



## Bucks, Bulls and Billion\$

**How hunter spending on gear and hunting trips paves the way for conservation.**

When conservation visionaries sat down and crafted the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation—treated in wildlife management circles with a reverence usually reserved for this country's founding documents—they declared that all wildlife would be held in the public trust. What a beautiful thing it is that every bugling bull marching along a ridge with ivory-tipped tines trailing along his back, every plump cutthroat trout rising to sip a fly off the water, every flushing grouse, strutting turkey and pronghorn zipping across the prairie are owned by us all.

Such valuable resources demand careful and intentional managing and that isn't cheap. It's why proceeds from licenses and tags have historically been allocated to state agencies, and, in 1934, the U.S. added an additional license for hunting migratory birds, the Duck Stamp. Three years later, Key Pittman and Absalom Willis Robertson shepherded the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act through Congress, implementing an excise tax on the sale of guns, ammunition and archery equipment. The Pittman-Robertson Act has gone on to fund more than \$17 billion worth of wildlife conservation.

Pooled together, annual hunter funding has great power, but it is pulled in many different directions, from studying piping plovers on the shores of the Great Lakes to paying the salaries of state agency big game biologists. This makes additional funding from private sources crucial. Enter critter groups. Organizations such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation attract the likes of outdoor enthusiasts who give their hard-earned money to help get more done for wildlife and wild country.

According to a 2024 study contracted by the Sportsmen's Alliance, in 2022 this private NGO



## HOW THESE NUMBERS MEASURE UP

- The revenue generated by the hunting industry is higher than the Gross Domestic Product of 121 countries
- Hunters contributed nearly \$38 million a day in state, local and federal taxes in 2022 that supported wildlife agencies and conservation
- Hunting generated more revenue in 2022 (\$45.2 billion) than Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company (\$44 billion), United Airlines (\$43 billion), Dow (\$43 billion) and Tyson Foods (\$42.4 billion)
- The hunting industry supports nearly 541,000 jobs—that's more than any U.S. company except Walmart and Amazon
- The retail sales produced by hunting in 2022 was nearly equal to the combined system-wide sales of both Starbucks (\$26.5 billion) and McDonald's (\$21.1 billion)
- The revenue generated by hunting was 10 times more than the revenue of the top 10 most valuable NFL teams combined (\$4.5 billion)
- Hunting generated well over three times more revenue in 2022 than the NFL (\$12 billion)
- Hunting generated more revenue than the worth of the top 10 most valuable MLB teams combined (\$33 billion)
- The revenue generated by migratory bird hunting in 2022 (\$5.9 billion) was more than the revenue of the top 10 most valuable NFL teams combined (\$4.5 billion)

\* Source: Sportsmen's Alliance 2024 "Hunting in America" study

funding added up to right around \$2.5 billion that went straight to conservation. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Director Zach Lowe says this is the linchpin of the North American Model.

"Hunters, anglers, trappers and target shooters are the primary economic engine for sustaining fish and wildlife resources in the United States under the user-pay, public-benefit model," says Lowe.

To fully understand hunting's contribution to the national economy, we must peel back a few layers and look first at how hunters' spending on their passion benefits so many industries. We can do this thanks to the Sportsmen's Alliance "Hunting in America" study, which sought to quantify the economic impact hunting has outside of easily tallied license fees, donations and excise taxes.

Administered by market research firm Southwick Associates, the study used 2022 hunter data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and GIS mapping software to reveal hunting is a mega-industry in the U.S. and contributed more than \$56.5 billion to the nation's GDP in that year alone.

One force behind that staggering number is the nearly 541,000 Americans who earned income as part of the hunting industry in 2022. If the hunting industry was a singular employer, it would employ more people than any U.S. company besides Amazon and Walmart. Total wages earned added up to an impressive \$33.5 billion—a portion of which went on to pay into taxes; \$5.6 billion to state and local governments, and \$8.3 billion to the federal government.

Further, the study found that hunters spent \$45.2 billion on hunting in 2022. That's more than the revenue reported that same year by Starbucks and McDonald's combined. When factoring in the





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## A study using 2022 hunter data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and GIS mapping software revealed hunting is a mega-industry in the U.S. and contributed over \$56.5 billion to the nation's GDP in that year alone. Further, the study found that hunters spent \$45.2 billion on hunting.

ripple-effect this spending has, that number more than doubles to suggest a total economic impact of \$107 billion. Let's break it down.

### Trip Costs—\$12.3 Billion

No one has ever accused traveling to hunt of being cheap. In fact, in 2022 hunters spent \$12.3 billion on hunting trips. Oftentimes, big corporations are not the ones seeing these dollars, but rather mom-and-pop operations, says Lowe. "The economic importance of hunting, angling, outdoor recreation and wildlife viewing is vital to local and regional economies in western North America."

Lodging expenses, such as those racked up by the DIY hunter renting a little vacation cabin on the fringes of a national forest, accounted for about \$1.7 billion in annual spending. Transportation costs to get there totaled over \$3 billion.

With any luck, those hunters went out for post-successful-hunt beers and burgers in Small Town, USA, where hunter spending can help rural small businesses stay operational. In many small towns throughout some of the best elk and deer country, hunting *is* the industry. There are no mills, no factories—just businesses that wait for the door to chime on opening day of hunting season. The diners have bucks and bulls hanging on the walls and the waitress doesn't bat an eye when you walk in wearing camo, asking, "Any luck out there?" as she pours your cup

of coffee. According to the survey, dining spending added up to around \$2.5 billion.

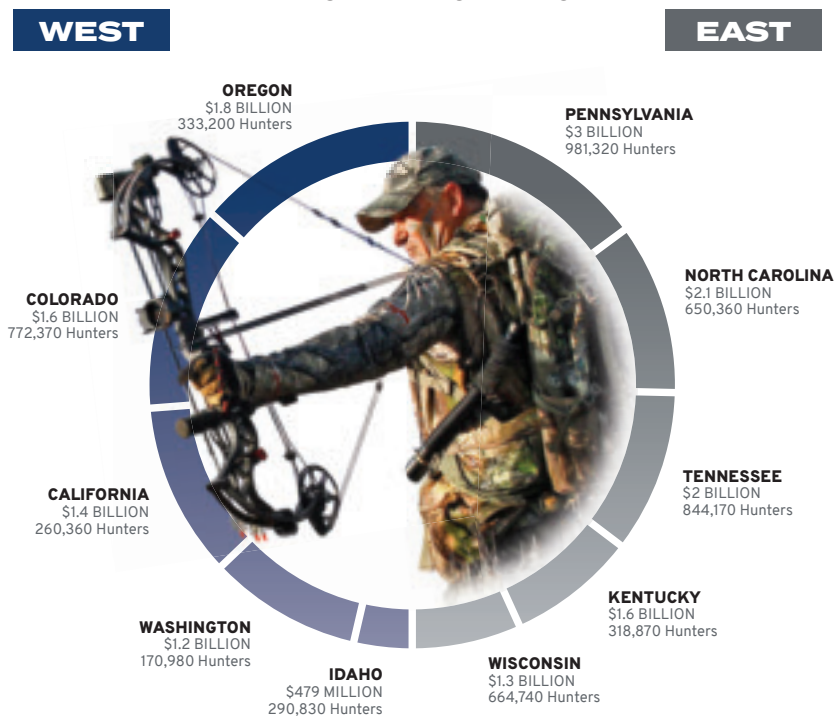
After factoring in other expenses like cooking fuel, total trip spending added up to over \$12 billion, which RMEF Chief Conservation Officer Blake Henning says is the lifeblood of recreation-tourism-dependent economies.

"I think that's a considerable number; those of us that hunt would agree we pay a lot to do it, and it's not just licenses," he says. "As the study mentions, it's gasoline, it's hotel rooms, it's meals. And so, the benefit to small towns' local economies is very significant."

### Consumer Spending—\$32.9 Billion

Henning's point about the cost of hunting brings up an important discussion about hunter spending habits—hunters bought \$7.9 billion worth of hunting equipment such as guns, gear, decoys, scopes and sights in 2022. Rifle purchases made up the largest chunk with about \$1.5 billion; bow sales were just shy of the \$1 billion mark. Other guns, including shotguns,

## HOW MUCH HUNTERS SPENT ON HUNTING-RELATED PURCHASES IN TOP ELK STATES



\* Data based on reports produced for the Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation by Southwick Associates using the 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other independent resources.



muzzleloaders, handguns and pistols added up to combined sales of around \$2 billion.

Additional expenses including camping equipment (\$669 million), clothing (\$1 billion), taxidermy (\$736 million) and personal meat processing equipment (\$471 million) accounted for another \$25 billion.

The circular model of hunting license fees supporting wildlife and habitat on the ground has long stood as clear evidence of RMEF's declaration that Hunting is Conservation. But now with this study, there is clear data that hunting is so much more; it's also jobs for hard-working folks, income for American manufacturers and the lifeblood of many rural communities.

### **Target Shooting—an Explosive Economic Impact of \$144 billion**

Hunting aside, we'd be remiss not to give a nod to the impressive impact recreational target shooting has on the economy and conservation funding. According to FWS data, over 39.5 million Americans went target shooting in 2022. And when factoring in the cost of their firearms, ammunition, range fees, targets and other expenses, they spent over \$61 billion. The chunk of that spending that went to state and federal wildlife management through the PR tax amounted to over \$1 billion. Further, target shooters nearly doubled the funds going to conservation by paying out \$940 million in dues and donations to conservation groups like RMEF. When target shooter spending is combined with other factors such as wages and state and local taxes paid by target shooters, the total economic impact of target shooting totals over \$144 billion.



25 REASONS WHY



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Hunters create \$33.5 billion in wages and 540,920 jobs.

Share these facts and use [#huntingisconservation](#) in your social media posts to spread the word that hunters are the original, and greatest, contributors to conservation. For 24 more reasons why hunting is vital to wildlife management and a healthy lifestyle, visit [RMEF.ORG](#).

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