

News Release



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Report Shows National Wildlife Refuges Provide Economic Boost

Recreational use on national wildlife refuges generated almost \$1.7 billion in total economic activity during fiscal year 2006, according to a new report released today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The report, titled *Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation* was compiled by Service economists.

According to the study, nearly 35 million people visited national wildlife refuges in 2006, supporting almost 27,000 private sector jobs and producing about \$543 million in employment income. In addition, recreational spending on refuges generated nearly \$185.3 million in tax revenue at the local, county, state and federal level. The economic benefit is almost four times the amount appropriated to the Refuge System in Fiscal Year 2006. About 87 percent of refuge visitors travel from outside the local area.

“We’ve always known that national wildlife refuges enrich Americans’ lives,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director H. Dale Hall. “This report reveals that the Refuge System, while admirably fulfilling its conservation mission, also repays us in dollars and cents. Those economic benefits go far beyond the system’s mandated mission to ensure wild creatures will always have a place on the American landscape.”

Using findings from 80 national wildlife refuges considered typical in terms of the nation's recreational interests and spending habits, the report analyzed recreational participation in and expenditures for freshwater fishing, saltwater fishing, migratory bird hunting, small game hunting, big game hunting and non-consumptive activities, including wildlife observation. Calculation of the total economic activity included money spent for food and refreshments, lodging at motels, cabins, lodges or campgrounds, and transportation.

In making its calculations, *Banking on Nature 2006* used the Service's "2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation" and the visitation numbers from the individual refuges. Units with fewer than 1,500 visitors per year and those in Hawaii and Alaska (because travel there is so expensive) were excluded from the final calculations. Therefore, the *Banking on Nature* study estimates that 34.8 million people visited wildlife refuges—a tally smaller than the actual visitation figure of more than 37 million reported by all refuges.

The National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses 97 million acres and 548 national wildlife refuges. While the primary purpose of the Refuge System is to conserve native fish and wildlife and their habitat, priority is given to hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, wildlife observation, environmental education, and interpretation.

Among significant other findings:

- About 82 percent of total expenditures came from non-consumptive recreation (recreation other than hunting and fishing) on national wildlife refuges. Fishing accounted for 12 percent of total expenditures, while hunting accounted for 6 percent.

The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, published every five years by the Service, found that more than 87 million Americans, or 38 percent of the United States' population age 16 and older, pursued outdoor recreation in 2006. They spent \$120 billion that year pursuing those activities. About 71 million people observed wildlife, while 30 million fished and 12.5 million hunted.

- The Southeast Region—with such popular attractions as Okefenokee, J.N. “Ding” Darling and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges—had the most visitors in fiscal year 2006 with 9.4 million. Spending in the region also supported the highest number of jobs, at 7,381.
- Of the report’s 80 national wildlife refuges, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia reported the most recreational visits (about 7.5 million) as well as the most jobs, at 3,766, and generated the most economic return, at \$315.4 million. It also showed the greatest economic benefit, with \$155.42 returned for every \$1 in budgeted expenditures.
- Many other national wildlife refuges also had marked returns for their budgets. Don Edwards San Francisco National Wildlife Refuge, for example, had more than 1.5 million visits in 2006 and returned \$43.55 for every \$1 in federal budget expenditures. Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Delaware—with 271,000 visitors in 2006—returned \$23.38 for every \$1 in budgeted expenditures and was responsible for 198 private sector jobs. Muscatatuck in south central Indiana—spanning just 7,800 acres—returned \$21.56 for every \$1 in budgeted expenditures and supported 48 private sector jobs.

For a copy of the report or to find more information on the National Wildlife Refuge System, visit <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance

program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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