

THE VALUE OF RECREATIONAL BOATING IN FLORIDA

A four-year study of Florida's boating access facilities and their economics significance was recently completed for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). This study is the largest single effort to evaluate recreational boating in Florida completed to date and includes several components.

Facilities Inventory: The project includes a facilities inventory of coastal and inland recreational boating access facilities, including ramps, marinas, dockominiums, private clubs, dry storage facilities, hotels/restaurants, commercial establishments and large residential development with recreational boat dockage. This data was collected to use in economic analysis of recreational boating, but will be available via an online guide so that boaters can access information on any boating facility in the state, queried by county or region.

Economic Significance of Recreational Boating in Florida: The economic analysis estimated expenditures made by recreational boaters to determine the stream of dollars through local communities, the region and the state. The estimates were based on online surveys completed by boaters from around the state. The report shows the state's boaters spent \$3.38 billion on boating trips in 2007 and \$5.15 billion in watercraft expenses, which together supported 97,000 jobs. The economic effect of these same activities in Charlotte County was \$86.76 million in trip spending and \$103.85 million in watercraft spending, to-

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gether supporting 2,702.6 jobs.

Future Demand: The report predicts a 1.8 percent decline statewide in boating demand by 2025 in Florida. About half the 63 counties in the study will see a decrease in boating which is attributed to changes in population demographics in those counties. Southwest Florida however is projected to see an increase in boating demand over the same period. Lee County is projected to see the greatest increase in demand for saltwater boating (8.98%) in 2025. Lee is followed by Collier, Citrus, Hernando, Levy and then Charlotte counties in 2025 projected growth for saltwater boating. In Charlotte County, the 2025 projected boating demand increase is 7.59% for freshwater and 5.14% for saltwater.

Economic Value: Economic value (termed Consumer Surplus) is used to measure the value boaters gain from the experience of boating. This analysis looks at the choices boaters make in determining access points, such as number of lanes, distance by road, distance to water destination, condition of ramp, parking spaces, restrooms, seagrasses, etc. The report demonstrated the importance of launch lanes, parking and overall ramp condition as well as the site's overall condition (such as restrooms at a ramp). Artificial reefs, seagrasses and management areas were all seen as important. Negatives included traveling costs to ramps and on the west coast of Florida manatee zones.

Capital Budgeting for Boat Ramps: For evaluating priorities for capital budgeting, the report applied three criteria to all counties for both freshwater and saltwater launches and then ranked them according to how many times a county made the top 15 list for each criteria. The criteria used was (1) lane congestion (most congested); (2) demand forecast (highest growth); and (3) consumer surplus (largest CS). If a county made three lists it is considered a highest priority county; two lists make it a high priority; and one list makes it a priority.

For freshwater access, Collier County was the only county to make the highest priority list. Charlotte County made the high priority list along with Sarasota County and seven other counties across the state. For saltwater access, Charlotte County is on the highest priority list along with Citrus, Lee, Sarasota, Pasco, Levy and St. Johns counties.

Capital budget projections use cost estimates for land acquisition and ramp construction tied to projected demand and present ramp infrastructure. The study projects a price tag of \$68 million to \$111 million to maintain state's boaters' access to water at the 2006 level (baseline) over the next 15 years.

In order to meet the demand for boating in 2025, the report indicates that Charlotte County will need to spend 2.5-3.4 million, depending on the size of the access sites. Most of that amount will be needed to meet saltwater demand (1.8-3.0 million). (estimates based on FWC and Florida DEP sources and assumes the average boat lane costs approximately \$100,000 to design, permit and construct and require between 1.5 and 2.5 acres of property).

The entire report is available at www.myfwc.com/About/About_economics.htm.

Source "Florida Boating Access Facilities Inventory and Economic Study", Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. RFP No. FWC 04/05-23. September 2009.

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