

RECREATION/ TOURISM



Photo: A. Johnson

THE NATURAL BEAUTY AS WELL AS THE DIVERSITY of animal and plant life in many wetlands makes them ideal locations for tourists. Many of the finest sites are protected as National Parks or World Heritage Sites and are able to generate considerable income from tourist and recreational uses. In some countries the revenue is a significant component of the national economy.

In Brief

- ✓ **Many wetlands are prime locations for tourism; some of the finest are protected as National Parks, World Heritage Sites, Ramsar sites, or Biosphere Reserves. Many wetland sites generate considerable income locally and nationally.**
- ✓ **Recreational activities such as fishing, hunting and boating, etc., involve millions of people who spend billions of dollars on their activities.**
- ✓ **Wetlands offer ideal locations for involving the general public and schoolchildren in hands-on learning experiences, in an essentially recreational atmosphere, to raise awareness of environmental issues.**

- ◆ **In Australia, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park recorded 1.6 million visitor-days with a value of more than US\$ 540 million in 1997 while the more remote Kakadu National Park collects US\$ 800,000 annually.**
- ◆ **The Cayman Islands attract 168,000 divers per year, who spend US\$ 53 million.**
- ◆ **Collectively, Caribbean countries rely on their beaches and reefs to attract million of visitors each year; their tourist industry was valued at US\$ 8.9 billion in 1990, one half of their GNP.**
- ◆ **Recreational fishing involves more than 45 million people in the USA, who spend US\$ 24 billion annually on their hobby.**
- ◆ **In Canada, Mexico and the USA, more than 60 million people watch migratory birds as a hobby and 3.2 million hunt ducks, geese and other game birds; collectively they generate more than US\$ 20 billion annually in economic activity.**

Caribbean countries rely on their beaches and reefs to attract millions of visitors each year; their tourist industry was valued at US\$ 8.9 billion in 1990, one half of their GNP (Gross National Product). In Australia, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park recorded 1.6 million visitor-days with an approximate annual value in excess of US\$ 540 million in 1997, while Kakadu National Park collects over US\$ 800,000 in visitor fees annually. At the Bonaire National Park in the Netherlands Antilles, divers pay a US\$ 10 fee each year, which covers the operational costs of the park, and they are estimated to contribute about US\$ 30 million per year to the island's economy through other expenditures. Similarly, a small marine protected area in the Cayman Islands attracts 168,000 divers per year, who spend around US\$ 53 million. The Florida Keys wetland area generates at least US\$ 800 million in annual income from tourism.

Freshwater recreational fishing is entirely dependent on wetlands. In the USA it has been estimated that half of the seawater catch is also associated with wetlands. Recreational fishing can generate considerable income: more than 45 million people take part in recreational fishing in the USA, spending a total of US\$ 24 billion each year on their hobby.

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There are of course a whole range of recreational activities associated with wetlands that generate income locally and nationally, from boating and other water sports to hunting, watching wildlife and even art and literature. For example, Monet has inspired millions of people with his paintings of water lilies! More than 60 million people watch migratory birds and 3.2 million people hunt ducks and geese in North America (Canada, USA and Mexico); collectively they generate US\$ 20 billion annually in economic activity.

There are many wetlands with great recreational value for which a dollar figure cannot easily be given because visitors use the area without direct payment. Employing economic valuation techniques to investigate how members of the public “value” the Norfolk Broads wetland area in the United Kingdom, researchers estimated that the recreational value of the area to users amounted to US\$ 32.5 million per year for people living relatively close to the Broads and US\$ 12.9 million per year for those living further away.

Although not strictly speaking a “recreation” function, the educational value of wetlands is closely related: there are many wetland education centres and programmes around the world that involve the general public and school children in practical activities in their local wetland environments; these activities span the border between education and recreation. Waterwatch Australia is a community-based programme with 50,000 volunteers in 1,800 groups from all over the country that monitors water quality in local rivers. Using simple but effective water monitoring kits, the general public and school children are better able to understand environmental concepts through hands-on activities and at the same time contribute significantly to the conservation of their local watershed. 350,000 visitors a year are expected at a new 40-hectare wetland complex in the heart of London; created from a series of reservoirs, it offers 30 lakes and marshes, boardwalks, hides and pathways as well as an exhibition centre that will educate visitors on the functions and values of wetland ecosystems, biodiversity issues, and other environmental matters in an essentially recreational setting. ◆

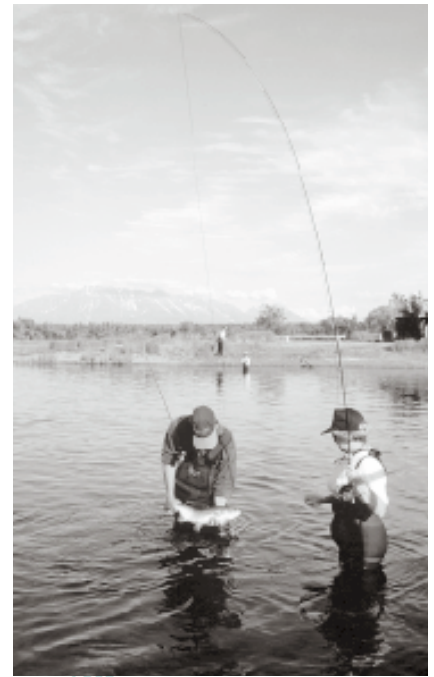


Photo: WWF-Canon/Kevin Schaefer

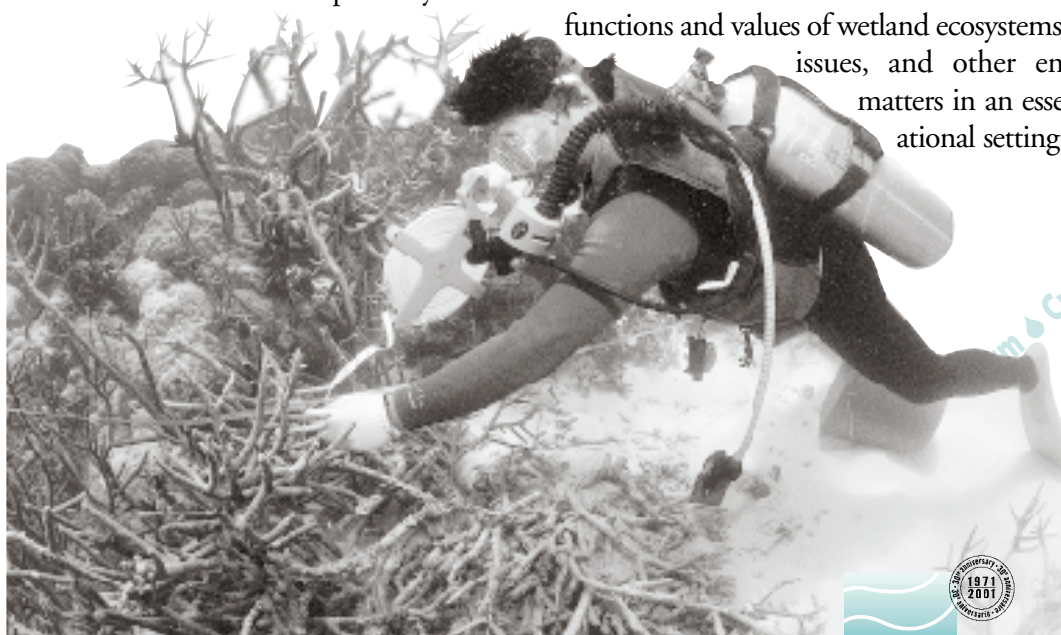


Photo: WWF-Canon/Jürgen Freund



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Wetland Values and Functions

The Ramsar Bureau
Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland
Switzerland

Tel.: +41 22 999 0170

Fax.: +41 22 999 0169

e-mail: ramsar@ramsar.org

Web site: <http://ramsar.org>