



# Economic importance of Outdoor Recreation

**IN CHELAN AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES**

Booklet produced by

**Wenatchee Valley TREAD**

*(Trails, Recreation, Education, Advocacy, Development) of Chelan and Douglas Counties*

# Importance of mountain towns

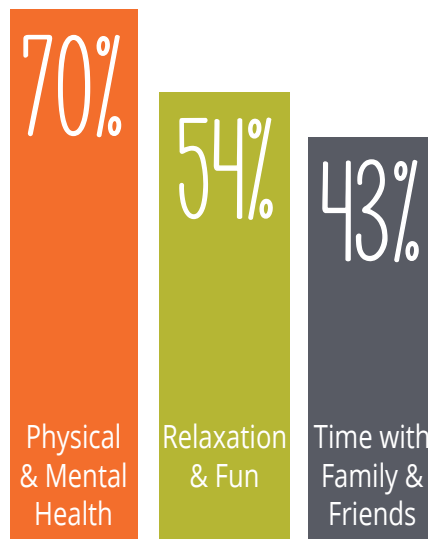


Outdoor recreation is a major economic driver for many mountain towns in the western United States. Outdoor recreation is a central factor in where people choose to live and work. Many people, including millennials and active retirees, desire quick and easy access to natural areas for recreational, health and social purposes. Mountain towns often rely on outdoor recreation activities and facilities to attract visitors to boost their tourism industries.

Few places in the United States can boast of the natural assets that Chelan and Douglas counties possess along the east slopes of the Cascade Mountains. Despite that competitive advantage, the region has faced challenges in developing a full-fledged outdoor recreation economy and infrastructure.

Outdoor recreation — across all seasons and for non-motorized and motorized — is growing in economic and community importance in Chelan and Douglas counties, according to a recent study by *EcoNorthwest*. At the same time, the study found, there is much room for economic growth if the outdoor recreation infrastructure (trails, trailheads, signage, maps, docks, facilities, education) is improved.

## Why recreate outdoors in Chelan & Douglas Counties?



The U.S. Department of Recreation has found outdoor recreation-oriented counties are the fastest growing rural counties in the United States, thanks in large part to technology advances that provide flexibility in terms of when and where people work.

More than **70 percent** of residents in Chelan and Douglas recreate outdoors because it improves their physical and mental health, according a 2016 survey by *EcoNorthwest*. **54 percent** cited relaxation and fun and **43 percent** recreate because it means spending time with family and friends.

Furthermore, public land opportunities are particularly scarce in Washington State relative to other states. Development of more opportunities in Chelan and Douglas counties likely will lead to more state residents staying home to recreate rather than traveling to other states or Canada.

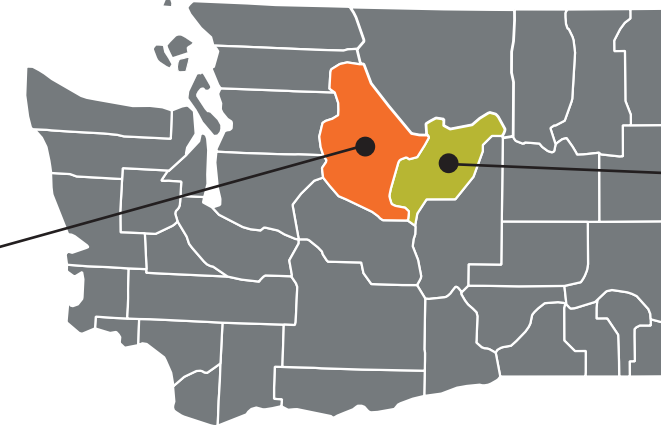
The following pages provide a look at the current state of outdoor recreation in the region, along with its challenges, opportunities and future potential.

# A glance at Chelan & Douglas counties

Population of Chelan and Douglas Counties: **118,478**

Square miles of land in Chelan County: **2,921**

Publicly-owned land in Chelan County: **82%**



Square miles of land in Douglas County: **1,820**

Publicly-owned land in Douglas County: **15%**

An estimated **54,949** Chelan County residents — or **72.3%** of the county's overall population — utilized a trail at some point in 2016.

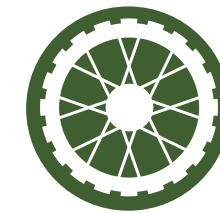


An estimated **29,481** Douglas County residents — or **71.4%** of the county's overall population — utilized a trail at some point in 2016.

Highest-in-demand recreation activities for residents and visitors in Chelan and Douglas counties all require trails. Here are the top activities:



**Hiking**



**Mountain biking**



**Fishing**



**Non-Motorized Boating**



**Downhill skiing and snowboarding**

## Economic impact

Total spent on outdoor recreation overall: **\$477.9 million**

Total spent on outdoor recreation equipment: **\$150 million**

Total spent on outdoor recreation events: **\$33 million**

State and local taxes generated from sales: **\$19.4 million**

Businesses associated with outdoor recreation and tourism collectively provide nearly **20 percent** of private regional employment in Chelan and Douglas counties.

**3,330:** Number of jobs supported by outdoor recreation in Chelan and Douglas counties

Sources: State of Washington; 2014 study by Earth Economics for the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office

Sources: Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan survey; Washington State Office of Financial Management; 2017 study by EcoNorthwest of the Economic Importance of Outdoor Recreation in Chelan and Douglas Counties

# Impact of our summer trails

**Wenatchee/East Wenatchee** — 54 miles  
of trails nearby (Apple Capital Loop Trail and extensions, Squilchuck State Park, Saddle Rock, Number Two Canyon, Sage Hills and Horse Lake Reserve)

**Cashmere** — 24 miles nearby (Devil's Gulch)

**Leavenworth** — 23 miles nearby (Leavenworth Ski Hill, Freund Canyon, Fourth of July, Icicle Ridge)

**Chelan/Manson** — 41 miles nearby (Echo Ridge, Chelan Butte)

88% of visitors to Chelan and Douglas counties participate in some sort of trail-based activity while in the region.




**Hiking:**  
8.7 hiking visits (a visit is defined as one hiker on the trail for one day) were undertaken per Chelan-Douglas resident in 2016.

An estimated \$46 million was spent on hiking by Chelan-Douglas residents in 2016 — or \$45.20 per hiking visit.

An estimated \$50.4 million was spent on hiking by visitors to Chelan and Douglas counties in 2016.

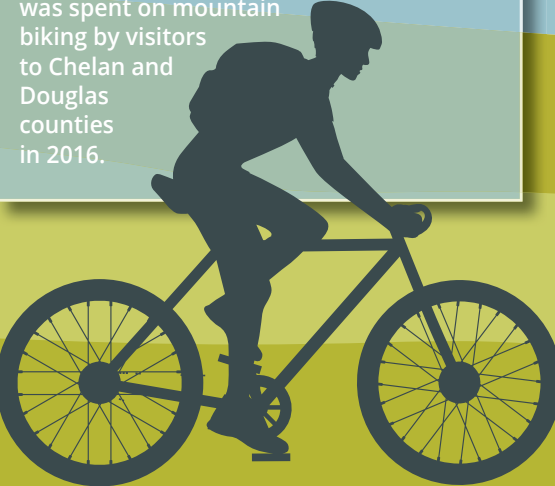
**Rock climbing:**  
20% of visitors report rock climbing in Chelan and Douglas counties. That is nearly twice the statewide average. About the same percentage of residents participate in rock climbing at least once annually.




**Mountain biking:**  
8.5 trail bike visits (a visit is defined as one biker on the trail for one day) were undertaken per Chelan-Douglas resident in 2016.

An estimated \$44.6 million was spent on mountain biking by Chelan-Douglas residents in 2016 — or \$44.87 per mountain biking visit.


An estimated \$25.1 million was spent on mountain biking by visitors to Chelan and Douglas counties in 2016.



**Motorized off-road riding:**  
**In Washington State:**  
Number of participants annually: 786,907  
Amount spent per activity day: \$43  
Amount spent per participant annually: \$2,442


**Activities in Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (2010):**  
Hiking/walking: 44 percent  
Viewing wildlife: 30.5 percent  
Downhill skiing: 15.6 percent  
Fishing: 12.8 percent  
Cross-country skiing: 11.5 percent  
**Motorized trail: 4.4 percent**  
Biking: 2.4 percent  
**Off-highway vehicle riding: 2.0 percent**  
Snowmobiling: 1.5 percent  
Horseback riding 1.2 percent

**Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (2018):**  
Total acres: 4.3 million  
Acres open to motorized travel: 2.6 million  
Miles of roads: 8,000  
Miles of motorized system trails: 1,000



**Running:**  
RunWenatchee attracts more than 2,500 participants to its Wenatchee Valley Trail Run Series and community road races each year.

About 40 percent come from outside the region to take part in runs in the Wenatchee Foothills, Wenatchee National Forest, Leavenworth Ski Hill, City of Wenatchee, and Apple Capital Loop Trail.



**CHALLENGES:**  
At present, there are few trails between trail sections in the Greater Wenatchee Area, nor are there trails connecting the Greater Wenatchee Area with Cashmere, Leavenworth, Entiat, Malaga and Rock Island. Many trailheads in Chelan and Douglas counties have inadequate parking lots, restroom facilities and signage.

In particular, mountain biking opportunities in Washington state and in Chelan and Douglas counties are relatively scarce compared to other locations.

**Mountain biking trails in Washington state vs. other states:**

Colorado: 10,974 miles  
California: 8,538 miles  
Idaho: 6,202 miles  
Utah: 3,644 miles  
Oregon: 3,002 miles

Washington: 1,825 miles

**Mountain biking trails in Chelan-Douglas vs. other communities**

Central Oregon: 774 miles  
Oakridge, Ore.: 350 miles  
Whistler, B.C.: 300 miles

Chelan and Douglas counties: 262 miles



**OPPORTUNITIES:**  
High demand exists for greater access to trails in Chelan and Douglas counties as well as expanding access to areas currently without recreational facilities. A 2016 survey by EcoNorthwest found residents and visitors requesting more trails, parking, docks, access, facilities, and transportation options.

Participation in mountain biking, trail running and other trail activities continues to climb in Chelan and Douglas counties and in the state as a whole. Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance and the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust have been building new trails and retiring unsustainable ones over the past few years. This level of interest and demand bodes well for additional development.

Sources: Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance

Sources: 2017 study by EcoNorthwest of the Economic Importance of Outdoor Recreation in Chelan and Douglas Counties; Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance; RunWenatchee; Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; RCO/Earth Economics data; Washington State Office of Financial Management

## Impact of our winter trails

Both residents and visitors rank snowshoeing, downhill skiing, and Nordic skiing as their top three snow sports.

### Amount spent per participant annually in the state:

Snowboarding: \$1,297  
 Downhill skiing: \$1,160  
 Snowmobiling: \$580  
 Nordic skiing: \$477  
 Snowshoeing: \$181

### Expenditures by skiers and snowboarders at Mission Ridge in 2016-2017:

Number of day/local visitors: **77,816**  
 Estimated spending per visit: **\$71**  
 Estimated total spending for the season: **\$5.5 million**

Number of overnight visitors: **36,620**  
 Estimated spending per visit: **\$163**  
 Estimated total spending for the season: **\$6.0 million**

### Mission Ridge Ski & Board Resort ticket sales by region:

<b>ONLINE SALES:</b>	<b>WINDOW SALES:</b>
Western Washington: <b>67.3%</b>	Western Washington: <b>54.7%</b>
Eastern Washington: <b>17.6%</b>	Local: <b>30.6%</b>
Local: <b>15.1%</b>	Eastern Washington: <b>14.7%</b>

Sources: Mission Ridge Ski & Board Resort; Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; RCO/Earth Economics data

**There are 1,320 miles of snowmobile trails accessible from Sno-Parks in Chelan County.**

### Nordic trails in Chelan County:

Icicle River Trail: **8 kilometers of trails**  
 Leavenworth Golf Course: **8 kilometers**  
 Leavenworth Ski Hill: **7 kilometers**  
 Waterfront Park: **3 kilometers**  
 Plain Valley Nordic Trail System: **22 kilometers**  
 Lake Wenatchee State Park: **18 kilometers**  
 Kahler Glen Golf Course: **10 kilometers**  
 Echo Ridge Nordic Ski Area: **40 kilometers**

## CHALLENGES:

The recent acquisitions of Stevens Pass and Crystal Mountain, respectively, by Vail Resorts and Alterra Mountain Co. creates additional pressure on Mission Ridge Ski & Board Resort near Wenatchee. In an era of increasing ski-industry consolidation, where a handful of companies control more and more winter sport terrain, Mission Ridge is facing pressure to stay modern and relevant with its infrastructure and services.

The 2013-18 Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan found many North Central Washington residents not satisfied with their access to winter recreational opportunities and facilities. Among the activities for which some residents said they do not participate now but would like to: downhill skiing and Nordic skiing.

## OPPORTUNITIES:

Mission Ridge Ski & Board Resort has submitted plans to expand the ski area, introduce housing and address capacity issues, in order to remain viable in the highly competitive ski industry. Plans call for the construction of 870 residential units, a lodge and commercial space over 20 years, plus the addition of three new chair lifts, and parking lot improvements.

### Projected increase in visitation tied to Mission Ridge expansion:

2016-17 Skier Visits: **114,436**  
 Year 1 After Expansion Skier Visits: **127,367**  
 Year 5 After Expansion Skier Visits: **154,722**  
 Year 10 After Expansion Skier Visits: **168,305**

Sources: Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; Mission Ridge Ski & Board Resort

## Impact of our water trails

### Motor boating:

Visitors who motor boat in Chelan and Douglas counties:

**39 percent**

Residents who motor boat in Chelan and Douglas counties:

**31 percent**

Sources: Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; RCO/Earth Economics data



## CHALLENGES:

The 2013-18 Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan found many residents in the North Central Washington not satisfied with their access to non-motorized boating (stand-up paddling, kayaking, canoeing) and fishing.

In addition, a 2016 survey by EcoNorthwest found Chelan-Douglas residents and visitors requesting more docks and access to water, including access provided by facilities.

Fishing is the most popular water-based recreation activity for residents of Chelan and Douglas counties, followed by stand-up paddle boarding, kayaking and canoeing, motorized boating, and whitewater rafting. For visitors, motorized boating is the top water-based recreation activity followed by stand-up paddle boarding, fishing, kayaking and canoeing, and waterskiing.

### Amount spent per participant annually in the state:

Motorized boating: \$3,007  
 Fishing: \$882  
 Paddling kayaking & rafting: \$767

## OPPORTUNITIES:

The nonprofit Wenatchee River Alliance is in the investigative stages of developing a whitewater park on the Wenatchee River.

In addition, the Our Valley Our Future community visioning and development initiative includes a Waterfront Destination action item that is meant, in part, to provide for better water access for people living in the Wenatchee, East Wenatchee, Entiat, Malaga and Rock Island areas. This action item was developed by residents during Our Valley planning work in 2016.

Sources: Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; Wenatchee River Alliance; Our Valley Our Future

# Taking the next step

**The potential for Chelan and Douglas counties to become Washington state's premier outdoor recreation spot is immense.** Chelan and Douglas counties possess world-class natural assets — mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes — and are located just two hours from a major population center. The highest-in-demand activities — hiking, mountain biking, fishing, paddling, and skiing — all fit well with the region's topography. In 2016, outdoor recreation was a \$477.9 million industry in the two counties and supported more than 3,300 jobs.

**Yet a fully developed outdoor recreation system and economy in Chelan and Douglas has yet to be realized.** Two recent studies have found residents and visitors clamoring for improved access, and more and better trails, trailheads, parking, signage, docks, facilities, and other amenities. For instance, the number of mountain biking trails, which are often co-utilized by trail runners and hikers, pales in comparison to other recreation hubs in the West.

**If the region were to add more trails and docks and related amenities, it would generate millions and millions of dollars for the local economy.** One example: Getting one more mountain-bike trip per resident every year (it is currently at 8.5 trips per resident), would add \$5.26 million annually to local coffers. Another example: if Mission Ridge Ski & Board Resort's expansion plans go through, it would mean a \$12.1 million annual boost within five years.

**The benefits go beyond just generating more dollars for the region.** Thanks to technological advances, people are increasingly choosing to live and work from places that offer quick and easy access to natural areas. They view outdoor recreation as central to a healthy lifestyle and do not want to travel long distances to access this world.

**The question is: Will the region take the next steps?**



*For the complete study report:*  
<https://www.wvtread.org>

**For more on Wenatchee Valley TREAD:**  
[www.wvtread.org](http://www.wvtread.org) • [www.facebook.com/treadwenatchee/](https://www.facebook.com/treadwenatchee/)

Thank you to these organizations for contributing to the production of this booklet:

Chelan-Douglas Land Trust • Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance  
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