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# Study: S.C. natural resources bring in $29 billion annually

By John Staed
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A study shows that South Carolina's natural resources, including those in the Upstate, contribute $29 billion to the state economy.

The study found that 230,000 jobs are linked to natural resources in the state, involving activities that include fishing, motor boating and lake and river swimming.

Those are tied especially to the area lakes, said Billy Birdwell, a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which operates Hartwell Lake and Lake Russell in the Anderson area. Other area lakes include Jocasse and Keowee.

The study, "Underappreciated Assets: The Economic Impact of South Carolina's Natural Resources," was conducted by the University of South Carolina Moore School of Business.

"It's obvious that Lake Hartwell is a destination point when it comes to the Upstate and having an overall economic on our region," said Lee Luff, president of the Anderson Area Chamber of Commerce.

Luff said about 11 million people visit Lake Hartwell per year, contributing about $130 million to the local economy. The lake contributes about $120 million annually in payrolls, he said.

"Anderson County has been in the top 10 of dollar expenditures as an overall recreation point"

in the state, Luff said.

With the lake now recovering from a drought and the economy still in a slump, the area may benefit from people vacationing closer to home, Luff said.

"They are looking for opportunities in their back yard," he said. "With the economy the way it is and the lake now being up, we should see those numbers increase as we come into the recreational period."

The state's natural resources include beaches, mountains and the lakes.

The study report, made public Wednesday, was written by Douglas P. Woodward and Paulo Guimaraes, economists in the school's Division of Research.




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"While it is hard to put a value on all the ways natural resources contribute to South Carolina's economic development, it can be clearly shown that they support thousands of jobs, millions in income and a permanent base for economic development that should last forever," the report says.

Hartwell Lake had nearly 500,000 campground visits in 2008, Birdwell said. And there were 735,000 day use permits issued for the lake property, he said.

"We seem to know intuitively that our reservoirs have a great impact on the region," Birdwell said. "We measure visitors to Lake Hartwell in the millions annually."

Until now, there has been no study of the economic effect of those Corps lakes, but the agency and six counties in Georgia and South Carolina have joined to fund the first such study. It will be completed by Clemson University's Strom Thurmond Institute.

Anderson, Oconee and Pickens counties in South Carolina and Hart, Franklin and Stephens counties in Georgia are participating in the $211,522 study.

"In about a year or so we should know better numbers," Birdwell said.

The study showed bird watching was the top recreational activity in the state, with 58 million "participation" events, or number of times they occurred, per year.

"When you talk about recreation, it comes in all forms," Luff said.

Others included:

* watching wildlife, 46 million

* beach swimming/sunbathing, 24.5 million

* motor boating, 19.8 million

* freshwater fishing, 16.2 million

* lake/river swimming, 11.7 million

The study made public Wednesday found that fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing added about $3.8 billion to the economy and supported nearly 59,000 jobs. State forestry added 84,000 jobs and South Carolina beaches contributed 81,000 jobs, according to the report.

"Access to abundant recreational opportunities and natural assets plays 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," John Frampton, director of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, said in a statement. The study was initiated by the department.

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