AMERICA’S SPORTING HERITAGE:
Fueling the American Economy
Time in the field hunting or on the water fishing is often spent alone or with a small group of close friends and family. But when you add up all of those individuals, 37.4 million people over the age of 16 hunted or fished in this country in 2011. That’s as much as the population of the entire state of California. And the numbers are going up - 2011 saw the first increase in hunters (9 percent) and anglers (11 percent) in recent years.

All of those sportsmen and women are an economic force, fueling the American economy. The $90 billion they spent in 2011 would land them at #24 on the Fortune 500 list, above well-known companies like Kroger, Procter & Gamble and Costco. From boats to shotguns to land purchased for a place to hunt or fish, on average each sportsman and woman spent $2,407 that year.

Beyond the money they spend on their outdoor pursuits, sportsmen and women bankroll conservation. Excise taxes on fishing, hunting and shooting equipment, and motorboat fuel as well as fees for licenses and stamps are all dedicated toward state fish and wildlife management, fueling the American System of Conservation Funding. Add their generous support of conservation organizations through memberships and contributions and you’re looking at $3 billion for conservation over the course of a year.

When you take a closer look, America’s sportsmen and women are an economic engine helping to fuel our country’s economy and the future of conservation.
When it comes to defining your typical sportsman or woman, there’s no right image. Anglers fish in rivers and lakes… except that nearly a third of them fish in saltwater. Hunters come from the south… except that Wisconsin has the second highest number of in-state hunters at nearly 900,000. Sportsmen and women are rural… but they also hail from the big city. There’s no simple way to categorize sportsmen and women, and that is what makes them such an important constituency in this country.

Nationwide, there are 37.4 million Americans, age 16 and older, who hunted or fished in 2011. If you add youth age 6 to 15, there’s an additional 1.8 million hunters; young anglers add another 8.5 million to the ranks. And in 2011, hunting and fishing increased by 9 percent and 11 percent respectively from five years before. There are more people who hunt and fish in America than go bowling (34.9 million participants age 7 and up) or play basketball (26.1 million participants over age 7).

But perhaps more importantly during a time of economic recession, sportsmen and women spend a lot of money in pursuit of their sports. The $90 billion they spent in 2011? That’s the same as combined revenues for the United States’ TV broadcast and cable network industry – yes, that includes NBC, FOX, ESPN, Discovery Channel and much more.

The bottom line is that hunting and fishing are good for the economy – for small, rural communities where sportsmen and women visit to hunt and fish, as well as for companies in cities across the country that make and sell the equipment that sportsmen and women depend on.

There are 37.4 million hunters and anglers over the age of 16, that’s equivalent to the entire population of the state of California.

If every sportsman and woman had voted in the 2012 presidential election, they would have made up 30 percent of the total votes cast.

Sportsmen spent $25 billion in special equipment (boats, trucks, RVs, ATVs, cabins, etc.) in 2011, which is as much as the revenues for the video game industry.

Combined, sportsmen spent more than 835 million days afield and took more than 711 million trips in 2011 – that averages out to 22 days in the woods and on the water.

The $11.6 billion in food and lodging spent by sportsmen in 2011 is almost 3 percent of the entire Gross Domestic Product in these industries.
America's Hunters Spend $38.3 Billion

For many, it is a tradition passed down for generations, parents or grandparents to children, spending hours in the field and precious time together. Some may not think that hunting is “mainstream” anymore, that a sport like soccer has far more participation. But that is far from the truth. There are 13.7 million people age 16 and up who hunted in the United States in 2011 and if you add the 1.8 million youth hunters, age 6 to 15, you have a total of 15.5 million hunters. In comparison, a mere 13.9 million Americans over the age of 7 play soccer.

These hunters may live in small towns, but they are just as likely to live in the city and travel to the country in order to hunt. Many of them are men, but a growing number are women. They may be mostly interested in big game hunting (10.8 million), but more than a third of them hunt migratory and upland birds.

And of particular note, there are 9 percent more hunters than there were five years ago. Whether that increase comes from the growing ranks of women hunters or the movement to eat local, organic meats, or simply from a renewed interest in connecting with the great outdoors in a more fundamental way, hunting is on the rise.

This is great news for the American economy because hunting requires gear and usually travel. When you add up all those hunters, their equipment and all the trips they take – you’re looking at $38.3 billion in spending in 2011, topping revenues for Comcast that same year ($37.9 billion). In difficult economic times, hunters spent 30 percent more than they did five years before.

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More Than 40 Million Anglers

It starts with a worm and a bobber and then you are hooked for a lifetime of fishing enjoyment. That bait starts to add up ($1.5 billion), and then spinners or crank bait or other artificial flies and lures are added to the mix ($1.17 billion). Don’t forget about rods and reels ($2.37 billion). Add in all of the tackle boxes, hooks, lines and sinkers, and fishing equipment and bait becomes a $7.6 billion business.

That’s just the tip of the iceberg. Many anglers book guided trips or charters ($1.1 billion in guide fees and package costs). Those trips usually require hotel or lodge stays ($2.3 billion in lodging) – or they might just decide to buy a cabin or camper for a more personal overnight trip. And eventually they probably will end up buying a boat and paying to dock it and fuel it. When you add up all the expenditures by anglers in 2011, it totaled a whopping $47.7 billion, more than revenues for Lockheed Martin that year ($46.9 billion).

But the beauty of fishing is that the simple worm and bobber on the end of the rod and reel still work perfectly. Fishing appeals to the most back-to-basics outdoorsmen and women as it does to the tech-savvy angler with the latest tackle innovations on the market. No matter what your budget or where you live, there are always bluegills in the local reservoir or wild trout in your dream stream in Montana.

Perhaps this is why fishing has such an appeal throughout this country. In 2011, 33.1 million Americans over the age of 15 fished, and youth from ages 6 to 15 added another 8.5 million anglers. All together that is 41.6 million American anglers. The best news of all is that represents an 11 percent increase in participation since the last survey was done five years ago.

With so many anglers spending so much money, there’s a whole lot of fishing going on.
Seventy-five years ago, America’s great outdoors looked much different. Generations of natural resource use resulted in leveled forests, tilled native grasslands, and drained wetlands. Bison were largely extirpated from the lower 48 states, passenger pigeons were about to make their final appearance, and sightings of some of today’s common wildlife species like deer and turkeys made the local newspapers. Instead of clouds of ducks in the Central Flyway, residents saw clouds of dust darkening the skies. The situation was bleak.

But America’s sportsmen and women knew and cared about these resources. They knew that fish and wildlife were sustainable natural resources and that with quality habitat and regulations to limit harvest numbers, populations would rebound. Hunters and recreational anglers, shooters and boaters cared so passionately about these resources that they advocated to tax themselves on the equipment and motorboat fuel they used to fund conservation. They pushed for hunting and fishing licenses with the fees dedicated to state-based wildlife management and for a duck stamp to protect wetlands critical for maintaining waterfowl populations.

All of these excise taxes and fees are directed into the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs for use exclusively by state fish and wildlife agencies to professionally manage fish and wildlife and provide access for sportsmen. These “user-pays, public-benefits” funding programs celebrated their 75th Anniversary in 2012. They are the foundation of the American System of Conservation Funding and have allowed the larger public to enjoy the benefits of bountiful fish and wildlife populations and the lands and waters on which they depend. It is a uniquely American approach to conservation funding that is still paying dividends – and is still the primary funding source for fish and wildlife conservation in the country. Combined, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs have totaled $14.5 billion for conservation since they were established.

Without sportsmen and women and industry partners stepping up for conservation, our outdoor world would be a very different place.

Since 1934, hunters have bought Federal Duck Stamps to hunt waterfowl, to the tune of more than $750 million generated to date that has protected over 6 million acres of wetland habitat – an area the size of the state of Vermont.

In 2011, sportsmen and women contributed more than $3 billion toward conservation efforts, including the purchase of licenses, stamps, motorboat fuel, excise taxes, and contributions to organizations - that’s $8.3 million per day, $344,000 per hour, $5,700 per minute, $95.54 per second.

Without sportsmen and women and industry partners stepping up for conservation, our outdoor world would be a very different place.
Industry insiders know that a large percentage of outdoor enthusiasts go target shooting or boating, but may not hunt or fish. These markets are very important to sportsmen and women because the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs utilize excise taxes on arms and ammunition and motorboat fuel regardless of whether the buyer intends to hunt or fish. And these funds—which fuel the American System of Conservation Funding—are essential to the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats.

The lines between enthusiast groups are typically blurred, and shooters and boaters that don’t hunt or fish may not be captured by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s data. But, every hunter likes to brush up on their skills through a round of sporting clays or target shooting at shooting ranges and the boats sportsmen and women buy can also provide a pleasant cruise at the local lake. And in the reverse, an avid user of a shooting range might decide to take his or her skills afield as they become more proficient or a boater might decide to bring a fishing rod aboard. Case in point—boat manufacturers already estimate that six out of ten boaters fished while they were on the water.

With this in mind, these pages spotlight some of the research developed by industry trade groups as well as expenditures by sportsmen and women from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey to add more details to the trends for shooters and boaters.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation reports that the arms and ammunition industry directly employs 98,750 people.

Buying a boat is the first stage of an ongoing investment. After that there’s boat fuel, mooring and storage, launch fees and more. Expenditures by sportsmen and women for these additional boating costs is over $4 billion, making up just under half of the boating industry’s estimate of $9.8 billion for this market.

The National Marine Manufacturers Association estimates that there were 16.35 million boats in use during 2011. More than one million boats changed hands that year with sales of all watercraft (including sail boats, personal water craft and others) totaling $15 billion. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data estimates that hunters and anglers spent $3.9 billion on motorboats and non-motorized boats that year—equaling more than a quarter of the market.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey to adds more details to the trends in shooters and boaters.

83 million adults in the United States participated in recreational boating at least once in 2011—nearly 35 percent of the adults in the country.

There are more than 32,000 retail/service boating businesses, employing over 200,000 people in 2010—that’s more than eight times the 3,982 Walmart stores in the country and twice the number of employees Intel has.

NSSF and Responsive Management research in 2009 found that 15 percent of the U.S. population participated in some type of target or sport shooting—that’s 34.4 million people.
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**ECONOMIC IMPACT OF STATE HUNTING**: The expenditures reported are greater than the total reported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Sportsmen often attributed purchases to both hunting and fishing (excluding vessels and big ticket items). These items were not included in the Service’s expenditures estimates. Such items were included in this table by prorating each item’s cost based on each respondent’s total days of hunting and fishing activity.

**Estimate based on a small sample size of 10-29 hunters**

**The Alaska Department of Fish and Game** (ADF&G and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department) have expressed concerns regarding the expenditure estimates from the USFWS. Hunters may wish to defer to economic statistics provided by these states as alternative sources.

**DATA PROVIDED BY**: NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION AND AMERICAN SPOTTING RIFLE ASSOCIATION.
Since 1989 the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF) (www.sportsmenslink.org), has maintained a singleness of purpose that has guided the organization to become the most respected and trusted sportsmen’s organization in the political arena. CSF’s mission is to work with Congress, governors, and state legislatures to protect and promote hunting, recreational fishing and shooting and trapping. The unique and collective force of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen’s Caucus (GSC) and the National Assembly of Sportsmen’s Caucuses (NASC), working closely with CSF, serves as an unprecedented network of pro-sportsmen legislators that advance the agenda of America’s hunters and anglers.

For more information visit www.sportsmenslink.org or call Cole Henry at 202-543-6850 x19.

Sources:


Sportfishing in America: An Economic Force for Conservation. Southwick Associates for the American Sportfishing Association under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sport Fish Restoration grant (F12AP00137;VA M-26-R) awarded by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 2012.


Comparisons to other industries:

Apple, Inc.; CNN Money; Entertainment Software Association; ESPN; Fortune Magazine; GoArmy.com; Intel Corp.; McDonald’s Corporation; Nash Information Services; National Bicycle Dealers Association; National Sporting Goods Association; NASCAR; Research and Markets; Starbucks Corp.; Themed Entertainment Association; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.