

Article #: 39

Title: Valuing Nature-Based Recreation in Public Natural Areas of the Apalachicola River Region, Florida

Authors: Ram K. Shrestha, Taylor V. Stein, and Julie Clark

Journal: Journal of Environmental Management (article in press)

Date: 2007

Pages: 9 p(KB 11/12/08)M

Abstract:

This paper analyzes visitors' demand and estimates economic value for nature-based recreation in the Apalachicola River region in Florida using the travel cost method. This is of particular concern in Florida, where population density and number of annual tourists have risen dramatically and are projected to continue rising, putting pressure on natural areas to provide nature-based recreation. Five recreation areas were chosen for this study based on their level of development, access, and recreational opportunities.

Fishing (25.7%), camping (16.5%), and hiking (13.9%) were most often rated as participants' most satisfying recreation activities. Those who find fishing and boating as the most satisfying recreational activities have higher trip demand in the Apalachicola River region. Of demographic variables, only education was a significant predictor of recreation trip demand, as frequent visitors are relatively less educated. The average economic value of nature-based recreation visits in the Apalachicola River region is \$787.76 per trip. This relatively high amount is due to the higher amount multi-day trips typical to more undeveloped, pristine natural areas. When divided by the average number of days per trip, the amount is \$74.18 per day. This is a relatively high value when compared to other studies; for example, an analysis of 30 years of outdoor recreation economic values revealed a value of \$47.10 per day. Using the annual estimated recreation visits of 615,117 individuals, the aggregate economic value of the region is estimated to be \$484.56 million, based mainly on the 87% of people who visit either Apalachicola National Forest (64%) and St. George Island State Park (23%). While increased development to increase visitors is important, the pristine, undeveloped state of the Apalachicola River region clearly creates a high demand and overall economic value for recreation in this region and should also be preserved. In addition, those who visit undeveloped sites also visit sites in the region regularly, so providing greater opportunities to access these areas and informing the public of their existence is also important.