

Benefits of Water Trails

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During the past 15 years, participation in non-motorized boating activities has more than doubled in the state of Oregon (see Table 1 below). In an effort to better manage for this rapidly increasing participation in non-motorized boating, the Oregon Statewide Trails Plan calls for establishing a state-administered program to promote good planning, public involvement and design of water trails throughout the state.

Table 1. Change In Annual Participation - Statewide.
(1987 - 2002)¹

Activity	1987 User Occasions*	2002 User Occasions	Change	% Change
Power Boating	2,668,085	2,751,190	**	**
Non-Motorized Boating***	929,369	2,210,552	1,281,183	+138%

* A user occasion is defined as each time an individual participates in a single outdoor recreation activity

** Within the +/- 8% Confidence Interval.

*** Non-motorized boating includes canoeing, sea kayaking, whitewater kayaking and whitewater rafting.

In Oregon, water trails (like other recreational trails) are corridors between specific locations on a lake, river or ocean. Water trails are primarily designed for small watercraft such as canoes, sea and whitewater kayaks, rafts and drift boats. Necessary water trail facilities include a safe place for the public to put in, parking, restrooms, a safe place to take out, and in some cases day-use sites and overnight campsites. Water trails offer a variety of challenge levels on white water, flat water and tidewater and emphasize low-impact use and provide stewardship of the resource.

The following is a summary of the many benefits that water trails can provide to the state of Oregon.

1. Economic Benefits. As previously mentioned, non-motorized boating has grown in popularity in recent years in the state of Oregon. This increase in participation translates into financial benefits for communities that provide access to water trails. Water trails as a recreation destination provide rural communities with income to local boat liveries and outfitters, motels and bed and breakfasts, restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations and shops.²

Evidence from economic studies include:

¹ Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (2003). 2003-2007 Oregon Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. pp. 4-12.

² Water Trails For Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin Extension.

- An Oregon study of guides and packers³ indicates that in 1986, the outfitter/guide industry in Oregon (for river, land and marine activities) had a direct impact of \$42.5 million. This resulted in a total economic impact of \$300 million to the overall Oregon economy.
- River recreation in Oregon is one of the activities that attracts people from other areas. In the Columbia Gorge region (consisting of Hood River and Wasco Counties), revenues from transient lodging taxes grew just over 25% during 1992/93, following a similar increase of approximately 21.4% in the previous fiscal year⁴.
- For every \$1 paid to canoeing outfitters, customers spent \$5 for gas, groceries, restaurants, campgrounds, and other lodging. Seventy canoe liveries in Florida generate \$38.5 million per year⁵.
- During the 1999 summer season, anglers and canoeists combined brought \$2.2 million of new spending to the Kickapoo and Timber Coulee watersheds in the state of Wisconsin⁶. The total estimated economic impact was \$3.25 million, which helped to support approximately 85 local jobs. Approximately 80% of the canoeists rented boats from one of the local liveries. An average canoeist spent \$93 during their trip. That included boat rental, a night in a motel or campground, beer in a local tavern or breakfast at a local diner.
- In 2001, kayakers, rafters and other recreational users of the Wild and Scenic reach of the Chattooga River in northwestern South Carolina, northeastern Georgia, and southwestern North Carolina spent \$1.8 million in the six county area, resulting in a \$2.7 million overall economic contribution⁷.
- The Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America estimated that a total of \$200 million was spent on retail sales for paddle sports outdoor recreation equipment, apparel, and accessories in 1996.
- According to a survey conducted by the National Association of Canoe Liveries and Outfitters, the average river trip covers 10.8 miles and takes 4 hours and 15 minutes, the average charge per guest is \$13.00, and 85% of guests are between 20-50 years of age.

³ Bureau of Land Management (1987). Recreation 2000. Washington, D.C. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.

⁴ Oregon Tourism Division (1994). 1992 Economic Impacts and Visitor Volume in Oregon. Prepared by Dean Runyan Associates, Portland, OR: Oregon Tourism Division, Economic Development Department.

⁵ Stout, A. (1986). Testimony at Orlando, Florida PCAO hearing.

⁶ Anderson, A., Hewitt, L. and Marcouiller, D. (2001). Canoeing and Angling in Southwestern Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin-Extension. Madison, WI.

⁷ Moore, R., and Siderlis, C. (2003). Wild and Scenic Chattooga River An Economic Asset to Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

- A study in San Jose, California⁸ reported that "People who exercise regularly have 14% lower claims against their medical insurance, 30% fewer days in the hospital, and have 41% fewer claims greater than \$5,000."

2. Recreational Value and Health Benefits.

The recreational value of water trails are often their foremost attraction. In addition to the entertainment values of recreation, there is a significant health and fitness benefit as paddling involves exercise. This health benefit accrues to the individual, and, in the form of reduced health-care costs, to society as well.

Many people realize exercise is important for maintaining good health in all stages of life, however many do not regularly exercise. The U.S. Surgeon General estimates⁹ that 60% of American adults are not regularly active and another 25% are not active at all. In communities across the country, people do not have access to trails, parks, or other recreation areas close to their homes. Water trails provide a safe, inexpensive avenue for regular exercise for people living in rural, urban and suburban areas¹⁰.

Exercise derived from recreational activities lessens health related problems and subsequent health care costs. Regular, moderate exercise has been proven to reduce the risk of developing coronary heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, and depression. This kind of exercise is also know to protect against injury and disability because it builds muscular strength and flexibility, which helps to maintain functional independence in later years of life¹¹. A nationwide study on the cost of obesity¹², concluded that increasing participation in regular moderate activity amount the more than 88 million inactive Americans over age 15 could reduce annual national medical costs by \$76 billion in 2000 dollars.

Every year, premature deaths cost American companies an estimated 132 million lost work days at a price tag of \$25 billion. Finding and training replacements costs industry more than \$700 million each year. In addition, American businesses lose an estimated \$3 billion every year because of employee health problems (National Park Service, 1983).

3. Conservation/Stewardship Benefits.

Water trail activities can support the conservation of the aquatic and shore land ecosystems. Trail builders and activists are a respected constituency who advocate for resource protection, and participate in resource restoration. The water trail community

⁸ City of San Jose (1988). Feasibility Study: Corporate Wellness Program. Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1996). Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health. Department of Health and Human Services. July 1996.

¹⁰ Benefits of Trails and Greenways. From Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse.

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1996). Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health. Department of Health and Human Services. July 1996.

¹² Pratt, M., Macera, C., and Wang, G. (2000). Higher Direct Medical Costs Associated With Physical Inactivity. The Physician and Sports Medicine 28(10).

is a watchdog (e.g. through the citizen enforcement provision of the Clean Water Act), helping to prevent damage to the environment and striving to sustain the natural integrity of the trail and its watershed¹³.

By promoting minimum-impact practices, water trails embrace the "Leave No Trace" code of outdoor ethics that promote the responsible use and enjoyment of the outdoors. A trail user who is educated to respect the quality of the water, shore land vegetation and wildlife habitat is a good caretaker. As users learn protection and restoration on the trail, they will be inclined to apply these principles in their daily lives¹⁴.

4. Educational Benefits

Water trail organizations use comprehensive trail guides, signage, public outreach, and informative classes to encourage awareness of the natural, cultural, and historical attributes of the trail¹⁵.

Every teacher knows the value of outdoor laboratories, the value of learning from real life. Students have great experiences along pathways or in the fields. But what about marine and riverine environments? Not every community can build an aquarium. Water trails connect the teacher and the student with these ecosystems and their living population. The water trail is a perfect classroom for the teaching biologist, botanist, and ecologist, both amateur and professional. Educators naturalists, rangers and scoutmasters—all can demonstrate and illustrate their lessons along the water trail¹⁶.

Chances are your community started at the water's edge. Prior to the railroad, virtually all of community development occurred along North American's waterways. Water was the primary means of transportation. Communities great and small trace their beginnings to waterside commerce, industry, or transportation. Whether they were Native American settlements, military encampments, early European-settled villages, trading posts, outposts on the trails west, or fishing communities or seaports, Oregon grew up along the water. As a result, water trails touch Oregon's being like no other concept.

So as a water trail proceeds, it touches and laces together sites through which our heritage can be experienced and understood. Seen from a small boat, our communities' roots are manifest. Water trails become linear classrooms for your children. And visitors will come to share your history with you¹⁷.

¹³ Wisconsin Water Trails: Basic Concepts. Lakes Partnership.

¹⁴ Water Trails for Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin Extension.

¹⁵ Water Trails for Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin Extension.

¹⁶ North American Water Trails, Inc. Why Water Trails?

¹⁷ North American Water Trails, Inc. Why Water Trails?