



Tourism Bureau Receives \$750,000 Sports Tourism ARPA Grant

by Stephanie Tate

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ALTON - Sports tourism in southwest Illinois received a financial shot in the arm when the Madison County Board approved a \$750,000 ARPA grant to the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau for sports marketing.



"This is great news for Madison County and our region," Cory Jobe, President/CEO of the Tourism Bureau noted. "The funds will be used to grow the sports tourism market for Madison County which, in turn, will bring more visitor spending and increased tax revenues to the county."

The grant will be used for the following:

- Regional and national brand marketing campaign
- Incentive/support funds to attract and support sports tournaments in Madison County
- Engage with an outdoor recreation consultant to indicate future facilities needed to become a top-rated fishing, boating and outdoor recreation tournament destination

"This funding will help the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau drive sports tourism into Madison County," Madison County Board Chairman Kurt Prenzler said. "The American Rescue Plan Act allowed governments to fund tourism, as it was one of the hardest hit sectors during COVID. The use of these funds will help benefit communities throughout the county."

The Bureau has been working since January to re-establish the region's position in the highly competitive sports tourism market. Those efforts included hiring Jason Troop as the new Sports Tourism Marketing Manager along with efforts to bring in established tournaments and sporting events to the region. The Bureau recently secured the 2023 Spring Tough Mudder event at WorldWide Technology Raceway ensuring millions in new revenue for the county.

"Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau understands the economic impact sports tournaments and events can have on communities in Madison County," Mr. Jobe said. "One thing to note, Madison County lost a potential \$2.8 million in economic impact on events the Bureau could not secure for 2021 and 2022. These additional funds will help solidify and secure important tournaments for the region."

In 2019, Madison County reported an economic impact of \$7.9 million from sports tourism. That number dropped to \$3.9 million in 2020 (COVID impacts); and rose to \$5.8 million in 2021. That number is expected to climb as a result of the new funding.

A recent report conducted by Tourism Economics and Sports ETA revealed that the sports tourism industry accounts for over \$45 billion of direct spend economic impact nationally. It generates over \$14.5 billion of tax revenue and nearly \$7 billion accrued by state and local governments. In addition to the significant direct financial impact, these sporting events become a source of civic pride and improve the quality of life locally with improved infrastructure and business recruitment and retention.