

Nature Tourism and Nature-Based Festivals

Nature Tourism has been defined as discretionary travel to natural areas that conserves environmental, social, and cultural values while generating an economic benefit to the local community. Nature tourists are travelers who spend time and money to experience the outdoors, learn more about the particular wildlife or culture of the destination, and have a concern for minimum impact to the environment.

Nature-Based Festivals are appealing because they bring people together to celebrate their relationship to nature. Nature-based festivals are fun, educational, and conservation effective, and they bring tourism dollars into the communities hosting them. Wildlife festivals demonstrate the value people place on wildlife and wildlife-related recreation.

Wildlife Watching is Big Business!

Wildlife Watching and its associated activities are a major economic force.

- 69 million Americans currently watch or feed wild birds, and that number is projected to increase in the next ten years.
- By 2020, an estimated 117 million Americans will participate in non-consumptive wildlife recreation, such as birding, nature photography, identifying wildflowers, and watching wildlife.
- Nature, birding, and wildlife festivals are increasing in response to this demand. These festivals occur year-round, and there are now over 230 major festivals taking place nationwide.

In 1996, 77 million adults in the U.S. spent \$101 billion on wildlife-related activities. An estimated 35 million adults (25% of U.S. adults) fished and spent \$38 billion, 14 million adults (10%) hunted and spent \$21 billion, and 63 million adults (50%) engaged in some form of non-consumptive or appreciative uses of wildlife such as feeding, observing, or photographing wildlife, and spent \$29 billion. Of the 63 million adults who reported participating in wildlife activities other than hunting or fishing, 61 million participated around their homes, including 44 million who observed wildlife, 54 million who fed wild birds, and 16 million who photographed wildlife. Americans spent over \$29 billion on equipment, transportation and other costs associated with these non-consumptive and appreciative recreation activities.

Public land areas are critical to primary non-residential, non-consumptive, wildlife recreation, and these lands are becoming even more important. In 1980, 75% of the total non-consumptive users participated on public lands, and that figure increased to 86% in 1996. The majority of the increase is associated with state-owned areas that witnessed a 20% increase in proportional participation. The increased use of federal and state lands is explained by less habitat being available from private lands due to more intensive land use and reduced accessibility. Based on projected changes in the U.S. population, the Rocky Mountain region is expected to have the largest increases in wildlife and fish recreation with all recreational activities showing an increase in the number of participants over the 1980 base year, especially non-consumptive use recreation, small game hunting, waterfowl hunting, and fishing.

Survey Finds More Than \$555 Million Spent on Wildlife Watching Activities in Utah!

More than \$555 million was spent on wildlife watching activities in Utah in 2001, according to the 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation.

The survey also found that wildlife-watching expenditures in Utah more than doubled in five years. In 1996, almost \$237 million was spent on wildlife-watching activities in the state. By 2001, that figure had climbed considerably, with almost \$556 million spent on wildlife-watching activities in Utah that year.

Conducted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the 2001 survey also found that 82 million U.S. residents (39 percent of the population 16 years of age and older) participated in wildlife recreation activities in 2001.

Wildlife-related recreationists consisted of 34 million anglers, 13 million hunters, and a whopping 66 million wildlife watchers!

The 2001 survey also found that wildlife-watching expenditures amounted to \$38 billion, with wildlife-watching enthusiasts spending an average of \$374 per year (with an average trip expenditure of \$22 per day) on wildlife-watching activities.

“The amount of money wildlife watchers are contributing to the national and state economy is considerable and probably surprising to most people,” said Bob Walters, Watchable Wildlife program coordinator for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

Sources:

- 1996 and 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE): 2000-2002. The Interagency National Survey Consortium, Coordinated by the USDA Forest Service, Recreation, Wilderness, and Demographics Trends Research Group, Athens, GA and the Human Dimensions Research Laboratory, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.
- Nature Tourism for Utah Business (Publication No. 99-5), Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Department of Natural Resources.
- Utah! Travel Barometer—A Research & Planning Newsletter, Utah Division of Travel Development, Utah’s Travel Council, Spring 2003
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