



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of June 13, 2022 -- 'Step outside and grow the economy'

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 13, 2022

| ISSUE: **OUTDOOR RECREATION**



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

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, "Step outside and grow the economy"

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

It is worth some attention here in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes. At a time when we need to stay in pursuit of every possible ray of hope, it is one bright spot in an otherwise cloudy and unsettled economic future.

The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) gets right to the point: “Outdoor recreation is an economic force.”

It’s a point well taken and one that governmental leaders, at all levels, and in all places, should take to heart.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19 and subsequent shutdowns across our economies and ways of life, it was reported that America’s outdoor recreation industry was generating a \$734 billion “gross domestic product output” while producing \$887 billion in consumer spending and supporting nearly eight million jobs.

Yet even in the face of the pandemic’s unprecedented challenges and upheaval, outdoor recreation remained strong, still accounting for nearly \$700 billion in gross domestic output in 2020 -- and will likely emerge from this crisis even stronger.

“Throughout this pandemic, outdoor recreation has been a cornerstone of American life,” the OIA states. “As we look forward, it’s clear the outdoors will be an important part of America’s economic future.”

In other words, there is a lot of biking, 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 nearly one-half of American citizens annually take part in an outdoor recreation activity and that these Americans 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 estimates 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 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.

"This includes day trips as well as overnight trips," the PTNY has noted, "with visitors spending money on park entrance and use fees, sporting equipment, food and drink, transportation, lodging, and other expenses. Visitor spending creates jobs and revenue not only for the park system, but also has a multiplier effect, as jobs and revenues are created in supporting industries throughout the local economy."

In this period of great uncertainty, one thing is clear: More and more New Yorkers 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.

###