

Wayne National Forest

Recreation Feasibility Study

Strategic Research Group

Executive Summary

Outdoor recreational activities have always been important in America, but within the past decade their importance and frequency have increased rapidly. According to the Recreation Roundtable,¹ benefits of outdoor recreation include increasing appreciation of nature and the environment, improving mental and physical health, and alleviating social problems facing today's youth. Outdoor recreation sites can also be destination points for drawing in visitors, which can increase local and state tax revenues, jobs, and economic and entrepreneurial opportunities for developing outdoor recreation sites and support services.

Wayne National Forest (WNF), the only National Forest in Ohio and one of the major holders of public land in southeast Ohio, has commissioned a study of Outdoor Recreation Feasibility. Currently WNF consists of three separate Units: Athens, Marietta, and Ironton. Because the three Units consist of land from twelve counties in southeast Ohio, WNF has the potential to have a major impact on the economy of the area. Additionally, its mission for addressing the recreation needs of the population make it well positioned to partner with state and area agencies and residents in expanding existing recreational opportunities, thus providing outdoor recreation enthusiasts across the region a destination for many activities.

¹ Roper/Starch Worldwide Inc. 2000. "Outdoor Recreation in America: Addressing Key Societal Concerns." Internet Website: www.funoutdoors.com/research/statistics. Also referred to as "Recreation Roundtable" survey data.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the findings of the Outdoor Recreation Feasibility Study conducted for WNF.² Any recreation feasibility study conducted for the United States Forest Service (FS) must follow the guiding principles of its mission statement. Studies must take into account the diverse interests of citizens, while balancing them with the need to protect lands under Forest Service jurisdiction. They must also examine the economic impact of National Forests on surrounding areas in order to promote economic development on state, area, and local levels. Thus, including the opinions of policy makers, business owners, and local recreation users is instrumental in representing the needs of local areas.

The data collected for this recreation feasibility study followed these guidelines. Input from the public was obtained from a wide variety of Wayne National Forest stakeholders, potential users, and existing data sources. In addition to national, state, and local secondary data sources, data for this report were collected from: 1) over 100 stakeholder interviews conducted in the twelve counties making up the planning area of WNF and gateway communities in both West Virginia and Kentucky; 2) 400 interviews conducted with outdoor recreation users in four urban areas surrounding WNF (Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Charleston); and 3) six town meetings held in gateway communities to WNF area.

This document presents a summary of the study's findings, with a focus on discussing their implications. It is organized into three major sections that answer the following questions:

1. What is the current outdoor recreational opportunity landscape of the area surrounding WNF, concentrating on the twelve counties most impacted by WNF?
2. What is the current demand for outdoor recreation in the area?
3. Where does WNF fit into the outdoor recreation landscape of the area?

² The detailed findings are presented in a Technical Report available from WNF Headquarters.

Outdoor Recreational Opportunity Landscape in Southeast Ohio

When identifying the state of current opportunities for outdoor recreation in an area, three questions must be considered. First, what are the current outdoor recreational activities available? Second, what support services are available to enhance these activities? Third, what is the political atmosphere that must be taken into account when considering expansion and partnering opportunities?

Current State of Outdoor Recreational Activities

Many consider southeast Ohio to be one of the state's most beautiful areas. It has the capacity to offer Ohioans and other Americans an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities. This particular study concentrates on outdoor recreational opportunities found in the general area bounded by the Ohio River, Interstate 70, and Route 23. There are already many existing outdoor recreational opportunities and support services in this area, creating a strong foundation for further expansion of outdoor recreational opportunities. These existing opportunities are located on public lands managed at federal, state, and local levels, as well as on privately owned sites, as displayed on the following map.

Wayne National Forest itself has a wide range of activities. It provides scenic beauty and the opportunity to view wildlife and plant life in their natural settings. Additionally, there are facilities for picnicking, camping, swimming and watercraft, and trails for horseback riding, off-road vehicle riding, biking, and hiking. Other available activities include backpacking, primitive camping, rock climbing, hunting, trapping, and fishing.

The area surrounding WNF also hosts a large number of sites managed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and by county and local parks. Additionally, four privately owned sites are important supplements to the publicly held outdoor recreational activities: Bob Evans Farms, American

Electric Power's Recreation Lands (AEP), the Mead/Westvaco Paper Company, and The Wilds.

Despite the four major commercial sites, available outdoor recreational opportunities are concentrated on public lands. Current publicly held lands in close proximity to WNF consist of almost 283,000 acres held by Ohio State Parks, Ohio Division of Wildlife, and Ohio State Forests. In comparison, WNF manages 233,422 acres.

Most public lands provide opportunities for viewing wildlife, scenic viewing, and picnic sites, so the preceding map can be used as a general indicator of the availability of sites for these activities. Bodies of water, walking and hiking trails, places to view wildlife, and picnic areas are complementary to one another, so it is important to remember the concept of integration when formulating and implementing recreation programs.

Historical/heritage sites are abundant in the counties surrounding WNF, but many either are not promoted as tourist attractions, or are promoted individually instead of along with other area attractions. However, some local organizations are beginning to develop heritage sites into “touring” opportunities in which similar sites are packaged together. For example, the *Little Cities of Black Diamonds Tour* of the Hocking coal-mining district is being promoted by Hocking College and other local organizations. One coordinated tour WNF promotes is the covered bridge tour, but there are many other potential opportunities in WNF and surrounding areas that could be used to attract outdoor recreation users.

Public agencies do not provide many picnic areas and shelters in the area surrounding WNF. Among state agencies, Ohio State Parks provides the most opportunities, with more than twenty sites. As for WNF, its available picnic sites are not equally distributed across Units. The Marietta Unit has more sites than either of the other two Units. However, picnic sites in the areas surrounding WNF are more plentiful around the Athens Unit than the other

two Units. Additionally, many facilities for picnicking (more than 380 sites) are available on the AEP lands, which are located between the Athens and Marietta Units.

Trail systems are a major concern for outdoor recreation programs provided by public land management agencies. The following table provides an overview of trails on public lands in the 12 county area surrounding WNF.

Trail Systems Offered at State Land Management Agencies and WNF

System	Hiking Miles	Bridle Miles	Mountain Bike Miles^a	ORV Miles^b	Backpack Miles
State Agencies	426.5	331.5	364.2	38	83
WNF	362.6	88.2	213.3	116	16
SE Ohio Totals	789.1	419.7	577.5	154	99
WNF Percentage	46%	21%	37%	75%	16%

^a Mountain Bike miles overlap with Bridle Trail miles with 32.7 miles designated solely to mountain biking.

^b **Off-Road Vehicle (ORV)** An Off-Road Vehicle is defined as any motorized, off-road recreational vehicle designed for, or capable of, cross-country travel. It includes, but is not limited to, low-pressure tired vehicles (such as ATVs), trail bikes, dual-sport motorcycles and related two-wheeled vehicles. The term excludes any registered sport utility vehicles (SUVs), and all other four-wheel drive vehicles; dune buggies; any military, fire, or law enforcement vehicle; any farm-type tractor and other self-propelled agricultural equipment used exclusively for agricultural purposes; any self-propelled equipment for harvesting and transporting forest products, or for earth moving or construction while being used for these purposes on the work site; and self-propelled lawnmowers, snow blowers, garden or lawn tractors, or golf carts while being used for their designed purpose. This definition is equivalent to the State of Ohio’s All-Purpose Vehicles (APV) definition, except that it does not include vehicles that operate on a cushion of air.

Among the various trails in the area, hiking trails are predominant. However, many trails are multipurpose, meaning that they support more than one type of activity. Unfortunately, some of these activities are incompatible with one another, with the most conflict existing between powered and non-powered trails. There are six off-road vehicle trail systems in southeast Ohio, three of which are on WNF lands (two on the Ironton Unit and one on the Athens Unit). Because of the circuitous and interconnecting nature of off-road vehicle trails, it should be understood that reference to an off-road vehicle trail implies a composite of many connected trail segments. WNF has one

horseback-riding trail at each Unit, and there are a total of nineteen such trails dispersed throughout the area.

In addition to trails on state and federal lands, there are also several tour-biking trails in the area: Gallia County has a 7-mile trail between Gallipolis and Bidwell, Ross County has a 1.4 mile trail, Athens County has the 16.4-mile Hocking-Adena trail from Athens to Nelsonville, and Scioto County has a trail near Ironton.

Trails are not evenly distributed across WNF Units. As illustrated in the next table, there are far more miles available for hiking in the Athens and Ironton Units than in the Marietta Unit. The Marietta Unit does not have an off-road vehicle trail, and it has fewer bridle miles than either of the other Units. However, it does have more mountain-biking miles than either the Athens or the Ironton Units.

Summary of WNF’s Existing Trail System by Unit

Designated Trails	Total # of Trails	Total # of Multipurpose Trails	Hiking Miles	Bridle Miles	Mountain Bike Miles	ORV Miles	Unit Totals
Athens	5	2	132.25	22.5	70	70	132.25
Marietta	10	10	98.3	19.9	97.3	0	98.3
Ironton	13	6	132.05	45.8	46	46	132
TOTAL	28	18	362.6	88.2	213.3	118	362.6

There are many camping sites in the area, mostly on public lands. These camping sites provide both an outdoor recreational activity and a support service for other activities. Camping areas are also of particular importance because they are complementary with trails and most other forms of outdoor activities. These sites are listed in the following table.

Camping Facilities Offered at State Land Management Agencies and WNF

System	Number of Campgrounds	Number of Sites	Electric Sites	Group Sites	Flush Toilets	Showers
State Agencies	21	2,162	1,194	13	5	11
WNF	13	155	64	4	5	3
SE Ohio Totals	34	2,317	1,258	17	10	14
WNF Percentage	38%	7%	5%	24%	50%	21%

The Ohio State Parks system has many campsites in the area, with a range between thirty and one hundred per park. Several parks also have bridle camps, but this type is limited. Although there are several camping areas on WNF, the actual number of sites for camping is small. The Athens Unit has the fewest number of camping sites, with approximately twenty-nine, while the Ironton Unit has the most, with around seventy-three. However, state and commercial sites offset the dearth of sites on the Athens Unit. There are at least twenty-seven private campgrounds near the Athens Unit, and fewer than ten near the other two Units.

Camping is complementary with wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing. WNF has the most extensive available area for these activities of any agency in southeast Ohio, but few designated sites. In contrast, Ohio Department of Wildlife has designated twenty-eight formal viewing sites, and promotes another hundred on a more informal basis.

Wildlife Outdoor Recreational Opportunities Offered at State Land Management Agencies and WNF

System	Total Acres	Hunting Acres	Fishing Acres	Observation Sites
State Agencies	282,302	255,952	17,282	44
WNF	233,422	232,843 ^a	447 ^b	2
SE Ohio Totals	515,724	487,373	17,729	46
WNF Percentage	45%	47%	3%	4%

^a Does not include trails, developed recreation sites, or administrative sites.

^b Only lakes or ponds of at least five acres are included in this figure. In addition, there are dozens of small undeveloped ponds throughout WNF (abandoned mining pits).

Definite potential exists for enhancing these outdoor recreational opportunities at WNF. Doing so is inviting because viewing sites do not always have to be highly developed. Additionally, a variety of potential viewing areas and many types of wildlife are already available in all WNF Units. Hunting opportunities are available on the three WNF Units, AEP’s Recreation Lands, Ohio State Forests, and several State Parks and Wildlife lands in the area. Hunting is also available on private lands, such as those of the Mead/Westvaco Paper Company, with the approval of their owners.

Yet another appeal for outdoor recreation users provided by public land management agencies in southeast Ohio, water-oriented activities, are displayed in the following table.

Water-Oriented Outdoor Recreational Opportunities Offered at State Land Management Agencies and WNF

System	Water Acres	Boat Ramps^a	Boating Amenities^b	Swimming Areas	Canoe Areas	Beach Areas
State Agencies	12,765	13	9	17	14	10
WNF	447	3	1	1	10	1
SE Ohio Totals	13,212	16	10	18	24	11
WNF Percentage	3%	19%	10%	6%	42%	9%

^a Does not include any launching points on the Ohio River.

^b Boating Amenities include any combination of boating services and conveniences beyond parking, and ramps such as fuel sales, dock or slip rentals, and boat rentals.

There are many existing opportunities in the area for water-based activities, such as beach activities, fishing, and boating. Most of them take place on public lands, so private facilities generally have not been economically viable in the area. Fishing is readily available in the area, including on the Ohio River, which bounds the area on the east and south and provides fishing and boating opportunities. Other boating opportunities exist, but because of the lack of a large body of water (other than the Ohio River), most are for small crafts with limitations on motor size.

Support Services in Area

Two of the primary types of support services are food establishments and lodging facilities. Food establishments are located throughout the area, but are concentrated in the more populated locations, such as cities and towns. The Ohio Restaurant Association lists 186 different food establishments around the Athens Unit, 101 around the Marietta Unit, and 266 around the Ironton Unit.

According to the Division of Travel and Tourism³, 9.4% (235) of Ohio's 2,495 hotels, motels, and resort facilities are located in southeast Ohio, with an average of 20.4 rooms per establishment. This is the smallest average in the state. The central region has the greatest average of 68.7 rooms per property. The areas surrounding the Athens Unit contain the most bed and breakfasts and motels, while areas near the Ironton and Marietta Units have fewer. The weighted occupancy rate for southeast Ohio is 48.6% in contrast to 60% typical for these accommodations in more metropolitan locations.

Area outdoor recreation users who have visited WNF were asked how adequate the support services were both at and adjacent to WNF. Because only a few people from the sample had visited WNF, their responses are limited in

³ The Economic Impact, Performance and Profile of the Athens County, Ohio, Travel and Tourism Industry. 2000-2001 Prepared for Athens County and the Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism by Rovelstad & Associates and Longwoods, International.

their statistical accuracy. For those who had visited the area, the average responses on a 1 (very inadequate) to 5 (extremely adequate) scale were 3.92 for WNF services and 3.87 for services in the adjacent area. These ratings indicate that current support services are above average but that they still have room for improvement. Improving current support services has the potential to result in increasing the number of visitors as well as visitor spending in the area.

Economic, Demographic, and Political Landscape

Although the basic foundation to provide a premier outdoor recreation destination is available in southeast Ohio, the political, demographic, and economic climate of the area presents a number of challenges. These challenges center on the economic and demographic characteristics of the area and the attitudes of public opinion leaders and stakeholders.

The area surrounding WNF is one of the most depressed and impoverished areas in Ohio. Measures of economic health and vitality in rural counties within and surrounding WNF continue to lag behind both national and state indicators. These counties remain a part of the Appalachian Regional Commission, a national program created in 1965 and consisting of multiple state counties targeted for economic development to reverse the damaging trends of chronically higher unemployment, net outward migration, and acute lower levels of income.

Population in the area has increased slightly over the past ten years. Only two counties had population decreases, each at 2% or less (Monroe and Scioto Counties). Although most of the population increases are less than 10%, three counties had increases of over 10% (Hocking, Vinton, and Noble Counties). The 45-59 age group tended to have the highest rate of increase in the area, with increases over 18% in all counties since 1999. This is attributed in part to the general increase in that age group because of the “baby boomer

generation,” but there are also indications from stakeholders that individuals may be migrating into the area or “moving back” from the more populated urban areas in the state. Regardless of the cause, this group of individuals provides a stable influence in the area that not only provides the potential for more discretionary spending, but also seed money for business development. Additionally, when the population increases of the twelve counties surrounding WNF are combined with the general population increases in the state of Ohio and the four urban areas closest to WNF, the increasing demand for outdoor recreational opportunities becomes even more apparent.

Unemployment rates and weekly average incomes are both good indicators of local economic vitality. In July 2002, the unemployment rate for Ohio was 5.8%, while the rate for the twelve counties in WNF area ranged from 4.9% (Athens County) to 13.3% (Morgan County), with an average of 8.15%. According to the 2000 U.S. census, the weekly average income for Ohio was \$618.35 (equating to about \$32,000 annually), but it ranged from \$421.02 (Lawrence County) to \$540.12 (Monroe County) in the twelve counties surrounding WNF. The average weekly income for 2000 across all twelve counties was \$483.58, or approximately \$25,000 a year.

It is obvious that this area needs economic stimulation to bring it up to the Ohio norm. Outdoor recreation has the potential to provide it by bringing visitors to the area, developing sites and support services, and creating jobs. Ken Cordell⁴ reports that in non-urban counties in the United States, outdoor recreation generated 767,000 jobs in 1999. Approximately 39% of these jobs were associated with food and beverage purchases, and the remainder was equally distributed across retail, trade, and recreation services. There is an

⁴ Cordell, H. Ken et al. 1999. “Outdoor Recreation in American Life: A National Assessment of Demand and Supply.” Sagamore Publishing. Urbana, IL.

economic benefit from visitors' expenditures as well. One study⁵ estimates that hunters spend \$515,000,000 a year on hunting related expenditures in Ohio. In a study about the economic impact of WNF, Warren Kriesel,⁶ using data from three similar sites and a visitation figure provided by WNF, estimated that out-of-area visitors generated over \$31,772,000 in annual expenditures (using estimates of 348,000 visitors spending \$82.74 per day). This estimate does not include local area visitors whose dollars remained in the area instead of being expended elsewhere.

There are several indicators that southeast Ohio is well situated to take advantage of the economic opportunities that would be available with increased outdoor recreation use in the area. For example, one important indicator of motivation and sustainability of economic health is high school graduation rates. The level of motivation to graduate from high school provides information about career orientations and can have a direct influence on unemployment rates. This is generally a positive aspect in southeast Ohio, because Ohio's 2000 high school graduation rate was 86%, while the area ranged from 71.6% (Morgan County) to 91.3% (Noble County), with an average of 83.9%.

Another indicator of the sustainability of a healthy local economy is a comparison of business starts and business terminations. Caution should be used against overgeneralizing when analyzing net business success, however, because it is dependent upon its position in the business cycle at any given time. However, it appears that there may be an entrepreneurial spirit that can be tapped in the area. In 2000, when the average number of business starts in the area was eighty-three, nine of the twelve counties had more business starts

⁵ United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. "National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation."; Wisse, John. 1997. "Ohio Hunters Invest \$515 Million." Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

⁶ Arbogast, Kenneth. 2000. "An Overview of the Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation of the Wayne National Forest in the Counties of Southeast Ohio." United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. Athens, OH.

than terminations. Counties such as Athens County, which had more terminations than starts, had a total of 132 starts, the second highest in the area. Scioto County had the highest number of starts (166), while Morgan County had the lowest (35).

Attitudes of Public Opinion Leaders and Stakeholders

High school graduation, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a growing population of individuals in their 40s and 50s provide a foundation for economic stimulation. In order for this stimulation to occur, opportunities need to be identified and supported by federal, state, and local agencies. Of course, regardless of any impact, communities that do not perceive recreation as being important to their economies, or that recreation is something upon which they wish to focus, will not work toward encouraging recreation and supporting commercial concerns. For these reasons, WNF stakeholders were asked whether they feel that recreation has an economic impact on the area. Stakeholders overwhelmingly indicated that recreation's major role in their area is tourism development. Most stakeholders said that recreation is very important to the area; however, not all of them were able to provide concrete examples of the types of roles it plays. The general attitude toward recreation in the economic development of an area is that it brings in money to the area, specifically through bringing in tourists. Another important economic benefit cited by stakeholders was that recreational opportunities in an area might encourage industry to locate in that area because employees could benefit from the proximity to recreational activities.

Although there are many public opinion leaders and other potential stakeholders who see outdoor recreation as a foundation for economic prosperity in the area, many others are in fact not supportive of a concerted and sustained effort to expand outdoor recreation and support services in the

area. This attitude takes a number of forms that culminate in a lack of motivation and effort toward promoting potential opportunities.

One of the common beliefs of area stakeholders toward expanding outdoor recreational opportunities is that the jobs that would result from this expansion are not the most appropriate type of jobs to sustain economic health. Stakeholders who are most interested in economic development tend to focus their attention on bringing in needed industry to the area, but “tourism” jobs are seen as low paying jobs that lack career advancement opportunities. This is often true, especially for first-time employees and for those in seasonal positions. High rates of turnover, as well as the hiring of employees to work less than full time in order to avoid the cost of benefits, also add to the mix of concerns. However, while these positions may not be very highly paid, and advancement often requires relocation outside a given rural area, they do have a niche, meet a need for some age groups, and typically offer a career ladder for advancement opportunities. These positions may not be desirable for a lengthy career, but they certainly can come close to matching the area average income of around \$480.00 a week for full time-equivalent employees, while also reducing unemployment rates.

Another hindrance to the expansion of outdoor recreation-related economic and support service development is the feeling that there are already enough recreational opportunities and support services available in the area. Many public opinion leaders in the stakeholder group feel that the primary need is to bring in more people to use existing facilities and opportunities. Those who would like to see some increase in opportunities suggest that WNF could increase the number of camping sites and promote overnight stays in the area, or connect both motorized and non-motorized trails to roads or businesses in the area. However, town meeting participants, as well as these stakeholders, express that they do not want to see the existing culture and atmosphere of the area changed, because they like the rural feel and do not

want to be inundated with “suburban sprawl” or major tourism attractions. On the other hand, individuals who feel that the primary need is to bring in more visitors want more promotion of the area. Along with others, they are willing to help promote the area, although they can be reluctant to take leadership roles in that promotion.

Of course, stakeholders and town meeting participants demonstrate a desire for positive change. Those who have a vested interest in outdoor recreation include those interested in tourism and economic development as well as recreation users themselves. Although they are not always aware of WNF’s opportunities, local tourism development agency directors are aware of the advantages of attracting more tourists and outdoor recreation enthusiasts to the area. The Athens Visitors Bureau is one of the most active in the area and promotes a number of regional attractions. Stakeholders such as these are very supportive of any effort to coordinate promotional activities in the area. However, many local visitors bureaus and WNF do not promote one another's activities. WNF has limited information available about activities other than its own, and most local bureaus do not have any information regarding WNF’s activities.

A second positive finding is the motivation of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. During interviews with stakeholders and with town meeting participants from associations for mountain biking, driving off-road vehicles, and horseback riding, it was evident that these individuals were highly motivated to work with WNF and other agencies to enhance their outdoor recreational activities. Additionally, they were supportive of other outdoor recreational activities in the area.

Outdoor Recreation Demands

Upon first glance, there appears to be an abundance of outdoor recreation and support services available in the area surrounding WNF. An important question

that cannot be answered here is whether current capacity meets current demand. If capacity exceeds demand then current facilities are sufficient. As a surrogate for demand, outdoor recreation trends have been identified. General trends in outdoor recreational activity demands tend to be similar across the nation, the region, and the four cities in Ohio and West Virginia surveyed (area recreation users). Data from The National Survey of Recreation and the Environment (NSRE)⁷ were used to determine national recreation trends, while the survey of four urban areas surrounding WNF conducted for this project was used to identify the most frequent activities for the area. One must use caution when comparing percentages across surveys because of differences in wording on the survey instrument and respondent interpretation. For example, the area recreation users were asked, “Have you used an off-highway recreational vehicle?” The NSRE (national and Midwest) asks, “Did you drive off-road for recreation using a 4-wheel drive, ATV, or motorcycle?”

When focus is placed on outdoor recreation, the top five activities across all populations usually revolve around being low-impact, relaxing, and pleasurable, as well as having a nice scenic quality to them. In general, nature viewing, hiking, picnicking, beach activities, and visiting historic sites are reported most often as the outdoor activities people do. Nature viewing includes bird watching, wildlife viewing, and visiting nature centers. Hiking and picnicking can also include nature viewing. In fact, many of these activities can be conducted during one outing or trip. Although there is some inconsistency among how the activities were measured, staying overnight (lodging and camping), boating, fishing, and using trails also have high percentages of participants.

⁷ United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. 2002. “National Survey of Recreation and the Environment.” Internet Website: www.srs.fs.fed.us/trends/NSRE.

Local, State, Area, and National Outdoor Recreational activities by Percentage of Population Participating

Activity	Area Recreation Users (2002)	Area Midwest (NSRE 1994/95)	National NSRE 2000
Nature Viewing/Sightseeing	79	NA	NA
Hike/ Nature Walk	70	68.2	33.2/ 83.1
Picnic	64	52.2	54.7
Swim/ Beach	59	53.4	60.7
Historical Site	53	43.9	46.3
Lodge	36	NA	NA
Boat	35	31.8	36.4
Fish	33	31.5	34.2
Tent Camping	27	21.7 ^a	26.2 ^a
Tour Bike	24	31.4 ^b	39.7 ^c
Off-Road Vehicle	18	12.6	17.5
Recreational Vehicle	14	NA	NA
Mountain Bike	13	NA	21.5
Hunt/Trap	12	11.3	11.4
Shooting	12	NA	NA
Horseback Riding	10	6.8	9.8
Backpack	9	5.4	10.7

Two other indicators of participation trends are frequency of use and participation trends across time. First, recreation has increased in terms of frequency of participation. Cordell et al.⁸ found that between 1994 and 2000, the percentage of outdoor recreationists who report participation rates of several times a week increased from 15% to 34%. Participants reporting doing activities several times a month increased from 21% to 32%.

⁸ Cordell, H. Ken et al. 2001. "Footprints on the Land: An Assessment of Demographic Trends and the Future of Natural Lands in the United States." Sagamore Publishing. Urbana, IL.

Second, the percentage of people participating in given activities has also increased. Although the percentages of most recreational activities have increased, according to Cordell et al., the fastest growing recreational activities between 1983 and 2000 were backpacking (215%), hiking (182%), walking (84%), downhill skiing (84%), off-road driving (80.4%), and bird watching (80.2%). Other activities that saw increases were swimming in rivers and lakes (67.8%), boating (54.9%), biking (52.6%), camping in primitive areas (45.8%), camping in developed areas (37.7%), sightseeing (33.6%), and fishing (12.9%). Finally, the only decrease occurred for hunting (-1.4%).

Although caution must be used when considering these rates of increase, combining all activities that have some aspect of viewing wildlife makes it evident that wildlife viewing is one of the fastest growing outdoor recreational activities. Ohio Division of Wildlife⁹ reports that wildlife watching has increased 63% nationally over the last decade, which equates to a total of 76 million visitor engagements. Almost 50% of those outdoor recreationists (30 million) take wildlife viewing trips away from home annually.

In conclusion, increasing numbers of citizens enjoying outdoor recreation results in an increased need for outdoor recreational opportunities. The currently available opportunities will not be sufficient for tomorrow's outdoor recreation needs. Stakeholder and town meeting participants have indicated, for example, that ORV trails in the area are already crowded, that horseback riders need more camping sites with horse facilities, and that, particularly during the summer season, the number of existing camping facilities is insufficient.

⁹ Ohio Division of Wildlife. 2001. "Public Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife Viewing Areas." Publication 77 (R101). Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Fountain Square, Columbus, OH.

Participants

Just as important as the increase in demand for outdoor recreation is the participants themselves. What sets outdoor recreation enthusiasts apart from others? What types of facilities do they seek? Do they recreate alone, and if not, whom do they bring? These are questions that can be answered using the responses from the telephone survey of four urban areas surrounding WNF. Using a statistical method to determine common characteristics among users, three types of users have been identified: 1) Nature Lovers; 2) Recreation-Commercial Enthusiasts; and 3) Recreation Consumers. Although all three types use outdoor recreation facilities, they have different perceptions of how these resources should be used.

Members of the Nature Lovers group make up approximately 40% of the population of outdoor recreation users. They believe that the primary benefit of WNF is to provide a home to animals and plants, whereas the potential benefit of WNF to provide wood for homes and pulp for paper is not at all important. Compared to other groups, they are also most likely to say that the Forest Service should place high priority on providing public education about the Forest, conservation, and the local ecology, and to place low priority on helping to meet the country's need for wood and minerals. Nature Lovers are most likely to say they are concerned with the environment and to be science-oriented, while they are least likely to describe themselves as "supporters of economic growth."

Recreation-Commercial Enthusiasts, on the other hand, believe that the primary benefits of WNF include providing a place to meet with friends or family, contributing jobs and products to the local economy, providing a place to get shade on hot days, and providing wood for homes and pulp for paper. Also, compared to those in the other two groups, they are most likely to say that the Forest Service should place high priority on: 1) providing opportunities for recreation such as camping, hiking, boating, hunting, or picnicking; 2)

building roads, bridges, and trails to help people get to different parts of the Forest; and 3) helping to meet the country's need for wood and minerals. This group makes up the largest percentage of users, at 46%.

Finally, the Recreation Consumers make up the smallest group of users, at 14%. In their responses on the benefit items, their importance ratings consistently fell in the middle of the range, indicating that none of the benefits that can be derived from WNF is of particular value to them. In a congruent fashion, they did not think the Forest Service has the responsibility to place high priority on any of the proposed development efforts, such as building roads, bridges, and trails to increase human access to WNF, providing public education, or developing more opportunities for recreation.

Considering that 86% of the outdoor recreation users (Nature Lovers and Recreation-Commercial Enthusiasts) value natural environments, providing natural environments are paramount in encouraging outdoor recreation facility use. Caution must be taken not to overbuild a site, however, or Nature Lovers will not support the facility. Wildlife tours and interpretive signs on existing trails and wildlife viewing areas can provide a good compromise between the wants of both Nature Lovers and Recreation-Commercial Enthusiasts. Additionally, minimal site development does not alter the rural atmosphere valued by stakeholders and town meeting participants.

Companions

Taking into account whether an activity is individual-, family-, or friend-oriented can assist in prioritizing which activities to develop or expand in an area. The agency or organization may wish to concentrate on activities that draw a specific type of user(s) to the area. In deciding which target population to focus on, there are many considerations discussed under upcoming criteria. One consideration that is not discussed elsewhere is that families who recreate together may do so more frequently than friends who recreate together.

Additionally, according to the 2000 Recreation Roundtable,¹⁰ Midwesterners engage in outdoor recreation as a family more than recreation users in any other area, and family participants in outdoor recreational activities say they recreate at least monthly as a family.

Area outdoor recreation users were asked who usually goes with them when they participate in recreational activities. Five activities have over 20% of the participants who usually do the activity alone: tour biking, mountain biking, off-road motorcycling, kayaking, and motorized sailboating. However, most activities are done with friends and/or family members. Horseback riding, swimming/beach activities, and picnicking have over 30% of the participants who usually do the activity with children. Over 20% of hikers and nature walkers, historical site visitors, and motorized sailboaters go with one's spouse only. Finally, over 30% of mountain biking, fishing, off-road vehicle trail driving, hunting, and most forms of boating are done with friends.

Concentrating on activities that bring more people into an area results in more economic rewards. Family-oriented activities contribute to a wholesome environment, while friend-oriented activities may draw individuals with different wants and needs. These populations may not be compatible, in that parents may not want their children to be exposed to adult-oriented evening activities. When enhancing outdoor recreational activities, care must be taken to separate activities that may conflict. In addition, support services wanted by family- and friend-oriented outdoor recreation enthusiasts may differ, requiring a community to consider what environment it wishes to create when enhancing outdoor recreational activities.

¹⁰ Roper/Starch Worldwide Inc. 2000. "Outdoor Recreation in America: Addressing Key Societal Concerns." Internet Website: www.funoutdoors.com/research/statistics. Also referred to as "Recreation Roundtable" survey data.

Location of Activity

Where do outdoor recreation users go to enjoy their activities? Information regarding where national or state users go is not available, but according to the telephone survey of area outdoor recreation users, much of the recreational activity that can be tracked in Ohio happens at local or state parks. Again, caution must be used when interpreting these data because some of the activities have very small numbers of participants, resulting in low levels of statistical validity. Additionally, it is important to note that recreation users often do not distinguish among the various jurisdictions, meaning that many of them may not be aware of when exactly they are in local parks, state parks, commercial facilities, or the National Forest. Those recreational activities that have the highest percentages (over 25%) of their participants visiting the National Forest are hunting, off-road motorcycling, four-wheel driving, and ATVing.¹¹ Swimming and beach activities are more likely to be located at commercial facilities, but also have high participation rates at local and state parks. Finally, horseback riding is equally likely to be located in public or commercial facilities.

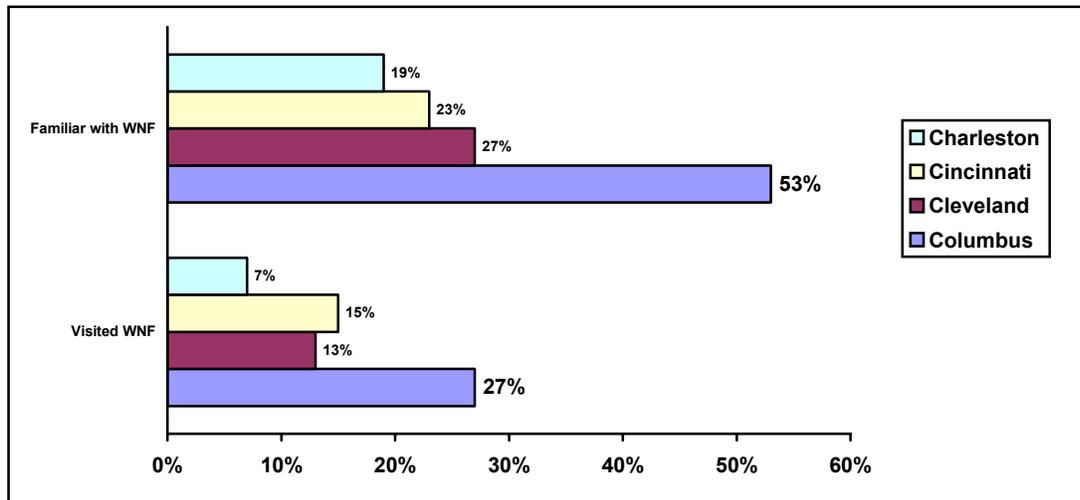
The lack of usage of WNF is an important consideration for this study. When asked a series of questions regarding their awareness and usage of WNF, relatively few area outdoor recreation users had heard of it, indicating that Wayne National Forest may well be one of the best-kept secrets in Ohio. Columbus area outdoor recreation users were much more likely to have heard of WNF (53%) but those from the other three urban areas examined were below 30%, with the lowest percentage of familiarity (19%) in Charleston.

Those area outdoor recreation users who were aware of WNF were also asked if they had visited WNF. The second set of bars on the following figure

¹¹ Off-road motorcycling, four-wheel driving, and ATVing are distinguished from one another here, as opposed to all of them being generally considered as off-road vehicling, because of question wording in the survey of area outdoor recreation users.

shows that among those users who were aware of it, only a small percentage of them had visited the Forest.

Area Outdoor Recreation Awareness of WNF



Even those who have visited WNF are not always aware of the opportunities available. On a 1 (low awareness) to 4 (high awareness) scale, the average awareness rating was 2.11 for WNF outdoor recreation users.

A lack of public awareness was also found within the stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders generally know that WNF exists, and could name some recreational activities they thought were probably available at WNF, but most had not actually visited the Forest. Several county commissioners were not even aware of how much land in their county is owned by WNF.

Demand for Support Services

In addition to expanding recreational opportunities in an area, it is important to provide support services for individuals participating in recreational activities. This need for support services aids entrepreneurs and business owners, and thus ultimately has an impact on the economic state of the area.

Area outdoor recreation users were asked during their telephone interviews what support services they look for when choosing a site for their

recreational activities. Only food services are important to a majority of area outdoor recreation users, with 58% citing this as a factor in deciding where to recreate. Other important services are lodging (42%), shopping (41%), and recreation supply stores (41%). Finally, a full 21.4% of respondents simply did not know of any more support services they would like to see.

Which support services are the most important to recreation users differs by type of recreational activity. This information is important for locating support services near activities that will draw the most people to the service. The service wanted most by picnickers is entertainment, while food is wanted most by hikers and nature viewers, historical site visitors, tour bikers, off-road vehicle enthusiasts, and horseback riders. Approximately 40% of historical site visitors and nature viewers also look for area lodging. Recreation supply stores are most wanted by people who fish, tent, mountain bike, and hunt.

When stakeholders and town meeting participants were asked what kind of support services are needed in the area, most saw little need to expand any. Those most commonly suggested by town meeting participants are safety services, recreation equipment vendors, camping facilities, improved mapping and distribution of information, more/clearer signage, horse camping facilities, food/gas services, better communication networking, and visitor information centers. The most commonly reported response provided by stakeholders is the need for advertising what is available. Some stakeholders also indicated that camping areas and cabins in the area are in need of expansion.

WNF Challenges

WNF has a number of challenges that impede its efforts to become a major proponent and partner for expansion of outdoor recreation and support services in the area. The first challenge is that WNF is divided into three separate physical Units: the Athens, Ironton, and Marietta Units. Because WNF

is located in three distinct locations, it cannot be promoted as a “one stop” recreation destination.

The second challenge is that WNF lands are segmented within each of the three separate Units. Parcels of land owned by WNF are separated by land owned by private individuals. This provides challenges when recreational activities require a large contiguous landmass, such as off-road vehicle trails or hunting. It also presents problems because it is difficult for prospective recreation users to know whether they are on Forest or private lands.

The third challenge is a lack of specific, definable entrances into the Forest. Individuals driving to WNF often drive in and out of the Forest a number of times, which decreases the likelihood of potential visitors spontaneously finding and visiting WNF. Area visitors may know that they drive through WNF, but it is difficult for them just to “stop by” to investigate the available outdoor recreational opportunities. Additionally, although WNF headquarters are visible from Route 33, the sign only identifies the building as WNF headquarters and does not include a reference to visitor information, which may further deter visitors from stopping by.

The final challenge to WNF is the general animosity that some area residents feel toward the Forest. This animosity takes a number of different forms. First, some stakeholders and town meeting participants felt that WNF staff people are difficult to work with and that WNF does not honor previous commitments. Several stakeholders and town meeting participants suggested that WNF staff are hard to contact and do not return telephone calls. Recreation users also report that WNF does not stand by reciprocal agreements and commitments for trail expansion, particularly if another party challenges such expansion.

High staff turnover rates make the situation even worse because once a working relationship has been formed and the staff person then leaves, the process has to begin again with someone new. In addition, when WNF staff

people move on, incoming staff do not always honor previous agreements. The high turnover rates also create inconsistent policies within WNF when new staff people have different priorities.

Another major source of animosity toward the Forest is that some WNF area residents do not understand its funding and budgetary process. They may assume that once a Forest Management Plan has been approved, the federal government automatically funds the recommendations. They may not realize that Congressional appropriations do not always result in funding proposed plans, and so when users and area residents do not see these plans come to fruition, they may feel that WNF is not fulfilling its promises and obligations.

The final source of animosity toward WNF was voiced by several stakeholders in counties containing large amounts of WNF land. These stakeholders have the impression that the public lands within the county contribute less monetary return than they would if they were privately owned. As previously noted, the areas surrounding WNF are some of the most economically depressed areas in the state of Ohio. Since Ohio's school funding comes partially from property taxes, some residents feel that their area school systems suffer because they are not receiving property taxes from public lands. However, residents do not always realize that the federal government does reimburse counties in other ways.

These negative impressions can be a challenge because these residents are less likely to support WNF in its endeavors than those who have positive perceptions of the Forest. They are more likely to be distrustful of WNF's intentions when it works with communities to expand outdoor recreation.

WNF Niche

Although there are certainly challenges facing WNF in its goal of enhancing area outdoor recreational activities, it also has several advantages

that contribute to its “niche” in southeast Ohio. This niche includes both social and structural considerations.

First, being both a National Forest and one of the largest public landowners in the area provides WNF with the opportunity to become a focal point for visitors to the area. WNF is vitally important to the southeast Ohio planning area because of its prominence and influence as a potential tourism and recreation destination. WNF's existing facilities complement and enhance state and local facilities in many ways.

Public lands under WNF’s control have an abundance of heritage sites and are a draw for many types of outdoor recreationists. Since wildlife viewing and visiting historical/heritage sites are high demand activities for all types of people, WNF is well placed to provide them.

WNF's large landmass also provides ample opportunity for long trail systems. Although there are many types of activities that require such systems, horseback riding and off-road vehicles require the longest. Eleven of the twelve counties in the area have very active Ohio Horseman Councils, which would clearly benefit from and fit into any niche that WNF could provide. On the other hand, while the Forest’s large landmass also gives it the best opportunity to provide off-road vehicle trails, Nature Lovers would not support WNF doing so. However, one of the previously mentioned challenges, the division of the Forest into three separate Units, could become an advantage in this situation since different activities could be confined to different WNF Units.

Second, WNF, as the second largest holder of public lands in southeast Ohio, currently has the opportunity to become an important partner in increasing the economic viability of the area by working with other state and local agencies to attract outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Stakeholders and public opinion leaders agree that the large amount of land that WNF controls is one of its unique characteristics that should determine where it fits within the matrix of outdoor recreational opportunities. The Forest Service's goal of

partnering with communities gives WNF the motivation to coordinate with state and local agencies and residents so that its activities can be further enhanced.

Finally, even though there have been problems in the past, most stakeholders are not averse to “trying again” to develop good working relationships with WNF. They see the potential for their areas or recreational activities if successful partnerships are developed. In particular, stakeholders are willing to work with WNF to promote and advertise the area to bring in more outdoor recreation users.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The increasing need for outdoor recreational opportunities has been well documented in this study. With all the different types of recreational activities available, it is important to find the potential opportunities that will coordinate with and enhance existing opportunities. WNF, ODNR, and the twelve surrounding counties are well situated to meet this growing need. However, limited foresight by local public opinion leaders and other stakeholders regarding these opportunities creates a stumbling block to their further development in southeast Ohio. Unfortunately, there is not a wealth of published results about combined centers of community economic development and tourism. Webster and Chappelle¹² report that, in communities surrounding public forestlands, forest products and nature-based or rural tourism provide viable economic development opportunities that can foster more stable local economies by creating a better job mix and lower unemployment rates. However, the authors also indicate that tourism should not exceed 35-50% of a community’s economic base, so that stability can be

¹² Webster, Henry H. and Daniel E. Chappelle. 2001. “Tourism and Forest Products: Twin Resource Sectors for Effective Community Development in the Lake States.” *Journal of the Community Development Society*. Vol. 32, No.1.

maintained. They strongly suspect that the most important factor for economic stability is an encompassing and unifying community leadership.

There are two major areas of concern this study identifies for WNF to consider in aligning its outdoor recreation responsibilities with its stated goals. The first pertains to the provision of its current and future inventory of outdoor recreation areas and facilities, while the second is community and economic development. The former responsibility is obviously more focused and tangible, and it has been given the greatest amount of attention in the past. The latter concern, however, is a broader, more challenging process, having a variety of target audiences both within the designated proclamation boundary and beyond the defined planning area. It requires joint community and state agency participation for effective comprehensive planning and administration. Because of this complexity and its need for more attention, the second concern must now be addressed. Therefore, recommendations for both of these concerns have been identified and proposed for full consideration. Both types of recommendations are appropriate, since a feasibility study by its nature is a combination of factual information and intended policy.

Recommendation 1: Develop, Coordinate, And Maintain Stronger Relationships With Planning Area Communities, Outdoor Recreation Associations, And State Agencies.

There is already a significant effort to provide and operate outdoor recreation areas by a variety of agencies and businesses in southeast Ohio. Tourism offices are destination-marketing organizations that promote their respective counties. The overlapping definitions of outdoor recreation and tourism are seldom recognized. Tourists are typically stereotyped as wealthy outsiders who spend vast amounts of time and money. Recreationists, on the other hand, are usually considered to be residents who engage in less-costly non-work activities as a normal part of their weekly routines. While both kinds

of participants are important to the tourism system, neither of these perceptions is entirely correct. The real distinctions between them are the distance traveled and whether an overnight stay at a location other than home takes place. There is no perfect definition for a tourist; however, someone who has a travel distance of fifty miles each way and an overnight stay is used by Ohio for purposes of convenient measure. Participants who do not meet this standard are usually seeking destinations where they can participate in the kinds of activities that provide the same desirable experiences and satisfaction as “tourist” activities without having to stay overnight. It is convenient to refer to this type of day user as excursionists, even when they travel more than fifty miles and return to their residences the same day. Tourists typically spend more money on support services like food and lodging. Therefore, such services are important components of a comprehensive tourism system, along with destinations like WNF and specific facilities such as ATV trails.

A process to integrate the multiple parts of this complex system and to provide guidance for its successful operation is a concern of equal importance with management of outdoor recreation areas. A jointly formulated and comprehensive tourism system development strategic plan should be the eventual goal of WNF, state agencies, communities, tourism organizations, support service proprietors, and citizens. WNF should make a concerted effort to provide leadership and engage in a process that will strengthen cooperative relationships with surrounding communities, state agencies, and user organizations in order to coordinate outdoor recreation efforts and enhance the quality of users’ experiences. The entire destination area should be the principal focus, rather than a single agency, Unit, or activity. Existing information sources such as this study, Ohio's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and tourism impact reports are a foundation for such a strategic plan.

This study investigated three separate survey populations (nearest

metropolitan centers, stakeholders, and gateway areas) with questions about what should be done to stimulate community and economic development and how it might best be accomplished. The responses of town meeting participants and stakeholders strongly support this first recommendation. Stakeholders identified five concerns of most importance for better cooperation with WNF. They are:

1. Get more directly involved with communities (on an individual basis);
2. Generate more communication for general public relations;
3. Increase personal contact and communications;
4. Work with travel and tourism organizations; and
5. Meet regularly with local officials.

Stakeholders do not expect WNF to be fully responsible for these activities. They expressed a strong willingness to help with promotion, distribution of information, development of partnerships, assistance with planning, and volunteer recruitment. They were highly desirous that such cooperation with WNF would materialize more visibly in the future.

Town meeting participants' responses were similar in spirit and intent. Six items of highest importance for cooperation with WNF were identified by at least four of the six town meetings. Their priority items are listed in the following table.

Town Meetings

Item	Number
Better promotion and advertising	6
Better communication	5
Develop tourism	4
Develop existing areas and facilities	4
Support community infrastructure development	4
Community planning with WNF	4

Town meeting participants were also asked to focus on process and to develop a set of guidelines to assist with future outdoor recreation development decisions. An arrangement of those criteria reflects a definite emphasis on community goals and cooperation. The criteria are arranged by the number of town meeting groups identifying them as necessary. A criterion had to be identified by at least two town meetings in order to qualify for listing.

Guidelines for Tourism Development

Four Groups

Support economic development

Positive economic impact on community

Three Groups

Support interests of local residents

Changes should be compatible with the planning areas' culture, economy and rural life style

Utilize unique recreational activities e.g. historical and natural sites

Two Groups

Natural environment should be maintained through responsible development

Communities and WNF need to agree on long range plan

Include, align, and connect community facilities and businesses in recreational planning for WNF

Encourage and enhance new business

Utilize user fees and permits to directly support outdoor recreation development

Economic development, community involvement, comprehensive planning, and environmental protection are the primary themes in these criteria. These are similar to the values and contrasts between the Nature Lover and Recreation Commercial Enthusiast groups identified with the recreation user survey in this study. WNF is considered by all respondent groups to be a primary attraction in the planning area that offers activities for both excursionists and tourists and for which nearby communities can provide support services to enhance and extend the experiences of users. These criteria are basic prerequisites for creating a mission and goals for a comprehensive strategic plan for tourism system development. A regional economic development plan, with heritage tourism at its core, is a good idea in need of an effective strategy. There is an excellent opportunity for WNF to pursue its key outdoor recreation goals and to provide visible leadership for southeast Ohio, but such a vision will be less feasible without engagement and leadership.

WNF should give full and serious consideration to being a leading partner in a series of collaborative planning processes with local communities. This process is a perfect complement to the use of demographic and socioeconomic information articulated by Cordell of the Forest Service Experiment Research Station system. It is similar to the one used to create the Hocking County Tourism Association in southeast Ohio, which has enjoyed much success in its tourism system development efforts since 1990.

Additional opportunities for development of the planning area could be realized by a collaborative planning process for specific parts of the tourism system. There are five such planning projects identified by this study that would generate useful information for such a comprehensive plan. They are identified and recommended in progressive order for consideration by WNF.

1. Review, update, approve, and implement the 1994 Draft Trail Master Plan Summary for WNF;
2. Develop a Safety Services Plan and create necessary partnership agreements to implement for each WNF unit;
3. Prepare and implement a Wildlife Observation Sites Plan in cooperation with the ODW for each WNF unit;
4. Develop and implement a Heritage Tourism Plan (with natural, historical, and cultural elements) for the southeast Ohio planning area; and
5. Complete an integrated Comprehensive Tourism System Development Strategic Plan with the various partners indicated above for the southeast Ohio planning area.

Recommendation 2: Develop Immediate Outdoor Recreation Association Partnerships For Trail System Development.

Planning and coordination of major projects are extensive time and staff commitments, so actions that offer more immediate success and satisfaction for patrons are also important for balancing program goals. Two such opportunities for short-term accomplishment currently exist for WNF, and they should be more enthusiastically pursued at this point in time.

One of the more important findings of this project is that outdoor recreation association members are willing to assist cooperative agencies that nurture such partnerships. This willingness is exemplified by the major presence of recreation association representatives attending the town meetings (particularly Ohio Horseman's Council members). Ohio Horseman's Council (OHC), organized in 1972, is the premier example of a potential partnering opportunity that this project has uncovered. There are sixty-one county chapters of OHC throughout the state, with more than 3,000 members, promoting interest in trail riding and camping that would preferably be at horse campgrounds. Eleven of the twelve counties in the planning area for this study have an active OHC chapter. This statewide organization has donated

thousands of person hours for trail construction, trail maintenance, and litter pick-up to other cooperating agencies, indicating its members' strong desire to assist with trail system development.

Although other outdoor recreation associations and trail user groups are not always organized to the same extent as OHC is at the local level, they pursue their activities with the same general enthusiasm. These groups have similar concerns about public access and diminishing outdoor recreational opportunities. The Ohio Trails Partnership (OTP), is composed of OHC, the Buckeye Trail Association, and the International Mountain Bike Association. It has been organized for all non-powered trail users to share information, to work cooperatively with public agencies and/or private land-owners, and to develop and maintain high quality trail systems. This willingness and productivity could be utilized by WNF to supplement agency expenditures for developing and maintaining its trail system.

Many user groups are already organized and involved in cooperative activities. A trail related organization that has users of both powered and non-powered trails, the Ohio Multi-Use Trails Association (OMTA), has similar intents as OTP for all trail uses and users. These associations are reflective of the strong interest in trail systems and their potential for regional economic development. They could become formidable partners with public agencies in community development efforts and have a positive impact on tourism system development.

Outdoor recreation associations are much more willing to work with an agency when there is an atmosphere of trust within which teamwork can occur and when they are given equitable consideration for their efforts. For example, when one user group contributes more person hours to a volunteer work project, it is reasonable to expect more consideration for areas and facilities for that group's particular outdoor recreation use. Likewise, user groups that demonstrate responsible use of outdoor recreations resources and/or the

highest levels of use should be acknowledged and rewarded in management decisions. The same concept should apply for user types that provide the greatest amount of revenue in the form of fees.

These four measures of support (volunteer work, level of use, responsible use, fees paid) should be tracked so they can be duly recognized by management. An honor system, administered by the user association and periodically checked by the agency for reliability and accuracy, has been effective and efficient in many instances. Such a procedure as the one that OHC has used successfully to report trail use and donated time could be useful for all outdoor recreation users associated with WNF. This approach would send a strong message to user groups to get organized and become effective if they would like to receive preferential treatment and additional benefits from WNF.

Active participation and engagement with coordinating groups such as OTP is an effective way to demonstrate real intent for fulfilling an agency's mission and goals. This involvement should of course also include state agencies. Benefits from this collaboration would promote a more positive working relationship with WNF, and an enhanced cooperation among all participants. The group with the most to gain from these positive working partnerships, however, is obviously the public being served by them.

Recommendation 3: Develop, Facilitate And Sponsor Programs To Attract Visitors And Support Community Economic Development.

Programming is another way for WNF to partner with stakeholders and generate economic development. Sponsoring, co-sponsoring, facilitating, and promoting special events for targeted outdoor recreation users is also a way to enhance public relations, provide educational opportunities, network with local communities, and improve visitor services.

WNF has many opportunities to acquaint a broader base of users and supporters with all national forest assets throughout the year. Some of these opportunities should be joint ventures with stakeholder communities. It is strongly suggested that a National Forest weekend conference for general audiences be considered for each of the three units each year. The best timing may very well be during the winter months since it is the normal off season. Specific themes for such a conference in random order could include:

1. Multi-Use Trails,
2. Southeast Ohio Wildlife Observation Areas,
3. Heritage Tourism Workshops,
4. Values, History and Techniques of Conservation
5. Multiple Use Management Policy and Planning,
6. School Funding Impacts and Policy,
7. Government Budgeting Process and Support, and
8. Regional Tourism and Promotion.

Sponsored forums of this sort hosted periodically by WNF that informs the public and promotes a positive atmosphere of cooperation helps to alleviate negative perceptions and images. In addition, such programming would assist in the facilitation and emergence of sustained community leadership and support.

Stakeholders identified by this study are another fertile target audience for formal programs. Almost one-quarter of respondents in this group did not know of any constructive ideas for developing support services in southeast Ohio. Creating and facilitating positive educational opportunities with them is crucial in promoting desired leadership and developing better community relations. Some existing programs could be used for this purpose. For example, Ohio State University Extension already has a number of programs, including Community First Impressions, Small Business Management Excel, Nine Weeks to a Better Community, Coverts Management Program, and Forestland

Absentee Owners Workshops. In addition, the Ohio Bed and Breakfast Association provides networking opportunities plus workshops at area meetings and an annual conference. The Ohio Travel Association also has a series of meetings throughout the year for their southeast district. It is anticipated that the Ohio Appalachian Regional Commission office would be interested in co-sponsoring and supporting activities of this type.

Recommendation 4: Assist And Be More Visible With Development Of A Comprehensive And More Effective Promotion Of The Planning Area.

This activity is the marketing component of the tourism system. Most of the counties in the southeast Ohio planning area have a tourism organization for this purpose. They produce adequate visitor guides and calendars of events in many cases. They have even joined forces in their marketing efforts and identified a heritage area theme as an anchor for such promotions. However, the degree of familiarity with WNF and those who have visited this destination from the four closest metropolitan areas is less than impressive. The results of the survey for this study are listed in tabular format for the sake of convenience.

Metro Area	Familiar WNF	Visited WNF
Charleston	19%	7%
Cincinnati	23%	15%
Cleveland	27%	13%
Columbus	53%	27%

The ratio of familiarity to visitation is basically two to one in every case. Cincinnati and Cleveland both show promise for potential market increase. One of the important strategies to increase visitation would be to improve familiarity in the best potential market areas. Both targeted market areas and

market segments would be the best approach rather than random promotion to achieve desired results most economically. WNF definitely must become more prominent in the promotion copy for this destination area since it is the second largest land owner for the entire region.

Stakeholders strongly believe this should be a high priority activity. Communication, promotion, cooperation and more involvement with community leadership dominated the suggested goals by both stakeholders and town meeting participants to strengthen recreation development in southeast Ohio. A process to implement these goals is an extremely important mechanism for successful accomplishment of those goals. A progressive pattern from facilitative leadership to collaborative planning and, finally, shared leadership will be necessary to make a difference and move beyond the status quo. It must be a sustained process throughout the LRMP planning period. Stakeholders are willing to help promote the area and seek partnerships for positive development. Almost one-quarter of stakeholders lacked creative ideas about how to proceed. This is a strong indication of stagnation. WNF was the most frequently suggested institution to lead recreation development in the planning area. This is not a fully realistic view, but it certainly recognizes the prominence of WNF. The facilitative role is currently vacant, and it is one that should not continue to be ignored. Good community relations could be developed through a process focused on more effective marketing as a component of the tourism system.

Outdoor recreation users from the four urban areas were also asked their preferences for receiving information regarding a national forest destination area. The most preferred means were city and community newspapers, radio, and the internet.

Recommendation 5: Develop Recreational Opportunities That Have The Highest Attraction Potential And Greatest Comparative Advantage.

Provision of outdoor recreation areas and facilities is a continuing responsibility. The present comparative advantages in outdoor recreation for WNF are its trail system (ORV in particular) and hunting opportunities. Viewing wildlife has not been previously recognized as an important part of its wildlife component, but it could be since recreation users have expressed a strong interest in it. There are substantial existing outdoor recreation facilities, but the public would like to see some upgrading and a better distribution among the three units. As a public outdoor recreation provider, WNF could enhance its comparative advantage and gain added benefit from a broader scope of formally offered outdoor recreational activities. This strategy would also bode well for both community and economic development.

Outdoor recreation user surveys of Ohio, the mid-west region, and nationally are remarkably similar. Activity groups organized by percentage of participation reflect opportunities to be considered. All of these activities are important to users and they are pertinent throughout southeast Ohio, hence, they all should be considered for relevant planning situations.

Outdoor Recreation Activity Participation Groupings

<u>High Level</u>	<u>Moderate Level</u>	<u>Low Level</u>
(= 51%)	(25-50%)	(=25%)
Hike/Nature	Lodging	Tour/Mountain Biking
Picnic	Boating	ORV
Beach/Swim	Fishing	Recreational Vehicle
Historical/Cultural Sites	Camping	Hunt/Trap
		Shooting
		Horseback riding
		Backpacking

Perceptions of local stakeholders and users do not always coincide closely with the perceived demand associated with user preference surveys from a larger geographical area. The most prominent outdoor recreational opportunities identified by stakeholders in this study are also displayed in three similar groupings for comparison to those of users at the state, regional, and national geographical levels.

Southeast Ohio Stakeholder Outdoor Recreation Opportunity Groupings

<u>High Identity</u> (>51%)	<u>Moderate Identity</u> (25-50%)	<u>Low Identity</u> (<25%)
Hiking/Nature Walking	Boating	Tour Biking
Hunting/Trapping	ORV Trails	Mountain Biking
Fishing	Horseback Riding	Water Related Activities
Camping	Nature-related Activities	

One of the most notable differences between local stakeholders and non-resident activity priorities is centered on common distinctions with urban and rural lifestyles. Fishing, hunting-trapping and camping are all identified as high priority activities by stakeholders. Likewise, horseback riding and ORV trails ascend to the moderate level grouping for these respondents. They are preferred modes of transportation over mountain bikes or touring bikes that have a stronger connection with urbanizing population centers. Water-related activities descend to the low identity grouping since common knowledge by stakeholders makes them more aware of limitations for such activity other than fishing.

The distinctions in these groupings is not considered to be a significant disparity, but more of an acknowledgement and reflection by planning area residents of those activities they do, see or hear about the most. Stakeholder’s capacities as a government official, business proprietor, or service provider also

make them more sensitive about tourism potential and attraction of large numbers of outside visitors. This combination of factors can be the source of some unintentional disparity which often confuses activity preferences with potential for promotion of the area.

A more important and revealing difference between stakeholders and users is the absence of picnicking and historical cultural sites, although both opportunities definitely exist throughout the planning area and could complement each other. Since it is common to see individual picnic sites often unused, there may be a sense of sufficiency by stakeholders. Thus, such an activity would not be deemed a primary opportunity of high importance. The absence of historical/cultural sites is a serious gap between user participation and local stakeholders' perceptions. The existence of this gap conforms to a general lack of recognition about existing assets, underutilized opportunities, and potential development. Almost one-quarter of stakeholder respondents did not know what to suggest for expansion of facilities and support services when queried for these ideas. However, three of the six town meeting groups recognized historical sites as unique and recommended that they be utilized.

There were no additional potential activities nor development opportunities recognized by the participants of the six town meetings for this study. They supported the premise of the stakeholders that adequate types of activities and support services were available for the near future.

Town meeting participants were very supportive of improving camping facilities, especially horse camps and expanding the trail system. Fishing is one activity that received similar support. ORV facilities, not to be confused with trails, was the idea with the least amount of recognition at the town meetings.

New activities that are most likely to bring added visitors are nature viewing and heritage and historical sites. Opportunities for these activities already exist in abundance at WNF and throughout the planning area, but are not always developed into attractive sites with interpretive information, parking

areas, and signs. One suggestion is to develop driving tours based on specific routes. For example, WNF and communities may develop a “bird watching” tour for wildlife observation sites. Other potential heritage tours could feature trees, furnaces, Native American sites, and covered bridges. A combination of these features would be the most preferred tour in all likelihood. Joint development of these heritage opportunities with local tourism organizations and state agencies would be the best strategy. Another strength to this approach is that the longer a visitor stays in the planning area, the better it is for economic health and development of support services. Additionally, tours would also encourage family-oriented participants to visit these areas by drawing both Nature Lovers and Recreation-Commercial Enthusiasts. This was an important concern to most of the stakeholders and town meeting participant for the planning area of WNF.

Recommendation 6: Enhance Existing Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure.

Future growth of outdoor recreation use is a very important consideration for providers of these services and facilities. Future expansion of the outdoor recreation assets for WNF should be targeted to fill any unnecessary voids and to complement the efforts of other providers. There are different types of potential gaps that require attention. The total capacity for a specific outdoor recreation activity across the planning area within WNF, and between the units of WNF is one important type of gap analysis.

The most feasible and cost effective strategy for future development of outdoor recreation by WNF is to utilize existing optimum capacity. In addition to determining actual current use levels, this strategic approach may require upgrading of some facilities and more fully employing prescribed monitoring procedures for the existing inventory of outdoor recreation areas and facilities. One planning period of not more than five years should suffice to implement

these procedures and to complete necessary up-grades. This strategic scenario is totally consistent with the five key goals formulated by the Forest Service to guide their outdoor recreation responsibilities.

The trail system in southeast Ohio is impressive. The contribution by WNF is significant and will face continued pressure to improve and expand. The present trail system is the most prominent outdoor recreation asset for WNF. It consists of 362.6 total miles, some of which is double counted for more than one type of trail use. Mountain biking and bridle trails are usually a multi-use trail of the same length for example. Total trail miles in southeast Ohio and respective percentages provided by WNF are listed below.

Type	Total Miles	WNF Miles	Percentage
Hiking	789.1	363.6	46%
Bridle	419.7	88.2	21%
Mountain Bike	577.5	213.3	37%
ORV	154.0	116.0	75%
Backpack	99.0	16.0	16%

Land ownership is nearly equal between WNF and related ODNR state agencies in southeast Ohio. It is a normal tendency to expect each agency to provide almost equal contributions to each type of trail opportunity in the systems. This rule-of-thumb would indicate that hiking and mountain bike trails are in a relative state of balance. It would not require too much adjustment of more multi-use miles allocated from hiking to mountain biking to achieve more balance. The same approach could be done for back-packing miles to increase that low percentage.

Bridle trails, currently multi-use in combination with mountain biking, also could use some added miles to strengthen the trail system. This would be most appropriate for the Athens and Marietta units where only 22.5 and 19.9 miles of bridle trail are designated respectively. That is less than 25% of WNF

bridle trails. Stakeholders and town meeting participants both supported this conclusion. Local users were very adamant that such action would be appropriate.

The most notable strength of WNF trail system is ORV trails. There are only two agencies, WNF and the state Division of Forestry, that permit ORV trails in Ohio. An ORV does not include four-wheel drive outfits. There is increasing demand for these opportunities, a growth in participation of 80% since 1983, but they do not mix well with non-powered users in most cases. The four wheel drive advocates are mounting more pressure to accommodate their activity. Presently, there are no designated trails for ORV use on the Marietta unit. This could be a control site for a comparative study of the complete and partial multi-use trail concept that is allowed on the other two units.

It was a pleasant surprise to find a Trail Master Plan (TMP) developed by a WNF collaborative planning committee in 1994 to address issues associated with trail system development. It was very distressing to be advised that this TMP was not considered nor approved as an amendment to the Land and Resource Management Plan; therefore, went unheeded except in the minds of stakeholders. It is a prime example of the animosity and lack of credibility that has intensified about WNF outdoor recreation operations the last few years. That trail plan could be the basis for trail system improvements in line with the findings of this study. Such action would be a good beginning to enhance public relations and to restore some public confidence.

A total of 36 public campgrounds with 2,317 campsites for the planning area is also an impressive inventory of assets. One-half of these sites have electric hook-ups and 40% include shower facilities at the campground. Ten of the 36 campgrounds, less than 30%, have flush toilets. These amenities are highly preferred by recreation vehicle campers.

WNF currently provides 36% (13) of the campgrounds, but only 7% (155) of the total composites. Sixty-four of these 155 sites (40%) have electric hook-ups; however that is only 5% of the total planning area with electric sites. Likewise, three of the thirteen campgrounds (23%) have showers that constitute 21% for the planning area. It is not very likely that on-site campers will stay for extended periods of time without these amenities.

It would appear that upgrading existing campsites would be the best strategy before adding new campgrounds, except in the case of horse camps. This approach makes sense because it is more practical with limited budget allocations, it demonstrates good management, it serves the public better, and it could induce added demand for private campgrounds. Stakeholders were very supportive of more horse camps for existing and anticipated bridle trails on the various units of WNF. They also recommended improvements to camping facilities.

Although WNF contribution to the total developed camping inventory for the planning area is not high in terms of percentage, this is a workable arrangement when combined with a preponderance of campsites with such amenities provided primarily by Ohio State Parks. State Parks and Forests have 21 campgrounds, 2,162 campsites with 1,184 (55%) of those with electric hookups and 11 campgrounds (52%) that provide showers. These public campgrounds, in combination with private campgrounds, seem to meet current demand levels. There are 27 advertised private campgrounds near the Athens unit, nine near the Marietta unit, and none near the Ironton unit. Distribution of both public and private campsites with amenities is an issue that needs more attention as future planning proceeds.

Recommendation 7: Link Recreation Development To Communities To Enhance Economic Health And Opportunity.

Increasing communities' perceptions of the feasibility of entrepreneurial opportunities should be a priority for WNF. Most support services are seen as adequate but underutilized. Therefore, increasing demand for outdoor recreation by increasing visitation, especially during low use time periods, would improve the current business climate for retention and expansion. Eventually business volume would attract new business enterprise and thus community enhancement. The most feasible outdoor recreation business related to WNF at this time would be campgrounds in close proximity to the Ironton and Marietta Units, according to the data accumulated in this study. Another inviting opportunity could be tour directors and guides/outfitters for an extended tour package of the "comprehensive" outdoor recreational opportunities in the planning area. It is noteworthy that the Athens unit is much more heavily visited and the Ironton unit the least visited by metropolitan respondents for this study. Familiarity and proximity are the two most probable reasons.

The Athens unit has the most numerous outdoor recreation development in the surrounding area. Outdoor recreation development by WNF should therefore be concentrated on the Marietta and Ironton units where fewer opportunities are currently offered. The Marietta unit is the most lacking in overall outdoor recreational opportunities. The Ironton unit opportunities are sparse as well, but it does have Lake Vesivius and Shawnee State Park as main attractions.

Enhancing trail and camping opportunities will increase participation and hence economic viability of the area and entrepreneurial opportunities. Trail activities such as hiking, nature walks, and horseback riding are often done as a family. Other trail activities such as ORVing and mountain biking

are more likely to be done with friends. Camping is both a family and friend experience. Not only are more people involved in these activities but these outdoor recreation users also look for support services in the area when doing these activities. Along with historical sightseers recreation users who like hiking and nature walking (see recommendation 3) tend to want lodging and food services. Shopping is also an important component of these activities. Other trail users also look for food services and shopping experiences, although they are more likely to look for stores providing support services to their activity. Campers look for all types of support services including shopping, related stores, food services, and entertainment services. Thus, enticing more outdoor recreation users to the area and enhancing and increasing targeted activities combine to create more economic opportunities.

Recommendation 8: Expand And Establish Locations For Visitor And User Information To Be Distributed.

Information is required during the planning stage prior to an actual visit, and also on-site at various locations when users are at WNF or in the surrounding area. This distinction between types of information often requires different details and channels of distribution.

WNF headquarters welcome center is an excellent facility for visitor contact and information. The extent and quality of available information at this location is very impressive. Cooperation with adjoining county tourism organizations to the Athens unit is also evident. However, it can not adequately serve the Ironton and Marietta units from this single location. Other existing locations in conjunction with the individual counties throughout the planning area could be useful for this public contact and should encourage visitors to use more opportunities available on WNF property. Likewise, this type of contact will result in better public relations.

A prominent visitor center is a strong agency identity. The fragmentation of WNF into three separated units requires such an identity for each unit even more. An arrangement for more prominence and greater public contact to familiarize visitors with WNF and southeast Ohio opportunities needs added attention. This would be most effective as a partnership with communities and other agencies for general public information. There is also concern expressed by both users and stakeholders that on-site information would make the visitor experience much more satisfying. Occasional personal contact would further enhance these outdoor recreation experiences.

Extensive personal contact at on-site areas is not always convenient or even necessary. However, basic self-directing information should definitely be available. One of the most frequent constructive criticisms for this study was a lack of maps and trail signs. Such a situation creates frustration and unnecessary dissatisfaction for users who visit any given destination. Conversely, the greater the satisfaction the more likely visitors will return for another visit and encourage others to do likewise. It cannot be determined by this study whether it is a lack of information or the distribution of such information or the location of signs that is the obstacle, but they should all be analyzed further on a site specific basis. It is most probable that the distribution of such information is the weakest link in this process. Visitors and users are definitely in favor of more site information such as trail maps and signs, both directional and informational.

The distribution of general information about WNF to potential visitors beyond the planning area by a cooperating agency could most effectively be done by the Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism (ODTT) 1-800-BUCKEYE program. Such an arrangement could be done independently by WNF or in a consortium partnership with county tourism organizations in conjunction with WNF. A consortium partnership would be the most beneficial. This marketing channel should be expanded for WNF.

Outdoor recreation users indicated the internet was a preferred form of communication. Currently WNF has an internet site consisting of information regarding recreation opportunities, forest policy, and other related issues. Future linkages with county tourism organizations would assist visitors when planning trips to the area.

A familiarization tour (fam tour) is a very efficient method to acquaint visitor contact persons with the opportunities, facilities, and particulars associated with a destination area like WNF. Such fam tours for stakeholders and tourism organization workers near each of the three WNF units could be very useful as part of the process for facilitation leadership development and initiating contact with communities for future collaborative planning. At the very least, personal knowledge and concrete information would be confidently transferred to visitors at contact points in the area or to others at remote locations seeking general information. WNF should give full consideration to such familiarization tours for each unit, especially in concert with adjoining county tourism organizations.

Recommendation 9: Utilize A Monitoring Program And Share Information With Stakeholders.

Monitoring of actions and progress according to approved plans is a prescribed responsibility of land and resource management on national forest ranger districts. It is recommended that more attention be paid to such a program and appropriate details for its implementation be designed with public input. A sound monitoring program should be closely observed and utilized for a variety of outdoor recreation operations. Those activities include site planning and site development; site maintenance; demonstration fee program; policy analysis; and tracking economic impact.

Both town meeting and stakeholder respondent were concerned about communication with WNF and lack of commitment. This credibility with

commitment included both a lack of desire to make such commitments, and more importantly, failure to follow-through with actual or perceived commitments. The TMP Summary of 1994 was the most recognized example for this situation, but others of a lesser scale were also mentioned. Development of positive working relationships simply will not materialized unless there is trust that each party will make and fulfill reasonable commitments on a regular basis. Such commitments must be viewed as agency and program agreements that transcend staff changes, budget restrictions, policy voids or program revisions. Likewise, they should not be determined in a unilateral and arbitrary fashion.

Planning will articulate commitments for a desired direction. Monitoring of those plans annually will show their adequacy and progress toward fulfilling those plans. This is also the same kind of information that should be useful for the budgeting process. Sharing of this information with local stakeholders will develop more credibility and trust. There will be very little, if any, opportunity for WNF to achieve goals four and five of their National Recreation Agenda without developing a solid foundation of trust with appropriate stakeholders. The components of trust to be observed are: 1) inclusion, 2) consistency, 3) accountability, and 4) truthfulness. This is the strong message that was delivered by stakeholder respondents and town meeting participants for this study. It is very feasible to accomplish the development of greater trust and credibility with some adjustments in the management style and process of WNF as outlined in these recommendations.

Recommendation 10: Economic Impact Should Be Tracked As The Comprehensive Measure Of Outdoor Recreation And Tourism Development.

A comprehensive view of tourism economic impact is derived for direct, indirect, and induced expenditures. There are 88 counties in Ohio. The total economic impact for the 29 county Appalachian Regional commission (ARC) in southeast Ohio for 1992 was almost \$1.2 Billion as reported by the Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism (ODTT). It was estimated that this tourism activity accounted for 35,232 jobs with a payroll in excess of \$446 million resulting in more than \$61 million of tax revenues. Only 12 of the 29 ARC counties are in WNF planning area, and not all counties received equal shares of the total revenues generated. The ARC area portion of all tourism revenues in Ohio is less than 15%. The 12 WNF counties share is probably less than 7%. This should not be an acceptable level of performance given the growing interest in outdoor recreation and potential that exist in southeast Ohio. The feasibility to enhance current levels of performance certainly appears to be available, but remains to be more fully developed.

The OHC reports a \$2.8 billion economic impact for 2001. Hunting related expenditures account for \$515 million each year. Ohio also ranks fifth in national off-road motorcycle and ATV annual sales according to the American Motorcyclists Association (AMA) which is headquartered in central Ohio. There are similar patterns of sales growth for highway camping units and backpacking equipment. These impacts are a reflection of increasing participation and quite likely greater per capita involvement.

The current economic impact of outdoor recreation on WNF has been estimated to be \$31 million annually. This economic impact can be substantially increased by employing the suggestions and principles included in these recommendations. The greater the commitment to facilitative

leadership, collaborative planning, and cooperating partnerships, the more significant the increased economic impact would become throughout the next LRMP planning period. It is recommended that this strategy be endorsed and that the objective for tourism economic impact for WNF increase 10% by 2005, 25% by 2007, 50% by 2010 and 100% by 2015.