

Chapter 7
KENTUCKY WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PROGRAM²²

WILDLIFE VIEWING IN KENTUCKY

In 2001, 1.4 million U.S. residents ≥ 16 years old fed, observed, or photographed wildlife in Kentucky. Approximately 91%—1.2 million—enjoyed their activities close to home and are called “residential” participants. Those persons who enjoyed wildlife at least 1 mile from home are called “nonresidential” participants. In 2001, people participating in nonresidential activities in Kentucky numbered 385,000—28 percent of all wildlife watchers in Kentucky. Of these 385,000 participants, 282,000 were state residents and 102,000 were nonresidents.

Kentuckians ≥ 16 years old who participated in nonresidential wildlife watching within their state totaled 385,000. Of this group, 354,000 participants observed wildlife, 139,000 fed wildlife, and 116,000 photographed wildlife. Since some individuals engaged in more than one of the three nonresidential activities during the year, the sum of wildlife observers, feeders, and photographers exceeds the total number of nonresidential participants, see Table 1.

Kentuckians spent nearly 5.7 million days engaged in nonresidential wildlife-watching activities in their state. During 2001, they spent 4.4 million days observing wildlife, 1.8 million days feeding wildlife, and 808,000 days photographing wildlife. The sum of days observing, feeding, and photographing wildlife exceeds the total days of wildlife-watching activity because individuals may have engaged in more than one activity on some days. For further details about nonresidential activities, see Table 1.

Kentucky residents also took an active interest in wildlife around their homes. In 2001, 1.2 million state residents enjoyed observing, feeding, and photographing wildlife within 1 mile of their homes. Among this residential group, 1.1 million fed wildlife, 703,000 observed wildlife, and 201,000 photographed wildlife around their homes. Another 186,000 participants maintained natural areas of one-quarter acre or more for wildlife; 177,000 residential participants visited public parks within 1 mile of home, and 156,000 participants maintained plantings for the benefit of wildlife. Adding the participants in these six activities results in a sum that exceeds the total number of residential participants because many people participated in more than one type of residential activity. The statistics provided above show the potential to engage these individuals into a Watchable Wildlife program coordinated by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources see Table 2.

WILD BIRD OBSERVERS IN KENTUCKY

Bird watching attracted many wildlife enthusiasts in Kentucky. In 2001, 803,000 people observed birds around the home and on trips. A large majority (84% or 672,000) observed wild birds around the home while 37% (300,000) took trips away from home to watch birds.

People bird watching in Kentucky varied in their ability to identify different bird species. Within Kentucky, 603,000 of these 803,000 birders (75%) could identify 1 to 20 different

types of birds, 67,000 birders (8%) could identify 21 to 40 types of birds, and 90,000 birders (11%) could identify 41 or more types of birds.

WILDLIFE WATCHING EXPENDITURES IN KENTUCKY

Participants ≥16 years old spent nearly \$602 million on wildlife-watching activities in Kentucky in 2001. Trip-related expenditures, including food and lodging (\$27 million), transportation (\$22 million), and equipment rental (\$710,000) amounted to \$50 million (8% of all wildlife-watching expenditures by participants). The average trip-related expenditure for nonresidential participants was \$129 per person in 2001.

Wildlife-watching participants spent \$329 million on equipment—55% of all their expenditures. Specifically, wildlife-watching equipment (binoculars, special clothing, etc.) totaled \$108 million (33% percent of the equipment total). Auxiliary equipment expenditures (tents, backpacking equipment, etc.) and special equipment expenditures (campers, trucks, etc.) amounted to \$221 million—67% of all equipment costs. Special and auxiliary equipment are items that were purchased for wildlife-watching recreation but can be used in activities other than wildlife-watching activities. Other items purchased by wildlife-watching participants such as magazines, membership dues and contributions, land leasing and ownership, and plantings totaled \$223 million—37% of all wildlife-watching expenditures.

Nonresidential (away from home) Wildlife-Watching Participation in Kentucky	
<i>(State residents and nonresidents 16 years old and older)</i>	
Participants, total	385 thousand
Observe wildlife	354 thousand
Feed wildlife	139 thousand
Photograph wildlife	116 thousand
Days, total	5.7 million
Observe wildlife	4.4 million
Feed wildlife	1.8 million
Photograph wildlife	902 thousand

Source: Table 25.
Detail does not add to total because of multiple responses.

TABLE 1

Residential (around the home) Wildlife-Watching Participation in Kentucky	
(State residents 16 years old and older)	
Total	1.2 million
Feed wildlife	1.1 million
Observe wildlife	703 thousand
Photograph wildlife	201 thousand
Maintain natural areas	186 thousand
Visit public areas	177 thousand
Maintain plantings	156 thousand

Source: Table 28.
Detail does not add to total because of multiple responses.

TABLE 2

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The mission of a Watchable Wildlife program is “to foster the conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats by providing enhanced opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife, promote learning about wildlife and habitat needs, contributing to local economies, and enhancing active support for resource conservation,” as stated by National Watchable Wildlife Program Partnership. This partnership is comprised of 14 federal agencies and national non-profit organizations and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies representing the interests of all 50 state fish and wildlife agencies. In pursuit of this mission, the national partners incorporated the following four elements and encouraged balance among each of them as direction for Watchable Wildlife programs. They are adapted here as objectives to assist in meeting the stated needs.

1. Promote **resource conservation**
2. Provide **educational opportunities**
3. Enhance **recreational experiences**
4. Encourage **local community economic development**

EXPECTED RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- **From an agency perspective:** Watchable Wildlife is a management strategy that enhances people’s opportunities for sustainable, low impact recreation. Watchable Wildlife develops facilities and orchestrates activities to increase the chances of successful viewing experiences. Watchable Wildlife teaches viewing skills and viewing ethics, gives people the opportunity to learn about wildlife and leads to increased public support for wildlife habitat acquisition and protection. A Watchable Wildlife program typically promotes viewing, wildlife photography, bird feeding, nature study, and wildlife appreciation. Watchable Wildlife strategies can be described as passive or active. **Passive wildlife viewing opportunities** are a result of information or directions given to people in order to

see wildlife. Publications like viewing guides, brochures, newspaper articles, web site information, Wildlife Watch, and birding hot lines are examples. **Active wildlife viewing opportunities** are those where people and wildlife are actively managed to insure safe and satisfying viewing experiences. Efforts are made to ensure that people will see wildlife at a developed site. Fertilizing a hillside overlooked by a developed viewing deck to see wintering big game, or constructing blinds that overlook roosting or nesting sites are examples of active viewing management.

- **From the public perspective:** Watchable Wildlife is all wildlife that people might see, enjoy, and learn about. What people like to see is as diverse as the viewers themselves. Watchable Wildlife is also the recreational activity of viewing, photographing, feeding, and learning about wildlife and wild places. All Watchable Wildlife experiences should have three components: fun, learning, and law enforcement. People watch wildlife because it is enjoyable - a fun activity either on its own or as part of another outdoor activity like picnicking, auto touring, hiking, bicycling. Wildlife viewing is fun, and is the “hook” and emphasis needed to develop a successful program; however, when people watch wildlife, they expect to learn something from the experience. Wildlife agencies can use this expectation to provide interpretive and educational materials. Because there is clearly a potential for disturbing and destroying what is being watched, Watchable Wildlife must always emphasize viewing etiquette and ethics. As stated in the Kentucky Wildlife Viewing Guide, “Always move slowly and quietly to avoid being detected by wildlife and to keep disturbance to a minimum. Enjoy wildlife at a safe distance. Never attempt to approach too close or touch any animal in the wild. Remember animals can become dangerous if approached closely. Honor the rights of private landowners. Honor the rights of other wildlife viewers.”
- **From the Tourism perspective,** Watchable Wildlife recreational activities, popular among residents and nonresidents alike, are the source of significant economic benefits to businesses and communities. Unlike traditional manufacturing industries, which are easily identified by large factories, the Watchable Wildlife industry is comprised of widely scattered retailers, manufacturers, and wholesalers, and support services that form an important industry. Given that Watchable Wildlife recreation dollars are often spent in rural areas, the economic contributions of Watchable Wildlife recreation can be especially important to the economic base of rural communities.

PROGRAM SEGMENTS

As stated previously, the mission of Watchable Wildlife programs is to foster the conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats by providing enhanced opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife, promote learning about wildlife and habitat needs, contributing to local economies, and enhancing active support for resource conservation. The following program segments must be implemented in order to accomplish the stated objectives.

STUDY OF ELK AND WILDLIFE VIEWING POTENTIAL FOR KENTUCKY

- **Partnerships:**

Networking among all potential interest groups is vital in the development of wildlife tourism. It is important to identify potential partners, and define their roles in establishing a successful wildlife tourism initiative. Scheduling opportunities for the partners to meet, visit actual/potential tourism sites and discuss topics of mutual interest, creating a timetable for networking partners to develop marketing assessments and plans is crucial for successful Watchable Wildlife programs. Therefore, we have tentatively identified a network of partners to involve in the planning stages to develop a Watchable Wildlife program in KY.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- **State Agencies:**

- Commerce Cabinet
- Kentucky Department Fish and Wildlife Resources, Watchable Wildlife Program
- Kentucky Department of Parks
- Kentucky Department of Tourism, Tourism Development Manager
- Kentucky Department of Transportation, State Trail Coordinator (TEI and LWCF)
- Kentucky Nature Preserves Commission

- **Federal Agencies:**

- U. S. Forest Service (Daniel Boone and Land Between the Lakes National Forests)
- National Park Service
- U. S. Army Corp of Engineers
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), State Director for KY

- **Ecotourism Agencies:**

- Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association

- **Local Government:**

- Kentucky Association of Local Officials
- Parks and recreation
- Chambers of Commerce

- **Private Land Managers**

- The Nature Conservancy
- Private Landowners

- **Conservation partners:**

- Kentucky Ornithological Society
- Audubon/Birding Clubs
- Garden Clubs
- Sportsmen's Clubs

- Photographer's Clubs
- Herpetological Society
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation,
- Ducks Unlimited
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- East Kentucky Power Cooperative
- Toyota
- Quail Unlimited

STATE WORKING GROUP – WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PARTNERSHIP

- **Agency Representatives**
 - Southern & Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association,
 - Kentucky Department of Tourism
 - U.S. Forest Service-Daniel Boone Forest Service
 - National Park Service
 - Americans for Disability Act-State Director
 - U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
 - Governor's Office of Local Development
 - Kentucky Department of Parks
 - U.S. Forest Service – Land Between the Lakes
 - Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources
 - We Make Things Happen Corporation
 - Kentucky Association of County Officials
- **Managing Wildlife Viewers/Viewing:**

Contrary to earlier descriptions of wildlife viewing, it is a consumptive use of natural resources. Popular areas can be impacted significantly due to increased visitation causing habitat and wildlife to suffer. This leads to more regulation and strategies to protect both. This can separate rather than connect viewers with wildlife if not implemented carefully. Managers face these three mandates when developing watchable wildlife viewing areas:

 - **Management Mandates:**
 - **Conserve and protect wildlife and habitats**
 - **Provide opportunities for people to enjoy and learn about wildlife**
 - **Protect people from potential hazards caused by wildlife**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommends the following guidelines for managing viewer numbers:

- **Design areas to lessen impacts**
- **Conservation objectives and features drive program development**
- **Control the numbers of viewers to maintain quality experiences**

- **Encouraging Ecotourism:**

The Kentucky Watchable Wildlife Program should adopt the following credo of Ecotourism: *“responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people”* (Ecotourism Society, 1993). Such tours serve to maintain and meet the definition of a positive viewing experience: **The wildlife watcher slows down and quietly discovers a wild animal without alerting the animal’s behavior. As a result of this rewarding experience, the watcher gains a greater appreciation of the natural world.**

Guided tours have become increasingly more popular. When ever possible every viewing area should have on-site naturalists to interpret the natural history of the area, offer helpful viewing tips, and ensure responsible viewing guidelines.

- **Wildlife Viewing Guidelines:**

- Conduct briefings before each stop, including behaviors to avoid, restricted practices and zones, special alerts for fragile and endangered species, specific distances to maintain with local wildlife, and local regulations.
- Discourage unrealistic expectations of observing rare wildlife and plants by interpreting aspects of the ecosystem pertaining to the specific site.
- Monitor negative environmental impacts, including trail erosion, improper waste dumping, littering, water pollution, species harassment, and illegal collecting of plants and animals, or the feeding of all wildlife. Notify authorities or landowners both verbally and, if need be, in writing.

- **Wildlife Viewing Areas and Successful Ecotourism:**

Managers of wildlife viewing areas can help Ecotourism succeed by:

- Offering incentives and privileges to ecotour companies
- Providing or sharing training of guides
- Distributing ecotourism guidelines
- Seeking out partnerships with nonprofits that actively help Ecotourism
- Working closely with communities, landowners and local businesses to encourage involvement with watchable wildlife as a viable form of sustainable tourism, economic benefit and conservation.

- **Resource Assessment:**

- **Identify the potential area in which tourism opportunities exist**

- Determine a 60 to 90 minute driving radius around your focal point (town)
- Identify all areas of public natural resource land and potentially accessible private land within that circle.

- **Identify all officials (individuals, clubs, local, state, federal) who may have special knowledge of the wildlife of the areas identified. Make contact and solicit input (data, lists, publications).**

- **Identify the primary featured species or natural features around which wildlife tourism efforts can be based from these top 9 resources:**
 - **Bald eagles.** The first rule of wildlife tourism is that people thoroughly enjoy viewing bald eagles.
 - **Large charismatic mega fauna.** Bison, deer, elk, black bears, etc. are big attractions.
 - **Wildlife breeding grounds or display sites.** Bison in rut, elk bugling, heron rookeries, concentrations of large ground nesting birds (geese, short-eared owls)
 - **Migratory concentration sites/wintering areas along migration routes.** Migrating/winter concentrations of animals are a natural attraction for people. All waterbirds, sandhill cranes, bald eagles, monarch butterflies, migrating raptors, neotropical songbirds, etc.
 - **Quality examples of native plant communities/ natural land features.** People appreciate seeing panoramic views of large expanses of relatively undisturbed natural environments. Learn the special features and major plant communities of the local area. Focus on areas that feature several plant communities/land features in close proximity to each other. (**Rock formations:** caves, cliff lines, rock shelters, sinkholes; **Wetlands:** springs, seeps, moist soils, bogs, vernal pools, sloughs, swamps; **Stream bars and Islands:** gravel bars, sand bars, sand islands, mussel beds; **Forests and Woodlands:** eastern hardwood forests, bottomland hardwood forests, high elevation forests, old growth forests, savanna woodlands; **Open Lands:** barrens, glades, prairies).
 - **Wildflower concentrations, including associated butterflies, moths, and other insects.** Spring ephemeral woodland flowers, prairie wildflowers, orchids, and carnivorous plants in natural settings or landscaped grounds, butterfly gardens. Insects at night, (back-lit white sheets to concentrate insects).
 - **Rare, unusual or endemic species including rare birds.** Some rare species are too sensitive to disturbance and should not be included. Other rare species are very tolerant of human presence. Birds of prey in migration, falcons and bald eagles at wintering areas, bat emergences where large concentrations occur and site restrictions control access. Rare bird sightings that draw birders from long distances with facilities that restrict access.
 - **Places where families, individuals, children, or people with disabilities can view common wildlife easily.** Never underestimate the importance of opportunities to see common

wildlife, year-round resident songbirds, raccoons, foxes, deer, squirrels, turtles, frogs and snakes. Sites can include city parks, cemeteries, etc. that are stroller or wheelchair accessible and have accessible trails

- **Nocturnal wildlife viewing.** Places that are conducive to owl prowls, bat watching, coyote howling, frog calling and the use of spotlights where legal.
- **Use planning teams (including local experts) to evaluate potential sites and to explain the unique features of the sites.** Familiarize the planning team with the sites and times of year for best viewing opportunities. Investigate public access issues, parking facilities, ease of viewing, and time of day for best opportunities, special equipment that might be needed for viewing, etc.
- **Create a phenology chart of the sites natural events of interest and plot the month of year that these special features take place.** When picking a target season (known as Shoulder season), for promotion of wildlife tourism, featured focal points will be identified for marketing strategies.
- **Designing Facilities:**

Facility design is dependant upon site sensitivity, access to people, and which experience group it makes sense to attract.

 - **A facility should be:**
 - A gateway to a wilder outdoor experience
 - Help resolve management dilemmas
 - Give something back to the landscape
 - **Site Selection:**
 - Site should be able to withstand public use (this eliminates sites that would be negatively impacted)
 - **Facility Design:**
 - Create a site planning team (biologists, recreation planners, interpreters, engineers, user groups that will be attracted to the site including people with special needs)
 - Accomplish these goals:
 - ✓ Restore degraded habitats in the process of developing the site
 - ✓ Guide recreationists away from sensitive habitats and toward adaptable sites
 - ✓ Educate viewers about wildlife issues and appropriate behavior in the outdoors
 - **Restoring and Enhancing the Site.** Restore and enhance habitats to attract wildlife and lessen the impacts of developing the wildlife viewing facility.

- The facility should harmonize with the landscape and be sustainable.
- The facility should be a gift to wildlife.

This program document is intended to guide the participants in developing a watchable wildlife program that will help communities and wildlife prosper. Without the networking among the potential interest groups the development of wildlife tourism in Kentucky will not be successful. The program will promote the Commonwealth's rich, natural diversity, history and cultural heritage. It will establish our mission to foster the conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats by providing enhanced opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife, promote learning about wildlife and habitat needs, contribute to local economies, and enhance active support for resource conservation.

Please Note: This section of the study was written by Danny Watson, Wildlife Biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources based on the publication, "Providing Positive Wildlife Viewing Experiences, a Practical Handbook", by Deborah Richie Oberbillig, Colorado Division of Wildlife and Watchable Wildlife, Inc., March 2000.

Statistical information was derived from the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation, U.S. Department of Interior, 2001.

The document was written on behalf of and voted on by the members of Kentucky's Watchable Wildlife Partners* in 2004.

**Partnership members include representatives from the following agencies:*

KDFWR, SEKTDA, KDP, KDT, USFS, NPS, USACOE, USFWS, ADA, WMTH, KACO