

Santa Cruz, California Surf Spot Valued at \$8.4 Million Annually

By Nathan Pierce

A recent study by a graduate of California State University has put a dollar value to surfing in Santa Cruz. Using a method titled Travel Cost Modeling, Charles Tilley found a net value of the "Pleasure Point" surf-zone in Santa Cruz, California to be \$8.4 million annually.

"The TCM," said Tilley, "has gained worldwide acceptance from policy makers ever since it was used on the economics of recreation in US National Parks in 1947." Policy makers often use methods like TCM to show the value of protecting and restoring natural areas. This is the first time, however, the TCM has been used to estimate the value of a surf spot.

Using surveys conducted in February 2000, Tilley, a recent graduate of CSU Monterey Bay, was able to estimate how often people surf and for how long, how far they travel to surf in Santa Cruz, and how much money they spend on surfing each year. Tilley surveyed the number of surfers in the water at six surf spots within 3/4 mile along Soquel Point, Santa Cruz to find that approximately 400 people surf at Pleasure Point on an average day of surf. Finally, using the average of 149 surf trips per year, surf spots along Pleasure Point were given a dollar value.

"I wanted to give a much needed dollar value to these unique areas and their benefits," Tilley said, "in the hope that they will be more fully recognized as such and treated accordingly."

"The surf at Pleasure Point really is known worldwide," said a board member of Surfrider Foundation, Santa Cruz Chapter. Surfers from around the globe visit Santa Cruz every year and the Surfrider Foundation hopes to use Tilley's report to gain improved preservation of Pleasure Point and other surf spots. "Pleasure Point is truly a unique spot," said the board member. "Thanks to Mr. Tilley we now begin to see how valuable surfing is to Pleasure Point and Santa Cruz."

Tilley conducted the study as a Capstone project for his Bachelor of Science degree at CSUMB. It is hoped that studies like these will allow surf spots the same regard as traditional parks, which typically receive more maintenance. One of Tilley's concerns is access-ways to the shoreline, which can become hazardous when run down or obliterated due to erosion or neglect. "These hazards," says Tilley, "should be considered a protocol for action in maintenance as would a stairway in need of repair at a park inside of city limits."

"It is simply not enough to justify the value of surf zones through the smiling faces, healthy bodies and enlightened spirits common to most surfers," said Tilley. "It seems money talks and maybe this value estimate will speak for all of us."

"Nothing in the way of valuing surf zones with hard dollar figures has been done to date," said Tilley. The Surfrider Foundation valued a surf spot in El Segundo, California in the 1980s, but it was not done with this level of accuracy. Surfrider's research resulted in Statewide recognition of surfing waves as an important public resource, while Tilley's study has already gained attention from representatives of Surfrider Foundation Santa Cruz Chapter, O'Neill Wetsuits Inc., the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and CSUMB.

Additionally, the TCM and Tilley's report offers policy and decision-makers a tool to better address such surf zone issues as water quality and overcrowding. "By assuming the responsibility to treat that experience and its ingredients as a valuable asset to the community, policy-makers gain the potential to meet the growing needs of the surfing community for generations to come."



Top photo: Pleasure Point offers a choice of excellent surf year-round from many swell directions.

Middle: While surf spots are often overlooked for maintenance, such as erosion threatening this "goat trail" access to Pleasure Point, it is hoped the valuation study will afford this, and other surf spots, the attention they deserve from park managers.

Bottom: The excellent surf at Pleasure Point hosts several surf contests throughout the year, but benefits from contests, and the professionals who make a living in the surf-zone, were not taken into account when six breaks were found to be worth \$8.4 million annually.