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Assessing the economic benefit of the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP): 2016

In partnership with



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Washington, DC



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2016 HIGHLIGHTS

(Estimated contributions of newly enrolled acres and expanded outdoor recreational activity resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill VPA-HIP investments.)

New landowners enrolled
27

New land acres enrolled
4,732

Estimated number of recreational users on new acres
490 people

Ratio of additional spending to VPA-HIP investment on new acres
\$0.63: \$1.00
(see text for discussion)

Economic activity from additional spending
\$0.06 million
Jobs associated with additional spending
1 jobs

**Background (Based on VPA-HIP grant proposal)**

With 93% of the state's land being privately owned, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) focuses on creating access to outdoor recreational activities by leasing land from private landowners. MDC administers more than one million acres of public land and actively manages more than 200,000 acres for wildlife habitat on these public conservation areas each year. According to Southwick Associates' Hunting in America: An Economic Force for Conservation report, Missouri was ranked #8 for total number of resident hunters in the U.S. and #6 by total number of non-resident hunters. In fiscal year 2014, there were 576,000 hunters and 1.7 million wildlife watchers in the state. The number of small game, deer and turkey permits purchased has remained relatively constant over the past three years.

Program Objectives

MDC received a three-year grant for \$1.1 million through the 2014 VPA-HIP. The state's overarching goal is to provide and expand recreational activities, such as small and large game hunting and wildlife viewing, for urban and rural residents and non-residents alike. More specifically, their goals are to:

- Increase and enhance wildlife habitat for small game and other wildlife species on private land.
- Increase the interest and number of small game hunters by providing additional lands and hunting opportunities on private lands.
- Increase youth hunter recruitment by providing access to private lands that provide hunting opportunities with less competition and hunting pressure relative to MDC Conservation Areas.
- Provide wildlife watching opportunities on private lands, especially on lands in close proximity to major metropolitan areas.

Methods and Outreach Efforts

A combination of promotional efforts and partnership programs were used to recruit and support landowners. For example, MDC has a long-term partnership with Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and currently has nine Quail Forever Farm Biologists (FBBs) working in the state. Quail FBBs aided the 48 MDC private land biologists in the promotion and delivery of the Missouri Outdoor Recreation Access Program (MRAP) by conducting landowner workshops and outreach programs within their local communities and provided one-on-one assistance to private landowners in the development of wildlife habitat management plans.

Landowner Enrollment

A total of 6,311 acres (27 properties), supported through the VPA-HIP program, were open for public access during the 2016/2017 hunting seasons. Approximately 4,732 acres were newly enrolled to the program. The other acres had previously been enrolled in a pilot public access program, but are now supported under the VPA-HIP. Currently, there are no youth properties, but it's a strong focus for Spring 2018 hunting season.

Figure MO1. Recreational activities available for the 2016/2017 season on Missouri’s enrolled ac res



At the time of enrollment, a minimum of 20% of each enrolled parcel was required to provide quality habitat wildlife, as defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) practice standard requirements. To encourage installation of additional wildlife habitat on enrolled MRAP parcels, MDC provided up to 90% financial assistance to implement additional practices.

Annual payments for hunting and wildlife viewing averaged between \$15 to \$25 per acre, which consisted of a base payment plus any bonus payments. The total annual payment for fishing only access properties consisted of a base payment plus potential bonuses. The base payment was based on the acreage of impoundments or length of streams being enrolled. The average landowner contract is roughly four years.

Participating landowners had the option to select certain outdoor recreation scenarios and allow only certain wildlife user groups access to their lands. VPA-HIP funds were used to encourage landowners to allow access for all seasons for all users, and youth access only options. All-access options will provide the opportunity to include both hunting and fishing opportunities. Incentives were available for proximity to metropolitan areas and location within MDC designated priority geographies, and commitment to enhance additional wildlife. MRAP applications were prioritized based on parcel size, percentage of parcel consisting of wildlife habitat, contract length, season selections, and proximity to metropolitan areas.

Usage and Satisfaction

According to MDC’s user survey, 21% of recreational users reported having youth or apprentice hunters/ anglers/nature viewers with them. Ninety percent of users hunted, 5% fished and 3 % used the lands for wildlife viewing. Seventy-six percent were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied ” with their experience on the lands and 81% plan to use the lands again in the future.

The VPA-HIP holds value to recreational users as 84% say that it’s “important” or “very important” to increase available acres for the program. Ninety percent say that it’s “important” or “very important” to improve wildlife habitat and wildlife population.

While the state does not capture an exact count of user days or users, an estimated 653 residents and non - residents accessed the VPA-HIP lands during the Fall 2016 through Spring 2017 hunting seasons. Three quarters of visitors are assumed to utilize newly enrolled acres. Their estimate is based on registration data. The estimated total annual days spent on VPA-HIP lands is two days and additional days is one day.

Economic Contributions

The goal of this research is to determine the estimated net increase in economic benefits associated with VPA-HIP investments. This is based on increases in sporting and recreational activities that would not otherwise exist. In other words, this net increase is defined as the recreational and economic activity over and above current levels (prior to new VPA-HIP investments). The net increase is calculated using the recreational spending that can be associated with the additional days spent on the newly enrolled VPA-HIP private lands.

Table MO 1. Missouri's VPA-HIP statistics for 2016.

Enrollment	New acres enrolled using 2014 Farm Bill VPA-HIP funds
Acres*	4,732
Average contract term	4 years
VPA-HIP investments in 2016**	\$108,936

*Total acres, new and renewed, supported through VPA-HIP is 6,311 acres.

**Only VPA-HIP grant funds are reported. State and private matching funds are not included.

Based on the above goals and assumptions, a total of \$0.12 million of in-state trip and equipment related spending can be associated with total annual days on newly enrolled acres this year. Including both direct effects and the multiplier effects (indirect and induced), the total economic activity, also known as output, associated with all recreation on VPA-HIP lands in 2016 is estimated to have generated between \$0.11 million in economic activity. Recreational activities generated \$0.45 million in income (salaries, wages, and business earnings). This income is associated with 2 full and part-time jobs in businesses across the state whose products and services were purchased by hunters.

A total of \$0.07 million dollars of in-state trip and equipment related spending can be associated with the additional days spent on the newly enrolled lands. This spending generated \$0.06 million dollars in new economic activity, \$0.03 million of income, and supported 1 full and part-time employees and proprietors who worked in the Missouri businesses whose products were purchased by recreational users of VPA-HIP supported lands.

Table MO2. Economic activity attributable to VPA-HIP investments in new acres.

	Total annual days on new acres	Additional days on new acres
Hunter spending		
Trip spending	\$40,982	\$23,360
Equipment spending	\$79,793	\$45,482
Total spending	\$120,775	\$68,842
Return on Investment (ROI)*		\$0.63
Total State-level Economic Contribution with multiplier effect		
Output	\$111,546	\$63,581
Income	\$44,924	\$25,607
Employment	2	1

*ROI is calculated as total spending associated with additional days divided by VPA-HIP investments in new acres.

Note: State-level output may be lower than direct spending. This is a result of "leakage" or recreational user spending lost to other economies, spending on goods imported into the state for example.

A total of \$0.29 million in both state and federal funds was spent to support all enrolled acres over the course of 2016 and includes payments to landowners. A total of \$0.11 million in VPA-HIP funds were invested to support newly enrolled acres. When we compare spending on additional days by

recreational users to investments, every dollar invested through VPA-HIP is matched by an estimated \$0.63 of economic activity based on additional recreation days on acres newly opened for public access. While the benefits for every federal VPA-HIP program dollar invested falls below a 1:1 ratio, Missouri's Outdoor Recreational Access program is a young program. As general knowledge of these lands grows, utilization and the return to every dollar invested also grows.