# HAYWOOD COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

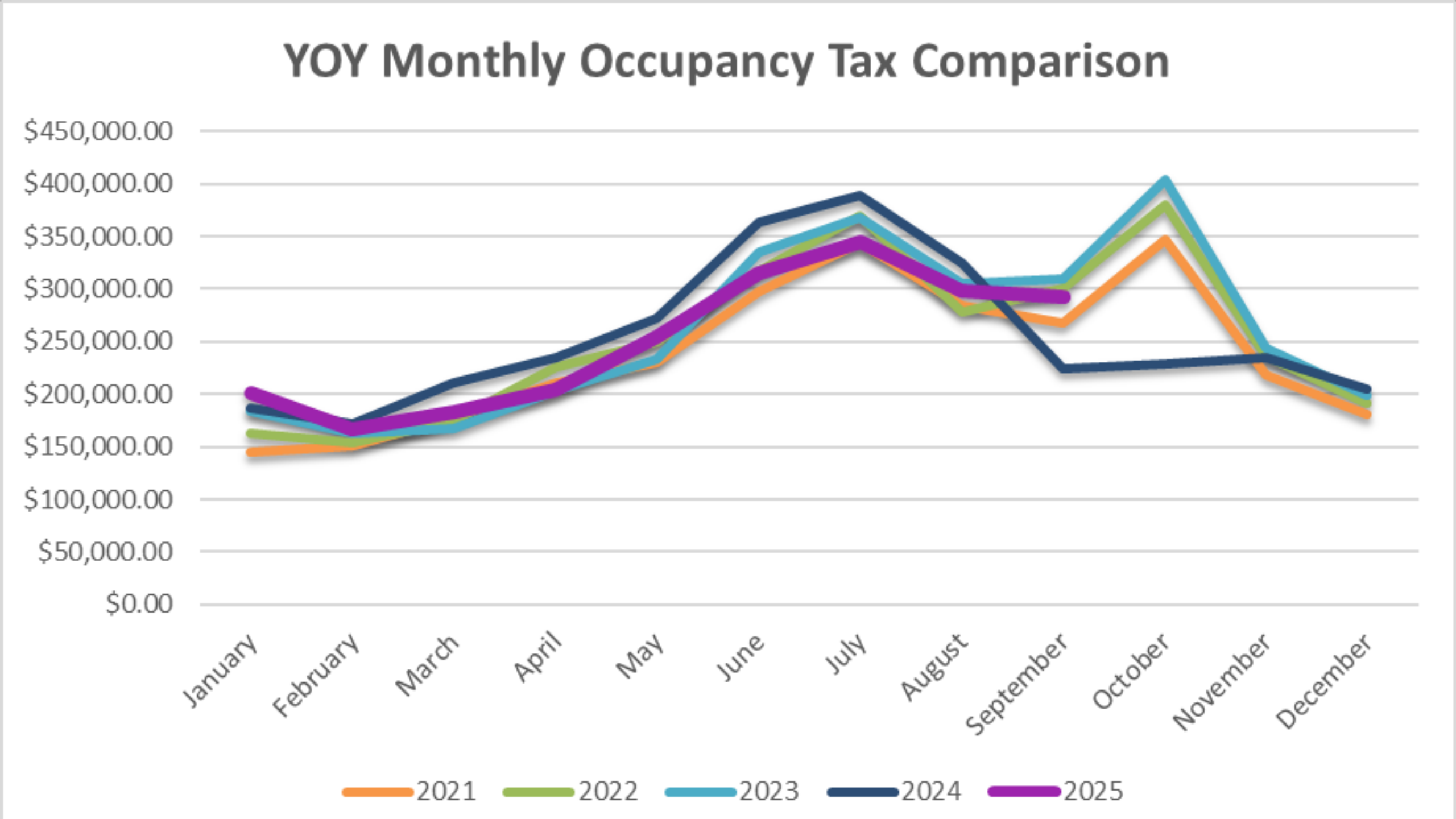
December 3, 2025 | Board of Directors Meeting

# Occupancy Tax & Lodging Data

## Fiscal Year Monthly Occupancy Tax Comparison (Gross)

| | 2022-2023 | 2023-2024 | 2024-2025 | 2025-2026 | $ Change from Previous Year | % Change from Previous Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| July | $369,695.58 | $367,752.94 | $388,684.72 | $345,170.63 | ($43,514.09) | -11.20% |
| *Canton* | *$26,879.79* | *$19,497.12* | *$25,455.96* | *$23,596.53* | *($1,859.43)* | *-7.30%* |
| *Clyde* | *$12,404.07* | *$19,607.12* | *$21,166.77* | *$23,515.31* | *$2,348.54* | *11.10%* |
| *Lake Junaluska* | *$39,626.65* | *$40,797.83* | *$43,022.88* | *$41,873.31* | *($1,149.57)* | *-2.67%* |
| *Maggie Valley* | *$177,268.47* | *$170,417.23* | *$175,808.74* | *$141,219.00* | *($34,589.74)* | *-19.67%* |
| *Waynesville* | *$113,516.60* | *$117,433.64* | *$123,230.37* | *$114,966.48* | *($8,263.89)* | *-6.71%* |
| August | $278,678.56 | $305,809.64 | $323,963.71 | $297,964.84 | ($25,998.87) | -8.03% |
| *Canton* | *$21,871.08* | *$28,032.84* | *$23,336.22* | *$15,660.89* | *($7,675.33)* | *-32.89%* |
| *Clyde* | *$12,041.72* | *$17,010.14* | *$17,041.81* | *$15,899.06* | *($1,142.75)* | *-6.71%* |
| *Lake Junaluska* | *$23,659.93* | *$26,325.12* | *$27,008.34* | *$30,155.08* | *$3,146.74* | *11.65%* |
| *Maggie Valley* | *$126,942.01* | *$126,475.88* | *$143,722.74* | *$114,187.66* | *($29,535.08)* | *-20.55%* |
| *Waynesville* | *$94,163.82* | *$107,965.66* | *$112,854.60* | *$122,062.15* | *$9,207.55* | *8.16%* |
| September | $300,578.84 | $309,562.65 | $225,130.03 | $291,781.25 | $66,651.22 | 29.61% |
| *Canton* | *$24,268.90* | *$20,707.64* | *$10,569.43* | *$24,332.40* | *$13,762.97* | *130.21%* |
| *Clyde* | *$19,558.11* | *$16,975.34* | *$11,812.43* | *$16,046.25* | *$4,233.82* | *35.84%* |
| *Lake Junaluska* | *$29,171.45* | *$28,818.89* | *$24,685.05* | *$30,700.23* | *$6,015.18* | *24.37%* |
| *Maggie Valley* | *$130,740.68* | *$135,273.39* | *$95,390.88* | *$117,638.93* | *$22,248.05* | *23.32%* |
| *Waynesville* | *$96,839.70* | *$107,787.39* | *$82,672.24* | *$103,063.44* | *$20,391.20* | *24.67%* |
| | **$3,043,483.81** | **$3,270,866.51** | **$2,932,906.56** | **$934,916.72** | **($2,861.74)** | -0.31% |

Link to Online Version


YOY Monthly Occupancy Tax Comparison
$450,000.00
$400,000.00
$350,000.00
$300,000.00
$250,000.00
$200,000.00
$150,000.00
$100,000.00
$50,000.00
$0.00
January
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025

TOURISM ECONOMICS

AN OXFORD ECONOMICS COMPANY

**National Hotel occupancy rates, October 2025:**

At 2.4% lower than October 2024, this marked the eighth consecutive month that US hotel occupancy trailed prior year levels.

# Old Business

# Waynesville Advertising Grant Request 2nd Round

| Project | Total Cost | Grant Request | Average Score | PDC Rec | EC Rec |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pioneer Heritage Festival | $7,340 | $2,000 | 12.0 | Fully fund with caveat that applicant must meet grant requirements of 75-25 ad spend. | Agree with PDC |

**FY25-26 Budget Remaining: $4,000**
**Estimated Fund Balance Available: $160,000**

**Scoring Guidelines:**

| | |
|---|---|
| 18-20 | High priority for funding |
| 15-17 | Recommended for funding |
| 12-14 | Consider funding if resources allow |
| 0-11 | Not recommended for funding |

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WESTERN NC MOUNTAINS

# New Business

[2026 Meeting Dates Online Here]

# 2026 Calendar Year Meeting Dates

# FY 2026-2027 Grant Program

Promotion Grant Guidelines – proposed edits in red

Capital Grant Guidelines – proposed edits in red

## Grant Guidelines Improvements

VISIT HAYWOOD
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# FY 2026-2027 Grant Program

| | |
|---|---|
| Wednesday, December 3, 2025 | TDA Board votes on revised grant guidelines |
| Monday, December 8, 2025 | Open Grant Cycle |
| Friday, January 9 ALL DAY | Grant Coaching Sessions |
| Wednesday, January 14 ALL DAY | Grant Coaching Sessions |
| Thursday, February 12 ALL DAY | Grant Coaching Sessions |
| Tuesday, March 17, 2026 5 PM | Deadline to submit grant applications |
| Thursday, April 9, 2026 5 PM | Deadline to submit additional information |
| Wednesday, May 13, 2026 | PDC Retreat + Capital Grant presentations |
| Thursday, May 21, 2026 | EC review grant recommendations |
| Wednesday, May 27, 2026 | TDA Board to vote on grants |
| Friday, May 29, 2026 | Send applicant decision letters |

## Grant Timeline for 26-27

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WESTERN NC MOUNTAINS

# Proposed Officers

*For the balance of the July 2024 – June 2026 term.

**Current**
Chair- Jim Owens
Vice Chair – Shelley White
Treasurer – Mike Huber
County Commissioner – Jennifer Best
County Finance Officer – Kristian Owen
Member at Large – Jeff Hillis

**Proposed**
Chair- Jim Owens
***Vice Chair – Jeff Hillis***
Treasurer – Mike Huber
County Commissioner – Jennifer Best
County Finance Officer – Kristian Owen
***Member at Large – Chad King***

# Staff Reports

Southern Living

# A Year After Hurricane Helene, These Western North Carolina Towns Are Ready For You To Return To The Mountains

By Jennifer Prince | Published on October 4, 2025

07 of 11 **Canton**

Credit: Getty Images

The terms adorable, quaint, and charming come to mind with Canton, North Carolina, where everything a small town needs is packed into a few blocks. While the Main Street area features a well-stocked bookstore and coffee shop, a step onto the side street reveals an artisan shop, where locally crafted treasures await.

After Helene, Hannah Burnisky, the owner of Cold Mountain Art Collective, found that her space was under 7 feet of water. Although the road to reopening took seven months, Burnisky was grateful for the support she received. "Had it not been for the generous, hard-working hands of our beloved community we wouldn't have been able to rebuild so quickly," she says. You also can't miss Southern Porch, a restaurant serving delicious fare in a historic hotel.

OUR GUIDE TO CANTON

11 of 11 **Waynesville**

Axe + Awl Leatherworks in Waynesville.
Credit: Robbie Caporetto

Located about an hour west of Asheville lies Waynesville, with a walkable, shoppable Main Street. A few blocks away lies the Frog Level Historic District, which currently features a brewery and coffee shop that both recovered relatively quickly after Hurricane Helene. Other Frog Level businesses, such as Soul Sisters Depot and The Funky Fern Emporium, were severely damaged and forced to relocate nearby.

"Helene reminded us how connected we are," says Chelsea Gaylord, who co-owns Soul Sisters Depot with her sister, Haley Ramsey. "Neighbors rallied and worked hard to help one another heal and rebuild, showing that our community spirit is stronger than any storm." Because the area is rural, you can choose a unique stay, such as sleeping waterside at Lake Junaluska or waking up to mountain views at The Swag.

OUR GUIDE TO HAYWOOD COUNTY

https://www.southernliving.com/nc-mountain-towns-post-hurricane-helene-11824360

MATADOR NETWORK

# There's Nothing Like Fall in the Smokies. Here's Where to Start.

NORTH CAROLINA | INSIDER GUIDES

by LISA BLAKE NOV 7, 2025

**Drive and hike the Blue Ridge Parkway**

Photos: Lisa Blake

Skirting Great Smoky Mountains National Park and several national forests, the Haywood County section of the Blue Ridge Parkway spans 46 miles and tops out above 6,000 feet. Mouth-gaping vistas emerge from every corner as you wind through endless balsam, spruce, and hemlock (the blue hue coming from the terpenes the trees release).

I savored the "quiet side of the Smokies" with a photo stop at roadside Sunburst Falls (find it south of Canton along NC Highway 215) and a waterfall-laced hike at Graveyard Fields — named for the scattered tree stumps left behind from logging and fires. The 2.3-mile well-marked loop is an immersive must, traveling past tiered cascades, dense forest, and wild blackberry bushes.

***Blue Ridge Parkway:*** *Canton, NC*

https://matadornetwork.com/read/great-smoky-mountains-fall/

# Public Relations Coverage

VISIT HAYWOOD
WESTERN NC MOUNTAINS

TAMPA MAGAZINES

# Falling for Haywood County

by *Hayli Zuccola* November 5, 2025

For a taste of the highlands, The Scotsman Public House occupies a historic 1927 Masonic lodge and has been featured on *America's Best Restaurants*. Its menu spans traditional Scottish staples — bangers and mash, haggis, shepherd's pie — to hearty pub fare like mac and beer cheese, Bavarian pretzels and poutine.

Comfort food lovers will appreciate Singletree Heritage Kitchen in Waynesville, where warming dishes like crispy mushroom strudel or green lentil and basmati cakes with roasted carrots and early fall squashes make each meal feel like a hug on a plate.

For breakfast, Beach Mountain Diner offers lighter fare such as the healthy morning with egg whites and veggies — perfect fuel before a day on the trails — or heartier options like fried chicken and waffles. Joey's Pancake House is a local hotspot for pancakes, best enjoyed with real maple syrup. For a quick pick-me-up or a whimsical twist on coffee, the newly opened Blue Ghost Outpost serves inventive drinks like the Laura Palmer, made with butterfly pea flower tea, mint, vanilla, lemonade and edible glitter.

*https://tampamagazines.com/haywood/*

## Broadcast Spotlights:

# Public Relations Coverage

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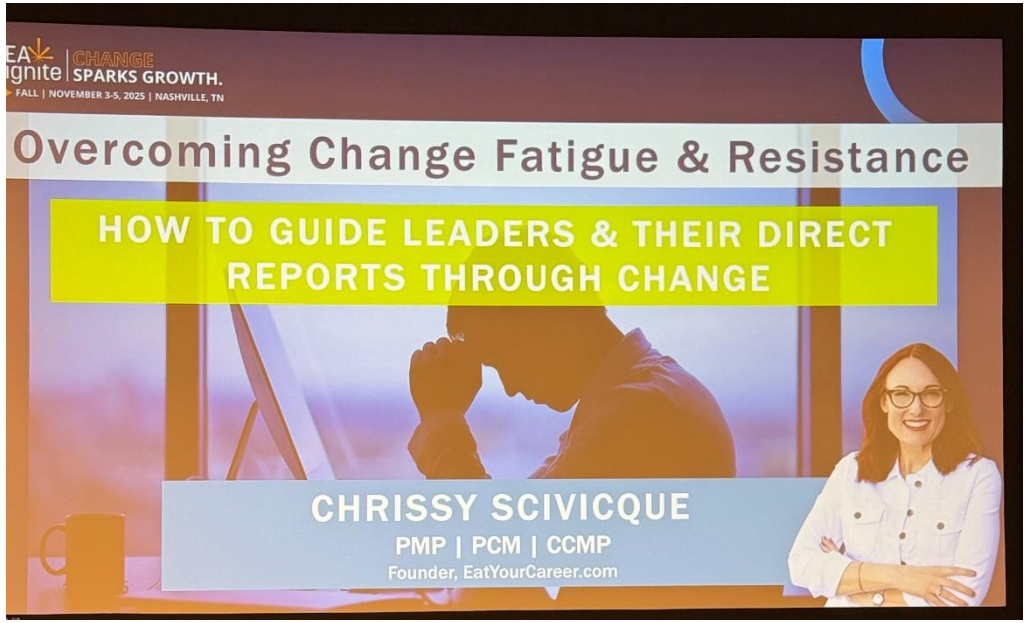
## Top 3 Sessions

- Imposter to Impact: Recognizing, Managing, and Overcoming
- AI for Project Management: Leveraging Technology to Streamline Your Workflow
- Overcoming Change Fatigue & Resistance



# EA Ignite Conference

November 3-5 | Nashville, TN

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NCTIA
North Carolina Travel Industry Association
TOURISM. TOGETHER. TODAY.

# NCTIA Tourism Leadership Conference

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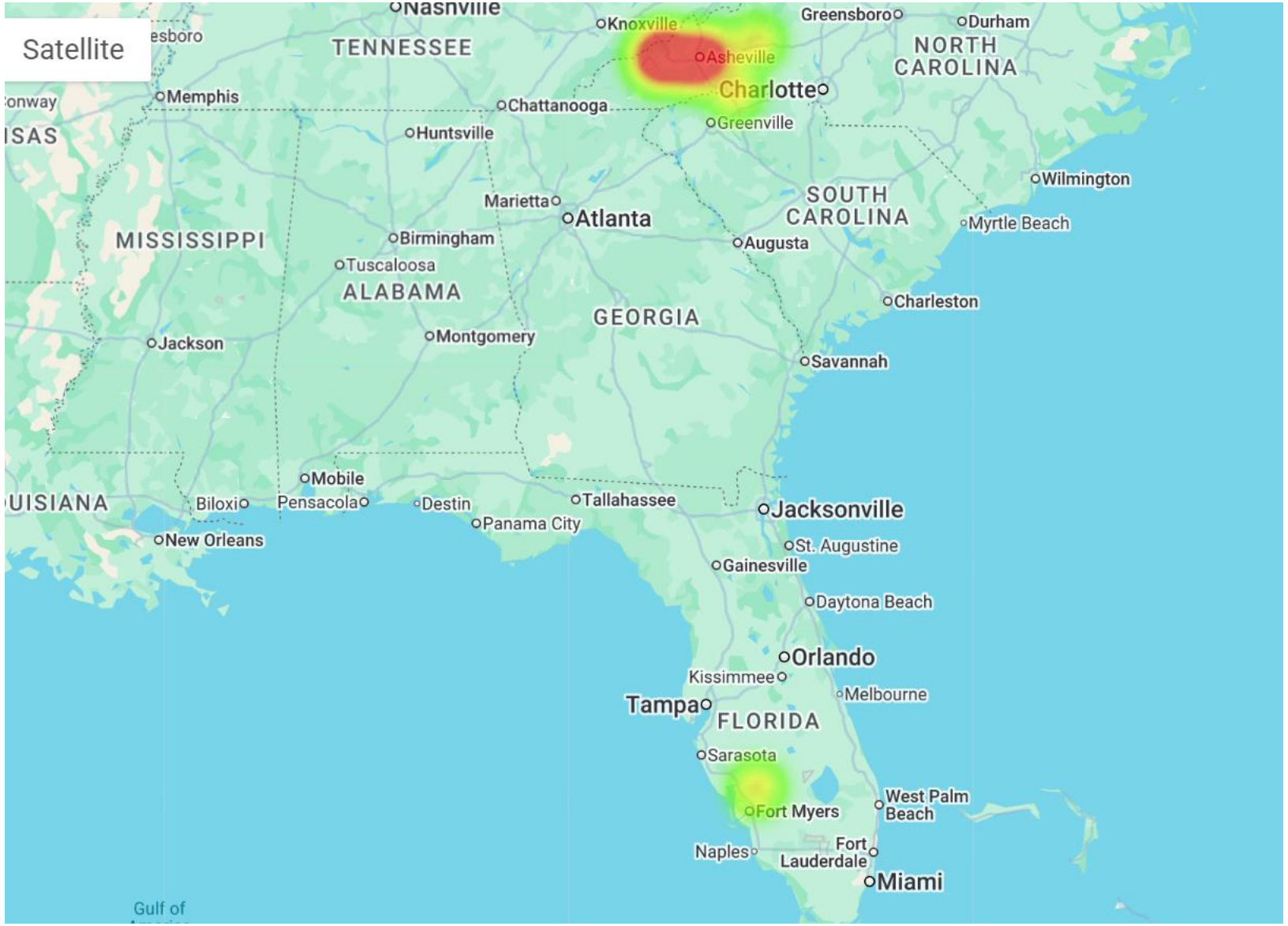



# Ice Fest Weekend Updates

63 Tickets sold as of 12.01.2025

https://runsignup.com/TicketEvent/MaggieValleyIceExtravaganza2026

*Merch designed by local artist, David Suriano!*

**3** Custom sculptures in Maggie Valley
*** need more!*

**13** Custom sculptures in Waynesville

# Ice Fest Weekend Updates

# Open Haywood: Summer 2025 Recovery Campaign

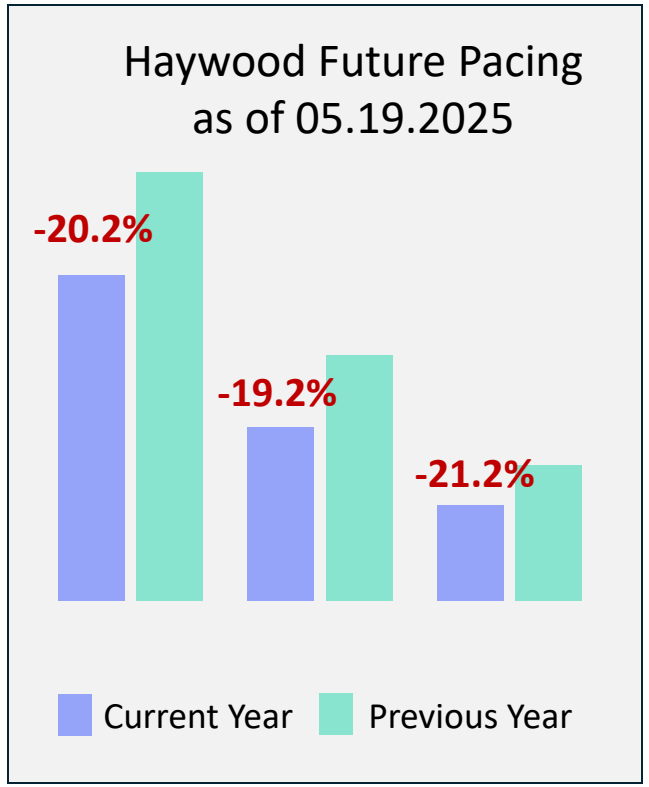
*How We Rebuilt Traveler Confidence After Hurricane Helene*

Campaign Dates: June 23 – September 30, 2025

# Open Haywood Summer Campaign

## The Challenge

- Lodging pace was down ~20% vs. prior year (July-Sept, AirDNA)
- Haywood lagged behind neighboring destinations in summer bookings
- Ongoing misperception that WNC, including Haywood, was closed or damaged
- Tourism businesses were still recovering from Hurricane Helene
- National economic uncertainty and travel hesitancy affected demand




## The Urgency

- ❑ Needed to quickly restore traveler confidence
- ❑ Communicate clearly that Haywood was open for visitors
- ❑ Protect the critical summer season and local tourism economy
- ❑ Shortened booking window created opportunity: Average lead time for summer 2025 was 35 days, down from the historical 57-day average, giving us a chance to influence near-term decisions

# Open Haywood Summer Campaign

## The Solution

- Open Haywood & Elk Bucks Campaign as a strategic response to Helene impacts and soft bookings
- Launched a coordinated, multi-channel campaign to reach high-intent travelers
- Fast turnaround: Planned and deployed within weeks using existing partners and new tools
- Central message: Haywood is open—and worth visiting now

## Campaign Goals

- ❑ Rebuild traveler confidence post-Hurricane Helene
- ❑ Promote Haywood as “Open for Visitors” for summer 2025
- ❑ Encourage midweek stays through Elk Bucks incentive
- ❑ Drive measurable visitation, room nights, and local spending

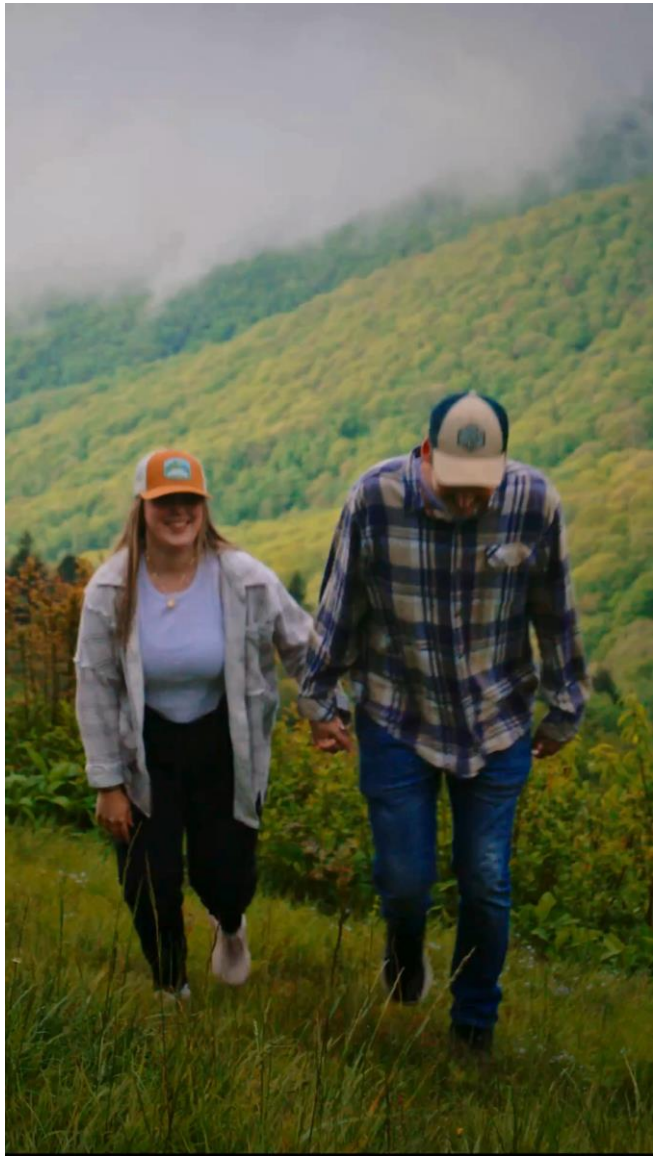
# Open Haywood Summer Campaign

## Investment in Creative

- Executed a last-minute photo and video shoot on a lean budget
- Partnered with New Union Films for rapid production turnaround
- Collaborated with Buddy Melton (formerly of Balsam Range) to create a custom campaign song—written and recorded in just days
- Developed a full suite of creative assets:
  - Campaign video featuring local scenes and original music
  - Elk Bucks graphic and branded visuals
  - Digital ad versions for Meta, YouTube, Google Display, and programmatic placements

## Elk Buck Emblem

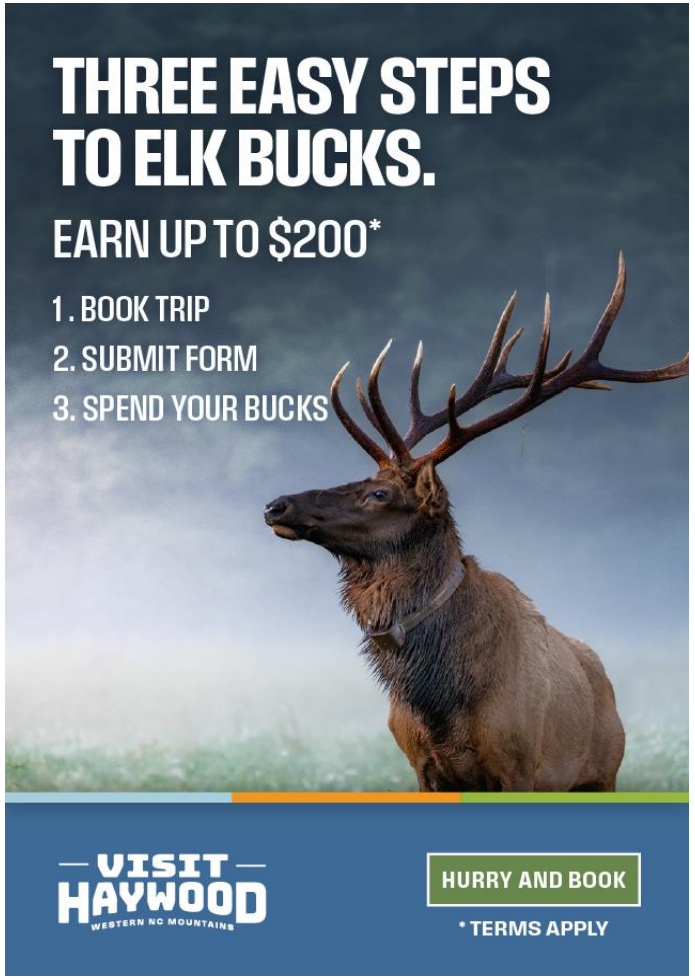
## Video Ads

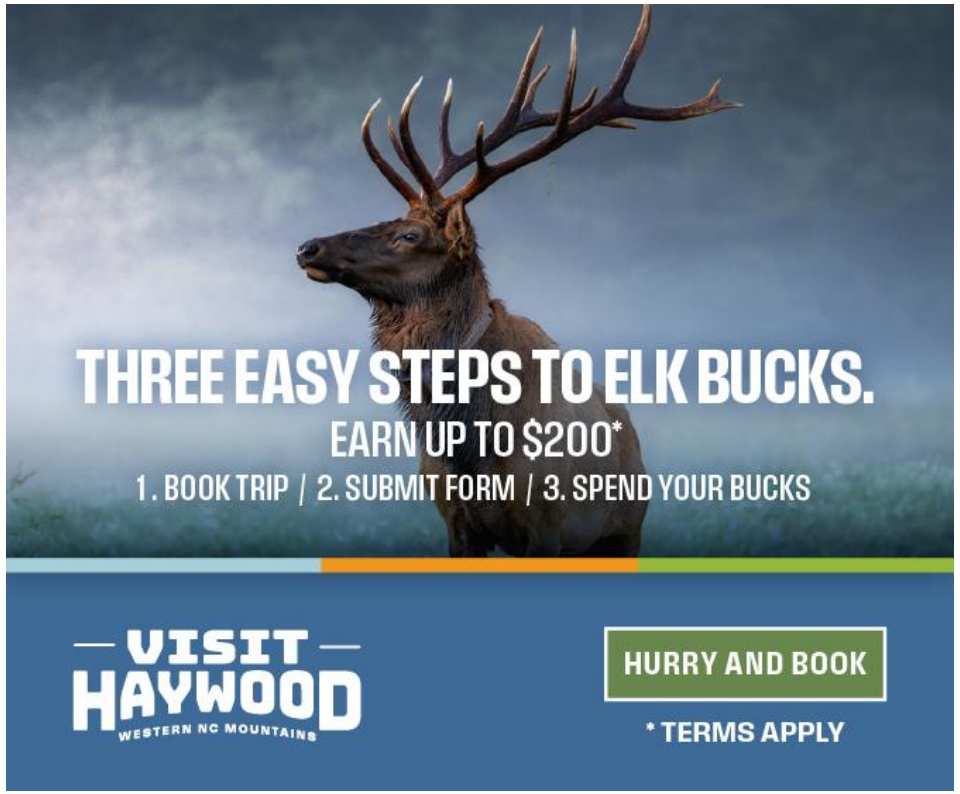


## Digital Retargeting Ads

# Open Haywood Summer Campaign - Creative

# Open Haywood Summer Campaign Creative



# Strategy & Media Mix

## Total Media Investment: $70,000

- Expedia/VRBO: $40,000
- DCI (Meta, YouTube, Google): $20,000
- Datafy Display & Attribution: $10,000

## Funnel-Based Campaign Strategy

*Awareness:* Reach high-intent travelers in key drive markets through video, display, and social ads

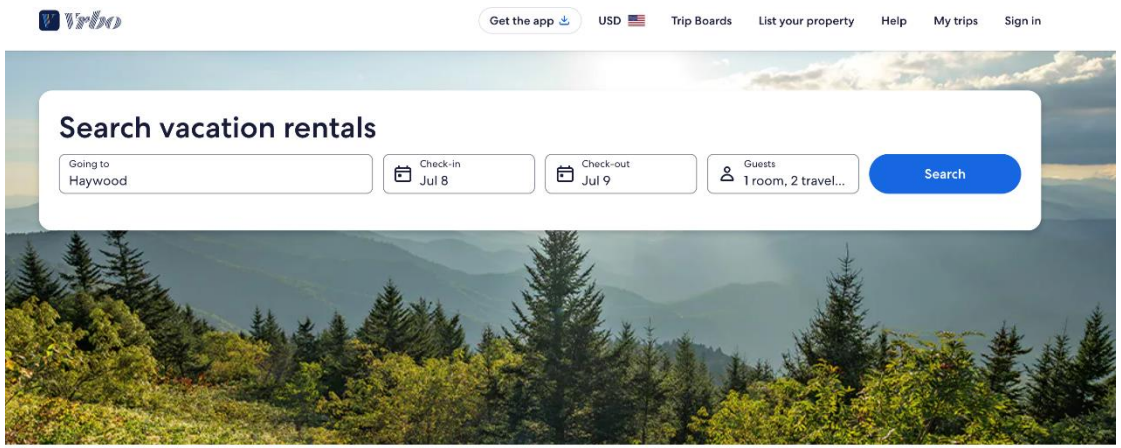
*Interest:* Direct traffic to OpenHaywood.com to explore the destination and discover Elk Bucks offer

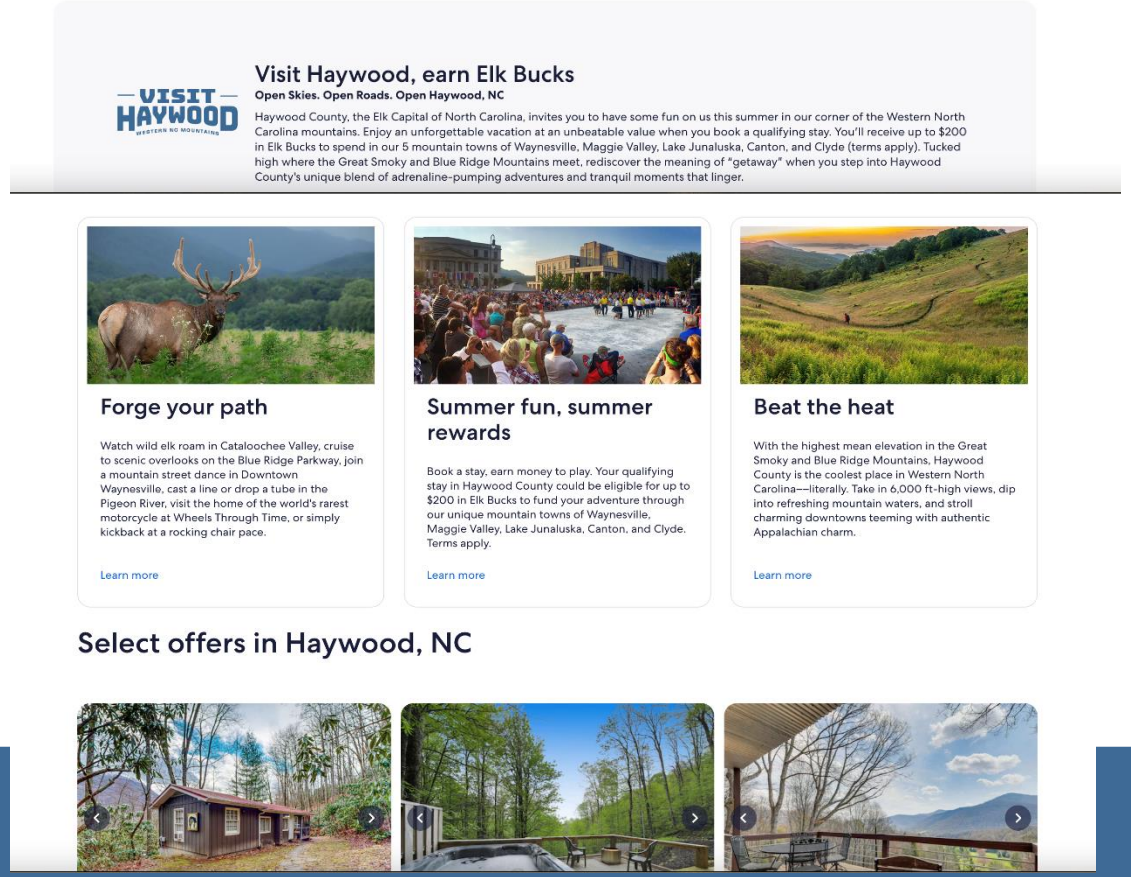
*Action:* Convert interest into bookings and redemptions through the Elk Bucks incentive

Expedia Meta YouTube Google DATAFY

# Open Skies. Open Roads. Open Haywood

- Live June 23 – September 30, 2025
- Expedia.com - Haywood
- VRBO.com – Haywood
- **OpenHaywood.com**

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# Results: Awareness – How We Reached Travelers

Over **4.2 million impressions** delivered across digital platforms telling travelers – "Haywood is open."

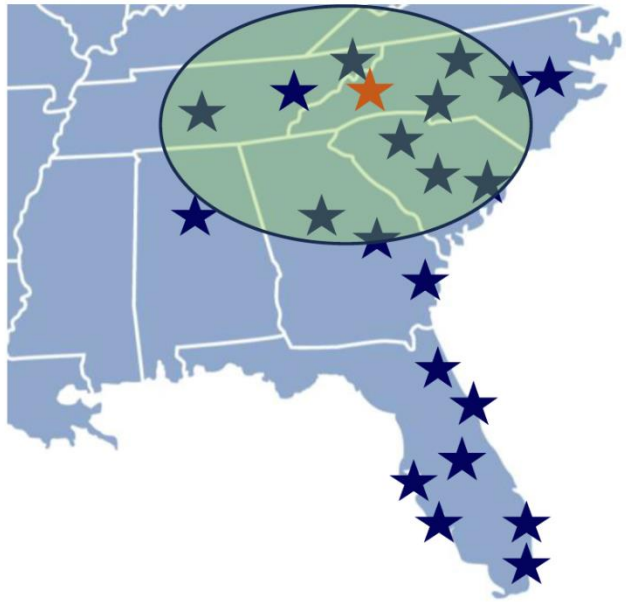
**Total Campaign Impressions: 4.26 million**

- Expedia/VRBO: 1.9M
- DCI (Meta, YouTube, Google): 2.3M
- Datafy Display: 1.06M

**Targeted Reach in Core Drive Markets**

- Charlotte
- Nashville
- Atlanta
- Greenville-Spartanburg
- Raleigh-Durham

## Key Markets



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Home » Book a Stay, Earn Bucks to Play

## BOOK A STAY, EARN BUCKS TO PLAY

Haywood County, the Elk Capital of North Carolina, invites you to have some fun on us this summer in our corner of the Western North Carolina mountains!

When you book a qualifying stay, you'll receive up to $200 in Elk Bucks to spend at over 100 local restaurants, shops, attractions, and more while exploring the best of our five welcoming mountain towns: Canton, Clyde, Lake Junaluska, Maggie Valley, and Waynesville.

We're giving away Elk Bucks all summer, but once they're gone, they're gone.

## MAXIMIZE YOUR ELK BUCKS

| Length of Stay | Eligible Nights | Elk Bucks Value |
|---|---|---|
| 2 nights | Sun-Thurs only | $50 |
| 3 nights | Sun-Thurs only | $100 |
| 4+ nights | Must include **at least 3 midweek nights** (Sun-Thurs). One Fri/Sat is allowed. | $200 |

**Results: Interest – Engaging Potential Visitors**

- 155,203 views on OpenHaywood.com during the campaign
- 841 clicks to the Elk Bucks submission form
- Quickly became the #2 most-visited page on the website (after the homepage)

**OpenHaywood.com**

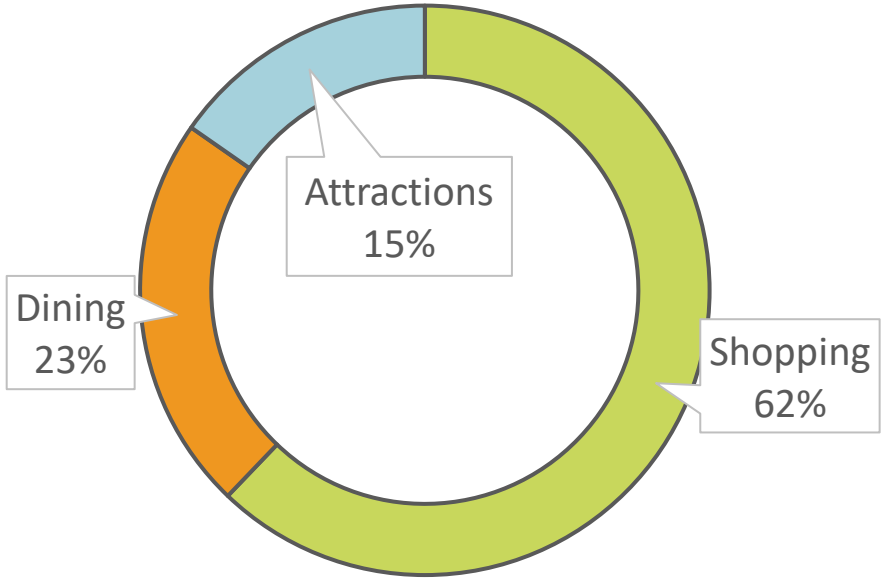
# Economic Impact: Elk Bucks Incentive Performance

67 eligible Elk Bucks, mid-week stay submissions.

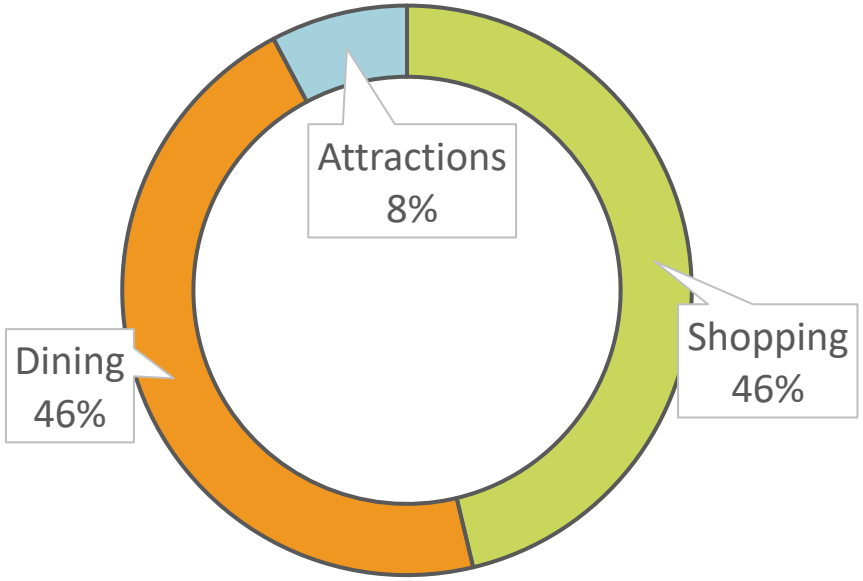
*Of the eligible submissions:*

- 35 were for 4+ nights ($200)
- 10 were for 3 midweek nights ($100)
- 22 were for 2 midweek nights ($50)

**Business Types Signed Up (total = 111)**




**Elk Bucks Sales by Business Type**



# Economic Impact: Lodging & Visitor Spending

## Datafy Attribution Highlights

- $325K in estimated visitor spending
- 1,799 trips attributed (75% stayed 2+ nights)
- ROAS: $32.51 for every $1 spent
- Cost per visitor day: $2.28
- Visitors who saw ads were 6.85x more likely to visit

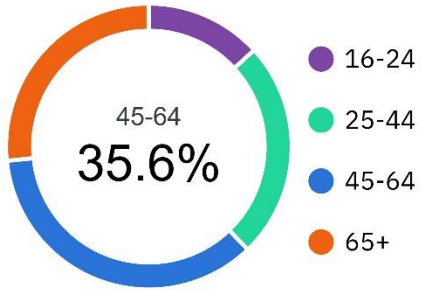
## Expedia/VRBO Highlights

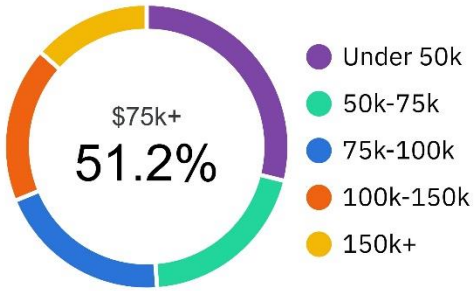
- $532K in attributed lodging revenue
- 395 hotel nights, 1,554 vacation rental nights
- 2,321 travelers reached
- ROAS: 13.3:1 overall

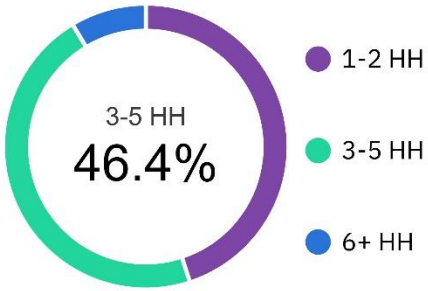
*These are two very different platforms with different, yet interesting, data sets.*
*Datafy = modeled impact based on ad-exposed visitors who then arrived in-destination and spent at local businesses*
*Expedia = actual bookings via Expedia + VRBO, only looking at lodging spend*

# Who We Reached

## Demographics All Attribution Groups




DATAFY

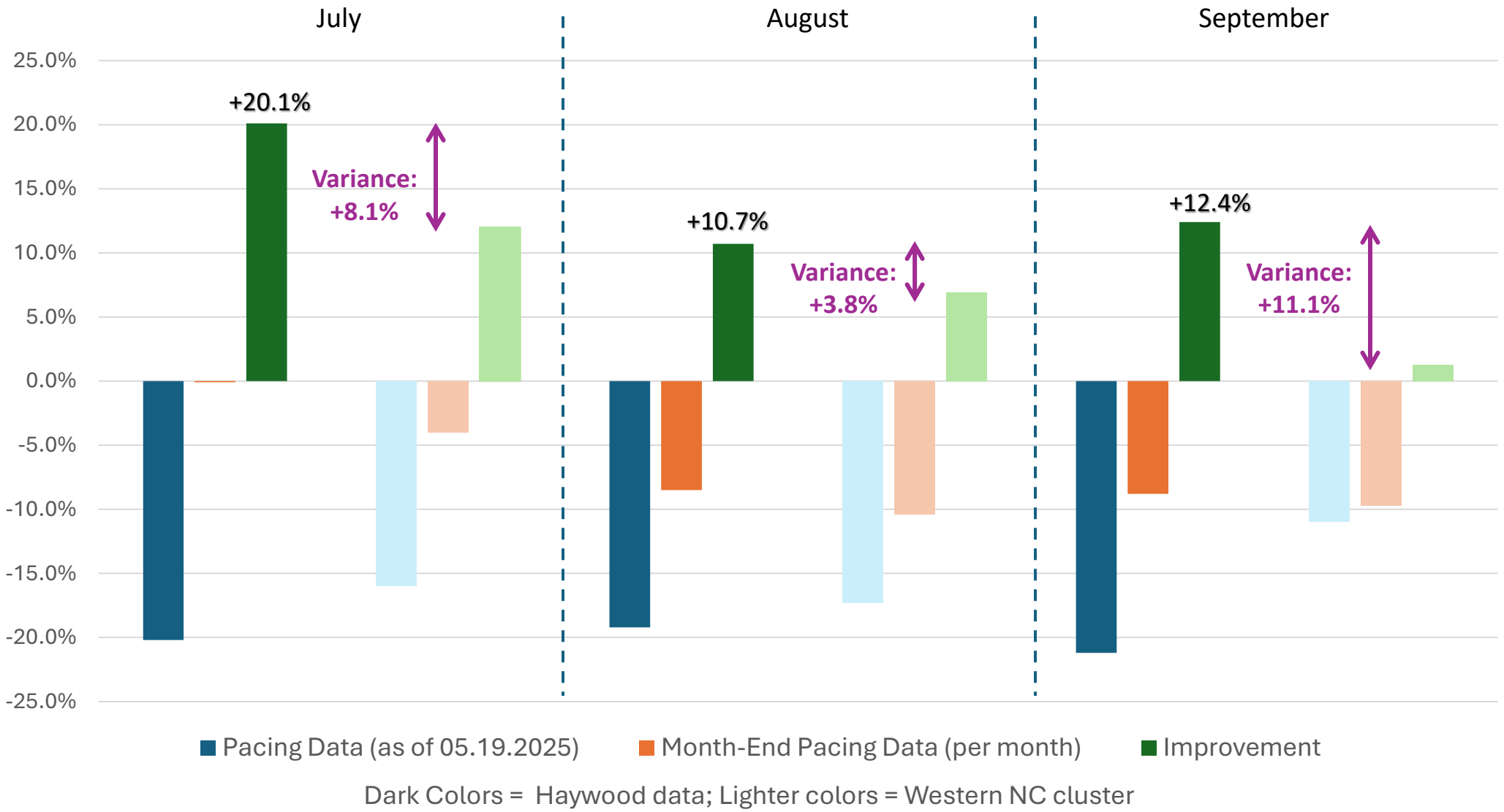
*Information on this slide is from Datafy platform only.*

## Top DMA

For Destination

| DMA | Est. Impact |
|---|---|
| Charlotte | $98,736 |
| Nashville | $71,208 |
| Greenvll-Spart-Ashevll-And | $57,577 |
| Atlanta | $57,420 |
| Raleigh-Durham -Fayetvlle | $30,100 |
| Columbia- SC | $28,457 |
| Knoxville | $22,161 |
| Greensboro-H.Point-W.Salem | $20,328 |
| Chattanooga | $2,160 |
| Orlando-Daytona Bch-Melbrn | $1,008 |
| Tri-Cities- TN-VA | $927 |

View Market Breakdown




AIRDNA

*Haywood & Western NC Counties Short-Term Vacation Rental Future Pacing, Pre and Post Open Haywood Campaign*

# Outcome: Did We Achieve Our Goals?

**GOAL: Rebuild traveler confidence after Helene**

☑ Shift from being 20+% behind in early summer to out-pacing neighboring communities by the end of the season (AirDNA).

**GOAL: Drive midweek, overnight visitation**

☑ Strong Expedia/VRBO results with 1,949 total room nights.

Datafy shows 1,799 trips with average stays of 3.3 night midweek stays, aligning with our focus

**GOAL: Deliver measurable economic impact**

☑ $325K+ in attributed spending via Datafy and $532K+ in Expedia/VRBO booking revenue

Thank You!

VISIT HAYWOOD
WESTERN NC MOUNTAINS

# Welcome Center Hours:

Open Mon-Sat 9-5PM

Closed 12/24, 12/25 & 1/1

# Office Holiday Hours:

Closed Dec. 24- Jan. 2

# MOUNTAIN MORNINGS

NEXT MOUNTAIN MORNINGS:

FEBRUARY 12 | THE SCOTSMAN | 8:30AM

# Thank you, Shelley for your dedication to the TDA Board!

## Two Times WINNER!!

*Reputation Management – Multi-Channel Integrated Marketing for our joint work following Hurricane Helene*

**Silver Award** – against all applicants

**Best Of Category Award** – best submission in the small budget range

HSMAI ADRIAN AWARDS

dci

VISIT HAYWOOD
WESTERN NC MOUNTAINS

MMGY Global

# Next Board Meeting
# January 28, 2026 | 9 AM
# Gaines Auditorium

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