

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Great Smoky Mountains National Park's economic impact

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park has long held the title of the nation's most visited national park, but a recent study shows it holds the top spot in terms of visitor spending.

The study estimates that in 2010 the park's 9 million visitors spend more than \$818 million in the gateway communities around the park and that 11,367 local jobs were supported by park visitor spending.

This is great news for the people and communities around the park, and it really drives home a pair of key points for the people of the Southern Appalachians.

The first, despite the old argument that environmental health and economic health are mutually exclusive, we have evidence that a tremendously bold conservation initiative – creating the national park, has resulted in a major economic driver for the area, while protecting the headwaters of numerous streams, helping clean our air, and providing a diversity of wildlife habitats.

Secondly, the study drives home the fact that in the Southern Appalachians, the quality of the landscape is an economic driver. People come here, and spend money, because of the forests, the fields, and the streams. These things can never be outsourced, the jobs associated with them will be here as long as people come to experience the outdoors. Whatsmore, protecting that landscape improves the quality of life for those of us who call this area home.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.