

# **The Economic Contributions of Recreational Visitation at Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge**

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This paper establishes the economic contribution baseline for recreational visitation at Las Vegas 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, Las Vegas 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**

Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1965 to provide wintering and migration habitat for ducks and geese of the Central flyway, as well as other migratory bird species. This 8,672 acre refuge is open seven days a week to the public for wildlife observation and photography. While driving the 8 mile auto tour, you may see many types of wildlife depending on the season. In the fall and winter months when you look across the short grass prairie you may see Sandhill Cranes and thousands of geese and ducks feeding in the fields, or see the majestic Bald Eagle roosting on a cottonwood snag at the Crane Lake Observation Deck. In the spring and summer months you may see a variety of raptors, elk, or hear the howl of a coyote. The Crane Lake Observation Deck is a great place to view elk in the early morning or early evening hours. Whatever the season, you can always enjoy the Gallinas Nature Trail which begins near a crumbling old rock homestead, drops down into a canyon and winds its way through Ponderosa pine and Juniper trees.

The Refuge offers environmental education and interpretation programs to school groups and sponsors public events such as Fall Flight Festival Wildlife Drive, Concert for the Birds, and a variety of special presentations, in conjunction with the Friends of Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge. Stop by the Refuge Headquarters for more information, Monday – Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. The Melton Pond overlook, located at the headquarters, is open during daylight hours.

## Activity Levels

Table 1 shows the recreation visits for the Refuge. The Refuge had about 12,000 recreational visits in 2017 which contributed to the economic effect of the Refuge. Non-consumptive recreation accounted for nearly all visits with residents comprising 55 percent of Refuge visitation. Interpretation activities include guided hikes, bird walks, and a variety of other conservation presentations.

**Table 1. Las Vegas NWR: 2017 Recreation Visits**

Activity	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
<b>Non-Consumptive:</b>			
Pedestrian	675	364	1,039
Auto Tour	3,200	3,912	7,112
Boat Trail/Launch	-	-	-
Bicycle	-	-	-
Photography	150	350	500
Interpretation	1,254	66	1,320
Other Recreation	489	26	515
Visitor Center	564	564	1,127
<b>Hunting:</b>			
Big Game	-	-	-
Small Game	-	-	-
Migratory Birds	34	29	63
<b>Fishing:</b>	-	-	-
<b>Total Visitation</b>	<b>6,367</b>	<b>5,310</b>	<b>11,676</b>

Source: Refuge Annual Performance Plan 2017 and Refuge Staff

## Regional Economic Analysis

The economic area for the Refuge is San Miguel County, New Mexico. It is assumed that visitor expenditures occur primarily within this county. Visitor recreation expenditures for 2017 are shown in Table 2. Total expenditures were about \$169,000 with non-residents accounting for \$115,000 or 68 percent of total expenditures. Expenditures on non-consumptive activities accounted for 98 percent of all expenditures.

Spending in the local area generates and supports economic activity within San Miguel County (Table 3). The contribution of recreational spending in local communities was associated with about 2 jobs, \$39,000 in employment income, \$25,000 in total tax revenue, and \$174,000 in economic output.

**Table 2. Las Vegas NWR: Visitor Recreation Expenditures (2017 \$,000)**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Residents</b>	<b>Non-Residents</b>	<b>Total</b>
Non-Consumptive	\$52.8	\$111.7	\$164.6
Hunting	\$1.0	\$3.1	\$4.1
Fishing	-	-	-
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$53.9</b>	<b>\$114.8</b>	<b>\$168.7</b>

**Table 3. Las Vegas NWR: Local Economic Contributions Associated with Recreation Visits (2017 \$,000)**

	<b>Residents</b>	<b>Non-Residents</b>	<b>Total</b>
Economic Output	\$63.9	\$110.3	\$174.2
Jobs	1	1	2
Job Income	\$14.3	\$25.2	\$39.4
State and Local Tax Revenue	\$10.0	\$14.9	\$24.9

## 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 8 activity visits to the refuge; yet, they are only four visitors.

## References

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