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## **Hunting is Big Business**

Contact: Billy Higginbotham, (903) 834-6191, [b-higginbotham@tamu.edu](mailto:b-higginbotham@tamu.edu)

VERTON -- Hunting is a long-standing American tradition, whose roots run especially deep in Texas. Hunting is also big business in Texas and many other states.

Dr. Billy Higginbotham, Texas Cooperative Extension wildlife specialist here, said the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies reported that nationwide, the sport generated \$25 billion in retail sales, \$17 billion in salaries and wages and employed 575,000 Americans in 2001.

“That year, 13 million Americans age 16 or older took to the fields to hunt,” said Higginbotham. “Another 13 million Americans participated in various forms of shooting sports, including sporting clays, trap, skeet and rifle shooting. In Texas alone, 1.2 million hunters spent 14 million days afield in pursuit of game.

“Hunters pay the wildlife management bills for game and non-game species through the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937. The Act levies an excise tax on sporting arms, ammo, archery equipment and handguns. In 2002, over \$200 million was returned to U.S. states and territories to fund habitat restoration, shooting ranges, hunter education and wildlife research. Texas received over \$7 million of these monies last year alone.”

Higginbotham said of the \$25 billion in retail sales spent annually in the United States, Texas ranks first among all states with almost \$1.8 billion spent in 2001. Each U.S. hunter spends an average of \$1,896 per year on their hunting activity. The ripple effect of these expenditures generates three times more than that amount for the national economy.

“Hunting in Texas generates \$864 million in salaries and wages,” said the specialist.

“The sport creates 31,711 jobs, pays \$93 million in motor fuel sales and taxes and provides \$148 million in federal income tax. Texas deer hunting alone generates almost \$1 billion in retail sales and provides 18,000 jobs. Deer hunting’s economic impact reaches far beyond our state’s borders. Out-of-state deer hunters spend an estimated \$157 million annually to hunt here.

“Hunting is the lifeblood of many rural Texas towns and cities. Every tank of gas, every sack of groceries and every night’s lodging means more dollars pumped into rural areas that are often struggling just to survive.

“Texas landowners rely on lease fees as part of their annual income. Without hunters’ dollars, landowners would be forced to consider converting wildlife habitat to less wildlife-friendly purposes to survive these tough economic times.

“If you enjoy watching wildlife, are a non-hunter, or even hate hunting but enjoy seeing a white-tailed deer or a wild turkey, thank a hunter. Hunters are the ones who foot-the-bill so we all can enjoy abundant wildlife.

“Remember - what’s good for wildlife is good for hunting—and what’s good for hunting is good for our economy!”