



# WETLANDS FACT SHEET # 4

## Economic Benefits of Wetlands

Wetlands contribute to the National economy through the resources/commodities they produce and the services they provide. In 1991, the dockside value of fish landed in the U.S. was \$3.3 billion which served as the basis of a \$26.8 billion fishery processing and sales industry which employs hundreds of thousands of people. It has been estimated that 71% of this value is derived from fish species that during their lifecycle depend directly or indirectly on coastal wetlands. Also, more than half of all U.S. adults (98 million Americans) hunt, fish, birdwatch or photograph wildlife. These activities which rely on wetlands added an estimated \$59.5 billion to the Nation's economy in 1991.

Due to the diversity of wetland types and their location, each wetland provides different products and services. This fact makes it extremely difficult to measure the total economic benefits all wetlands, or a particular type, provide for the entire nation. However, some site-specific studies have been completed that illustrate the economic benefits to society of preserving wetlands. It should be remembered that these studies usually measure only one or several of the many functions or values wetlands provide to society.

### Resources and Services

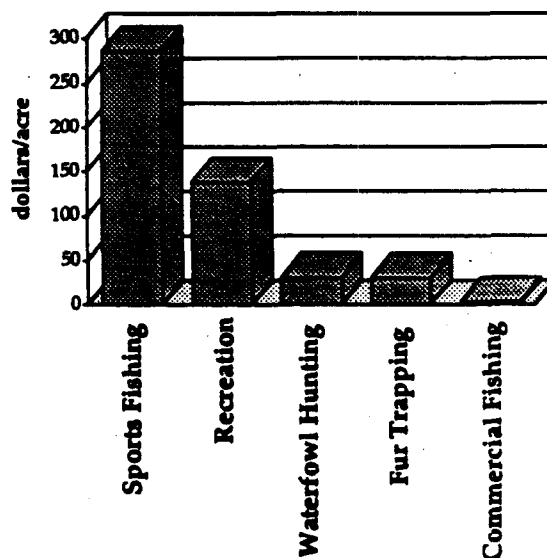
**Water quality service/ improvement**  
The wetlands of the Congaree Bottomland Hardwood Swamp in South Carolina provide valuable water quality functions such as sediment removal as well as toxicant and excess nutrient removal or filtration. The least cost substitute for the water quality services provided would be a water treatment plant costing \$5 million [1990\$].

**Flood control:** The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has computed the cost to replace on average each acre-foot of flood water storage at \$300. In other other words, if development eliminates a one acre wetland that naturally holds 12 inches of water storage during a storm, it would cost the public \$300 to replace that water storage. The cost to replace the 5,000 acres of wetlands lost annually in Minnesota would be \$1.5 million [1990\$].

**Fishing Industry:** Wetlands are important spawning and nursery areas and provide plant food for commercial and recreational fish and shellfish industries. Louisiana's marshes, for example, produce an annual commercial fish and shellfish harvest of 1.2 billion pounds worth \$244 million in 1991.

**Michigan:** A 1977 study estimated that Michigan's over-100,000 acres of coastal wetlands produced an economic value of \$489.69 per acre or an aggregate \$51.8 million [1977\$]. This figure measured the individual services provided by the wetlands (see chart below).

Economic value of wetland services in Michigan (1977)



For More Information: call the EPA  
Wetlands Hotline\* at 1-800-832-7828

\*contractor operated

Printed on Recycled Paper