

USDA Forest Service Update July 2007



SUBJECT: Nature-tourism/viewing on National Forests

SUMMARY: Nature-tourism/viewing is currently the second most popular outdoor recreational activity on our National Forests and Grasslands, bringing well over one billion dollars into the US economy each year. The Nature-Tourism industry is booming. Millions of people travel to National Forests and Grasslands to view our tremendous wildlife, fish and wildflower resources. The Forest Service NatureWatch Program has been in existence for over 20 years, providing the public areas to view wildlife and wildflowers, education programs for schoolchildren and adults, and a tremendous amount of environmental education resources and materials. All of these resources are in high demand by the public and tourism industry.

BACKGROUND: The NatureWatch Program is currently completing its first-ever full-scale inventory of existing nature viewing sites that will result in an unprecedented compilation of nature-viewing site information and maps, all public accessible through a state-of-the-art, and fully searchable website, that is planned to be aggressively marketed. We are hoping to release the website to the public in 2007. In addition, the information will also be available to Forest Service resource managers in the form of an intranet-based analysis management tool that will simplify development of public recreational management strategies and long-range planning efforts.

Completion of this inventory sets the stage to begin a new level of integrated recreation management and public outreach among the Recreation, Tourism, Naturewatch, Wildlife, Fish, and Botany Programs. The opportunity to finally assemble this valuable information and utilize it in an integrated manner brings with it unmatched marketing, accountability, and partnership development opportunities.

In 2006 the NatureWatch Program combined Forest Service efforts with partners, resulting in over 1500 accomplishment reports, 881 of which are reports with photographs, of on-the-ground projects and programs designed to implement the NatureWatch mission. The efforts directly reached over 876,000 children under 18 years of age through a variety of outdoor and in-class presentations, and were also responsible for the construction of 27 new nature viewing areas. Many of these efforts were national and local community award recipients for their excellence and cooperative spirit.

To view a compilation of the NatureWatch Program's 2006 accomplishments online please go to:

<http://www.notes.fs.fed.us:81/wo/wfrp/WFWPartnerships.nsf/report?openpage&id=73>

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