Economic Impact of nature tourism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Kyle O’Haver– Natural Resource Specialist, Estero Llano Grande State Park
Why do they come to the LRGV for Nature Tourism?
The growth of nature tourism

• Started with birding
  – Listers
  – General bird watchers

• Expanded to other nature related activities
  – Butterflying
  – Dragonfly watching
  – Nature Photography
  – General nature and wildlife experiences
¿Why the LRGV? ¡BIODIVERSITY!

Birds: ~520 species; only 4 states have recorded more species than this four county area

Butterflies: ~300 species

Dragonflies: ~110 species
Rare Birds and other Wildlife
PLANTS: ~1,100 SPECIES
Many not occurring elsewhere in The U.S.
Lower Rio Grande Valley birding locations:

- World Birding Centers
- National Wildlife Refuges
- Audubon facilities
- Nature Centers
- City and County Parks
- Privately owned lands
- Levees
Lower Rio Grande Valley birding location references:

- Great Coastal Birding Trail
- Birding and Butterfly map of the Rio Grande Valley
- A Birder’s guide to the Rio Grande Valley
- Nesting birds of a tropical frontier
- Texbirds (listserv)
- Texas E-bird
Lower Rio Grande Valley birding locations:

• In Weslaco alone there are 3 major birding/nature sites

  – Estero Llano Grande State Park, World Birding Center

  – Valley Nature Center

  – Frontera Audubon Thicket
World Birding Center

World Birding Center

• 120 miles along Rio Grande Corridor

• Diverse habitats:
  – Semiarid Brushlands
  – Lush resaca woodlands
  – Freshwater Marshes
  – Coastal Wetlands
Three State Parks

Mission

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park

Weslaco

Estero Llano Grande State Park

Brownsville

Resaca de la Palma State Park
Six Municipal Sites

- Edinburg Scenic Wetlands
- Harlingen Arroyo Colorado
- Roma Bluffs
- South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center
- Old Hidalgo Pumphouse
- Quinta Mazatlan
250 acres of Wetlands and Thorn Scrub Habitat / 325 bird species
Facilities

- Construction of visitor center began July 2004
  - Includes an observation deck, classroom and gift shop

- Trails and boardwalks through wetlands and thorn-scrub habitats
Wetlands

• Estero Llano Grande has the largest wetlands environment in the WBC network

• Wetlands were created from former agricultural fields
Estero Llano Grande Park Features

• Over 5 miles of trails
• Ponds of varying size
• Levee Access overlooking the Llano Grande
• Park store
• Classroom
• Event Hall
• Camp Thicket
Estero Llano Grande Programs

• Public programs
  – Bird walks
  – Nature Walks
  – Breakfast with the Birds
• School group programs
• Special events
Estero Llano Grande State Park

SPooky SCience FEST
Featuring THE
PROTECTORS
OF THE
PARKS

"Unite with superheroes in an epic battle to save the park and its resources!"

Saturday, October 20th 6 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Join us for the 6th annual Spooky Science Fest. Superheroes of all ages from across the universe will be in a battle to save our parks as well as our natural and cultural resources from the clutches of evil. Superhero photos, mad science lab, games, crafts, hay rides, live animals, costume contests, food, drinks, and much, much more. What can you do to save the park?

$6 adults • $4 children 12 and under • $2 with a Texas State Parks Passport

Also Check Out
313 South Missouri Street
Weslaco, TX 78596
(956) 295-2000

Facebook

Find Us on
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Estero Llano Grande State Park • World Birding Center
3301 South International Blvd. (F.M. 1015)
Weslaco, Texas 78596
(956) 365-3919

2nd Nature Chaser 5K Fun Trail Run/Walk
at Estero Llano Grande State Park Weslaco, TX

DATE & TIME: Saturday, November 3, 2012 *8:00 AM Sharp!

This is a Trail Run so wear the proper shoes

PRE-REGISTRATION FEE:
5K Race is $10.00 • Only at the park!
• Please do not mail checks or cash – we are not responsible for lost money
• Checks can be made payable to: Estero Llano Grande State Park

RACE DAY:
Registration is from 6:00 AM - 7:30 AM
Late Registration Fee - $12.00

LOCATION:
Estero Llano Grande State Park
3301 S. International Blvd. Weslaco, Texas (South 1015 on the curve)
Phone: (956)565-3919

AWARDS:
Top 3 finishers in each division will be awarded.
Nature Festivals

• There are 7 major nature festivals held in the valley each year
• These festivals bring in 50 – 500 out-of-town visitors each

- Texas Butterfly Festival, Mission
- Wild in Willacy, Raymondville
- Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, Harlingen
Don’t forget the Winter Texans

• Winter Texans don’t just come down for the great weather

• A majority of Winter Texans enjoy:
  – Bird watching
  – Butterflying
  – Bicycling
  – Nature Watching
  – Nature Photography
Money to the community

- Hotels
- RV Parks
- Restaurants
- Park entry fees
- Groceries
- Gasoline
- Sales Taxes
- Souvenirs
- Misc.

ALL THIS EQUALS MORE $ IN OUR COMMUNITY AND MORE LOCAL JOBS!
Economic Impact of Nature Tourism on the Rio Grande Valley: Considering Peak and Off-Peak Visitation for 2011

**Average peak visitor:**
- Group size of 2.3
- M=57
- Undergraduate or Graduate Education
- Staying 20 days
- Return visitor
- Automobile
- Spending $822.08 (per person) on Nature Tourism Experiences

**Average non-peak visitor:**
- Group size of 2.6
- M=47
- Undergraduate or Graduate Education
- Staying 7 days
- Return visitor
- Automobile
- Spending $497.72 (per person) on Nature Tourism Experiences
What's the Impact

Estimated annual expenditures by intentionals for 2011 were $307 Million.

Economic contribution from RGV nature tourism led to a total economic output of $463 million and 6,613 full- and part-time jobs annually.

This total contribution includes a $266 million contribution to gross regional product and a $163 million contribution to labor income across the region.

Local taxes generated from direct nature tourist expenditures for 2011 was $2.5 Million for sales tax and $7.5 Million for hotel tax.
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