

Economic Impact of Ecotourism

Middle Peninsula Region, Virginia

Ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” by the International Ecotourism Society.

This includes recreation, entertainment, and retail businesses which fulfill those essential criteria.

Ecotourism is also supported by other local visitor-serving businesses such as accommodations and food services. Businesses in these sectors may, for example, offer lodging near areas for natural exploration or prepare and explain food from local ingredients.

AT A GLANCE:



\$33.1 million
total annual impact



442
annual jobs

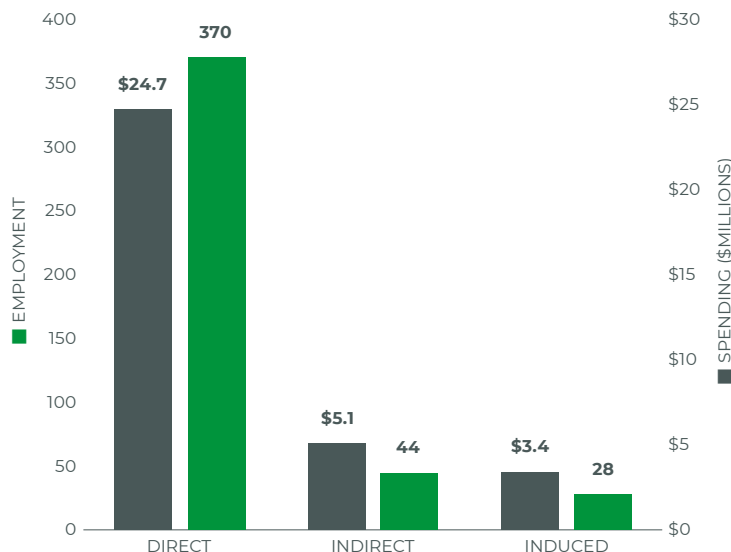


50+
ecotourism-related businesses



\$1.6 million
state and local tax revenues

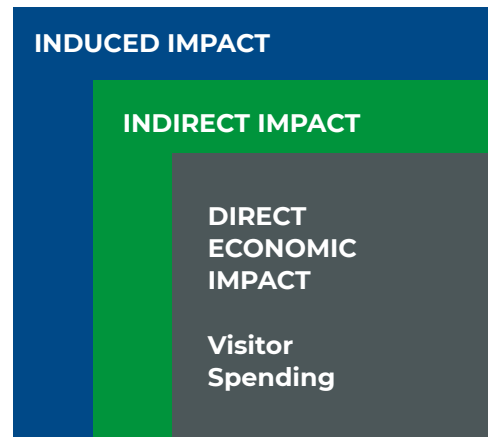
ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT 2019¹



ECOTOURSIM SALES GREW 13.5% IN MIDDLE PENINSULA REGION (2014 - 2019)²



Ecotourism employment projected to grow 0.2% each year 2020-2025



Direct Impact:

Total visitor spending and number of employees at ecotourism-related businesses.

Indirect Impact:

Benefits to suppliers of goods and services to ecotourism-related businesses such as food suppliers and recreation and sporting equipment suppliers.

Induced Impact:

Benefits to businesses derived from wages and salaries paid to workers in ecotourism-related businesses, primarily in consumer-related services such as retail, restaurants, and healthcare.

¹Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics; JobsEQ®; IMPLAN 2018. ²Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics.

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ECOTOURISM JOBS

Occupation	Average Hourly Wage	Employment (Place of Work)	Employment (Place of Residence)	Employment Forecast
Direct Ecotourism Occupations				
Captains, Mates, and Pilots of Water Vessels*	\$31.88	14	39	→
Motorboat Mechanics and Service Technicians	\$18.14	12	34	↑
Recreation Workers	\$11.03	114	117	→
Tour Guides and Escorts	\$10.82	5	12	↑
Ecotourism-Related Occupations				
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	\$27.27	59	74	↑
Food Service Managers	\$26.83	56	69	↑
Chefs and Head Cooks	\$23.99	21	48	↑
Training and Development Specialists	\$27.81	44	42	→
Facilities Managers	\$39.22	34	29	→
Meeting, Convention, and Event Planners	\$22.86	16	17	→

*Data are for full-time employment, but many ecotourism charters may be part-time. The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) Fisheries Management reports there were more than 30 active guide and charter boat licenses in the Middle Peninsula Region in 2019.

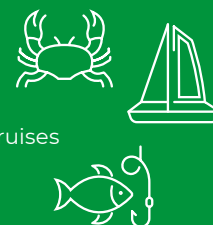
Source: JobsEQ by Chmura

LOOKING AHEAD

- Recent growth suggests ecotourism is an emerging tourism opportunity in the Middle Peninsula Region. Ecotourism sales grew at an average annual rate of 3.2% between 2014 and 2019.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism spending in the Chesapeake Bay area is forecast to decline between 9% and 35% from 2019 to 2021.¹
- Accounting for impacts from the pandemic and economic recovery, Chmura's JobEQ® projects employment in ecotourism-related industries to grow at an average rate of 0.2% each year between 2020 and 2025.

EXAMPLES OF ECOTOURISM BUSINESSES IN THE MIDDLE PENINSULA REGION

- » Aquaculture Tours
- » Canoeing and Kayaking Tours
- » Oyster Harvesting Tours
- » Birdwatching/ Wildlife Charter Cruises
- » Commercial Fishing Tours
- » Softcrabbing/ Wading Tours



BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

- The Middle Peninsula Region is defined as the counties of Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, King William, Mathews, and Middlesex, and the towns of Tappahannock, Urbanna, and West Point.
- Alternative definitions of ecotourism provide additional context for which businesses should be included in the impact. One alternative is "sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on learning about nature first-hand, and which is ethically managed to be low impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented." Ecotourism typically occurs in natural areas and should contribute to the conservation of such areas.²
- To produce an estimate of the impact of ecotourism, Chmura began with a list of businesses from the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission. Chmura conducted research to identify additional businesses and to classify each as ecotourism-related or not according to the definitions described above.
- Revenues and jobs for these businesses (direct impact) were estimated based on industry averages using data from the U.S. Census, IMPLAN 2018, and Chmura's JobsEQ®. Ripple impacts were modeled with IMPLAN 2018. Estimates were cross-referenced with estimates.

¹ Source: "COVID-19's Impact on Virginia's Visitor Economy," Tourism Economics, May 1, 2020.

² Stronza, Amanda L., Carter A. Hunt, and Lee A. Fitzgerald. "Ecotourism for Conservation?," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-101718-033046>.