

THE BUSINESS OF WILDLIFE

TED DOSSETT, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, 512 North Salisbury Street, Raleigh, NC 27611

SYDNEY BAYNES, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, 512 North Salisbury Street, Raleigh, NC 27611

Abstract: One of the most important, yet difficult challenges facing wildlife agencies is increasing the public's awareness of the economic value of wildlife. Wildlife associated recreation including hunting, fishing, bird watching and other outdoor activities all add dollars to national and state economies. Yet, loss of this potential is rarely considered when conflicts occur between habitat protection and development. This slide show addresses the economic value of wildlife and can be adapted for use by all states in the Southeastern Association membership.

Proc. Ann. Conf. S.E. Assoc. Fish & Wildl. Agencies 35:679-680

Hunting, fishing and wildlife associated recreation is big business. In 1975 almost 96-million Americans took to the woods, fields and streams in pursuit of a wide range of wildlife-related activities. In the process they spent \$21 billion on hunting and fishing. Now that's big business.

It all stems from people enjoying themselves, by experiencing wildlife in 1 way or another. A case in point begins on a chilly October morning. John Dawson has been on his deer stand in northeastern North Carolina since before daylight. He had left work early the previous day and made the 150-mi trip to the hunt club where he has been a member for 7 years. As usual, there were several last minute stops along the way, for little things: insect repellent because even in October the mosquitos can be a real nuisance, a pair of camouflage gloves to replace the ones he had lost earlier during the bow season, and the inevitable stop to gas up — 22 gal at \$1.40/gal. During supper at a motel near the camp, he had overheard the night clerk quoting the rate for a double room. It had increased almost \$7 since he had last stayed there. He felt fortunate to belong to the club. But even with that, he figured, the trip still will cost him \$80 to \$100 by the time he got home. No question about it, he thought, being in the great outdoors, getting away from it all for a few days, costs money. Just then, his thoughts were interrupted by a flick of white off to his left.

John Dawson's trip after big game, with many variations on the same theme, occurred 1,300,000 times in North Carolina in 1975 — trips in which hunters spent a total of \$76,429,000.

That figure is just for big game. North Carolina hunters spent another \$82,151,000 on hunting small game, migratory birds and other game such as crows and woodchucks. In all, Tarheel hunters spent \$171,620,000 in 1975. That's money that was pumped into local economies all across the state, from Murphy to Manteo, and it went for all sorts of items ranging from buckshot to broadheads.

Hunting is only 1 type of wildlife associated recreation that North Carolinians enjoy. On that same October morning, several hours later and about 300 mi to the west, the sun has finally topped the ridge as Bob Fisher lays a dry fly into an eddy

on a trout stream. Within seconds a silver shape flashes in the green water and the rod tip snaps into a tight arc. Fisher quickly works the fish into his net; it's a handsome brown trout that will go about 12 in. He savors the moment, and any thoughts of what the fish actually cost him never cross his mind. He knows how to talk money; admits that a season of trout fishing costs him about \$1,000. The dozen or so trips he has made from his Piedmont home each took about \$30 worth of gas. He has cut some trip costs by camping, but his food bill still averages about \$25 per trip. Several years ago his initial investment in equipment — a good graphite rod, reel and line, wading shoes and fishing vest — had come to about \$700. and there were still the annual costs of replacing equipment . . . He knew the figures, understood all the arguments; but, he still couldn't put a price on the thrill of catching a 12-in trout.

Fishing has widespread appeal, if money spent in the pursuit of it is any measure. In 1975, over \$571 million was spent on fishing in North Carolina. Heading the list was salt water fishing with over \$305 million spent in 1975. More than \$221 million was spent on warm water fishing during that same period. Another \$19,657,000 went for cold water fishing, a category that includes trout fishing. The lowest expenditure, almost \$19 million was laid out in 1975 for sea-run fishing — an activity that includes striped bass, shad and herring fishing.

By now these figures begin to overwhelm, but they actually represent only 2 categories of wildlife associated recreation. Many persons take part in activities that are only indirectly related to hunting or fishing. On a national basis, for example, 44,586,000 persons took part in some type of recreational shooting; this included archery, target shooting with guns, plinking and other types of shooting. All of these activities, of course, require an array of equipment ranging from clay pigeons to spotting scopes.

Next to fishing, wildlife observation was the most popular nationwide wildlife related activity. In 1975, over 49 million persons engaged in this activity. Other activities, clamming, crabbing and sea shell collecting, ranked 3rd in popularity with over 25 million participants. Including wildlife photography, almost 59 million persons participated in these activities in 1975. And to some degree, they all cost money in terms of equipment, transportation, food and lodging.

For too long, the economic value of hunting and fishing and other wildlife associated activities has been ignored. Perhaps it stems from a traditional belief that because wildlife is free of captivity, it is free of cost. But as our nation has changed — become more urbanized — the role of wildlife has undergone a radical shift. There is no longer the direct relationship in which man uses wildlife only to provide him with food or a livelihood; instead, the relationship has become one in which man looks to wildlife to reaffirm his ties with the natural world — to know something other than asphalt and concrete, steel and glass and neon lights.

The numerous trips that North Carolinians make to woods, fields and streams offer strong proof of the popularity of wildlife-associated recreation. At the same time, money spent on these activities has become a large share of North Carolina's economy, a fact that has too long been overlooked; but, in reality has become the business of wildlife.