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Economic Impact of the 2024 Fire Mountain Bike Trail

The Fire Mountain Bike Trail (FMBT) is a multi-use trail system. The trails are located near the Oconaluftee Indian Village in Cherokee, North Carolina. There are multiple trail ride options and each travels through some of the most beautiful scenery in North Carolina and the nearby Great Smoky Mountains.

An online survey was administered to riders using Qualtrics© online survey software. A large sign with a QR code was posted at the start of the trail from Memorial Day to the end of December of 2023. In addition, the survey was posted to social media and the Western North Carolina Mountain Bike Facebook group in July. Two-hundred and eighty one riders completed the survey.

Thirty one percent of the respondents traveled to the Oconaluftee area and stayed overnight. Of these, 34% stayed one night, 22% stayed two nights and 44% stayed more than two nights. Thirty-one percent of overnight stays were in a hotel (or B&B), 29% were in a rental house and 32% were at a campsite.

Considering those respondents who visited the trails in 2023 and traveled from their homes to the area, average total spending per party was \$889 during their stay. The top two categories for expenditures were lodging and restaurant meals. For those who spent more than \$0 in these categories, average lodging expenditures were \$323.46 and average restaurant expenditures were \$191.51.

Summing expenditures in these and other categories over the total number of non-local visitors in 2023 yields total direct spending of \$982,584 associated with visits to Fire Mountain Trails. Direct spending circulates through the regional economy and generates additional spending through the “multiplier effect.” Applying a RIMS II multiplier of 1.45 for the tourism sector yields a total economic impact of \$1,447,027.

This is a project of the App State Student Chapter of the NABE and the CERPA Undergraduate Research Program. NABE members who contributed to the Fire Mountain Economic Impact Report are Sitara Brent, Ethan Grant, Catie Holder and Lianna Palko-DiStefano. Contact: John Whitehead, Professor of Economics, (828)262-6121 or whiteheadjc@appstate.edu.