

The Economic Contributions of Recreational Visitation at National Bison Range

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This paper establishes the economic contribution baseline for recreational visitation at National Bison Range (Range). The paper addresses the levels of Range recreational activities and the economic effects of Range 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, National Bison Range 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 Range 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 Range would address all applicable economic effects associated with the use of Range-produced goods and services. However, some of the major contributions of the Range 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 Range’s total social impacts.

Range Description

The National Bison Range, it’s two overlay Refuges (Ninepipe and Pablo NWR’s) and nine units of the Northwest Montana Wetland Management District (WMD) are located in the intermountain Mission Valley with spectacular views of the Mission Valley. The refuge complex headquarters is located in Moiese, Montana, in Lake County, about 45 miles north of Missoula. Established in 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt to prevent the extinction of the plains bison, it is one of the oldest refuges in the system. The National Bison Range is located within the external boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation.

The refuge complex is located on the gently rolling, glacial till deposits of ancient Lake Missoula which support high densities of small wetlands. More than 205 bird species have been recorded in the area, a host for migrant birds of the Pacific flyway. These grassland and wetland areas provide important habitat for wetland and grassland dependent migratory birds. The Waterfowl Production Areas of the Northwest Montana WMD provide opportunities for the public to hunt waterfowl and upland game as well as observe and photograph wildlife. Refuge complex lands also border some State and tribal lands that are managed for conservation purposes

The refuge complex is best known for the bison herd that roams the Bison Range. The bison herd is maintained at 300 to 350 animals and is managed to maintain a high level of genetic diversity that can be shared with other agencies and Tribes. The beautiful setting of the Mission Valley combined with this diversity of wildlife species attracts visitors to the refuge complex annually. In the summer months, these visitors are accommodated in the visitor center and on the 19-mile Red Sleep Mountain Drive that travels

through the various habitats found on the Bison Range. The tour drive and associated hiking trails provide excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and photography

Activity Levels

Table 1 shows the recreation visits for the Range. The Range had about 278,000 recreational visits in 2017 which contributed to the economic effect of the Range. Non-consumptive recreation accounted for most visits with residents comprising 16 percent of Range visitation.

Table 1. National Bison Range: 2017 Recreation Visits

Activity	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
Non-Consumptive:			
Pedestrian	12,560	50,240	62,800
Auto Tour	19,650	111,350	131,000
Boat Trail/Launch	-	-	-
Bicycle	248	83	330
Photography	7,800	44,200	52,000
Interpretation	35	200	235
Other Recreation	75	25	100
Visitor Center	4,715	26,716	31,430
Hunting:			
Big Game	-	-	-
Small Game	-	-	-
Migratory Birds	-	-	-
Fishing:	240	160	400
Total Visitation	45,322	232,973	278,295

Source: Refuge Annual Performance Plan 2017 and Refuge Staff

Regional Economic Analysis

The economic area for the Range is the three-county area Flathead, Lake, and Sanders Counties in Montana. It is assumed that visitor expenditures occur primarily within these counties. Visitor recreation expenditures for 2017 are shown in Table 2. Total expenditures were \$16.3 million with non-residents accounting for \$15.6 million or 96 percent of total expenditures. Expenditures on non-consumptive activities accounted nearly all of expenditures.

Spending in the local area generates and supports economic activity within the three county area (Table 3). The contribution of recreational spending in local communities was associated with about 223 jobs, \$6.8 million in employment income, \$1.7 million in total tax revenue, and \$24.8 million in economic output.

Table 2. National Bison Range: Visitor Recreation Expenditures (2017 \$,000)

Activity	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
Non-Consumptive	\$682.9	\$15,591.2	\$16,274.1
Hunting	-	-	-
Fishing	\$2.2	\$4.8	\$7.0
Total Expenditures	\$685.0	\$15,596.0	\$16,281.1

Table 3. National Bison Range: Local Economic Contributions Associated with Recreation Visits (2017 \$,000)

	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
Economic Output	\$1,051.3	\$23,699.9	\$24,751.2
Jobs	11	212	223
Job Income	\$305.2	\$6,531.0	\$6,836.3
State and Local Tax Revenue	\$75.0	\$1,626.7	\$1,701.7

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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