

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Sweetwater County Tourism Economy Remains Strong**

Sweetwater County – The Sweetwater County 4% lodging tax is administered by the Sweetwater County Travel and Tourism board (SWCTT) with the sole purpose of generating visitation to the area. The SWCTT board just released their 2022 annual report, which reflected that the direct advertising efforts of the board generated \$65 million in visitor spending in the county in 2022 (SMARI) and they have several new projects underway.

“It is no secret that the incredible landscape, abundant wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities that we all know, and love are also very attractive to visitors from around the country and world,” said Jenissa Meredith, Chief Executive Officer of Sweetwater County Travel and Tourism. “While our advertising efforts alone generated \$65 million in visitor spending in 2022, total visitor spending typically reaches almost \$160 million (Dean Runyan), which is money realized in the cash registers of our valued local businesses. Tourism is big business in Sweetwater County. It is truly an honor to work for a dedicated board, and with a talented team of marketing professionals, to showcase this great county,” added Meredith.

### **How was the Sweetwater County lodging tax spent in 2022?**

#### Lodging Tax Budget Breakdown

- 79% Multi-Media Marketing Campaign
- 7% Event Grants (any non-profit, local event that generates lodging occupancy)
- 3% Rock Springs and Green River Chambers of Commerce (staffing of visitor services)
- 4% Sweetwater Events Complex (out-of-county marketing and event recruitment)
- 7% Administration

### **How does the lodging tax work?**

#### Election Year 2022

The Sweetwater County Local Option Lodging Tax was originally approved by Sweetwater County voters in 1991. Since 1991, local voters have approved the renewal of the tax every 4 years. The Sweetwater County Local Option Lodging Tax was on the ballot for renewal during the November 2022 General Election and 81% of voters supported the tax.

### **What does Sweetwater County Travel and Tourism do?**

#### New Visitor Center

Since 2020, Sweetwater County Travel and Tourism has operated the Explore Rock Springs and Green River, Wyoming Visitor Center at 1641 Elk Street in Rock Springs. Elk Street (Hwy 191) is the perfect location to offer information and encourage travelers to spend more time in Rock

Springs and Green River as they travel to and from Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.

### Event Recruitment

SWCTT works with several local partners to actively recruit to host events in Sweetwater County. Several events have been recruited to the area over the years generating thousands of visitors. Most recently SWCTTB partners with both the Rock Springs and Green River High Schools to recruit the 2023 & 2024 State High School 3A and 4A Boys and Girls Soccer Tournaments. “We will be hosting approximately 800 athletes, their families, supporting coaches and staff for several days during these events and we were so proud to be able to partner with both communities to make this happen. These events will generate an estimated \$6 million in economic impact to the local economy over two years,” said Jenissa Meredith.

### Local Event Grant Funding

Any non-profit organization hosting an event in Sweetwater County qualifies for lodging tax grant funding up to \$6,000 per event. Grant hearings are held quarterly, and grant information can be found at [www.ExploreWY.com](http://www.ExploreWY.com).

Events receiving lodging tax funding in 2021/22 include:

**SWEETWATER RODEO CLUB:** SWEETWATER COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL & JUNIOR HIGH RODEO

**GR GRAPPLERS WRESTLING:** RUDY GUNTER MEMORIAL WRESTLING TOURNAMENT

**QUILT COMMITTEE:** QUILTING ON THE GREEN

**RS URA:** SWEETWATER BLUES ‘N BREWS

**CITY OF GR:** ART ON THE GREEN

**GR AMERICAN LEGION KNIGHTS:** INVITATIONAL BASEBALL

**RS URA:** ARTEMBER

**GR CHAMBER:** RIVER FESTIVAL

**RDR INC.:** RED DESERT ROUNDUP RODEO

**GR HIGH SCHOOL:** FLAMING GORGE CLASSIC BASKETBALL

**GR HIGH SCHOOL:** THOMAN INVITATIONAL WRESTLING

**RS AVENGERS’ SOCCER:** ROCK CHALLENGE SOCCER TOURNAMENT

**RS CIVIC CENTER:** DECEMBER DUNK BASKETBALL

**WYOMING WILDERNESS:** RUN THE RED

**RS MEN’S HOCKEY:** 36<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BUD CUP HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

**RS URA:** SNOWMAN STROLL

**RS AMATEUR HOCKEY:** HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION B STATE HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

**RS CIVIC CENTER:** WIND & MUD HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

**RS CIVIC CENTER:** DROP-IN HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

**OSSR:** OVERLAND STAGE STAMPEDE RODEO

**SW WY BMX:** DOUBLE, TRIPLE, TRIPLE POINT RACE WEEKEND

**UNITED SOUTHWEST AQUATICS:** SHIVER IN THE RIVER SWIM MEET

**SW Wyoming Equine Action Team:** Sweetwater Classic AQHA & Open Show

**WDA:** Wyoming Dental Association 106<sup>th</sup> Annual Session

**American Legion Post 28:** American Legion Wyoming Convention

**GR Development Fund:** Flaming Gorge Days

**Western Shooters Council:** Sweetwater USMS Western Regional

**RS Renewal Fund:** Rock Springs Encore- WY International Film Festival  
**RS High School:** 4A State Golf Tournament  
**RS High School:** 4A Regional Conference Tennis  
**RS MEN'S HOCKEY:** 37<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BUD CUP HOCKEY TOURNAMENT  
**Wyoming County Assessor's Association:** Wyoming Summer County Assessor's Meeting  
**Jr. Cowgirls Traveling Basketball:** 1st Annual Jr. Cowgirls All Out Ball Out  
**GR USA Swimming:** USA Youth Swimming District Championships  
**Western Shooters Council:** Mid Mountain Regional

## TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM MASTER PLAN

As visitors travel through Wyoming, they often are looking for ticketed attractions, rentals, restrooms, signage, and guided tours. With this in mind SWCTT has moved into tourism product development in recent years to further enhance the visitor experience beyond the traditional marketing efforts.

With the impact of the pandemic, SWCTT worked to prepare for any federal or state funding programs that might become available and developed a Tourism Master Plan in 2021 to address the product development needs. SWCTT worked with all local partners, governing bodies and residents to develop the plan to be well vetted. The Master Plan was instrumental in being qualified to apply for several funding opportunities in 2022.

### Flaming Gorge – Green River Basin All-American Road Designation

SWCTT has promoted the Flaming Gorge Scenic Byway for decades. In 2021, SWCTT worked with corridor partners to update the Corridor Management Plan and submitted an application for the byway to be designated as an All-American Road – a destination unto itself. The application was successful, and the byway was designated as an All-American Road in 2021 as part of the National Scenic Byway Program. It is now one of only 37 All-American Roads in the United States. This designation provides opportunities for funding to build out amenities along the byway and SWCTT has submitted almost \$2 million in grant applications so far for these projects.

### Flaming Gorge Bus Tour

SWCTT launched full-day guided bus tours along the Flaming Gorge Scenic Byway in Summer 2021. Over 500 passengers enjoyed the tour since 2021 and reported mainly 5 Star Ratings. Lucy Diggins-Wold, formerly with Wyoming Game and Fish, and Dawn Dale are the Flaming Gorge Tour Guides and provide fun facts and byway interpretation along the route. Tours will continue in Summer 2023.

### Sand Boarding

With inspiration from the Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado and many destinations around the world, SWCTT began selling Sand Boards in summer of 2022 to encourage residents and visitors to explore and “surf” the Killpecker Sand Dunes.

### *What is Sand Boarding?*

**Sandboarding** is a board sport and extreme sport similar to snowboarding that involves riding across or down a sand dune while standing on a board, either with both feet strapped in or while standing loose, without bindings. Sandboarding can also be practiced sitting down or lying on the belly or the back. It typically involves a sandboard, although it is also possible to use sleds, surfboards, a skateboard deck, or snowboards. - Wikipedia

### KUTV2 News Partnership

SWCTT has been partnering with KUTV2 News out of the Salt Lake City market to feature local attractions for several years. In 2022, SWCTT featured the new Mustang Loop Trail in Rock Springs and Sand Boarding at the Killpecker Sand Dunes.

SWCTT also worked to secure funding for signage on the Mustang Loop Trail that will be installed Spring 2023.

### Brave Girl

SWCTT sponsored the documentary film Brave Girl in 2022. Brave Girl is about a strong young adventurer who is just beginning her journey of finding out what it takes to climb mountains. Even though she's only 6, she has an unwavering ambition to climb the biggest mountains in the world, starting with the ones in her own backyard here in Wyoming. Watch here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD-xgzqan9k>

### New Customer Service Program

The Sweetwater County Certified Tourism Ambassador program is a multi-faceted program that serves to increase tourism by inspiring front-line employees and volunteers to turn every visitor encounter into a positive experience. When visitors have a positive experience, they are more likely to return in the future and also share their experience with others. Everyone benefits—the visitors, the industry, the local economy, and most importantly, the front-line worker. There are currently over 120 local Certified Tourism Ambassadors.

### COST/RENEWAL

There is a one-time, non-refundable, non-transferable application fee of \$39 and an annual renewal fee of \$19 per person. In addition to the renewal fee, CTAs must log 50 CTA points throughout the year, earned through a variety of activities.

### CLASS SCHEDULE/ENROLLMENT

For a class schedule and online enrollment, go to [www.ctanetwork.com](http://www.ctanetwork.com). If you have any questions, please contact [allison@tourwyoming.com](mailto:allison@tourwyoming.com).

### Hospitality Awards Program

The Sweetwater County Travel & Tourism Board recognizes outstanding customer service in the local lodging industry through the R.E.A.C.H. Awards Program. R.E.A.C.H. stands for Rare and Exceptional Achievement for Customer Service in Hospitality. "We can deploy a great deal of

targeted marketing and work to enhance the amenities here in Sweetwater County, but if visitors have a bad experience with a front-line employee when they get here, it is all for not. The R.E.A.C.H. awards luncheon is conducted each quarter of the year to recognize the outstanding hospitality employees we have here, proudly representing us every day. They are truly the backbone of the Sweetwater County Tourism industry,” said Jenissa Meredith.

### **What does tourism promotion mean to the local economy?**

#### **Travel Impact Studies**

SWCTT commissions a conversion and advertising effectiveness study to determine the effectiveness of the marketing campaigns administered with lodging tax dollars.

- Advertising Influenced almost \$65 million in Visitor Spending
- Advertising Influenced Over 46,000 Visits
- ROI for every Advertising Dollar Spent \$399
- Average # of Days Spent in SWC 3
- Average # of People in Travel Party 2.7
- Average # of Activities in SWC 4.1
- Average Trip Spending per Party \$1,400
- An increase in Advertising Awareness between 2021 and 2022 resulted in a more positive opinion of the area.

“Tourism marketing and product development generates visitor spending which is realized as money going into the cash registers of local businesses. I am fortunate to work with an incredible team here at Sweetwater County Travel and Tourism and we take our mission of growing the visitor economy very seriously,” said Jenissa Meredith.



#### Back Row L – R:

Chezney Goglio – Marketing and Operations Manager  
Grace Banks Administrative Assistant/Grant Specialist  
Kim Strid – Board Member  
Devon Brubaker – Board Treasurer  
Mark Lyon – Board Vice-Chair  
Cory Gardner – Board Member  
Randall Dale – Board Member

#### Front Row L – R:

Melissa Hutchinson – Board Member  
Bridget Bernard – Board Chair  
Jenissa Meredith – Chief Executive Officer  
Allison Volcic – Industry Relations Manager  
Dawn Dale – Flaming Gorge Bus Tour Guide

#### Not Pictured:

Stacy Colvin – Board Secretary  
Dominic Wolf – Board Member  
Angelica Wood – Board Member  
Brad Raney – Board Member  
Lucy Diggins-Wold – Flaming Gorge Bus Tour Guide





Family hiking in Green River, WY



Flaming Gorge Bus Tour  
(Firehole, Flaming Gorge National  
Recreation Area)



Sandboarding at the Killpecker  
Sand Dunes North of Rock Springs,  
WY.



Mountain Biking along the Wilkins Peak Trail System.



Rock Springs Coal sign in Downtown Rock Springs, WY