

Even during recession, hunting remains bulletproof industry



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By Marty Roney, USA TODAY
Hunting is proving to be recession-proof.

Nationwide, spending on hunting gear is soaring, says the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which tracks hunting trends.

Companies that make, distribute or sell sporting firearms, ammunition and supplies generated \$27.8 billion in economic activity in 2009, vs. \$19.1 billion in 2008, says the group's 2010 Firearms and Ammunition Industry Economic Impact Report. Those companies paid \$450 million in excise taxes in 2009, up 38% from 2008, the report shows.

"During difficult times, people are looking for ways to cut down on costs and save as much money as possible," says Chuck Schlueter, spokesman for [South Dakota's](#) Game, Fish and Parks Department. "Hunting helps on the grocery bills."

More than 18.8 million people hunted with firearms in 2009, vs. 19.75 million in 2008, says Larry Weindruch of the National Sporting Goods Association. Yet in states where hunting is a large contributor to the economy, license sales are on the rise, according to the [National Rifle Association](#).

raised from \$19 to \$29 in April 2009, said Lori Severino, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Environmental Conservation. Yet license sales rose more than 10% to 1.13 million from 2007 to 2009, according to the agency.

•**South Dakota.** Licenses sold rose to 393,000 last year, up 4,000 from 2008, and another rise is expected this season, Schlueter says. Hunting "allows you to put meat in the freezer."

•**Pennsylvania.** License sales grew from 924,448 licenses in 2007 to 948,381 for 2009, reports the Pennsylvania Game Commission. "People may stick closer to home during tough economic times," spokesman Jerry Feaser says. "There is a very rich hunting tradition in the commonwealth. When things get tough, people return to what is familiar as a way to cope with how things are."

•**Texas.** Clayton Wolf of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department predicts another rise in license sales this year on top of the 10% increase in sales from 2008 to 2009. In tough times, "People ... may cut back in some areas, and they may not go hunting as often as they would in good times," said Gary Moody, chief of the wildlife division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. "But people are going to hunt."

Dustin Tyler, a hunter from Millbrook, Ala., agreed as he prepared for opening day of his state's dove-hunting season. "I know a lot of folks who have really cut back on things since it started getting tough," he said. "But all my friends that hunt continue to hunt. It's a great way for the family to spend quality time together."