GREAT FALLS HOSTS MONTANA TOURISM INDUSTRY, TAKES CONFERENCE LEARNING ON THE ROAD

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GREAT FALLS, Mont. — Great Falls welcomed approximately 190 tourism professionals for the 2026 Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism, generating nearly $108,000 in estimated local economic impact while putting a new spin on how attendees learn about tourism development in Montana.

Hosted by the Montana Department of Commerce with Great Falls serving as the host community, the conference brought tourism professionals together at the Mansfield Convention Center for industry insights, networking and discussions about Montana's visitor economy. Attendees came primarily from communities across Montana, with additional participants from around the country.

Visit Great Falls worked with the Montana Department of Commerce to help develop immersive breakout sessions throughout Great Falls and North Central Montana. The full- and half-day experiences connected attendees with business owners, community leaders and organizations to examine tourism development in action.

"The goal was to get people into communities and have real conversations about how tourism works on the ground," said Rebecca Engum, Executive Director of Great Falls Montana Tourism. "Attendees heard about the wins, challenges and partnerships behind tourism assets and were asked to think about what could work in their own communities."

Rather than sightseeing tours, the sessions used businesses, attractions and community projects as real-world case studies. Experiences reached Fort Benton, Havre, Stanford, Belt, Conrad, Power, Fort Shaw and the Great Falls area, exploring topics including agritourism, arts and events, outdoor recreation, heritage and Indigenous tourism, local manufacturing and public-private partnerships.

Great Falls businesses were incorporated throughout the conference. The opening-night Taste of Great Falls featured Borrie's, Teriyaki Madness, Enbär, Electric City Catering, Buffalo Noir and Big Dipper. Attendees also gathered at The Newberry for networking.

At the Montana Tourism Awards Luncheon, Great Falls broadcasting legend Norma Ashby Smith received the Excellence in Cinema and Cultural Heritage Award. Smith is one of five women featured in Visit Great Falls' documentary, "The Feisty Women of Great Falls." Great Falls and Central Montana were also well represented among the Tourism Rising Star Award nominees. Visit Great Falls Content Director Liz Lauver and Central Montana Tourism Director Avery Creveling-Hughes were two of the four nominees, with Creveling-Hughes receiving the award.

The conference's economic impact is one example of tourism's broader contribution to Great Falls. Great Falls welcomes more than one million overnight visitors annually, generating more than $191 million in visitor spending across lodging, restaurants and bars, retail, fuel, groceries and other local businesses.

More information about Great Falls' visitor economy and the local impact of travel is available in Great Falls Montana Tourism's 2025 Annual Report: 2025 Annual Report.

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