

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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## News Release

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### National Wildlife Refuges Fuel Local Economies

An economic impact study released earlier this year, titled [Eastern North Carolina National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Use Study \(pdf 1.40mb\)](#), shows that the region's National Wildlife Refuges are an important economic engine in northeastern North Carolina and southeastern Virginia. The study, based on data collected from October 2004 through October 2005 on the region's eight refuges, reveals that the annual direct economic impact in terms of visitor expenditures was estimated to be \$166.6 million within the region. Of that amount, \$136 million was attributed to Pea Island refuge and \$3.2 million was related to Alligator River. Also included in the survey area was Roanoke River, Mackay Island, Pocosin Lakes, Back Bay, Great Dismal Swamp and Mattamuskeet refuges.

"We all know the ecological value of preserving habitat and the many species we have here," said Mike Bryant, US Fish and Wildlife Service's Alligator River manager. "Now this study shows that do so also is good sound business." Hans Vogelsong of East Carolina University's Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies conducted the study paid for by the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society. Based on 1,673 surveys of refuge visitors, the report states that approximately two-thirds of those responding to the requests for information identified themselves as tourists.

Data revealed that another \$324.6 million spent by visitors in the region, although not directly associated with a refuge, also was attributed to the presence of the wildlife refuges. Included in that total is \$280 million spent by visitors to Pea Island and \$9.4 million by those visiting Alligator River.

Fishing ranked No. 1 in the list of planned activities on the refuges, with bird-watching, "other" and hunting following. Collected data indicates that the average visitor to the refuges is 51.44 years old and has a mean household income of at least \$50,000, however, more than a third of all respondents reported income in excess of \$75,000. More than 80 percent of those surveyed had at least some college and more than one-third had engaged in post college graduate work.

At Pea Island, 80 percent of those surveyed identified themselves as tourists, and the majority indicated that the refuge was the primary reason that they visited the region. More than 1 million visitors a year take advantage of outdoor opportunities available on Pea Island, particularly

birders, many of whom travel the world in pursuit of their hobby.

Of the eight refuges, Roanoke River, Pea Island and Alligator River visitors reported the highest amount of spending directly related to refuge visits. Expenditures for Alligator River respondents averaged \$184.91 and those visiting Pea Island averaged \$208.80. Roanoke River visitors averaged more at \$221.30, however, the primary difference with Pea Island was in the higher permit and program fees reported at Roanoke River refuge.

Alligator River and Pea Island data shows that spending not directly related to the refuges but incurred during the trip to the region far surpassed that spent in relation to other refuges in the region. Alligator River visitors averaged \$575.17 and those trekking to Pea Island reported spending of \$573.59.

The collected data indicates that indirect impacts related directly to a refuge visit -- such as groceries needed by restaurants or visitor's laundry expenses -- also help fuel the regional economy.

Visitors to the 12-county region created an estimated \$30.4 million in indirect impact. And induced impacts such as employee wages that are recycled through the region were set at \$35.4 million. These impacts also translated into approximately 4,700 jobs in the region.

An additional \$54 million of indirect impacts and \$67 million of induced impacts generated by visitors spending not directly related to refuge visits prompted the creation of another 9,500 jobs.

Interested persons may [download a copy of the report \(pdf 1.40mb\)](#) from <http://www.fws.gov/alligatorriver>, stop by the any of the refuges involved in the study to review a copy of the report, or call 252-473-1131 ext 230 for more information..