



Governor's Tourism Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday & Thursday, July 16-17, 2025

Wednesday – Brookings tours: 2 PM to 4:30 PM CT

2:00 PM Tour of the Oscar Larson Performing Arts Center

**3:30 PM Tour of the newly renovated Fishback Bank & Trust Arena
(formerly Frost Arena)**

3:40 PM Tour of the Dana J Dykhouse Stadium

Some of the Visit Brookings board members will join the tour

Thursday – Board meeting at Children's Museum of South Dakota

521 4th St, Brookings, SD 57006

8:30 AM to 12:00 PM (lunch served)

Board Members

Ann Lesch

Julie Ranum

Carmen Schramm

Kristie Wagner

Frank Smith

John Brockelsby

Caleb Arceneaux

Val Rauch

Gwyn Wathen

Tom Biegler

Tourism Staff

James Hagen

Wanda Goodman

Kirk Hulstein

Katlyn Svendsen

Mike Gussiaas

Cole Irwin

Calvin Bloemendaal

Teresa Tople

Kortney Fethkenher

Ashley Worth

Ann DeVany

Ciara Forest

Stephanie Spronk

President Ann Lesch called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for coming to the meeting in Brookings, she thanked Kerrie Vilhauer from the Children's Museum for hosting the board meeting. Laura Schoen Carbonneau from Visit Brookings did a great job on the tours held on Wednesday.

Secretary Hagen welcomed the board and attendees to Brookings, thanked Visit Brookings and the SD Children's Museum for their outstanding hospitality, and gave an overview of what would be presented during the meeting.

Kerrie Vilhauer, Director of Marketing and Communications at the Children's Museum of South Dakota, was excited that everyone could come to Brookings and see all it has to offer. She was honored and grateful to have us all there.

- Brookings Updates
 - Destination NEXT Community Assessment
 - Marketplace
 - Tourism Ambassador Program
- Merging of Economic Entities
 - Visit Brookings
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Downtown Brookings
 - Economic Development Corporation

President Lesch asked each board member to give a brief report from their area:

Carmen Schramm – Yankton

- Water levels and camping are good
- New businesses are moving into the mall

Tom Biegler – Sioux Falls

- June was down about 6%
- Hopefully next quarter is up
- Work force is good, places are fully staffed
- Sioux Falls bus tours business is the highest it has been
- Summit League BB tournament just announced it will be in Sioux Falls through 2029

Frank Smith – Gettysburg

- Fishing has been fantastic
- The water levels have been good
- Employees are getting burned out with the exceptionally busy fishing season
- Looking forward to fall, the pheasant hatches have been good

Kristi Wagner - Whitewood

- Like the continued focus on rural from the department
- Black Fork Farms south of Clear Lake in Brandt is a great facility

Val Rausch – Big Stone City /Abbey of the Hills

- Abby of the Hills retreat center is a 100,000 square feet facility
- The rain has been unbelievable-some flooding due to all the rain
- Summer activities are looking good

Caleb Arceneaux – Black Hills / LIV Hospitality

- The season has been volatile- numbers are up and down
- Deadwood gaming is flat
- The new sports complex is coming to Rapid City
- The workforce is stable

John Brockelsby – Rapid City/Reptile Gardens

- It has been a challenging year-spring was OK
- Visitor numbers
 - Down 3.5% in June
 - First week in July (usually the busiest week of the year) down 18%
 - Second week in July had a little rebound from first week down 8%

Gwyn Wathen - Hill City

- Congratulations to Johnny on being inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame
- “Patience” is the name of the game this year. The booking window has shrunk, visitors are booking 2 weeks out
- Reservations are down about 4.6% overall
- 100-year anniversary at Palmer Gulch

Julie Ranum – Watertown

- First week of July is usually the busiest week of the year-this year was eerily quiet
- Arts Center is doing about the same as last year
- Retail is down
- Three more original Terry Redlin paintings have come back to the center
- 40 paintings remain out in the public
- Summer of 2026 will have a Summer Art Program
 - Open to all ages
 - Students will be finishing replicas of Terry Redlin paintings that have not been completed
- Watertown has music all summer long

Ann Lesch – Ingalls Homestead, DeSmet

- Many cancellations due to the weather
- The business Fields, Fish and Game closed

- Two motels are up for sale
- There is a new Country Club restaurant, and they are open on Sundays
- Main Street is still torn up, but the contractor has been good to work with and making sidewalks for pedestrians to get to their destinations
- People make reservations and cancel and lose their deposit with no worries
- Booking window is crazy
- Pageant numbers were flat this year

Carmen Schramm-Update on Tourism Coalition of South Dakota

- The Tourism Coalition of South Dakota is working on a Legislative Toolkit
- 20 new members and are happy with the member numbers
- Financially they are doing well
- Hosting a fundraiser-Golf Tournament in Rapid City on September 26 with a live auction

Secretary Hagen-Personnel update

Secretary Hagen shared personnel updates from the department, including Erin's departure to work for her Catholic parish and Alexa's accident (broken arm and broken ankle). He will share Erin's and Alexa's email and physical addresses to the board members so they can reach out to them.

Hallie Willey-Budget and Revenue updates

Promotion Tax:

- We closed out the fiscal year successfully on June 30th, so you can see the full years' worth of promotion tax collections.
- We only have two months of collections since the last meeting.
- In May, which would be March activity, we received in \$1,066,879 which was 4.72% higher than May of 2024.
- In June, we receipted in \$939,160, which was another increase of 2.74% over the previous fiscal year.
- We ended the fiscal year at 2.84% higher than FY24.

Gaming Tax

- We have two months to report on since we met last.
- In May, we collected \$415,498 which was 12.92% higher than the previous May.
- For June, we receipted in \$373,893 and another increase of 3.14%.
- You will see that the % change by each month was pretty volatile, however, Caleb has mentioned before that comparing month by month might not be the most impactful way of looking at it because it really depends on when business remit their taxes to the Department of Revenue. However, you can see that we finished FY25 3.14% higher than FY24, so overall a pretty good fiscal year.

Calvin Bloemendaal-Research Update

Research Projects:

- UPCOMING
 - September: begin prep on next statewide resident sentiment study with Longwoods
 - November: begin prep on ROI + Image and Perception studies
- RECENTLY COMPLETED
 - South Dakota Visitor Profile Webinar Tuesday, July 22, 2025
 - American travelers still planning vacations, slightly down from previous month but still high historically
- Travel deterrents are relatively the same now as they have been historically, though seeing an uptick in responses like: 1) busy at work, 2) not enough PTO, 3) weather, 4) none of the above
- Average booking windows remain short
- Hotel demand and str demand down slightly year over year
- July demand not the peak it once was, seeing shift we want to see, which is extending traditional peak season
- Looking at demand for next 30 days, relatively on track YOY

Kirk Hulstein-Industry Outreach and Development Team

- Working well ahead of schedule this year for planning the 2026 Governor's Conference on Tourism
- Our current lineup of speakers include:
 - **Shane Feldman** – will be sharing insights on human connection, relationships and collaboration and how to use those to develop leadership skills and improve your business or organization's culture.
 - **Dr. Rebecca Heiss** – Will be sharing her message regarding past research she has done and sharing a different look at fear and stress. That we should embrace it knowing that it can be used to your advantage and improve performance.
 - **David Reichbach** - We'll explore global trends in travel and marketing, including artificial intelligence, social media, technology, traveler sentiment, and behavioral trends shaping the future of tourism and hospitality.
 - **Damon West** - you can change the world around you with the power is inside you. Come listen to Damon West tell his story, about how an unlikely messenger in life empowered him with a simple shift in thinking that allowed him to find opportunity in extreme adversity
- Other key topics include
 - Trail Development
 - The Traveler's Journey
 - AI In Tourism Marketing
 - Local Resident Sentiment Study Findings
 - Partnering with Native American Communities
 - Multi-Generational Marketing
 - Website Accessibility

Ciara Forest

- Destination Development applications open August 4th

Cole Irwin-Global Travel and Trade

- International Roundup Rapid City recap
 - International tradeshow held in South Dakota in May
 - Attendees (40+ international tour companies and 35 South Dakota tourism suppliers)
 - Events throughout the week
 - Key takeaways
- IPW recap
 - Largest international tradeshow in the USA
 - Custom booth, events and additional SD exposure
 - Completely full appointment schedule
 - Key Takeaways
- Great American West FY 26 budget and examples of upcoming campaigns
- Collette Co-op for August- October
- U.S. Travel committees on Group Tour and International
- Upcoming mission schedule

Katlyn Svendsen-Senior Director, Global Public Relations and Content Services

- FY25 earned media impressions totaled 5.5 billion with 543 clips.
- This week, the team is conducting a satellite media tour on Friday, July 18. This will be held in Custer State Park promoting the 85th anniversary of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally and 60th anniversary of the Buffalo Roundup.
- Inspiration Guide is complete and has been used at upcoming travel shows. eVacation guide use has been strong with 1.75 total page views last fiscal year and average of 13:37 time spent with the guide.
- Rally Rush and Rooster Rush industry programs are rolling, and Rally Rush specifically has been delivered to partners already.
- TravelSouthDakota.com update launch is scheduled for end of July barring any last-minute technical glitches, etc.

Mike Gussiaas, Chief Marketing and Creative Officer, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy

- Gussiaas shared that despite the conflicting research or sometimes strange consumer sentiment, search activity and booking windows all are seeing, Peak marketing efforts have been performing above expectations, thanks in part to strategic and creative shifts from the department's marketing agency partners.
- Peak Campaign performance through June was up \$11M in estimated hotel and flight booking revenue attributed to efforts over the prior year. Revenue generated per 1,000 paid media impressions was up \$67.10 in part to the strategic and creative changes.
- Bookings for the public/private Sturgis OH HD campaign were up 266.9% over 2024, while impressions were only up 131%. This increase in booking activity equates to \$3.145 million in estimated booking revenue.

- The Arts & Culture campaign has been a strong, surprise performer and is generating a rate of booking revenue CPM that was 7x the average across all peak campaigns. Revenue attributed to the campaign is up \$2.87 million.
- This spring's Fishing campaign was responsible for 15,974 license sales and drove an estimated \$3.14 million in estimated booking revenue.
- The Forever 605 campaign is up 307% in revenue over the prior year campaign, generating \$4.54 million more than last year.
- Hotel trip planning windows – specifically – first search to book continued to shrink, down to 7.6 for 2025 v. 9.2 in 2024 and 15.9 in 2021.
- The department was able to add \$1.25 million in incremental spend to its paid marketing efforts for peak 2025.
- To more positively impact visitation, the department optimized media spend in stronger regional markets, adjusting targeting away from low-performing national markets.
- The partnership with Jeep and Matador Network is now live with the first two episodes launched across partner networks and episode #3 going live 7/25. After all episodes are live, a weekly giveaway will be planned for the month of August to help promote the series and generate leads. The series also airs on ROKU devices and channel and in total will generate more than 52.6 million impressions.
- Gussiaas and representatives from Karsh Hagan shared plans for an upcoming Buffalo Roundup-focused content series that will include a YouTube series, organic social series and a long-form documentary.
- Gussiaas also shared that the department launched a new passport in celebration of America's 250 and has plans for a fall-themed one to launch pre-Labor Day.
- Last, the team shared campaign direction for the upcoming pheasant hunting campaign, which is run in conjunction with the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.

Nick Harrington- Game, Fish and Parks

- Pete Lien shooting range opens in October north of Rapid City
- 60th year at the Buffalo Roundup in Custer State Park
- GFP is expanding the habitat and access programs
- **Hunting**
 - Conditions for pheasant and grouse numbers look better than last year
 - When the department puts numbers out, preserves are not in the count
- **Parks**
 - The department is working on modern lodging opportunities for the State Parks
 - Camping has been down in mid-week
 - Visitors aren't utilizing the 90-day window as they did in the past, they are booking closer to the time of travel
- **Fishing**
 - The fishing has probably been the best year in Lake Oahe and Lake Sharp
 - Northeast had a great ice fishing season
 - Great fishing in the Black Hills area

Black Hills Energy's electrical Power outage plan update -Gwyn Wathen shared an update on Black Hills Energy's Power Outage Plan. He shared that Michelle Thomson from Black Hills and Badlands Tourism Association will keep the board and department updated on any new developments.

Secretary Hagen Secretary Hagen shared an update on an exciting new marketing initiative planned for early 2026.

Deputy Secretary Wanda Goodman – Deputy Secretary Wanda Goodman provided a brief update on upcoming meetings regarding the 2026 Mt. Rushmore fireworks celebration.

President Lesch asked if there were any other questions or comments. She thanked everyone for coming and mentioned the upcoming meeting in Lemmon on October 8-9, 2025.

Secretary Hagen thanked the board and all attendees for the excellent meeting and for their support.

Meeting adjourned around 12:00 PM