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Nonconsumptive Wildlife-Associated Recreation in the U.S.: Identifying the Other Constituency

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Introduction

Sportsmen are the traditional clientele of wildlife management. As an organized force, sportsmen have long endorsed the principles of conservation upon which wildlife management is based. As a source of political and financial support, sportsmen continue to represent wildlife's most recognized constituency.

Public interest in wildlife and wildlife-related recreation encompasses more than traditional fishing and hunting activities. As recently documented, participation in nonconsumptive forms of wildlife-associated recreation is substantial. In 1975, 49 million Americans spent 1.6 billion days engaged in wildlife observation (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 1977). In 1980, approximately 29 million individuals took trips primarily to observe wildlife, while 56 million observed wildlife in residential settings.²

Though a sizeable portion of the public participates in nonconsumptive activities, relatively little is known about the characteristics of this segment of wildlife management's clientele. As characterized by More (1977), with regard to nonconsumptive activities we remain at the stage of counting participants and describing categories of users. In light of the high degree of public participation in nonconsumptive activities, our lack of knowledge seems appalling. It is, however, quite understandable when one considers both the current status of funding for wildlife programs and the nature of nonconsumptive recreation.

Though the interests of the wildlife profession have expanded to include both a broader mix of species (both game and nongame) and a diversity of roles (i.e., from promoting recreational use to protecting threatened and endangered species), management activities remain, for the most part, financially dependent on receipts from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and Federal funds from taxes on sporting equipment. Recent initiatives have been taken at both the state and federal levels to establish alternative funding bases for nongame programs. However, traditional sources of funding continue to provide the dominant portion of support for wildlife management.

The nature of nonconsumptive wildlife-related recreation, in itself, has hindered efforts to gather needed data. First, because records similar to those provided by hunting and fishing licenses are not available for nonconsumptive activities, individual participants cannot be identified through a tally of license holders. Second, since a great deal of elaborate equipment is not needed to participate in most

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²Figures reported from the 1975 and 1980 Surveys are not comparable due to differences in activity definitions, respondent characteristics and methodologies.

nonconsumptive activities, product sales cannot be used to measure participation. Third, the product of participation is difficult to define and less easily quantified than the product of a successful hunt or a day of fishing. Finally, individuals can engage in nonconsumptive activities in a multitude of settings, including non-residential and residential sites in urban and rural environs. Characterizing participants based upon the site of their activity or the focus of their interest is usually difficult.

Though studies of selected participants in specific nonconsumptive activities have been conducted, these have tended to focus primarily upon people who actively pursue wildlife observation. Most have been based upon local samples relevant only to the area studied. Basic data pertaining to the characteristics and behaviors of nonconsumptive users, the activities in which they engage, and the types of wildlife and habitats that they use are lacking. In fact, an acceptable definition of nonconsumptive use is still wanting.

Why invest the time, effort, and money required to identify this non-traditional segment of wildlife management's constituency—the nonconsumptive user? The following reasons are proposed:

First, for the most part, responsibility for the management of fish and wildlife resources has been placed in the hands of public agencies. These agencies have a responsibility to seek to maximize public benefit in the conduct of their activities. In fact, this charge is explicitly stated as the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: “. . . to provide the Federal leadership to conserve, protect and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of people” (USFWS 1980).

Though it may be argued that wildlife programs have sought to maximize public benefit, management efforts have traditionally focussed upon only one segment of the public—the consumptive sportsmen. As recognized by Nelson (1976), “. . . our clients are no longer just fishermen and hunters—they're everybody— It is not our responsibility as stewards of fish and wildlife to scratch our heads and puzzle over this phenomenon. We must accept it and begin, perhaps, to think differently of our constituencies.”

Second, by virtue of the estimated size of the population of nonconsumptive users, this clientele warrants additional attention. Forty-nine percent of the U.S. population 16 years of age and older participated in nonconsumptive wildlife-related recreation in 1980 (USFWS 1982). The extent of participation in these activities reflects not only a substantial demand for the products of wildlife management, but a potentially significant impact on the resource base. Concern for the effects of nonconsumptive activities has been expressed by other authors (Weeden 1979, Wilkes 1977). In fact, Wilkes has stated that “. . . the nonconsumers are shown to be the most serious consumers, simply by virtue of their numbers, by what they do, and where they do it.”

Third, as increased demand is placed upon wildlife management agencies to meet the needs of an expanding clientele, new sources of funding must be sought. Nonconsumptive users, as a largely non-paying beneficiary of current wildlife management efforts, represent an untapped source of additional program support.

Fourth, lack of data pertaining to the nonconsumptive uses and users of wildlife has led to many misunderstandings regarding this wildlife-user segment. In fact,

these misperceptions may be viewed as a myth, consisting of the following elements:

1. Nonconsumptive users are “for the birds”—i.e., nonconsumptive use is synonymous with birdwatching;
2. Nonconsumptive users are typified by the “little old lady in tennis shoes”—a stereotype of the average participant in nonconsumptive wildlife-related recreation;
3. Nongame and nonconsumptive use are synonymous terms, implying that the sole focus of nonconsumptive activities is nongame species of wildlife; and
4. Nonconsumptive users and consumptive sportsmen comprise two separate and distinct user groups. This dichotomy is further emphasized by the belief that nonconsumptive users, for the most part, are opponents of hunting—i.e., “It’s Them versus Us.”

Methods

In order to increase understanding of the characteristics and behaviors of nonconsumptive wildlife users, the 1980 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation included, for the first time, a detailed segment on nonconsumptive wildlife use. Through a screening interview administered by telephone, nonconsumptive users were identified based upon the types of activities in which they engaged. Nonconsumptive activities were sorted into four distinct categories based upon two key criteria: (1) whether involvement with wildlife was the primary purpose of the activity or secondary to some other purpose and (2) whether the activity occurred in a residential setting (in the immediate vicinity of home) or more than one mile from home (non-residential). The following framework resulted:

	Non-Residential	Residential
Primary		
Secondary		

A total of 116,000 households participated in the screening phase.

Detailed data for nonconsumptive activities were gathered through indepth, face-to-face interviews with a subsample of those who were identified during the screening phase as participants in nonconsumptive activities. Approximately 6,600 individuals participated in these detailed interviews, generating information regarding participant behaviors, socio-economic characteristics, and expenditures.

The 1980 National Survey was conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A 95-percent response rate was achieved for both the detailed and screening phases of the Survey.

Results³

Participation in nonconsumptive wildlife-associated recreation in 1980 was extensive. Ninety-three million Americans, 16 years of age or older, participated

³The results reported are initial findings from the 1980 National Survey. As such, they are subject to minor modification prior to publication of the final national report.

in at least one nonconsumptive activity in 1980. Participants in primary activities totalled 83 million or 49 percent of all adults 16 years of age or older. Non-residential participants included 29 million Americans (17 percent of the adult population) and participants in primary residential activities numbered 80 million (47 percent). Participants in secondary activities included 69 million non-residential users and 81 million residential participants. A total of 88 million Americans (52 percent of the adult population) participated in at least one secondary nonconsumptive activity in 1980.

The remaining results will be presented as they pertain to the elements of the myth of the nonconsumptive user:

1. *For the birds.* As anticipated in the design of the nonconsumptive questionnaire, Americans participated in a diversity of wildlife-related recreational activities, of which birdwatching was only one. Activities for which participation data were gathered included, for nonresidential settings, wildlife observation, photography, and feeding, and, for around the home, observation, photography, feeding of birds and other wildlife, maintaining plantings and natural areas for wildlife, and visiting public parks (see Table 1). The focus of these activities included not only birds, but also large mammals such as deer, small mammals such as chipmunks and squirrels, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.

2. *The "Little Old Lady in Tennis Shoes."* Data from the 1980 Survey indicated that participants in nonconsumptive activities came from a wide range of socioeconomic groups and age classes. As the data for one user group, non-residential wildlife observers, indicate, the majority of participants were male (52 percent), under 35 years of age (58 percent), and from households with incomes of between \$10,000 and \$30,000 (55 percent) (see Figure 1).

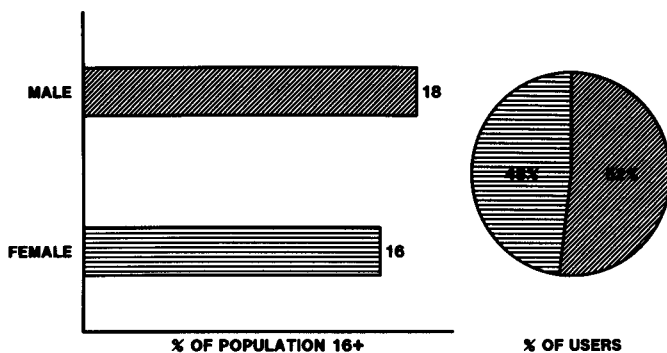
3. *Nongame—Nonconsumptive Use.* Both game and nongame species were the focus of nonconsumptive wildlife-related recreation in 1980. As illustrated in Figure 2, the use of game species of wildlife by nonconsumptive users was extensive. Game species most often observed, photographed, or fed on trips included waterfowl, deer, rabbits and hares, and upland game birds.

Table 1. A summary of participation data for primary nonconsumptive activities.

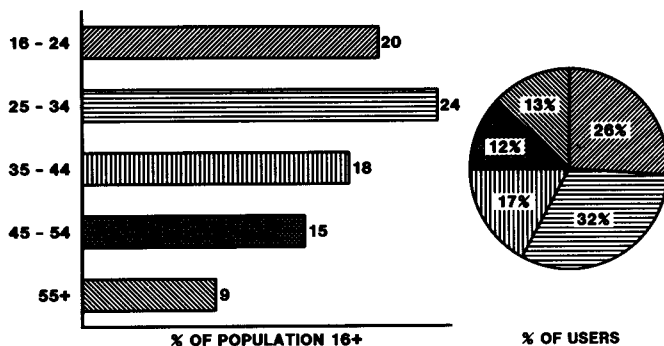
Activity	Number of participants (millions)	Percentage of population
Any primary activity	83.2	49
Any residential activity	79.7	47
Special interest observation	55.9	33
Photography	12.4	7
Fed birds	62.5	37
Fed other wildlife	20.8	12
Maintained natural areas	10.1	6
Maintained plantings	12.5	7
Visited public parks	13.5	8

Source: USFWS 1982

NON-RESIDENTIAL WILDLIFE OBSERVERS, BY SEX



NON-RESIDENTIAL WILDLIFE OBSERVERS, BY AGE



NON-RESIDENTIAL WILDLIFE OBSERVERS, BY INCOME

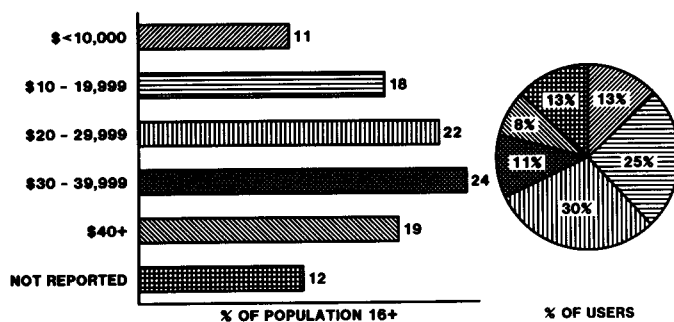


Figure 1. A summary of selected socio-economic characteristics of nonresidential wildlife observers.

TYPES OF WILDLIFE OBSERVED, PHOTOGRAPHED, OR FED ON TRIPS (% OF USERS)

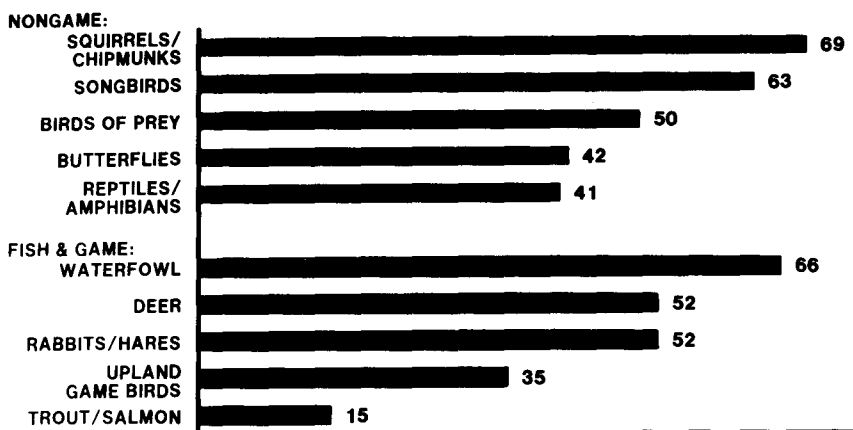


Figure 2. Relative use of wildlife by participants in nonconsumptive activities.

4. *"Them versus Us."* A large percentage of nonconsumptive users also participated in fishing and hunting. Thirty-six percent of those who participated in any primary activity were also sportsmen. With reference to specific activities, 42 percent of those who observed wildlife on trips and 34 percent who fed birds around the home also fished and/or hunted.

A majority of sportsmen also participated in nonconsumptive activities. Sixty-five percent of all sportsmen participated in at least one primary nonconsumptive activity in 1980; 26 percent took trips primarily to observe wildlife while 46 percent fed birds around the home.

Discussion

Sixteen years ago, John Gottschalk, as Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, summarized the problems of fish and wildlife conservation at the time (Gottschalk 1966):

The problems besetting wildlife conservation in 1966 are reasonably clear and have scarcely changed in fundamentals in recent decades. . . . We need habitats. . . . We need access. . . . We need know-how. . . . And we need public support. If I ever, in my professional career in this business of conservation administration, had any doubts about this [latter] facet of the modern conservation needs/solutions equation, it has been effectively dispelled in the brief time I have had to appreciate the growing obstacles of indifference, exploitiveness, and selfishness which combine to thwart so many of our altruistic efforts. Obviously, public support is what is required to get more healthy habitat, and access to it, and scientific know-how.

Fish and wildlife will share the benefit when we have the facts to justify a larger role. To get the facts we need increased research—and I don't mean life history

or population dynamic studies—as valuable as they are for management purposes. We need to know our *customer* better. We need to study the markets—beyond the usual consumptive public. Who is our public—and what do they really want—and what are they willing to pay? We need to know!

The same problems besetting wildlife management in 1966 continue to plague the profession today. In fact, as a result of the expanding interests and legal responsibilities of wildlife management during an era of constricted program budgets, these same problems are exacerbated.

Data generated by the 1980 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation provide the opportunity to understand our “customer” better than ever before. Wildlife management’s clientele is a diverse and substantial segment of the U.S. population. Active participants in wildlife-related recreation in 1980, sportsmen and nonconsumptive users combined, accounted for more than *one in every two* adult Americans. These individuals came from a wide range of age, education, and income groups and do not appear to reflect the special interests of a narrow segment of society.

As these data also reveal, participants in nonconsumptive activities, as previously hypothesized, represent a significant portion of wildlife’s constituency—our “customers.” Unfortunately, concern for the fact that nonconsumptive users are largely non-paying customers has led to an apprehensive if not adversarial relationship between nonconsumptive and consumptive users of wildlife. This attitude is typified by the following excerpt from a 1978 article in *Outdoor Life* regarding a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service funded study of American attitudes toward wildlife and natural areas (Starnes 1978):

. . . What if the big, three-year study . . . is actually the subtle opening gun in a long-range campaign to switch the emphasis on the use of our land and game away from hunting and into birdwatching, hiking, and other saintly, non-noisy enterprises? . . . For whose primary benefit are deer herds, the flocks, and our dwindling reserves of wild land really intended? These resources . . . have been preserved, bought and paid for largely by the hard dollar taxes and fees spent by gunners and fishermen. The Bambi set has shown some latter-day skills at fund raising . . . but I have yet to hear of them springing for one acre of wetland. I suspect their dough all goes for effete cocktail parties, where they sip vile chartreuse drinks and swap stories about what a bunch of roughnecks the rest of us are. . . .”

Preconceived notions regarding the characteristics and behaviors of nonconsumptive users, the foundations of the “myth of the nonconsumptive user,” are dispelled by the findings of the nonconsumptive segment of the 1980 National Survey. In short, nonconsumptive users:

1. include, but are not limited to, birdwatchers. Individuals engaged in a diversity of nonconsumptive activities in 1980, which focussed on species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and insects;
2. are neither predominantly female nor old. A range of socio-economic groups are represented in the ranks of the nonconsumptive users;
3. do not restrict their activities to the pursuit of nongame species. Both game and nongame species of wildlife were the focus of observation, photography, and feeding by nonconsumptive users; and
4. include both sportsmen and those who engage in purely “appreciative” activ-

ities. Nearly two-thirds of all those who fished or hunted in 1980, also participated in at least one active form of nonconsumptive recreation.

Perceived distinctions between the consumptive and nonconsumptive populations have also led to the belief that nonconsumptive users are opposed to sport hunting. Several recent studies shed additional light on the attitudes of nonconsumptive users toward hunting. In each, a sample of birdwatchers, one segment of the nonconsumptive population, was surveyed to determine their attitudes toward sport hunting. In a 1978 study by Shaw et al., 56 percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement, "Hunting is essential to prevent overpopulation of some types of wildlife." A study by Witter and Shaw (1979) revealed that 75 percent of the avid birdwatchers surveyed believed that "hunting should continue as a management tool." Finally, in a recent national survey by Kellert (pers. comm.), 66 percent of those who were categorized as avid birdwatchers, approved of hunting "for recreation and meat." As the findings of these studies indicate, concern for opposition to hunting among birdwatchers is largely unfounded.

A recent issue of *Field and Stream* contained an article by George Reiger (1982) entitled "Age of Unreason." The author, in evaluating the current status of the conservation movement in America, described a "polarization [which is] being pushed upon the sporting community by various factions." Though efforts may be made to exaggerate the differences that exist among various segments of the wildlife community, perceived distinctions between consumptive and nonconsumptive users are not well founded.

Concern that nonconsumptive wildlife programs would provide competition for already scarce financial resources generated primarily by the sporting community is valid. Wildlife managers cannot continue to meet their expanded responsibilities without finding new sources of financial support. As the data presented indicate, both game and nongame species are the focus of nonconsumptive activities. In this sense, nonconsumptive users may be considered the non-paying beneficiaries of current wildlife management efforts. However, the lack of an appropriate vehicle for nonconsumptive users to provide financial support to current wildlife management programs has hindered the expansion of these programs to address existing demand for nonconsumptive wildlife-related recreation. This lack is likely to persist until appropriate sources of new program funding are identified.

Conclusion

Whether hunted with a rifle or camera or taken home in a creel, game bag, or on a roll of film, the majority of all adult Americans have an active interest in wildlife. The other constituency, nonconsumptive users, represents a potential and, thus far, untapped source of additional financial and political support for both game and nongame wildlife programs. Though often viewed as an adversary, the nonconsumptive segment of wildlife's constituency should be considered an ally if fish and wildlife resources are to benefit.

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