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Nature adds $30 billion to state's economy

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In what Moore School of Business professor Doug Woodward described as an "eye-opener," researchers found almost $30 billion of annual economic activity stemming from South Carolina's natural resources, plus about 230,000 jobs — one out of every eight jobs in the state.

The new study from the University of South Carolina asserts that well-managed natural resources are essential for economic development. The state's natural resources – and the economic activity that grows out of those assets – are

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"the baseline for what we do across our different business sectors," said John Frampton, director of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, which initiated the study.

S.C. DNR has been under pressure from budget cuts for years, with the knife falling particularly hard in the current recession. The department's financial resources have been cut more than any other state agency's, its advocates said.

Well-managed natural resources have yet another impact, according to the report: "Increasingly, scholarly research shows that talented people – the kind the state wants to retain – reside in places with quality natural resource-related amenities and recreation opportunities. Thus, they provide a magnet for human capital."

Brad Wyche, executive director and founder of Upstate Forever, a Greenville-based conservation advocacy group, said the first-ever impact report on the value of natural resources is an extremely important study.

"I hope it will open the eyes of our legislators to the value of our natural resources," Wyche said. "It's a shame they have cut DNR more than any other agency."

Wyche said the Upstate's biggest issue is its lack of funding for conservation.

"With the shutdown of the state conservation office, we have no funds," Wyche said. "In just four years, that office preserved over 150,000 acres for conservation, at an average cost of just over $500 an acre."

"We'd like the counties to establish funds for conservation," Wyche said.

Woodward, with Paulo Guimaraes in USC's Division of Research, said it can be clearly shown that natural resources support thousands of jobs, millions of dollars in income and a permanent base for economic development that should last forever.

"Access to abundant recreational opportunities and natural assets play an important role in economic growth and quality of life, so protection and enhancement of our natural resources should be part of our overall economic development strategy," Frampton said.

The impacts presented in the study titled "Underappreciated Assets: The Economic Impact of South Carolina's Natural Resources," measure the annual economic activity associated with certain resource bases such as land (forestry) and

ing added $2.2 billion to the economy and supported nearly 59,000 jobs.

- The state's forestry industry exported more than $1 billion in forest products and supported nearly 84,000 jobs.
- The boat-building industry added nearly $400 million to the state's economy and supported more than 9,500 jobs.
- Mining activities added nearly $219 million to the state's economy and supported more than 2,500 jobs.
- Commercial marine fisheries in South Carolina added about $14 million to the state's economy and supported 661 jobs.

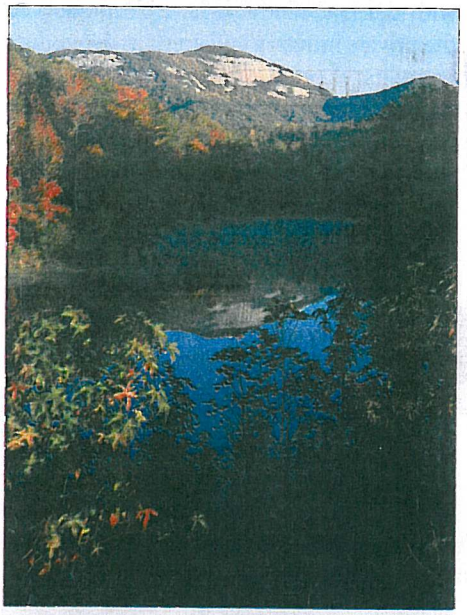


Table Rock Mountain is among the Upstate's natural scenic assets. (Photo/S. Kevin Greene)

As the economy recovers from the recession and "expands in the years ahead, these impacts will grow," the report said. "Natural resources should always be considered integral to economic development."

Jim Anthony, who counts on the appeal of the S.C. highlands to attract homebuyers for the Cliffs communities he has developed, said, "I can only say 'Amen' to these facts and figures."

The natural beauty of the Blue Ridge escarpment has attracted more than 3,000 families to Anthony's upscale housing developments, he said, and his marketing efforts have produced more than 28,000 leads.

For Anthony, his investment in projects built on the region's natural beauty was a no-brainer.

"I was born here, and I believe this is the most beautiful place in the world," Anthony said.

Anthony said professional golfer Gary Player, with whom he is planning

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The impacts presented in the study, titled "Underappreciated Assets: The Economic Impact of South Carolina's Natural Resources," measure the annual economic activity associated with certain resource bases such as land (forestry) and water (fishing, swimming, boating).

The study produced the following findings, from 2008:

- Visitors and local residents who took advantage of South Carolina's most famous recreational assets — sandy beaches and ocean surf — added $3.5 billion to the state's economy and supported nearly 81,000 jobs.
- Fishing, hunting and wildlife view-

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Anthony said professional golfer Gary Player, with whom he is planning a golf-oriented development, calls the region the Switzerland of America.

"When I hunted as a boy, deer were scarce and turkey nonexistent," Anthony said, noting that the work of the Department of Natural Resources has restored those wildlife populations.

The complete study is available online on the Moore School's Web site.