

Fremont County Tourism Council 2015 Destination Marketing Report

Record Lodging Tax Collection

The budgeted state remittance of \$130,000 was exceeded by \$60,297 to total \$190,297 as of the most recent and final reports through December, 2015. This is an increase of \$39,311 over 2014, and based on available history, may be a record for the county.

Strong Financials

Additional revenue totaled \$112,897 (\$60,297 add'l tax revenue, \$25,000 from the CTO, \$25,000 from the City, and \$2,600 of misc. income from FCHC to match CTO grant). After accounting for expenses, we ended the year with a favorable variance of \$55,285.

The biggest expenses incurred were for the Royal Gorge Region Visitor Guide distribution, fulfillment, internet marketing, and management services. The council awarded \$6,500 in grants for community events.

Economic Benefits

Research conducted for the Colorado Tourism Office by Dean Runyon Associates reported the latest figures on the economic benefit of tourism to Fremont County.

- Travel spending - \$59.7 million
- Earnings - \$13.6 million
- 756 tourism-related jobs
- Local taxes - \$1.4 million
- State taxes \$1.7 million

2015 results are expected to be even stronger. See the complete report at <http://industry.colorado.com/research/dean-runyan>

Lodging Tax Reauthorized by Voters

Permanent reauthorization, including removal of any future 'sunset' date for the Fremont County Lodging Tax, Issue 1A on the November 2015 general election ballot was approved by a wide margin. Even though an official "Committee to Approve 1A" was formed, money donated to the campaign fund was returned to donors following the election as there was no cash outlay for voter education and campaign efforts. Prairie Mountain Publishing (The Daily Record) donated ad space. Vista Works donated ad design. KRLN featured the issue on The Morning Show with Kari Jacobs and other community outreach and voter education efforts led to voter approval.

CTO Grant

In 2015, VistaWorks managed the investment of the 2015 CTO grant, and the FCTC saw a huge return on investment as outlined in separate notes below. The grant amount was \$25,000 with a \$25,000 match from the FCTC budget. The money was spent in the following ways:

- VisitCOS.com email broadcasts and email leads
- Colorado.com email broadcasts, leads, banner ads, web + print listings.
- Visitor Guide fulfillment
- Heritage tour development
- Social Media Promotion
- Search Engine Advertising

An application for 2016 was made by VistaWorks on behalf of the FCTC was submitted to the CTO, and accepted.

Royal Gorge Vacation Guide

2015 production was 100,000 copies. 30,825 copies were distributed under contract with Certified Folder Display Service, Inc., with additional copies distributed through our publisher's network. Of the few copies of the 2015 edition that remained, a case (75) were made available for distribution at the Tour Colorado/Colorado Tourism Office exhibit booth, *at no charge*, during the National Tour Association's 2016 Travel Exchange conference and exhibition held January 30 to February 2 in Atlanta. The contract for publishing and distribution of the official Royal Gorge Vacation Guide magazine with the current vendor, Colorado Activity Centers, was extended for one (1) year, due to delays in the development, approval and release of a Request for Proposal (RFP).

Vacation Guide Fulfillment

LEADS	FEB/MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	TOTAL FULFILLED	TOTAL RECEIVED
DIRECT	128	270	164	163	145	104	55	1,029	1,029
CTO	1,244	686	746	901	586	607	279	5,049	12,548
COS	978	500	600	668	702	488	310	4,246	9,878
NAT PKS	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	24
TOTAL	2,374	1,456	1,510	1,732	1,433	1,199	644	10,348	23,479

Fulfillment is the number of Vacation Guides mailed on request. A budget of \$60,575 would be required to fulfill every request. The 2016 fulfillment budget is \$21,000.

RoyalGorgeTravel.com Website

Unique visitors: 225,906 (This is an increase of 282% over 2014)

Page views: 588,701 (This is an increase of 189% over 2014)

In total 24,578 LEADS (inquiries) were generated from royalgorgetravel.com, the Colorado Tourism Office, the Colorado Springs CVB and a small number from the National Parks program. Just over 10% were International requests.

More than 1,000 were from TX, CO, MO, IL, KS, OK - more than 900 from FL, IA, WI (ranked).

Not surprisingly, April, May and June are the busiest months.

Facebook

Total PAGE Likes 39,000 (This is an increase of 425% over 2014)

Total Reach (Unique Users): 5,496,557 people

This is a decrease of 59%, but expected because in 2014 the grant of \$150,000 was obtained from the EDA, and a good portion of the budget was on Social Media promotion. Looking at dollar for dollar spending, the results were outstanding, reaching more people on Facebook than live in the entire state of Colorado.

In the spring and fall of 2015, the FCTC entered into an agreement with the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) to participate in a Facebook co-op, under which our investment in advertising is matched dollar-for-dollar, up to \$2000; with the potential to repeat the campaign under the same agreement.

Instagram

In 2015 as part of a partnership with the CTO, VistaWorks on behalf of the FCTC started an Instagram account and at year end had 652 followers. Our organization was selected to participate in an 'Instagram Take-Over' in 2015, allowing the FCTC to saturate the CTO's Instagram page with compelling photographs featuring our region. Viewer 'LIKES', SHARES and Comments were a powerful promotional tool.

Royal Gorge Email Newsletter

VistaWorks on behalf of the FCTC creates and distributes an email newsletter once per month to people interested in the region. The email list is comprised of opt-in only recipients and is currently distributed to over 50,000 people. In 2015, approximately 600,000 people were reached through this newsletter.

Cañon City Chamber of Commerce

The Cañon City Chamber of Commerce is the defacto 'OFFICE' and public face for the virtual organization that is FCTC, answering the published telephone number and responding to inquiries for email and walk-in visitors. They are a great asset to our efforts, and the statistics speak for themselves...

- Tourism telephone inquiries: ~1,300 calls received on three lines, including 800-704-6743, the 'official' number for Royal Gorge Travel.

- Tourism Walk-in's to Chamber office: 1,786
- Visitor Cabin in Veteran's Park (May to September): 5,477 visitors. Of these, 3,763 were out-of-state guests, and 228 were International.

Staff also assist other vendors with fulfilling direct requests for the Royal Gorge Vacation Guide from people considering a visit to the region. In 2015, Chamber staff mailed out 580 magazines, fielding requests from 43 states and 27 international requests; about 20 percent of which were from Canada.

Tourism Council ON THE ROAD

In what may have been a first in the Council's history, FCTC meetings went ON THE ROAD in 2015, with one meeting each quarter held at locations around the county, outside the Fremont County Administration Building. This improved public access, facilitated greater participation, and increased awareness of the FCTC's role, activities and service in support of regional destination marketing. March at the Royal Gorge Bridge & Park; May at the BLM Regional Office in Cañon City, September in Howard, and December in Florence.

Royal Gorge Bridge and Park

The Royal Gorge Bridge welcomed 334,000 visitors in 2015, up 25% from the last full operating year before the Royal Gorge Fire 2013 and up 10 percent from a normal year. Gate receipts of \$10 million dollars (gross) for 2015 were the highest ever, making possible a \$2.1 million dollar lease payment to Cañon City for 2015; the highest in the Park's history.

Fremont County Heritage Commission

Fremont County Tourism Council cooperated with the Heritage Commission, and other agencies to produce five popular Self-Guided Heritage Tours. Over 5,000 printed copies of the guidebooks and 2,300 PDFs were distributed.

The commission also assisted the Tourism Council in updating heritage-related copy for the regional tourism guide and provided heritage content for the regional website, royalgorgetravel.com

Tourism Marketing District (TMD)

FCTC Chairman Steve Kaverman was invited to serve on the Pikes Peak Tourism Marketing District Steering Committee. Andy Neinas, owner of Echo Canyon River Expeditions and Chairman of the Board for the Colorado Springs Convention and Visitor's Bureau is also a member of the Steering Committee. Meetings began in June 2015, and continued through the year. A TMD, if enabled by state legislation in 2016 would create a special tax district. Subject to approval by voters the district would be authorized to levy and collect a 'gate fee' (recommended at 2%) on admission to certain activities & attractions in Teller, Fremont and El Paso County. Revenue to the district would fund destination marketing activities in the region.

Region 13 Tourism Sector Partnership

Peggy Gair, FCTC Secretary became the Convener of Colorado's first Tourism Sector Partnership when launched in September. The Partnership is comprised of tourism-related business owners and managers and is supported by government partners in Fremont, Custer, Chaffee and Lake counties. These counties are all within Region 13, one of the state's Workforce Development Planning Regions. Peggy and Steve Kaverman continue involvement with the emerging Partnership, which has identified and will be collaboratively working to resolve challenges which face the tourism industry in the region.

Governor's Tourism Conference

The Governor's Tourism Conference was held September 13 – 15 in Crested Butte. Steve Kaverman attended and represented the FCTC. Lisa Hyams was also a registrant, as was Bryan Jordan of VistaWorks. This annual conference is the single best opportunity for professional and relationship development in the state.

2015 Volunteer Board Appointees / Fremont County Tourism Council

Heidi Anderson, Treasurer

Dan Brown, Board

Peggy Gair, Secretary

Larry Hill, Board

Beth Katchmar, Vice-Chair

Steve Kaverman, Chair

John Miller, Board

Council Appointments

Appointments of three Council members expired 12/31/15. Dan Brown did not seek reappointment. Members Beth Katchmar and John Miller were reappointed. Kristyn Econome was appointed to fill the seat vacated by Mr. Brown.