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Report: Elk hunting boosts Central Montana economy

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Elk hunting in Central Montana contributes an estimated \$3.8 million to the area's economy.

Elk hunting generates a large chunk of revenue for a couple of Central Montana counties, according to a recently released report.

Last year nearly \$4 million in economic expenditure was generated by hunters in four different hunting districts in Fergus and Petroleum counties, according to a research brief conducted by Ben Alexander

of [Headwater Economics](#), a Bozeman-based research group. The majority of the expenditure — an estimated \$3.8 million — came just from elk hunting, according to the report.

The analysis was released this week by the Montana Wilderness Association, which is lobbying for greater protection of large blocks of Bureau of Land Management property in the region.

The BLM is working on a [Resource Management Plan for its Lewistown Field Office](#), which includes portions of Fergus and Petroleum counties. The plan will guide how the BLM manages more than 650,000 acres in the region for the next 20 to 30 years. The agency plans to have the document finalized by January 2017.

It's long been known that recreation is a big financial driver for Montana. A survey conducted by the [Outdoor Industry Association](#) in 2011 and 2012 said recreation generated \$5.8 billion in direct spending and created 64,000 jobs in the state.

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In 2006 Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks estimated that elk hunters "spent \$98.5 million on transportation, lodging, food, guide fees and other purchases, excluding license fees."

The four hunting districts include the Chain Buttes, Horse Camp Trail and Dovetail Creek areas, as well as Blood Creek, Arrow Creek, and Carter Coulee.

"These areas represent some of the most productive ungulate habitat anywhere in North America, and that's because these areas are largely roadless and undeveloped," said Bill Berg, a former deputy project leader of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, in a press release. "If we want to continue having big game populations that are this healthy, we need intact ecosystems."

The Headwaters Economics report shows that Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks recorded more than 25,000 elk hunter days in 2015 on the four Fergus County hunting districts. Of those days, 7 percent overall were represented by nonresidents, but expenditures by out-of-state hunters comprised about half the total.