

USFWS SURVEY: SCI ENCOURAGES SPORTSMEN AND POLICYMAKERS TO INTERPRET DATA CAREFULLY

TUCSON, Ariz., June 5, 2002 ¾ Safari Club International, an organization dedicated to protecting hunters' rights and wildlife conservation worldwide, today saluted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for its preliminary release of information from the tenth National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. SCI also called for sportsmen and governmental leaders to interpret the data without being influenced by the editorial fanfare being propagated by the Fund For Animals and other groups of animal rights extremists.

"Kudos to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and to all the state agencies and conservation organizations monitoring the impact of wildlife recreation on our nation's economy," said SCI President George Banks. "Policymakers and communities need to be reminded about the \$110 billion that more than 82 million Americans spend while enjoying the outdoors, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does an outstanding job of measuring this activity."

Animal rights extremists have taken liberties with a few preliminary findings from the survey to proclaim more and more people are trading their guns for cameras, added Banks. "Nothing could be further from the truth. Most hunters are both anglers and wildlife watchers, so it's absurd to look at subgroups of the outdoor recreation community and make conclusions without factoring in overlap. Hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities are alive and well. Sportsmen are investing record amounts of money as they enjoy the outdoors, and they're doing extensive hands-on work to conserve wildlife. "

What's clear, said Peter J. Dart, SCI Executive Director, is what Steve Williams, USFWS Director relays in the survey's opening message: "Americans derive many hours of enjoyment from wildlife related recreation. Perhaps even more important, wildlife recreation is a cornerstone of our Nation's great conservation ethic. Whenever a grandfather shows a young hunter how to set decoys early in the morning, or a teacher helps students focus binoculars to find a rare bird, a new generation is learning to appreciate our Nation's wildlife heritage."

This message is reinforced by the survey's summary reminding readers that all findings need to be taken in the context of economic and social conditions: "1991 was a year of economic recession, increasing gas prices, and the Gulf War. 1996 saw a prosperous and peacetime economy, low unemployment and high consumer confidence. 2001 experienced an economic recession, terrorist attacks, and a military reaction. Throughout these social and economic vicissitudes, Americans remained involved with wildlife recreation. Wildlife recreation was not a fad that came and went but instead called to people no matter what else was going on in their lives."

Given the complexity of its preliminary findings and the need to establish a context for the state-specific findings it will release in July, USFWS used SCI's Capitol Hill Center in Washington DC to make a detailed presentation to sportsmen's groups. Among the notable findings contained in the USFWS National Overview are:

- Almost 38 million people hunted and fished in 2001, and this number does not include millions of people who participate in the sports, but not necessarily every year, a characteristic USFWS surveyors identified as "churn".
- Hunters and anglers spent \$70 billion on their 2001 activities, including \$20 billion on trip expenses, nearly \$41 billion on equipment and \$9 billion on licenses and fees, magazines, membership dues and contributions, and land leasing and ownership.
- Hunters and anglers paid \$1.3 billion in 2001 license fees, and this investment largely funded the state wildlife agencies that are most responsible for managing precious wildlife resources.
- Hunters and anglers spent an average of \$1,851 enjoying the outdoors in 2001.
- Sportsmen spent 29 percent more in total hunting expenditures and 14 percent more in total fishing expenditures (corrected for inflation) than they did 10 years prior when the study reported on the economic activity of 1 million more hunters and 1.5 million more anglers.
- Thirty percent of the 66 million wildlife watchers in 2001 were sportsmen, and many of the wildlife watchers spent time observing legally hunted species (waterfowl = 14.4 million; small game = 13 million; big game = 12.2 million; upland game birds = 7.9 million).

"The family traditions of hunting and fishing in the United States do face some real challenges," said Dart, "and it's important that we continue to monitor the effects of socio-economic factors on our sport. This said, it is vital for all sportsmen to become advocates for hunters' rights. We must not allow animal rights zealots to ignore facts and propagate myths."

Safari Club International is a nonprofit association dedicated to protecting the rights of 45 million hunters worldwide. It is a tireless advocate for outdoor enthusiasts, who, through legal hunting, annually drive more than \$1 billion in funding to maintain wildlife populations, to conduct wildlife research and to enforce wildlife laws. For more information on SCI, call 520-620-1220 or click on www.safariclub.org.