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Title: Toward a Value for Guided Rafting on Southern Rivers

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on estimating a value for guided whitewater rafting on the Chatooga River and the Nantahala River, two fast flowing rivers in the Southeastern United States. The study uses a variant of the travel cost method to estimate the per trip consumer surplus for each of these rivers, with a basic overview of travel cost included in the paper and a detailed definition of the model used for this study. Economic surplus represents the number of additional trips an individual would take based on a particular price, assuming income remained constant. A two-part sampling of commercially guided rafting participants was used, yielding 398 surveys for Chatooga and 394 for Nantahala.

This study estimates per trip economic surplus for guided rafting on the Chatooga River is between \$119 and \$286. The per trip economic surplus for the Nantahala the estimates range from \$89 to \$191. The surpluses for the Chatooga exceed those of the Nantahala by anywhere from 4 to 49%, which can be expected when considering the higher quality and better rapids of the Chatooga. The time cost of trips had the biggest influence on the size of the surplus so the results are heavily dependent on assumptions made about the opportunity cost of time. Consumer surplus estimates are also proportionally more sensitive to wage increases, which seems likely for all recreational activities.