

Think Outside!

New England's Outdoor Recreation Economy



What's the Issue?

The rugged hills, forests, trails, mountains, rivers, and lakes of New England are not just a scenic backdrop to our iconic region – they are intricately tied to our culture, history and economy. Our natural landscape provides the allure of adventure to visitors from near and far, setting the stage for economic opportunity in communities throughout New England.

As the outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism industries continue to grow, so does their contribution to our region's economy. Currently, over 400,000 people are employed in these industries in New England, and consumers spend nearly \$52 billion each year on outdoor recreation in the region. However, the demand for additional recreation opportunities in the forests, mountains and waterways of our region continue to grow. Even with great advances in protecting public and private land in the past two decades, New England continues to lose 24,000 acres per year of forests to diffuse development. The only way to ensure the outdoor recreation and nature tourism industries—and thus, the rural communities in New England which depend on them—continue to grow and thrive is through permanent conservation of the landscapes on which they rely.



Photo: Charlie Reinertsen, courtesy New England Forestry Foundation

Land Permanently Protected

9.8 million acres

26% of forests

Outdoor Recreation Economy 2,000 jobs

\$51.6 billion per year in consumer spending

\$7.6 billion per year in state and federal tax revenues

Strength of the Outdoor Recreation Economy

Each year, visitors from around the world come to hike, fish, bike, ski, hunt, snowmobile, and simply enjoy the scenery in New England's forests and along its waterways. Tourism is currently the predominant industry in rural New England, employing 14.2% of its population, and generating \$51.6 billion in consumer spending and \$7.6 billion in state and federal tax revenues in the region. According to a report this year by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, the outdoor recreation economy is growing at nearly double the rate of the overall economy (3.8% and 2%, respectively, in 2016). Counties with recreation-based tourism¹ see a faster growth in employment and higher overall employment levels, especially among youth and senior citizens, than those without this industry.

Something for Everyone

Outdoor recreation and tourism bring 40% of New England's residents, as well as visitors from around the world, into the region's natural spaces. The countless ways to enjoy the outdoors present ample opportunity for growth and innovation in this sector. The White Mountains National Forest alone welcomes 6 million visitors per year, many of whom come to hike, ski, and snowmobile. The 4 million visitors to Cape Cod National Seashore engage in a variety of other activities, including fishing, kayaking, whale watching, and relaxing on the beach. Visitors contribute to the local economy, buying supplies, eating at local restaurants, and staying at hotels and lodges. This contribution is possible because some of the special places visitors come to enjoy have been made accessible and are protected from development. Yet others remain unprotected.

Land Protection Supports Small Businesses

CASE STUDY: Millinocket, Maine

Land protection provides opportunities for outdoor tourism and recreation, which supports local businesses. According to Matthew Polstein, owner of the New England Outdoor Center (NEOC) in Millinocket, ME, business has already benefitted from protection of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument: “[Tourists] came and stayed with us, citing talk of a new national monument in the Katahdin region as the catalyst for their visit. The monument breathed new life into our fall [business] and drove a 33 percent year-over-year increase in revenue at [NEOC’s] River Drivers Restaurant as day and overnight visitation to the region grew.”²



Mountain biking in Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.
Photo: Susan Adams

Importance of Protected Lands

Outdoor recreation is the primary use of the National Forest System’s protected lands, and 38% of private conservation easements also require some form of public access for recreation. People cannot participate in outdoor recreation activities without access to protected natural open spaces. Although much of the land currently used for recreation is already conserved, adding additional lands can meet the growing demand for outdoor recreation and other nature-based tourism. Additionally, core recreation hotspots and wilderness areas need to be buffered by additional protected land to protect the scenic beauty of the landscape. Patchy development diminishes this natural beauty visitors are seeking, and thus negatively affects the industry.

Conclusion

Investing in conservation has often been considered a luxury. But now, it is time to rethink how we approach investments in conservation as investments in our livelihoods, our communities, and our natural assets. Outdoor recreation in both urban and rural areas depends on the existence of undeveloped lands in perpetuity; only by elevating conservation of these lands to the higher funding priority level they deserve can this crucial New England industry thrive.

Notes

¹ 14 Feb., 2018. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account: Prototype Statistics for 2012-2016. Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Dept of Commerce.

² Gilroy, John. Pew Charitable Trust, [Conservation of Public Lands Helps Small Businesses Thrive](#), April 30, 2018.

State	Consumer Spending (\$ billion)	Direct Jobs	State and Local Tax Revenues (\$ million)
Connecticut	\$9.0	69,000	\$743
Maine	\$8.2	76,000	\$548
Massachusetts	\$16.2	120,000	\$911
New Hampshire	\$8.7	79,000	\$528
Rhode Island	\$4.0	37,000	\$293
Vermont	\$5.5	51,000	\$505
New England	\$51.6	432,000	\$3,528

Outdoor recreation generates billions in consumer spending in all New England states, while also creating jobs and contributing to state and local tax revenues.

*For further discussion of these issues, complete sources for statistics and other resources, see Holland, I., Culbertson, K., and S.R. Meyer. 2018. *The Economic Case for Conservation*. Highstead Foundation, Redding, CT.*

Highstead is a regional conservation organization dedicated to conserving the New England landscape and achieving the Wildlands and Woodlands vision through science, sound stewardship, and collaboration with our regional partners.

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