

The Economics of Wilderness on the Mon

What can wilderness areas bring to our local economy?

Money from recreation

- It is estimated that about \$44 per acre of eastern Wilderness is generated every year. Visitors spend an additional \$44 per acre each year in nearby communities¹. 143,000 additional acres could lead to an additional \$12.6 million per year in potential tourist revenues for West Virginia and local communities.
- Wilderness holds the highest land protection, and allows the natural habitat of wildlife to remain ‘untrammeled by man.’ This translates into refuges for game and nongame wildlife, pristine recreation areas, and open space. If visitors spent \$589 million on wildlife-associated recreation in West Virginia in 1996, the additional notoriety gained from protecting additional Wilderness areas will likely lead to an increase in this figure in the immediate future.²
- The Monongahela National Forest draws both West Virginians and out-of-state visitors, many of whom are drawn to Wilderness areas. These visitors spend a considerable amount of money, according to a recent WV Division of Natural Resources study, nearly \$1 billion dollars in 1996 on recreation in West Virginia.³
- Wilderness areas are part of a well-known, national system that is proven to attract tourists. State and national parks and other public lands benefit greatly by having additional attractions such as Wilderness areas nearby for visitors to enjoy.

How else do protected wild lands contribute to the economy?

Real Estate Enhancement Value

- Protected land can enhance the value of nearby private property. In the area surrounding the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont, for example, land prices are higher in towns adjacent to Wilderness, while land prices decrease with distance from a Wilderness boundary.⁴
- Wilderness designation permanently protects forested watersheds, which helps control water runoff, thereby decreasing the potential for downstream flooding. It was for this very purpose, in fact, that the Mon NF was established by Congress, as it contains the headwaters of five major Eastern watersheds. The economic benefits of this value are so far-reaching as to be beyond estimation
- According to Costanza et al. (1998)⁵, temperate forests like West Virginia’s provide ecosystem services like clean air, clean water and open space that are valued at \$122 per acre per year. Agriculture and forestry raw material production is responsible for less than one tenth of this. All direct uses, including recreation, account for about one third. So, it can be said that natural, untouched forests offer in excess of \$80 per acre per year. This translates into a potential increase in value of the Monongahela National Forest by nearly \$12 million with Wilderness designation of 143,000 acres.

How many people visit and use wilderness areas for recreation?

- According to a survey done by the Outdoor Industry Foundation, over 26 million people from West Virginia and surrounding states participate in wilderness and wild land related activities.

Number of Participants per State for Wilderness Related Activities

	WV	VA	OH	MD	KY	PA	Total
Backpacking	112,063	293,060	325,213	294,145	180,193	659,191	1,863,865
Bird watching	34,751	326,237	852,584	224,694	148,580	630,109	2,216,955
Camping	186,287	436,825	791,058	253,291	199,161	833,683	2,700,305
Canoeing	186,287	619,297	887,753	551,521	180,193	940,317	3,365,368
Climbing	37,840	71,883	61,527	110,304	60,064	232,656	574,274
Fly Fishing	224,127	182,471	360,371	110,304	148,580	630,109	1,655,962
Hiking	372,575	1,675,419	3,357,600	1,691,332	894,643	135,716	8,127,285
Kayaking	1,455	110,589	35,158	73,536	9,484	416,841	647,063
XC Skiing	2,911	38,706	430,687	183,840	60,064	77,552	793,760
Snowshoeing	14,554	110,589	96,685	73,536	6,323	184,186	485,873
Trail Running	224,127	691,180	887,743	73,536	537,418	1,337,770	3,751,774
Total state:	1,396,977	4,556,256	8,086,379	3,640,039	2,424,703	6,078,130	26,182,484

(Outdoor Industry Foundation 2003)

How will wilderness affect our timber industry?

- On average, only 3.2% of the state's timber harvest comes from the Monongahela National Forest.⁶ The proposed wilderness areas account only for about 0.5% of West Virginia's commercial timberland.

What is the value of water from natural, wild forests?

- The US Forest Service has estimated that around 60 million people (about 1/5 of the U.S. population) get their water from National Forest sources. The estimated worth annually of this water is a minimum of \$3.7 billion⁷
- Water quality is easily degraded when headwater areas are subject to clear-cut logging, mining and the associated road building. Certain proposed Wilderness areas can protect headwater transition areas from roads.⁸ Protecting the forest is an economically sound way to protect our water. A good example of protecting water quality by preserving forest land can be found in New Jersey. They chose to spend \$55 million to protect the Sterling Forest Watershed rather than spending an estimated \$160 million in filtration costs.⁹

¹ Loomis, J. B. and Richardson, R. In Press. *Economic Values of Wilderness in the United States*. Fort Collins, CO: Dept of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Colorado State University

² US Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation for West Virginia*

³ West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Inc. 1998 *The Blackwater Canyon*, Morgantown, WV.

⁴ Phillips, S. 2000. Windfalls for wilderness: land protection and land value in the Green Mountains. In Cole, D.N. and McCool, S.F. *Proceedings: Wilderness Science in a Time of Change*. Proc. RMRS-P-000. Ogden, UT: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

⁵ Costanza, et al. 1998. The Value of the World's Ecosystem Services. *Ecological Economics* 25: 3-15.

⁶ Wilderness Society. 2001. *The Monongahela National Forest and the West Virginia Economy*. November 16

⁷ Sedell, J., et al. 2000. *Water and the Forest Service*. Washington, D.C: USDA Forest Service, FS-660.

⁸ Tombulak, S. and C. Frissel. 2000. *Review of Ecological Effects of Roads on Terrestrial and Aquatic Communities*. *Conservation Biology*. 14:1.

⁹ The Wilderness Society. 2001. Review by Krieger D J. *Economic Value of Forest Ecosystem Services*