



December 23, 2022

Mr. Don Friske
Chair – Lincoln County Board of Supervisors
C/O County Clerk – Chris Marlowe
801 N Sales Street, Suite 201
Merrill, WI 54452

Dear Mr. Chairman,

At a recent North Central ITBEC Marketing meeting, it was brought to our attention that Lincoln County will no longer monetarily support NC-ITBEC nor the Merrill or Tomahawk Chambers.

We understand the budgetary reasonings that may have gone into this decision; however, we would like to share with you the tourism numbers for Lincoln County and the State of Wisconsin from 2021.

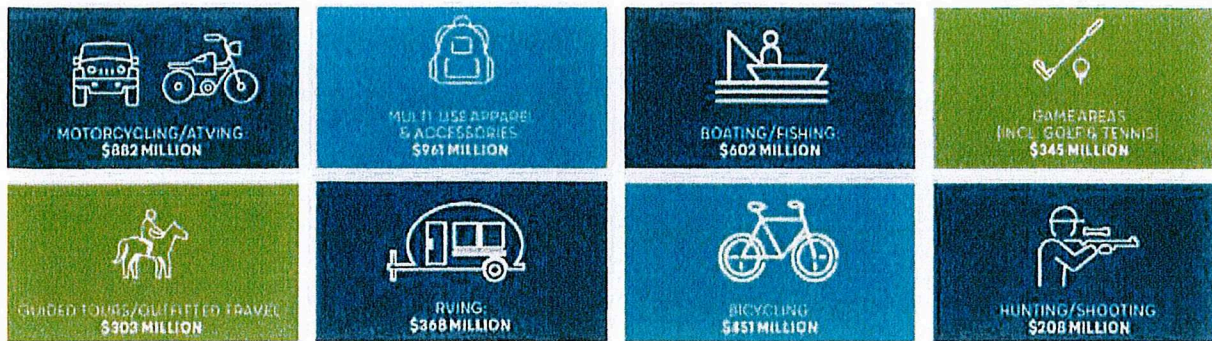
Wisconsin tourism surged back in 2021 with double-digit growth in total economic impact in every single one of Wisconsin's 72 counties year-over-year. In Wisconsin, and Lincoln County, tourism has proven to be a powerful driver of our economy.

In 2021, Wisconsin saw:

- **\$20.9 billion** in total economic impact
- **169,700+** full and part-time jobs, largely comprised of small businesses, travel and hospitality jobs, which cannot be outsourced or exported
- **1 in 21** Wisconsin jobs sustained by tourism
- **\$1.4 billion** in state and local taxes generated because of tourism
- **102.3 million** visitor trips

Tourism is also especially important to our local economy. In **Lincoln County**, we saw \$96 million in total business sales; \$62.8 million in Direct Visitor Spending; \$17.9 million in Total Labor Income and \$5.5 million in State and Local Taxes, while supporting 659 jobs. Each Wisconsin household would need to pay **\$580** to maintain the current level of government services generated by tourism.

Wisconsin's outdoor recreation plays a significant part of our tourism in Lincoln County. The latest numbers tracking the impact of outdoor recreation in the state illustrate just how huge and growing this industry is. According to the data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry contributed a record setting \$8.7 billion to the state's gross domestic product. The report also underscores the inextricable link between outdoor recreation and tourism with travel, tourism, and local trips accounting for nearly \$2.8 billion of outdoor recreation's contributions to Wisconsin's GDP.



Although 2022 numbers will not be reported until June, Lincoln County saw a dramatic increase in visitors attending the Northwoods Fall Ride weekend, Lincoln County Fair, and the Wisconsin River Pro Rodeo to name a few of the many events that draw out of town visitors to Lincoln County.

The importance of travel is clearer than ever — to both travelers and our local economies. Lincoln County is ready to deliver exactly what travelers are looking for — joyful moments shared between friends and family in the perfect place for making lasting memories.

Tourism is an asset to this county! Without the support of our local governments, the Chambers and the area tourism organizations will no longer have the funding to highlight the "WHY" visitors should choose Lincoln County over, say Oneida and Vilas.

At a recent Administrative and Legislative Committee meeting (November 2, 2022) Chairman Friske discussed the development of a County Strategic Plan to address "how do we grow Lincoln County and how do we move forward" at which time Supervisor Boyd discussed his ideas of a long-range plan for the County. During that discussion he stated that the plan includes strategic priorities and goals. As part of that discussion, he said, among other items, the County would contact partner organizations, city government, Chambers of Commerce to address new visitors and tourism to the County. Mr. Nelson was at that meeting and immediately after contacted Supervisor Boyd to ask how we, Merrill, and Tomahawk Chambers, could assist. Mr. Nelson discussed this with him and agreed to meet in early 2023. However, it is unfortunate/ironic that when you are cutting the funding/membership in the Chambers and NC-ITBEC that you are also looking to form a strategic partnership to increase tourism and business development.

Although we are recovering, we are not yet recovered. The recovery is more a dial than a switch. While different sectors of the tourism industry are recovering at different rates, we are optimistic about the recovery we see. We have never faced a more difficult challenge, yet it is the partnership of stakeholders like yourself that help make this recovery possible. We know that with your help we will continue to bounce back and grow our local economy.

Thank you for your past support of tourism and business development, and we hope you will reconsider your future funding support! Should you have questions, feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Sherry Hulett
 Executive Director
 Tomahawk Regional Chamber of Commerce &
 Visitor Center



Clyde Nelson
 Executive Director
 Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce

Cc: William Bialecki, Lori Anderson-Malm, Elizabeth McCrank, Steve Osness, Jr, Nathan Peterson, Norbert Ashbeck, Greta Rusch, Laurie Thiel, Jesse Boyd, Randy Detert, Julie DePasse, Calvin Callahan, Brian Hafeman, Marty Lemke, Michael Loka, George Brixius, Ken Wickham, Julie Allen, Angela Cummings, Eugene Simon, Greg Hartwig