

PENINSULA STATE PARK:

The Economic Impact of New Mountain Bike Trails



Photo: Dan Eggert Photography



Preliminary Results Show Positive Impact of Mountain Bike Trails

Peninsula State Park is a haven for outdoor recreation, attracting 1.3 million visitors annually who come to the park for a variety of activities. To enhance the opportunities available for visitors, the Friends of Peninsula State Park and park staff recently completed Phase 1 of a purpose-built mountain bike trails project and opened 7.5 miles of new mountain bike trails in the park. Phase 2 of the project includes an additional 11.7 miles which were under construction in 2025 and will open to riders in 2026. The new trails have been widely popular and are the first purpose-built mountain bike trails on public lands within Door County.

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, which is updated every five years, found a continued increase in the popularity of mountain biking and the need for more mountain bike trails, especially in Door County. The mountain bike network will include trails and amenities for all ages and skill levels.

This report is a collaborative effort of the Friends of Peninsula State Park, park staff and Destination Door County. The preliminary findings demonstrate the economic activity these trails generate for the local area, which will aid in future development and funding. This will also help other parks decide if mountain bike trails should be installed.

Preliminary data show a positive impact, such as increased visitation and spending.

Visitors to Peninsula State Park's new mountain bike trails spent \$1.3 million in Door County.



Meeting A Growing Need

Peninsula State Park is considered Wisconsin's most complete state park. With 8 miles of shoreline, rocky bluffs, sandy beaches, dense forests, and stunning views of Green Bay and nearby islands, it offers a nearly comprehensive selection of outdoor recreation opportunities. USA Today recently listed Peninsula State Park as the sixth-best state park in the country.

While the park offers many natural features and outdoor activities for visitors to enjoy, there were few opportunities to explore the area by mountain bike until recently.

As part of the process to develop the 2018 Northern Lake Michigan Coastal Master Plan, which includes Peninsula State Park, the results of a public survey indicated this region had the highest need for mountain bike trails. Heeding the need, park staff completed a review of the trail system and recommended a 15-25-mile mountain bike trail network in areas that would not impact the park's special features or natural environment.

The full mountain bike network will include trails and amenities for all ages and skill levels, including an accessible trail for adaptive bicycles. Phase 1 was completed in 2025, and Phase 2 is under construction. This study gathered initial data to understand the economic significance of the trails even before the full network is completed.



Overnight Visitors Drawn to Trails

As one of the state's most-visited parks, Peninsula State Park is a local gem that attracts visitors from near and far. Survey results from mountain bike users within the first few months of the trail network opening reveal that most users (57%) were from outside Door County, including other states, while 30% were second homeowners and 13% were full-time residents. This is consistent with data collected from Azira, a geo-location data provider, for the park overall: 62% of park visitors were from outside Door County.

Madison was the origin community most frequently indicated by mountain bike riders from out of town, followed by Green Bay and Milwaukee. Visitors indicated staying multiple nights, with 1-2 nights (44%) being the most popular length of stay, followed by 3-5 nights (33%) and nearly a quarter stayed 6 or more nights (23%).

Azira data also shows that most visitors stay 1-2 hours, but the mountain bike user survey revealed that riders engage in other activities as well, most commonly hiking, road and gravel biking and swimming.

In its first season, the new mountain bike trails were not heavily promoted. Most users were first-time visitors and indicated learning about the trails through word of mouth and social media. Riders most frequently traveled in groups of 1 to 3 people, followed by groups of 3 to 5. After riding, 100% of respondents rated the trails as either excellent or good, positioning the park for increased visitation from satisfied users and future promotion.

Most Riders Are from Out of Town



ORIGINS

57% out-of-town visitors

30% seasonal or second homeowners

13% full-time residents

Madison most frequent origin community

BEHAVIORS

2 riders average group size

37% first-time riders

22% have ridden 3 times



Pedal-Powered Spending

Preliminary findings indicate the mountain biking trails are attracting riders and spurring economic activity at a variety of local businesses.

Since opening (May 28, 2025 - October 23, 2025), trail counters recorded 4,708 total riders on the new mountain bike trails of Phase 1. Survey results showed that 57% were from out-of-town and spent an average of \$154 per person daily:

- \$71 on lodging or camping
- \$51 on restaurants and bars
- \$16 on gas and transportation
- \$16 on souvenirs

That spending adds up, as out-of-town riders stay an average of four nights in the area. In just the first season, spending by out-of-town mountain bike riders totaled \$1.3 million, supporting businesses and the Door County economy.

Locals and second homeowners also spend money in Door County communities when they ride, primarily on food and drink, gas and retail purchases. Second homeowners, like visitors, spend on other activities like brewery and winery visits, boat rentals and tours.

Benefits of Mountain Bike Trails

Recent studies by American Trails and the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA), which included numerous mountain bike trails throughout the United States, noted that quality, multi-skilled mountain bike trails have had a significant impact on local economies. The IMBA study reported the average expenditure for mountain bike tourists was \$416 per visit.

The studies also noted the benefits to:

- Mental health with the feeling of well-being and identity
- Social connectedness and being part of a community of recreational enthusiasts
- The health benefits of mountain biking exercise
- Improved quality of life and connection to nature

With the robust use of the mountain bike trails in their first season, it is expected that the completed system will become home to community events, a training ground for clubs and high school teams and provide a sense of place for many in the community who enjoy mountain biking and time spent outside.



"We have made two additional trips into the area this year just because of the mountain bike trails. That includes us staying at a hotel, dining out, shopping and boating."

Chad Friedli, Visitor
(Green Bay)



Photo: Dan Eggert Photography

First Summer of Economic Gains: May - October 2025



**2,684 non-local
mountain bike
riders**



**\$487 average
trip spend
per non-local rider**



**\$1.3 million
in total visitor spending**

Future Plans

With the completion of Phase 2, Peninsula State Park will be home to 20 miles of mountain bike trails, expanding the network into more desirable areas of the park. Phase 2 is being constructed to shape the trail system into a sought-out, destination-worthy experience.

In addition, the Peninsula State Park mountain bike trails are anticipated to serve as a catalyst for other mountain bike trails, which are now being discussed in other parts of Door County. There is also strong potential for the formation of mountain biking clubs and hosting competitions and special events. Clubs, competitions and special events attract riders, guests and spectators, all of which will expand the trail system's impact and increase its contribution to the local economy.

Future plans include the creation of an outdoor gathering area at the trailhead, which also serves as the trailhead for the ski trails. Eventually, the Friends of Peninsula State Park intend to construct an enclosed year-round shelter as well. A plan for a multi-modal trail throughout Door County will include a segment in Peninsula State Park to connect bikers to the new mountain bike trails.

Destination Door County will continue to collect Azira location data on the mountain bike trails to monitor visitation trends. Friends of Peninsula State Park and park staff will collect data from trail counters and surveys on an ongoing basis. This will allow us to collect a comprehensive data set, compare trends over time and inform programming, promotion, outreach and management actions.



"Adding more mileage to the already existing trails will make this trail system a destination wherein visitors will want to stay, ride and recreate for several days, stimulating the local economy. The trails also have potential for nearly year-round use with the growing popularity of winter fat bike riding. Trails can make a positive difference in our community."

**Terry Chier, Manager,
Door County Sunglass Company (Egg Harbor)**



Photo: Mike Tittel

Methodology

Trail counters were purchased by the Friends of Peninsula State Park and placed on the mountain bike trails. An online survey was created to understand user behaviors and spending. Signs were posted at the trail, links were shared on social media to encourage riders to take the survey and 83 responses were collected. Destination Door County provided Azira data on visitation to Peninsula State Park for the study.

The economic contributions of trail user 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.



OutdoorRecreation.wi.gov



DoorCounty.com



[PeninsulaStatePark.org/
mountain-bike-trails](http://PeninsulaStatePark.org/mountain-bike-trails)



HarbingerConsult.com

This report was produced by the Friends of Peninsula State Park and Destination Door County with support from the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation and The Harbinger Consultancy as a result of the Office's Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Program in 2025.

Photos are courtesy of these organizations, Mike Tittel and Dan Eggert Photography.