



## **Governor's Tourism Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday October 8, 2025**

**Wednesday- Board meeting at The Kokomo Inn-John Lopez Sculpture Gallery**  
**304 Main Ave #1, Lemmon, SD 57638**  
**8:30AM-10:30AM MT**  
**10:30AM MT Tours**

### **Board Members**

Ann Lesch  
Carmen Schramm  
Kristie Wagner  
Frank Smith  
John Brockelsby  
Ivan Sorbel  
Val Rauch  
Gwyn Wathen

### **Tourism Staff**

James Hagen  
Wanda Goodman  
Hallie Willie  
Katlyn Svendsen  
Mike Gussiaas  
Calvin Bloemendaal

### **Other Attendees**

Dave Johnson-Lemmon Chamber  
Judy Larson-Lemmon Chamber  
John Lopez-Sculpture  
Michele Thomson-BHBL Region  
Director  
Bob Mercer-KELOLAND

President Ann Lesch called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for coming to the meeting in Lemmon.

Secretary Hagen welcomed the board to Lemmon, thanked John Lopez and the Chamber Director for hosting the meeting, and for their warm welcome. Secretary

Hagen also acknowledged and thanked Bob Mercer from KELO News for attending the meeting. Secretary Hagen shared that the format of the meeting was going to change a bit and would foster more interaction from the board. He expressed excitement about these subtle changes.

### **Lemmon Chamber Executive Director Dave Johnson**

Dave thanked everyone for coming to Lemmon and was excited to have us there

### **Secretary Hagen-Personnel update**

Secretary Hagen shared that Calley Geigle has been selected as the new Industry Liaison Manager for the eastern half of the state. He shared that Calley comes from the Global Travel and Trade team and has already hit the ground running. Secretary Hagen shared that Calley will also serve as the liaison to the Native Tourism Alliance and agritourism interests. He also shared that we would be filling Calley's position on the Global Travel and Trade Team in the next couple of months, and that there is a current opening on the Marketing team. He shared we are looking to fill that position with a digital strategist who has a strong background in AI.

### **Hallie Willey-Budget and Revenue updates**

#### **Promotion Tax:**

- July receipts, which is May activity, we receipted in \$1,389,323 and this was down from FY25 by 5.51%.
- In August we receipted in \$2,556,721, up just slightly from FY25 by 0.41%.
- September, which would be July activity, was up quite a bit compared to last September. We receipted in \$3,267,110 which was a 15.77% increase.
- Lastly this month, we received \$2,809,585 which was a slight decrease from FY25 just by 0.83%
- But so far, this fiscal year, we are still up compared to last year by 3.62%

#### **Gaming Tax**

- In July, we receipted in \$395,416 which was a slight decrease of 3.47% from FY25.
- In August, we receipted in \$406,912 which was 4.29% higher than FY25.
- September was \$484,371 again another increase of just over 4%, 4.53%.
- Lastly, October- another increase there of 5.28% for receipts of \$480,895.
- In total, we have receipted in just over \$1.7M and we are up 2.77% compared to FY25 at this same time.

### **Carmen Schramm – Yankton**

- Thank you for all of you for being at the TCSD meeting yesterday. It has been kind of interesting to be around industry members in a different capacity now.

- I have seen a lot of Indiana plates, and I spoke to some people from Washington.
- As far as who I am seeing- I am not seeing as many kids. It depends on who I am talking to and who they are catering to.
- We have a new place just outside of Yankton and it is a roadside place where to buy fresh produce and eggs, it is a farm to table place.
- I am happy to report highway 81 construction will be done here soon.

#### **Ivan Sorbel- Martin**

- South Dakota has put on a ton of great events- from the rally, roundup, small town fairs, mustang rally, etc.
- My brother lives in Sioux Falls and they just had the Governor's Cup rodeo, and he said that it was insane how busy they were.
- We just got through the Volksmarch and moving into the fall we will have the black hills powwow. This has gotten so big that it has almost outgrown the monument.
- The living history museum wrapped up their last tours last weekend.

#### **Frank Smith – Gettysburg**

- Fishing has been crazy high, I see people from North Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, etc.
- We are seeing people from everywhere and we are doing well.
- Fishing technology has taken over big time and so people are catching big fish, and we are getting more young people because that is what they care about. If those people catch a couple big walleyes, then the word-of-mouth travels and people just keep coming.
- On the pheasant hunting side, we will see a lot more of those when they get the crops out of the field.

#### **Kristi Wagner - Whitewood**

- I have heard from a lot of rural communities this summer, and they are seeing such value in the regional tourism associations and doing daytrips to these rural communities. I have heard such great things from each of the regions.
- Thinking about what webinars, I would like to focus on customer service. I think it's so valuable and helpful to provide that in a virtual setting for our rural communities. I am just wondering if there are any creative or innovative settings that we provide that training.
- One other thing I wanted to mention is that I was able to attend the buffalo roundup this year and we stayed next to a couple from out of state and they could book their cabin 24 hours prior. They commented how nice South Dakotans are. They are going home, and they are planning to bring their family and friends next year.

### **Val Rausch – Big Stone City /Abbey of the Hills**

- We don't track the numbers as much as some of the others. We are a retreat center, so it depends on those and who is showing up.
- We do a big banquet each year and coach Stiegelmeier is going to speak this year on his spiritual walk.
- We have gotten a lot of rain this year and we even have some ditches out of town that still have standing water.
- Some projects we are talking about is replacing the bell tower at the Abby, which is a \$100K project. We have had a lot of fundraising and people want to be generous.

### **John Brockelsby – Rapid City/Reptile Gardens**

- One of the observations that I have had is the license plates in our parking lot. What I found this summer is that we have had a lot of rental cars in our lot. Many vehicles from North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana
- People with limited resources want a short drive.
- We are showing a movie in Rapid at the Journey Museum to support the Badlands National Park, called "Out There".

### **Gwyn Wathen - Hill City**

- We had a weird summer. The weather was interesting so that didn't help. We did have a good fall though.
- At our Palmer Gulch property, we will finish the year probably flat.
- Rapid City is down roughly 10% but keep in mind that we had roughly 1/3 of our area under construction.
- One thing that I have heard is that people want more expensive and more luxurious cabins, so we are working on that.
- We are still seeing families and even younger families. What we are hearing from them is that they want to be outdoors, and they are pulling some sort of toy, like boat or camper.
- We get a lot of questions on golf courses near us, too.
- Lastly, our booking window has gotten a lot smaller. People don't book accommodations until they are on their trip so that would be my idea for a webinar is to get that information out there.

### **Ann Lesch – Ingalls Homestead, DeSmet**

- We saw a lot of families with young children and a lot were tying their vacation into a wedding or other event.
- We see a lot of Georgia, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan. We did see a lot of Minnesota still but maybe less.
- We heard more and more about being outdoors.

- I have heard a lot of couples doing longer trips. One couple was staying in Sioux falls for a month and then they were going around the state.
- We are hosting a man who is doing a podcast for the America250.

### **Calvin Bloemendaal-Research Update**

#### Focus Groups:

- FY26 we will be conducting 4 focus group sessions each quarter, so 16 total.

#### Summer season:

- State Park visits:
  - The month of August was up 2% YOY.
  - August YTD was even with last year
- National Park visits: NP's in SD up 5.3% August YTD. Which is outperforming national parks nationally which are down -4.1%.
- Visitation: August YTD up 2.3% YOY
- Tourism promotion tax revenue: August YTD up 3.7%
- Hotel Occupancy: statewide August YTD down -3.1%
  - While over half of U.S. hospitality markets are experiencing occupancy declines, South Dakota's occupancy remains relatively flat with last year, experiencing a -3.1% decline YTD in August. Nationwide and in South Dakota we continue to see luxury hotels outpace economy hotels.

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

- Gussiaas gave an update on the department's "Unexpected South Dakota" episodic series done in partnership with Matador Network and Jeep, sharing that the total view time for the series equaled more than 25 years, or 9,260+ days. He also shared the weekly giveaways in August exceeded partner goals, reaching more than 31,000.
- Gussiaas also provided an update on the "Into the Roundup" five-part series the team launched in September on YouTube and done with the help of Custer State Park and Game, Fish and Parks. Early feedback has been positive, and engagement remains strong, with more than 310 days of total view time to date and click-thru-rates on social channels 6.84 to 8 times higher than benchmarks. He also reported that the team conducted a YouTube Brand Lift Study as part of their buy, which showed a +1.2-percentage point increase among viewers with a positive response for consideration.
- Next, Gussiaas provided a detailed overview of the current "Hunt the Greatest" hunting campaign, also done in partnership with Game, Fish and Parks. Since 2020, when the joint effort began to address the ongoing decline in small game license sales in the state, he reported that these efforts have resulted in a 23.7% increase since 2019. Gussiaas also discussed changes to audience targeting, markets, and measurement for this year's campaign, along with sharing creative assets and placements currently in-market.

- Gussiaas provided a detailed look at three creative concepts and direction from Karsh Hagan that the team is currently reviewing for 2026. The group was able to review, vote on and discuss the concepts.
- Last, Gussiaas presented strategy and creative direction for the “Forever 605” campaign. In the upcoming quarter, the campaign will concentrate on the “Support Local” campaign pillar.
- 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.

**Secretary Hagen-2026 Rose Parade** Secretary Hagen shared details about the department participation in the 2026 Rose Parade and some PR efforts around the department’s float/participation. He shared there are many details being worked on now.

**Deputy Secretary Wanda Goodman-2026 Tourism Conference update** Deputy Secretary Goodman shared the keynote speakers and breakout session topics for the upcoming Tourism Conference. She also let the Board know of the Wednesday evening sponsor and when to expect more information regarding sponsorship and registration

**Deputy Secretary Wanda Goodman-2026 Rushmore Fireworks update** Deputy Secretary Goodman gave updates regarding the planning for the Mt. Rushmore fireworks event on July 3, 2026, noting that the federal agencies have been excellent to work with, and that planning is moving along well and we’re in a good place.

President Lesch asked if there were any other questions or comments. She thanked everyone for coming to Lemmon and is looking forward to seeing everyone in Pierre in December.

Secretary Hagen thanked the board for a great meeting and for the wonderful discussion and input. He reminded the board that the next meeting will be in December in Pierre.

Meeting adjourned around 11:00 AM