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VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS & HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM  
2011

THE  
APPRECIATION  
of  
ACCESS



# Benefits of the Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program: 2012

## WHAT IS

# VPA-HIP

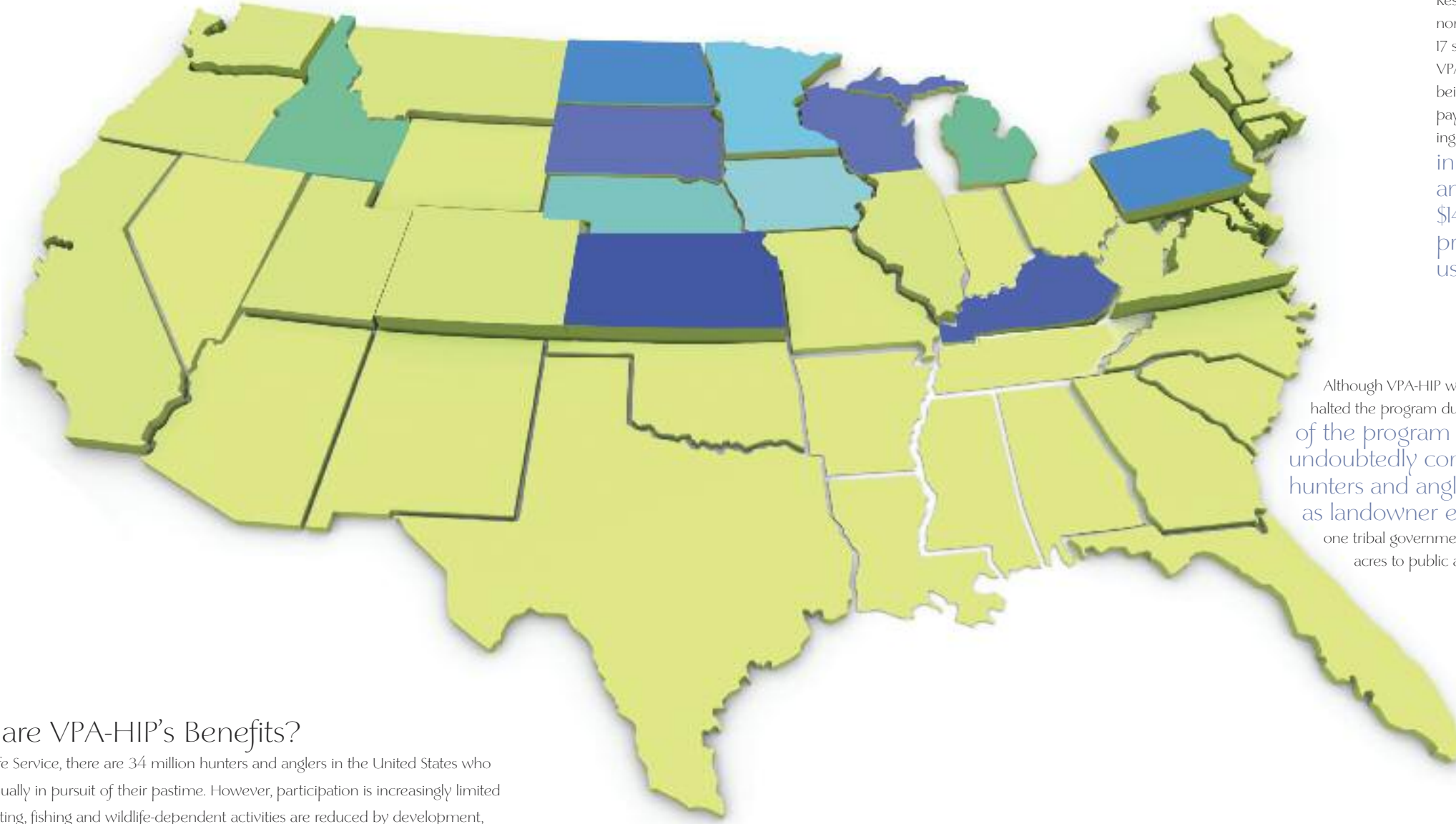
As part of the 2008 Farm Bill, the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) encourages landowners to voluntarily open their land to public recreation—primarily hunting and fishing. The program was designed to augment state-administered public access programs, many of which are limited by insufficient funds. Landowners are offered incentives—such as lease payments, technical services for habitat enhancement and legal protection against landowner liability—to open their lands to public access.

Fifty million dollars were authorized for the VPA-HIP program to be paid out over four years (2008-2012). However, funding was delayed until late in the 2010 fiscal year, and then, due to legislative action, was cancelled for the 2012 fiscal year, bringing the program to a premature close. Nevertheless, in this short time, it was possible to measure the economic and recreational benefits created by the grant funded state public access programs in 2011.



## What are VPA-HIP's Benefits?

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, there are 34 million hunters and anglers in the United States who spend approximately \$76 billion annually in pursuit of their pastime. However, participation is increasingly limited as access to land and waters for hunting, fishing and wildlife-dependent activities are reduced by development, legal issues and increasing numbers of Americans desiring recreational access to open areas. One solution is to open more private lands for public use.



Research firm Southwick Associates, which specializes in natural resource economics, quantified the economic returns from VPA-HIP investments in 13 of the 17 states that participated in the program's first year. The \$9.1 million invested by VPA-HIP in those states in year one resulted in an additional \$18.2 million dollars being spent by recreational users. This represents a 99 percent return on taxpayer investment, benefiting rural communities and landowners in all participating states. This spending generated \$41.7 million dollars in new economic activity and supported 322 full and part-time jobs across the nation, providing \$14.6 million in payroll for businesses whose products and services were purchased by users of VPA-HIP-enrolled lands.

Although VPA-HIP was slated to provide four years of funding, Congress prematurely halted the program due to the difficult federal budget climate. The successes of the program witnessed in just a single year would have undoubtedly compounded with each successive year as hunters and anglers became aware of the available lands and as landowner enrollment continued to grow. By 2012, 26 states and one tribal government were awarded VPA-HIP grants, opening thousands of additional acres to public access and potentially doubling the economic benefits reported here.



## A Juicy return.

Money invested by VPA-HIP enjoyed a 99% return in just a 12 month period, beating even Wall St. sweetheart Apple, whose return was only 90%.



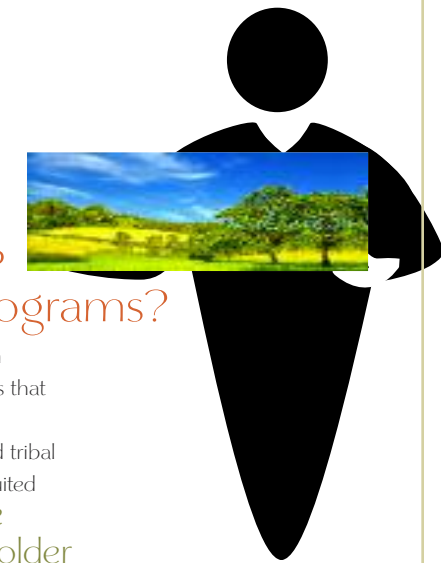


# KEY PROGRAM DIFFERENCES

**Why Pay Landowners to Open Private Acres?**  
Unfortunately, landowners say due to concerns over liability; the costs to maintain and improve roads and areas impacted by increased traffic; worries over litter, vandalism and gates being left open; and the time required to deal with public inquiries regarding access, many of them are hesitant to open their properties to the public. In fact, only 37% of surveyed landowners say they would have opened their land to general public access without the VPA-HIP program.

## How is VPA-HIP Different from Other Programs?

Unlike many Farm Bill programs, often encumbered with restrictive mandates that must be adhered to, VPA-HIP funding allowed broad discretion for states and tribal governments to tailor solutions best suited for their local areas, and gave the most important stakeholder group—landowners—a major voice in how programs were designed. Landowners and states are in the best position to determine what will work in their areas. This is in line with the current federal America's Great Outdoors Initiative, which "recognizes that many of the best ideas come from outside Washington. Instead of dictating policies, this initiative turns to communities for local, grassroots conservation initiatives" and that "lasting conservation solutions should rise from the American people—that the protection of our natural heritage is a nonpartisan objective shared by all Americans."



## Why Pay People to Recreate?

The answer is VPA-HIP does not pay people to recreate. Instead, enrolling landowners are compensated for making their land and waters available to hunters and anglers. Without incentives, fewer acres would be open, which would ultimately mean fewer sportsmen. As a result, rural economic health would be negatively impacted. Hunters and anglers are the primary financial supporters of state fish and wildlife conservation programs. Through excise taxes and license revenues, they have contributed more than \$10 billion toward conservation and annually provide more than 80 percent of the funding for most fish and wildlife agencies. Statewide management of VPA-HIP enrolled private lands allows sportsmen to easily locate and identify areas where they're permitted to hunt and fish through published and online maps—a huge factor when it comes to encouraging both resident and nonresident sportsmen to visit and spend tourism dollars. By incentivizing landowners to open their lands, the economic and conservation benefits from hunting and fishing can be maintained and enhanced.



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Look at the impact VPA-HIP had on selected states in little more than a single year:



**IDAHO**—Funding from VPA-HIP was used to expand hunting and fishing opportunities through the state's Access Yes! Program by enrolling 196,640 acres of land and 20 stream miles owned by 50 landowners. These lands and streams were enjoyed by 6,146 citizens and generated \$4 million of additional in-state trip- and equipment-related spending. VPA-HIP investments to landowners for access total roughly \$307,000, generating an estimated return of \$13.16 in recreator spending within the state for every federal dollar invested. As an additional benefit, these enrollments opened more than 11,000 acres of land-locked public lands to public access.



**IOWA**—The Iowa Department of Natural Resources piloted a program called the Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP). In the first year, 10 landowners enrolled 1,365 acres for an average of 7.5 years. Based upon estimated yearly investments to support habitat improvement work, every dollar is estimated to generate \$1.82 in additional sportsman spending, further benefiting the rural economy and conservation.



**KANSAS**—The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism allocated VPA-HIP funds toward two different programs. For hunters, they developed a complementary VPA Access program, which would not replace, but merely work in tandem with its long-successful Walk-In Access Hunting Program (WIHA). Each dollar invested towards access to private acres will generate roughly \$5.91 each year over the next 12 years as increased hunter expenditures flow through the rural economy. For anglers, Kansas expanded its Fishing Impoundments and Stream Habitats (FISH) program. In late 2011, a total of 75 new landowners opened 736 water acres (a 52 percent increase), 32 stream miles, and nine big river access sites for public access. Fishing began in these sites at the onset of the 2012 fishing season.

**KENTUCKY**—The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife developed a Landowner Fishing Access Program that saw 64.5 water acres and 18 miles of stream enrolled upon initiation of the program. For the majority of the participating landowners, it is the first time they have enrolled their lands in this type of program. Early feedback is extremely positive. Recreational users have shared comments such as “Thank you for opening to the public.”, “Like what you are doing, keep it up!” and “VPA-HIP is a good use of public monies.”



**MICHIGAN**—The state has a longstanding Hunter Access program, which has seen a continual decline in participating landowners in recent years. In 2011, with the support of VPA-HIP funding, the program's coordinator enrolled a total of 23 new landowners with 2,749 new acres of private lands, expanding the program by 38 percent. Eighty-three percent of landowners are satisfied with the program and plan to continue participation. Eighty-six percent of recreational users plan to visit program lands in the future.

Stating the  
**ECONOMIC IMPACT**  
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**MINNESOTA**—Much of Minnesota's 5.3 million acres of public hunting lands are in the northern part of the state. VPA-HIP funds were used to provide access in the southwestern region. In 2011, a total of 89 landowners enrolled 9,113 acres, meeting 91 percent of the Department of Natural Resources' goal to enroll 10,000 acres in the first year. Investments to landowners for access total roughly \$105,000. These new acres are estimated to have spurred \$300,000 in extra hunter spending, generating a return of \$2.83 for every dollar invested.



**NEBRASKA**—Under Nebraska's reconfigured Open Fields and Waters Program, funded in part by VPA-HIP, 193 new landowners enrolled an additional 74,175 acres of land and water, as well as 8 miles of stream for public use. The program expansion is estimated to have generated an additional \$1.6 million of in-state trip- and equipment-related spending in 2011 based upon user surveys. Just under \$370,000 of VPA-HIP funds was invested to support these new landowners, generating an estimated return of \$4.37 for every federal dollar invested.



**PENNSYLVANIA**—By expanding existing access programs, VPA-HIP funding helped the state open 40,152 additional acres owned by 260 landowners who volunteered to participate. These landowners say that the ability to allow people to enjoy the land and liability protection are among the most important benefits of the program. More than 75% indicate they would like to continue participation once their current contracts end.

**NORTH DAKOTA**—The Game and Fish Department enrolled new landowners to provide additional walk-in opportunities through the Private Land Open to Sportsmen—Wetland Reserve Program. All landowners are enrolled under a 30-year contract and 83 percent of landowners are satisfied with the program indicating continued access for many years to come. Over the life of each contract, VPA-HIP investments average roughly \$24,000 per year. Based upon user surveys, every dollar of investment is estimated to generate \$8.16 in additional sportsman spending, further benefiting the rural economy and conservation.



**SOUTH DAKOTA**—VPA-HIP funding helped expand the state's successful Walk-In Area (WIA) Program to the southeastern portion of the state where a need for public access was not being adequately met. The state enrolled 156 landowners, opening 28,000 acres of private land and water for public use for an average of 8 years. Over the first year of the program, every dollar of VPA-HIP investment is estimated to have generated \$1.76 in additional sportsman spending, benefiting the rural economy and conservation.



**WISCONSIN**—The Voluntary Public Access Program, which replaced Wisconsin's struggling Public Hunting Grounds program, allowed Wisconsin to nearly double the public land available in their state for hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife viewing. Surveys of these landowners suggest as many as 18 landowners holding just under 3,000 acres (11 percent of total enrolled lands) would have discontinued public access had it not been for the changes brought about by VPA-HIP funding. VPA-HIP investments to landowners for access totaled roughly \$173,000 in 2011. These new acres are anticipated to spur \$364,000 in extra hunter spending, generating a return of \$2.10 for every dollar invested.

# A look at some of the highlights of VPA-HIP.

## VPA-HIP BY THE numbers

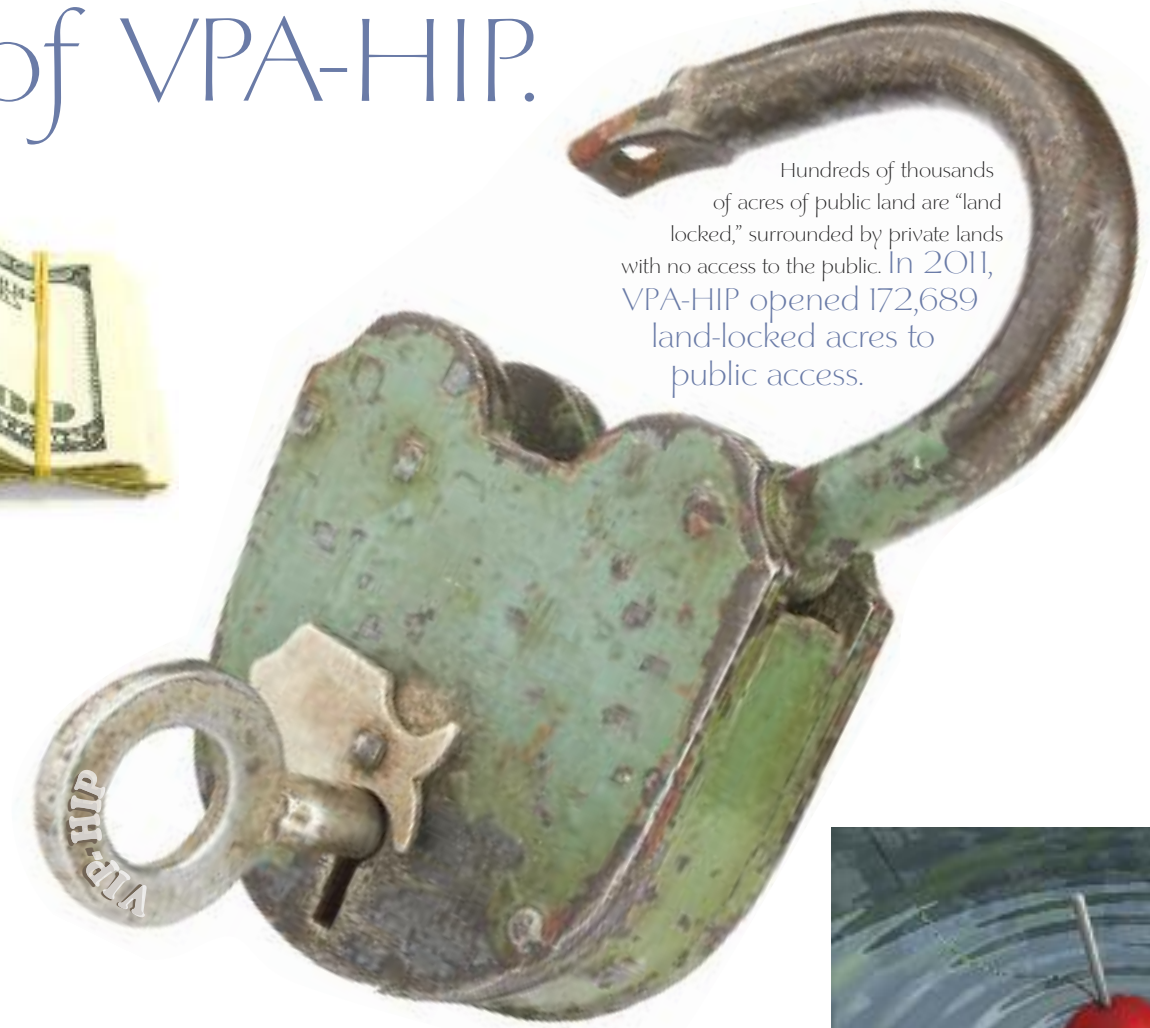
- \$9.1 million invested by HIP in 2011 generated:
  - \$41.7 million dollars in new economic activity,
  - \$14.6 million in salaries, wages and business income
  - 322 full and part-time jobs in hunting and fishing related businesses, as well as in ancillary service industries such as hotels, restaurants, gas stations and retail shops.



A total of 117 miles of stream—nearly the distance from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore and back—were made available for fishing and related recreation supported through VPA-HIP.



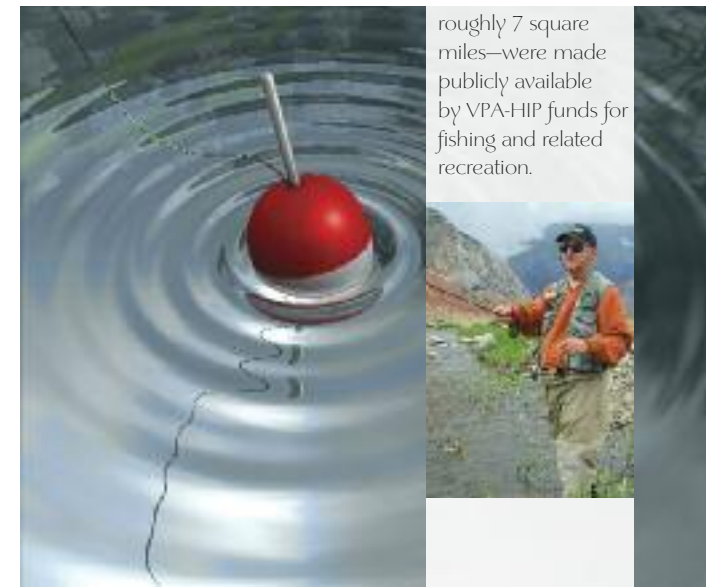
Every VPA-HIP dollar invested returned \$1.99 in retail activity.



Hundreds of thousands of acres of public land are "land locked," surrounded by private lands with no access to the public. In 2011, VPA-HIP opened 172,689 land-locked acres to public access.

In 2011, 4,542 water acres—

roughly 7 square miles—were made publicly available by VPA-HIP funds for fishing and related recreation.



- 1,932 total landowners voluntarily enrolled in state public access programs funded by VPA-HIP in 2011.
- Eighty-three percent of landowners are satisfied with their program, more than 75 percent would like to continue participation and 63 percent of landowners say had it not been for the benefits of participating in their state program, they might not have made their land available to the public.
- VPA-HIP investments in 2011 supported a total of 970,197 acres for public hunting, fishing and related recreation. This equals 1,410 square miles, or more than 20 times larger than the District of Columbia.
- In 2011, 24,173 estimated recreational users in 13 states took advantage of newly enrolled lands available through the VPA-HIP program.

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