

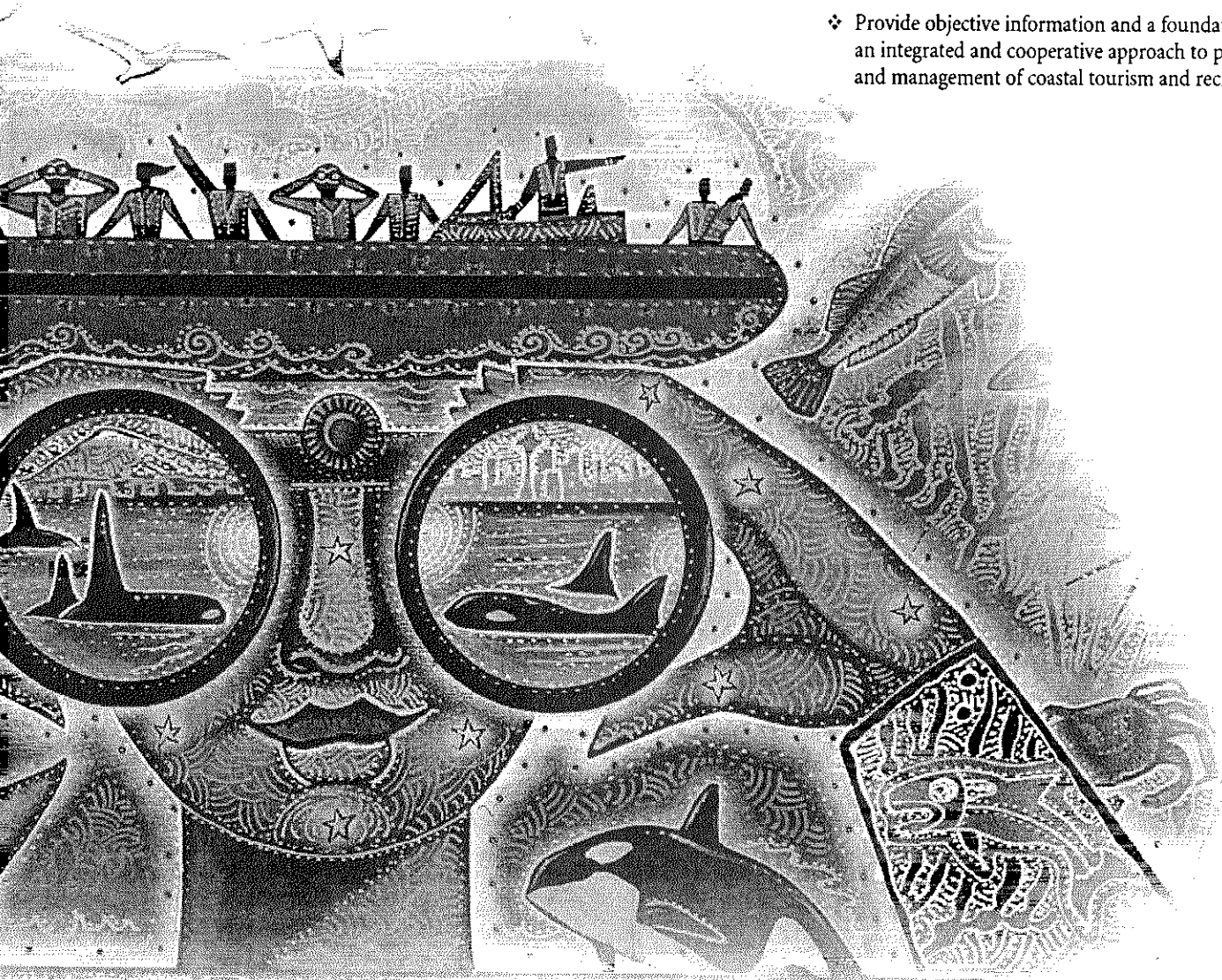
# COASTAL TOURISM IN WASHINGTON

The Washington State Coastal Tourism Project was conducted as part of a larger effort by Washington Sea Grant Program to conserve and sustain the aesthetic and economic value of coastal and marine resources. This one-year study assessed the importance of coastal tourism and recreation in the state.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In Washington's 15 coastal counties, an ever-expanding range of tourism, leisure and recreational-oriented activities take place in both urban and rural settings. Through interviews with stakeholders and a comprehensive review of secondary source information, several goals and objectives were accomplished:

- ❖ Assess opportunities, constraints and impacts (positive and negative) to the social and natural resources upon which coastal tourism relies;
- ❖ Highlight the importance of coastal tourism and recreation in a usable manner for the tourism industry and natural resource managers;
- ❖ Provide objective information and a foundation for an integrated and cooperative approach to planning and management of coastal tourism and recreation.



## COASTAL TOURISM AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Annually, 3.5 million people participate in some form of coastal activity in Washington. Popular activities include beach-going, sightseeing, wildlife watching, fishing, boating and diving. Frequently, these activities occur in parks, refuges, sanctuaries and other public lands in the coastal zone.

- ❖ Over two million people visited Washington's nearly 200 miles of public beaches in 1999, making beach-going by far the most popular form of coastal recreation in the state.
- ❖ Wildlife watching in Washington is done by nearly two million people annually, yielding nearly \$57 million in state tax revenues. Birding and whale watching are especially popular with both residents and visitors.
- ❖ It is estimated that in 1999, nearly half a million anglers participated in marine sportfishing in Washington—this is a 28 percent increase since 1996.
- ❖ In 1999, over 800,000 people participated in some kind of coastal boating activity (motorboating, sailing, personal watercraft use, canoeing, rowing, or waterskiing) in Washington, a state that has more boats per capita than any other state.
- ❖ Washington is the only state in the country with a National Marine Recreation Trail (a status identical to that of the Appalachian Trail), enabling kayaking, canoeing and rowing access to numerous waterways of the state.

### RATIONALE FOR PLANNING

Why plan for coastal tourism? For many, the growing recreational and touristic interest in the state's shorelines and adjacent marine areas represents an opportunity too important to overlook. In 1999, there were over 13 million visitors to Washington and over three million participants in coastal recreation activities — beach-going, sightseeing and photography, wildlife and bird watching, fishing and swimming being the most popular activities. In addition to these activities, several tourism "hot spots" are worthy of special interest.

- ❖ The marine protected areas of the state—the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary and adjacent National Park as well as the seven coastal National Wildlife Refuges that are open to the public—offer significant opportunities for education and encourage support of resource protection.
- ❖ With the opening of the Port of Seattle's cruise ship terminal in 2000, the number of passengers coming through Washington is predicted to increase in the following years by almost 25 times, resulting in millions of dollars in revenues and taxes, as well as jobs.

In meetings between tribal leaders and the state governor, developing economic opportunities through the tourism industry for Washington's federally recognized Native American tribes (of which 24 of 28 are in coastal areas of the state) was identified as a priority.

- ❖ Shipwrecks, marine mammals, and underwater parks attract over 108,000 people to participate annually in scuba diving in Washington.
- ❖ Within the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Pacific Ocean coast, 24 surfing spots are used by over 16,000 people annually.

### RISKS

If improperly planned and managed, coastal tourism may adversely impact estuaries, rivers, coastal environments and wildlife by causing changes in coastal processes, dunes, vegetation and animal behavior. Tourism development can also put pressure on local utility resources through water and energy usage and trash and solid waste generation; traffic can cause congestion, as well as air and noise pollution; and hotel construction usually demands additional land space and utilities. Other hazards include coastal erosion and related measures taken to combat erosion, over-development and pollution from sewage discharge and other wastes.

For these reasons, tourism and recreation activities and amenities need to be carefully planned and managed by tourism *and* natural resource managers. Even in urban areas like Seattle, where tourism is well established, almost no research has been done examining the actual relationship between the numbers, activities and behaviors of tourists and their environmental and social impacts. The limited research and compatibility determinations that have been initiated have only focused on single-species (e.g., orca whales) or activities (e.g., driving on the beach) over the short term. Additional research is clearly needed in this area as national and international agencies are holding the tourism and recreation industries accountable with regard to environmental impacts.

### BENEFITS

Tourism and recreation activities create incentives to protect the natural and cultural environment. An informed and concerned public is a powerful force for protecting natural and cultural sites. In Washington, parks, wildlife refuges and the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary facilitate this process.

Many rural communities are realizing their potential to increase tourism by offering a variety of nature- and cultural-based recreational and educational activities and amenities. The shift away from commercial fishing and logging towards tourism in many of these areas indicates that tourism planning, development and management is appropriate and timely.

## FINDINGS

The research findings suggest several important points:

- ❖ Coastal tourism will continue to grow in magnitude and, consequently, economic importance, particularly given that the industry has reached current levels without focused input from state agencies.
- ❖ A significant portion of tourism and recreation is focused in the coastal areas of the state— including both rural *and* urban settings.
- ❖ There are direct links between the health of coastal resources and the economic health of coastal communities that rely on tourism; for example, salmon population declines and ensuing fishery limits curtail sportfishing revenues for charter companies and guides.
- ❖ With few exceptions, state agencies that govern tourism marketing and those that manage marine and natural resources remain disconnected.
- ❖ There is very little or no evidence of an integrated coastal tourism planning and management structure that takes into account all of the associated risks, benefits opportunities and constraints.
- ❖ Businesses and private associations, in addition to non-governmental organizations, are playing an increasingly salient role as tourism brokers of specific activities (e.g., kayaking) and promoters of certain values (e.g., “best practices”).
- ❖ The sudden growth of Seattle into a significant cruise ship port, the recent completion of a tribal tourism study and the increasing interest in marine protected areas are additional points to be considered.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, several recommendations for future action are included here:

- ❖ **Recognition.** A comprehensive qualitative and quantitative profile of all regions/communities involved in coastal tourism and recreation needs to be completed and the results distributed widely among all agencies with a direct mandate for, and interest in, coastal tourism and recreation activities.
- ❖ **Management/Coordination.** Evaluation and “mapping” of interactions between tourism and natural resource managers within the public, private, and non-governmental sectors would be of great value. Specific barriers to cooperative management must be determined and overcome if integrated coastal tourism and recreation planning is to occur. It would be appropriate to do this through a series of exploratory workshops. Once this is completed, consideration should be given to the creation and coordination of an interagency initiative devoted to coastal tourism planning.

- ❖ **Use Monitoring.** Continued, systematic monitoring of participation in coastal recreation activities at state and national levels is needed to better understand trends in participation, to support management of activities and impacted areas and to prevent user conflicts.
- ❖ **Impact Monitoring.** Development of core coastal zone indicators of health, safety and ecological and social carrying capacity with relation to coastal tourism and recreation activities is needed — especially in urban areas — and should be initiated in the very near future.
- ❖ **Community Development/Planning.** Coastal communities should define what type of tourism development they will/can/should support, what future development might look like, the scale of the development and the type of visitor activities that can or should be supported. Practical guidance and assistance in developing standards, manuals and guides for managing coastal tourism and recreation in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the private sector is deemed necessary.
- ❖ **Partnerships.** Discussions with coastal tourism and recreation stakeholders on specific needs and potential opportunities for partnerships should be initiated. To ensure greatest possible effectiveness, those involved should form an integrated industry association (see Management/Coordination above).

## CONCLUSION

Properly planned resource conservation and tourism development in Washington can be compatible, sustainable and economically profitable. The challenge is to develop a cooperative initiative that can best facilitate planning and managing tourism with the goal of sustaining the aesthetic and economic value of coastal and marine resources.

For more information, contact:

Nina P. Hadley  
Washington Sea Grant Program  
3716 Brooklyn Avenue NE  
Seattle, WA 98105-6716  
206.43.6600  
[ninah@u.washington.edu](mailto:ninah@u.washington.edu)

# Sea Grant Washington

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Environment*

## Washington Sea Grant Program

University of Washington  
3716 Brooklyn Avenue N.E.  
Seattle, WA 98105-6716  
206.543.6600  
206.685.0380 fax

*seagrant@u.washington.edu*  
*http://www.wsg.washington.edu*

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