

NINE MILE COUNTY FOREST:

The Economic and Visitor Impact for Marathon County



Executive Summary

Located southwest of Wausau, Nine Mile County Forest is a cornerstone of outdoor recreation in Marathon County. At nearly 5,000 acres, the forest consists of mixed uplands, marshes and water impoundments available for various recreation activities. Nine Mile is intensively managed for multiple uses, including 30 miles of trails for mountain biking, winter biking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, hiking, snowmobiling and snowshoeing. It hosts diverse activities and events with impacts that ripple across the local economy.

While it attracts only a small share of Marathon County's total visitors, the forest generates a meaningful economic impact. Spending by out-of-town visitors to Nine Mile in 2023 supported \$3.25 million in business activity across Marathon County. The Village of Rib Mountain, Marathon County Parks and the regional economy all benefit from Nine Mile visitation.

This report explores the data behind these numbers and tells the stories of how Nine Mile serves as a hub for recreation, a driver of local business revenue and a valuable community asset.

**Out-of-town
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Mile Forest
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Marathon County
economy**



A Community Asset Attracting Visitors

Geolocation data suggest that Nine Mile County Forest attracted over 42,000 visitors in 2023. Most of these were local residents, but 31% traveled from out of the area to recreate at Nine Mile. In 2023, spending by 13,000 out-of-town visitors to Nine Mile generated \$3.25 million in business activity in Marathon County, supporting 42 local jobs and \$1.5 million in labor income, and generating \$341,000 in state and local taxes.

Nine Mile appeals to a variety of demographics, including families, competitive athletes and outdoor enthusiasts. Nine Mile visitors also enjoy other outdoor assets, with 57% reporting visiting Rib Mountain State Park.

Generating Revenue for the County

Nine Mile County Forest generates substantial revenue for the Marathon County Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department:

- **Skiing:** \$23,911 in annual and daily pass revenue.
- **Biking:** \$18,391 in pass revenue.
- **Camping:** \$3,697 from permits.

Beyond direct revenue, the forest enhances the county's ability to attract regional and national events, such as Ragnar Trail Wisconsin and Wausau24, which collectively bring thousands of participants and spectators.

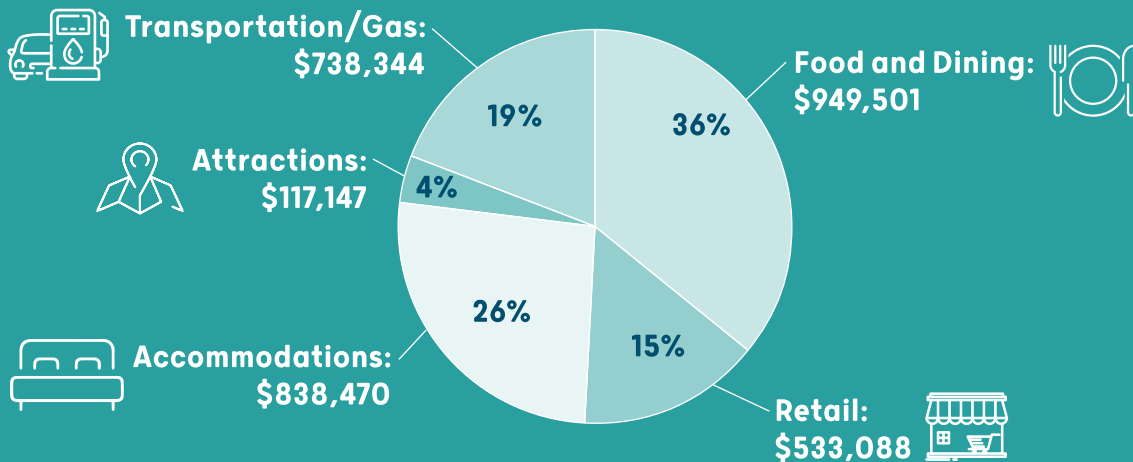
Environmental Benefits

Nine Mile Forest preserves natural spaces and sustainable tourism. A 15-year County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan helps manage use and growth of the forest and its sustainable timber harvest, and seeks to connect the forest to other publicly owned lands.



Out-of-town Visitor Spending

In 2023, Nine Mile visitors spent significantly across categories:



Stimulating the Local and Regional Economy

The proximity of Nine Mile to the Village of Rib Mountain amplifies its local economic impact. Out-of-town visitors to Nine Mile frequently visit other Rib Mountain attractions, including Granite Peak Ski Area, driving economic synergy. Popular dining spots like Van Acre Restaurant and retail hubs like Sam's Club see significant traffic from Nine Mile visitors. Events hosted at Nine Mile lead to overnight stays, benefiting the village's hotels and generating room tax revenue.

But Nine Mile's impact doesn't end there; in fact, it extends far beyond Rib Mountain. Over half (57%) of out-of-town visitors to the forest spend money at locally owned food and retail establishments or visit other outdoor recreation and cultural attractions during their stay, contributing to the broader Marathon County economy. Visitors often venture into downtown Wausau, exploring arts and culture destinations like the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum.

An asset to the county, the forest figures prominently in regional recreation development plans and sustainable tourism initiatives. As the forest's infrastructure and amenities are improved to accommodate increased visitation and events, additional enhancements such as road and trail maintenance to the forest, also benefit county residents. These improvements are partially funded through park revenues and county tax revenues that have increased over time with the forest's success at drawing visitors.

Providing Community Benefits

Nine Mile Forest offers benefits beyond its economic contributions, providing a place for residents and visitors to engage in health and wellness activities and strengthen the community. Nine Mile preserves natural habitats, promotes sustainable outdoor recreation and offers a place for people to find peace with nature. Events like the Wisconsin Special Olympics Winter Games showcase Nine Mile as a venue for connection and inclusivity. Nine Mile also builds and strengthens community connections across user groups, municipalities and the county.



"Our downtown retail shop featuring Wisconsin creators does particularly well during ski season as visitors to both Granite Peak and Nine Mile shop our store. Especially during peak weekends, we see an uptick of 20% in sales."

- Alison Magnuson, Owner of The Local, Wausau, WI

Economic Impact



13,047
out-of-town
visitors



\$3.25 million
in total business
activity



42 jobs
supported



\$1.5 million
in labor income
supported

Recommendations for Growth

Nine Mile County Forest is not just a park-it's a catalyst for economic growth, a cornerstone of community health and a symbol of sustainability. From Marathon County Parks to the Village of Rib Mountain, and across Marathon County, Nine Mile's impact is felt far and wide. By telling these stories and building on its strengths, Nine Mile can continue to thrive as a vital destination for visitors and residents alike.

To build on its successes, Nine Mile and its stakeholders should consider:

- **Enhanced Marketing:** Target the Twin Cities and Chicago markets with campaigns emphasizing multi-day stays.
- **Visitor Packages:** Collaborate with local businesses to create bundled deals, including lodging, dining and recreation.
- **New Experiences:** Expand winter activities to include nighttime trail events, enhancing seasonal appeal.
- **Community Partnerships:** Continue working with Marathon County Parks and the Village of Rib Mountain to align development with community goals.



Photo courtesy Ragnar Events

"We came up to do the Ragnar and stayed at the Hilton Garden Inn after the event to enjoy Wausau a bit more. Shepherd and Schaller is a great outdoor outfitters - our favorite restaurant was downtown at Lemongrass. Ragnar is epic here. We will be back!"

- Tom S., Milwaukee



Methodology

This report integrates insights from multiple data sources and stakeholder contributions.

Nine Mile County Forest revenue and events data was provided by Marathon County Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department. Revenue included pass revenues, camping permits and event participation fees. Event attendance, revenue and cross-visitation rates sourced were included from Ragnar Trail Wausau, Wausau24 and Wisconsin Special Olympics Winter Games.

Zartico Geolocation provided visitor data and spend data (2023), based on representative device and cardholder data samples for Marathon County-category-specific visitor spending estimates based on Marathon County averages.

The economic contributions of visitor spending to the local economy were estimated using a sales area multiplier calculated using the formula provided by Wen-Huei Chen in "Variations in multipliers and related economic ratios for recreation and tourism impact analysis" (Michigan State University, 2001) and applying a conservative capture rate of 70% to reflect the proportion of visitor spending that is retained in the local economy.

Estimates of the number of jobs, labor income and local/state tax revenue supported used ratios reported by Travel Wisconsin for the economic impact of tourism in Marathon County in 2023.



OutdoorRecreation.wi.gov



VisitWausau.com



MarathonCounty.gov



RibMountainWi.gov



HarbingerConsult.com

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