

Study: State park system a strong driver of economic, ecosystem health

The Washington state park system provides access to a bounty of Washington's most beautiful and significant natural and cultural heritage sites for outdoor recreation and education. A recent study concludes that access to these sites generates significant contributions to the state's economy and ecological health.

The August 2015 report, "Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation at Washington State Parks," was completed by Earth Economics of Tacoma. The study confirms that more than 35 million annual visits to state parks result in a total economic contribution of \$1.4 billion, including \$95 million for state and local taxes. During the 2013-15 study period, the park system generated six times the tax receipts it received in its budget to operate the system.



Beacon Rock State Park

The study also notes that the state park system creates jobs, contributes to tourism and especially benefits rural communities.

Among specific findings, the study notes that state parks annually generate:

- \$803 million in travel expenditures such as gas, food and fees
- \$721 million in outdoor equipment purchases – for backpacks, boats and tents
- 14,000 full- and part-time jobs in food and beverage services, wholesale trade and petroleum-related sectors
- \$212 million in federal, state and local tax revenues.



Sun Lakes-Dry Falls State Park

State parks generate \$64 million annually to the state’s General Fund. Currently, State Parks receives \$15.6 million a year in General Fund and other public funding sources (\$31.1 million for the 2015-17 biennium).

The report further finds that state parks generate between \$500 million and \$1.2 billion a year of “ecosystem service value.” This value measures the economic benefits people derive from natural ecosystems—for example, aesthetics, habitat for wildlife, and natural water filtration to sustain local water systems.

The Earth Economics’ state parks research is an offshoot of a statewide study from earlier this year, called “Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State.” The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission initiated this latest study to understand the specific effects of the state park system on the state economy as part of its Transformation Strategy goal of demonstrating that all citizens benefit from state parks and services.

The Commission also wanted to understand the system’s specific economic benefits to tourism and to individual counties.

To view the study report, visit online at bit.ly/ParksEcon

