

Wisconsin's \$8.7 Billion Outdoor Recreation Industry Sees Record Year

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin
Friday, 16 December 2022 11:21 -

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Data show Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry grew 14.1 percent in 2021

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, together with Wisconsin Department of Tourism Secretary-designee Anne Sayers and Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation Director Mary Monroe Brown, announced Thursday that annual data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis show Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry contributed a record-setting \$8.7 billion to the state's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021. Additionally, Wisconsin's outdoor economy grew by 14.1 percent—more than three times faster than the state's overall economy, which grew by 4.6 percent.



“From hunting and fishing to boating and paddling to snowboarding and skiing, outdoor recreation is part of who we are as a people and a state—it improves our quality of life, draws visitors from all over the world, supports tens of thousands, and serves as a major economic driver for communities across Wisconsin,” said Gov. Evers. “I’m proud of our work to create the Office of Outdoor Recreation and to ensure this critical industry recovers from the pandemic, and these numbers are an excellent testament to this important work and the Office’s success.”

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Key findings of the report show Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry supported nearly 90,000 jobs across various sectors in 2021, with a growth rate of 9.7 percent compared to 2.4 percent for all jobs. Manufacturing jobs accounted for 10 percent of all outdoor recreation jobs in each of the last two years, ranking Wisconsin fourth in the country. Despite supply chain issues during the pandemic, manufacturing jobs continued to grow from 2019 to 2021, increasing by 11 percent.

The data also show travel and tourism, as well as local trips, account for nearly \$2.8 billion of outdoor recreation's contributions to Wisconsin's GDP. In 2020, Wisconsin was one of only seven states to see an increase in economic impact from local outdoor recreation-related trips. In 2021, the economic impact of local trips grew even more, increasing by 7.2 percent to \$771 million.

"We've long understood this inextricable link between outdoor recreation and tourism. Our traveler surveys consistently show outdoor recreation is a top marketable reason people visit Wisconsin," said Secretary-designee Sayers. "Supporting the entire outdoor recreation industry through the work of the Office of Outdoor Recreation is essential to safeguard and enhance a significant tourism offering that helped buoy our industry during the most unprecedented challenges of the pandemic."

The [Office of Outdoor Recreation](#) was created at the Department of Tourism by Gov. Evers in 2019 and serves as a central hub for Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry, working with stakeholders and providing resources to bolster Wisconsin as a top outdoor recreation destination.

"This incredible growth puts an exclamation point on the significance of the outdoor industry to our economy and the overall well-being of Wisconsin and Wisconsinites," said Office of Outdoor Recreation Director Mary Monroe Brown. "The Office is working with partners to not only unite the industry but also to deliver critical resources, like the recent workforce attraction tool that businesses are already using to attract talent to our beautiful state."

Last month, the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation released [Live + Work Where You Play: Outside in Wisconsin](#), a free, 16-page publication to assist businesses and organizations with recruitment and talent attraction. The tool leverages the state's outdoor recreation culture, industry, and abundant offerings to give Wisconsin employers an edge over the competition in the job market. The free resource is one of many available on the Office's website, along with educational webinars, a research library, and a first-of-its-kind outdoor business directory to help businesses and organizations connect.

"As St. Croix Rod has experienced tremendous growth over the past three years, recruiting and retaining staff in a small rural area has been challenging. We've shifted our effort to seeking individuals who want to live an outdoor lifestyle and who can represent our brand authentically," said Scott Forristall, CEO of Park Falls-based St. Croix Rod. "We had been directing job candidates to the Office's website as part of our recruitment efforts, and we are thrilled to utilize the beautiful new booklet to show how Wisconsin is an outdoor enthusiast's paradise."

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In Wisconsin, fishing was one of the categories that grew in 2020 and again in 2021. According to the new data, the top categories within outdoor recreation's contributions to Wisconsin's GDP were:

- Multi-use apparel and accessories: \$961 million
- Motorcycling and ATVing: \$882 million, number one nationally
- Boating and Fishing: \$602 million
- Bicycling: \$451 million, number two nationally

Nationally, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 1.9 percent and \$454 billion of GDP and grew 18.9 percent compared to 5.9 percent for the overall U.S. economy. The top three categories were boating and fishing, RV traveling, and hunting, shooting, and trapping.

"From the creation of jobs and increased profit for small businesses in local economies to larger boons to our national economy, this sector is a consistent driver, even in times of economic uncertainty," said Jessica Turner, president of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, a national coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations. "The strength of the outdoor recreation economy reflects what many in the industry have long known to be true: there are infinite benefits that come from more people spending time outdoors, and they'll only grow with continued investment."

For the national report and state-level data and tables, visit the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account section of the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis website at: <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>