

## Secretary of Interior Reports Economic Impact of National Wildlife Refuges

Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton on October 6, 2005 released a report that shows recreational use on national wildlife refuges generated almost \$1.4 billion in total economic activity during the 2004 fiscal year. The report, ***Banking on Nature 2004: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation***, was compiled by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service economists.

According to the study, nearly 37 million people visited national wildlife refuges in 2004, creating almost 24,000 private sector jobs and producing about \$454 million in employment income. Additionally, recreational spending on refuges generated nearly \$151 million in tax revenue at the local, county, state and federal level.

"Our national wildlife refuges are not only beautiful places where fish and wildlife can flourish, they are also economic engines for their local communities, providing jobs, customers for local businesses, and tax revenue for local governments," Secretary Norton said. "With 17 new refuges and a 30 percent increase in the refuge system budget since 2001, we are ensuring our refuges continue to be places of awe and wonder as well as economic vitality for local communities across the country."

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The report reinforces the travel industry's belief that ecotourism is becoming big business, according to Roger Dow, president of the Travel Industry Association of America, who unveiled the report with the Secretary of the Interior. The study measured the economic impact of ecotourism, large numbers of people traveling substantial distances for outdoor activities like wildlife observation and photography, as well as more traditional refuge programs like hunting and fishing.

Highlights from the ***Banking on Nature 2004*** report include:

- More than 80 percent of retail sales came from people who traveled some distance to get to national wildlife refuges and the recreational opportunities they offer. Local residents accounted for just 17 percent of total retail sales to refuge visitors.
- The Southeast led the Refuge System in economic impact. With nearly 11 million visitors last year, national wildlife refuges in the Southeast created more than \$451 million in economic activity and more than 8,500 jobs.
- The report shows a considerable "consumer surplus" of more than \$1 billion in 2004. Consumer surplus is a measure of how much more people are willing to pay for recreation than it actually costs them. Using findings from 93 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. Costs considered in the 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 2004*** used the Fish and Wildlife Service's "2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation" and the visitation numbers from Refuge Management Information System. Refuges 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.

The National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses nearly 100 million acres and 545 national wildlife

refuges. Priority uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System are hunting, fishing, photography, wildlife observation, environmental education, and interpretation.

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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.