

# Economic Benefits of Mountain Bike Tourism for Santa Cruz County



Mountain Biking in Santa Cruz County



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July 2007

## **Executive Summary**

Santa Cruz County is well known as a mountain biking destination to active mountain bikers in Northern California. The County has many natural advantages as a mountain bike travel destination including temperate weather, redwood forests, ocean views and an abundance of single track trails.

There is a global market for mountain bike tourism and many communities across North America and the world are embracing this segment of adventure tourism as a low cost and environmentally sustainable way of generating more economic activity. Mountain bike tourists are generally people in their mid-20's to mid-40's with relatively high levels of income and education and have a high willingness to pay to get a unique experience in the wilderness. Mountain bikers tend to spend more money than less-active tourists.

There are many economic benefits to mountain bike tourism to the local community that includes longer hotel stays, restaurants, services and other benefits to local businesses.

Santa Cruz has an active mountain bike community and industry that can be leveraged to help with the promotion of mountain bike tourism.

Developing a mountain bike tourism industry requires the creation of more legitimate trail networks and promoting these networks. This can be done with relatively little cost by utilizing volunteer labor for trail construction. Once the trail network has been created, mountain bike events can be held to promote the network as a destination.

With very little investment and effort, the city can market Santa Cruz as a global mountain bike destination.

## Introduction

All across the country, bicycle facilities like paths and trails are proving to be a wise economic investment for developing bicycle tourism. They stimulate local economies by increasing hotel, restaurant and local merchant revenue that in turn generates additional sales tax revenue for the city<sup>1</sup>.

The season for mountain biking in Santa Cruz County extends beyond the summer months and can be enjoyed all year round. Mountain biking tourism is an activity that can diversify the tourism economy of Santa Cruz beyond the summer season.

There are many small towns all over the world that have recognized the economic potential of mountain bike tourism and have actively promoted their areas to draw riders from all over the world. Some of the more popular towns include Moab and St. George, Utah, Fruita and Durango, Colorado, Whistler, British Columbia and Downieville, California.

## What is Mountain Biking?

Mountain biking can be described as cycling that is focused primarily on off-road travel. Mountain biking is an environmentally sustainable and quiet activity that gives the rider a physical and enjoyable outdoor experience.

Riding on gravel and dirt roads may be considered part of mountain biking and is suitable for novices. Singletrack refers to a trail or pathway that is only wide enough to accommodate users traveling in single file. Singletrack provides users with a closer connection to nature, segregation from motorized vehicles, and a more challenging experience. Singletrack cycling is the most highly sought after experience for mountain bikers.

Mountain biking is a sport that is enjoyed internationally.

## Who are Mountain Bikers?

In the US, about 46 million people rode a bicycle on singletrack in 2001 with the highest per capita participation in the western States. Between 1994 and 2003, regular participation ranged between 4-6% of the nation's population that represents about 14 million riders. Mountain biking is also popular in Europe, Canada with participation on par with the US (about 4%). The sport is also thriving in countries like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Studies and surveys conducted on mountain bikers in recent years indicate that mountain bikers are mostly males in their mid-20s to mid-40s, with relatively high levels of income and education. Most studies showed similar results with respect to education levels. In one survey, 70% of respondents possessed a post-secondary education. Incomes were consistently high in most of the studies. Half of respondents in one US study had household incomes of at least \$75,000.

Women are becoming a growing part of the sport. Between 2002 and 2003 in the US, women's participation in the sport increased 33.9% as compared to 5.6% growth overall.

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<sup>1</sup> **The Economic and Social Benefits of Off-Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities** 1995 National Bicycle and Pedestrian Clearinghouse Technical Brief

Mountain bikers tend to participate in the sport frequently, indicate a preference for the sport in comparison to others, and become more dedicated with increasing years of involvement in the sport. In general, the sport's growth depends on higher levels of volunteerism than is inherent in most adventure sports, primarily due to ongoing trail access issues and need for trails maintenance and construction.

Mountain biking is an international sport and many active mountain bikers are willing to travel long distances in order to get a unique experience in the wilderness. Mountain bikers tend to spend more money than less-active tourists<sup>2</sup>.

## **If we build and promote it, they will come**

The trails in Western North America are valued highly all over the world for their technically challenging characteristics and the romance of the cowboy mystique: rugged individualists exploring the western lands. Northern California and Santa Cruz played a part in the development of the sport of mountain biking. Santa Cruz is well known as a mountain biking destination to enthusiast mountain bikers in Northern California. The single-track trails through redwood forests and with ocean views have a great reputation throughout the global mountain bike community.

The local company Santa Cruz Bicycles and Watsonville's Fox Racing Shox capitalize on the notoriety of the trails in Santa Cruz County in their global marketing efforts so the demand creation for these trails have been pre-sold.

The [Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz](#) (MBOSC) web site is highly visible to search engines. We field inquiries from all over the world - England, Spain, France, Canada and all across America - from mountain bikers who want to visit Santa Cruz. They will usually ask questions like: where to stay/camp, restaurants, bike rentals, trails, etc.... Some of these inquiries are from people who do business in Silicon Valley and will stay over the weekend in order to experience the trails in Santa Cruz County. These people are usually enthusiast mountain bikers who know the reputation of Santa Cruz as a great place to ride and want to experience it.

Unfortunately, casual mountain bikers or active tourists interested in a mountain biking adventure vacation will never know that Santa Cruz is a mountain bike destination because it is not marketed as one. These adventure tourists would probably go to other places like, Moab, Whistler, Fruita or Downieville instead to experience a mountain bike adventure holiday.

If we develop and promote Santa Cruz as a mountain bike adventure destination then we can capture some of the market for mountain bike tourism. With very little investment and effort, the city can market Santa Cruz as a world-class mountain bike destination.

## **Economic Benefits of Mountain Bike Tourism**

Mountain bike tourism will provide a number of economic benefits to the community. A 1996 study<sup>3</sup> of the economic benefits of mountain bike tourism to Moab, Utah concluded that an individual per-trip

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<sup>2</sup> **Marketing for Mountain Bike Tourism** 2006 World Mountain Bike Conference in Whistler. Oliver Flaser, Tourism Whistler.

<sup>3</sup> **The Economic Benefits Of Mountain Biking At One Of Its Meccas: An Application of the Travel Cost Method to Mountain Biking in Moab, Utah** 1996 Peter Fix And John Loomis Colorado State University

value and an annual value of the trail system were estimated, with the estimates ranging from \$197 to \$205 and \$8,422,800 to \$8,770,300 respectively.

A more recent study on the economic impact of mountain biking in Western British Columbia was published in January 2007<sup>4</sup> concluded that *total visitor spending in Whistler attributable to mountain biking exceeded \$34.3 million over the period June 4 to September 17, 2006 supporting an estimated \$39.1 million in new economic activity (GDP).*

With many of the natural advantages of Santa Cruz, there could be a potential to reach if not surpass that level of economic activity.

There are many beneficiaries of promoting mountain bike tourism. These benefits extend to the city, the university, and the local bike industry.

## **City of Santa Cruz**

There is a strong desire among the Santa Cruz city leaders to boost tourism in the off summer season and look for sustainable economic activities to support city services. Mountain bike tourism is an environmentally sustainable activity that could increase economic activity in the city and therefore increase sales and hotel tax revenue coming into the city.

Back in 2003 and 2004, the City of Santa Cruz commissioned some studies examining long-term strategies to help develop the economy of the City of Santa Cruz. One of the key conclusions of the Bay Area Economics' Background report was:

*“The tourism sector is suffering from the economic downturn. Over the long term, this sector will remain key to the City's vitality and should be strengthened to the extent possible. Potential strategies include ... (listing initiatives around hotel, conference and transportation facilities)... Despite progress in this direction, there does not yet appear to be a fully realized strategy to maximize Santa Cruz's potential drawing power.”<sup>5</sup>*

The background report lists some of the potential economic development strategies. One of them expresses a desire to increase hotel revenue outside of the summer beach and boardwalk season.

Santa Cruz is a desirable tourist destination which offers numerous and diverse recreational opportunities. The City already has an infrastructure of hotels, motels, restaurants and attractions to support recreational trail users.

Mountain bikers from all over the world recognize that Santa Cruz is a great destination for riding. These riders stay in local hotels, eat at local restaurants, rent bikes and buy products from local shops. Expanding the existing regional trail network and promoting mountain bike tourism will create longer stays for mountain bike tourists and will provide additional tourism revenue.

The economic impacts to the city may be magnified once legitimate mountain bike events can be incorporated in the calendar. Events in the off summer season could fill vacant hotels and create more

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<sup>4</sup> **Sea to Sky Mountain Biking Economic Impact Study** January 2007 Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association (MBTA)

<sup>5</sup> **City of Santa Cruz Economic Development Background Report** July 2003 Bay Area Economics (BAE)

activity for local businesses. These events will also serve to promote Santa Cruz as a mountain bike destination.

One of the problems with other small town mountain bike destinations is that mountain biking is the only activity that they have to offer. Santa Cruz has a lot more to offer an entire family beyond mountain biking. The mountain biking spouse and children could ride the trails while the rest of the family could hike in the same parks, enjoy the beaches, shop or do any other activity that Santa Cruz could offer.

## **Local Bike Industry**

There are over 30 bicycle related businesses in Santa Cruz County including several industry leading manufacturers such as [Fox Racing Shox](#), [Santa Cruz Bicycles](#), [Giro Helmets/Bell Sports](#), [Rock Lobster](#), [Kestrel](#). [Specialized Bicycles](#) is a juggernaut in the bike industry and is located in Morgan Hill. Many of Specialized's employees live in Santa Cruz. The local bike industry generates over \$130 million in annual revenues and employs over 500 workers<sup>6</sup>. The bicycle industry is an environmentally friendly industry whose products provide healthy, non-polluting, and sustainable transportation and recreation.

Promotion of bicycling including mountain biking will help grow the local bike industry and businesses that support the bike industry. This provides increased employment opportunities for local residents.

Mountain bike tourism could be an economic engine that could create opportunities for new businesses. For example:

- Trail guides, guidebooks and maps.
- Airport shuttle service for getting bikes and riders to and from the airport to area hotels and motels.
- Shuttling bikes and riders to the top of the hills.
- Bicycle rentals. There is no large scale established bike rental place in the city. Some shops offer rentals and some high-end mountain bikes can be rented in this city for up \$65 a day – which is more than a car rental!
- Increased opportunities for new bike shops/coffee bars.
- Bike related events like races and festivals.

American mountain bikes are recognized as the best off-road human powered machines in the world. Santa Cruz Bikes and Fox Racing Shox are local companies and have a great international reputation for quality and performance. The local bike industry can develop a program to target Europeans, Asians and North Americans for “Santa Cruz delivery” of their high-end mountain bikes. This would be analogous to the German car manufacturers like BMW and Porsche with their European delivery programs.

As an anecdote, one of the bike shop owners mentioned that some Europeans have traveled to Santa Cruz to buy a high-end Santa Cruz bike equipped with Fox Shox. A bike purchase like this represents a \$3,000-\$4,000 local sale which goes directly into our economy at the retail, manufacturing and design level. This seems like a large purchase but due to the exchange rate between the euro and the dollar and European tariffs on bikes, this still represents a great value for the visitor. These types of tourists will buy the bike at the beginning of the trip, ride it in the redwoods (where it has been developed) and then bring it home. These Europeans go home with the bragging rights of having bought and ridden their American bike at the place where it had been developed.

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<sup>6</sup> Santa Cruz Bicycle Industry Coalition (SCBIC) Economic Data from 2003

## **UCSC Summer Conference Services**

The [UCSC Summer Conference Services](#) generate a considerable amount of money for UCSC. According to the July 3, 2000 issue of [UCSC Currents](#), the conference program generates more than \$3.5 million annually for UCSC. Conference guests occupy the 2,400 beds at UCSC's nine residential colleges, purchasing food and other services from the campus. Income from the summer helps to offset room-and-board rates charged to UCSC students by about \$200 each year. Income is also returned to UCSC's colleges to help support student programs.

In 2004, Specialized Bicycles held an event using the UCSC Conference Services where they invited the bike industry media sales and distributing representatives from all over the world to introduce their 2005 product line. Specialized's guests enjoyed the facilities and the open space around the University. The event was considered a success and they plan to use the facilities on subsequent years.

More legitimate trails would make the campus a desirable venue for holding events in for the mountain bike industry and other environmental groups.

## **The Santa Cruz Advantage**

Santa Cruz has so many natural advantages for developing mountain bike tourism. The temperate climate allows for a long cycling season. The natural attributes of spectacular redwood single track and coastal views offer an adventure tourist a unique experience. One of the best value propositions is that a visitor could enjoy many days of riding by riding from a hotel in Santa Cruz. This means that the tourist doesn't have to rent a car.

- Many nearby greenbelt areas and parks surrounding the city with an abundance of great trails.
- A tourism based infrastructure already in place.
- San Jose International airport is 45 minutes along the scenic Hwy 17
- Many trail destinations can be ridden to from a hotel room in the city - reduces mandatory driving.
- Supportive bike industry and advocacy groups like [Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz](#) and [Trailworkers.com](#).
- Many alternative activities for non-mountain biking family members.
- World-class destinations including San Francisco, Monterey and Silicon Valley only an hour away.
- A vibrant nightlife, great restaurants, scenic coastline and family friendly beaches and activities.

## **How to Develop Mountain Bike Tourism**

Developing mountain bike tourism will not require a significant investment in infrastructure. Santa Cruz is already recognized as a destination for mountain biking among enthusiast mountain bikers so marketing as a destination would require very little effort. One of the biggest challenges is the need for more legitimate mountain biking trails.

### **We need more legal mountain bike trails**

There is already an excellent trail system that has challenging trails, spectacular vistas and redwood forests. Unfortunately, many of these trails are unauthorized and other existing trails are closed to

mountain bikes. A mountain biking trip to Santa Cruz on legal trails represents about 1-2 days of riding. Legitimizing the existing network and expanding existing trails to mountain bikes will go a long way in providing visitors more places to ride and extending their visits.

There is a lot of potential within the existing regional parks and open space to provide more options and opportunities for mountain biking. These parks and open space include:

- Wilder Ranch/Gray Whale/Scaroni State Park.
- Henry Cowell State Park
- Fall Creek Unit of Henry Cowell SP
- Big Basin State Park
- Nisene Marks State Park
- Soquel Demonstration Forest (CDF)
- Pogonip and DeLaveaga (City of Santa Cruz)
- Coast Dairies Properties (managed by DPR and BLM)

In addition to opening trails in these parks, the county and local mountain bikers could negotiate recreational access to private lands. Agreements may be put in place to ensure proper stewardship and maintenance of the lands and to address the concerns of the landowners to their exposure to liability. These instruments include a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Recreational Use Statute (RUS) that may be negotiated with the private landowner. Some of the large private landowners in Santa Cruz County include:

- CEMEX
- Big Creek Lumber
- Swanton Ranch
- Lockheed Martin
- Hewlett Packard

Creating more legitimate riding opportunities mountain biking will allow the publication and promotion of this trail network. Expanding the trail network will also have benefits to the broader trail user community like hikers and equestrians. It also creates business opportunities for tour companies and guides to show visitors the trail network. For example, Park City, Utah has fully embraced the development and promotion of its trail system as an economic driver for the city during the off-ski season.

## **Other initiatives**

There are some specific projects that should be done in order to bring in the tourists:

- Open more trails to mountain bikes with an emphasis on regional connectors between parks and open space.
- Develop more beginner level trails for children, families and novices.
- Develop more advanced level trails like jump parks, free ride, downhill trails and pump tracks.
- Get a consensus with the local bike industry and the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council to promote mountain bike tourism
- Lobby state and federal representatives to get additional funding for local public parks.



- More camping in the north part of the county. This could be in Coast Dairies, Big Basin and Butano State Parks.
- Market Santa Cruz as a mountain biking destination.
- Hire a paid advocate to promote and drive these initiatives. This position would organize and promote events and be a cheerleader for mountain bike tourism.
- Hold events like races and expos similar to the Sea Otter for cycling or the Cold Water classic for surfing. These events offer a great way to introduce riders to the area so they may come back later and go home and tell their local riders about Santa Cruz. These events can be funded through partnerships and sponsorships with local businesses and the bike industry.

## **Conclusions**

Mountain bike tourism is an environmentally sustainable economic activity that brings in revenue to the host community.

Santa Cruz is well known as a mountain biking destination to active mountain bikers in Northern California. With very little investment and effort, the city can market Santa Cruz as a global mountain bike destination.

## **Appendix A: Exploring the Market Potential for Yukon Mountain Bike Tourism**

The following document is the executive summary for a March 2005 study that examines the market potential of mountain bike tourism for the Canadian territory of Yukon.

The full document can be found at

<http://www.tirc.gov.yk.ca/pdf/PotentialforMtnBikeTourisminYT2004.PDF> (51 pages, 5.05 MB).

This document is a great overview of the demographics of mountain bikers and shows case studies of other communities that have embraced mountain bike tourism.

- Part 1 discusses the history and global demographics of mountain biking.
- Part 2 talks about the economic impact of various mountain bike related events.
- Part 3 has case studies of existing mtb destinations and some lesson learned for aspiring destinations.
- Part 4 and 5 discusses the assets of the Yukon Territories and outlines a strategy for how they can capitalize on the mountain bike tourism market.



# Exploring the Market Potential for Yukon Mountain Bike Tourism

by Jane Koepke



March 2005

# Executive Summary

The following study was conducted in response to a mutual interest on the part of Tourism Yukon and the Cycling Association of Yukon to explore the market potential for mountain bike tourism in the territory. The study aimed to determine the following:

- Size and characteristics of the global mountain bike market;
- Current product delivery in mountain bike tourism;
- Future trends in mountain bike tourism;
- Strategies and stories behind successful mountain bike destinations;
- Strengths and weaknesses of the Yukon with respect to the development of a mountain bike tourism industry;
- Potential strategic areas of growth and opportunity for the Yukon; and,
- Potential economic benefits of Yukon mountain bike tourism.

The study was undertaken through a combination of attendance at key mountain bike industry events, literature review, secondary market research, targeted industry canvassing, and a focus group with Yukon tourism and mountain bike stakeholders.

The results of the secondary market research showed that mountain biking is one of the world's most popular adventure sports. Approximately 12 million people in the US mountain bike regularly, with per capita rates of participation (approximately 4%) estimated to be similar in Canada, the UK, and German-speaking Europe. Mountain bikers are generally well educated males 25-45 years of age with high household incomes. Mountain bikers tend to prefer the sport over other activities, participate in it frequently, and maintain this participation over the long-term. Women are a rapidly increasing segment of the market.

Industry experts predict that the strong growth of lift-assisted bike parks will lead to a mainstreaming of the sport, similar to the role ski resorts played in the development of snowboarding. The popularity of long-distance “epic” races and multi-day stage races indicates that there is also a large segment of mountain bikers who value a more adventurous experience. Some tour operators predict that the next phase of mountain bike tourism will be high performance riding in exotic wilderness locations.

Destination reputation and recommendations from friends and family are key travel decision making factors for mountain bikers. Mountain bikers consider variety/difficulty of terrain, number of trails, and scenery to be the most desirable features in a mountain bike destination. A large percentage of mountain bikers travel, and participate in the sport almost exclusively during their mountain bike trips. Mountain bikers show a strong preference for singletrack and their willingness to pay in the travel decision making context is directly related to the abundance and variety of singletrack.

An examination of successful mountain bike destinations within the context of adventure traveler behavior raises several key lessons for regions aspiring to develop mountain bike tourism:

- Destination image persists, so make sure it's positive.
- A reputation is built more on substance than style.
- Small is beautiful.
- Partnerships and politics product results.
- Build it and they will come.
- Create an experience, and make it unique.
- Numbers do count.

These lessons, when applied to the Yukon situation, suggest that a healthy mountain bike tourism industry could develop as long as a market-responsive destination image is created, the trail product and level of supporting services meet visitor expectations, and strategic partnerships can be formed.

The focus group highlighted a number of important advantages the Yukon has in developing a mountain bike tourism industry: a frontier reputation, world-class scenery, wilderness, a legacy of mining roads and trails, convenient air access, a strong network of wilderness tourism operators, existing events, potential partners, and a strong mountain biking community in the capital region. Disadvantages include: limited bike “friendly” accommodations, shortage of singletrack in the communities, potential visitor misconceptions and fears about the Yukon, lack of signage and user friendly maps for most trail systems, and the sport’s low profile in the business, tourism and First Nation community.

The development of a mountain bike tourism industry presents many opportunities for the territory. The focus group saw mountain bike tourism as a means to reclaim some of the cultural and historical values lost when the territory’s once extensive trail network was abandoned in favor of highway travel. They felt that mountain biking could become a source of pride and focus for Yukon youth. They envisioned a trail network that would build on existing trails and tracks to provide the best singletrack in the world. Most importantly, they envisioned a tourism industry that would respect local capacity and values, maximize economic and social benefits to Yukoners, and provide quality, authentic experiences for a variety of users.

Mountain bike events and tourism could create substantial economic opportunities for the Yukon. A Canada Cup mountain bike race and an international multi-day race/event would have an estimated \$360,000 and \$585,000 economic impact for the territory, respectively. A thriving mountain bike tourism industry attracting approximately 4500 riders per year would generate about \$5.76 million in the local economy. Furthermore, the singletrack trail expansion that would facilitate mountain bike tourism could have economic impacts in excess of \$10 million.

Mountain bike tourism has significant potential for growth as a niche Yukon tourism market. Demographics and geographic markets dovetail with the broader target demographics of Yukon Tourism. Mountain biking would support many ongoing tourism initiatives, including the growth of destination tourism throughout the Yukon and attraction of major sporting events. An improved wilderness trail system would create year-round recreation, interpretive and business opportunities for Yukoners. Most importantly, it would assist in positioning the Yukon as a world-class wilderness destination by ensuring that the territory’s trail product meets the expectations of a discriminating global adventure travel market.

Recommendations arising from this report are as follows:

**Short Term:**

1. Establish a working group to develop a more detailed vision and action plan for Yukon mountain bike tourism.
2. Initiate the process of educating the tourism, business, and First Nation communities about the market potential for Yukon mountain bike tourism.
3. Initiate discussions with the City of Whitehorse to develop a signage scheme to assist mountain bike tourists.
4. Identify potential partners and resources required to host a Canada Cup race in preparation for preparing a bid to host an event in 2008. (Note: the Canadian Cycling Association will host its Annual General Meeting in Whitehorse in fall 2005).
5. Identify the funding and organizational structures required to realize the above stated goals.

**Medium Term (2-4 years):**

6. Develop a simple user-friendly guide or brochure detailing mountain bike rides, businesses, and services in Whitehorse, including maps tied to trail signage initiatives.
7. Undertake a pilot project in partnership with a Yukon community, including trail signage and building initiatives and a recreational program for youth.
8. Undertake a feasibility study for the creation of a long-distance non-motorized trail network in the Yukon, identifying strategic locations, potential project partners and funding.
9. Develop initiatives to support a 2008 Canada Cup race (assuming a bid is successful) and maximize its promotional and marketing potential for Yukon mountain bike tourism.
10. Develop a mountain bike-specific destination positioning and marketing plan in partnership with Yukon Tourism and the wilderness tourism industry.

**Long Term (5+ years):**

11. Work with interested Yukon communities to enhance the economic and recreational benefits of singletrack trails.
12. Develop a long-distance wilderness trail network in strategic areas of the Yukon to facilitate major events and enhance trails-based and year-round tourism opportunities.
13. Stage a world-class mountain bike event to enhance the Yukon's mountain bike destination image.

## Appendix B: Sea to Sky Mountain Biking Economic Impact Study

The following document is the executive summary for a January 2007 economic impact study that measured the economic activity attributed to mountain bike tourism to the Sea to Sky region of British Columbia in the summer of 2006.

The full document can be found at

[http://www.mbta.ca/News/?sp=Sea\\_to\\_Sky\\_Economic\\_Impact\\_Study](http://www.mbta.ca/News/?sp=Sea_to_Sky_Economic_Impact_Study)

This study gives credible data on the economic benefits of mountain bike tourism and complements the Yukon study in that it shows the economic results for Whistler, BC - a community that fully embraced mountain bike tourism.

This study discusses the survey methodology, breaks down visitor origin, size of the party, number of nights stayed and spending per visitor. The benefits of out of town visitors to a community cannot be overstated:

*"The study found that mountain biking draws visitors to Sea to Sky communities and generates significant overnight stays. Overall, 20% of non-resident riders stayed overnight in Sea to Sky communities, staying an average of 4.8 nights and having an average party size of 2.8 people."*

The bottom line of the study is something that should please local business and government:

*"In total, mountain biking has a sizable impact on the summer economy of Whistler and British Columbia, with total expenditures totaling more than \$34.3 million between the valley trails, the Bike Park, and Crankworx. This spending generated more than \$39.1 million in economic activity, and supported more than \$26.5 million in wages and salaries and 798 jobs throughout the Province. Mountain biking in Whistler also supported considerable tax revenues, with over \$8.5 million and \$7.3 million in government taxes paid at the federal and provincial levels, respectively; while municipal revenues throughout the province exceeded \$2.1 million."*

# Sea to Sky Mountain Biking Economic Impact Study

## Whistler Report



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## *Executive Summary*

Whistler has long been known as one of the premier North American ski destinations, but increasingly, the Resort is becoming one of the top summer destinations as well, particularly for mountain biking. In addition to the Whistler Bike Park, the Whistler Valley has an officially authorized trail system and plays host to the Crankworx mountain bike festival, a nine day spectator oriented event running at the end of July each year. As a result of visitor spending in the Resort, mountain biking in Whistler generates considerable economic activity over the summer months. However, quantifiable data was needed to demonstrate the value of the trails to further encourage investment in infrastructure, and establish appropriate trail management policies. To meet these objectives, the Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association (MBTA) conducted a pilot study to measure the economic impact of mountain biking in the Sea to Sky Corridor which, in addition to Whistler, includes the communities of Squamish and the North Shore (North Vancouver and West Vancouver).

Total visitor spending in Whistler attributable to mountain biking exceeded \$34.3 million over the period June 4 to September 17, 2006 supporting an estimated \$39.1 million in new economic activity (GDP).

The Whistler municipal trail system demonstrates the potential benefit of mountain biking in the Sea to Sky corridor, with visitor spending attributable to the Whistler Valley Trail system totaling just over \$6.6 million, this accounts for nearly two-thirds of the total generated from local trails in the Sea to Sky study communities (note figure excludes Whistler Bike Park and Crankworx spending).

In addition to the trail systems, the study also measured spending by visiting riders at the Whistler Bike Park (WBP) and spectators at the Crankworx festival. The WBP, the most visited mountain bike park in North America, is a considerable source of revenue for both Whistler and the Province of BC. Non-resident visitors to the WBP spent an estimated \$16.2 million in Whistler during the study period. Finally, the Crankworx Mountain Bike Festival continues to grow, attracting 55,000 unique visitors to the 2006 event (of these, more than 23,000 travelled to Whistler solely to attend the Festival). Crankworx generated non-resident expenditures in excess of \$11.5 million. In total, visitor expenditures in Whistler attributable to mountain biking totaled in excess of \$34.3 million during the 3 month study period.

The authorized trail system in the Whistler Valley generates considerably more economic activity than the trail systems in Squamish and the North Shore where few authorized trails exist. Whistler has been able to capture higher visitor expenditure in part by having the ability to promote its municipal trails and associated services (bike rentals, guides, camps, etc) directly to visitors both within the Resort and externally.

Although one might draw the conclusion that the lift accessed Whistler Bike Park draws most riders to Whistler, the survey showed that just over half of the Whistler Valley riders indicated cycling was an important trip motivator (i.e. 52% gave cycling a 4 or 5 on a 1 to 5 scale of importance where 5



represents cycling being the primary reason for taking the trip), illustrating the importance of the municipal trail system. Furthermore, the survey found that there was less than 10% cross over between Whistler Bike Park riders and those on the Whistler Valley Trails reinforcing the notion that the Valley Trails were a significant stand alone draw.