

The Public Benefits of the Recreation Residence Program

In looking at the future of the Recreation Residence Program (14,000 cabins spread across 25 states), the broad economic impact and forest stewardship associated with these cabins is especially relevant. Sustaining and enhancing recreation opportunities for the public is a stated goal of the Forest Service. Since inception in 1915, the Cabin Program has fulfilled this goal by providing family-oriented recreation opportunities while generating revenue for the U.S. Treasury.



Over 5.1 million recreation visitor days typically occur each year on the small footprint of the Cabin Program (< .003 % of National Forests). Over 68% of the typical cabin visits include one or more kids. Educational and recreational activities for kids are often provided to all forest visitors. Expenditures by cabin owners and guests benefit, not only the federal government, but local and state governments and local businesses as well. In many forests, cabin communities support and provide services that enhance the public's recreation experience as well as enhance the quality of life in rural communities.

Local economies receive over \$110 million each year from the Cabin Program. Cabin owners purchase food, staples, improvement and repair items, participate in area recreational activities and frequent area restaurants. In addition, cabin owners donate funds to local churches, rescue services and volunteer their time as firemen, museum and kiosk docents, and more, in total injecting locally more than \$7,600 annually per cabin. The very existence of the local Lodge, grocery store or restaurant often depends on cabin owners and their visitors for support. Surprisingly, even emergency facilities and utilities are provided by some cabin communities to the public, Forest Service and others, which otherwise would be difficult to maintain or support in these rural communities.

Annual government revenues of about \$34 million are generated nationally. Property taxes, special use permit fees and other access fees total almost \$2,400 annually for the average cabin. Plus, direct business expenditures for utilities and various insurances cost on average about \$1,600 each year. This amounts to an additional \$24M each year, much of which benefits rural businesses and utility providers dependent on cabin business.

Forest stewardship, as a family value, is nurtured by the cabin program where the average cabin is host to over three generations. Cabin owners, their families and guests are frequent participants in activities such as mitigating invasive plant species, litter removal, recycling, improving water systems and assisting in fire fuels reduction. The cabin community volunteers an estimated 192,975 hours annually (valued at \$4.2M) for trail maintenance, forest restoration, fire and rescue and other services to the forest and its visitors.

Cabin owners are valuable resources. Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Tom Vilsack, has stated, "It is essential that we reconnect Americans across the nation with the natural resources and landscapes that sustain us." Cabin owners, their families and friends are already connected with Mr. Vilsack's vision. They continue to play a vital role in the health of our rural communities and our National Forests, furthering the goals of the Forest Service and enhancing public services and recreation experiences where cabin communities exist.