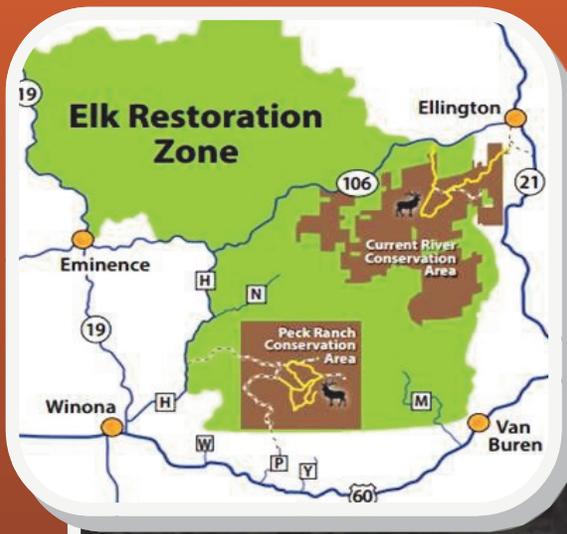




MDC Resource Science

Did You See the Elk? Visitor Survey Results From MDC's Elk Tour Loops

Science Notes



Did You See the Elk? Visitor Survey Results From MDC's Elk Tour

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Information Need:

The Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) key message that "Conservation pays by enriching our economy and quality of life" implies that MDC needs to be accountable to Missourians by evaluating and publicizing those benefits. Successful management of Missouri's natural resources involves a partnership with citizens, organizations, and agencies. During the decision making process on the elk restoration plan one idea communicated to the public was the potential for economic benefits from the restoration of elk. Using onsite visitor surveys, we estimated the number of people visiting specifically to view elk and both the economic impact of these visits to local communities and the economic value that elk provided to the visitors.

Results:

Throughout 2016, MDC conducted onsite visitor surveys at the two Elk Tour Loops which were on Peck Ranch (PR) and Current River (CR) conservation areas. Clerks stationed at randomly selected dates, times and exit locations attempted to stop all exiting parties and asked them about where they were from, their reasons for coming, their spending and whether they saw elk (among other things). From this we estimated overall visitation and user attitudes. These data also allowed us to estimate regional economic impacts. This was done using an input-output model (IMPLAN) and other commercially available data. In addition, we used travel data to estimate the economic value of elk viewing to the visitors using travel cost model (TCM) procedures written in Statistical Analysis Systems (SAS).

Over 11,000 visitors toured each of the areas in 2016, with PR visitors coming farther distances than CR's. More PR visitors came specifically to see elk (and saw them) than did CR's but both groups of visitors were overwhelmingly satisfied with their visits. Overall the two tour loops yielded a nearly \$1.3 million dollar economic impact on the local area (counting only spending by non-local visitors), supporting about 13 full-time jobs. This estimate includes the direct, indirect and induced impacts associated with visitor spending. The economic value of the elk viewing experience to visitors (the consumer surplus), as measured by willingness-to-pay analyses, was over \$14 at each area.

Table 1 – Selected results from the on-site visitor use survey at MDC's elk tour loops.

	Peck Ranch CA	Current River CA
Total Visits (2016)	11,867	11,557
Avg. Times Visiting per Year	1.1	3.5
Avg. Distance Traveled to Site (miles)	86	28
Local Visitors	19%	62%
Came to See Elk	89%	27%
Saw Elk	31%	3%
Satisfaction (excellent/good)	86%	84%
Lodging Expenditures	\$176,263	\$64,995
Food Expenditures	\$148,471	\$269,571
Transport Expenditures	\$220,667	\$323,929
Other Expenditures	\$18,250	\$-
Total Economic Impact	\$649,810	\$644,620
Consumer Surplus (per visitor)	\$14.95	\$14.80

Using the Information:

Information gathered in this study provides MDC decision makers, Outreach and Education (O&E) "marketers," area staff, as well as local political and business leaders with baseline estimates of how many people are going to see (or try to see) elk at MDC's Elk Tour Loops. It helps us understand what this new tourism is doing for the local economy, and for the visitors themselves. Local governments can use the information to encourage further investments in tourism infrastructure and in designing marketing campaigns. Follow-up studies can then gauge the effectiveness of their campaigns. MDC can use the information to help garner support for elk restoration outside of our usual constituency and the information will serve as a baseline when measuring the economic impacts of elk hunting should a season be implemented.

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