Public Comment Opportunity to Inform How the Outdoor Recreation Economy is Defined

Last year, Congress directed the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) to measure the outdoor recreation economy per the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact (REC) Act of 2016. Now the BEA is seeking public input in defining what activities should be considered part of the outdoor recreation sector – the first step in measuring the industry’s contribution to the U.S. economy.

The Mountain Pact gives you a run down on the latest data from the Outdoor Industry Association, the BEA process, and how you can submit comment by the May 26 deadline.

The Outdoor Recreation Industry's Economic Contribution
The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) released its latest report detailing the significance of the outdoor economy both economically, and socially. No surprise: they found the outdoor recreation industry to be one of the largest economic sectors in the United States. The outdoor recreation economy generates: $887 billion in annual consumer spending, 7.6 million direct jobs, and $125 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue.

OIA defines recreation as:

- Camping (RV, Tent, rustic lodge)
- Fishing
- Hunting (shotgun, rifle, bow)
Motorcycling (on and off-road)
Off-roading (ATV, ROV, Dune buggy, 4x4 and Jeep)
Snowsports (x-country, downhill, telemark and nordic skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, snowshoeing)
Trail sports (hiking, backpacking, rock or ice climbing, running, horseback riding, mountaineering)
Watersports (kayaking, rafting, canoeing, surfing, scuba diving, sailing, stand-up paddleboarding, boating)
Wheel sports (bicycling, skateboarding)
Wildlife viewing

Consumer spending on outdoor recreation is more than Americans spend on pharmaceuticals and fuel combined, and the hunting and fishing sector of the outdoor recreation economy alone provides more than twice as many direct jobs as oil and gas extraction. These jobs span beyond positions in guiding or park service employment; outdoor recreation jobs also include product developers, retailers, and professionals in the manufacturing and marketing realms.

Americans annually spend $702.3 billion on trips and travel related to outdoor recreation. This includes things such as: airfare, lodging, groceries, guides, and lessons, much of which contributes directly to the communities close to recreation opportunities. With $125 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue, of which $59.2 billion is state and local tax revenue, this industry stimulates both the national and local economies.

Importance of Outdoor Recreation to Mountain Communities
The outdoor recreation industry depends on healthy public lands and waters, which are the basic infrastructure for the industry. Many communities in the Intermountain West are surrounded by these lands and their economies are inextricably linked to the health of public lands. In fact, 46.9% of land in the West is owned by either the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or the U.S. Department of Interior, and studies have found that rural counties closer to a larger number of national public lands out-perform rural counties close to fewer public lands in several key economic factors.

Outdoor recreation supports healthy communities, contributes to a high quality of life, and attracts businesses, families, and workers. Continuing to invest in this infrastructure, is a continued investment in the long-term health of our communities.

Outdoor REC Act and Bureau of Economic Analysis Study
The Outdoor REC Act, signed into law in December 2016, directs the Department of Commerce—via the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and in collaboration with the Federal Recreation Council (FRC)—to measure the economic contribution of the outdoor recreation industry to the overall U.S. economy. The BEA produces official government statistics, and the FRC is made up of seven agencies dedicated to protection and management of public lands and waters. These agencies are: the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and
Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Per the Outdoor REC Act, together, these agencies will begin a new study to inform the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA), that will for the first time create separate and distinct recognition of the contribution of the outdoor recreation industry to the U. S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Once the ORSA numbers are finalized, they will provide valuable information when it comes to making the case for the protection and restoration of the public lands and waters that the outdoor economy relies on.

In early 2017 sixteen Mountain Pact towns and fourteen chambers of commerce sent letters to congressional leadership and the White House expressing the importance of the outdoor recreation economy to their communities and urging President Trump to support the Bureau of Economic Analysis in conducting the study. The completion of this study is essential for recognizing the universality of the outdoor recreation industry, and providing evidence for the necessity of further protection of the public lands that the outdoor economy and our communities depend upon.

How Mountain Communities Can Help

The first of three steps in creating the ORSA and measuring the outdoor recreation economy will be for these agencies to conduct a comprehensive study to define what activities and industries are encompassed by the outdoor recreation economy.

Through May 26, the BEA is seeking input from experts, as well as accepting public comment on the matter. They are asking for public comment in regards to:

- which recreation-related activities should be considered as in scope for the ORSA;
- the types of statistics that potential users of the ORSA would like to see presented in the account in addition to output, value added, employment, and compensation;
- information about datasets that could supplement BEA’s core statistics in estimating shares for partially-in-scope goods and services; and
- information on datasets that could be used for possible future regionalization of the account.

Continued protection of, and future investments in public lands and waters will be significantly increased by the speedy completion of this study that will officially recognize the outdoor recreation economy for the powerhouse that it is. The public comment period ends on May 26, when the BEA and FRC will move on to preparing prototype estimates of the industry’s economic contributions.

In support of our mountain communities and the public lands that enhance and sustain them, The Mountain Pact will submit a letter that highlights the integrity of the OIA’s existing definitions of the outdoor economy, supports the completion of the BEA study, and maximizes the role that public lands play in what is defined as the outdoor recreation economy.

Because of the tight turnaround, this will not be a large sign on letter, however we encourage each of you to submit a comment as well, which you can do either by submitting directly to BEA (OutdoorRecreation@bea.gov) or through the Outdoor Industry Association's website.
Please contact us if you'd like template language or with any questions.

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