

State to set new record for outdoor recreation in 2021

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Wisconsin is on pace to break its 2019 record for outdoor recreation-related economic activity this year.

Since the start of the pandemic, Wisconsin has outpaced the national average in travel spending, acting Tourism Secretary Anne Sayers said. In 2020 this led to a local spending infusion of \$2.5 billion that would have been spent elsewhere in a normal year, she added.

Sayers was a guest during the “Lake Talks: How the Great Lakes Drive Outdoor Recreation and Wisconsin Tourism” virtual event hosted by Wisconsin Sea Grant.

“An increase in the share of overnight trips from in-state, plus local spending, all led to Wisconsin faring better during the pandemic than most other states,” she said.

According to Sayers, the number of trips being planned of two nights or longer in Wisconsin this year is outpacing 2020, and the record-setting year of 2019.

Website traffic at travelwisconsin.com is also up 20 percent over 2019, a year in which the website set a record for web traffic, she said. According to Sayers, this is a great indicator of travel intent.

This is good news for Wisconsin as outdoor recreation contributes \$7.8 billion to the state's GDP. According to Mary Brown, the director of the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation, the growth in GDP related to outdoor recreation outpaces the state's total GDP growth.

"One dollar in every \$40 generated in Wisconsin is from outdoor recreation related activities," Brown said, citing a report from Headwaters Economics, an independent and bipartisan nonprofit research group.

According to the Headwaters Economics report, outdoor recreation accounts for 93,000 jobs in Wisconsin, making it the fifth-largest share of outdoor recreation-related jobs in the nation. This makes it a critical industry for the state, Brown said.

"The Office of Outdoor Recreation is leveraging the state's natural assets, it's legacy of stewardship and our fun-loving affection for the outdoors to support and uplift this essential industry," she said.

Sayers concluded: "The dollar grows when residents and visitors recreate in Wisconsin. There are so many ways our economy benefits. From the gear that was designed and manufactured to the retailers that sold the equipment, to the restaurants travelers stop at after a day of activity."

-By Grayson Sewell

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