

March 16, 2020

Contact: Jeremy Sage, associate director, UM Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, 406-243-5552, jeremy.sage@umontana.edu; Norma Nickerson, director, UM Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, 406-243-2328, norma.nickerson@umontana.edu.

National Economic Conditions of Large Concern as Travelers Weigh Their Options Amidst Outbreak– Montana Currently Faring Better than Most

MISSOULA – As the ramifications of the novel coronavirus continue to unfold in the US and around the globe, concern within the travel and tourism industry, and those industries reliant on it, continues to rise. Nationally, enforced or recommended travel restrictions are set to generate significant economic hardship across the travel industry. The temporary ban on European travel to the US alone is set to cost the industry more than \$3 billion in visitor spending.¹

While the Montana tourism industry is largely less dependent on international travel (roughly 2.5% of all travel groups) than many other states and large urban centers, domestic travel is expected to be substantially altered in the weeks and months to follow. To get a better feel for what this coronavirus outbreak may mean for the Montana tourism industry, The Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) conducted multiple online surveys starting Wednesday March 11th, running through the morning of Sunday March 15th. During this period, Montana started to observe confirmed cases of the virus.

In typical years, more than three quarters of visitor groups have been to Montana before. Many of these visitors come to Montana, frequently. ITRR surveyed previous Montana visitors about their perceptions of the virus outbreak and how it has impacted their travel plans. More

¹ US Travel Association Press Release (3/12/2020): <https://www.ustravel.org/press/us-travel-oval-office-coronavirus>

than half, 58%, of respondents indicated they were at least somewhat concerned about their own health. Meanwhile, a larger portion, 71% indicated concern for the health of their community. While these are moderately high levels of concern, they are small compared to the 87% who indicated concern over the economy. Forty percent indicated they are extremely concerned, and 45% strongly agree with the sentiment that this outbreak is increasing the likelihood of a recession. Montanans surveyed tend to agree with the economic sentiment of these previous and potential future visitors to the state. However, likely attributable to the current lack of confirmed virus in the state, Montanans were less likely to be concerned about their own health, only 48%, and the health of their community, 62%.

According to ITRR associate director, Jeremy Sage, “concerns about both one’s own health, and the future health of the economy are likely to impact travel decisions.” To measure the current sentiment and realized changes to booked and planned travel, ITRR asked respondents to indicate changes to their upcoming plans. Prior to reports of the outbreak in the US, two-thirds of both Montanans and Non-Montana residents surveyed had already booked trips – including flights, hotels, or special events – more than 50 miles from home. As of the time they were surveyed, 20% of either group had cancelled any of these booked trips. In total, non-Montanans indicated they have cancelled 10% of their already booked trips across all destinations and are still considering cancelling an additional 17%. Booked trips to Montana is faring better, as only 3% have been cancelled so far, and another 8% being considered for cancellation. Montanans currently appear equally unlikely to be canceling their booked trips, with almost half of their booked trips occurring within the state.

While the current cancellations by these reported groups to Montana remains in the single digits in total, Sage indicates that “lessons should be observed by cancellations of booked trips to other states, most of which have more reported coronavirus cases and we are seeing a 11-16% cancellation rate in our data and upwards of 25% consideration of cancelling.”

Sage reiterated that these numbers appear to be changing quickly as more news unfolds, and necessitating continued monitoring.

This preliminary report can be found at

https://tableau.mus.edu/t/missoula/views/PanelViz/BookedTrips?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y. As this data is finalized, all information and reports published will be available online at <http://itr.umt.edu/Publications/recent-findings.php>.

###

This release is online at: