

Custer County Tourism: 2021 Year in Review

The Custer County Tourism Board is pleased to announce its most productive year yet. Not only did the tourism board see its highest ever lodging tax numbers, but it also received fantastic press coverage, joined the Colorado Tourism Office's Restart Destinations program, and launched a new focus on responsible travel.

Financial Overview

Custer County Tourism has a healthy fund reserve and will maintain an annual budget of \$65,000 in 2022. Custer County collected \$90,708 in lodging tax in 2021 compared to \$54,652 in 2020. That's a 66 percent increase in lodging tax revenue Custer County Tourism will have for future marketing efforts and community event support.

According to the 2021 Dean Runyon Report on the Economic Impact of Travel prepared for the Colorado Tourism Office, only seven counties in Colorado saw an increase in overnight direct travel impacts across all five categories—travel spending, earnings, employment, local taxes, state taxes—in 2020 when compared to 2019. Custer was one of those counties!

Local Support

In November, Custer County Tourism granted five \$1000 marketing grants to local organizations for their 2022 events. 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.

The Tourism Board encourages local organizations to list their event on the online Events Calendar as soon as dates are established so Tourism can help market these events in various ways. Our monthly newsletter now has over 7000 subscribers and our Facebook page has over 3100 followers and growing.

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 2021 for 437 hours, greeted 876 visitors and 261 locals for the year. We are always looking for friendly folks to staff a five hour shift at the Welcome Center April through December.

Colorado Tourism Office Restart Destinations Program

The Colorado Tourism Office selected the Custer County Tourism Board to participate in the Restart Destinations Program currently guiding the formation of a valley-wide destination stewardship initiative.

The Restart Destinations Program runs through June 30, 2022. As a participant in the program, the tourism board received a recovery assessment and a full-day action planning workshop in October. In 2022, the tourism board will receive 75 hours of

technical assistance to advance the stewardship project and \$10,000 of direct marketing support.

The Restart Destinations Program is 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.

A Shift in Messaging

With more people coming to the Wet Mountain Valley, Custer County Tourism became a Care for Colorado Member to kickstart its goal of increasing responsible travel. As a member, the tourism board may participate in quarterly meetings and use content created by Care for Colorado and its partner, Leave No Trace.

Responsible travel information is now available on visitwetmountainvalley.com. The tourism board adds content monthly and will share it via social media and monthly newsletters to educate visitors on how to travel with respect and how to leave no trace while visiting the Wet Mountain Valley.

Wet Mountain Valley in the Press

In 2021, The Wet Mountain Valley received coverage in outlets like *Conde Nast Traveler*, *EnCompass Magazine*, *Matador Network*, and *The Denver Post*. More recently, the tourism board's PR team coordinated a visit for Fox News for a feature on stargazing for the network's new weather channel.

Tourism Board

The Tourism Board welcomes LeAnn Bair, Karalin Alsdurf and Jeannette Steigerwald on the Tourism Board this year along with Jackie Shepherd, Wade Pettis and Deb Snell serving for another year. Deb Adams is serving her fourth year as chairperson. Monthly public board meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month except August from 9am to 11am at the Welcome Center.