

Wolf Ecotourism

Conserving Wildlife and Boosting Local Economies



Ecotourism: “*responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people*” (The International Ecotourism Society, www.ecotourism.org)

Ecotourism is quickly coming to the forefront of family recreational activities. More and more tourists are seeking vacations where they can enjoy wilderness areas. According to the [2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation](#), 38% of all American adults participate in some form of wildlife-related recreation. Wildlife watchers alone spent \$45.7 billion in the United States in 2006. Wolf-oriented ecotourism is part of this larger social trend, and many Americans are willing to travel long distances to see wolves. Wolf-related activities have generated economic benefits throughout North America.

Red Wolves in North Carolina

Since the first red wolves were reintroduced to northeastern North Carolina in 1987, about 100 red wolves now roam in the wild. A [2005 study](#) found that the red wolf and wildlife may increase tourism throughout the “Inner” Banks region. Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge holds [weekly howling tours](#) in the summer as part of this tourism.

- Red wolf activities are forecast to attract over 25,000 households and bring in about \$37.5 million to eastern North Carolina, boosting tourism by up to 19% in the region.
- A Red Wolf Education Center could potentially bring more than \$1 million in gate receipts and food or gift purchases over a summer season.
- More than 1,000 local residents and visitors from across the U.S. participated in howling safaris in the summer of 2008.



Courtesy of USFWS

Gray Wolves in Yellowstone National Park

Since wolves returned to Yellowstone National Park in 1995, the charismatic predators have stimulated significant economic activity, and clearly having a positive impact on the economy of the greater Yellowstone area. Visitors to the park now rank the wolf as one of the primary animals they come to see, thereby creating new demand for lodging, guided wolf-watching tours and a variety of wolf-related merchandise.



Courtesy of William C. Campbell, USFWS

- In 2005, approximately 94,000 visitors from outside of the three states surrounding the Yellowstone—Montana, Wyoming and Idaho—came to the park specifically to see or hear wolves and spent an average of \$375 per person, or a total of \$35.5 million in the three states.
- The estimated total economic impact of wolf recovery on the three-state area outside of Yellowstone is estimated to be about \$58 million in 2005.

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The International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota

The [International Wolf Center](#) (IWC) is a science-based wolf educational facility and a tourist destination for visitors to Ely, Minnesota. Along with outdoor recreational activities in the nearby lakes and forests, the IWC's educational programs and exhibit wolf pack are a main reason that tourists visit Ely. Visitors to the center have a major economic impact in St. Louis and Lake Counties.



- A third of all tourists to Ely visit the IWC, and about half of IWC visitors state that the center influenced their decision to visit Ely and that they might return on a future vacation.
- A recent survey shows that the IWC brings as much as \$3 million per year to Ely and creates as many as 66 jobs in tourism-related businesses and other industries.
- The IWC's economic impact is not limited to increased tourism expenditures. The center itself plays a role in the regional economy by hiring employees, purchasing maintenance and heating supplies, and buying goods and services from local businesses.

Mexican Wolves in the Southwest

In 1998, the Mexican gray wolf was reintroduced in east-central Arizona and west-central New Mexico, including the Gila and Apache National Forests. Anecdotal evidence indicates that wolf reintroduction has triggered tourist visitation.

- Many private citizens lead hiking trips in the wolf reintroduction area for visitors to see wolves.
- The Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club organizes trips to the area to volunteer with wolf management projects. Participants stay at local lodges and generate benefits for the local economy.



Courtesy of Jim Clark, USFWS

Eastern Wolves in Algonquin Provincial Park

[Algonquin Provincial Park](#) in Ontario, Canada is the largest protected area for the wolf and has been successful in using wolves to attract visitors. Since 1963, the park's public wolf howls have been one of the most popular events in Algonquin. At these events, park naturalists imitate wolf howls in the hopes that a nearby pack will return the call, making for an unforgettable thrilling experience.



Courtesy of National Geographic/Joel Sartore

- By the end of 2008, more than 144,000 people had participated in the public wolf howl program.
- From 8,000 to 10,000 people participate in the howling expedition each summer.