



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of June 17, 2024 -- 'The great outdoors helps grow the economy'

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 17, 2024

| ISSUE: **OUTDOOR RECREATION**



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Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, **"The great outdoors helps grow the economy"**

Among other designations, the month of June is recognized as National Great Outdoors Month.

That designation is certainly worth some attention here in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, especially at a time like now when we need to keep growing and strengthening every sector of economic opportunity for local communities.

According to the latest report released earlier this month from the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR), a leading coalition of outdoor recreation associations, “The outdoor recreation industry does more than bring joy to millions of Americans: it helps drive our economy.”

According to statistics from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the industry provides nearly five million jobs nationally (3.2% of all U.S. employees), generates more than \$1 trillion in economic output, and accounts for 2.2 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP).

Here in New York State, the numbers are equally impressive, with the industry providing 275,000 jobs (2.7 percent of the state’s employees) and generating upwards of \$31 billion in economic activity.

ORR President Jessica Wahl Turner said recently, “Every June, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable is proud to coordinate Great Outdoors Month. This is an opportunity to celebrate outdoor recreation and America’s incredible natural treasures. Outdoor recreation contributes an impressive \$1.1 trillion to the economy, while also providing health and well-being benefits to communities across the country. Great Outdoors Month is also an opportunity to ensure the outdoors are welcoming and accessible to everyone. This month, let’s come together to celebrate the joys and benefits of outdoor recreation and renew our commitment to making the outdoors accessible for all.”

Outdoor recreation would turn out to be a ray of hope throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of unprecedented challenges and upheaval, outdoor recreation remained strong, still accounting for nearly \$700 billion in gross domestic output in 2020. According to reports, in 2021 outdoor recreation hit a record high with 164 million participants nationwide.

“Throughout this pandemic, outdoor recreation has been a cornerstone of American life,” the Outdoor Industry Association noted at that time. “As we look forward, it’s clear the outdoors will be an important part of America’s economic future.”

It has been all of that and more. In other words, there is a lot of biking, boating, hiking, hunting, camping, climbing, fishing, paddling, bird watching, and other outdoor recreation going on locally, statewide, and across the United States.

We're told that more than one-half of American citizens annually take part in an outdoor recreation activity and that they annually make more than 10 billion outdoor outings.

As a former chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee and a lifelong sportsman, I have been grateful for opportunities to support the ongoing resurgence of outdoor recreation. The Legislature annually takes actions on behalf of the outdoors, not solely for the economic and conservation benefits but also because these activities offer a high-quality means of exercise, healthier lifestyles, and family fun and recreation.

Surveys by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have shown striking facts about the nationwide economic impact -- to the tune of \$122 billion in revenue and millions of jobs -- of the 87.5 million Americans who fish, hunt, or engage in other wildlife-related recreation. Hunting, fishing, and trapping are deeply rooted in New York's (and our region's) culture, experience, and tradition.

The same goes for our unmatched network of New York State parks, trails, and historic sites. The advocacy group Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) routinely highlights the economic impact of New York's more than 200 state parks, dozens of historic sites, more than a thousand miles of hiking trails, and over 8,000 campsites (to say nothing of numerous boat launches, beaches, swimming pools, and nature centers). PTNY has estimated that the state parks and trails system supports approximately 54,000 jobs and generates upwards of \$5 billion in park and visitor spending -- which means each dollar of state investment is supporting a return of an estimated nine dollars in consumer spending.

As we continue working to turn around the Upstate New York economy through small business growth, a revitalization and strengthening of manufacturing, high tech research and development, an ongoing foundation of agriculture and tourism, and in many other ways, we will be smart to keep an eye on the outdoors.

New York's unique outdoor experiences and pastimes -- and our region is unmatched in this arena -- are sure to entice increased spending on goods and services provided by local businesses. These expenditures support jobs, generate sales and income taxes, and spark tourism.

In this period of ongoing uncertainty about the economic future of our state and nation, one thing is clear: More New Yorkers than ever before are eager to get outside for a breath of fresh air and a better view -- and it keeps adding up to a stronger bottom line.

It's at least one bright spot on the horizon.

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