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## Upswing in hunting, fishing bucks trend

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The decline in hunting and fishing has been so relentless since the early 1970s that many in the industry view it as a kind of terminal illness – something to be suffered through until the end.

But in 2006 and 2007, sales of hunting and fishing licenses increased in California, according to the state Department of Fish and Game.

The increase was small: about 5 percent more anglers over 2005 and 3 percent more hunters. Last year California sold 307,270 hunting licenses and 2.1 million for fishing.

Upticks have occurred before in response to regulation changes, new license programs and other factors. But the latest gains are the first to stretch over two years since 1990 for hunting and since 2000 for fishing, surprising many observers.

"I hardly believe it," said Dick Pool, president of Pro-Troll, a fishing tackle manufacturer based in Concord.

Pool and others had no single theory to explain the increase. The state collects no demographic information on license buyers that might reveal a trend.

But various factors may be at work. One is that baby boomers have begun to retire and now have more time for hunting and fishing.

Interest among women has grown. In 1994 the Department of Fish and Game launched a program called "Becoming an Outdoorswoman" to offer training in the necessary skills and ethics.

The program, managed by Sharon Herrgesell, was eliminated during state budget cuts in 2003. But it was so popular that Herrgesell turned it into an independent nonprofit and now teaches 1,000 women a year.

"It's got to be women out there buying these licenses," she said.

The increase may also reflect a trickle-down effect from the organic food movement.

An offshoot is the "eat local" trend, in which consumers are rejecting foods made in far-flung factories. Instead, they seek health benefits and a smaller environmental footprint by buying food raised in their own region.

"When you see a culinary trend like that, those who have been associated with hunting or fishing say, 'I can go get me some of that'," said Sonke Mastrup, Fish and Game deputy director. "It adds to the allure or prestige. Not only are you serving wild game to your friends, but it's game you got yourself."

The trend was nudged along by "The Omnivore's Dilemma," a popular 2006 book by Michael Pollan, a UC Berkeley journalism professor. He writes about preparing a gourmet meal for friends using only foods he personally harvested – including a wild pig he shot in Sonoma County.

"It's a great way to remind yourself we are dependent on nature and not industry to feed ourselves," Pollan said.

Bridget Maloney-Krips of Placerville appears to be part of this trend. She started hunting and flyfishing in Herrgesell's program about five years ago. Her husband encouraged her.

Now she goes duck hunting 10 to 15 times each fall and also makes at least a half-dozen fly-fishing trips a year.

"I have a greater understanding of the (natural) resources and how important they are," said Maloney-Krips, 52.

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