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Booming Black Belt tourism pumps billions of dollars into state's economy

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (May 7, 2024) – Tourism in Alabama's 23-county Black Belt region generated an annual economic impact of \$3.8 billion in 2023 and accounted for about 45,500 jobs, according to a new report commissioned by [the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association \(ALBBAA\)](#).

The economic impact of tourism on the Black Belt roughly doubled from 2020 to 2023, growing from \$1.9 billion in 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, to \$3.8 billion in 2023.

"Tourism is a key factor in Alabama's growing economy," Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said. "Having grown up in the heart of the Black Belt in Wilcox County, I understand this region has so much to offer – from outdoor recreation like hunting and fishing to world-changing cultural events, talented artisans and crafters and historic sites. I'm excited to see the growth of the tourism industry in the Black Belt."

The report, titled "The Economic Impact of Tourism in Alabama's Black Belt Region," was produced by Dr. Keivan Deravi of Montgomery-based Economics Research Services, Inc. Highlights of the growing economic impact of the tourism industry on Alabama's Black Belt from 2020 through 2023 include these key findings:

- Black Belt tourism accounted for a total economic impact of nearly \$3.8 billion in 2023, up from \$1.9 billion in 2020.
- Black Belt tourism is responsible for an estimated 45,500 direct and indirect Alabama jobs in 2023, reflecting an increase of approximately 5% over 2022.
- Direct and indirect payroll in 2023 reached \$1.25 billion, a growth rate of 8% from 2022.
- Alabama's state and local governments received \$219 million in taxes from Black Belt tourism.
- Hunting and fishing accounts for \$1.7 billion in annual economic impact, representing nearly half of all tourism spending in the Black Belt.

- Tourism pumped \$750 million into rural counties' economies in 2023.
- Black Belt tourism accounts for \$70 million in contributions to the Alabama Education Trust Fund and the General Fund.

"Alabama's Black Belt attracts visitors for a wide variety of reasons, led by outdoor recreational activities like hunting, fishing, birding, hiking and camping," said Pam Swanner, director of the Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association. "The Black Belt is also blessed with cultural events and festivals, such as the Airing of the Quilts in Gee's Bend, as well as many historical landmarks. Throw in a lively art and food scene, and it's easy to see why so many people are traveling our scenic back roads year-round."

The report shows all 23 Black Belt counties have experienced tourism growth since 2020.

"Those of us who live in the Black Belt have long recognized the bountiful recreational and cultural activities available here, and it's clear people from all over the country and all over the globe have now noticed," said Greenville Mayor Dexter McLendon, a member of the ALBBAA board of directors. "I know I've seen people visiting Greenville from so many different places that it's hard to remember them all, and this report shows the immense economic benefits that tourism is having for our entire region. Tourism is a crucial part of the local economy in all 23 Black Belt counties."

All areas of the Black Belt benefit from tourism, the report shows.

"This report clearly shows that every county in the Black Belt benefits from tourism, and it also shows the positive impact those tourism dollars have on our state budgets," Swanner said. "Our organization is dedicated to highlighting outdoor recreational opportunities and working together with our regional partners in providing visitors an immersive experience in our cultural heritage. Our efforts are bearing fruit, and that's incredibly gratifying."

The Black Belt includes the following 23 counties: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa and Wilcox.

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***The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association** is committed to promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the Black Belt in a manner that provides economic and ecological benefits to the region and its citizens. For information, go to www.alabamablackbeltadventures.org.*