

A man in a blue shirt, tan vest, and cap is fly fishing in a rocky river. In the background, there is a large wooden cabin with a balcony, surrounded by trees with autumn foliage. The scene is set in a scenic, natural environment.

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

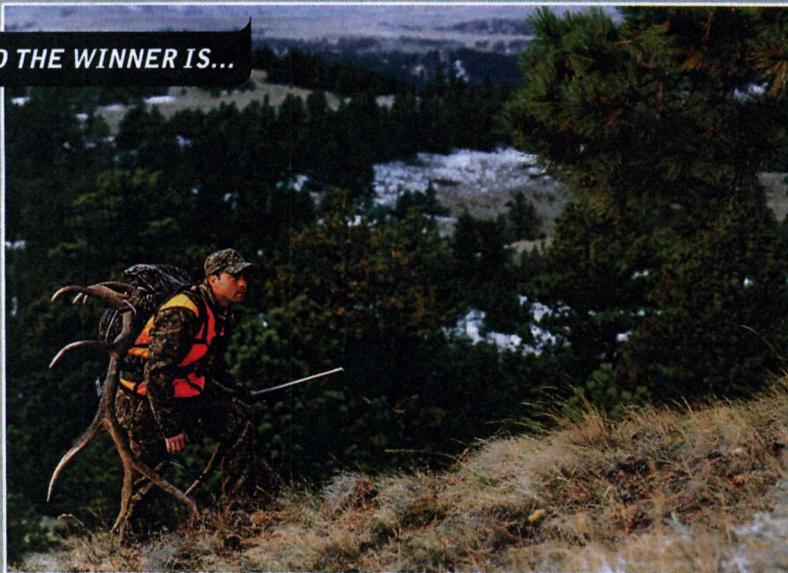
The website city-data.com has proven to be invaluable since we began this program. This is where we get the data for the bulk of our socio-economic categories: Population, Population Growth Since 2000, Median Household Income, Median Home Value, Cost of Living, Population Density,

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 100.) 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, 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: \$223,676 // 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