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Governor's budget proposes significant investments to promote local tourism, attract large-scale events, and supports the arts.

MADISON — Gov. Evers this week joined the Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism and to celebrate the Governor's Tourism Awards winners and nominees for their innovation and resiliency in uplifting Wisconsin's tourism industry. During the conference, the governor also highlighted his historic 2023-25 budget investments and initiatives to bolster the state's tourism industry that will expand existing programs, attract and recruit large-scale events and conventions to Wisconsin, and provide for the local arts with innovative programs and funds.



"Wisconsin's tourism industry surged in 2021 and 2022 and outpaced our neighbors in Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota, and in my 2023-25 budget proposal we're making sure it continues to succeed," said Gov. Evers at the conference. "My budget proposal would provide an additional $13.3 million to the Department of Tourism's base budget to keep them competitive with our

neighbors, as well as create a Meetings, Conventions, and Sports Bureau and an Opportunity Attraction and Promotion Fund so we can go big and compete for major events.

“We’re also investing more than $30 million in the Department of Tourism’s budget for marketing in the next biennium and continuing the successful Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program to support major infrastructure projects that will help the industry for years to come. And finally, folks, I hear it often—Mary Monroe Brown and her team at the Office of Outdoor Recreation are doing some really spectacular work and the numbers show that. So, my budget makes that Office a permanent part of the state of Wisconsin team.

“All these investments—and more—are designed to strengthen the economic engine that is Wisconsin’s $20.9 billion tourism industry. But the fuel behind that engine is you.”

Since 2020, Gov. Evers has invested more than $1 billion of Wisconsin’s federal pandemic relief funds in economic resilience, including small businesses and other industries impacted by the pandemic, and more than $200 million of that total was invested in the travel and tourism, hotels and lodging, and entertainment industries alone.



Additionally, success in the state’s tourism and outdoor recreation industries has served as a key indicator of Gov. Evers’ strong economic recovery strategy. In November, Gov. Evers anno unced
that visitor spending in Wisconsin grew 5.9 percent in September 2022 compared to September 2019, which was the largest gain of any month since the start of the pandemic when compared to the same month in 2019. In December, Gov. Evers
also announced
that the outdoor recreation industry contributed a record-setting $8.7 billion to the state’s gross domestic product in 2021 and that the outdoor economy grew by 14.1 percent—more than three times faster than the state’s overall economy. Economic impact data for 2021 also showed tourism generated $20.9 billion in total economic impact—a 21 percent increase from

2020—and supported more than 169,000 full- and part-time jobs, demonstrating the significant economic impact of the industry in Wisconsin.

The governor's 2023-25 budget ensures the continued success of the state's travel and tourism industry by making more than $117 million in additional investments in existing programs and new economic development strategies. The governor's plan to invest in and bolster the tourism industry is available below.

Expand Existing Programs to Promote Tourism

Gov. Evers is proposing additional investments into existing programs and departments that already work daily to increase travel and tourism opportunities in the state, including:

- $37 million over the biennium for marketing and advertising so the Wisconsin Department of Tourism can continue its good work to promote Wisconsin as a premier business, cultural, and recreational destination; and
- Continuing the state's investment in the Office of Outdoor Recreation to expand the state's growing outdoor recreation market by providing $1.1 million and three full-time equivalent (FTE) positions over the biennium to make the office a permanent hub for outdoor partners, brands, and industries.



Recruit and Attract Large-Scale Events
Gov. Evers' budget includes funding to recruit and attract major events and become a staple destination by:

- Creating and funding an opportunity and attraction fund with more than $30 million over

the biennium to recruit large-scale events to Wisconsin. This substantial investment will help showcase everything Wisconsin has to offer and reap significant benefits for local businesses and the statewide economy. This would allow Wisconsin to compete for several major events, such as NFL Drafts in Green Bay, the NBA All-Star Game in Milwaukee, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) events, and NASCAR races; and

- Creating a new Meetings, Conventions, and Sports Bureau within the Department of Tourism, supported by $2.7 million and two FTE positions over the biennium, to focus on promoting the state as a destination for large events.

Investing in the Arts

Gov. Evers understands how critical arts are to the state's culture and economy and is proposing innovative initiatives to fund Wisconsin's investment in the arts for years to come, including:

- Increasing funding for the Wisconsin Arts Board by $552,500 over the biennium to maximize the drawdown of available federal funds and continue supporting individuals and organizations engaged in the arts; and
- Transferring $100 million from the General Fund to the Artistic Endowment Fund. Every year the proceeds on the interest in earnings will be distributed to fund investments in arts, including the Arts Board, throughout Wisconsin.

Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program

Finally, the governor is proposing $50 million for the Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program, which provides funding to assist local and Tribal governments and nonprofit organizations to bolster Wisconsin's tourism, travel, and lodging economies.

The Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program ensures the state's travel and tourism economy continues its momentum by providing support for major tourism-related capital improvement projects across the state that help promote, maintain, or bolster Wisconsin's tourism industry. To date, $21.9 million in grants have been awarded to 26 local governments and organizations through the Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program, including investments to support the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation for facility upgrades to better serve the more than 10,000 participants who come to northern Wisconsin each year for the "Birkie," to construct the new Experience Greater Green Bay Visitor Center in Green Bay, and to expand maritime infrastructure at Port Milwaukee to accommodate larger cruise ships.