

percent of the ocean's productivity. However, tourism is predominantly driven by private-sector interests in the *land* of the coastal zone [35]. Tourism, until recently, has been relatively little influenced by government regulatory policies regarding the wetland fringe and waters of the coastal zone.

Tourism data are sparse, and commonly cannot distinguish between different forms of tourism. However, according to one 1982 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey, 29 million U.S. citizens took some 310 million trips in 1980 based on nonconsumptive<sup>3</sup> enjoyment of nature and wildlife. At least 1 million of these tourists traveled to foreign lands primarily to experience the ecologies of remote destinations [7].

In recent years, increasing numbers of travelers have sought nature-based experiences that the traditional, leisure-oriented beach vacation or "old cities and cathedrals" tours generally fail to offer. Such tourists find these experiences primarily in two types of locales—in less developed countries that are still relatively resource rich, and in certain protected or remote regions of developed countries. Ecotourism in the United States is primarily oriented to the larger national parks, forests, marine sanctuaries, and other such protected areas. Lesser developed countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda have set aside large areas for wildlife preserves that allow tourist safaris. Today, countries such as Costa Rica and Belize are aggressively promoting tourism to their undeveloped forest and coastal areas.

A new integration of environmental concerns and tourism is widely evident, not only in the efforts of many governments to promote ecotourism, but also in the many institutional structures that now focus on ecotourism. In the United States, for example, the Ecotourism Society was founded in 1990 as a "center for research, information and policies on developing ecologically sound tourism in natural areas around the world" [65]. The newly formed Environment Committee of the American Society of Travel Agents is encouraging travel agents and mainstream tourists to participate in nature tourism. And the Society of American Travel Writers has organized a Tourism/Environment Watch Committee "to generate concern for the world's environments among professionals in travel journalism"

[62]. Internationally, the World Tourism Organization, an intergovernmental organization established in 1975 to promote and develop tourism (particularly with developing countries) cooperates with the mission of the United Nations Environment Programme as described in the Joint Declaration on Tourism and the Environment, adopted in 1982. Ecotourism also has become a common theme for conferences and workshops organized by academic and other nongovernment organizations.

As the request for this background paper illustrates, it is also an emerging concern of Congress. The following sections summarize information and identify issues related to ecotourism development and management, focusing where possible on issues of special concern to U.S. Atlantic and Caribbean coastal and island areas.

## DEFINITIONS OF ECOTOURISM

The variety of terms used synonymously with or that fall under the umbrella of "ecotourism" provides an idea of what it potentially encompasses. These terms include, but are not limited to: nature tourism, adventure tourism, ethnic tourism, responsible or wilderness-sensitive tourism, soft-path or small-scale tourism, low-impact tourism, and sustainable tourism. Scientific, educational, or academic tourism (more specifically, biotourism, archeotourism, geotourism, etc.) are considered forms of ecotourism with a specialized clientele of students and scholars.

One widely quoted definition of ecotourism, introduced by Hector Ceballos-Lascurian in 1987, stresses the destinations and objectives of ecotourism from the traveler's point of view. Ecotourism, he suggests, is "traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of admiring, studying, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural features (both past and present) found in these areas" [10]. This definition "implies a scientific, aesthetic or philosophical approach to travel" [7].

Many authors consider ecotourism a form of "alternative tourism," and define it in part by contrasting its attributes and clientele with those of mass or resort tourism. The ecotourist as Ceballos-

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<sup>3</sup>Nonconsumptive uses of natural resources are those uses with no specific intent to remove resources from the environment, ~~and~~ does hunting and fishing, but they may have unintended adverse impacts that result in loss of the resources.

**Box A—Tourism, Ecotourism, and Recreation**

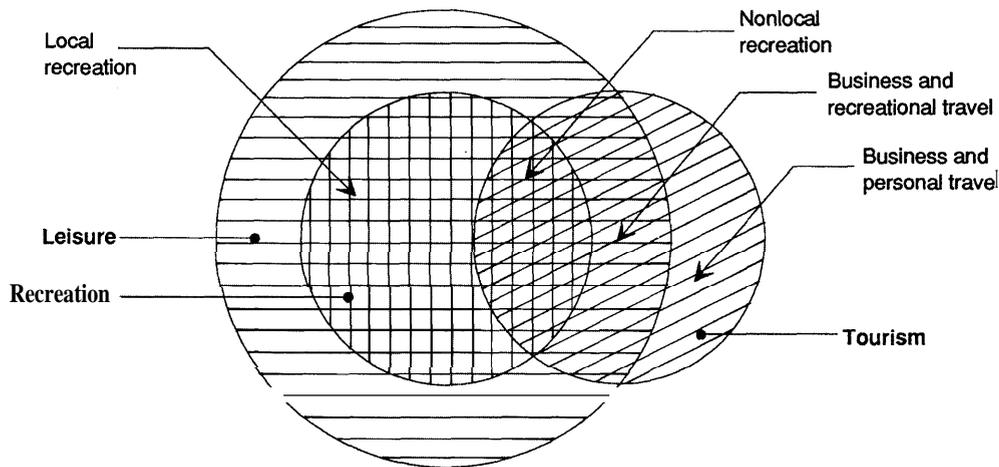
In addition to the commonly made contrast between mass/resort tourism and ecotourism, many authors also distinguish between ecotourism and outdoor recreation [10:39]. Most commonly, the ecotourist is envisioned to be attracted to a destination because of an interest in its natural characteristics (e.g., observing wetland biodiversity), not simply in a setting for carrying out certain recreational activities (e.g., fishing). Many definitions also assume that ecotourism destinations commonly are parks or other protected areas; an assumption not as commonly applied to mass/resort tourism or outdoor recreation. Finally, tourism commonly is defined as entailing travel to a destination requiring at least one overnight stay, whereas outdoor recreation may take place in a neighboring park.

Outdoor recreation grew explosively from the end of World War II until the 1970s, when it slowed to approximately the rate of population growth. Rapid expansion of demand has been linked with a general shift from a rural society to a more centralized, urban society. Workweeks declined to 40 hours, personal incomes rose rapidly, and improved transportation systems and cheap fuels permitted access to outdoor recreation for middle and lower income groups [54]. In addition, migration to the South and West put more people in closer proximity to Federal lands.

National recreational programs have evolved over the last several decades to serve different objectives, and are based on resource management for different user densities and activities. For example, National Forests are managed for resource extraction and recreation (“multiple use”) and National Recreation Areas are planned for high user carrying capacity, whereas National Wild and Scenic Rivers allow only nonmotorized boating, and access to the National Wilderness Preservation System is restricted to foot or horseback.

Although contrasting tourism, ecotourism, and outdoor recreation may be useful for initial planning purposes, in terms of resource management such a distinction likely becomes less useful. The same coastal destination may simultaneously or sequentially attract a bird-watching ecotourist, a recreational sailor, and a beach resort tourist. The type and level of impact potentially may vary with each type of use, but concerns such as resource conservation, access, congestion, and conflict management among resource users will affect all.

**Relationships Between Recreation and Tourism**



NOTE: Ecotourism, as most commonly defined, would be a subset of nonlocal recreation in this depiction.  
 SOURCE: P.E. Murphy, *Tourism-A Community Approach* (New York, NY: Methuen, 1985).

Lascurian envisions him/her is attracted to a natural area per se, not for other purposes. (See box A.) Cities and towns are primarily arrival and departure points-the real destination tends to be an undevel-

oped area, commonly a park or preserve [51]. Ecotourism also differs from mass/resort tourism in terms of (smaller) group size, (lower) expectations for amenities, (more diverse and participatory) types

of experiences, (greater) amount of interaction with local residents, and (larger) contributions toward conserving local resources [13].<sup>4</sup>

The ecotourist, in contrast to the mainstream mass tourist, thus is viewed as more willing to adapt to and appreciate local conditions, customs, and foods, and as less demanding in terms of lodging [7]. Ecotourists, suggests one analyst, “are expected to have less overall impact, consume less, demand less, and behave better than the upscale mainstream tourist, who has no particular environmental background” [33]. Another echoes this idea, defining ecotourism as “travel planned and performed in an environmentally and socially aware manner” [2].

While ecotourists may require less sophisticated services and infrastructure, they require a much higher level of biodiversity and wildlife experience than other tourists [2]. They are not after international glamour, but intact wilderness [7] and/or intimate contact with natives in other lands [61]. Thus, some analysts define ecotourism by the form of development it takes and the impacts it incurs: the U.S.-based Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people” [64].

In fact, ecotourism has most often been defined in terms of its perceived environmental and sociocultural benefits. Ceballos-Lascurain holds a particularly positive view of ecotourism, calling it a “powerful instrument for sustained conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the planet” [10]. Ecotourism has also been called a sustainable development strategy [7] because it may offer a new growth opportunity to depressed economies without threatening the continued functioning of natural ecosystems and human cultural systems [21].

Distinctions also have been attempted between types of ecotourists. One analysis identified three types: 1) the do-it-yourselfer, 2) the participant in organized tours, and 3) members of school and scientific groups [27]. Each may require different levels of tourist amenities. Nature tourism sites also attract traditional or mainstream tourists either visiting such destinations mainly to take an unusual trip or as an incidental part of a more conventional

vacation [31]. The “dedicated ecotourist” and scientists, on the other hand, travel specifically to see protected areas and to understand better the natural and cultural history of these areas.

The lack of consensus as to what does constitute a true ecotour or ecotourist injects a certain element of confusion into the literature of ecotourism; however, this may be a healthy stimulant to discussions of ecotourism as a growing sociological and economic force worldwide, and to analyses of its impacts. “What is the stereotype ecotourist? Whatever it is let’s get rid of it. We should not get lost discussing definitions. . . [but] concentrate on the concepts which embrace the kind of activity we are seeking to develop” [19].

No firm definition of ecotourism has emerged, suggests Ziffer [68] “because it is a complex notion that ambitiously attempts to describe an activity, set forth a philosophy and espouse a model of development.’ Those governments seeking to promote ecotourism in their countries see it as an activity compatible with conservationist philosophy and with sanely paced, culturally sensitive, sustainable development.

However, ecotourism is also a notion that lends itself readily to commercial exploitation. Today, anything with “eco” in the front will boost sales, one observer warns [3]. In some parts of the world, ecotourism may be little more than a new word to describe the same kind of tourist activities and developments that have degraded natural resources in the past [62]. Elsewhere (e.g., Nepal), an influx of tourists—even if ecotourists—may cause considerable ecological harm.

It would be elitist to define “good tourism” too narrowly. So called “adventure tourists” or “ecotourists” may be inspired by a desire for more authentic travel experience, but they may take an even costlier toll on the environment, particularly coastal and mountain ecology, than more sedentary travelers content to be moved about like registered parcels [45].

Certainly, ecotourism represents different things to conservationists, development assistance organizations, and travel agents. From the conservationist’s point of view, it is a tool to conserve resources,

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<sup>4</sup>Not all so-called “nature tours” would qualify as ecotourism by these definitions: watching shore birds with binoculars from the deck chair of a luxury liner, for example, bears more similarity to amenity-rich enclave/resort tourism. Beaches may be natural resources, but beach resorts may be too heavily used and highly developed to attract ecotourists [31].