

**PROJECT 70130**

**ECONOMIC EVALUATION OF TOURISM FOR NATURAL  
AREAS: VOLUME 1 – DEVELOPMENT OF A ‘TOOLKIT  
APPROACH’**

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## **PREFACE**

This study seeks to provide simple methods to evaluate the contribution of natural area tourism to local/regional economies. It draws on work undertaken by Carlsen and Wood in 2003 (see Carlsen and Wood, 2004) and longitudinal research undertaken by Wood in the Gascoyne region of Western Australia since 1997 (Wood and Dowling, 2002; Wood, 2003). The former study assessed the economic contribution of tourism to two Western Australian regions (the Gascoyne Coast and Southern Forests) whilst the latter provides stratified samples of tourism data each April in most years since 1997 and data from the other significant tourism seasons collected over two years between 2002 and 2004.

Whilst other studies in Australia and abroad have evaluated the economic contribution of natural area tourism to economies, data collection remains an issue for many natural area managers with limited personnel and financial resources. Similarly, the presentation of information suitable for funding decision makers is a vexed issue that sometimes inhibits the successful use of tourism data and interpretive reports. The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in Western Australia has successfully used the work of Carlsen and Wood to augment management resources in the State's Parks. This success is attributable to CALM's mounting of a plausible business case and to its confidence in tourism data collected independently by Wood, and Wood and Carlsen over a prolonged period. This prolonged data collection informs the current project providing insights into suitable data collection methods, sample size, key data required to assess economic contributions and methods for analysis and presentation of data.

The project was conducted by the Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre (CSTC), in collaboration with researchers from the University of Queensland, under the auspices of the Sustainable Tourism Co-operative Research Centre (STCRC).

## **SUMMARY**

Tourism to protected areas (national parks, marine parks, forests and beaches) contributes significantly to local, regional, state and national economies. However, the resources to manage natural areas are small and sometimes dwindling whilst, at the same time, the extent of natural areas is increasing to satisfy community expectations for environmental conservation. It has been recognised for some time that managers can exploit the demonstrable economic benefits of tourism to natural areas to argue for better management resources but all too often, arguments founder on the inability to collect primary data, consensus over data collection methods and reporting criteria. This project seeks to develop simple data collection and presentation methods drawing on experience in Australia and abroad leading to the preparation and validation of a survey instrument that minimises the quantity of data required to produce reliable results. We argue that direct tourist expenditure provides the most suitable method for assessing the contribution of tourism to local/regional economies given the resource constraints of natural area managers and nearby communities.

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