



## N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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Release: Immediate  
Date: May 22, 2008

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### **STATE PARKS MAKE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL ECONOMIES**

**RALEIGH** – North Carolina’s state parks potentially contribute \$289 million to local economies annually as well as \$120 million to local residents’ income, according to an intensive study researchers at N.C. State University conducted for the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation.

Fourteen state parks examined in the yearlong study contributed at least \$139 million annually when spending by tourists was combined with direct spending in the local communities by the parks. The study found that “tourist” visitors to those parks spent an average of \$23.56 a day to enjoy the outdoors. In addition, the parks’ impact on local residents’ income was estimated to be \$56 million annually.

The study projected the total potential economic impact based on statewide attendance and assumed similar travel and spending patterns for all visitors to the system’s 36 state parks and state recreation areas. For purposes of the study, “tourist” visitors were defined as those non-local visitors whose primary purpose for a trip was to visit a state park.

The researchers interviewed 852 “tourist” visitors in the 14 parks studied and found that the average group is 3.14 people and the average stay in a local community is 1.73 days. Thus, the average group spends \$127.98 during a park visit for such things as food, lodging, souvenirs, services and equipment.

“Our state parks stand on their own as stunning conservation lands representing North Carolina’s rich natural heritage,” said Lewis Ledford, director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. “And, record visitation shows our citizens and visitors value them as such. The economic contributions revealed in this study suggest that the true value of state parks to local communities and the state is much greater than we realized.”

In 2007, state parks reported record-level visitation of 13.4 million. That represents more than three times the combined attendance for the Carolina Panthers, Lowe’s Motor Speedway events and Atlantic Coast Conference basketball games in North Carolina.

The study was conducted by Recreation Resources Service of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at N.C. State University. Researchers visited each of the 14 parks between three and five times during the year on weekdays and weekends. The researchers interviewed 2,164 park visitors to determine a percentage of “tourist” visitors. The data was then analyzed with IMPLAN modeling software, an industry standard for economic impact research.

State parks vary in size, style and personality. So, researchers chose parks that represent a broad cross-section of

the parks system, including some with high day-use attendance, such as Jockey's Ridge and Hammocks Beach state parks and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, as well as those popular for weekend camping trips, such as Stone Mountain and Hanging Rock state parks. Large and small parks, as well as those in urban and rural communities, were included in the study.

The researchers noted that estimates of annual economic impact are conservative based on the narrow focus of the study. Local residents visiting the state parks and so-called "casual" visitors who traveled primarily for other reasons were not surveyed.

The study found that the percentage of "tourist" – non-local, primary purpose – visitors varies widely at different types of parks, from 17 percent at Eno River State Park in Durham County to 75 percent at Merchants Millpond State Park in Gates County.

Another finding is that the degree of economic impact is greater in those communities that offer a broad range of services, such as restaurants, lodging, retail shopping, repair shops and outfitters.

Analysis of the research shows that the state parks make a considerable economic contribution directly to the communities, through operations' budgets and jobs. The direct impact of the 14 parks studied was \$15 million in sales, \$10 million in personal income and 256.9 full-time equivalent jobs. The parks' capital projects were not included. Nor were park fees, such as those fees for camping, since those revenues are returned directly to North Carolina's general fund.

When this park spending is combined with the impact of "tourist" visitor spending, the annual economic impact in 2007 ranged from \$1.73 million at Eno River State Park to \$20 million at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area. In 2007, Eno River State Park had 341,646 visitors and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area had 834,544 visitors.

(NOTE TO EDITORS: The complete economic study, including separate reports on parks participating in the study, and 2007 attendance totals are available on our Web site, [www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov). Click "News" and find links from this media release).

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