



7. PUBLIC LANDS: Economic model cites benefits of 'quiet' recreation (10/29/2009)

Eryn Gable, special to E&E

A new economic model developed at Oregon State University has found that "quiet recreation" -- including hunting, fishing and camping -- provides more economic benefits than motorized recreation to communities dependent upon public lands tourism.

The model, based on U.S. Forest Service data and tested in a number of Western national forests, estimates a range of economic impacts from recreational activities, along with the indirect contributions that come from additional spending in local communities.

The model found that in several forests, quiet recreation generated between two-and-a-half and five times more economic activity, as measured in jobs and revenue, than motorized recreation.

In California's Tahoe National Forest, for example, visits by "quiet" recreationists helped generate 413 jobs and \$11.3 million for communities near the forest, while motorized recreation provided 163 jobs and \$4.4 million in income. More dramatically, in the Arapaho and Roosevelt national forests in Colorado, nonmotorized recreation provided 1,228 jobs and \$37.8 million in income, compared with 244 jobs and \$11.7 million for motorized recreation.

"There are economic benefits of quiet recreation that are often overlooked, and the costs of motorized recreation are also often overlooked," said Michelle Haeefe, an economist with the Wilderness Society, which has worked to disseminate the findings.

Kreg Lindberg, an OSU tourism and outdoor recreation professor who developed the economic model, known as the "Recreation Economic Impact Tool," said the purpose of his effort "was to document something that hasn't been documented that often in the national forest recreation context," adding that "we know a little bit about motorized recreation's contribution to the economy, but less about nonmotorized recreation."

Lindberg first applied the model to a study of the economic impacts of nonmotorized recreation on Oregon's Wallowa-Whitman National Forest produced for the Wilderness Society in March. The study found that "quiet" recreation accounted for 216 jobs and nearly \$4.6 million in income, while motorized recreation accounted for 78 jobs and \$2.1 million in income.

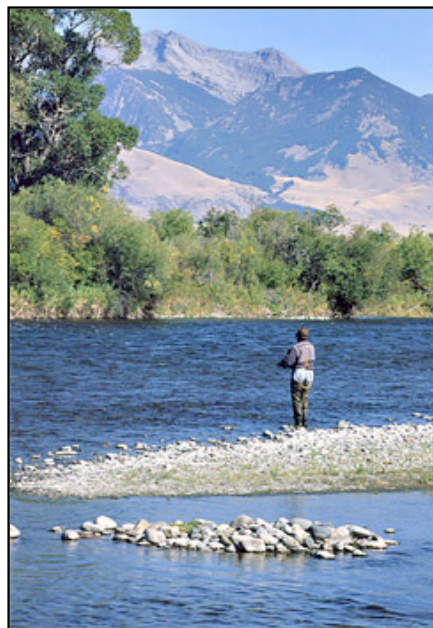
Just last week, the Wilderness Society and the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance released findings based on the model showing quiet recreation accounts for an estimated 1,234 jobs for New Mexicans who live in the counties near the state's five national forests -- three times the number of jobs attributable to motorized recreation. Additionally, the model found that the state's natural resource-based recreation industries, such as hunting and fishing, generate \$31 million in income to those counties, compared with \$9.4 million generated by motorized recreation.

The environmental groups that released the model's findings are hopeful that the economic analysis will be taken into account as federal land managers in New Mexico craft long-term plans that will chart the future use of off-highway and all-terrain vehicles on the Gila, Carson, Cibola, Santa Fe and Lincoln national forests.

Concerns about impacts

Garrett VeneKlasen, a hunter, angler and off-highway vehicle, or OHV, rider who lives near Taos, N.M., said he is concerned about the negative environmental impacts motorized vehicles have had on the state's forests and wildlife over the last decade. "We need to draw the line somewhere," VeneKlasen said. "Habitat and wildlife should take priority over laziness and convenience. There's not a good reason to cut up this country, mess everything up and ruin everything."

Concerns about the effects of OHVs on wildlife habitat have led some hunters



and anglers to join environmental groups in asking the Forest Service to expand its no-OHV zones in dozens of forests across the country. Environmentalists note that impacts from motorized vehicles can affect migration, breeding and even survival of wildlife, as well as pollute streams and rivers, tearing up riverbeds and causing sedimentation that ruins trout habitat.

A new economic model developed at Oregon State University indicates that quiet recreation activities such as fishing provide greater economic benefits to local communities than motorized recreation. Photo courtesy of Travel Montana.

Donna Stevens, executive director of the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, said land managers in charge of the Gila National Forest should not allow OHVs to disrupt hunting, fishing and camping experiences there. "Even though [OHV] users are a small minority, they create way more damage to our streams and wildlife habitat than quiet users like hunters, birders and hikers," she said.

In early September, Gila land managers released a travel management plan for the forest, including new prohibitions on cross-country motor vehicle use, the closure of 962 miles of forest roads to all motorized vehicle use, and increasing the miles of trails open to motorized vehicles less than 50 inches wide.

But Stevens expressed concern that some OHV users may respond to the restrictions by creating "rogue trails" through the forest. She also is concerned about a provision in the plan allowing hunters to use off-highway vehicles to travel up to 1 mile from an existing road to retrieve their game. The policy, she said, would open up 90 percent of the forest to off-highway vehicles and allow OHVs in the Santa Fe River.

OHV users react

But OHV user groups say efforts by environmentalists to diminish the value they add to local communities are wrongheaded.

Joanne Spivack, special projects coordinator for the New Mexico Off Highway Vehicle Alliance, noted that all trail-based activities -- including seemingly benign hobbies such as hiking, birdwatching and camping -- can disrupt wildlife.

Furthermore, she disputed the link environmental groups are trying to make between the economic benefits of nonmotorized recreation and excluding OHVs. "Even if it was true [that nonmotorized recreation contributed more to the economy], does that mean we can't be there?"

Brian Hawthorne, public lands policy director for the BlueRibbon Coalition, said there is an inherent contradiction in the claims made by environmental groups seeking to restrict OHV access to public lands. Such groups claim a need to protect the lands from the rampant growth in OHV use, while at the same time claiming that this growth in usage does not provide much economic benefit, he noted.

"The question we're asking is, 'How much is enough for these folks?' We accept and we want to be managed, but we can't accept being limited to where they say we should go," Hawthorne said. "These folks are asking for massive closures, which we don't see as fair."

Added Peggy Bogart, an OHV user, in Las Cruces, N.M., "It's the existing roads and trails we want kept open. We're not asking to go across the middle of the forest or the middle of the valley."

[Click here](#) to download Lindberg's Recreation Economic Impact Tool to estimate the economic impact of recreation on any national forest in the United States.

Gable is an independent energy and environmental writer in Woodland Park, Colo.

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