



# Outdoor Recreation: An Economic Engine

Why should local leaders promote opportunities for outdoor recreation? Besides improving quality of life for residents and encouraging active, healthy lifestyles, it can mean big bucks for local businesses and communities.

## Quick Facts:

- Outdoor recreation contributes \$821 billion each year to the US economy, supporting 6.5 million jobs.
- Active outdoor recreation employs FIVE times more Americans than Walmart, the world’s largest private employer.
- The yearly sale of gear and trips for outdoor recreation is greater than annual returns from other industries, like pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing, legal services, and power generation and supply.
- A National Park Service study found that National Park visitors spent \$12.13 billion in the local area (within roughly 60 miles of the park). Half of the spending was for lodging and meals, 19% for gas and local transportation, 10% for amusements, 8% for groceries, and 13% for other retail purchases.
- In 2008, nearly a third of U.S. adults went boating at least once.

## Number of Americans Enjoying Outdoor Recreation:

Wildlife Viewing	66 million
Bicycling	60 million
Trails	56 million
Camping	45 million
Fishing	33 million
Paddling	24 million
Snow sports	16 million
Hunting	13 million

## In Pennsylvania:

Tourism is currently the second largest industry in Pennsylvania, with outdoor enthusiasts spending \$4 billion annually, supporting 84,120 jobs and generating \$770 million in taxes. In fact, spending by outdoor recreation enthusiasts accounted for a third of total leisure travel spending in the state.

One of the most thoroughly researched rail trails in the country is the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) rail trail now running 138 miles from just outside downtown Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland, where it joins the C & O Canal Towpath and traverses another 182 miles to Washington D.C.

A market research study looked at economic impact directly related to the GAP for the 2008 and 2009 seasons and credited the trail with over \$40 million in direct spending by trail-users and \$7.2 million in employee wages at trail-related businesses. The eight small rural towns bordering the GAP have noted over 50 new and expanded businesses, resulting in more than 80 new jobs. Business owners indicate 25% of gross revenue is directly attributed to trail users and 2/3 of owners report some increase in revenue due to proximity to trail.





### Who Uses Trails?

The majority of trail users are 35 and older; with a significant percentage 45-54 and up. The household income levels of overnight trail users are significantly higher than average with 34.8% over \$100,000. The typical trail user traveling 50 or more miles will spend twice as much as the trail user traveling less than 50 miles. The average expenditure of an overnight trail user is \$98; day trippers on average spend \$13 per day.

#### Meaningful Tourism

Studies have shown that visitors will pay a premium when they think their purchase is doing good, such as improving the environment, preserving history, or maintaining the culture of an area. Travelers are increasingly looking for opportunities to experience authentic communities.

### Paddling:

- One study found that local paddlers spend an average of \$5 per day, while non-local paddlers spend an average of \$46/day.
- Paddlers benefit existing businesses, including outfitters, restaurants, and hotels.
- In 2008, 7.8 million Americans participated in kayaking, and 9.9 participated in canoeing.
- 47% of kayakers get out on the water at least 1 to 3 times a year.
- Kayaking is one of the top ten adventure activities for baby boomers, following fresh or saltwater fishing, biking, hiking and motorcycling.
- The Outdoor Industry Association names the number one reason for people not going kayaking more often is simply the lack of time. The top reason for going is for relaxation.

### Case Studies

- A National Park Service paper looked at the results of studies from across the country and found that on average paddlers spend \$27-\$63 per day in communities along water trails.
- The median paddler group on the **Northern Forest Canoe Trail** spends about \$215 per trip, primarily at lodging establishments, restaurants, grocery stores, and service stations.
- Approximately 3,078 paddling outings take place annually on the **Lake Superior Water Trail**, in Lake County, MN. Paddlers spend an average of \$34.53 per day.
- Paddlers on the **Roanoke River Trail** near Williamston, NC take approximately 2,220 paddling outings each year, spending an average of \$87.25 per trip. Trail visitors generated an estimated \$193,695 annually in this community of 5,800.
- A survey of users of the **Northern Carolina State Trails Program** found that viewing wildlife and being away from the city represented the top two elements of paddling trips most enjoyed by respondents. Over three quarters of respondents rely on word of mouth to plan their paddling trips. Other top sources for planning include Internet (69%), and books (43%).
- Visitors to **Ohio's Little Miami Scenic Trail** spend approximately \$13.54 per visit on food, drinks, and transportation.
- The **Mineral Wells to Weatherford Trail** near Dallas, TX attracts 300,000 annual visitors and generates \$2 million in local revenue.
- In the first few months following the opening of the **Mineral Belt Trail** in Leadville, CO, officials reported a 19% increase in sales tax revenues.

*The River Town Program is a project of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.*

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