New Data Project: Measuring the Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation

We Want to Hear from You

Members of the public, private industry, state and local governments, non-profit organizations, and other interested parties are invited to provide feedback on the development of a new set of statistics that will provide information on economic activity associated with the outdoor recreation segment of the United States economy.

The Federal Recreation Council (FRC) and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) are collaborating on the new data project. BEA is one of the U.S. government's premier producers of official economic statistics, and the seven agencies that make up the FRC are prominent stewards of federal public lands and waters for outdoor recreation. Those agencies are the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

About the Project

The new data project, known as the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA), will provide a first-of-its-kind look at the outdoor recreation economy. While BEA's current gross domestic product (GDP) statistics already embed economic activity associated with outdoor recreation, the new satellite account will allow these activities to be separately identified and highlighted in a way not possible with current statistics. Ultimately, creation of the ORSA will provide detailed data that will deepen the public's understanding of the economic impact of outdoor recreation, inform decision making, and improve governance and long-term management of public lands and waters.

The first major step in this effort is to define the range of activities encompassed by the outdoor recreation economy. In evaluating potential definitions, BEA and FRC will consider public comment as well as input from subject matter experts from the field of outdoor economics. The ORSA research team will initially develop two or three potential definitions ranging in scope from narrow to broad. This is a crucial and challenging task because the range of activities in each definition will determine which industries and detailed goods and services measured by BEA will be classified as in scope, out of scope, or partially in scope for the outdoor recreation economy.

Once these initial definitions have been established, the second major step will be to review the list of partially-in-scope goods and services, and identify data and methodologies by which the in-scope share of these "partial" items can be estimated. Finally, using the information collected in the first two steps, prototype national-level estimates of economic activity will be developed that could include measures of output, value added, compensation of employees, and employment in the outdoor recreation economy. With national-level estimates in place, the account could then be extended to include a regional dimension.

Tentative Timeline for Major Milestones

- Define outdoor recreation
  - Jan-Mar 2017: Independent development of a range of definitions, and review of goods and services by experts in field of outdoor recreation
  - Apr-Jun 2017: Reconciliation of independent reviews, incorporation of public comments, and consolidation into 2-3 potential definitions
- Prepare prototype estimates
  - Jul-Nov 2017: Identify data sources and methodologies to estimate partially-in-scope goods and services
  - Dec 2017-Jan 2018: Prepare and release prototype statistics based on the 2-3 potential definitions being evaluated
- Gather feedback on prototype statistics and finalize the definition, data sources and methodology to be used for the national-level statistics
  - 2018

How to Provide Comments on the Project

Comments and suggestions are welcome. In particular, we are interested in feedback regarding:

(1) which recreation-related activities should be considered as in scope for the ORSA;
(2) the types of statistics that potential users of the ORSA would like to see presented in the account in addition to output, value added, employment, and compensation;
(3) information about datasets that could supplement BEA's core statistics in estimating shares for partially-in-scope goods and services; and
(4) information on datasets that could be used for possible future regionalization of the account.

All comments must be submitted no later than May 26, 2017, and should be submitted directly to BEA through the following email address: OutdoorRecreation@bea.gov.