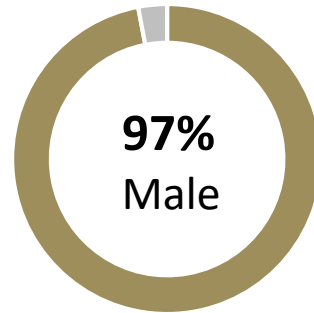


N=4,562

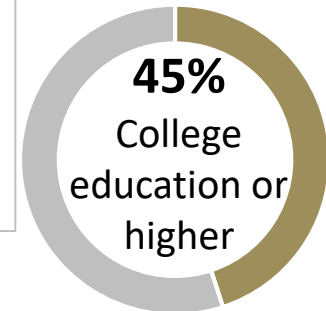
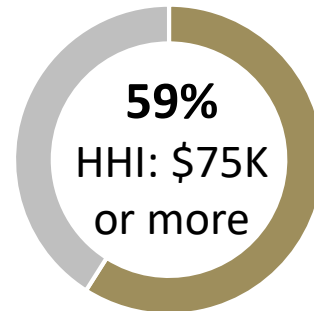




## Key Demographics

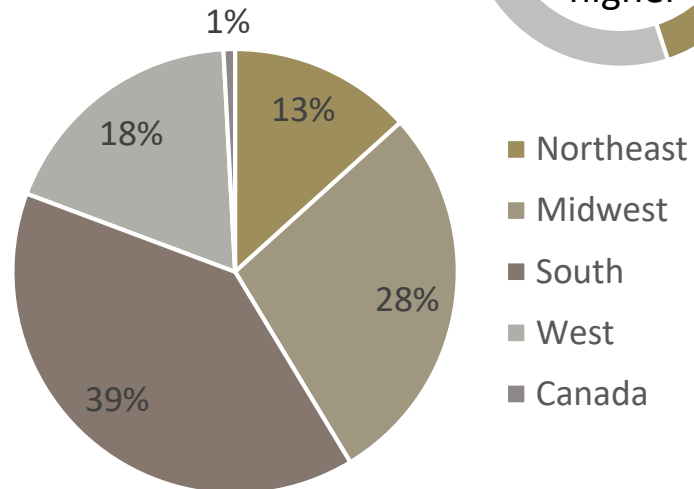


Avg. Age: 54



Of current hunters & target shooters who do not shoot with a modern sporting rifle but want to, most are male, middle-aged, affluent and/or educated. They are more likely to live in the Midwest and in the South.

### Region



## MOVING HUNTERS INTO MODERN SPORTING RIFLE



## What Do They Currently Hunt?

(THOSE WHO WANT TO TRY MODERN SPORTING RIFLE)



**87%**

Deer



**59%**

Turkey



**55%**

Small Game



**51%**

Upland Game



**44%**

Predators



**33%**

Waterfowl



**23%**

Wild Hog



**19%**

Elk



**15%**

Bear



**9%**

Other Big  
Game

Roughly forty percent are currently using a modern sporting rifle to hunt. The two firearms that are used the most are traditional rifle and shotgun. Two thirds (60%) say their father introduced them and 54% of them went small game hunting. Only six percent haven't tried hunting other species. For those that did, it took between two to five years for 40% of them and only one season for 26% of them.

## MOVING TARGET SHOOTERS TO MODERN SPORTING RIFLE



## What Types of Shooting They Currently Do? (THOSE WHO WANT TO TRY MODERN SPORTING RIFLE)

Plinking / Informal Target Shooting 90%

Sighting-in 73%

Sporting Clays with a Shotgun 37%

Pattern Shotgun 33%

Teaching / Informative 32%

Skeet with a Shotgun 31%

Trap with a Shotgun 30%

Long Range with a Traditional  
Centerfire Rifle 28%

Target Shooting w/ Traditional  
or Compound Bow 28%

Benchrest with a traditional  
centerfire rifle 27%

Testing (Ammo & Firearm)  
with a Semi-automatic 27%



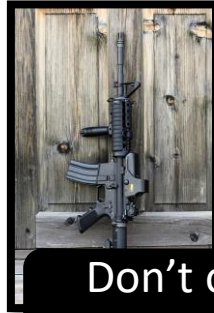
Two-thirds (62%) of shooters say their father introduced them to the sport and only 12% were introduced by a friend. Eighty percent started with plinking and then within two to five years, 33% of shooters tried a new activity and 26% branched out within a year. However, only 35 are plinking with a modern sporting rifle and 26% are sighting-in with a modern sporting rifle. The top three firearms being used with plinking are semi-automatic handgun (66%), traditional rimfire rifle (60%) and a traditional centerfire rifle (53%).



## PATHS TO MODERN SPORTING RIFLE

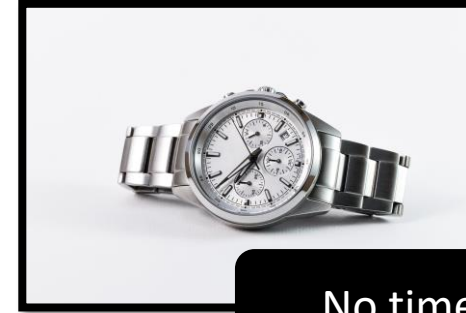


## REASONS WHY THEY HAVEN'T TRIED MODERN SPORTING RIFLE



**52%** say “don’t own or have access to the proper equipment.”

**Don’t own equipment**



**21%** say “there is not enough time.”

**No time**



**19%** reported “too expensive.”

**Too expensive**



**11%** say “they don’t know how to start.”

**Don’t know how**

Not having access to a modern sporting rifle is the only significant issue for them. Time, expense and not knowing how to start are challenges for some. Offering rentals or providing events that allow them to try shooting a MSR could be an opportunity.

## REASONS WHY THEY HAVEN'T RETURNED TO MODERN SPORTING RIFLE



**31%** say “these activities are not offered at my local shooting range.”

**Not available**



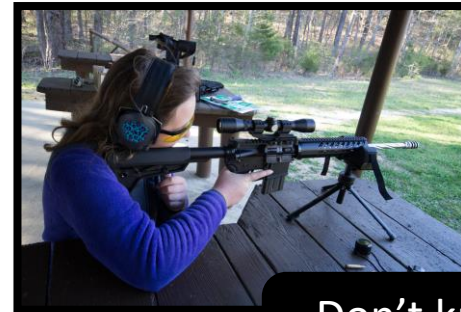
**42%** say “there is not enough time.”

**No time**



**18%** reported “not having anyone to go with.”

**Too expensive**



**25%** say “they don’t know how to start.”

**Don’t know how**

Not having enough time is the biggest problem. An opportunity may be to promote the convenience and benefits of local shooting opportunities as well as educate them on how to get involved.



## HOW TO HELP THEM TRY MODERN SPORTING RIFLE



**43%**

“Join a local range”



**30%**

“An invitation from a friend / family member”



**26%**

“Program offered by an outdoor retailer”



**25%**

“YouTube videos”



**24%**

“Program offered by a state wildlife agency”



**24%**

“Books / Magazines”



**17%**

“Membership in a non-profit organization that is specific to this activity”



**13%**

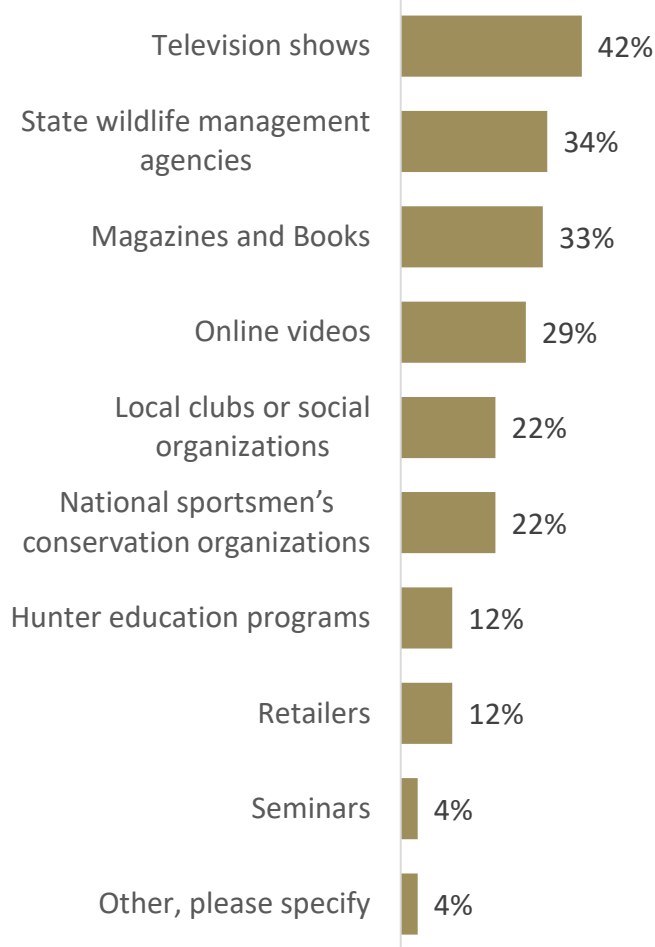
“Online forums / blogs”

53% of hunters and 45% of shooters say “friends” are the greatest influence in trying new types of hunting and shooting activities. Generating awareness through local ranges, providing programs hosted by outdoor retailers and state wildlife agencies and encouraging active MSR target shooters to invite friends will help more people engage in the sport.

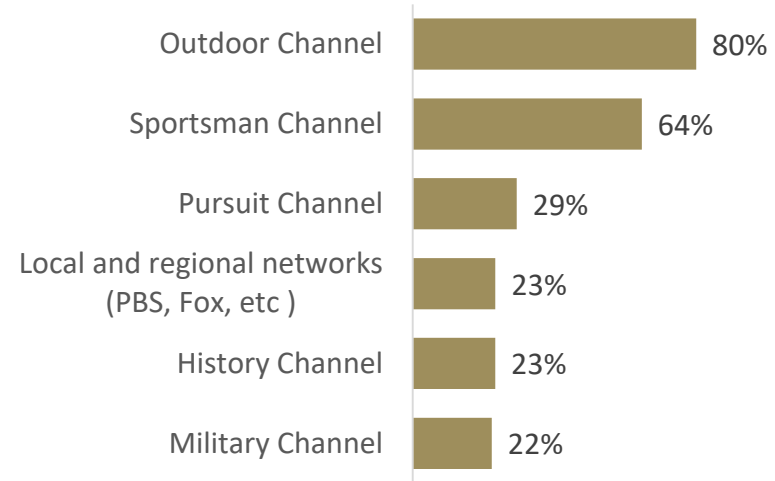
# **MOST INFLUENTIAL SOURCES FOR TRYING MODERN SPORTING RIFLE**

These hunters and shooters can be reached and influenced through multiple channels and resources.

## **TOP SOURCES**



## **TOP TV CHANNELS**



## **TOP ONLINE VIDEOS**



Q: Which of the following media or information sources have had the most influence, or intrigued you the most in regards to trying different types of shooting? (N=3,928); Which type of online videos have you viewed with respect to influencing you to try different types of shooting? (N=1,117). What channel did you watch shooting and fishing programs on? (N=1,655).

## Authors / Contributors

### **Southwick Associates, Inc.**

Southwick Associates is a market research, statistics and economics firm specializing in the outdoor recreation markets. For more than 25 years, Southwick Associates has delivered comprehensive insights that have advanced strategic decisions across the entire outdoor community; from resource agencies, industry associations and non-profit organizations to utilities and outdoor manufacturers and businesses. We find solutions to problems others cannot solve. For more information and solutions, contact Nancy Bacon, Vice President, at [Nancy@SouthwickAssociates.com](mailto:Nancy@SouthwickAssociates.com).

### **National Shooting Sports Foundation**

The National Shooting Sports Foundation is the trade association for the firearms industry. Its mission is to promote, protect and preserve hunting and the shooting sports. Formed in 1961, NSSF has a membership of more than 12,000 manufacturers, distributors, firearms retailers, shooting ranges, sportsmen's organizations and publishers. For more information, visit [www.nssf.org/research](http://www.nssf.org/research).

