Using Economic Data to Show the Importance of the Ocean and Great Lakes Economy

Businesses dependent on the nation's oceans and Great Lakes play an important role in the nation's economy. These businesses weathered the last recession better than the U.S. economy as a whole.

The U.S. ocean and Great Lakes economy accounted for:

- 1.47 million establishments
- 2.9 million employees
- $113 billion in wages
- $343 billion in goods and services

in the U.S. ocean and Great Lakes economy in 2012

In 2012, the ocean economy employed more people than the crop production, telecommunications, and building construction sectors combined.

U.S. Total Employment Comparison

Employment and GDP

The ocean economy is defined by the six sectors shown below. Some sectors, such as tourism and recreation, support a great number of jobs. Capital-intensive industries, such as offshore mineral extraction, yield high levels of gross domestic product (and higher wages) with a relatively small workforce, as depicted in the graphic.

Accessing Local Economic Data

Coastal resources provide countless intangible benefits, from natural systems that clean the water we drink to beautiful vistas that nourish the soul. But many tangible benefits are also provided, benefits that can be described in economic terms. Having this information is helpful when decision makers are considering actions that may impact the ocean economy our communities and our nation have come to depend on.

NOAA's Digital Coast provides many products that make it easier to access and understand economic data. The data are provided for about 400 coastal counties, 30 coastal states, eight regions, and the nation.

For more information, visit the Economics: National Ocean Watch page of NOAA's Digital Coast at coast.noaa.gov/dataregistry/search/collection/info/enow.