

SHORELINES – May 2004
As presented to the Island Review Magazine.

An Economic Engine

The tell-tale signs of the upcoming summer season are upon us -- the days are getting longer, the air and sea temperatures are climbing upwards, the fish are beginning to bite, and traffic along Highway 58 seems to be a little more robust with tourists. There is no better time of the year to appreciate the impact Bogue Banks has to our economy.

From a broader perspective, the beach is America's largest tourist destination and national coastal park. Approximately 180 million Americans make 2 billion visits to the ocean, gulf, and inland (lake) beaches. That's almost twice as many visits as the combined 1.16 billion visits made to properties of the National Park Service (286 million), Bureau of Land Management (106 million), and all state parks and recreation areas (767 million)!

As you might expect, the economic impacts of beach tourism and associated revenues are huge. A paper prepared by the Muskie School of Public Services at the University of Southern Maine for the National Governors Association for Best Practices reveals that approximately 75% of the American economy is generated within the boundaries of the coastal states – 25% of the American economy is generated just within the boundaries of coastal counties – and a full 11% percent of the American economy comes from the land known as the nearshore (beach communities)! That means that the relatively small sliver of land that we all enjoy produces 11% of the American economy. Moreover, much of the economic prosperity that is related to beach tourism are non-exportable, meaning that the beach economy of one municipality, County, or State, can not be simply moved to another area of the Country or overseas without tremendous economic harm.

A little closer to home, Bogue Banks is the only inhabited portion of the coastline between the 100-mile stretch extending from the North Carolina (N.C.) communities of Ocracoke Island to North Topsail Beach. This 100-mile stretch is almost a third of N.C.'s total ocean shoreline (320 miles) and is more than the entire ocean shoreline in the east coast States of Delaware (25 miles), Maryland (32 miles), and Rhode Island (40 miles), and rivals New Jersey's (127 miles) and New York's (125 miles) open ocean shoreline!!!

Despite our relatively isolated position along the N.C. coast, Bogue Banks provides the infrastructure necessary to accommodate thousands of tourists that enjoy the beach while help fueling our local, regional, State, and National economic engines. According to information available at the N.C. Department of Commerce's website, domestic tourism along Bogue Banks produces an approximate Statewide annual economic impact of \$178 million while providing a payroll of over \$40 million, and is responsible for well over 2,700 jobs in the region. Most of these numbers have a direct relation to the overall health of our beaches, which also positively affects property valuation and tax revenue. This helps municipal governments along the coast maintain their budgets while providing the funding necessary for vibrant school systems, effective law enforcement, and a host of other municipal functions. As an interesting tidbit, Bogue Banks accounts for 42% of the County's total property tax value – the oceanfront properties alone constitutes 15%.

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These economic powerhouse factoids also help underscore that Bogue Banks boasts one of the highest and most extensive naturally-occurring ocean front dune systems in all of N.C., which helps protect and preserve the thick forest cover and dune ridges positioned in the interior portion of the island. The aesthetic contrast of maritime forest, high oceanfront dunes, and beautiful beaches keep visitors coming back to Bogue Banks time and again.

Don't forget to take the time to enjoy all that Bogue Banks has to offer – unparalleled recreational opportunities, a healthy beach ecosystem, and a great source of economic benefits for all. ...And have a great summer.