

# 2005 Hurricanes Effects on Visitation and Local Economies at Gulf Coast National Wildlife Refuges

The 2005 hurricanes significantly damaged public-use facilities located on national wildlife refuges along the Gulf Coast. These facilities not only include the most apparent structures like informational signs and visitor centers, but also the hidden infrastructure that provides safe access to refuge visitors, such as roads, bridges, and boat ramps. Visitation at affected stations exceeded 4.5 million visitors during 2005, including over 250,000 at the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. Unfortunately, these visitation numbers were already lower than previous years due to impacts from the 2004 hurricane season, and will drop further in the coming years until public-use facilities can be repaired. The economic effect of reduced visitation on local communities is significant, but can rebound quickly once facilities and eco-tourism are restored.

*Banking on Nature 2004: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation* provides insight to the effect of reductions in visitation on gateway communities. Nationally the net economic value to local communities from visitation on national wildlife refuges is \$1.1 billion annually. In addition, the report highlights the economic effect of two national wildlife refuges severely impacted by hurricanes over the past two years. Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama was closed for nearly a year after Hurricane Ivan and Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in southwest Louisiana is currently closed after being devastated by Hurricane Rita.

Investment in the recovery of national wildlife refuges damaged by hurricanes is not only critical to the wildlife resources they support. Recovery of national wildlife refuges is vital to local economies and the overall reconstruction effort of the Gulf Coast.



*Big Branch Marsh NWR  
September 5, 2005*



*Bayou Sauvage NWR  
September 5, 2005*



*Sabine NWR  
September 27, 2005*



*Sabine NWR  
September 27, 2005*

<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/policyMakers/BankingOnNature.html>

*Bon Secour NWR is a 6,700-acre coastal/barrier island refuge with approximately 40,000 visitors in 2005 (down from 125,000 visitors in 2004). The drastic decline in visitation was due to the fact that much of this refuge was closed during 2005 to allow for clean-up of debris and materials deposited by Hurricane Ivan. In 2004, the economic effect of this refuge and its visitation was \$7.4 million, supporting 74 jobs (both full-time and part-time), and \$2.3 million in tax revenue. This is an average return of \$20.38 for every federal dollar spent operating this refuge.*

*Sabine NWR is a 125,000-acre coastal refuge with approximately 250,000 visitors in 2005 (down from 290,000 visitors in 2004). Due to safety concerns, the refuge was officially closed after Hurricane Rita destroyed facilities and littered the landscape with hazardous debris. Sabine NWR will not re-open until it can be done safely. In 2004, the economic effect of this refuge and its visitation was \$9 million, supporting 108 jobs (both full-time and part-time), and \$1 million in tax revenue. This is an average return of \$10.18 for every federal dollar spent operating this refuge.*

All photos: USFWS

