Over 1,000 paddlers were surveyed during the summer of 2006 to determine the economic impact of paddler recreation along sections of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail (NFCT), a 740 mile canoe route spanning New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

A full version of the report can be found at http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/

Methodology

Economic impacts were assessed in six regions: the Moose & Raquette Rivers, NY (58 mi.); the Missisquoi River Delta, VT (10 mi.); the Clyde & Connecticut Rivers, VT (38 mi.); the Androscoggin River, NH (10 mi.); Rangeley Lake, ME (8 mi.); and the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, ME (90 mi.).

Paddlers were surveyed at boat launches through the use of registration kiosks and in-person interviews conducted by University of Vermont researchers. Visitation rates were estimated by observing the use of registration kiosks and by surveying campground and lodging establishments.

A range of paddlers recreated on the waterways.* Expenditure data was categorized by accommodation type, and MGM2 (an input-output modeling software) was used to calculate economic impacts.

Types of paddlers*

- Canoe campers: 24%
- Local day users: 17%
- Non-local day users: 13%
- Campground campers: 20%
- Hotel, cabin renters: 20%
- Second home owners: 6%

*Canoe campers are paddlers on multi-day, backcountry trips. Campground campers stay in road accessible campsites. Local day users live within 25 miles of the waterway.
Paddler expenditures compared to other tourists

Paddlers make similar levels of expenditures compared to other tourists. A recent study of Vermont visitors reported average per visitor expenditures of $192, comparable to this study’s estimate of $185. While results vary between studies, paddler trip expenditures are also similar to snowmobilers.

Paddler knowledge of the NFCT

The NFCT is fairly visible, with 65% of paddlers reported some knowledge of the NFCT.

The NFCT is also beginning to attract users; 17.7% indicated it was a reason for their trip.

Managers at 35% of waterway lodging establishments reported either knowing a lot or a few things about the NFCT.

Visitation rates across the waterways

The Adirondacks had the heaviest use, followed by the Allagash, the Northeast Kingdom, Rangeley Lake, the Androscoggin, and the Missisquoi River. Standardized by waterway miles, Rangeley Lake and the Adirondacks appear to have the highest use intensity, due to the presence of state campgrounds and waterway lodging establishments. The results of other studies also show a wide range in visitation levels and use intensities across rivers and lakes.

NFCT visitation rates compared to other waterways

While paddlers came from a variety of locales, most live in the northeastern U.S. and the majority were paddling in their home state. The median group traveled 3.5 hours to reach their destination.

The results suggest that paddler recreation and tourism can positively impact local economies. Expenditures by new visitors attracted by the NFCT may help stabilize and diversify the local economy, supporting a greater mix of businesses in rural communities.

Local communities have an important role to play in guiding the development of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail. Economic benefits can be increased by expanding camping and lodging opportunities on both public and private lands, constructing rustic shelters to attract additional users, developing and supporting guide training and promotion initiatives, holding organized events such as canoe races and festivals, and participating in collaborative marketing efforts.

At the same time, local communities and the NFCT must work together to proactively plan and implement strategies to minimize the negative social and environmental impacts of increased visitation, which may include the spread of invasive aquatic species, wildlife disturbance, increased traffic, overcrowding of waterways, and land degradation at campsites.

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