

CLEANUP OF THE HOUSATONIC “REST OF RIVER”

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY



September 2012

TOURISM IMPACTS

Overview

The vitality and importance of tourism in Berkshire County is well documented. The 2011 *Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* provides the following summary:

Berkshire County's location ... coupled with its outstanding beauty has made the region famous as a vacation destination. A large seasonal population of urbanites has second homes or stays in resorts and motels, camp at the numerous state parks, visit friends, or simply drive through the area. Pastoral amenities are complemented by major cultural facilities ... and the many well-regarded theater venues. (p. 11)³⁹

Tourism is also a major part of region's economy. The 2006 *Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Project* report, for example, notes that "the Hospitality and Tourism cluster plays a central role in the economy of Berkshire County, and is a prominent aspect of the County's overall identity" (p. 35).⁴⁰ Between 2001 and 2006, the report also found that "the main driver of the region's economic recovery has been growth in the Hospitality & Tourism cluster, based principally on the region's rich set of cultural attractions set amidst its natural beauty" (p. 11).

Approximately 2.6 million people visit Berkshire County annually, spending \$327.25 million. In 2010, the county's tourism sector supported 3,450 jobs, 5.6 percent of all jobs in the county. Tourism provided \$84.95 million in annual wages (2.8 percent of the county's total employee compensation) and generated \$25.73 million in state and local tax receipts.⁴¹ The total economic impact of Berkshire County's tourism sector in 2010 was \$523.6 million, representing 10 percent of the county's total economy.⁴² Economic challenges associated with tourism include the seasonality of employment and relatively low average pay of tourism jobs. The 2006 *Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Project* report, for example, noted that "average Hospitality & Tourism wages in the county remain modest at just under \$21,000" (p. 36).

Tourism in Rest of River

Tourism in the Rest of River area encompasses diverse cultural, historical and recreational resources, as illustrated by Figure 6 below. Resources include theaters, spas and resorts, museums, historic homes and gardens, craft fairs, music festivals, recreation areas, boating and Native American heritage areas. The Housatonic River laces through the communities in Rest of River, extending from Pittsfield south and west through Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, Housatonic, Great Barrington and Sheffield before reaching the state line.

³⁹ Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. 2011. *Berkshire Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*.

⁴⁰ Berkshire Economic Development Corporation. 2006. *Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Report*. http://www.isc.hbs.edu/pdf/Berkshires_Rural_Strategy_Project_2006.pdf.

⁴¹ Wage data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Table CA06N, <http://www.bea.gov/itable/iTable.cfm?ReqID=70&step=1>.

⁴² Tourism statistics provided by the Berkshire Visitors Bureau. Berkshire County's 2010 GDP obtained from the Bureau of Economic Analysis: http://www.bea.gov/newsreleases/regional/gdp_metro/2011b/pdf/gdp_metro0211b.pdf.

Canyon Ranch, Shakespeare and Company, The Mount and Cranwell Resort – are at least one mile from the river and so would not face significant direct impacts from cleanup activities.

However, river-based resources (recreation areas, trails, boat launches), activities (boating, fishing, hunting, swimming), and related businesses such as outfitters would face significant direct impacts – full or partial closure of the river during cleanup activities, particularly in Reaches 5 and 6 (from the confluence to Woods Pond Dam). This area is also the part of the river used most heavily for recreational activities. Closure times could range from several years to more than a decade.⁵⁰ Resources located near the three candidate disposal areas could also face significant impacts. Here is how the *Revised CMS* describes the situation:

During the period of active construction, restrictions on recreational uses of the River and floodplain would be imposed in the areas where remediation-related activities are taking place. Due to safety considerations, boaters, anglers, hikers, hunters, and other recreational users would not be able to use the River, floodplain, or riverbank in the construction and support areas. Aesthetically, the presence of heavy construction equipment and cleared or disturbed areas would detract from the visually undisturbed nature of the area. (p. 8-64)

There is evidence that the area’s recreational resources are an increasingly important part of the tourism economy in Berkshire County. For example, the 2006 *Rural Clusters of Innovation: Berkshires Strategy Project* report found that while attendance at top cultural attractions or local ski areas remained largely unchanged between 2001 and 2005, total travel and tourism expenditures in Berkshire County continued to grow at rates exceeding national and state rates (3.6 percent versus 2.3 percent and 1.0 percent, respectively). The report’s conclusion states:

There is reason to believe, therefore, that activities that have traditionally been peripheral to tourism promotion efforts – such as outdoor recreation – have been significant drivers of recent growth and represent opportunities for continued expansion in the future. (p. 38)

The Outdoor Recreation Impacts section of the report provides more information on the potential impacts of the Rest of River cleanup on the area’s recreational resources.

South of Woods Pond Dam, the analysis identified two potential cleanup impacts on tourism resources. First, recreation restrictions could be put in place near dams during cleanup activities. Second, if the Rising Pond location is selected as a disposal area, this could lead to increased truck traffic, either through Stockbridge on Route 7 or through Housatonic on Route 183. Other than this potential truck traffic, the analysis found cleanup activities would not significantly impact tourism resources in the area south of Woods Pond Dam.

Secondary Impacts – Truck Traffic

Truck traffic associated with the cleanup could affect tourism resources in and around Lenox, especially resources located closer to the river, such as Eastover Resort and the Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum. This impact could be both location-specific – busier roads deterring visitors from visiting particular facilities – and more generalized. Over time, regular truck traffic from

⁵⁰ *Revised CMS*, Figures 8-8a to 8-12.