

The Economic Contributions of Recreational Visitation at Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge

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Division of Economics
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

This paper establishes the economic contribution baseline for recreational visitation at Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The paper addresses the levels of Refuge recreational activities and the economic effects of Refuge recreational activities. The analysis is followed by a glossary of terms. For more information regarding the methodology, please refer to “Banking on Nature – The Economic Contributions to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation” at <https://www.fws.gov/economics/divisionpublications/divisionpublications.asp>.

From an economic perspective, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge provides a variety of environmental and natural resource goods and services used by people either directly or indirectly. The use of these goods and services may result in economic effects to both local and state economies. The various services the Refuge provides can be grouped into five broad categories: (1) maintenance and conservation of environmental resources, services and ecological processes; (2) protection of natural resources such as fish, wildlife, and plants; (3) protection of cultural and historical sites and objects; (4) provision of educational and research opportunities; and (5) outdoor and wildlife-related recreation. A comprehensive economic profile of the Refuge would address all applicable economic effects associated with the use of refuge-produced goods and services. However, some of the major contributions of the Refuge to the natural environment, such as watershed protection, maintenance and stabilization of ecological processes, and the enhancement of biodiversity are beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, this paper focuses on economic effects associated with recreational visitation. As a result, benefits represent conservative estimates and do not represent the Refuge’s total social impacts.

Refuge Description

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is located along the northern Gulf of Mexico in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Congress established the refuge in 1980 for the protection and preservation of Alabama’s last remaining undisturbed coastal barrier island habitat. Bon Secour NWR features various coastal habitats including beach, sand dunes, scrub dunes, scrub forest, fresh and salt-water marshes, maritime forests, and open freshwater lakes and lagoons. These habitats serve as an important stop over and staging areas for a variety of neotropical migrants and other birds on their biannual journey between their nesting and wintering grounds. In addition to migratory birds, the Refuge provides important habitat for many native species of wildlife that include endangered and threatened species such as; the Alabama beach mouse, wintering Piping Plovers, and nesting loggerhead and Kemps Ridley sea turtles.

The Refuge’s 7,700 acres supports a rich mosaic of natural communities and landscape features that draws people to visit this wild gem. The Refuge serves as a living laboratory for students and scientists and the public is invited to connect with nature through: fishing, wildlife photography, observation, interpretation, and education. The Refuge hosts a public contact station, six miles of nature trails, a kayak launch and two beach access points to help facilitate these wildlife dependent activities.

The towns of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach host a combined resident population of 17,800 people but serves as a beach destination for many in the Southeast; drawing 6.3 million visitors a year. The number of visitors to the Refuge continues to rise due to the Refuge’s partnership with the cities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach as well as Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism. The city of Gulf Shores has even made one of its core values and top priorities, the protection of the natural environment through

conservation and education and supports the Refuge in its distinguishing designation as one of Alabama’s Top Ten Natural Wonders.

The Refuge not only continues to be a safe haven for the wildlife and the habitats they depend on but it is also a premier destination for birders, scientists, and visitors looking for a memorable and unique experience.

Activity Levels

Table 1 shows the recreation visits for the Refuge. The Refuge had about 132,000 recreational visits in 2017 which contributed to the economic effect of the Refuge. Non-consumptive recreation accounted for about 120,000 visits with residents comprising 47 percent of Refuge visitation.

Table 1. Bon Secour NWR: 2017 Recreation Visits

Activity	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
Non-Consumptive:			
Pedestrian	14,520	33,880	48,400
Auto Tour	-	-	-
Boat Trail/Launch	801	343	1,144
Bicycle	-	-	-
Photography	4,080	720	4,800
Interpretation	746	83	829
Other Recreation	34,440	22,960	57,400
Visitor Center	1,337	6,525	7,862
Hunting:			
Big Game	-	-	-
Small Game	-	-	-
Migratory Birds	-	-	-
Fishing:	5,801	5,801	11,602
Total Visitation	61,724	70,313	132,037

Source: Refuge Annual Performance Plan 2017 and Refuge Staff

Regional Economic Analysis

The economic area for the Refuge is the two-county area of Baldwin and Mobile Counties in Alabama. It is assumed that visitor expenditures occur primarily within these counties. Visitor recreation expenditures for 2017 are shown in Table 2. Total expenditures were \$5.5 million with non-residents accounting for \$4.5 million or 82 percent of total expenditures. Expenditures on non-consumptive activities accounted for 92 percent of all expenditures.

Spending in the local area generates and supports economic activity within the two county area (Table 3). The contribution of recreational spending in local communities was associated with about 71 jobs, \$2.3 million in employment income, \$557,000 in total tax revenue, and \$8.1 million in economic output.

Table 2. Bon Secour NWR: Visitor Recreation Expenditures (2017 \$,000)

Activity	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
Non-Consumptive	\$776.7	\$4,222.2	\$4,998.8
Hunting	\$0.0	\$0.0	\$0.0
Fishing	\$198.2	\$260.2	\$458.4
Total Expenditures	\$974.8	\$4,482.4	\$5,457.2

Table 3. Bon Secour NWR: Local Economic Contributions Associated with Recreation Visits (2017 \$,000)

	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
Economic Output	\$1,448.0	\$6,662.2	\$8,110.2
Jobs	13	58	71
Job Income	\$422.1	\$1,901.6	\$2,323.7
State and Local Tax Revenue	\$101.2	\$456.2	\$557.4

Glossary

Economic Contribution: The economic activity generated in a region by residents and non-resident recreation spending.

Expenditures: The spending by recreational visitors when visiting refuges. Expenditure categories include food, lodging, transportation, and other. Expenditure information is based on the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation (NSFHWR).

Economic Output: The total spending by final consumers on all goods. The amount reported in this study is the change in spending by final consumers in the region attributable to refuge visitation. Economic output includes spending by people who earn income from refuge visitors' activities as well as spending by refuge visitors themselves.

Impact: The new economic activity generated in a region as a refuge attracts non-residents to the area. This figure represents economic activity that would be lost if the refuge were not there.

IMPLAN: An economic modeling software package that applies input-output analysis techniques to regional economies.

Jobs: Full and part time jobs.

Job Income: Income to households from labor including wages and salaries.

Resident/Non-Resident: People living more than 50 miles from the refuges are considered non-residents for this study.

Tax Revenue: Local, county and state taxes: sales tax, property tax, and income tax

Visitors: A visitor is someone who comes to the refuge and participates in one or more of the activities available at the refuge.

Visits (visitation): A visit is not the same as a visitor. One visitor could be responsible for several visits on a refuge. For example, if a family of four went fishing in the morning and hiked a short nature trail in the afternoon, they would have contributed eight activity visits to the refuge; yet, they are only four visitors.

References

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