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### **REPORT: BICYCLING A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO WISCONSIN'S ECONOMY**

MADISON -- Recreational bicycling is among Wisconsin's top outdoor activities in terms of economic impact, and increasing bicycling has the potential to deliver impressive health benefits and savings, according to a new report from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The report, produced by the CHANGE program of the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, estimates that the economic impact of recreational bicycling in the state exceeds \$924 million. Of this amount, \$533 million is annual direct spending while an additional \$391 million is due to indirect and induced effects, such increased purchases of supplies and labor by restaurants and hotels serving cyclists. These indirect and induced impacts may also occur on an annual basis or may extend over a longer time-frame.

Combined with previous estimates of the state's bicycle manufacturing, sales, and services industry, this means bicycling generates more than \$1.5 billion a year in total economic impact, according to the report. By comparison, deer hunting in the state generates \$926 million, according to the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. And in a 2001 report, the Wisconsin Department of Tourism estimated the impact of snowmobiling to be just under \$250 million.

Bicycling's economic impact is not surprising given the predominance of the sport, say the report's co-authors, Maggie Grabow, Micah Hahn, and Melissa Whited, all graduate students in the Nelson Institute's Certificate in Humans and the Global Environment (CHANGE), a National Science Foundation-sponsored training program whose purpose is "to instill cross-disciplinary learning and prepare students to take on complex real-world environmental challenges of our times," according to CHANGE director, Professor Jonathan Patz. .

"According to the Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Plan, 49 percent of Wisconsin residents enjoy bicycling for recreation, making it among the most popular outdoor activities in the state," the trio writes. "State residents generate approximately \$388 million in economic activity while enjoying Wisconsin's extensive network of bicycle trails and scenic country roads and participating in bicycle races, rides for charity, and tours."

Other notable observations:

- Wisconsin is recognized nationally as a top destination for bicycle tourists and was again named second in the nation in 2009 by the League of American Bicyclists.
- Non-residents are estimated to spend 6.4 million days a year bicycling in Wisconsin and generate more than \$535 million.
- In all, bicycling supports an estimated 13,193 jobs in the state.

“People do not realize that bicycling is a big business in Wisconsin,” said state Rep. Spencer Black (D-Madison), a leading bicycling advocate, for whom the report was prepared. “It really is a big part of our economy, in many forms.”

The report’s authors also calculated the potential economic value of increased bicycling as a replacement for short automobile trips. They estimated that improvements in air quality and the health of Wisconsin adults could yield annual savings valued at more than \$400 million.

“By incorporating physical activity into the lives of sedentary Wisconsin residents, bicycling to work could save approximately \$319 million a year from reduced morbidity and healthcare costs,” they explain. “In addition, fewer cars on the road would result in a decrease in air pollution by fine particulate matter and ozone. This would not only reduce health problems such as asthma and chronic bronchitis but would further reduce health care costs by almost \$90 million annually in Milwaukee and Madison alone.”

Increased bicycle commuting also could help Wisconsin meet its goals in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the students say.

A follow-up study of the demographics of current and future cyclists will help target investments in bicycling infrastructure to maximize the potential benefits.

Among other things, the report recommends aiming bicycling improvements at younger people. Studies in Europe suggest that designated bike lanes and smooth roads on primary thoroughfares that are the most direct routes to major destinations provide strong incentives to this age group to commute by bike.

The report also recommends that future investments, ideally within the next two decades, focus on bicycle paths and traffic signals to accommodate Wisconsin’s aging population. The researchers emphasize that although investments should be targeted at younger riders, a safer infrastructure will ultimately encourage people of all ages to spend more time bicycling.

The report, “Valuing Bicycling’s Economic and Health Impacts in Wisconsin,” draws information from more than two dozen published sources. It is available free online at [www.bfw.org](http://www.bfw.org).

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