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Economic Impact of Kent County Parks

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With an annual operating budget of \$6 million in 2019, Kent County Parks (KCP) seeks to provide residents with traditional park amenities as well as recreational opportunities not typically found in local city and township parks. To this end, KCP emphasizes large regional parks offering diverse natural areas to explore. Of the total 7,300 acres under management, 80% is concentrated in fourteen parks of 200 acres or more.

impact of repeat visitors who return to Kent County because of their positive experience at a park or trail.

The health benefit of parks has been well documented in studies by the Center for Disease Control. A recent Pennsylvania State University study found significant correlation between improvements in health and the length of stay in visits to parks. Parks also play an important social role in communities as they provide a gathering place for families and social groups. In 2017, more than 2,000 groups reserved shelters and picnic areas in KCP to reunite with family members, participate in corporate and community activities, and celebrate life events.

In calculating the economic impact of KCP, the Seidman Research Office collected data to determine visitor count, the frequency of visits, and how much each visitor spent. KCP does not charge admission to most parks, making an accurate visitor count difficult to attain. The survey team used systematic sampling at random entry/exit locations for a select number of parks to estimate park attendance (**Table 1**).

To further understand its role in the community, KCP engaged the Seidman Research Office of Grand Valley State University in 2018 to conduct an economic impact study of county parks and trails. This study focuses on the quantifiable effects of KCP. This report does not address any long-term economic, health, or social impacts. Nor does it address the economic

Table 1: Total Visitor Count

Locations	Local (Kent County)	Nonlocal	Visitors
Millennium Park	89,995	0	89,995
Kaufman Golf Course	41,685	0	41,685
5 Kent County Park Trails	289,053	54,538	343,592
35 Kent County Parks	772,702	145,793	918,495
Total Visitors:	1,193,436	200,331	1,393,767

The spending data were collected from Millennium Park trails and are used to determine direct spending for Kent County trail systems. To supplement these data, the transfer benefit method is used to estimate direct spending for all Kent County Parks. The transfer benefit method estimates economic value by transferring information from a completed

study in another comparable location (Huron River, Glupker 2016). Benefit transfer is often used when an original valuation study is not feasible, yet some measure of benefit is needed. **Table 2a** shows the average spending for Kent County trailer users and **Table 2b** shows average spending for Kent County park users.

Table 2a: Average Spending Per Person, Kent County Trail Users

Expenses:	Local Visitors (Kent County)	Nonlocal Visitors
Meals	89,995	0
Shopping	41,685	0
Transportation	289,053	54,538
Other	772,702	145,793
Totals	\$21.11	\$37.69

Table 2b: Average Spending Per Person, Kent County Trail Users

Expenses:	All visitors (transfer benefit)
Meals	\$5.07
Shopping	\$1.73
Transportation	\$1.32
Other	\$0.62
Totals	\$8.74

Initial spending by visitors is referred to as direct spending. The direct spending is calculated as the product of the visitor spending (**Table 2a** and **2b**) and total visitors (**Table 1**). KCP provided direct spending (revenue) for Kaufman Golf Course and Millennium Park beach.

Direct spending by both local and nonlocal visitors is estimated at \$14.1M, with approximately 21% of that coming from people outside of Kent County (new money). This direct spending by visitors leads to indirect and induced spending. The dollar amount and effect on employment from indirect and induced spending can be estimated using the Regional-Input-Output Modeling System (RIMS II) multipliers

developed by the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The concluding economic impact can be viewed from two perspectives: Nonlocal visitors and all visitors. Excluding local visitors and focusing only on 'new' spending, the total economic impact is \$14.7M, which supports 156 jobs (**Table 3a**). If the focus is on all visitors to the parks and trails, the total economic impact is \$33M which supports 316 jobs (**Table 3b**). This figure should be used with caution, as it is unknown how much of the money would have been spent regardless of the parks or trails. That is, it is not known how much of this is 'new' money.

Table 3a: Total Economic Impact of Nonlocal Visitors

Visitors:	New Spending	Economic Activity	Jobs
Nonlocal visitors	\$2.9M	\$4.7M	40
Millennium Park and Kaufman Golf Course	\$1.4M	\$2.2M	26
KCP spending on parks	\$4.7M	\$7.8M	90
Total Visitors:	\$9.0M	\$14.7M	156

Table 3b: Total Economic Impact of Visitors

Visitors:	New Spending	Economic Activity	Jobs
All visitors	\$14.1M	\$23.0M	200
Millennium Park and Kaufman Golf Course	\$1.4M	\$2.2M	26
KCP spending on parks	\$4.7M	\$7.8M	90
Total	\$20.2M	\$33.0M	316

It should be noted that these are conservative impact figures. The survey was not designed to capture the impact of special events at Millennium Park or differentiate the spending between Millennium Park beach and Millennium Park trails.

In addition, the impact figures above do not include park rentals or campgrounds. Future studies should be designed to further investigate these aspects of the KCP. ■