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Economic Activity Associated with the Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit: An Exploratory Case Study of a Regional Recreation Event

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ABSTRACT

Outdoor recreation has become an increasingly important driver of rural economic development, creating opportunities for small businesses, workforce expansion, and community investment. This study examines the 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit as a case study of event-based economic activity in a rural region. Using participant survey data and IMPLAN input-output modeling, the analysis estimates the short-term economic effects associated with the event. Findings suggest that the Summit generated approximately $1.7 million in total economic output, supported more than 10 full-time equivalent jobs, and produced an estimated $548,000 in labor income within Allegany County, Maryland. These impacts reflect direct spending by attendees and organizers, as well as secondary effects captured through regional economic modeling. While the results provide insight into the potential contributions of outdoor recreation events, they should be interpreted as estimates of short-term economic activity rather than precise measures of economic impact. Overall, the findings highlight the role that coordinated recreation-related initiatives can play in supporting local business activity, strengthening rural economies, and informing economic development strategies within the outdoor recreation sector.

Keywords: outdoor recreation; economic development; rural economy; IMPLAN; tourism economics; event-based impact

INTRODUCTION

Outdoor recreation has emerged as a significant component of the modern economy, particularly in rural and small-market regions, where natural and cultural assets can be leveraged to generate employment, foster entrepreneurship, and revitalize communities. Across the United States, state and local governments have increasingly recognized recreation and tourism as tools for economic development, workforce expansion, and business innovation. The outdoor recreation sector contributes billions of dollars annually to the national gross domestic product. It supports a growing network of small businesses across lodging, food service, retail, and special events.

In Maryland, the establishment of the Maryland Office of Outdoor Recreation reflects this broader trend of strategic investment in recreation-based economies. Created to coordinate policy, promote entrepreneurship, and support rural development, the Office has positioned outdoor recreation as an economic engine and a community-building framework. The 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit (the Summit) represented the first statewide effort to convene industry leaders, government agencies, educators, and nonprofit organizations to advance these goals.

This study uses the Summit as a case study to examine the economic impact of outdoor recreation events in rural economies. Specifically, it measures the direct, indirect, and induced effects of attendee and organizer spending associated with the event and evaluates how such events function as catalysts for local economic activity. By analyzing the economic outcomes generated through the Summit, this paper contributes to a growing understanding of outdoor recreation as a business and economic development strategy, offering insights relevant to both policymakers and practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Outdoor recreation has emerged as a significant economic driver in both national and regional contexts, with growing scholarship highlighting its impact on business performance, employment, and community well-being. National data from the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (2024) indicate that outdoor recreation contributed approximately $1.2 trillion to the U.S. economy in 2023, supporting roughly 5 million jobs and accounting for about 2.3 percent of gross domestic product. This national recognition underscores how recreation increasingly functions as a strategic business and economic development sector.

In rural regions, outdoor recreation and tourism are being leveraged to drive economic revitalization. Reeder and Brown (2005) found that "recreation counties" in rural America consistently experienced higher employment and income growth than their non-recreation counterparts, though outcomes varied by the types of amenities available. Similarly, Bergstrom et al. (1990) demonstrated that recreational visitor spending generates substantial effects across local economies, extending beyond the tourism industry to benefit retail trade, service industries, and construction sectors. More recently, scholars have advanced the discussion by framing rural tourism and outdoor recreation as engines of broader community development. Liu, Chiang, and Ko (2023) found that tourism contributes to income growth, entrepreneurship, cultural engagement, and social cohesion, especially in amenity-rich rural areas. These findings align with Perry, Casey, & Snyder’s (2022) research, which noted that recreation is a form of economic diversification that strengthens small-business ecosystems and improves regional resilience.

Collectively, these studies (and others) reinforce the idea that outdoor recreation economies extend beyond the hospitality and leisure sectors to influence broader regional business ecosystems. However, the literature also emphasizes that successful outcomes depend on local capacity, infrastructure, and the ability to retain revenue within the community (Reeder & Brown, 2005; Liu et al., 2023).

Although a growing body of research quantifies the economic contributions of outdoor recreation, fewer studies have focused on event-based recreation impacts, particularly at the state or regional level. Existing work using input-output (IO) models, such as IMPLAN, has shown that events generate measurable short-term business activity, often concentrated in the lodging, dining, and service sectors (Bergstrom et al., 1990; Perry, et al., 2022). This study addresses that gap by examining the 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit as a case study of how event-driven recreation can function as a tourism generator and a business development strategy.

Input-Output Modeling in Tourism Economics

The IO model remains the predominant quantitative framework for estimating the economic impact of tourism and recreation activities. For example, Fletcher (1989) provides an early and influential overview of how IO analysis can trace inter-industry flows triggered by visitor spending. More recently, Artal-Tur, et al. (2020) highlight methodological issues in IO modeling for tourism, including the importance of selecting the appropriate regional table and accounting for backward linkages. These methodological insights are critical when applying models like IMPLAN to event-based spending in a regional context. The IO approach enables researchers to measure direct effects (initial spending), indirect effects (supply-chain linkages), and induced effects (household consumption) (Artal-Tur et al., 2020). However, limitations remain: IO models often assume fixed production coefficients and may not accommodate dynamic changes or supply constraints (Yamashita, 2024). Given those strengths and limitations, applying IO modeling to a one-time event such as the Summit offers both opportunities and caution: opportunity because the model can estimate the ripple effects of visitor spending; caution because static multipliers may overestimate impact if demand or supply dynamics differ.

Policy Development and Outdoor Recreation Offices

Parallel to the economics literature, policy-oriented researchers have examined how states and regions are creating structures to harness outdoor recreation for business and regional development. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL, 2023) describes how State Offices of Outdoor Recreation (OROs) function as coordinating bodies that bridge tourism, natural resources, economic development, and recreation sectors. These offices facilitate workforce training, business recruitment, infrastructure development, and equitable access to outdoor assets (NCSL, 2023). Seifer (2021) examined policy factors influencing the establishment of outdoor recreation offices and found that elected leadership, stakeholder networks, and institutional design were significant predictors of their success. Such offices are increasingly seen as an “industry cluster” approach, leveraging natural-amenity assets to create business opportunities, support entrepreneurship, and strengthen local ecosystems (Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, 2023). In this context, one-off events such as the 2024 Summit generate short-term economic activity and serve as platforms for policy coordination, industry networking, and longer-term business strategy.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Taken together, the literature underscores that outdoor recreation is more than a simple tourism activity; it serves as a multi-sector business ecosystem capable of generating employment, entrepreneurship, and structural economic change. Empirical research supports strong linkages between recreation spending and local business growth, especially in rural regions, and identifies IO modeling as the key quantitative tool. Policy research further advances our understanding of institutional design for state-level recreation development. However, a clear gap remains: the intersection of event-based recreation, business and economic development strategies, and institutional structures (such as state recreation offices) has been underexplored. This study contributes by bridging that gap: it applies IO modeling to assess a state-level recreation event, frames the analysis in economic development terms, and situates it within Maryland's recreation policy framework.

METHODS

This study used a common economic impact approach by combining participant survey data with input-output (I-O) modeling (Bradley & Maples, 2024) to estimate the economic impact of the 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit. The Summit was held at Rocky Gap Casino and Resort in Allegany County, Maryland, from October 9 to 11, 2024. The event brought together professionals from across the state to advance collaboration in the outdoor recreation economy, providing a valuable opportunity to measure the short-term economic activity generated by such gatherings in a rural setting.

Survey Data Collection

A post-event survey was distributed to all registered Summit attendees to gather information on spending patterns, travel behavior, and visitor characteristics. The survey was sent via email within one week after the event, followed by two reminder emails over the next two weeks to encourage participation. Participation was voluntary, and no financial incentives were offered. The survey asked respondents to report their expenditures across several categories, including lodging, food and beverage, transportation, retail purchases, and other event-related costs. Participants also provided information about group size, length of stay, and county of residence, which made it possible to distinguish between local and non-local attendees. This distinction is important because spending by non-local visitors represents new money entering the regional economy.

A total of 45 completed responses were received, representing approximately 26 percent of the 173 registered attendees. This response rate falls within the range typically reported in event-based tourism and recreation research, where post-event email surveys often yield response rates between 20 and 30 percent. Average per-attendee spending was calculated across all expenditure categories and used to estimate total direct visitor spending. In addition, organizer and vendor expenditures, including facility rental, catering, marketing, and contracted services, were included to provide a more complete picture of event-related economic activity. Due to data use restrictions, detailed individual-level spending data and category-specific expenditure breakdowns could not be reported; therefore, aggregated spending estimates were used in the analysis.

Input-Output Modeling

Economic impacts were estimated using the IMPLAN 2023 input-output model for Allegany County, Maryland. Input-output modeling is widely used in tourism and recreation research to estimate how initial expenditures circulate through a regional economy and generate secondary economic effects. Direct spending estimates were derived from survey responses and event-related expenditures and then allocated to corresponding IMPLAN industry sectors, including lodging, food services, transportation, retail trade, and professional services. Care was taken to align reported spending categories with the most appropriate sector classifications within the IMPLAN framework to ensure consistency in the modeling process.

Only expenditures considered new to the local economy were included in the analysis. Spending by non-local attendees was treated as the primary source of new economic activity, while expenditures by local participants were handled conservatively to reduce the risk of overstating impacts. Organizer and vendor expenditures associated with hosting the event, such as facility rental, catering, marketing, and contracted services, were also included when those expenditures represented economic activity that would not have otherwise occurred in the region. These direct expenditures were entered into the IMPLAN model to estimate indirect and induced effects. Indirect effects capture business-to-business transactions as local firms purchase goods and services from other local suppliers. Induced effects reflect household spending generated by wages earned through both direct and indirect economic activity. Together, these effects provide an estimate of total economic output associated with the event.

The IMPLAN model applies region-specific multipliers based on the structure of the local economy. These multipliers estimate how spending flows across industries and how much of that spending is retained within the region versus lost through leakages to other areas. Outputs reported in this study include total economic output, employment expressed as full-time equivalent jobs, labor income, value added, and tax revenues. As with all input-output models, several assumptions underlie the analysis. The model assumes fixed relationships between industries and does not account for dynamic changes in prices, capacity constraints, or substitution effects. In addition, results are sensitive to the accuracy of initial spending estimates and the degree to which those expenditures remain within the local economy. For these reasons, the findings should be interpreted as reasonable estimates of short-term economic activity rather than precise or comprehensive measures of economic impact.

LIMITATIONS

As with most event-based economic impact studies, several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the analysis is based on a relatively small sample of survey respondents, which introduces some uncertainty in estimating per-attendee spending. Although the response rate of approximately 26 percent is consistent with similar post-event surveys, it is possible that respondents differ in meaningful ways from non-respondents, which could influence the results. Second, the study relies on self-reported expenditure data, which may be subject to recall error or estimation bias. While the survey was administered shortly after the event to minimize these effects, some degree of inaccuracy is inherent in this type of data collection. Third, the analysis focuses on a single, three-day event in a specific rural context. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other types of events, locations, or timeframes. Differences in event scale, audience composition, and regional economic structure can all influence spending patterns and overall economic impact.

Finally, the use of input-output modeling introduces additional assumptions that should be acknowledged. IMPLAN estimates are based on fixed production relationships and regional multipliers, which may not fully capture dynamic market conditions, supply constraints, or leakages outside the local economy. While efforts were made to take a conservative approach to spending estimates, including careful consideration of local versus non-local expenditures, the results should be interpreted as reasonable approximations of short-term economic activity rather than precise measurements. Despite these limitations, the study provides a transparent and replicable framework for estimating the short-term economic contributions of recreation-based events in rural settings.

RESULTS

The 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit generated measurable short-term economic activity within Allegany County, Maryland. Based on survey responses, reported spending patterns suggest that expenditures were primarily concentrated in lodging, food and beverage, and transportation, which is consistent with spending patterns typically associated with multi-day professional events. Due to data use restrictions associated with the survey, detailed per-attendee spending estimates and category-level expenditure breakdowns are not reported. Instead, aggregated spending estimates were used to model total direct expenditures associated with the event. When these expenditures were scaled to reflect total attendance and combined with organizer and vendor spending, the event represented a meaningful source of new economic activity in the region. These direct expenditures served as inputs for the IMPLAN model, which was used to estimate the broader effects across the local economy. The results suggest that the event generated approximately $1.7 million in total economic output, supported 10.15 full-time equivalent jobs, and produced approximately $548,000 in labor income. The model also estimated $874,000 in value added and nearly $220,000 in total tax revenue, including both state and federal contributions. These findings should be interpreted as estimates of short-term economic activity rather than precise values, as they are based on modeled relationships and self-reported expenditure data.

Table 1. Total Economic Effects of the 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit

Impact Type	Employment (Jobs)	Labor Income ($)	Value Added ($)	Output ($)
Indirect	8.80	480,780.22	738,015.93	1,490,472.07
Induced	1.35	67,655.57	136,077.18	220,850.71
Total	10.15	548,435.79	874,093.11	1,711,322.78

Economic Activity by Industry

The distribution of impacts across industries demonstrates how outdoor recreation events stimulate multiple segments of a local economy. The most significant gains occurred in hospitality and food service, driven by visitor spending on lodging, dining, and entertainment. Media and broadcasting services also experienced notable growth due to increased activity in product and service promotion, coverage, and sponsorship coordination across the region. Other industries, including management, construction, utilities, postal services, and professional services, also recorded measurable output increases because of event operations and supply-chain linkages.

These results highlight the interdependent nature of local economies in rural regions. Although the Summit was primarily a professional and educational gathering, its short-term economic impact extended across a wide array of industries, demonstrating the multiplier potential of well-organized recreational events.

Table 2. Economic Summary of Study Area (Allegany County, MD)

Regional Indicator	Study Area Estimates
Total Population	67,273
Total Employment (Jobs)	35,615
Total Households	30,330
Total Personal Income (TPI)	$3,518,121,055.13
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	$3,413,340,533.16

Employment and Wage Effects

The Summit supported a modest but meaningful number of jobs within Allegany County. Employment effects were concentrated in sectors related to food service, accommodation, and event coordination, which benefited directly from visitor spending. Indirect employment gains were also observed in administrative support, communications, and maintenance services, reflecting business-to-business transactions tied to event preparation and operations. These short-term positions contributed to an estimated total labor income of roughly $548,000, thereby increasing household spending capacity in the local economy.

Fiscal Impacts

Tax impacts, though relatively small in absolute terms, were significant for a three-day event in a rural county. The estimated $220,000 in total tax revenue includes collections on sales, income, and business activity generated by attendees, vendors, and supporting industries. These revenues represent a tangible return to public agencies, supporting local services and future recreation-related investments.

Table 3. Top 5 Job Sectors by Employment

Industry	Employment (Jobs)
Hospitals	1,854.69
Employment and payroll of local government, education	1,732.59
Limited-service restaurants	1,691.99
Employment and payroll of the state government, education	1,201.84
Full-service restaurants	1,138.12

Table 4. Estimated Tax Revenues

Level of Government	Total Taxes ($)	Share of Total (%)
Local (County & Municipal)	27,224.90	13%
State (Maryland)	61,637.35	29%
Federal	131,225.53	58%
Total	220,087.78	100%

Overall Summary

Collectively, the results illustrate that outdoor recreation events, such as the Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit, can yield substantial economic benefits. They provide a practical model for how strategic event planning and interagency collaboration can drive local business activity, support workforce opportunities, and strengthen community economies in rural regions.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that outdoor recreation events can generate meaningful short-term economic activity and serve as catalysts for regional business development. The 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit created an estimated $1.7 million in total output and supported over 10 jobs within Allegany County, Maryland. This economic influence has a modest but significant impact on a rural community. These findings are consistent with prior research, which shows that recreation-based tourism can stimulate economic diversification, business expansion, and job creation in small-market regions (Reeder & Brown, 2005; Liu et al., 2023). They are also broadly consistent with patterns observed in recreation and tourism research, although additional context is useful for interpreting their magnitude.

When compared with similar event-based tourism and recreation studies, the spending patterns observed in this study are generally consistent with expectations for multi-day professional gatherings. Previous research has shown that lodging and food expenditures typically make up the largest share of visitor spending, particularly in rural or destination settings (Bergstrom et al., 1990; Perry, et al., 2022). Although total economic output estimates can vary depending on event size, location, and modeling assumptions, the distribution of impacts across sectors in this study aligns with patterns reported in the literature. At the same time, economic impact estimates derived from a single event should be interpreted with caution. Differences in attendee behavior, regional economic structure, and modeling assumptions can all influence the results. For this reason, the findings presented here are best understood as an illustration of the potential scale and distribution of economic activity associated with outdoor recreation events, rather than as definitive estimates that apply across all contexts.

Beyond quantifying output, results underscore the inter-industry relationships that make outdoor recreation a viable development strategy. The Summit's economic effects extended across hospitality, food service, broadcasting, construction, and professional service sectors, reflecting the integrated nature of local business ecosystems. Similar to findings by Bergstrom et al. (1990) and Perry et al. (2022), this case demonstrates that event-based recreation influences direct visitor-oriented businesses and supporting industries through supply-chain linkages. From a business perspective, these outcomes reinforce the value of outdoor recreation as a component of regional economic strategy. The creation of the Maryland Office of Outdoor Recreation exemplifies how institutional coordination can enhance the business environment surrounding recreation and tourism. By facilitating partnerships among government agencies, private enterprises, and nonprofit organizations, such offices help position recreation as a sustainable industry cluster rather than a single-use activity. The Summit's success, therefore, can be viewed as an economic and organizational outcome: it generated immediate revenue for local businesses while advancing a framework for long-term collaboration and growth.

These findings also carry managerial implications for event organizers and policymakers. For event managers, results suggest that comprehensive planning, particularly in vendor selection, local contracting, and participant engagement, can amplify community-level benefits. For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of developing state-level infrastructure to support recreation as an economic sector. These types of support include investment in workforce training, marketing, and cross-sector coordination, all of which can extend the impact of individual events.

While the immediate effects of the Summit are time-bound, the broader implications are enduring. Events of this nature contribute to brand identity, business networking, and knowledge exchange within the recreation economy. They also offer a low-risk platform for testing new ideas in sustainable economic development, particularly in rural areas where diversification options are limited, as Seifer (2021) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (2023) note, well-designed recreation policies and institutional support mechanisms are essential for capturing these benefits and turning short-term economic activity into sustained regional growth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The results of this study offer several practical insights for business and community leaders seeking to leverage outdoor recreation as a catalyst for economic development. First, the measurable financial outcomes of the 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit demonstrate that short-term events can generate meaningful returns for rural economies when designed with local engagement in mind. Organizers who source goods and services from nearby vendors, promote extended visitor stays, and collaborate with local chambers of commerce can substantially increase the local multiplier effect of event spending.

Second, state and regional outdoor recreation offices can play a critical role in coordinating and amplifying these benefits. As this study illustrates, institutional frameworks that link government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private enterprises provide a foundation for sustained growth. By treating outdoor recreation as a business ecosystem, rather than a singular industry, policymakers can align marketing, workforce development, and infrastructure investment strategies around a shared economic vision.

Third, for private-sector leaders, outdoor recreation represents a growing market opportunity. Businesses in hospitality, retail, marketing, construction, and service sectors can benefit from cultivating partnerships with recreation events and agencies. Strategic sponsorships, local procurement, and destination marketing campaigns enable firms to connect directly with recreation participants while strengthening their brands within an expanding, values-driven sector.

Finally, for higher education institutions and workforce training organizations, events like the Summit highlight the need to develop specialized programs that prepare professionals to manage recreation economies. Integrating business, hospitality, and natural resource disciplines can help build the next generation of leaders equipped to sustain outdoor recreation as both an economic driver and a tool for community resilience. Collectively, these practical insights suggest that the success of outdoor recreation initiatives depends not only on the quality of natural assets but also on the coordination, innovation, and business acumen of those managing them.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the 2024 Maryland Outdoor Recreation Summit as a case study of outdoor recreation's role in rural economic development. The findings suggest that recreation-based events can generate measurable economic outcomes while advancing broader community and policy objectives. Through survey data and IMPLAN modeling, the Summit was shown to contribute more than $1.7 million in total output, support over 10 full-time equivalent jobs, and yield approximately $220,000 in tax revenue. These impacts, though short-term, reveal how well-coordinated recreation events can function as catalysts for business growth, workforce engagement, and interagency collaboration. From a theoretical standpoint, results support existing literature that positions outdoor recreation as both an economic and social development mechanism (Bradley et al., 2025). The study extends that understanding by situating event-based recreation within a business and policy framework, one that emphasizes entrepreneurship, public-private partnerships, and institutional coordination.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis was based on a modest sample size and relied on self-reported spending data, which introduces potential bias. In addition, input-output models assume static relationships that may overstate or understate specific effects. Despite these constraints, the methodology provides a credible estimate of short-term economic activity and a replicable framework for similar analyses. Future research should expand on these findings by examining multiple recreation events across different regional contexts and periods. Comparative studies could assess how event type, scale, and management structure influence local business outcomes and long-term community impacts. Further exploration of workforce development and entrepreneurial dynamics within recreation economies would also deepen understanding of how this sector contributes to sustainable economic growth.

Ultimately, the results of this study reinforce that outdoor recreation is far more than a leisure pursuit; it is a viable and strategic element of modern economic development. When supported by data-driven planning and collaborative leadership, recreation can foster resilient economies, thriving businesses, and healthier communities.

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