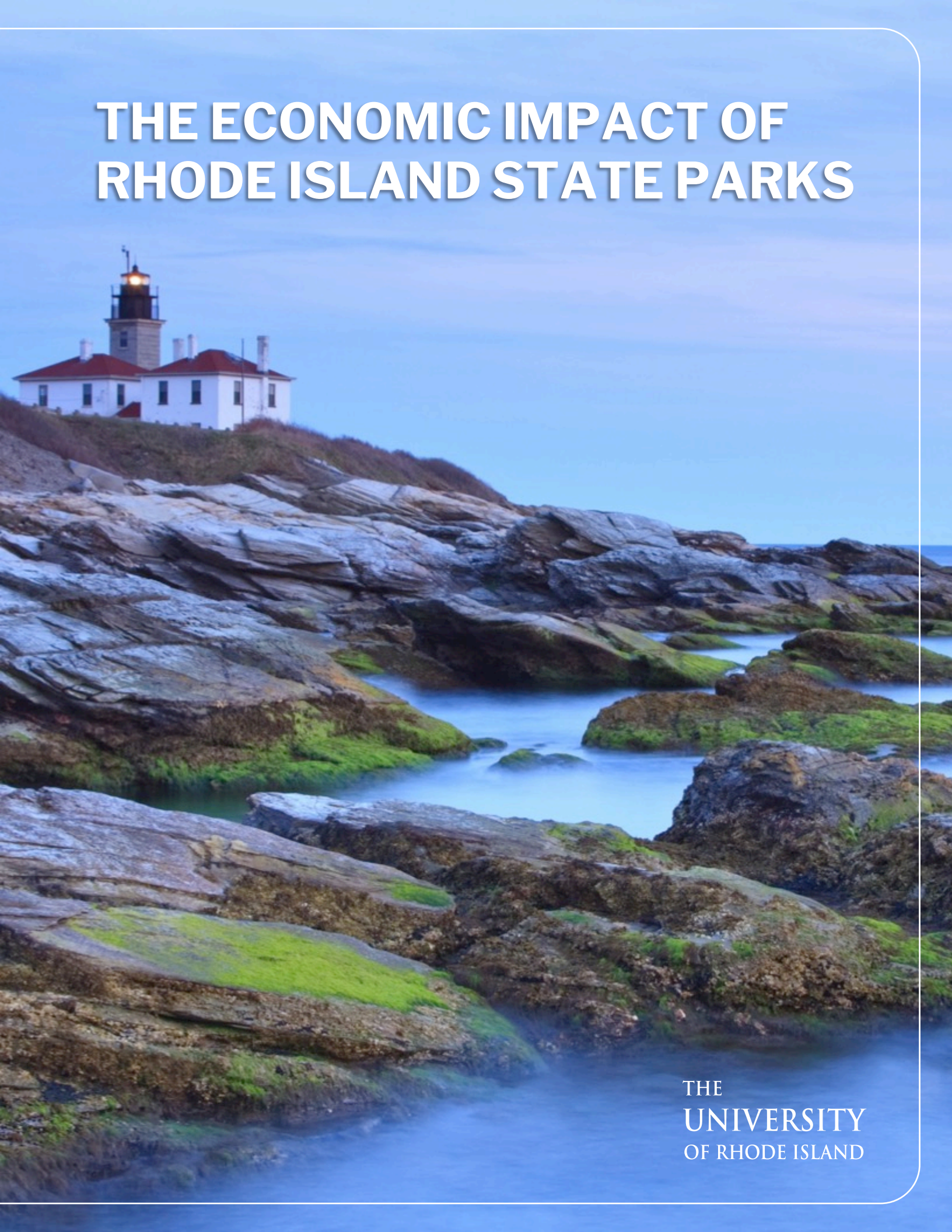
THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RHODE ISLAND STATE PARKS



THE
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HIGHLIGHTS

- 9.4 million visitors
- $311.9 million economic impact
- 3,709 jobs
- $38.8 million state/local revenue

Visitors to Rhode Island State Parks, including beaches, bikeways, campgrounds and park facilities, made substantial contributions to the state economy in 2016.

They spent $315.8 million (+/-$34.3 million) to generate economic output of $311.9 million and 3,709 jobs. They generated an estimated $38.8 million of revenues to state/local governments, including $4.4 million of bridge tolls and $6.0 million in park fees (including campsite fees, beach parking, and golf course fees).

Visitors spent the most money at restaurants and bars ($89.1 million) and gas stations ($75.9 million). The next most impacted business types were hotels and motels ($49.5 million) and grocery stores ($46.7 million).

The 9.4 million visitors in this study came from around the country and around the world, and also from just up the street.

An estimated 3.0 million visitors came to RI State Parks from out-of-state in 2016, while another 2.9 million "local" visitors lived within just five miles of the park. 3.5 million additional visitors came from elsewhere in Rhode Island.

Fort Adams State Park had the largest economic impact of all the sites in our study. Fort Adams' 1.3 million visitors generated an estimated $63.9 million of economic output in Rhode Island, alongside 759 jobs. Fort Adams had the second highest visitor total in the state, behind Goddard Park, and had the highest out-of-state visitor total, with 774,212.

BACKGROUND

The last decade has seen a surge of interest in Rhode Island's natural resource-based economy. Recent research has focused on the economic impact of businesses in the farm and garden sectors (*cf.* Sproul, 2015), but there has been little progress in evaluating the impacts from outdoor recreation on the Rhode Island economy. Prior work has focused on only one or a few facilities (Leonard et al., 2014; Salve Regina, 2016), or use only national-level survey data (OIA, 2012; NRPA, 2015). We aim to fill this knowledge gap by applying the latest methods (Crompton et al., 2015) to estimate the economic impact from visitors to the Rhode Island State Parks system.

In this study, we estimate economic impacts across 22 facilities managed by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM): seven beaches, two bikeways, four campgrounds and nine parks. We surveyed 1,499 people across eleven facilities and online in the summer of 2016. To supplement our survey data, DEM provided data on visitor counts, visitor origins (in-state vs. out-of-state) and total park fees collected.

We combined all of the data into statistical estimates of spending per visit. Costs incurred by out-of-state visitors in the process of getting to Rhode Island were excluded, as were all expenditures by local visitors. Visitors were asked to rate the park's importance (on a 10-point scale) as the primary purpose of their trip, and their spending was adjusted accordingly (Jeong and Crompton, 2014).

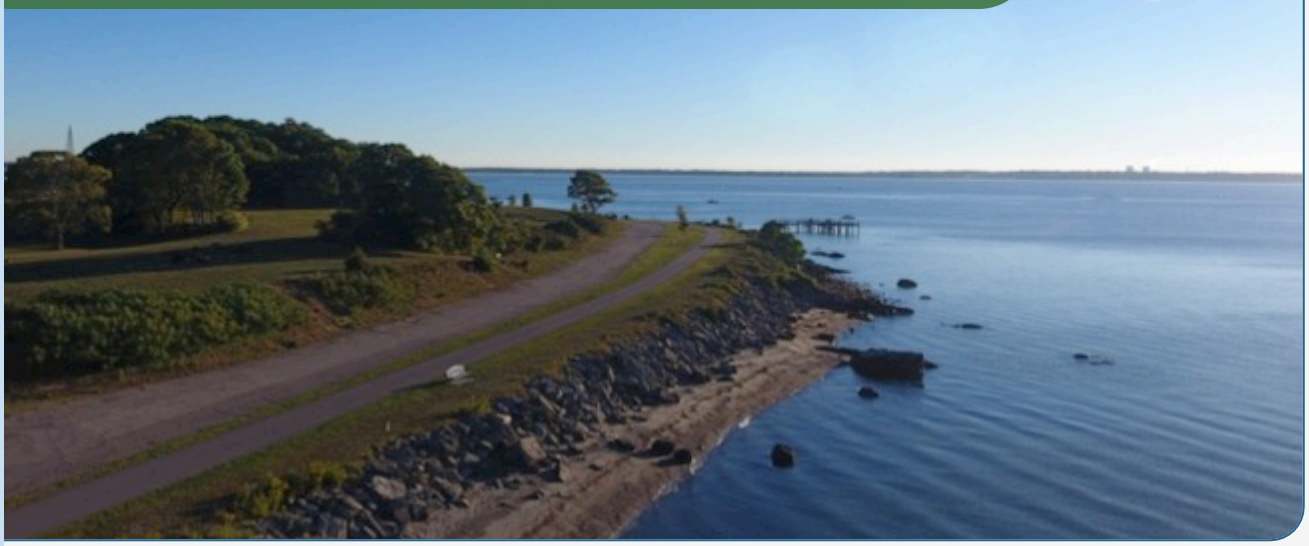
Details of our data collection, data cleaning and statistical analysis can be found in the Technical Appendix to this report. Economic impact estimates were generated using the IMPLAN input-output modeling software. All economic impact estimates are reported with conservative "output multipliers" following Crompton et al. (2015).

RESULTS

The sites in our study had **9.4 million visitors** and $315.8 million of spending attributed to 6.5 million non-local visitors. They produced **3,709 jobs** and economic output of **$311.9 million**.

Spending and Visitors by Category

Category	Spending	Visitors
Beaches	$115,016,556	1,171,817
Bikeways	$19,697,336	1,387,609
Campgrounds	$6,142,599	77,085
Parks	$174,898,900	6,796,764
Total	**$315,755,391**	**9,433,275**

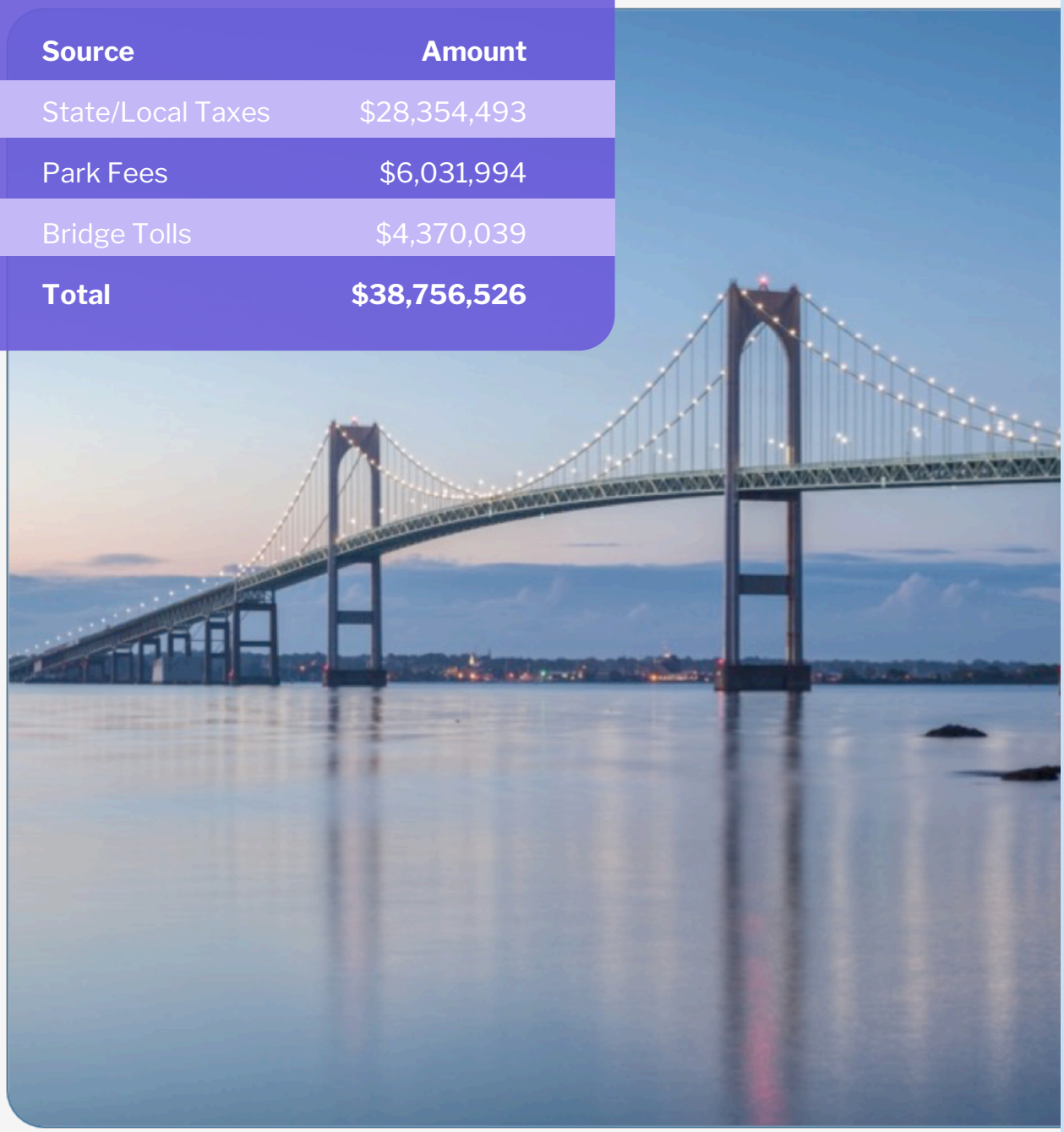


Total output includes *direct* spending by park visitors at local businesses, *indirect* purchasing by those businesses, and *induced* spending of new labor income ($125.3 million) by workers and business proprietors. The contribution to Gross State Product was $192.3 million.

Payments to state and local government entities, in the form of park fees and bridge tolls, are excluded from the input-output model as a measurement of economic activity. In the table, bridge tolls are estimated from survey data and park fees are official totals. State and local taxes are estimated in IMPLAN.

Government Revenues

Source	Amount
State/Local Taxes	$28,354,493
Park Fees	$6,031,994
Bridge Tolls	$4,370,039
Total	**$38,756,526**

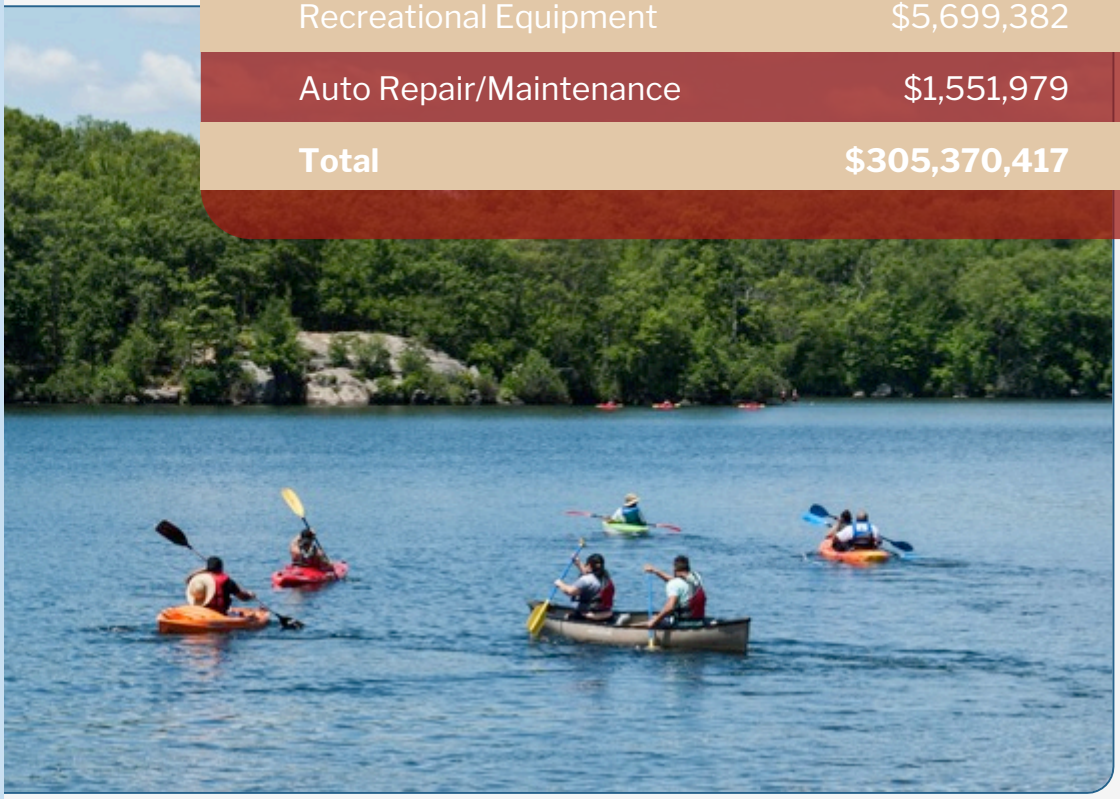


Of the $315.8 million spent by park visitors, $305.4 million was spent at local businesses, while $10.4 million was spent on park fees and bridge tolls.

Restaurants and bars, and gas stations, were the two business sectors that benefited most heavily from spending by visitors to Rhode Island State Parks. Over 50% of visitor spending is attributed to these two categories. The next largest sectors were lodging and grocery, combining for over 30% of the total.

Spending by Sector

Sector	Spending	Share
Restaurants and Bars	$89,069,679	29.2%
Gas Stations	$75,859,580	24.8%
Hotels and Motels	$49,488,826	16.2%
Grocery Stores	$46,704,630	15.3%
Shopping and Souvenirs	$25,648,897	8.4%
Auto Rental	$11,347,444	3.7%
Recreational Equipment	$5,699,382	1.9%
Auto Repair/Maintenance	$1,551,979	0.5%
Total	**$305,370,417**	**100.0%**



Spending per Visitor, by Origin

Category	In-State	Out-of-State	Percent Out-of-State Visitors
Beaches	$40.01	$199.22	46.9%
Bikeways	$9.73	$60.85	17.4%
Campgrounds	$64.62	$100.95	65.0%
Parks	$11.66	$72.82	32.4%
Average	**$15.97**	**$95.16**	**32.3%**

Campgrounds and beaches attract the largest percentage of visitors from out-of-state. Out-of-state visitors spend more per visit than in-state visitors, primarily on meals and lodging. Out-of-state visitors also spend the most at beaches, on average, while in-state visitors spend the most while camping.

BEACHES

Misquamicut State Beach in Westerly had the largest impact with 343,318 visitors spending $44.1 million, and the *most* out-of-state visitors (76.8%). Salty Brine State Beach and Roger W. Wheeler State Beach had the *least* out-of-state visitors, with 24.1% and 26.5% respectively.

Spending and Visitors by Site

Site	Spending	Visitors
East Beach	$6,163,189	52,666
East Matunuck	$13,498,205	178,179
Misquamicut	$44,067,053	343,318
Roger Wheeler	$18,688,431	244,918
Salty Brine	$3,612,335	52,851
Scarborough North	$19,343,843	192,477
Scarborough South	$9,643,499	107,408
Total	**$115,016,556**	**1,171,817**

Scarborough Beach is Rhode Island's most popular and well-known beach. Located in Narragansett, it is a 26-acre facility with 2,325 feet of beach frontage. 299,885 beach-goers visited Scarborough North and South in 2016, spending a combined $29.0 million.

BIKEWAYS

Rhode Island's system of bike paths includes over 60 miles of off-road cycling spanning all five counties in the state. Bikeways contributed almost $20 million in spending despite the lowest spending per visitor and lowest percentage of out-of-state visitors (17.4%) among the categories.

Spending and Visitors by Site

Site	Spending	Visitors
Blackstone River Bikeway	$7,281,185	550,910
East Bay Bike Path	$12,416,150	836,699
Total	**$19,697,336**	**1,387,609**

The true economic impact of Rhode Island bikeways is substantially larger, due to the omission of over 600,000 visitors from four bike paths not included in this study: Quonset (99, 182), South County (197, 641), 10 Mile (122,247) and Washington Secondary (201,675). Leonard et al. (2014) estimate that the four omitted bike paths generate annual spending of $7.6 million.

CAMPGROUNDS

Burlingame State Park and Campground is the largest camping facility in the state with 3,100 acres located in Charlestown. The campground attracts over 45,000 visitors per year, with more than 70% coming from outside Rhode Island. The facility also includes Burlingame Picnic Area, which we treat separately in the Parks section of this report.

Spending and Visitors by Site

Site	Spending	Visitors
Burlingame Campground	$3,763,574	45,869
Charlestown Breachway	$470,306	6,701
Fishermen's Memorial	$1,543,032	18,909
George Washington	$365,687	5,606
Total	**$6,142,599**	**77,085**

Despite low numbers of total visitors relative to the other park categories, Rhode Island State Campgrounds generate over $6.1 million in spending because they attract mostly high-spending, out-of-state visitors (65.0%).

PARKS

Fort Adams State Park generates the most spending of any site in the Rhode Island State Parks system, with $63.5 million. Among parks, it attracts the most out-of-state visitors (59.5%). Fort Adams is best known for the historic fort, outdoor events and music festivals, and sailing.

Spending and Visitors by Site

Site	Spending	Visitors
Beavertail	$18,934,891	557,085
Brenton Point	$13,859,179	815,274
Burlingame Picnic Area	$1,370,490	58,387
Colt State Park	$30,864,324	1,182,188
Fort Adams	$63,542,163	1,301,235
Fort Wetherill	$4,703,376	253,427
Goddard Park	$22,654,641	1,314,845
Lincoln Woods	$17,751,009	1,237,715
Pulaski Park	$1,210,686	76,608
Total	**$174,898,900**	**6,796,964**

Lincoln Woods was Rhode Island's first state park, founded in 1909. It attracts the third-most annual visitors behind Goddard Park and Fort Adams. There is substantial variation in the appeal of the Rhode Island State Parks to different types of visitors, with Goddard Park, Lincoln Woods and Pulaski Park attracting fewer than 20% out-of-state visitors, while Colt State Park attracts over 40% out-of-state and Fort Adams attracts almost 60% out-of-state visitors.

Rhode Island parks also offer a diverse array of amenities from equestrian facilities, swimming, and golf, to outdoor events, hiking and biking trails, picnic areas and sweeping views. Beavertail is unique in offering both a children's aquarium and a lighthouse museum.

More than half of the estimated visitor spending and over two thirds of the visitors in our study are attributed to the parks facilities within the Rhode Island State Parks system. Still, the true figures are likely even larger, as six facilities are not included in our study: Haines Memorial, Rocky Point, Snake Den State Park, the WWII Veteran's Memorial, Arcadia Management Area and the Chafee Nature Preserve.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Cover. Beavertail Lighthouse, Jamestown, RI (enfig, Bigstockphoto)
Contents. Fort Adams in Newport, RI (Tomtsya, AdobeStock)

1. Misquamicut State Beach, Westerly, RI (RI DEM)
2. Bicyclists on the East Bay Bike Path, Bristol, RI (Vinoverde, Bigstockphoto)
3. Beach umbrella, Goddard Memorial State Park, Warwick, RI (RI DEM)
4. East Beach State Beach, Charlestown, RI (RI DEM)
5. Rocky Point State Park, Warwick, RI (RI DEM)
6. Newport Bridge, Jamestown, RI (mcdonojj, Bigstockphoto)
7. Kayaks and canoes, Lincoln Woods State Park, Lincoln, RI (RI DEM)
8. CJ Buckley Regatta at Goddard Memorial State Park, Warwick, RI (RI DEM)
9. Roger W. Wheeler State Beach, Narragansett, RI (RI DEM)
10. Riding along the bikepath, Bristol, RI (WeatherRusty, Bigstockphoto)
11. Burlingame State Campground, Charlestown, RI (RI DEM)
12. Hammock in trees, Burlingame State Park, Charlestown, RI (RI DEM)
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16. Fireworks over Fort Adams, Newport, RI (RI DEM)