



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of July 7, 2025 -- 'Look outdoors and help grow the economy'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 7, 2025

| 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, **"Look outdoors and help grow the economy"**

Among other designations, the month of July is recognized as National Park and Recreation Month -- a designation certainly worthy of some attention here in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions.

In its 2025 "Outdoor Participation Trends Report," the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) highlights the following trends shaping the future of outdoor participation:

-- Growth across gateway activities like hiking, camping, and fishing, each gaining over 2 million new participants;

-- A surge in participation among seniors (+7.4%) and youth (+5.6%) -- fueling a more multigenerational outdoors;

-- A critical 5 million participant increase in "core" outdoor users -- the most frequent and committed adventurers.

According to the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), which tracks trends in the outdoor recreation economy, the outdoor sector grew by 37% during the decade between 2012 and 2023, outperforming other nationally important sectors like education and health care (26% growth) and finance, insurance, and real estate (33% growth).

According to the bureau, "As outdoor recreation continues to grow faster than the overall economy, it will become a more significant economic driver with greater influence in local and national policy conversations."

BEA statistics reveal that 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.

"Outdoor recreation has been a cornerstone of American life" over the past several years, notes the OIA. "As we look forward, it's clear the outdoors will be an important part of America's economic future."

It promises to be all of that and more, including right here at home and throughout New York. 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 America.

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 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 of manufacturing, high tech research and development, an ongoing foundation of agriculture and tourism, and in numerous other ways, we will be smart to keep an eye on the outdoors.

New York's unique outdoor experiences and pastimes are unmatched, and our region offers some of

the state's most noteworthy attractions which entice increased spending on goods and services provided by local businesses. These expenditures help support local jobs, families, and communities. They generate sales and income taxes, and spark tourism.

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 and at least one bright spot on the horizon.