

Boating and Cruise Ships

Boating in Rhode Island includes recreational boating, sailboat racing, and sea kayaking in local waters.

The America's Cup yacht race originally had its home in Newport, RI, largely because of the extremely favorable winds. Newport is widely referred to as "The Sailing Capital of the World," and the boating industry is heavily dependent on the local environment. Warmer temperatures and a longer boating season are positive impacts of projected climate change for boating. Conversely, reduced average wind speed decreases the attractiveness of the area for sailing and sailboat racing.

Increased storminess and less predictable weather negatively affect planning for regattas and sailboat races and reduce safety at sea. Storminess could also increase the costs of insurance premiums for marinas, recreational vessels and larger regattas.

Sea level rise, combined with storms, heavier winter precipitation, and runoff may place some marinas, yacht clubs and boat ramps at risk of inundation, erosion, and storm damage. Adaptation actions would require investments that will increase costs of operation.

Projections of greater storm intensity and more nor'easters could cause earlier hauling-out of recreational boats. Increased storminess could also make it more difficult to service Block Island by ferry, potentially adversely affecting recreation and tourism opportunities on both the island and mainland, with its ancillary businesses such as restaurants and fish retailers.

We must remember what economists call the multiplier effect, which is quite simply the situation in which a group comes to town to engage in a specific activity. Let's say they are using our coast as the location for a movie. Money gets spent on restaurants, hotels, caterers, drivers, truck and

car rentals, dry cleaners, hardware stores, rented space for offices or a studio, etc. The initial investment is making the movie but money spent on that endeavor multiplies as people spend money for all the things they want and need during the process. Tourism has a tremendous multiplier effect and climate change is a major threat to that economic engine.

Two prime examples occurred in 2012, when Newport hosted both the Tall Ships and America's Cup trial races. Thousands of people from across the country attended, and the revenue generated for both Newport and the state ran into the tens of millions of dollars.

Cruise Ship Tourism

Most cruise ship tourism to Newport is concentrated in the fall, when the sight of luxury liners arriving and departing accompanied by loud blasts of ship's horns is a part of daily life for the locals. Warmer fall temperatures would have a positive impact on the cruise ship industry, but since cruise ship tourism is concentrated in the fall hurricane season, increased storm intensity could put a damper on the cruise ship tourism industry as well as the benefit to local merchants when the passengers come ashore.



Cruise ship and tourists in Newport

Photo Credit: RI Sea Grant