



## Custer County Tourism: 2022 Year in Review

The Custer County Tourism Board is pleased to announce another productive year. Not only did the Tourism Board see another high lodging tax revenue number, but it also received fantastic press coverage, printed a new Custer County Guidebook, and continues to be a leader in the Colorado Stargazing program.

### *Financial Overview*

Custer County collected \$78,853. in lodging tax in 2022, and the Custer County Tourism Board has a healthy fund reserve of over \$100,000. They will maintain an annual budget of \$160,000 in 2023 including marketing and management grants from Colorado Tourism Office (CTO).

### *Local Support*

The Tourism Board is directing marketing funds back into the community by providing professional graphic design services for flyers to help promote local events that help bring economic vitality to the community. It has also supported local businesses and events through public relations, event listings, social media promotion, monthly newsletters, and a Business Directory on [visitwetmountainvalley.com](http://visitwetmountainvalley.com).

The Tourism Board encourages organizations to list their event on the online events calendar as soon as dates are established so Tourism can continue to market these events in various ways. They also encourage local businesses to use the directory as a resource page to let visitors and locals know the town better as to what is available.

### *Partnerships*

The Custer County Tourism Board continues its partnerships with Shelly Larson of Jo Studio and VistaWorks Destination Management. It also continues to be a leader in the Colorado Stargazing: Experience the Night program, which received over 28,000 visits on [colorado.com](http://colorado.com) in 2022 and won a Colorado Tourism Office Marketing Grant to produce a video promoting the importance of protecting night skies and how to stargaze responsibly.

### *Custer County Welcome Center*

The Welcome Center is now closed for the season and will reopen in March. We greatly appreciate the time and energy of the volunteer ambassadors who staffed in 2022 for 437 hours and greeted 875 visitors and 261 locals for the year. We are always looking for friendly locals to staff a five-hour shift at the Welcome Center from April through November.

### *VisitWetMountainValley.com*

Custer County's tourism website received over 43,000 visits in 2022, a 6% increase from 2021. Most importantly, these visits are largely coming organically, which means the tourism board did not pay for the traffic and that people are actively searching for information on visiting Westcliffe, Silver Cliff, and the Wet Mountain Valley. New content was added throughout the year and plans to add more content will continue throughout 2023.





### *Marketing*

Marketing efforts included a monthly newsletter, social media posts on Facebook and Instagram, the creation of flyers and brochures, print and digital ads and event listings in pertinent outlets, and more.

### *A New Guidebook*

The Custer County Tourism Board produced and printed a brand new Visit Wet Mountain Valley/Custer County Guidebook. Visitors now have a comprehensive guide of the valley, which includes information on communities, hiking, stargazing, history, and more.

### *Colorado Tourism Office Restart Destinations Program*

The Custer County Tourism Board participated in The Colorado Tourism Office's Restart Destination Program, during which it identified solutions for enhancing visitor management through increased visitor education, championing the value of tourism within the local community, advancing the tourism workforce, and diversifying tourism experiences. The Restart Destinations Program was part of a series of activities funded by a CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant to drive near-term recovery and foster long-term resilience for the Colorado tourism industry.

### *Wet Mountain Valley in the Press*

2022 press highlights for the Wet Mountain Valley include "Your Guide to Stargazing in Colorado" published in 5280 Magazine and a visit by TikTok influencer Nelson Holland, whose video of Smokey Jack Observatory has garnered 66,500 views, 9,762 likes, and 130 comments as of January 2023.

### *Tourism Board*

The Tourism Board welcomes Denise Fensholt and Jeannette Steigerwald on the board this year along with Karalin Alsdurf, Jackie Shepherd, and Wade Pettis, continuing their term. Deb Adams is serving her fifth year in leadership as the chairperson guiding the board. Monthly board meetings are open to the public and are held the second Tuesday of each month except August from 9 am to 11 am in the conference room at Kirkpatrick Bank. Public comment is allowed at the end of each meeting. We welcome citizen input to better serve the community and enhance the visitor experience.

### *Looking Ahead*

A major undertaking for 2023 is the redesign and printing of a new Past & Present 28 page booklet to replace the Then & Now Historic Touring 16 page booklet published in 2007. We are collaborating with Valley Strong to refresh the Main Street banners. Stay tuned for details of these community projects.

