

TRANSIENT BOATERS' POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ON COMMUNITIES
THAT ARE PROXIMATE TO THE ATLANTIC ICW

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The Inter Coastal Waterway (ICW) is a protected transportation route that runs from New England to the southern tip of Florida in the Atlantic Ocean, and continues north along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Maintained by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This water trail provides passage for commercial, recreational, and transient watercraft. While a great deal is known about commercial freight use of this waterway, little if any data is available concerning recreational and transient use patterns of the ICW.

Transient users, otherwise known as “snowbirds,” may be of particular interest to North Carolina coastal communities. It is believed that these users make annual trips up and down the ICW based on seasonal climate conditions. Much like migratory birds, in the fall they travel south to escape the cold of the northern winter, and then return north in the spring. Coastal communities who wish to attract these users may provide amenity rich waterfront areas in the hopes that these transients will stop for a few days and provide positive economic impacts in the communities.

However, very little is known concerning the travel behavior of these transient boaters. Additionally, no information is currently available to determine the efficacy of development efforts that are intended to boost local economies by luring them to coastal communities. Information regarding their willingness to travel specific distances off the ICW for goods and services, as well as the types of goods and services that would induce them to travel the greatest distances would assist coastal communities adjacent and proximate to the ICW to better invest in amenities and service delivery options designed to target the transient boater market segment.

The primary purpose of this project was to develop, test, and refine a methodology to collect travel behavior data from transient boaters on the ICW. A secondary purpose of the project was to collect data on travel behaviors and to develop a preliminary social-economic profile of ICW transient boaters. Data was collected through a combination of short intercept surveys and more extensive mail-back surveys that were given to transient boaters at several locations on the ICW in NC during Fall, 2015.

Discussion will focus on what amenities transient boaters look for when determining where they will make port, as well as what types of these amenities or attractions will convince them to travel the furthest distances off the ICW. In addition data will also be presented that describes the travel behavior of transient boaters and the importance of the voyage in relation to their final destination. Recommendations will be provided to assist communities proximate to the ICW to more efficiently create goods and services that are desired by the travel segment of ICW snowbirds. This will include specific

recommendations for the development of outreach materials to educate transient boaters about amenities, goods and services that are available in different ICW proximate communities.