

Assessing Hunting Regulation Complexity in the United States (Poster)

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To counter the decades-long decline of hunters, state wildlife agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have made substantial investments in recruiting, retaining, and reactivating hunters, known as R3 programs. Central to R3 efforts is understanding and developing tools to mitigate barriers that different demographics face in hunting or learning to hunt. While complex hunting regulations have long been proposed as a potential barrier to R3 efforts, there is no synthesis regarding how the complexity of hunting regulations varies among states and impacts R3 efforts. We (1) summarized the peer-reviewed and gray literature about hunting regulation complexity, and (2) documented the complexity of the most recent (2021-22 or 2022-23) firearms deer, upland bird, and waterfowl hunting regulations across all 50 states and identified outliers which were regulations shared by five or fewer states. We reviewed 23 articles or reports which addressed regulation complexity and indicated complexity is a barrier to R3 objectives, but not the primary driver of the decline in hunting participation. We identified 225 unique regulation categories which potentially add to the real or perceived complexity of hunting regulations. Hunting regulation complexity likely interacts with other factors to make hunting more intimidating or less appealing to new or lapsed hunters and more work is needed to determine how specific regulations may act as barriers to R3 objectives.