

Economic impact of duck hunting in arkansas

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“ It’s madness, I’ve never seen otherwise intelligent frugal men throw so much money at so little opportunity! ” (Unknown) This was the statement made by an unnamed source referencing the sickness and addiction of the wonderful sport of Waterfowl Hunting. The economic impact of waterfowl hunting in Arkansas can best be seen in the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2006 Economic Impact of Waterfowl Hunting report. This report states that in 2006 there was 1.3 million waterfowl hunters nationwide, 100,000 of these waterfowl hunters were residents of Arkansas who spent 1. million days pursuing the waterfowl of their choice. During these days, waterfowl hunters spend money on hunting trips, hunting equipment, salaries and wages and state, local and federal taxes. Nationwide, waterfowl hunters spent \$900 million during 2006 creating a positive economic impact for the nation's economy. When did all of this begin and why in Eastern Arkansas? It is said that the first to have stepped foot in what is now known as modern day Arkansas were duck hunters. In an archeological find near Big Lake in north eastern Arkansas, studies found more bones from Mallard ducks than from any other bird present.

Nature had set a perfect table not only for the Paleo Indians but for the future duck hunters in Arkansas. Eastern Arkansas borders the Mississippi River and is home of 8 million of the 24.2 acres of the Mississippi Alluvial plain. There are no other states in the continental United States that have more delta land than Arkansas. Before the advent of dams and tree clearing agricultural practices the delta was covered primarily with hardwood trees, mostly oaks. These Hardwoods provided the staple food source (acorns) for

the largest population of wintering waterfowl (mainly the mallard duck) in the world.

Early settlers took advantage of the abundant fowl and consequently started some of the very first duck hunting clubs in the United States. In 1906 the first known crop of rice was grown in Arkansas County. Although it was a small crop, it changed the scenery of agriculture in the delta and on the Grand Prairie region. Three years later Grand Prairie rice acreage was up to 27, 000 acres; by 1919 rice covered 143, 000 acres of the Grand Prairie in the Mississippi Delta. Today Arkansas harvests 41 percent of the nation's rice, almost twice as much as No. California (21 percent). Riceland Rice Corporation, located in Stuttgart Arkansas, alone is responsible for almost one-third of the U. S. crop. Local farmers founded the Riceland cooperative in 1921 to get better prices. The average Riceland farm is about 750 to 1, 000 acres, Reed says. About one-third to one-half is devoted to rice, with the rest going to soybeans, one of the other crops Riceland processes. The majorities of the Riceland Farms are either leased out to waterfowlers or have guide services ran on them.

In the early days of rice farming, the rice harvest and the migration of wintering waterfowl down the Mississippi Flyway coincided. Massive groups of waterfowl could potentially wipe out an entire rice field in one night. At the time, farmers would pay as much as 5\$ a gun per night and all of the shells the individual could shoot while keeping the ducks away. As quicker maturing rice was developed people started to realize that ducks were no longer a nuisance but had potential to be a great asset and compliment to

the rice harvest. A bi-product of the rice boom in Arkansas County was a drastic increase in Duck Clubs.

A Duck Club is privately owned business which charges the duck hunters by the day for guided hunts or requires members to pay annual dues for their membership in the club. Duck clubs had been around the state for several years prior to the rice boom of the early 1900's, but these clubs were set primarily on flooded hardwood bottoms or sloughs along the Mississippi delta. When rice farmers realized the potential cash flow that hunting clubs could provide during the winter season, many started Duck Clubs on their privately owned farms.

One such place was Wallace Claypool's Wild Acres reservoir, which came to be known just as Claypool's Reservoir. In 1956 NBC's popular television program "Wide Wide World" approached the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission about filming the first ever nationally broadcast live duck hunt. During the time the segment was filmed Claypool's Reservoir was holding approximately 300,000 mallard ducks. At 3:14 the NBC director pressed a button and 4 million viewers looked on. Shortly after 3:15 a TNT laden rocket was fired over the ducks to stir them up off the water.

With ducks in the air Wallace Claypool began to call ducks in for Lynn Parsons, a 12 year old local with a new shotgun. Six shots later Claypool's lab was retrieving 6 mallard ducks and Arkansas was officially on the map as the Duck Hunting Capital of the World. In 1936, 20 years prior to the airing of Claypool's duck hunt on national television Thad McCollum of Stuttgart Arkansas held the first annual World's Duck Calling Championship on Main

Street in downtown Stuttgart, Arkansas. It was known then as the “ National Duck Calling Contest”.

There were 17 entries in the Downtown Stuttgart event and the winner was promised a new hunting jacket valued at \$6. 60. This contest has helped form what is now the Wings over The Prairie Festival. Wings Over the Prairie is one of the oldest and most visited festivals in Arkansas, and has grown to an annual attendance of over 60, 000. Besides the World Championship Duck Calling Contest there is also a nationally renowned Gumbo Cook Off, as well as many crafts, lots of hunting gear for sale, dances, live bands, commercial exhibits and collectibles.

With such a large attendance containing people from all over the United States, the Festival brings in millions of dollars of revenue to Stuttgart’s economy each year. According to Stephen Bell, executive director of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce, It is estimated that the economic impact on Stuttgart is \$1 million a day during duck season. The town is also home to more than 70 commercial Guide Services that cater not only to Duck Hunters but also to deer hunters as well as a few that cater to turkey hunting.

In addition to the private guide services and the Membership Exclusive Hunting Clubs, Duck hunters are drawn from all over the state as well as the country to hunt the hundreds of thousands of acres of public hunting area managed specifically for waterfowl. In 1948, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission purchased Bayou Meto Flat which provided 34, 000 acres of public green timber duck hunting. Bayou Meto is one of the most renowned public hunting places in the United States.

Green Timber duck hunting is somewhat specific to Arkansas and with 34,000 acres available to the public; hunters come from all over the United States to get the thrill of a true Arkansas Green Timer Hunt. Bayou Meto however is far from being the only public Green Timber hunting the state has to offer. As a whole the eastern side of Arkansas is loaded with hundreds of thousands of acres of flooded, acorn producing trees that are typically loaded with ducks. Where there are ducks, there are bound to be duck hunters.

The state of Arkansas had 100,000 waterfowl hunters, 16 years old or older, in 2006. These 100,000 participants who enjoy hunting waterfowl in Arkansas are responsible for the state's ranking of 2nd in the nation only to Louisiana in participation. Waterfowl hunters in Arkansas spent \$91 million dollars on waterfowl hunting trips and equipment, which includes but is not limited to food, lodging, transportation, firearms and ammunition, fees, hunting dogs and related expenses. Arkansas waterfowl hunters also spent \$9.6 million in state taxes and \$9.4 million in federal taxes. These hunters also helped support 2,505 jobs that are waterfowl hunting related with \$47.9 million in salaries and wages. All this hunting and spending creates a ripple effect of \$124 million dollars. Arkansas attracts 53,000 non-resident hunters every year, from all over the country who spend a combined 662,000 days in the state. The out-of-staters spend \$167,811,000 on the sport in Arkansas, meaning each non-resident hunter spends about \$3,184 during a typical season.