

A fly fisherman in a blue shirt, tan vest, and cap is wading in a rocky river. In the background, a wooden cabin with a balcony is nestled among trees. The scene is set in a lush, green environment with some autumnal foliage.

OUTDOOR LIFE'S TOP 200 TOWNS FOR SPORTSMEN

LIVE HERE!

Our annual guide reveals the places where great hunting and fishing starts right at the edge of town

BY JOHN TARANTO

When we started our "Top 200 Towns for Sportsmen" program in 2008, our goal was to provide you with an exhaustive list of cities and towns that, in addition to having excellent and abundant hunting and fishing opportunities nearby, are also great places to raise a family and provide a high quality of life. That same mission continues today.

HOW WE RANK TOWNS

For our fourth-annual ranking, we highlighted towns that give you the best chance of finding a good-paying job and allow you to live comfortably within your means. With that in mind, we double-weighted three of our socio-economic categories this year to reward towns with low unemployment rates, high household income and a low cost of living.

WHERE WE GET OUR STATS

The website city-data.com has proven to be invaluable since we began this program. This is where we get the data for the bulk of our socio-economic categories: Population, Population Growth Since 2000, Median Household Income, Median Home Value, Cost of Living, Population Density,

Unemployment Rate and Mean Commute Time. (Note: All data from city-data.com is from 2009, the most recent available. The national average Cost of Living Index rating is 103.) Our School Grade numbers are from great-schools.org. Our Amenities scores are based upon access to services such as hospitals, cultural outlets and institutes of higher education. Combined, these categories measure each town's Quality of Life score, which makes up 40 percent of the overall ranking.

THE OUTDOOR LIFE

The other 60 percent is based upon the Outdoors score, which reflects each town's performance in the following categories: Gun-Friendliness, Fishable Species, Huntability Species, Proximity to Public Land and Waters and Trophy Potential.

AND THE WINNER IS...



1 BEND, OR

Surrounded by millions of acres of Forest Service land, grassland and wetlands, and hundreds of miles of fishable rivers and streams—and with nearly 300 sun-filled days a year to enjoy this embarrassment of sporting riches—Bend, Oregon, tops this year's list of the best towns for sportsmen.

All of that public hunting and fishing acreage surrounds a vibrant and growing city. Bend is by no means quaint, with roughly 80,000 people currently calling it home; that the population has grown nearly 50 percent in the past decade is a great indicator of a thriving community. At

the same time, the median household income in Bend has risen 30 percent since 2000, to \$53,177, and the cost of living here is right at the national average, if not a hair below.

In this unique landscape, where the Cascade Mountains meet the high desert, upland hunters chase quail, pheasants and chukar across a variety of terrain. Big-game hunters never run out of opportunities for elk, mule deer, antelope and black bears in the

Deschutes, Willamette and Ochoco national forests. If it's waterfowl that gets you out of bed in the morning, you'll appreciate great gunning for all the species that course the Pacific Flyway each fall.

Coldwater anglers really have it good in Bend as well, with legendary waterways like the Deschutes, Crooked and Metolius rivers, and smaller streams like Fall River, holding healthy populations of big reddsided rainbow and bull trout. Big waters, like Wickiup Reservoir and Paulina Lake, are home to enormous brown trout and plentiful kokanee salmon. A short drive to the Lower Deschutes will get you into salmon and steelhead, and a 3½-hour jaunt will put you in coastal towns like Newport, where you can enjoy all of the Pacific Northwest's saltwater fishing.

If your roll cast is rusty, head to the local Orvis store in the Old Mill district, where an 18-hole fly-casting course lets you practice your skills in a variety of settings similar to those you'll find on the waters around Bend.

If thinking about the abundant hunting and fishing opportunities in and around Bend is making you thirsty, you'll be glad to know that downtown is home to eight craft beer breweries, linked by what is known as the "Bend Ale Trail."

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 76,621/47.3% Median household income: \$53,177 Median home value: \$287,000 Cost of Living Index: 99.9 Mean commute time: 15.4 minutes Unemployment rate: 4.3%



2 | PINEDALE, WY

Tiny Pinedale currently finds itself at the middle of the West's energy development boom, and while the influx of jobs and income has helped the economy, the exploration hasn't been as kind to wildlife. But the beauty of Pinedale is that you don't have to go far to find incredible wildlife habitat. Mule deer and elk hunting in the Wind River and Wyoming ranges can be especially productive.

VITAL STATS: Population/growth since 2000: 2,221/57.3%
 Median household income: \$50,277 Median home value:
 \$223,076 Cost of Living Index: 84.3

1 | Bend, OR

2 | Pinedale, WY

3 | Rapid City, SD

4 | Kodiak, AK

5 | Saratoga, WY

6 | Cooper Landing, AK

7 | Lewiston, ID

8 | Pendleton, OR

9 | Sheridan, WY

10 | Bismarck, ND

11 | Mountain Home, AR

12 | Chamberlain, SD

13 | Pierre, SD

14 | Rawlins, WY

15 | Lander, WY

16 | Cody, WY

17 | Williston, ND

18 | Heber Springs, AR

19 | Marquette, MI

20 | Loa, UT

10 | BISMARCK, ND

With the median cost of a home around \$150,000, and a Cost of Living Index number well below the national average (83, compared to 100), residents of Bismarck are able to spend their hard-earned money on the important things in life—like bird hunting.

Centrally located on Interstate 94, North Dakota's capital city is the ideal jumping-off point for the best upland and waterfowl hunting in the state.

Bismarck is at the western edge of the famed Prairie Pothole Region, which provides breeding habitat for duck species like pintails, gadwalls and canvasbacks, and important migration habitat for scaup, wigeon and geese.

Of the Dakotas, it's usually South Dakota that grabs the pheasant hunting headlines, but North Dakota has long had an excellent ringneck population, which only continues to improve.

The Missouri River flows between Bismarck and its sister city of Mandan, providing close-to-home opportunities for stellar walleye fishing.



11 | MOUNTAIN HOME, AR

The number-one town in our inaugural ranking four years ago, Mountain Home continues to hold strong in the top 20, this year coming in at number 11. This small town of fewer than 15,000 people is nestled in a valley in the heart of the beautiful Ozark Mountains between two enormous reservoirs: Bull Shoals and Norfork lakes. Local anglers enjoy year-round, open-water fishing for numerous species, including largemouth, smallmouth and striped bass; walleyes; crappies; bream; and catfish. The White and North Fork rivers hold enormous brown and rainbow trout, which thrive in the coldwater habitat below the dams.

But stellar fishing isn't the only game in town. Whitetail populations are holding steady, stands of red and white oak trees are the haven of innumerable squirrels, and chasing gobblers through the hollows of the Ozark National Forest is as much a rite of spring as listening to Cardinals baseball on KMOX.

VITAL STATS: Population/growth since 2000: 12,485/13.4% Median household income: \$31,842 Median home value: \$124,961 Cost of Living Index: 85.6



27 BEMIDJI, MN

The family-friendly Northwoods town of Bemidji is surrounded by countless lakes filled with Bunyanesque muskies, pike, walleyes, perch, crappies and more. The "First City on the Mississippi" is also a gateway to deer, bear and grouse hunting opportunities in the Chippewa National Forest and several state forests.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 13,749/15.4% Median household income: \$36,887 Median home value: \$107,648 Cost of Living Index: 79.7

34 HEBER, UT

With the Provo, Green, Strawberry and Heber rivers, and reservoirs like Jordanelle, Deer Creek and Mill Hollow, all within casting distance, Heber is one of the Rocky Mountains' most prolific, albeit unheralded, fishing towns. And given its location 20 minutes down the valley from hopping Park City, Heber and the surrounding area offer plenty of diversions without the tourist crush.

- 21 Sioux Falls, SD
- 22 Roseau, MN
- 23 Idaho Falls, ID
- 24 Granby, CO
- 25 Kanab, UT

- 26 Devils Lake, ND
- 27** Bemidji, MN
- 28 Grand Marais, MN
- 29 Kenai, AK
- 30 Rochester, MN

- 31 Page, AZ
- 32 Sandpoint, ID
- 33 Pocatello, ID
- 34** Heber, UT
- 35 St. George, UT

- 36 Carbondale, CO
- 37 Glendive, MT
- 38 Kalispell, MT
- 39 Glasgow, MT
- 40** Easton, MD



40 EASTON, MD

Home to one of the oldest waterfowl celebrations in the country, Easton, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, has goose hunting in its blood. Each year, thousands of duck and goose enthusiasts flock to the Easton Waterfowl Festival (November 11-13 this year) for a weekend of decoy auctions, calling contests, wildlife art, crab soup and general avian revelry. A lot of the rich tradition that characterizes Eastern Shore waterfowling is a product of the decades-old hunt clubs, which lay claim to most of the prime hunting land in the area.

However, public hunting opportunities exist, and the Chesapeake Forest Lands are a great example of this. Comprising nearly 68,000 acres across seven counties (including Easton's Talbot), half of the CFL is open to public hunting, while the other half falls under a Hunt Club Lease program. The land is open to hunters of small game, upland birds, waterfowl and deer. This land, once the holdings of the Chesapeake Forest Products Company, is also home to exotic sika deer, a native of Japan.

Oh, and did we mention the world-class fishing in Chesapeake Bay?

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 14,829/26.7% Median household income: \$51,011 Median home value: \$261,623 Cost of Living Index: 86 Mean commute time: 19 minutes

Alamy (top), David J. Sams (bottom)



43 HAILEY, ID

Ernest Hemingway lived in Ketchum, 12 miles to the north. However, Hailey, in the heart of Sun Valley, is a more attainable destination for today's outdoorsman. Elk, mule deer, bear, moose, sheep, goat and mountain lion hunting is available in the national forests that surround the town. Silver Creek and the Little Wood, Big Wood and Lost rivers hold native browns and 'bows.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 8,075/30.2%
 Median household income: \$62,620 Median home value:
 \$446,413 Cost of Living Index: 96.4 Unemployment rate: 4%

- 41 Colorado Springs, CO
- 42 Vernal, UT
- 43 Hailey, ID
- 44 Eugene, OR
- 45 Richfield, UT

- 46 Rifle, CO
- 47 Ashland, WI
- 48 Casper, WY
- 49 Fairbanks, AK
- 50 Lewistown, MT

- 51 Trinidad, CO
- 52 Ruidoso, NM
- 53 Booneville, MO
- 54 Fort Collins, CO
- 55 Evergreen, CO

- 56 Moses Lake, WA
- 57 Maupin, OR
- 58 Bozeman, MT
- 59 Montrose, CO
- 60 Orofino, ID



49 FAIRBANKS, AK

As the terminus of the Alaska Highway, and the main stopping point along several other thoroughfares, Fairbanks is the hub of activity in the Last Frontier. At the same time, the Fairbanks North Star Borough is just slightly smaller than New Jersey...with roughly one percent of the population.

Getting into some of the best hunting land in North America is a simple matter of traveling 100 miles south into the heart of the Alaska Range. Big-game species include grizzlies, moose, Dall sheep, caribou, black bears and wolves, and trophy-class animals abound. The goose, duck and crane hunting around Fairbanks can be nothing short of spectacular, thanks to the 1,800-acre Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge just outside of town.

There is no shortage of fishing opportunities, either, with silver, king and chum salmon; northern pike; burbot; rainbow trout; and Arctic grayling all calling the icy-cold waters around Fairbanks home.

VITAL STAT Population/growth since 2000:
 35,252/16.6% Population Density: 1,107/sq. mi.
 Median household income: \$51,783 Median
 home value: \$192,458 Cost of Living Index: 107.2

57 MAUPIN, OR

What tiny Maupin lacks in size (population: 414) it more than makes up for in diverse hunting and fishing opportunities, both in town and within an easy drive.

Diligent big-game hunters chase black bears, elk and mule deer in the shadow of Oregon's tallest peak in the Mt. Hood National Forest, west of town. When it comes to winged game, Merriam's and Rio Grande turkeys keep hunters busy in the spring, and an awesome dove flight provides late-summer action leading into waterfowl season. The main draw, however, is the area's outstanding upland bird hunting. Chukar, valley quail and pheasants are all available in this high-desert setting.

The Deschutes River sees its fair share of trout and steelhead aficionados, but an hour's drive up Route 197 puts intrepid anglers in the Columbia River port city of The Dalles. From here, you can launch your boat and immediately be into what many consider the best walleye fishery in the country. Sturgeon, trout, salmon and steelhead round out a diverse mixed bag.

**70 | SENECA, SC**

Situated between Lakes Keowee and Hartwell in northwestern South Carolina, Seneca is a bass fisherman's dream town. Largemouth and spotted bass are most popular with locals, but the lakes hold hybrid and striped bass as well. The Hartwell Lake record 59.5-pound striped bass was caught nine years ago. Clemson is 10 miles to the east and provides the cultural benefits of a college town.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 7,632/2.4%
 Median household income: \$32,573 Median home value:
 \$141,200 Cost of Living Index: 83.3 Unemployment Rate: 3.9%

Doug Stamm/istamphoto.com

61 Dillon, MT

62 Livingston, MT

63 Cedar City, UT

64 Helena, MT

65 Payette, ID

66 Rogers, AR

67 Hood River, OR

68 John Day, OR

69 Medford, OR

70 | Seneca, SC

71 Petoskey, MI

72 Mohrbridge, SD

73 Joseph, OR

74 Hayden, CO

75 Cumberland, ME

76 Tillamook, OR

77 Craig, CO

78 Broadus, MT

79 Coeur d'Alene, ID

80 | Show Low, AZ**80 | SHOW LOW, AZ**

When most people think of the Arizona landscape, things like saguaro cacti, copper-colored rimrock cliffs and scrubby desert brush typically leap to mind. However, the White Mountains, of which Show Low is the commercial hub, will shatter those preconceived notions in a hurry.

Situated at 6,400 feet, Show Low is surrounded by enormous stands of juniper, piñon and ponderosa pines, and peaks that climb to more than 11,000 feet. This landscape is home to elk, mule deer and whitetail deer, antelope, javelina, black bears, turkeys, bighorn sheep and mountain lions. Abundant lakes and rivers hold bass, crappies, grayling, pike, walleyes, catfish and five species of trout: rainbow, brown, cutthroat, brook and the native Apache.

Oh, and the name? Legend has it that two of the area's settlers decided there wasn't enough room for the both of them, and agreed to let the outcome of a game of poker dictate who would claim a 100,000-acre ranch. After hours of playing, one said to the other, "If you can show low, you win," before flipping over the two of clubs. Said the second, victorious rancher, "Show low, it is."



86 : PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, WI

In 2001, this small city at the northern end of the mighty Mississippi dropped a river carp from a crane above BlackHawk Avenue at midnight on New Year's Eve. The "Droppin' of the Carp" has been the culmination of the four-day-long Carp Fest ever since.



87 : GULF SHORES, AL

The entirety of the Gulf of Mexico's fishing opportunities is at your disposal in this fast-growing coastal town. The city has experienced a 22.2 percent growth in population since 2000, a sign of great civic health. Gulf Shores is an excellent place to raise kids, too: Its public schools score an 8 out of 10 rating on the website greatschools.org.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 6,166/22.2% Median household income: \$50,386 Median home value: \$264,893 Cost of Living Index: 88.8

- 81 Klamath Falls, OR
- 82 Missoula, MT
- 83 Old Harbor, AK
- 84 Belle Fourche, SD
- 85 Salmon, ID
- 86 : Prairie du Chien, WI
- 87 : Gulf Shores, AL
- 88 Camden, ME
- 89 Prescott, AZ
- 90 Butte, MT
- 91 Bartlesville, OK
- 92 Phillips, WI
- 93 Newport, WA
- 94 : Gillette, WY
- 95 Los Alamos, NM
- 96 Lufkin, TX
- 97 Logan, UT
- 98 Saratoga Springs, NY
- 99 Winthrop, WA
- 100 : Durango, CO

94 : GILLETTE, WY

Gillette, the fourth-largest city in Wyoming, is a fine town for raising a family (more than 40 percent of the households have children under 18 years of age living in them); it also provides excellent big-game hunting opportunities right at the edge of town. Scads of pronghorns and good numbers of trophy mule deer roam the sagebrush prairies and badlands around Gillette.

A 90-minute drive to the west puts you in the beautiful Bighorn Mountains, where hunters seek out muleys, antelope, whitetails, moose, lions, coyotes, black bears and turkeys. Coldwater streams in the mountains offer rainbows, browns, cutthroats and brookies.

Gillette is known as the "Energy Capital of the Nation." Thanks to the growth in the energy industry in recent years, the city has seen its population increase by more than 19 percent in the past decade.

Residents enjoy a robust median household income of almost \$75,000, which is well above the state average of \$52,664, and a Cost of Living Index number of just 85.5, meaning that Gillettians' hard-earned dollars go far.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 23,423/19.2% Population Density: 1,752/sq.mi. Median household income: \$74,742 Median home value: \$207,394 Cost of Living Index: 85.5



100 : DURANGO, CO

Set in the Animas River Valley and surrounded by the rugged, majestic San Juan Mountains, the city of Durango blends Old West charm and 21st-century modernity. With more than 200 restaurants, abundant shopping, a brand-new hospital, a regional airport and a four-year college, Durango has an awful lot going for it in the quality-of-life department.

More than two million acres of public wilderness and national forest land, plentiful feed, ample habitat and excellent spring calving grounds help ensure that the elk herds around Durango remain among the largest in the West. While elk are certainly the most popular big-game species here, black bears, mule deer and mountain lions are also available.

Durango trout fishermen enjoy year-round angling opportunities on a number of nearby rivers, including the Rio Grande, San Juan and Animas, which flows right through town. Come summer, adventurous trout bums trek to high-country lakes in the Weminuche Wilderness.

105 PORT CLINTON, OH

Perhaps best known as the "Walleye Capital of the World," Port Clinton, on the shores of Lake Erie, is also a mecca for recreational shooters. Nearby Camp Perry has been home to the NRA-sponsored National Rifle Matches shooting competition since 1907.



106 SARANAC LAKE, NY

The picturesque village of Saranac Lake is located in the heart of New York's historic and scenic Adirondack Mountains. The 6.1 million acres amount to an area that is roughly the size of the state of Vermont.

That's a pretty big backyard—and it's filled with excellent fishing for trout, bass and panfish, and hunting for deer, black bears, grouse and turkeys.

VITAL STATS: Population: 4,769 Median household income: \$37,072 Median home value: \$107,708

- 101 Billings, MT
- 102 Flagstaff, AZ
- 103 Port Angeles, WA
- 104 Ogallala, NE
- 105 Port Clinton, OH
- 106 Saranac Lake, NY
- 107 Rhinelander, WI
- 108 Rexburg, ID
- 109 Red Wing, MN
- 110 Miles City, MT
- 111 Driggs, ID
- 112 Nebraska City, NE
- 113 Alexandria, MN
- 114 Beaufort, SC
- 115 Erie, PA
- 116 Redmond, OR
- 117 Helena, AR
- 118 Dickinson, ND
- 119 Manistee, MI
- 120 Panama City, FL



119 MANISTEE, MI

Experience the absolute best of the Upper Midwest's fishing in this Lower Peninsula town on the shores of Lake Michigan. Spectacular sportfishing for king salmon and huge German brown trout is available in lakes Manistee and Michigan, while legendary rivers like the Big Manistee, Little Manistee and the blue-ribbon-designated Pere Marquette hold both those species, as well as brook trout, rainbows and steelhead. In fact, four of the last five state-record brown trout were caught in the Manistee River, including a 41-pounder landed in September 2009. Walleyes, smallmouths, perch, panfish, pike and muskies are all available in nearby waters.

While the fishing opportunities in and around Manistee certainly grab the sporting headlines, ample hunting can be enjoyed as well. The Manistee National Forest offers 540,187 acres for squirrel, whitetail, ruffed grouse, rabbit, bear and turkey hunting. And while Michigan isn't known as a waterfowler's destination, western Michigan can experience good gunning for Canada geese and mallards year in and year out in the marshes around the area lakes.

VITAL STATS: Population/growth since 2000: 6,041/-8.3% Population Density: 1,856/sq. mi. Median household income: \$31,758 Median home value: \$94,285 Cost of Living Index: 77.5

Alamy (top), Jeff Schwabke/Images on the Wild Side (bottom)



125 REDDING, CA

World-class fishing opportunities in and around Redding are seemingly limitless: monster rainbows in the Lower Sacramento River tailrace; freestone 'bows in the Upper Sac; steelhead, chinooks, cohos and browns in the Trinity. There's technical nymphing and dry-fly fishing in the McCloud, and more bass than you can shake an Ugly Stik at in Lake Shasta. And almost all of it is available year-round.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 90,521/11.9%
 Median household income: \$45,830 Median home value:
 \$244,500 Cost of Living Index: 93.3

121 Clear Lake, IA

122 Lebanon, MO

123 Cleveland, TN

124 Deale, MD

125 Redding, CA

126 Jamestown, ND

127 Grand Junction, CO

128 Charlestown, RI

129 Valentine, NE

130 Lake Charles, LA

131 Toccoa, GA

132 Naples, FL

133 New Bern, NC

134 Gunnison, CO

135 Wolfeboro, NH

136 Kingman, AZ

137 Baker City, OR

138 Reserve, NM

139 Stevens Point, WI

140 Pascagoula, MS



130 LAKE CHARLES, LA

Southern Louisiana has no shortage of water, and the people who call this area home know a thing or two about recreating in, on and around it.

Some of the finest duck hunting on the planet can be found in bayous of southwestern Louisiana. A constellation of National Wildlife Refuges—Lacassine, Sabine, Shell Keys and Cameron Prairie—was created to provide wintering grounds for migratory waterfowl. Combined, they offer 184,000 acres of wetlands habitat for every species of bird that commutes via the Mississippi Flyway.

When the birds aren't in season, southwestern Louisiana sportsmen can be found on the Calcasieu and Sabine estuaries casting to bull reds, speckled trout and largemouths.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 71,475/
 -.4% Population Density: 1,780/sq. mi. Median
 household income: \$34,304 Median home value:
 \$111,400 Cost of Living Index: 86.5

133 NEW BERN, NC

At the confluence of the Neuse and Trent rivers sits this historic, 300-year-old city of nearly 30,000 people. New Bern is an extremely fast-growing city, its population skyrocketing 25 percent in the past decade. However, New Bernians continue to enjoy a laid-back way of life, with the two rivers serving as the social and financial fabric of the city. Boat building has been a part of the area since before the town existed.

Fresh- and saltwater species—from panfish, catfish and large-mouths to flounder, drum and stripers—are biting year-round in the region's rivers, ponds and creeks, not to mention the nearby Atlantic Ocean.

**148 ELY, NV**

Some 250 miles north of Las Vegas and 320 miles east of Reno, the desolate mountain terrain that surrounds Ely, Nevada, is true trophy country. Here, 400-inch elk, 200-inch muleys, 80-inch antelope and full-curl bighorns all roam the rugged landscape. The tags aren't easy to come by, but your chances of taking a record-book animal are outstanding.

VITAL STATS Population: 4,049 Population Density: 568/sq.mi. Median household income: \$41,911 Median home value: \$102,474 Cost of Living Index: 81.6

David Irwin/Images on the Wild Side

141 Kirksville, MO

142 Del Rio, TX

143 Kearney, NE

144 Spearfish, SD

145 Superior, WI

146 Morehead City, NC

147 Keokuk, IA

148 Ely, NV

149 Ashtabula, OH

150 Shelton, WA

151 Burlington, VT

152 Susanville, CA

153 Uvalde, TX

154 Green River, WY

155 Oswego, NY

156 Jamestown, RI

157 Mitchell, SD

158 Grand Island, NE

159 Poteau, OK

160 Rolla, MO

158 GRAND ISLAND, NE

No one should ever question the optimistic and ambitious spirit of Grand Islanders. After all, the city was developed and built in the mid-1800s by folks who thought that its central location would make it the ideal spot to relocate the nation's capital from Washington, D.C. While that goal never came to fruition, the town has, over the years, come to be known as a capital of another sort.

Although it isn't technically an island, Grand Island is surrounded by an awful lot of water, specifically the Platte River and countless wetland areas. Because of this, every spring and fall more than half a million sandhill cranes pass through the Platte River Valley, from Grand Island west to Kearney. It's estimated that 80 percent of the world's sandhill crane migration makes this biannual pit stop. Joining the cranes are well over 10 million ducks and geese, and while there is no season for sandhills in Nebraska, there's obviously plenty of action for the other waterfowl species.



172 : KINGSVILLE, TX

Located southwest of Corpus Christie in South Texas, the city of Kingsville is named for Captain Richard King, founder of the 825,000-acre King Ranch, which is widely considered the birthplace of game conservation in Texas.

While outside of the Lone Star State the King Ranch might be best known as a special-edition pickup truck, the legacy of the ranch is a great source of pride and honor for all Texans. It is a major player in the advancement of large-scale ranching innovation, game conservation, farming and even eco-tourism.

While most of the hunting land in South Texas is tied up

in private ranches, there is no arguing the fevered whitetail culture that pervades this part of the world. Folks who call South Texas home are flat-out crazy for deer.

In addition to whitetails, nearby ranches offer a variety of bird hunting (South Texas's bobwhite quail hunting is excellent and unheralded), as well as exotic species like nilgai antelope, native to India and first introduced on the King Ranch in the 1920s.

Kingsville's proximity to Corpus Christie and Baffin bays opens the door to all the excellent wade- and sportfishing the 130-mile-long Laguna Madre and the Gulf of Mexico have to offer.

161 Presque Isle, ME

162 Huntsville, TX

163 Great Bend, KS

164 Duluth, MN

165 Mammoth Lakes, CA

165 Weed, CA (tie)

167 : Aberdeen, SD

168 Cambria, CA

169 Virginia, MN

170 Escanaba, MI

171 Fallon, NV

172 : Kingsville, TX

173 Green Bay, WI

174 Junction City, KS

175 Wilmington, NC

176 Paducah, KY

177 Truckee, CA

178 Elko, NV

179 Vicksburg, MS

180 Quincy, IL

167 : ABERDEEN, SD

Everybody knows that South Dakota is *the* state for pheasant hunting (although we're keeping an eye on you, North Dakota), and Aberdeen, in the northeastern part of the state, has routinely led the way over the past decade in the total number of birds harvested. Hunters from nearly every state flock to Aberdeen each fall to partake in the staggering number of birds this region produces.

If you ever grow weary of chasing ringnecks (perish the thought), a wide variety of other game is at your beck and call. The Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge is located 30 miles northeast of town and is a popular stopping point for snow, blue and Canada geese and puddle ducks as they migrate south. From large ponds to little backwater sloughs, every body of water around Aberdeen seems to suck in waterfowl.

If you prefer land-based game, the rolling hills and creek bottoms around town provide excellent habitat for whitetail deer. When spring comes around, attention turns to the region's robust populations of Eastern and Merriam's turkeys.

Fishermen in Aberdeen ply the glacial lakes around town for everything from pike and walleyes to bass, panfish and catfish. Access to the Missouri River comes with a two-hour jaunt west to Mobridge. Big Stone Lake and its tremendous walleye and perch fishery are just over 100 miles to the east, on the Minnesota border.

In addition to the limitless hunting and fishing the area has to offer, Aberdeen's 25,000 residents enjoy excellent cultural opportunities as well. The Dacotah Prairie Museum, theatrical productions, concerts and more keep folks busy when they're not in the field or on the water.

WILDLIFE Population/growth since 2000: 24,992/1.4% Population Density: 1,928/sq.mi. Median household income: \$40,923 Median home value: \$115,008 Cost of Living Index: 79.7 Mean commute time: 10.6 minutes



**182 ISLAMORADA, FL**

The sportfishing capital of the Florida Keys is a saltwater fisherman's playground. Go offshore for dolphin, tuna, wahoo, swordfish and sails one day. Hit the wrecks and reefs for groupers, snapper, cobia and amberjack the next. Venture into the backcountry or out on the flats for tarpon, permit and snook on the third—if you can still lift your arms above your head.

VITAL STATS Population: 6,435 Population Density: 905/sq. mi. Median household income: \$48,826 Median home value: \$515,583 Cost of Living Index: 107.4

181 Atchison, KS**182 Islamorada, FL****183 Cornwall, NY****184 Houma, LA****185 Madison, IN****186 Price, UT****187 Portland, ME****188 Scottsbluff, NE****189 Spencer, IA****190 Wichita Falls, TX****191 Grants Pass, OR****192 Raton, NM****193 Yreka, CA****194 Lake Worth, FL****195 Elk City, OK****196 Corbin, KY****197 Tuscaloosa, AL****198 Waynesboro, VA****199 Roscoe, NY****200 Marshall, MN****196 CORBIN, KY**

This little Appalachian town of 8,000 people in southeastern Kentucky is a gateway to the largest elk herd east of the Mississippi River. Initiated in 1998 by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, with support from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Kentucky elk restoration project is widely regarded as one of the most successful wildlife restorations in U.S. history.

While the KDFWR will issue just 800 permits this year for a shot at one of the 10,000 elk that call Kentucky home, hunter success in the past has been right around 80 percent, which is far higher than in any of the Rocky Mountain states.

Local anglers enjoy great fishing in 5,600-acre Laurel River Lake. Rimmed with sandstone cliffs, this impoundment holds a variety of gamefish species, including largemouth and smallmouth bass, rainbow trout, walleyes, crappies, bluegills and catfish.

Corbin was once home to Colonel Harland Sanders, who would go on to gain prominence as a purveyor of fried chicken.

**200 MARSHALL, MN**

The last player taken in the NFL draft each year is known as "Mister Irrelevant," since he rarely, if ever, finds his way onto a roster. There's nothing irrelevant about number 200 on our list of the best towns for sportsmen, however.

The variety of game around Marshall keeps folks busy year-round. Light goose season opens March 1, followed by the turkey opener in mid-April. After a summer of walleye fishing, September 1 marks the dove opener, followed by early goose season. Before you know it, deer, upland, fall turkey and waterfowl seasons come in. Small game and varmints will see you through winter.

VITAL STATS Population/growth since 2000: 12,752/1% Population Density: 1,539/sq. mi. Median household income: \$43,076 Median home value: \$146,423 Cost of Living Index: 80.2

Stock Photo (top), John Erbison/Annapolis on the Wild Side (bottom)

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