

WOLVES AND ECONOMICS

(Source: <http://wyoming.sierraclub.org/WOLVES%20AND%20ECONOMICS.pdf>)

Travel and tourism make up a significant portion of Wyoming's economy. More than 7 million overnight visitors traveled to Wyoming in 2008, and visitors to Wyoming spent \$2.7 billion, or \$7.4 million each day in 2007.(1) Wildlife watching is one of the top reasons people choose to visit Wyoming.(2) In fact, 31 percent of visitors to Wyoming percent of visitors to Wyoming in 2008 participated in wildlife watching.(3) Fifty percent of tourists said they visited a state or national park – prime wildlife watching locales – in Wyoming. (3)

Visitors to Wyoming spend an average of 3.2 days in the state, with an average party size of 3.8 people, spending an average of \$1,207 on their trip, or approximately \$108 per person, per day.(3) Often, these tourism dollars are spread across multiple communities.

Why do Tourists Choose Yellowstone?

Yellowstone National Park is world-renowned for its scenery, wildlife, and geothermal features. Although viewing scenery was the primary activity for visitors to Yellowstone, wildlife watching was the second-most popular activity.(2) Eighty-five percent of visitors to Yellowstone participated in wildlife watching, bird watching or wildlife photography across the four seasons.(2)

For many visitors to Yellowstone watching wolves is a significant attraction. When asked which wildlife species they would like to see, 44 percent of visitors to Yellowstone National Park in 2005 wanted to see wolves. The only species that they wanted to see more was the grizzly bear.(2) Depending on the season, 50 percent or more of Yellowstone visitors were specifically interested in the possibility of seeing wolves in the park.(2)In winter, when wolves are most visible in the park, 59 percent of visitors came to Yellowstone specifically to see or hear wolves.(2)

Visitors to Yellowstone National Park spend close to one-third of the total cost of their trip in the counties around the park.(2) An average of 3.5 percent of park visitors indicated that they would not have come to Yellowstone if they had not had an opportunity to hear or see wolves.(2) Based on the average spending of visitors in the 17 counties around Yellowstone, across the four seasons, about \$22.5 million are directly attributable to the presence of wolves in the park.(2) Based on the amount of money spent in the entire three-state area around Yellowstone National Park, visitors who specifically want to see or hear wolves generate approximately \$35.5 million.(2)

Ecological Tourism

Many businesses depend on wolves and other wildlife species to help their bottom line. For example, one Jackson-based ecotourism company offers single and multi-day wildlife viewing trips in Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park and Jackson Hole. The company also offers trips catered specifically toward seeing wolves and bears. From the winter of 2006 through the end of winter 2009, approximately 650 people participated in multi-day, overnight wolf and bear watching trips. The cost of these trips ranges from \$650 to \$2,000, resulting in estimated revenues of \$422,500 to \$1,300,000.

Conclusion

Although the perceived economic costs of having wolves in Wyoming are often well-publicized, the economic benefits that wolves provide by drawing visitors and their valuable tourist dollars to the state far outweigh the costs.

(1) Dean Runyan Associates. 2008. The Economic Impact of Travel on Wyoming. 1997-2007 Detailed State and County Assessments

(2) Duffield, J, C. Neher and D. Patterson.. 2006. Wolves and People in Yellowstone: Impacts on the Regional Economy

(3) Strategic Marketing and Research Inc. 2009. Wyoming Tourism: 2008 Profile