




THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM IN ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT REGION

For calendar 2020 to 2023

April 12, 2024
ECONOMICS RESEARCH SERVICES, INC
Montgomery Alabama



Taxidermy: \$600

Ammo: \$100

Camo/Boots: \$550

Hunting Licenses: \$35

Rifle/Shotgun: \$1,000


ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT REGION

Rod and Reel: \$300

Fuel: \$250

Lures/Bait: \$100

License: \$25



Polarized Sunglasses: \$180



Lodging: \$180

Meals: \$150

Souvenirs/Gifts: \$200

Tour Guide: \$60

Pottery Class: \$75

A VITAL PART OF ALABAMA'S ECONOMY



Binoculars: \$200

Kayak: \$350

Hiking Boots: \$170

Glamping: \$125

Backpack: \$100

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a significant role in the economies of many countries and regions worldwide. The Black Belt region in Alabama is no exception. The Black Belt, a crescent-shaped region across Alabama's south-central area, boasts rich history, fertile land, and a vibrant culture. Its economic story is complex—world renown civil rights events, a legacy in agricultural and a proud heritage in hunting and fishing.

The identity of the Alabama Black Belt region finds its roots in both its physical and cultural geography, as well as its historical development. For the purposes of this report, economist Dr. Kievan Deravi utilized the boundaries of the 23-county region defined by the Alabama Black Belt Adventures' marketing and promotion outreach. Those include: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa, and Wilcox.

While the Black Belt region of Alabama may not be as well-known for tourism as some other areas of the state, it offers unique attractions and immersive experiences that can appeal to visitors interested in history, culture, outdoor recreation, and agritourism. Efforts to promote tourism development and showcase the region's assets contribute to its economic growth and sustainability.

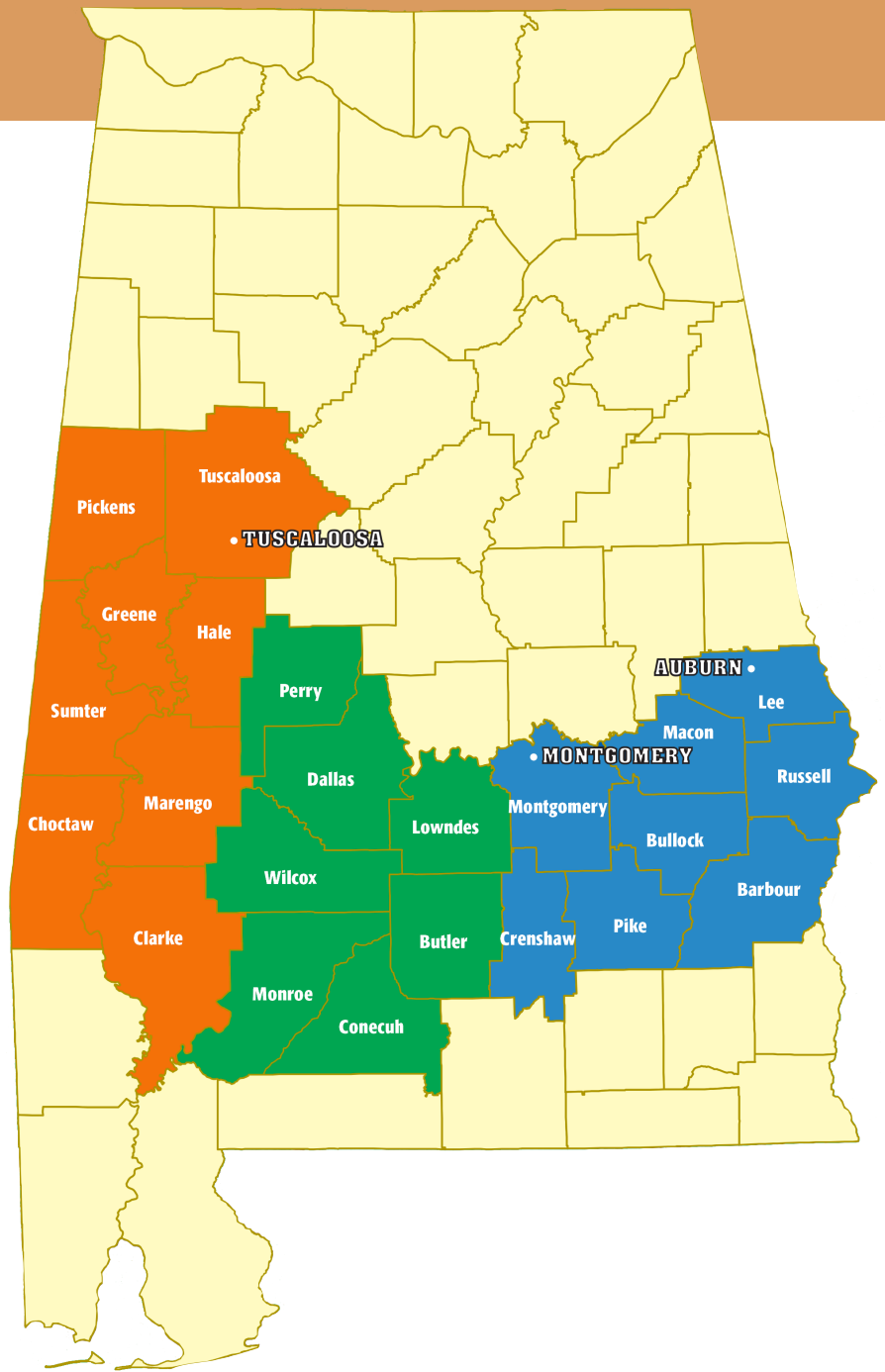


Table 1: The Alabama Black Belt Counties by Region

Central	East	West
Butler	Barbour	Choctaw
Conecuh	Bullock	Clarke
Dallas	Crenshaw	Green
Lowndes	Lee	Hale
Monroe	Macon	Marengo
Perry	Pike	Pickens
Wilcox	Russell	Sumter
Montgomery		Tuscaloosa

THE DIVERSE TOURISM ASSETS IN THE BLACK BELT ARE MOMENTOUS, ADVENTURESOME AND EVEN QUIRKY

- Edmund Pettus Bridge, where the march from Selma to Montgomery played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement.

- “Field Trail Capital of the World” in Union Springs where bird dog field trials have taken place for decades and a bronze statue of an English pointer is on display in the middle of main street.

- Black Belt Folk Roots Festival in Eutaw, a tribute to those who carried forward folkways, traditions and the culture of West Alabama.

- The river city of Demopolis and its Greek Revival mansion, Gaineswood.

- Hog Wild for Arts in Camden, showcasing Black Belt artists, crafters, potters, quilters, jewelry makers and more.

- Airing of the Quilts in Alberta, a celebration of its generations of quilting tradition.

- Lake Eufaula, a popular destination for fishing whose reputation has earned it the title of “Bass Capital of the World”.

- Lakepoint State Park, Chewacala State Park and Roland Cooper State Park are just a few of the many public facilities across the region providing opportunities for boating, camping, glamping, hiking, and canoeing.

- Bird-watching is a popular activity for novice and avid birders as well as wildlife photographers.

- Wildlife management areas, nature preserves provide habitats for diverse plant and animal species attracting hunters, anglers, outdoor enthusiasts, and nature lovers.

- Farms and agricultural enterprises in the area offer opportunities to tour life on a farm, pick your own seasonal fruit, farmers’ markets, and farm-to-table dining.

- Travel the scenic back roads on The Alabama Black Belt Nature and Heritage Trail that highlights the beauty of the rural landscape and points of interest related to nature, history, and culture.

- Let stories come to life on the pages found in Monroeville, the “Literary Capital of the World” and home to famed author of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Total Economic Impact: **\$3.8 billion in 2023**

Earnings: **\$1.25 billion in 2023**

Employment: **45,500 jobs in 2023**

- The tourism impact on the Black Belt region increased from \$1.9 billion in 2020 (the year of Covid) to \$3.8 billion in 2023. The 2023 growth rate over 2022 estimate is at 9 percent.
- Earnings in 2023 were \$1.25 billion and \$1.15 billion in 2022. The 2023 growth rate is 8 percent.
- Employment in tourism created approximately 45,500 jobs in 2023 and 43,300 in 2022. The 2023 figure shows an increase of approximately 5%.
- The central region of Alabama Black Belt is the biggest producer of tourism economic impact. This region, produces 39% of the Black Belt tourism dollars and 42% of the tourism related employment in the Black Belt.
- The west region, accounts for 31% of spending and 28% of all jobs in Alabama Black Belt.
- The east region, represents 30% of all tourism dollars for the Black Belt.





State and local government received **\$219 million** in taxes in 2023 from tourism in the Black Belt.

\$70 million contribution to the Alabama Education Trust Fund and the General Fund

\$1.7 billion economic impact from hunting and fishing alone

There are three categories of economic impact:

- 1. Direct:** The direct impact of visitors spending is the additional demand and expenditures in the State's economy that is directly because of travels and visits to the Black Belt region.
- 2. Indirect:** As visitor's direct spending reverberates throughout the economy and results in further increases in business transactions, there are indirect impacts. An indirect impact, for example, results when a business needs additional resources to service the increased demand from new hotels or restaurants. The suppliers of these assets find their sales increasing and need more input to meet the new demand. This process continues, yielding a multiplied effect on the output of the city's economy.
- 3. Induced:** the change in income in the economy induces additional indirect effects. For example, when a business hires an additional worker to meet the demand caused by tourists' visitation.

NUMBERS—BIG PICTURE

The Black Belt Tourism Model developed here follows the same method used for the State's tourism model. As a first step, we start with the definition of a traveler. We define a traveler as an individual who travels 100 miles from home (one-way) and stays overnight at a lodging establishment. In this context, lodging expenditures is the first block of the model. After estimating the lodging expenditures, we connect it, via survey result findings on tourists' spending patterns, to the rest of the travelers' spending. The survey results also provide input on the number of individuals who choose to stay with friends and relatives as opposed to staying in hotels. Subsequently, we link this information to a matrix of parameters and multipliers and estimate the economic impact for the major economic sectors within the tourism and travel industry.

Table 2: Total Tourism Impact of the Alabama Black Belt Region, 2020 to 2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Spending	\$1,903,067,878	\$2,804,498,578	\$3,452,535,546	\$3,767,073,714
Direct Earning	\$390,509,777	\$571,563,534	\$648,479,973	\$703,476,385
Direct & Indirect Earning	\$706,027,851	\$1,034,540,442	\$1,152,478,595	\$1,249,324,983
Direct Employment	19,758	27,667	29,746	31,618
Direct & Indirect employment	28,402	40,225	43,271	45,536
Taxes	\$115,309,654	\$169,928,653	\$201,118,739	\$219,441,365
Education Trust Fund	\$28,827,413	\$42,482,163	\$50,279,684	\$54,860,341
General Fund	\$7,206,853	\$10,620,540	\$12,569,921	\$13,715,085

Table 3: Total Economic Impact, Alabama Black Belt by Region

	2020	2021	2022	2023	Share in 2023
Central	\$816,624,905	\$1,105,791,642	\$1,379,386,263	\$1,486,511,574	39%
East	\$524,028,463	\$807,091,967	\$1,024,173,002	\$1,122,458,028	30%
West	\$562,414,510	\$891,614,969	\$1,048,976,281	\$1,158,104,112	31%

Table 4: Earning Impact, Alabama Black Belt by Region

	2020	2021	2022	2023	Share in 2023
Central	\$311,025,723	\$420,711,863	\$469,107,159	\$499,300,126	40%
East	\$200,615,934	\$307,623,322	\$355,682,985	\$388,276,716	31%
West	\$194,386,195	\$306,205,257	\$327,688,451	\$361,748,141	29%

Table 5: Employment Impact, Alabama Black Belt by Region

	2020	2021	2022	2023	Share in 2023
Central	13,510	17,094	18,416	19,040	42%
East	7,456	11,445	12,821	13,789	30%
West	7,437	11,686	12,035	12,707	28%

Table 6: Total Economic Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, Central Region

Central	2020	2021	2022	2023
Butler	\$44,166,500	\$59,070,999	\$64,700,254	\$68,791,420
Conecuh	\$16,482,446	\$20,212,365	\$19,138,323	\$17,689,542
Dallas	\$78,981,952	\$90,888,867	\$114,666,066	\$106,047,610
Lowndes				\$2,513,341
Monroe	\$24,683,666	\$30,161,637	\$32,686,396	\$38,987,231
Perry	\$4,666,319	\$5,922,851	\$7,001,447	\$7,676,163
Wilcox	\$7,223,164	\$9,604,252	\$7,943,630	\$8,909,413
Montgomery	\$640,420,857	\$889,930,671	\$1,133,250,146	\$1,235,896,854
Subtotal	\$816,624,905	\$1,105,791,642	\$1,379,386,263	\$1,486,511,574

Table 7: Total Economic Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, East Region

East	2020	2021	2022	2023
Barbour	\$53,116,703	\$69,857,783	\$70,675,337	\$72,645,626
Bullock	\$1,139,046	\$1,864,575	\$1,699,858	\$1,545,784
Crenshaw	\$2,359,806	\$2,301,079	\$2,299,099	\$2,702,639
Lee	\$332,162,662	\$558,313,098	\$747,877,834	\$800,596,865
Macon	\$5,563,732	\$6,820,351	\$7,992,130	\$7,482,254
Pike	\$57,235,986	\$89,102,576	\$93,145,800	\$97,087,728
Russell	\$72,450,529	\$78,832,505	\$100,482,944	\$140,397,132
Subtotal	\$524,028,463	\$807,091,967	\$1,024,173,002	\$1,122,458,028

Table 8: Total Economic Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, West Region

West	2020	2021	2022	2023
Choctaw	\$8,378,939	\$8,415,405	\$6,457,901	\$5,862,216
Clarke	\$47,896,961	\$58,893,526	\$73,329,845	\$70,493,274
Green	\$4,914,149	\$7,795,644	\$7,384,719	\$8,917,586
Hale	\$1,063,528	\$1,291,286	\$1,418,018	\$2,327,280
Marengo	\$36,458,419	\$46,652,795	\$46,898,009	\$50,000,145
Pickens	\$3,810,273	\$4,687,175	\$4,749,298	\$6,413,026
Sumter	\$9,874,479	\$14,910,563	\$13,496,520	\$14,499,240
Tuscaloosa	\$450,017,762	\$748,968,572	\$895,241,971	\$999,591,345
Subtotal	\$562,414,510	\$891,614,969	\$1,048,976,281	\$1,158,104,112

Table 9: Total Earning Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, Central Region

Central	2020	2021	2022	2023
Butler	\$18,175,731	\$23,625,287	\$24,736,424	\$26,163,585
Conecuh	\$6,114,542	\$7,431,968	\$6,969,409	\$6,484,330
Dallas	\$28,010,217	\$32,208,814	\$39,068,667	\$36,183,442
Lowndes				\$0
Monroe	\$9,381,956	\$11,585,872	\$12,393,053	\$14,558,688
Perry	\$1,744,599	\$2,206,593	\$2,547,029	\$2,780,624
Wilcox	\$2,561,628	\$3,403,514	\$2,706,529	\$3,039,892
Montgomery	\$245,037,050	\$340,249,815	\$380,686,048	\$410,089,566
Subtotal	\$311,025,723	\$420,711,863	\$469,107,159	\$499,300,126

Table 10: Total Earning Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, East Region

East	2020	2021	2022	2023
Barbour	\$19,734,664	\$25,653,225	\$25,874,918	\$26,581,322
Bullock	\$225,089	\$368,186	\$372,723	\$339,420
Crenshaw	\$827,910	\$815,447	\$819,235	\$922,140
Lee	\$126,927,775	\$213,114,533	\$252,562,462	\$270,749,297
Macon	\$4,754,812	\$5,826,776	\$6,671,254	\$6,501,145
Pike	\$21,105,798	\$32,562,846	\$33,800,180	\$35,279,894
Russell	\$27,039,886	\$29,282,309	\$35,582,214	\$47,903,498
Subtotal	\$200,615,934	\$307,623,322	\$355,682,985	\$388,276,716

It should be noted that a large portion of visitors to the rural counties of Alabama's Black Belt region often utilize larger towns and cities where greater options for lodging and other amenities are available.

The Black Belt region has the greatest potential for continued growth as the Alabama Black Belt National Heritage Area project is realized as well as the ecotourism development recommendations presented by Costas Christ moves forward.

Coupled with ALBBAA's continued marketing and promotion of the Black Belt's existing assets, these tourism product developments will create more demand for services and open investment opportunities that will enable the rural areas to capture a greater share of visitors' dollars.

11: Total Earning Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, West Region

West	2020	2021	2022	2023
Choctaw	\$2,998,433	\$3,014,519	\$2,290,048	\$2,089,920
Clarke	\$17,345,140	\$20,870,440	\$22,984,717	\$22,126,942
Green	\$2,801,584	\$4,484,892	\$4,254,526	\$4,848,627
Hale	\$210,165	\$254,982	\$269,215	\$442,467
Marengo	\$14,006,422	\$17,788,867	\$17,773,581	\$18,854,684
Pickens	\$1,095,871	\$1,347,430	\$1,355,967	\$1,719,791
Sumter	\$3,501,893	\$5,283,943	\$4,598,492	\$4,947,140
Tuscaloosa	\$152,426,687	\$253,160,184	\$274,161,906	\$306,718,569
Subtotal	\$194,386,195	\$306,205,257	\$327,688,451	\$361,748,141

Table 12: Total Employment Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, Central Region

Central	2020	2021	2022	2023
Butler	654	861	898	952
Conecuh	251	308	292	269
Dallas	1,084	1,248	1,411	1,310
Lowndes				
Monroe	412	508	545	636
Perry	79	100	119	133
Wilcox	107	143	117	132
Montgomery	8,904	11,904	13,012	13,585
Subtotal	13,510	17,094	18,416	19,040

Table 13: Total Employment Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, East Region

East	2020	2021	2022	2023
Barbour	798	1,056	1,068	1,097
Bullock	10	16	15	13
Crenshaw	35	33	33	39
Lee	4,542	7,665	8,677	9,079
Macon	199	243	281	264
Pike	858	1,323	1,374	1,437
Russell	1,015	1,107	1,373	1,859
Subtotal	7,456	11,445	12,821	13,789

Table 14: Total Employment Impact by Counties, Alabama Black Belt, West Region

West	2020	2021	2022	2023
Choctaw	111	111	87	80
Clarke	657	795	881	844
Green	114	181	171	212
Hale	9	11	12	20
Marengo	595	765	761	811
Pickens	41	51	52	70
Sumter	159	240	215	228
Tuscaloosa	5,751	9,532	9,854	10,443
Subtotal	7,437	11,686	12,035	12,707

Table 15: Economic Impact, Alabama Black Belt's 23 County Region

Almost 75% or 17 out of 23 counties showed respectable increases in 2023.

Since 2020, all counties have seen an increase in the three year period this report represents.



	2020	2021	2022	2023
Barbour	\$53,116,703	\$69,857,783	\$70,675,337	\$72,645,626
Bullock	\$1,139,046	\$1,864,575	\$1,699,858	\$1,545,784
Butler	\$44,166,500	\$59,070,999	\$64,700,254	\$68,791,420
Choctaw	\$8,378,939	\$8,415,405	\$6,457,901	\$5,862,216
Clarke	\$47,896,961	\$58,893,526	\$73,329,845	\$70,493,274
Conecuh	\$16,482,446	\$20,212,365	\$19,138,323	\$17,689,542
Crenshaw	\$2,359,806	\$2,301,079	\$2,299,099	\$2,702,639
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Green	\$4,914,149	\$7,795,644	\$7,384,719	\$8,917,586
Hale	\$1,063,528	\$1,291,286	\$1,418,018	\$2,327,280
Lee	\$332,162,662	\$558,313,098	\$747,877,834	\$800,596,865
Lowndes	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,513,341
Macon	\$5,563,732	\$6,820,351	\$7,992,130	\$7,482,254
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Sumter	\$9,874,479	\$14,910,563	\$13,496,520	\$14,499,240
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Wilcox	\$7,223,164	\$9,604,252	\$7,943,630	\$8,909,413
Total	\$1,903,067,878	\$2,804,498,578	\$3,452,535,546	\$3,764,560,373

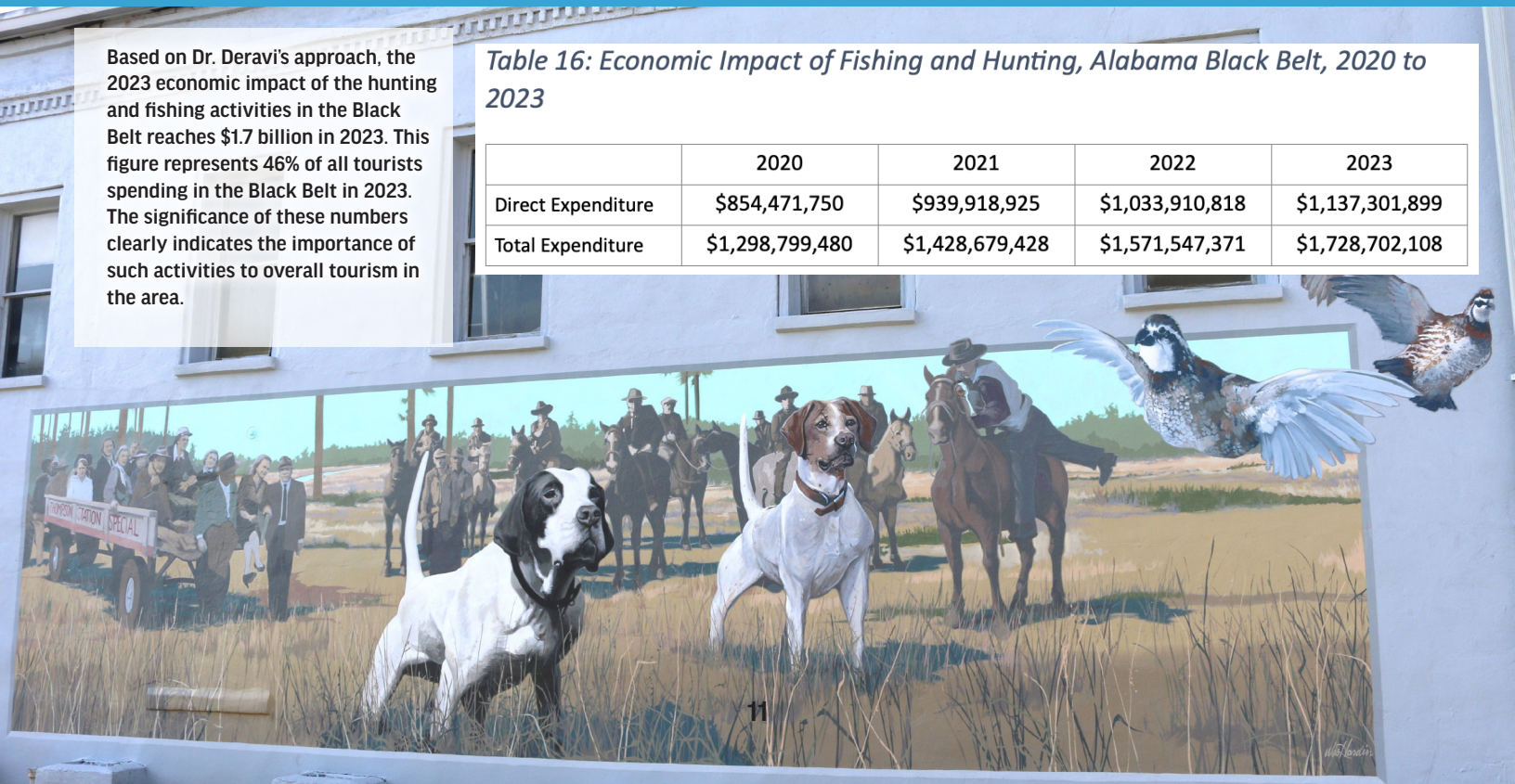
Economic Impact of Hunting and Fishing in Alabama Black Belt

In this section, Dr. Deravi attempted to update the estimates for the economic impact of hunting and fishing activities in the Alabama Black Belt. The last estimate was produced in 2018. The approach used for this task differs vastly from the earlier estimate. More specifically, he extrapolated the 2020 to 2023 estimates using the growth rates for the overall tourism spending in the area.

Based on Dr. Deravi's approach, the 2023 economic impact of the hunting and fishing activities in the Black Belt reaches \$1.7 billion in 2023. This figure represents 46% of all tourists spending in the Black Belt in 2023. The significance of these numbers clearly indicates the importance of such activities to overall tourism in the area.

Table 16: Economic Impact of Fishing and Hunting, Alabama Black Belt, 2020 to 2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Direct Expenditure	\$854,471,750	\$939,918,925	\$1,033,910,818	\$1,137,301,899
Total Expenditure	\$1,298,799,480	\$1,428,679,428	\$1,571,547,371	\$1,728,702,108



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