



What are New Hampshire's Surface Waters Worth?

(September 2008)



Surface waters, including lakes, contribute to the high quality of life enjoyed in New Hampshire.

New Hampshire is home to approximately 1,000 lakes and ponds and approximately 10,000 miles of rivers and streams. Not only are these surface waters important to the ecological health of the state, they contribute to our quality of life and to the state's economy. But, exactly how important are surface waters to New Hampshire's economy?

In 2001, the Lakes, Rivers, Streams, and Ponds Partnership, comprised of many lake and river non-profit organizations and state agencies, kicked off a four-phase economic study to determine the extent to which surface waters contribute to New Hampshire's economy. The hope of the study was that policy makers and citizens, with this knowledge, would take better care of state's surface waters, creating healthier waterbodies.

While many interesting results were generated by this comprehensive study which took place between 2001 and 2006, some of the most significant findings, which still ring true today, are discussed below:

"Estimates of Select Economic Values of New Hampshire's Lakes, Rivers, Streams and Ponds" (Phase II - 2003): This portion of the study found that just five uses of New Hampshire's surface waters contribute 1.8 billion dollars annually to the economy, as follows:

- Boating: \$328 – \$352 million
- Fishing: \$245 – \$352 million

- Swimming: \$269 – \$380 million
- Drinking Water: \$276 – \$301 million
- Waterfront Taxes: \$276 – \$301 million

In addition, the study found that New Hampshire surface waters attract approximately 14.7 million visitor days annually, provide approximately 10,900 – 17,600 full and part-time jobs, and generate household income of approximately \$395 – \$487 million annually.

“Public Opinion Poll Results in the Study of Select Economic Values of New Hampshire’s Lakes, Rivers, Streams and Ponds” (Phase III - 2004): This telephone survey of New Hampshire residents asking what they think of the state’s surface waters found that 90% of respondents were “satisfied” with their overall experience on the state’s surface waters. However, the study also showed that 58% of survey respondents said that natural views and scenery have gotten worse due to development, and that the three most important reasons why they avoid certain New Hampshire freshwater bodies are pollution, overcrowding (people and boats), and poor water quality.

Of those surveyed, users also reported that they are concerned about problems affecting our waters and they will reduce their use—and related spending—if problems worsened. For example:

- 58% would decrease use if water levels/flows worsened
- 67% would decrease use if invasive plants worsened
- 70% would decrease use if algal blooms worsened
- 71% would decrease use if mercury worsened
- 75% would decrease use if crowding worsened

“The Economic Impact of Potential Decline in New Hampshire Water Quality” (Phase IV - 2006): This survey, conducted at access points to surface waters throughout the state, was designed to answer the question “How would the New Hampshire economy be affected if resident and non-resident recreationalists who fish, boat and swim perceive any negative changes to the water quality in the areas where they recreate?”

The survey showed that perceived degradation to water clarity and purity would result in the following statewide:

- \$51 million of lost sales
- \$18 million in lost income
- More than 800 lost jobs

In the Lakes Region alone, the survey showed that perceived degradation to water clarity and purity would result in the following:

- Lost sales: \$25 million
- Lost income: \$8.8 million
- Lost jobs: 396

Even if you don’t have a personal connection to a lake, pond, river or stream in New Hampshire, please make the results of this economic study part of your daily discussion with lawmakers and friends. As our

surface water resources in New Hampshire will undoubtedly come under more pressure in the future as our population grows and spreads out on the landscape, we will all need to become better stewards of the land and water to help protect the quality of life we currently enjoy.

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For information, visit www.nhlakes.org, email info@nhlakes.org, or call 603.226.0299.

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