

National Park System Advisory Board 2013 Report

Task 4: Support Economic Valuation

This first-ever, truly comprehensive economic valuation of national parks and programs quantifies the wide range of public benefits that flow from the modern National Park Service as it approaches its second century. To accomplish that, this study will: (1) measure the total economic values of national parks and programs, (2) illustrate those values using case studies of specific parks and programs, and (3) develop research analyses of those values suitable for peer review and publication.

Addressing the Task

In 2016 the nation will mark the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, an occasion that is expected to attract significant public interest and stimulate a national dialogue about the success of the national park idea and its growing contributions to society. This economic valuation of the *entire* NPS, including both parks and programs, will offer key research to inform that discussion.

This valuation builds on existing research of the economic contributions from NPS visitor spending and payroll to include the critically important values not represented by those market activities. Those values include the net benefits received by the public from visiting national parks and using NPS-managed programs. Also critically important are the net benefits received by the public from knowing that parks and programs exist and will be preserved for future generations.

Progress Report

A privately funded and managed academic team, co-led by Harvard University and Colorado State University, developed this economic valuation study to accomplish the three objectives stated above. The team organized the entire study in two phases. Phase I produces a “blueprint” that identifies the specific economic values to be measured, the valuation methods to be utilized, and the major procedural steps required for the study. Phase II implements the study blueprint.

As a preliminary step, the team produced a conceptual framework describing the total economic values to be measured and conducted a case study of Joshua Tree National Park to illustrate those values. Additionally, the team conducted an extensive literature review and synthesized information about the parks and programs in order to design survey questionnaires for use in the Phase II valuation. The team has also begun to conduct focus groups to determine public understanding of national parks and programs, and to evaluate certain technical details for conducting the valuation surveys. Finally, the study team is assembling an advisory panel of leading economists and other experts.

Priorities Through 2016

Recommendations for advancing the economic valuation effort include completing Phase I and continuing fundraising activities to implement Phase II. Periodic briefings on the status of NPS economic valuation will be provided to NPS management. Developing a communications plan to convey findings about national parks and NPS programs to Congress and the public is a final goal.

Follow Our Work

Find a case study of Joshua Tree National Park and a status report of the economic valuation study at www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm. Visit the *Call to Action* website (*Item 14*).