

**The Economic Significance and Impacts of
West Virginia's State Parks and Forests**



Study conducted by:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the 1920's West Virginia State Parks and Forests have been an oasis for recreation, relaxation, and rejuvenation for millions of visitors. The West Virginia system is comprised of ten lodge / resort state parks, twenty-six cabin, camping and day use state parks, two rail trails, and eight state forests (See map contained in Appendix A). This diverse range of offerings enables a rich set of activities and amenities for visitors. Activities ranging from bicycling to birding, from gaga ball to geocaching, from Segway riding to skiing, can be found in this vast network of unique and picturesque locations.

As one might imagine, the millions of visitors attracted annually to West Virginia State Parks and Forests spawn a large amount of economic activity throughout the State. The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources has called for an updated economic significance and impact study based upon fiscal year 2014-2015 [referred to in this report as FY15] revenue data. A previous study was conducted nearly two decades ago: it was released in 1998 using data from the FY97 fiscal year (gai consultants, 1998). Parks, visitors, and economic conditions have changed significantly over the past two decades giving rise for the need for the updated study detailed in this report. A summary of key findings of this study are as follows:

- In FY15, West Virginia State Parks and Forests attracted 7.1 million visitors who spent \$226.5 million throughout the state during these trips. Approximately, 46 percent [\$103.6 million] of this spending was by out-of-state visitors.
- The total economic significance of West Virginia State Parks and Forests during FY15 was between \$213.4 million and \$248.7 million. Economic significance is a measure of all economic activity attributed to park visitors.
- The total economic impact of West Virginia State Parks and Forests during FY15 was between \$160.5 million and \$189.5 million. Economic impact is a measure of fresh money infused into the state's economy that likely would have not be generated in the absence of the park system.
- In FY15, for every \$1 of general tax revenue provided to State Parks, \$13.15 on average was generated in fresh money that wouldn't be there if not for the operation of State Parks and Forests.
- Regarding employment, the economic activity stimulated by visitation to West Virginia State Parks and Forests supported approximately 3,209 full-time equivalent jobs in the state in FY15.

- In terms of wages and income, the economic activity spawned by visitation to West Virginia State Parks and Forests was responsible for roughly \$91.6 million in wage and salary income in FY15.
- Economic activity stimulated by visitation to West Virginia State Parks and Forests was associated with approximately \$140.9 million in value added effects which is a measure of the park system's contribution to the gross domestic product of the state.
- Outside of the park system, the sectors of the West Virginia economy that capture the most visitor spending are lodging accommodations and restaurant/bars.
- Visitor spending attributed to the four park categories are estimated as follows:
 - Lodge and Resort State Parks (10 areas): \$118.6 million in spending
 - Cabin, Camping, and Day Use State Parks (26 areas): \$74.3 million in spending
 - Rail Trails (2 areas): \$10.1 million in spending
 - State Forests (6 areas): \$23.6 million in spending
- Economic significance (a.k.a. economic activity) and economic impacts are also calculated for each park location:

For instance, Blackwater Falls attracted 855,085 visitors, spending \$25.6 million in West Virginia during their visits. The estimated contribution to the economy was \$20.5 million in economic impact.

In terms of visitor spending, locations stimulating the largest amounts of spending in FY15 were Blackwater Falls, Pipestem, and Stonewall. With regarding to economic impact, these three locations also produced the highest levels.

INVESTIGATOR BIOS

Dr. Vincent Magnini holds a Ph.D. in International Business from Old Dominion University, an MBA from Wichita State University, and a Bachelor's of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management from Virginia Tech. He was recently ranked as one of the top 12 most prolific hospitality researchers worldwide and holds editorial board appointments on nearly all of the top-ranked research journals in the field. Further, he is a U.S. Fulbright Scholar. He has published six books and more than 100 articles and reports. His recent book titled *Performance Enhancers: Twenty Essential Habits for Service Businesses* appeared on the top 1% of Amazon.com's Best Seller Ranking at multiple points throughout 2014. Dr. Magnini has also been featured three times on National Public Radio's (NPR) *With Good Reason*, once on NPR's *All Things Considered* and cited in the *New York Times*.

Dr. Magnini regularly consults for a number of constituencies in the hospitality and tourism sectors. The consulting activities include projects such as strategic marketing plans, economic impact analyses, feasibility studies, and executive education seminars.

Dr. Muzzo Uysal holds a Ph.D. in tourism and recreation from Texas A&M University, an MBA from the University of New Haven, and a Bachelor's of Science in accounting and business administration from the Ankara Academy of Economics and Commercial Sciences. He has extensive experience in the travel and tourism field; has worked on several funded tourism management and marketing projects and conducted tourism workshops and seminars in more than 30 countries. He is a member of International Academy for the Study of Tourism, the Academy of Leisure Sciences, and serves as co-editor of *Tourism Analysis: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. He has also authored and co-authored a significant number of articles, five monographs, and eight books related to tourism research methods, tourist service satisfaction, tourism and quality-of-life, creating experience value in tourism, consumer psychology in tourism and hospitality settings.

Dr. Uysal has also received a number of awards for Research, Excellence in International Education, Teaching Excellence, and best paper awards. His current research interests center on tourism demand/supply interaction, tourism development and QOL research in tourism.