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Wildlife Refuges Raise Property Values, Study Shows

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Beyond the scenic views or flora and fauna, metropolitan area homeowners who live near a national wildlife refuge now have a different reason to appreciate the proximity. Research shows that such homes have higher property values than those that are farther from a reserve.

A study conducted by North Carolina State University researchers and issued on Wednesday by the federal Fish and Wildlife Service surveyed homes in urban areas that are close to refuges in three regions: the Northeast, the Southeast and California-Nevada. (They did not include data from, say, the Southwest, where refuges tend to be farther from urban centers.)

A water hole at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in Florida.

For homes that are less than a half-mile from a wildlife refuge and within eight miles of an urban center, property values were 7 to 9 percent higher on average in the Southeast and 4 to 5 percent higher in the Northeast. In the California-Nevada area, such homes were worth 3 to 6 percent more.

The data, drawn from the 2000 census, found that the 36 refuges studied added \$300 million to local property values — a boon to both homeowners and the tax base.

The report comes as the tradition of protected preserves faces challenges from some House Republicans who would like to see federal lands sold off to raise money and to encourage development.

Next year, the Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to update a 2006 analysis of the economic impact of such refuges in terms of tourism. That study found that 34.8 million visits to American wildlife refuges in fiscal 2006 generated \$1.7 billion in sales, nearly 27,000 jobs and \$542.8 million in employment income in regional economies.

“Our wildlife refuges are strong economic engines that generate and support jobs in communities across the country,” Jim Kurth, the chief of the national wildlife refuge system, said in a statement.