

Outdoor Recreation Research and Findings

To better understand participation and trends in outdoor recreation of Delaware residents, a telephone survey was conducted. The Division of Parks and Recreation contracted Responsive Management Inc., a survey and research firm specializing in outdoor recreation and natural resource issues, to assess Delawareans' participation in outdoor recreation activities. The survey was conducted in August of 2011. Survey respondents were queried about their personal recreational activities and those of their household. Responsive Management obtained a total of 2,064 completed telephone surveys that were evaluated for the statewide results. An analysis of the survey response data was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences as well as proprietary software developed by Responsive Management. The results were weighted so that all regions and municipal areas would be in their proper proportion in statewide totals. Additionally, the results were weighted by demographic and geographic characteristics so that the sample was representative of Delaware residents as a whole. Specifically, the survey concentrated on assessing the respondents' view of six content areas:

- Importance of and participation in outdoor recreation
- Outdoor recreation and activity level of children
- Reasons for participating in outdoor recreation
- Ratings of facilities and opinions on specific aspects of facilities
- Accessing facilities
- Priorities for funding and policy making decisions



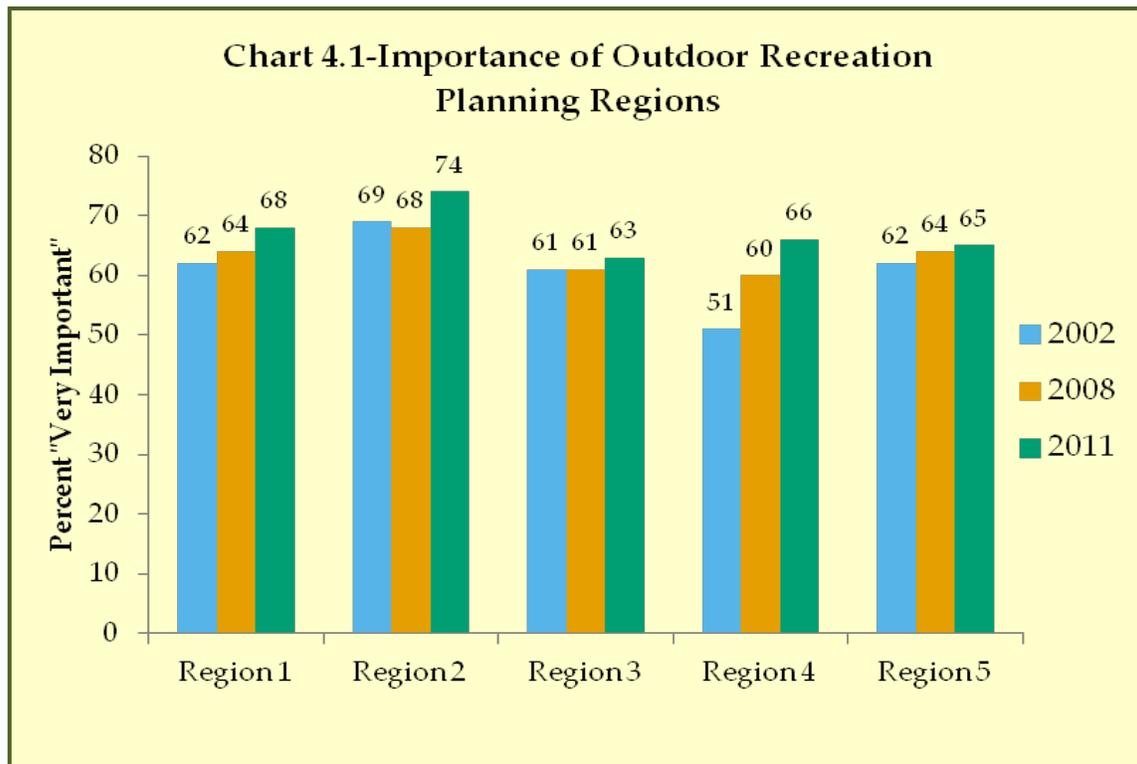
Similar surveys of Delaware residents were conducted in 2002 and 2008 and are useful for comparisons and revealing outdoor recreation trends. The 2011 Outdoor Recreation Participation and Trends (ORPT) phone survey methodology, instrument, and demographics can be found in Appendices B and C.

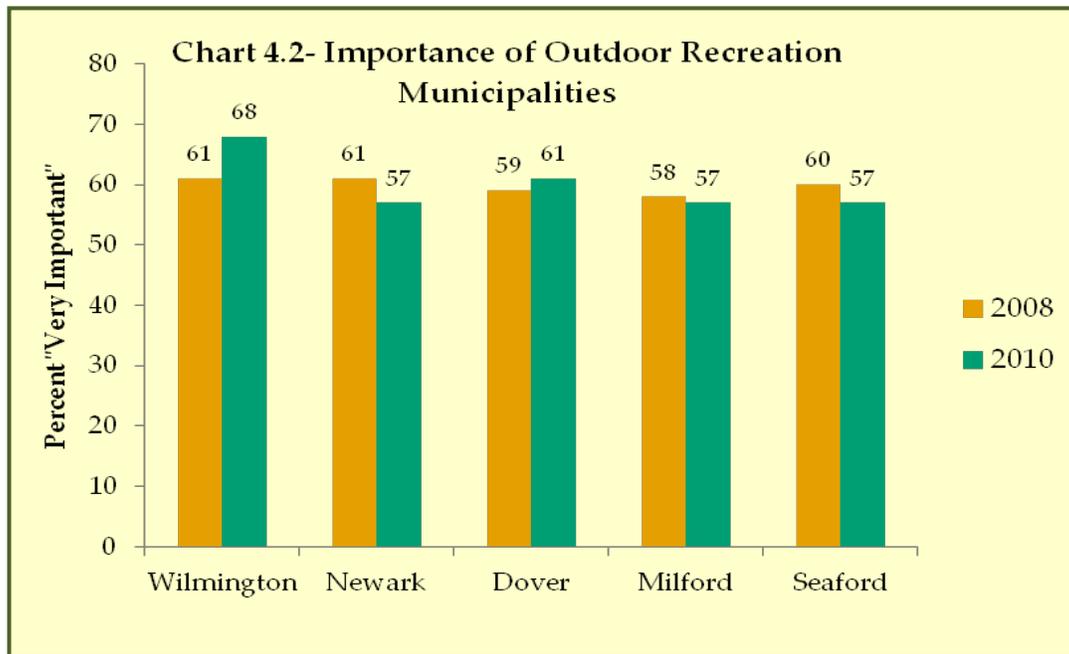
Importance of Outdoor Recreation

When looking at the findings from the 2011 ORPT telephone survey, it is apparent that Delawareans place a high importance on outdoor recreation. Statewide, 93% of Delaware residents indicated that outdoor recreation had some importance in their lives, while 67% said it was ‘very important’ to them personally. These findings are

93% of Delaware residents indicate outdoor recreation is important

very close to the results of the same question asked in the 2002 and 2008 public opinion telephone surveys. Responses over the past nine years indicate continued demand for outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the state. As exhibited in Chart 4.1, residents indicating that outdoor recreation is ‘very important’ to their quality of life has increased in every SCORP Region, with Region 4 showing the greatest increase. Chart 4.2 demonstrates the slight changes within the municipalities for those who indicate that outdoor recreation is ‘very important’.





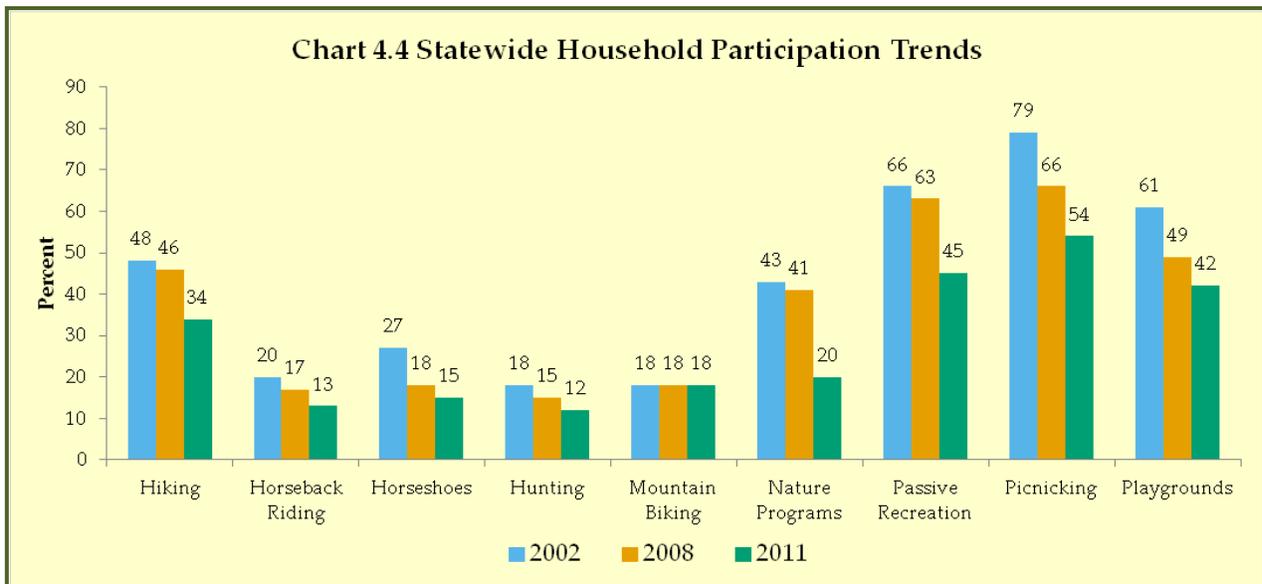
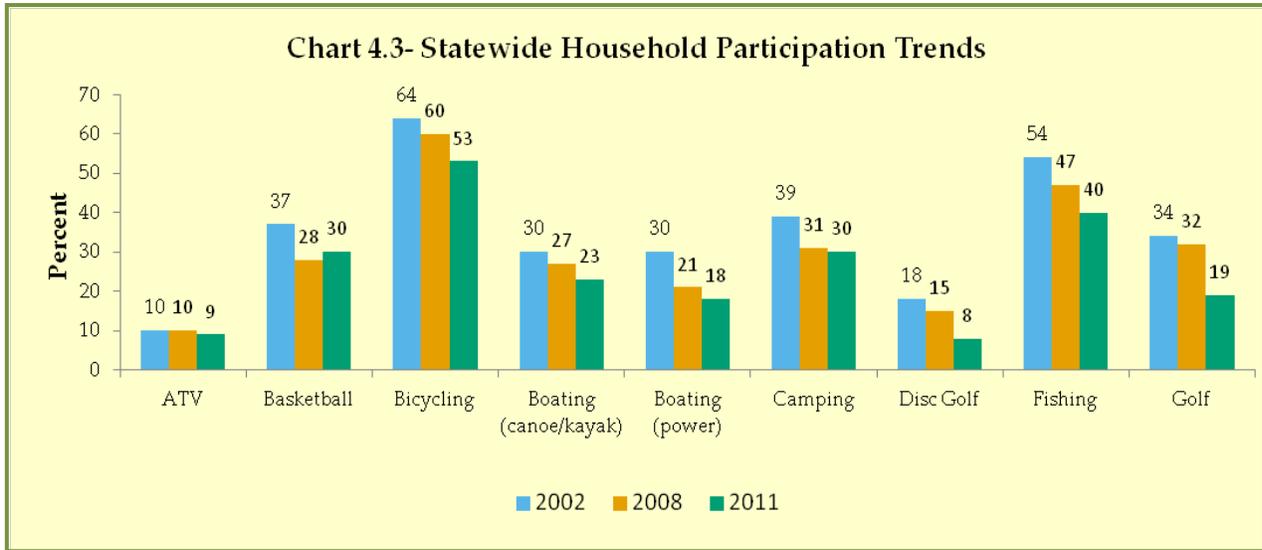
Participation in Outdoor Recreation

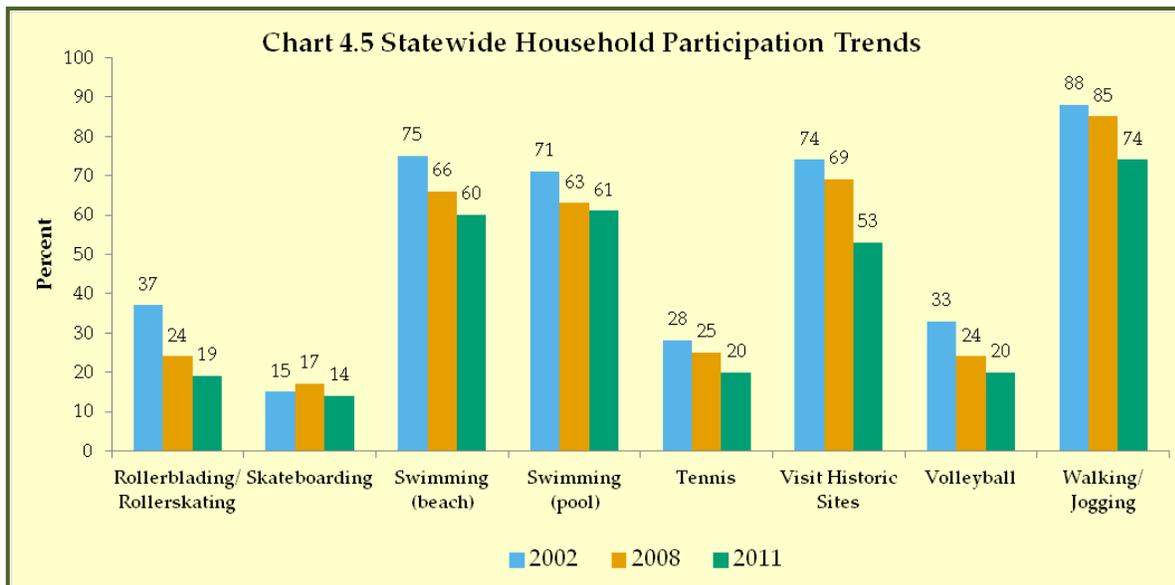
Delawareans participate in a variety of outdoor recreation activities. During the 2011 Survey, Delaware residents were asked which three activities have they personally participated in over the last 12 months. Statewide, more than one third of the respondents (36%) have personally walked or jogged, making this the most popular individual outdoor activity. Other popular individual activities include: bicycling (14%); swimming at the beach (13%); dog walking (12%); gardening (11%); swimming in a pool (10%); and fishing (10%). Alarming, nearly one in ten residents has not participated in any kind of outdoor recreation activity in the past year.

In addition, respondents were asked to indicate if they or any member of their household planned or expected to participate in a variety of outdoor activities in the next twelve months. The most popular outdoor recreation activity among Delaware households, by far, is walking or jogging (74% planned household participation). A second tier of responses in which activities have 50% participation or greater include: swimming in a pool (61%); swimming at the beach (60%); gardening (55%); picnicking (54%); visiting historic sites (53%); and bicycling (53%). Although there are some regional variations, there is little variation in the top activities among the Planning Regions and oversampled municipalities. Charts 4.10 through 4.20, show survey responses to activities in which any member of the household will participate in the next twelve months.

Each outdoor recreational activity in the survey has seen a decline in participation over the last nine years. The only two activities that have held steady in participation have been

mountain biking and skateboarding. The decline in participation is most likely attributed to the slow-down in the economy. Leisure time activities are often sacrificed when households cutback their spending. Charts 4.3 through 4.5 illustrate the nine year statewide outdoor recreation participation trend for Delaware households. The decline in participation is consistent with findings from national surveys conducted during the same time period.





Although there is very little variation in the top activities, there are regional differences for the second tier activities. Activities with the largest regional variations in participation include hiking, mountain biking, and hunting. These variations are most likely due to trail access and topography, rocky Piedmont setting to the north and flat coastal plain rural areas to the south. When compared to the average statewide participation, residents of Region 1 and 2 are more likely to hike than residents of other regions, particularly Region 4, southwest Sussex County. A similar variation can be seen in the municipal results where residents in Newark are far more likely than average to participate in hiking than residents in Seaford.

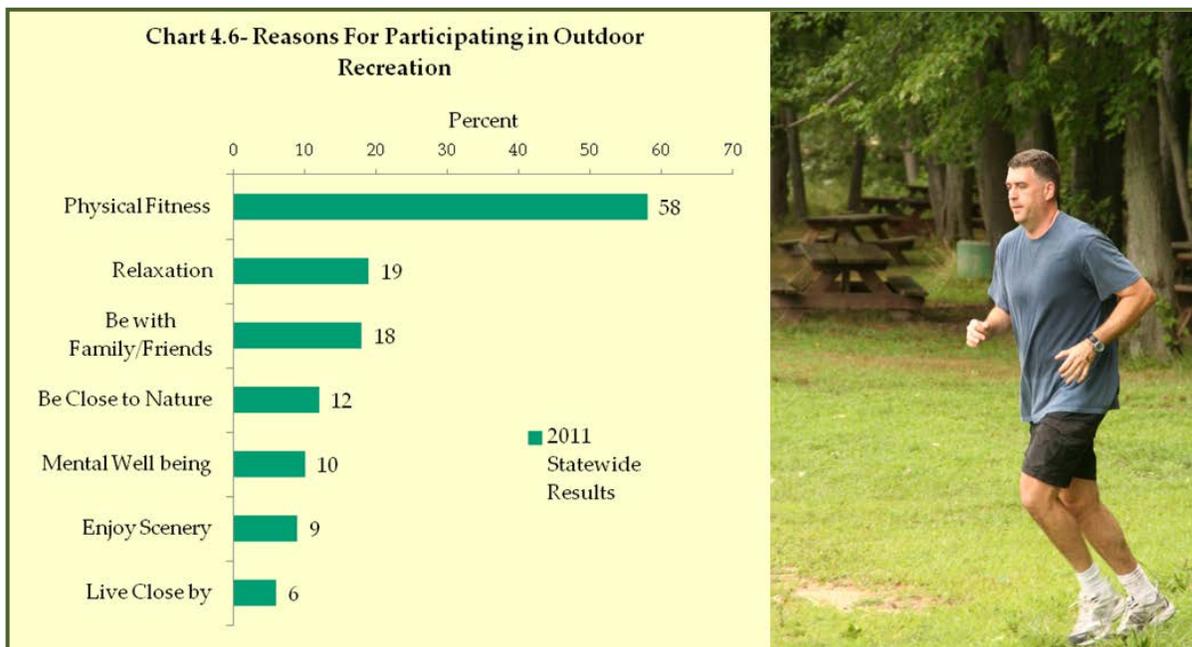
More traditional outdoor recreation activities like hunting and fishing also show regional disparities in participation. Residents in Region 4 are far more likely to participate in hunting than those in any of the other SCORP Planning Region. Fishing on the other hand has very high participation in Regions 3, 4, and 5 when compared to the statewide average. When looking at the natural resource areas needed to support these activities, these disparities are not surprising. Planning Regions 1 and 2 are the most built-out regions with few large tracts of undeveloped land suitable for hunting, fewer recreational water bodies and associated facilities to accommodate fishing. With the understanding that you cannot create the natural land and water resources that provide these outdoor recreation activities, there should be greater priority placed on protecting the remaining areas that do provide these opportunities.

Reasons for Participation and for Choosing Specific Areas

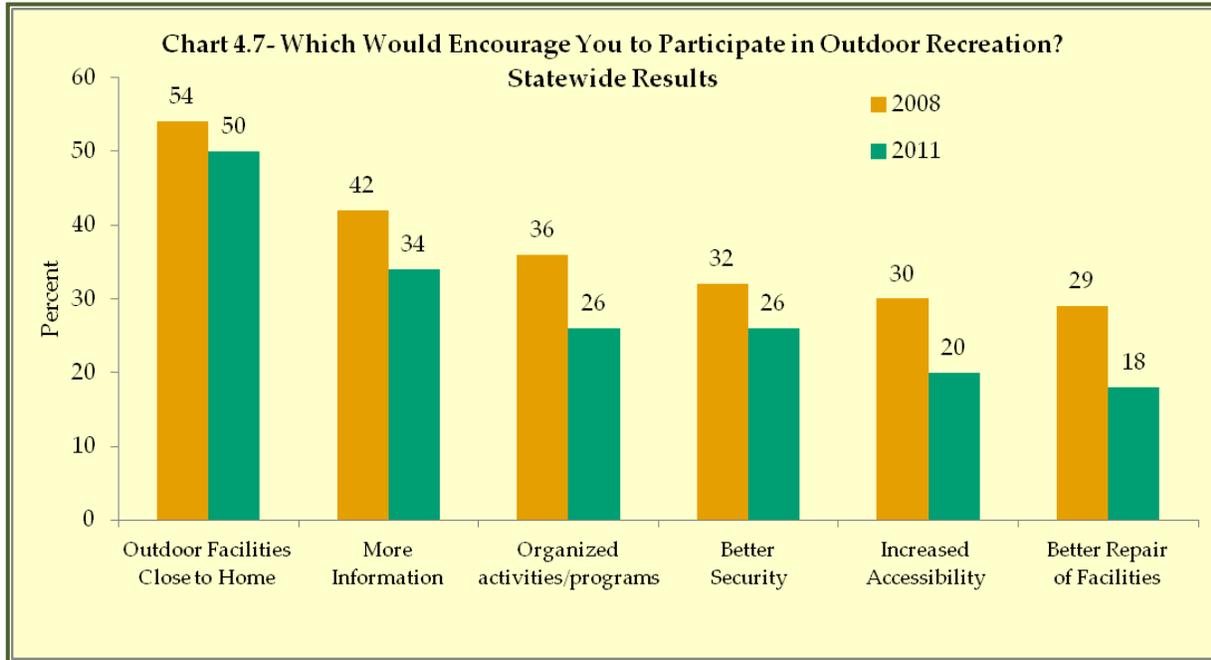
The top reasons that residents gave for participating in outdoor recreation is for physical fitness: 58% say this is their most important reason, distantly followed by relaxation (19%), to be with family and friends (18%), to be close to nature (12%), and for mental well-being (10%). Physical fitness continues to be the biggest motive for participating in outdoor recreation. This response has increased statewide from 2002 to 2011 by nearly ten percent. Similar responses are seen in each SCORP Planning Region and Oversampled Municipality. One marked difference is that Milford residents are much less likely than residents of other municipalities to participate in outdoor recreation for their physical fitness, while they are more likely to recreate to be with family and friends.

The survey asked respondents whether each of six items outlined below would increase their participation in outdoor recreation in Delaware (Chart 4.7). Respondents choose proximity to recreational facilities (50%) as the most important factor for increasing their participation in outdoor recreation. This is followed by having more information about facilities and recreation opportunities (34%); more opportunities to participate in organized activities/programs (26%); and better security within facilities (26%). The regional survey results show some differences; “more outdoor facilities and opportunities close to where you live” was more commonly chosen by Western Sussex County residents (Region 4) compared to other regions, while North New Castle County (Region 1) residents were the least likely to choose that answer. Chart 4.7 outlines a three year trend in what would encourage Delaware residents to participate in outdoor recreation.

Just under a third of Delaware residents (31%) said that there is a facility that they



would like to see added to a park in their community. Most commonly, they wanted outdoor swimming pools, indoor recreation facilities, improved amenities, playgrounds for children, and biking paths.

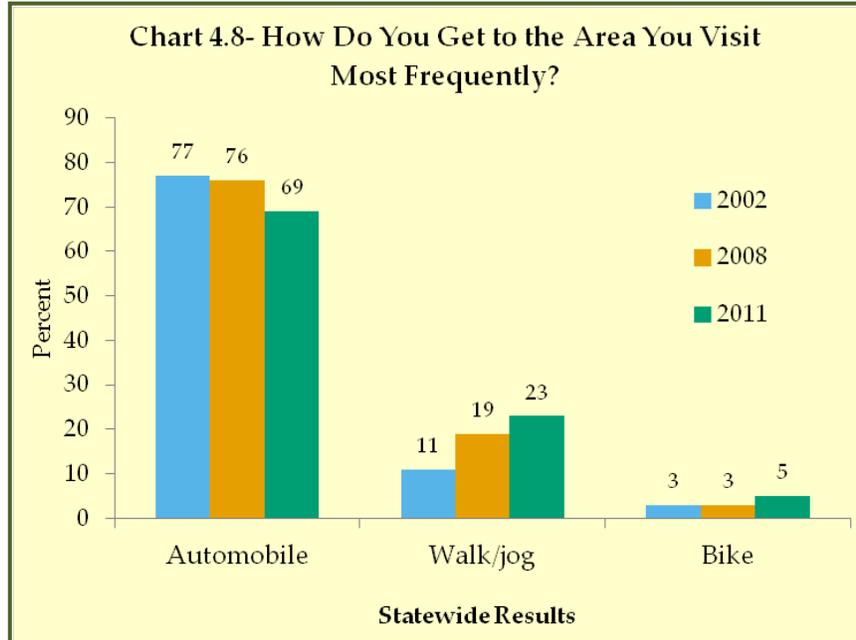


Accessing Facilities/ Built Environment

The majority of Delaware residents who have participated in at least one outdoor activity in the past twelve months (60%) live within 5 miles of the outdoor recreation area they most frequently visit; nonetheless, there are some who travel farther, with 15% of these respondents traveling beyond 10 miles. New Castle County residents have the shortest travel distance. They have the lowest mean distance (7.2 miles), and they have the highest percentage that live within the 1 to 5 mile range. Residents of West Sussex County (Region 4) have the longest travel distance, a mean of 12.6 miles.

The automobile (69%) is the most common mode of transportation that people use to get to their most visited outdoor recreation area, distantly followed by walking/jogging (23%), bicycling (5%), and to a lesser extent, public transportation (1%). Although the automobile continues to be the major mode of transportation, nine year trends show a marked increase in the number of people walking and biking to outdoor recreation areas.

Due to the number of alternative transportation facilities, the regional breakdown shows that residents of Region 1 (North New Castle County) are most likely to walk or jog and residents of Region 5 (East Sussex County) are most likely to bike to a park area. In the oversampled municipalities, Wilmington residents are most likely to walk or jog and Newark residents to bicycle to an outdoor recreation area.



Statewide, respondents listed distance/too far (59%) as the top reason for not walking or biking to a park. Other responses included traffic/dangerous roads (16%), physical inability to walk or bike because of health and/or age (7%), and driving convenience (7%).

Priorities for Funding and for State and Local Officials

Often, parks and recreation facilities are viewed as “nice to have” amenities. As more people depend on public parks for recreation, the importance of these facilities is becoming recognized as vital community infrastructure. When asked if public recreation programs are a luxury rather than a necessity, a majority of Delaware residents (63%) disagreed. To further solidify the importance of providing publicly accessible recreation spaces, a large majority of Delaware residents (68%) agree that parks, open spaces, and conservation areas should receive

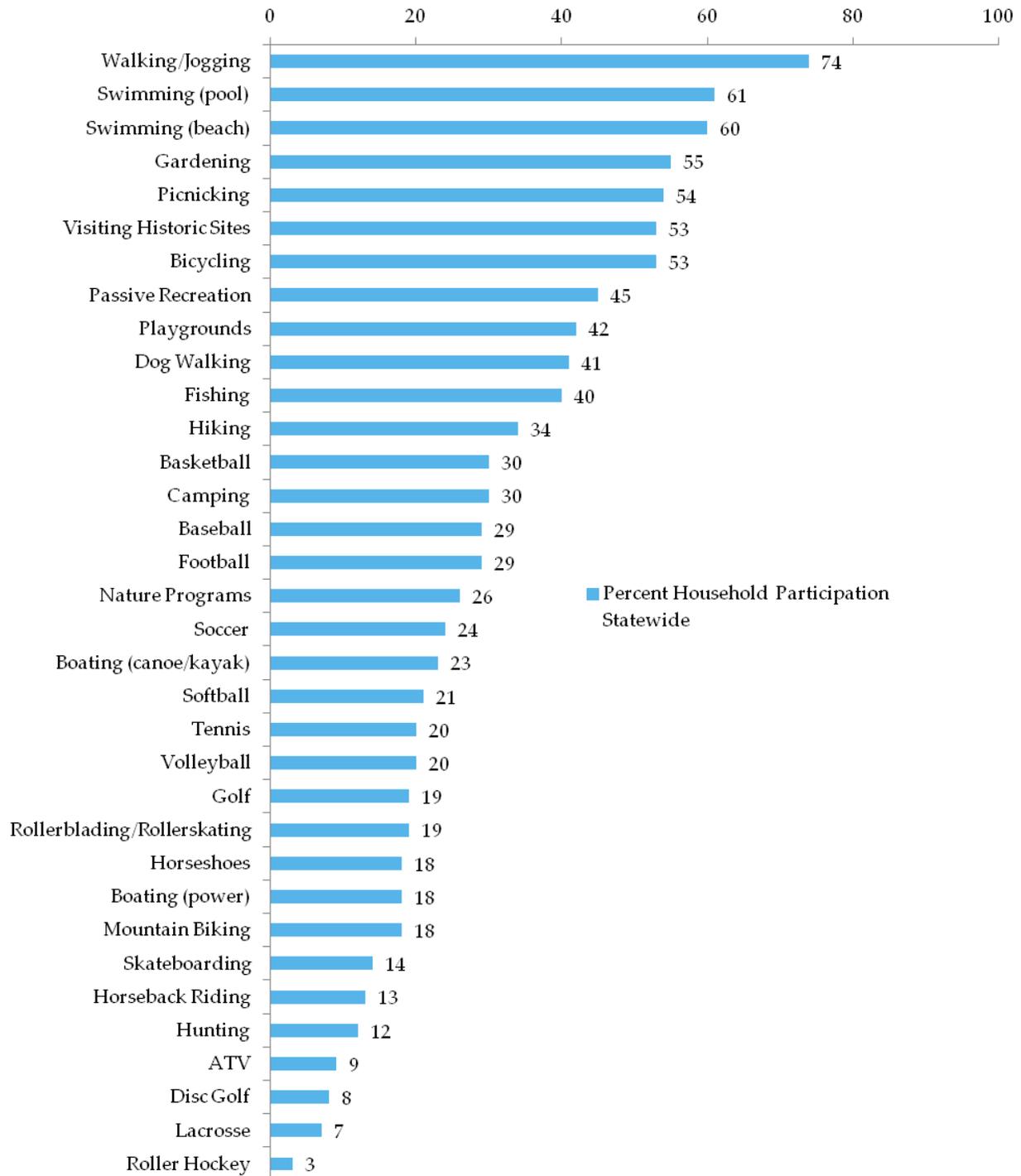


budget priority even during economically challenging times.

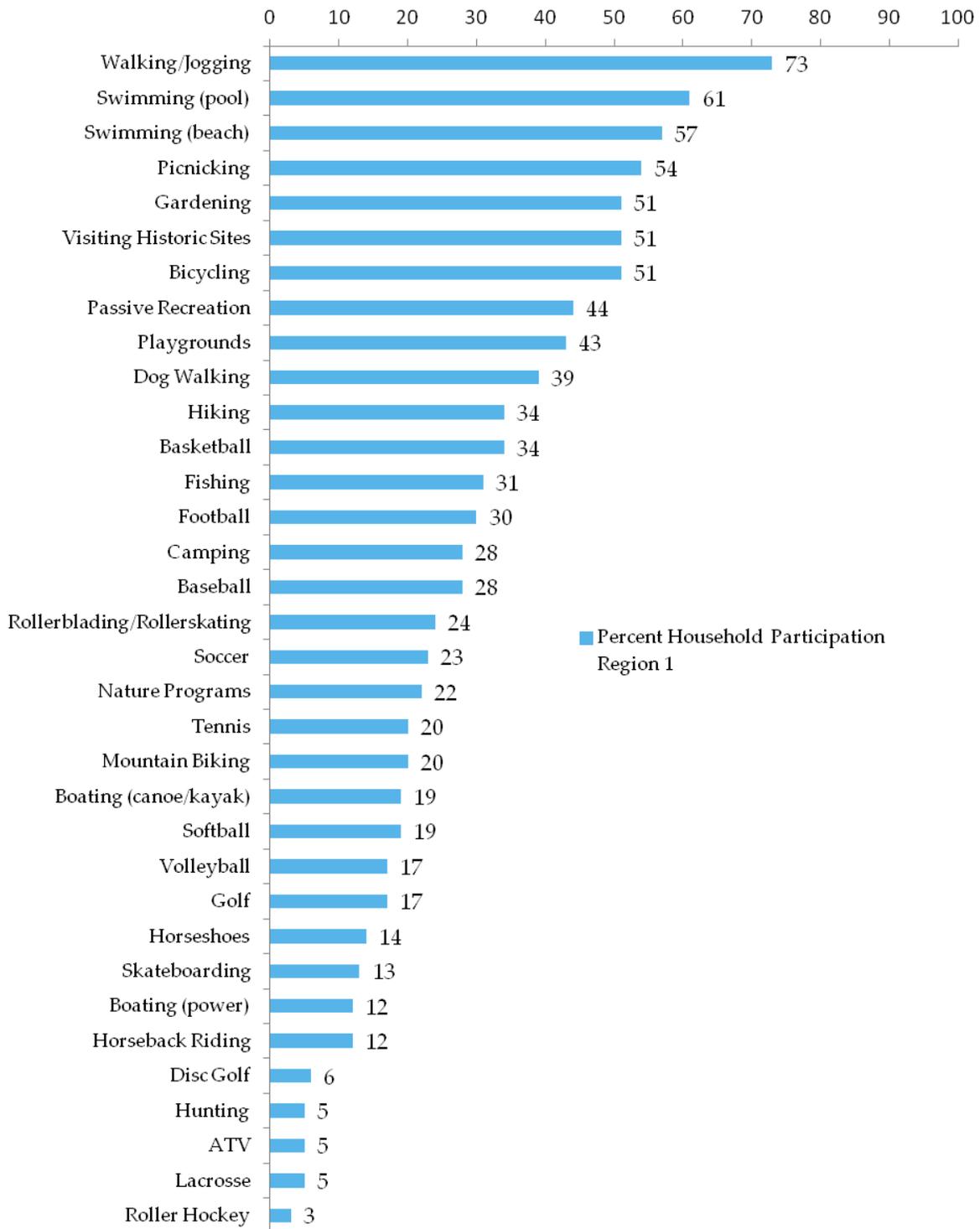
Delaware residents are cautious about any new construction for parks and recreation areas. A majority of residents would like future parks and recreation investments to go toward improvements or enhancements of existing areas (65%) rather than to be used for construction of new parks and recreation areas (29%). Region 1 residents are the most likely to say that they want to improve/enhance existing parks and recreation areas, and Region 5 residents prefer investments in new parks and recreation areas. In the municipal analysis, Wilmington residents are most likely to want improvements and enhancements to existing parks and recreation areas, while Newark residents are the most likely to want investments in new parks and recreation areas.

With limited funding and staff, determining which programs and facilities to offer continues to be a challenge for public recreation providers. When read a list of eight program areas, Delaware residents ranked the following programs as very important: outdoor recreation programs for teens ages 13-17; outdoor recreation programs for children ages 4-12; and outdoor recreation programs for persons with disabilities.

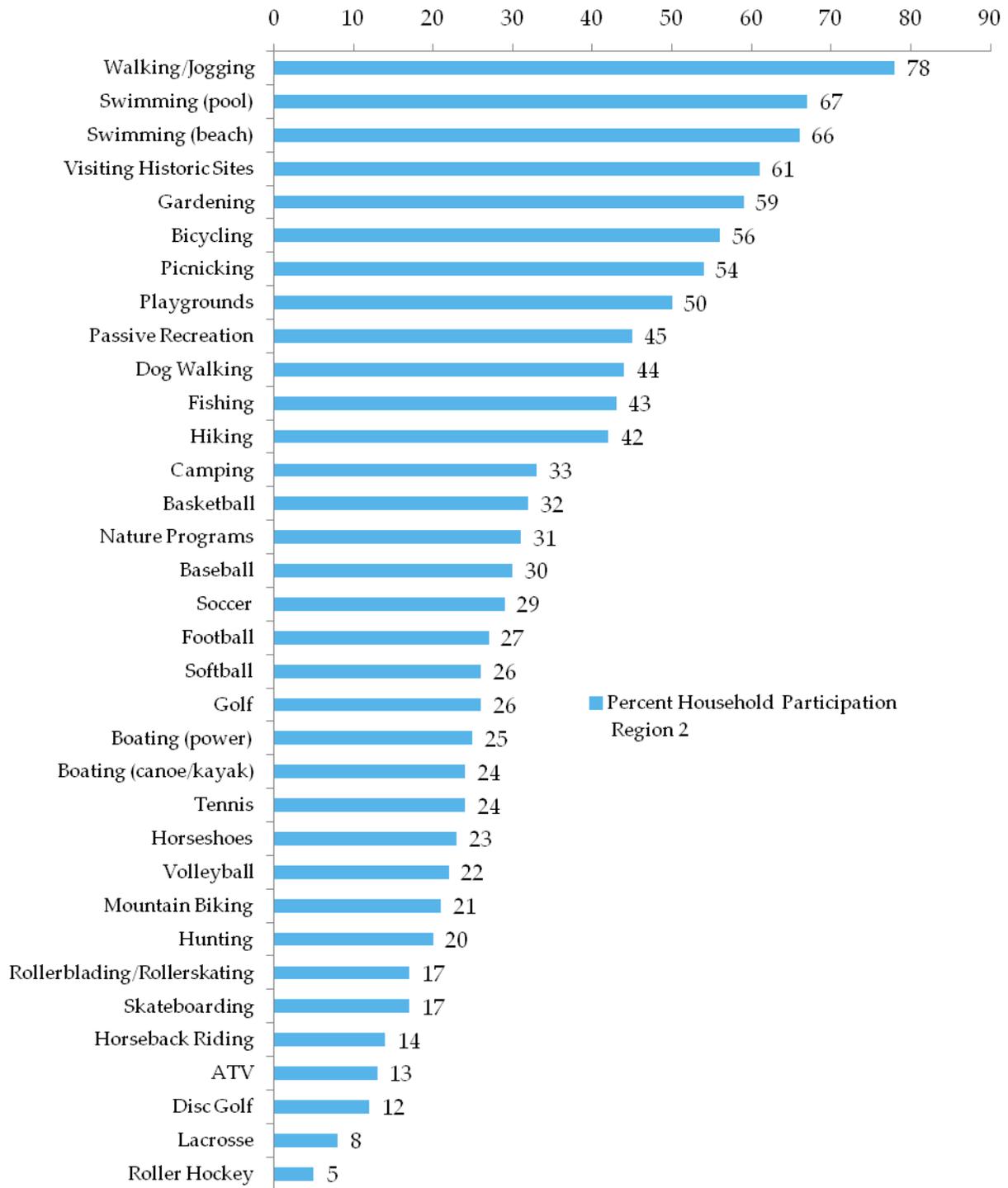
Chart 4.10- Statewide Household Outdoor Recreation Participation



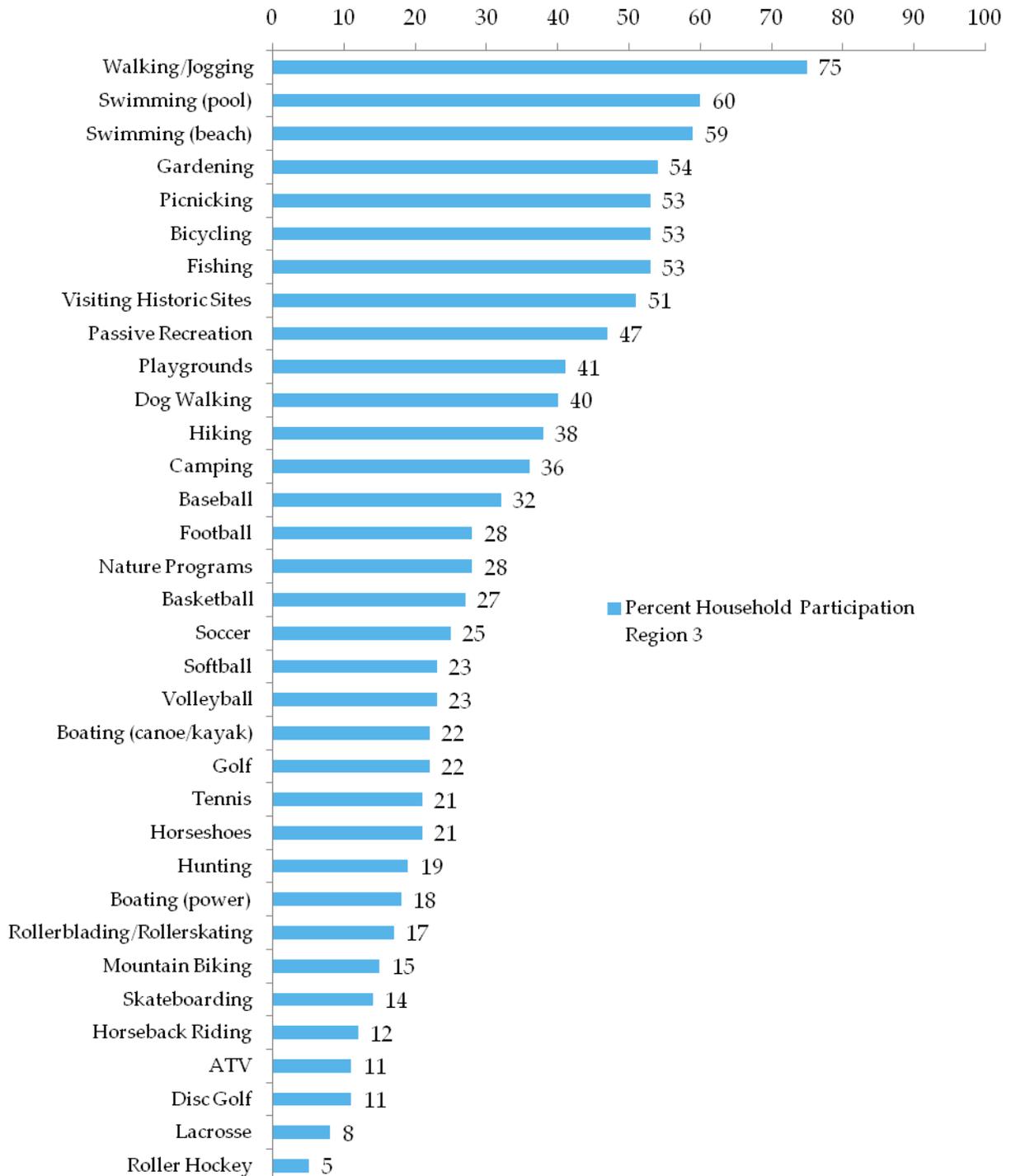
**Chart 4.11- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Region 1**



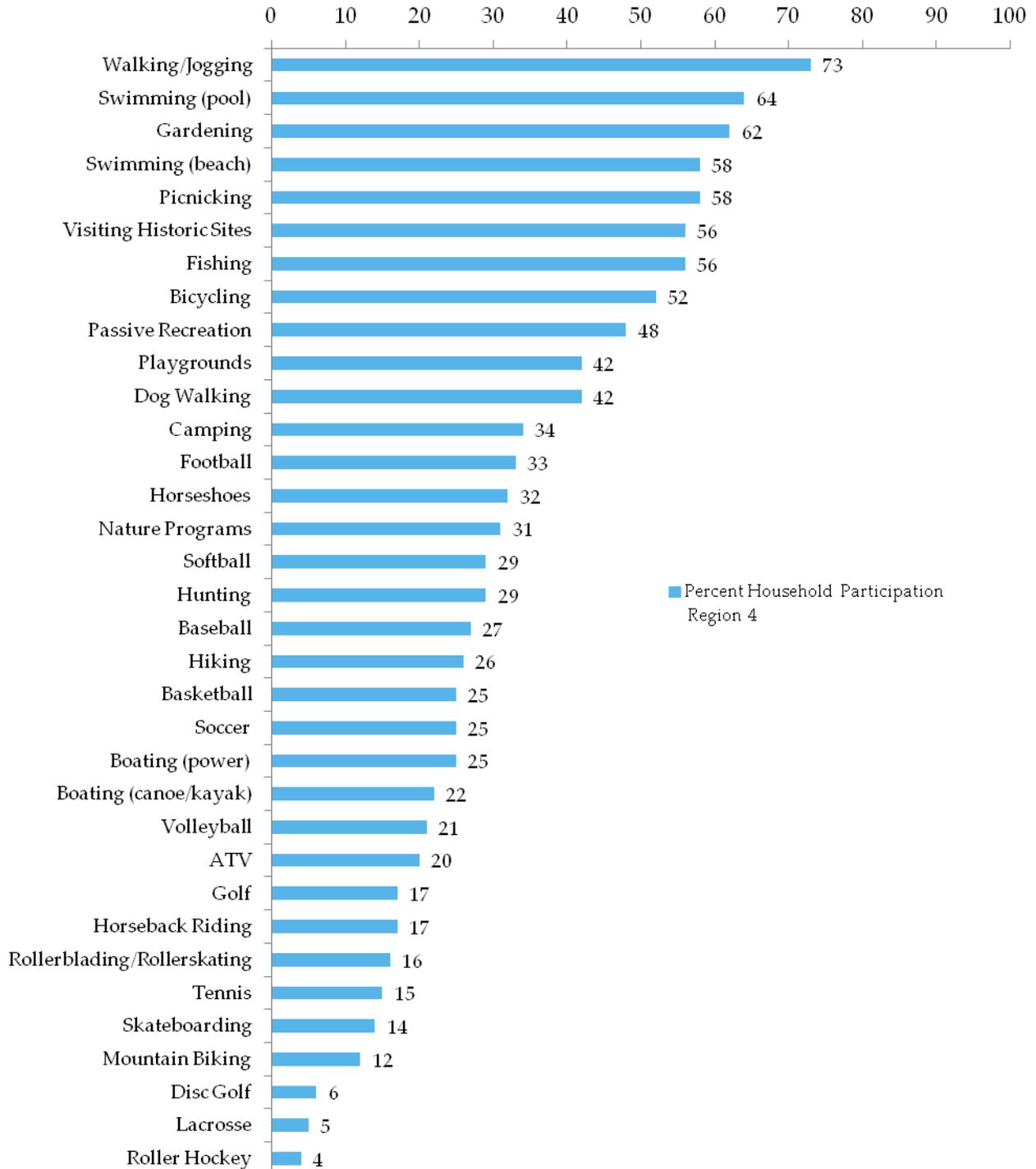
**Chart 4.12- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Region 2**



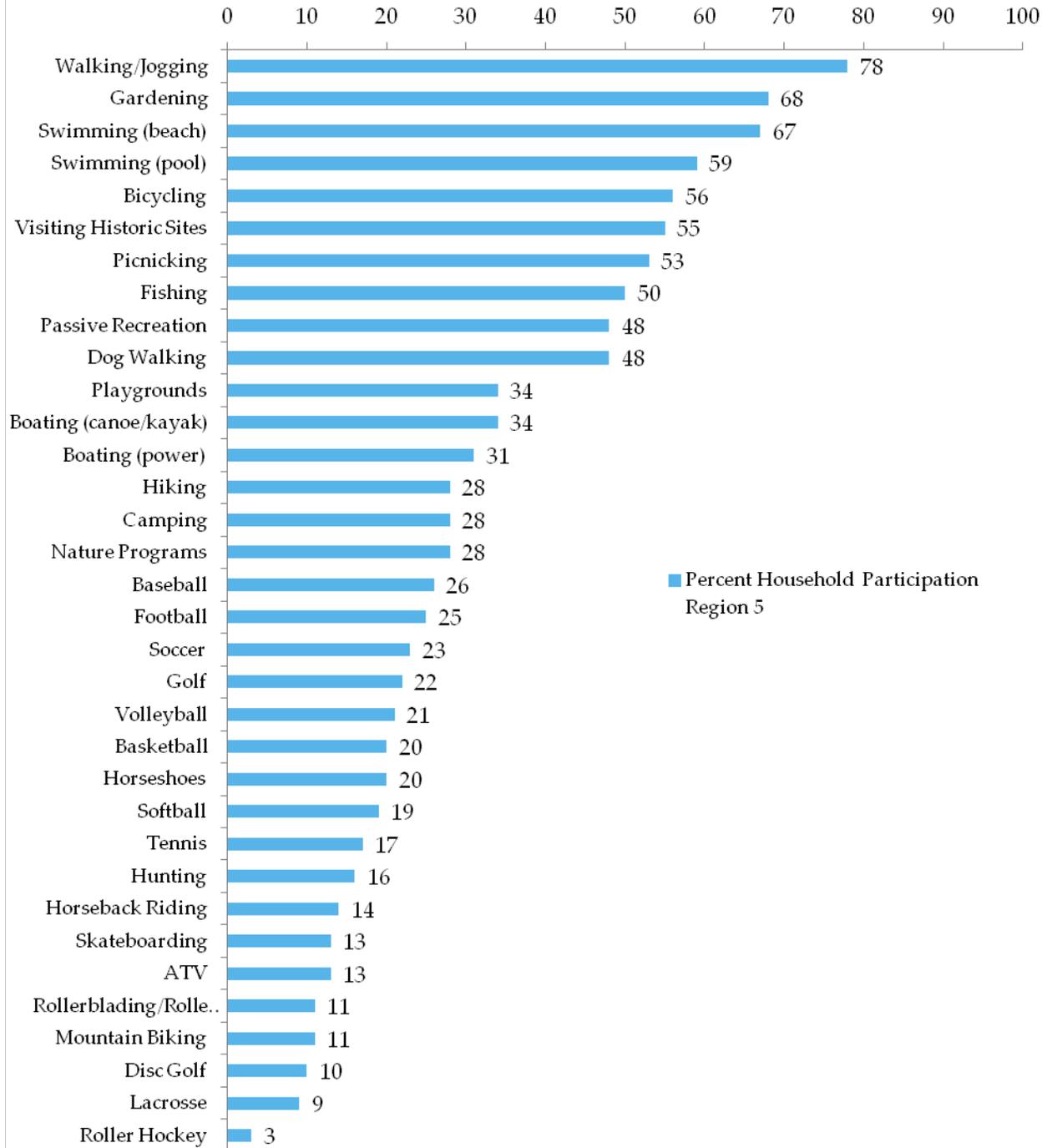
**Chart 4.13- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
Region 3**



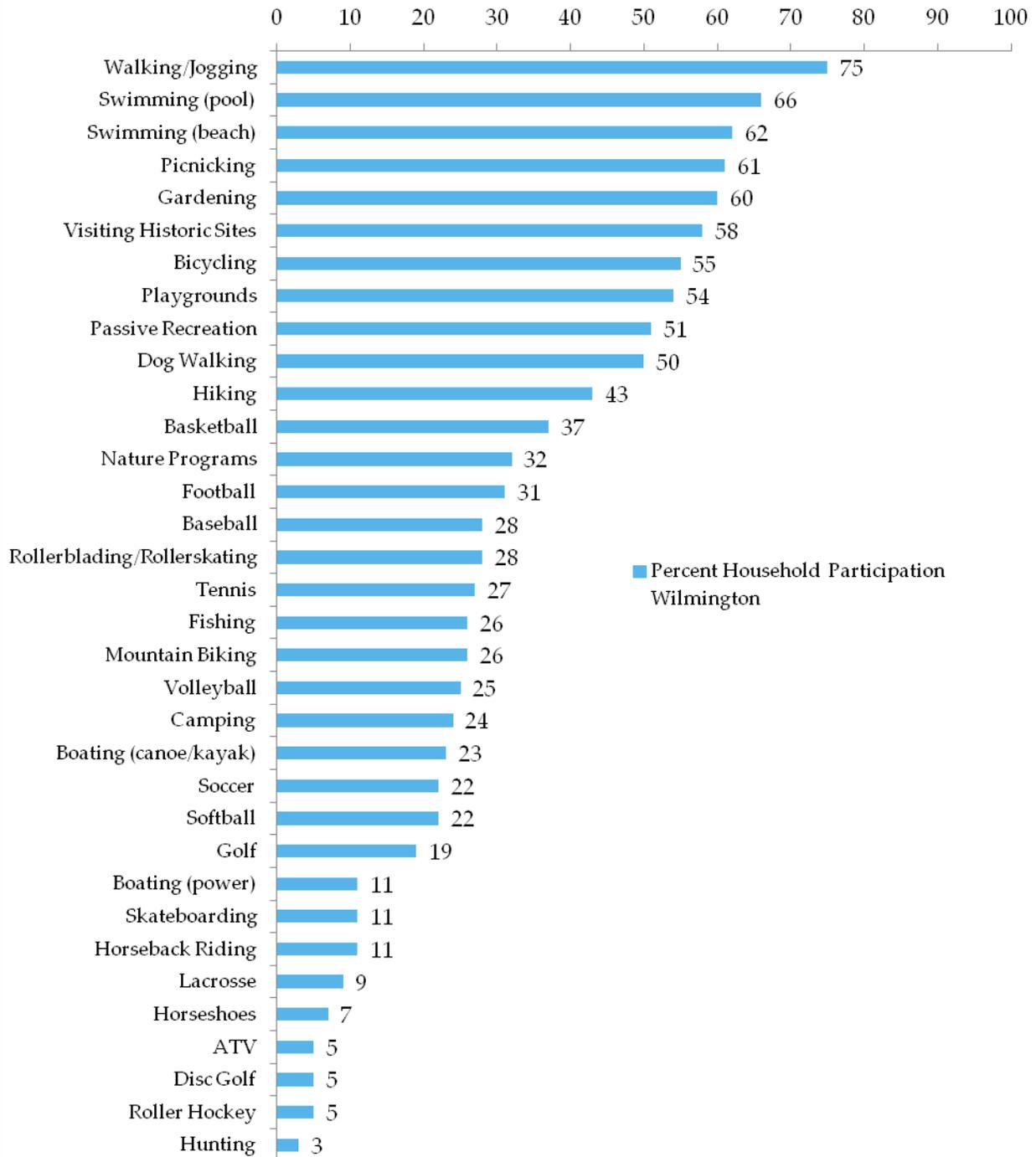
**Chart 4.14- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Region 4**



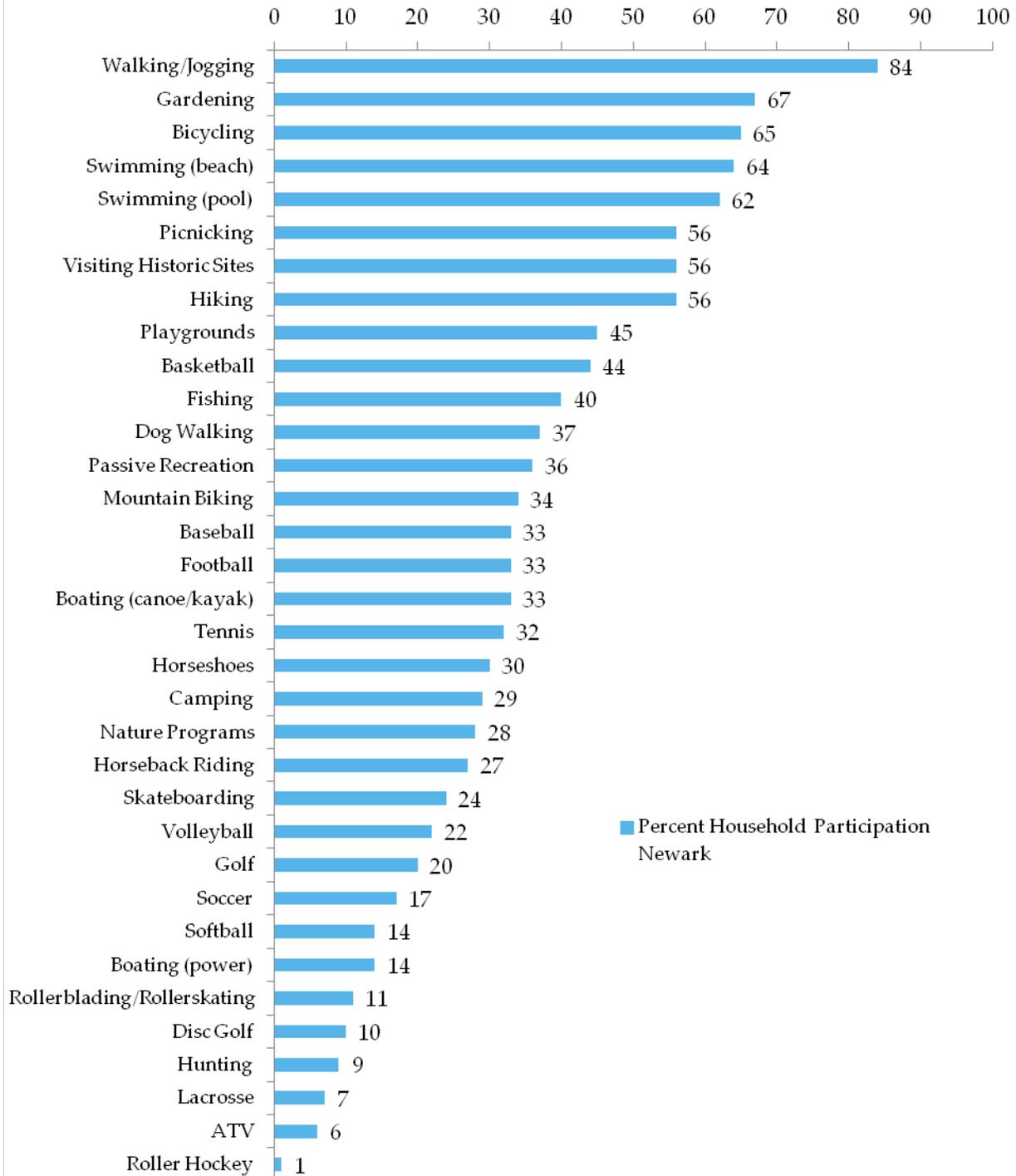
**Chart 4.15- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Region 5**



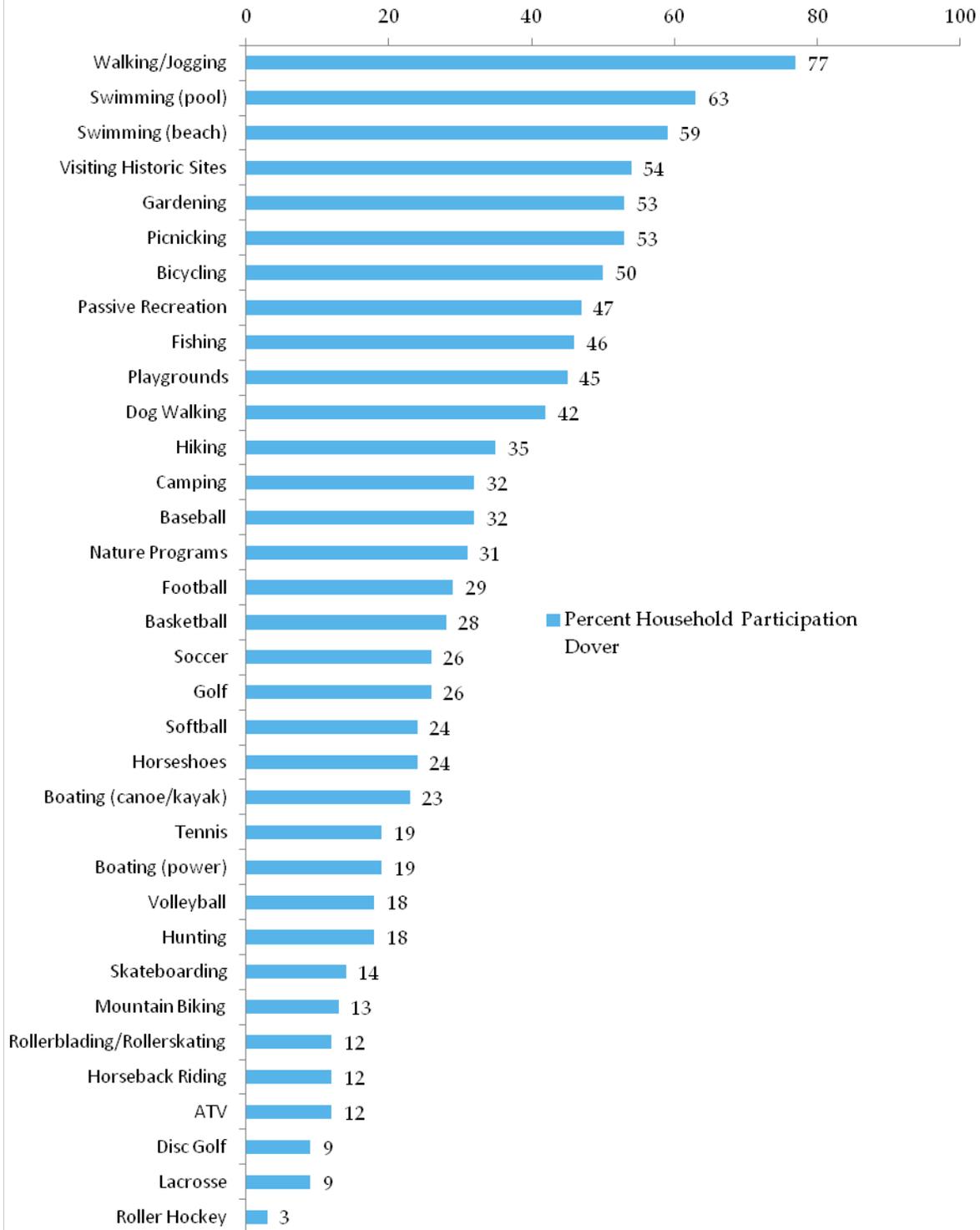
**Chart 4.16- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Wilmington**



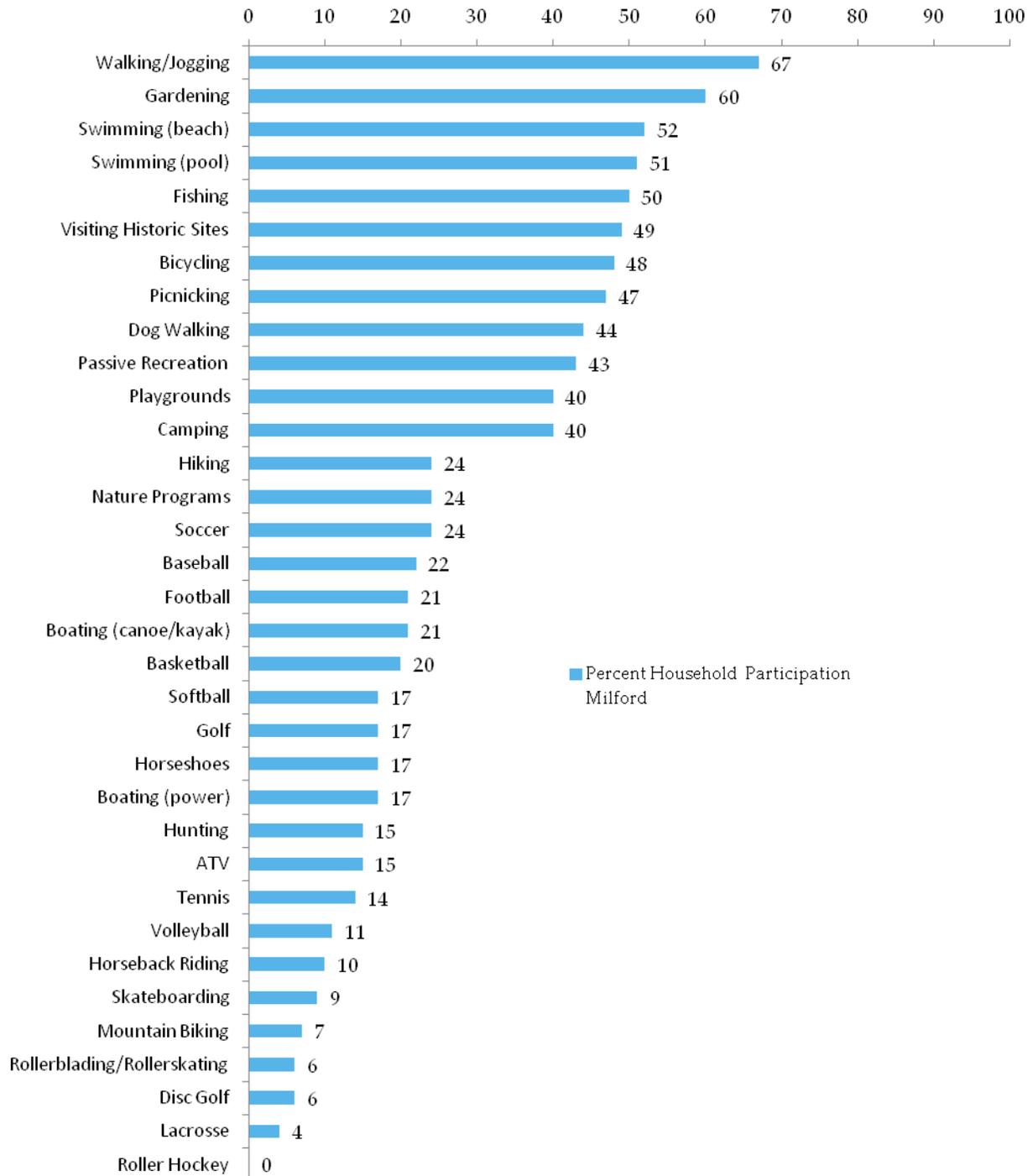
**Chart 4.17- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Newark**



**Chart 4.18- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Dover**



**Chart 4.19- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Milford**



**Chart 4.20- Household Outdoor Recreation Participation
 Seaford**

