

EEI Study 2013-2014

Gauging the Economic Impact of Eau Claire's Park and Recreation Facilities

Prepared For:



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This marketing research project was done with the intention to help estimate the economic impact of Eau Claire's Parks and Recreation facilities and the events that happen there. Eau Claire Parks and Recreation partnered with Visit Eau Claire to generate a survey, attend events throughout the course of approximately one year, and to survey attendees in order to generate an estimated economic impact number for facilities/events in the Eau Claire Area. The results will be beneficial to The Parks and Recreation Department to help determine the most popular local events and facilities, thereby providing reliable data to determine true ROI for city investment. Likewise, the findings are important for Visit Eau Claire to justify the investment made in sporting events and local organizations when marketing the area to out of town visitors. It also provides a road map for which events are the most popular and most likely to be of interest to people as the travel to the Eau Claire Area.

Objectives

The main purpose of this research project and report is to answer the fundamental research question: What is the estimated economic impact of Eau Claire's Parks and Recreation Facilities?

Objectives include:

- Targeting events throughout 2013-2014 for surveys
- Identify top facilities and events such as; Hobbs Ice Center, Fairfax Pool, Carson Park, Phoenix Park, Bike Trails, Riverview Park, Mt. Simon Park, Fairfax Park, Owen Park, Outdoor Ice Skating Rinks, Soccer Park, and other miscellaneous parks
- Determine the estimated economic impact of each event
- Use survey data and feedback to find:
 - Which facilities are most heavily used
 - What improvements could be made to facilities
 - What improvements could be made to promotional & marketing materials and efforts when targeting residents and visitors
- Learn what may attract more residents, and visitors to use Eau Claire Parks, and attend events at those parks
- Discover how visitors spend their dollars when visiting Eau Claire

Methodology

Data Collection

Utilizing the Device Magic app, and Google Drive was crucial for this research process. iPads were utilized at each event, and data collectors strolled amongst event attendees to generate the highest possible response rate. Generally, this method worked well, with a few exceptions. At times, people didn't want to take the time to do a survey, or were unsure on how to answer some of the questions. Data collectors were able to walk respondents through the process and help determine the best answer to questions when there was confusion. This hands-on approach allowed for the highest quality responses, as opposed to allowing attendees to answer questions individually. At the completion of each event, the data was compiled in to a Google Drive document for later input in the NASC Economic Impact Calculator.

Sampling Methodology

Survey respondents were a diverse mix of both local residents and visitors. This proved to be an ideal mix in order to find out what events and facilities were used universally by people who live in the area and those that were just visiting. A random sample ensured that respondents provided a wide range of age, group size, home location, money spent, and other demographic info.

Survey questions were taken from the Economic Impact Calculator tool provided by the National Association of Sports Commissions for compiling data on events. This tool uses data from recent study results compiled by Sportsimpacts, a national sports consulting firm, and data from over 50 events within the last decade spanning various market sizes and event types. Additionally, the tool also factors in results from a study conducted by the University of Arizona Sports Management program, which analyzed daily visitor spending trends at 30 events of various size and markets. The surveys were loaded on to iPads in a survey application named "Device Magic". Device Magic allows users to generate surveys, and to compile results from each, post-event. Surveys were administered by walking up to people at each event and asking if they'd be interested in taking a quick, two-minute survey to help benefit The Parks and Recreation Department, and Visit Eau Claire. Participants were entered in to a drawing for various overnight accommodation certificates and provided with Visit Eau Claire promotional materials (can cozies, sun glasses, etc.) for their time.

Findings

There were many great events that happened at Parks and Recreation facilities throughout the course of the study. We found that many of the local tournaments bring some of the best economic impact to the area. A lot of people that came to town for those tournaments come not only for the event, but also the other attractions and offerings available in the Eau Claire Area. We observed that the

development of Phoenix Park has proven to be a huge economic contributor to the Eau Claire Area through the many events that occur there. Although fewer people than anticipated visited the area specifically for an event at the park, they attended events there (along with thousands of local residents) as part of their time in Eau Claire. One unanticipated problem we faced was the difficulty of surveying people attending Carson Park for Eau Claire Express games. These events are huge contributors to the local economy, but most of the time attendees were singularly focused on entering the ballpark and getting their seat. We found it was hard to pull people aside for a few minutes to take a survey before the game, and in-game surveys proved too intrusive to fans trying to keep up with the action. Carson Park is another great draw for the area, hosting hundreds of events each year. Another surprising finding was the small attendance we experienced at Eau Claire Crush, and Eau Claire Predators football games.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overall we found that the survey went extremely well. We targeted all the facilities and parks we had originally planned, and received great information from each one. A total of 31 events/facilities were scheduled and 832 people were surveyed. With a total estimated attendance of 29,000 people, we generated a survey response rate of approximately 3% - generating a margin of error of $\pm 3.3\%$ on our results.

As we suspected, we found that the sporting tournaments that occur in Eau Claire are some of the biggest economic impact drivers. Local parks like Phoenix Park, Carson Park and the boat launch sites are very popular for residents, but it's tougher to gauge visitor economic impact. Also, the sporting tournaments created and held by local sporting groups scored the highest in the categories of hotel rooms/dollars, food and beverage, and entertainment spending. Continued investment in the local sporting events along with additional marketing to local residents will pay off through increased park usage and local visitor spending.

Estimated Economic Impact Study Survey Questions

- 1) Are you a visitor or do you live here year round?
- 2) Which of the following are you?
- 3) What is your home zip code? (If resident, skip to question 18)
- 4) How many days to you plan to spend on this trip?
- 5) If staying overnight, where are you staying?
- 6) If staying overnight in a hotel/motel, how much is your room rate per night?
- 7) How many hotel/motel rooms is your traveling party renting at this rate?
- 8) What type of transportation did you use to arrive?
- 9) What type of transportation are you using to get around?
- 10) If using a rental car, what is the daily rate including any applicable insurance?
- 11) Thinking about all the things you and your travel group do on a normal day during your visit, APPROXIMATELY how much would your group spend per day on: Food & Beverage
- 12) Thinking about all the things you and your travel group do on a normal day during your visit, APPROXIMATELY how much would your group spend per day on: Clothing
- 13) Thinking about all the things you and your travel group do on a normal day during your visit, APPROXIMATELY how much would your group spend per day on: Gas & Auto Maintenance
- 14) Thinking about all the things you and your travel group do on a normal day during your visit, APPROXIMATELY how much would your group spend per day on: Entertainment
- 15) Thinking about all the things you and your travel group do on a normal day during your visit, APPROXIMATELY how much would your group spend per day on: Parking
- 16) Thinking about all the things you and your travel group do on a normal day during your visit, APPROXIMATELY how much would your group spend per day on: Groceries/Drug Store

17) Thinking about all the things you and your travel group do on a normal day during your visit, APPROXIMATELY how much would your group spend per day on: Miscellaneous

18) Would you say the event was your:

- a. Main reason for coming
- b. Influenced your decision
- c. Did not influence your decision

19) In your group how many people are UNDER 18?

20) In your group how many people are 18-24?

21) In your group how many people are 25-34?

22) In your group how many people are 35-44?

23) In your group how many people are 45-54?

24) In your group how many people are 55-64?

25) In your group how many people are 65 AND OLDER?

26) How many total people are in your group?

27) What type of tickets do you have for today's event?

28) How did you get your tickets?

29) If purchased, what was the purchase price?

30) Email for Visit Eau Claire Info!

Event Specific Details

Red Flint Hockey Tournament 11/29/13 – Event 1

The Red Flint Hockey Tournament is put on by Memorial High School and held at Hobbs Ice Center. This tournament brings hockey teams from all over the state to compete over the last month of November before the season gets under way. There were roughly 1,300 people in attendance while we were surveying people and we were able to survey 24 people, 13 of them being residents and 8 being visitors. It was fairly obvious to see most people were within 45-54 years of age to watch their kids play in the tournament. Parents and families were found to spend most of their money on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$26,199.89 of total economic impact to the area.

UWEC Men's Hockey Game 1/18/14 – Event 2

This UWEC Men's Hockey Game was a featured game on the Blugold schedule and held at Hobbs Ice Center. The game was against St. Thomas, and was youth night at Hobbs Ice Arena. The age range at the game was quite sporadic, but found to be mainly 46-54, and the 24 and under range. There were roughly 504 people in attendance and out of that we surveyed 63 people, 38 being residents and 25 being visitors. Most people that came from out of town were from the cities area, and only were in town to watch the game and then head back home. The main areas people spent money was on food and beverage, and shopping. This event brought roughly \$90,917.59 of total economic impact to the area.

UWEC Women's Hockey Game 2/1/14 – Event 3

This UWEC Women's Hockey Game was against UW – Stevens Point and held at Hobbs Ice Center. This game was decided upon because it was senior night, and would draw a bigger crowd. There were roughly 204 people in attendance at this game and we surveyed 24 people, 10 being visitors and 14 being residents. Most of the people were of college ages that were in attendance. A lot of spectators were past players on the woman's team and were in town to celebrate with the seniors. Most of the money was spent on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$27,492.49 of total economic impact to the area.

ECYH Hughes Tournament 2/22/14 - Event 4

The ECYH Hughes Tournament is an annual hockey tournament put on by the Eau Claire Youth Hockey Association held at Hobbs Ice Center. This tournament draws in teams from all over the state and is an extremely beneficial tournament for the local economy. Most of the money spent was between food and beverage, and shopping. Again, most people in attendance fell in the age categories of 18 and under, or 35-44. We surveyed 45 attendees, 30 visitors and 15 residents. The average hotel room rate was \$112.00. This event brought an astounding \$565,275.88 total economic impact to the area.

Pinehurst Park #1 2/22/14 – Event 5

Pinehurst Park is an up and coming park in the Eau Claire Area. There are many things happening there to help boost this park into a year round facility for biking, skiing, snowboarding, hockey, and much more. It was decided to go to the park on a random day and survey those that were there. It was found that most people there that day were 18 and under and from the Eau Claire Area. There were two visitors, both of which were in town just for the day. There were about 30 people in total at the park, and we surveyed 8, two visitors and six residents. Overall, this survey yielded negligible impact. Once all the initiatives are finished, this park will bring a much higher economic impact to the area.

Pinehurst Park #2 3/1/14 – Event 6

On our second visit to Pinehurst Park, there were approximately 18 people in total at the park, and we surveyed 7, one visitor and six residents. Overall, this survey yielded negligible impact. Once all the initiatives are finished, this park will bring a much higher economic impact to the area.

Eau Claire Figure Skating Competition 3/8/14 – Event 7

The Eau Claire Figure Skating Competition is an annual event that is put on by the Eau Claire Figure Skating Club each year at Hobbs Ice Center. This event brings in boys and girls of all ages from all over the state to compete over the weekend in many different figure skating disciplines. We surveyed 20 attendees, 16 visitors and 5 residents. Most people were between 18-24 and 45-54 and spent the majority of their money on food and beverage, and shopping at the local mall. This event brought roughly \$125,348.91 of total economic impact to the area.

Taste of The Valley 6/1/14 – Event 8

Taste of the Valley transforms Phoenix Park into a festival grounds celebrating the culinary arts and showcasing the fine restaurants and specialty shops in our area. Fest-goers were treated to local musical entertainment throughout the day and fun for the whole family. It was very interesting to see that this event brought in a lot of people under the age of 18. It shows that this event is targeted at the younger age, and for parents to bring their kids to for a fun day down at Phoenix Park. This event is extremely popular among the residents of Eau Claire, and provides a great attraction event for visitors. There were roughly 6,000 people in attendance and we were able to survey 94 of those. This event brought roughly \$17,279.58 of total economic impact to the area.

EC Crush Game 6/17/14 – Event 9

This Eau Claire Crush Game was against The River City Rough Riders and held at Carson Park Football Stadium. This game was decided upon because it was a home game, and against an out of town opponent. There were roughly 40 people in attendance at this game and we surveyed 5 people, 2 being visitors and 2 being residents. Most of the people were of college ages, and 35-44. Most of the money was spent on shopping. This event brought roughly \$3,738.00 of total economic impact to the area.

EC United Tournament 6/14/14 – Event 10

The EC United Tournament is a yearly tournament held by the EC United Soccer Club and held at the Eau Claire Soccer Park. The tournament brings in over 100 soccer teams and thousands of soccer players of all ages, from cities throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota. This tournament brought in roughly 800 people while we were surveying and we surveyed 27 – 19 visitors and 1 resident. Most of those surveyed were of 18 and under, and 35-44 and spent most of their money on food and beverage. The average hotel room rate was \$109. This event brought roughly \$178,209.91 of total economic impact to the area.

EC Express Game #1 6/17/14 – Scratched do to low response - Event 11**EC Predators Game 6/21/14 – Event 12**

This Eau Claire Predators game was against The Sheboygan Rebels and held at Carson Park Football Stadium. There were roughly 40 people in attendance at this game and we surveyed 9 people, 1 being a visitor and 8 being residents. Most of the people were of college ages, and 35-44 that were in attendance. Most of the money was spent on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$132.00 of total economic impact to the area.

Fairfax Pool #1 6/22/14 – Cancelled due to weather – Event 13**EC Classic Fastpitch Tournament 6/28/14 – Event 14**

The Annual Eau Claire Fast Pitch Classic Softball Tournament was held at various fields around Eau Claire. We surveyed at Bollinger Fields. This tournament brings in families from all over Wisconsin and Minnesota to compete for the weekend. Most people in attendance were between 35-54 and 18 and under. There were roughly 250 people in attendance and we surveyed 30, 24 visitors and 4 residents. Most of the money spent by the visitors was on food and beverage, and shopping. This event brought \$732,608.32 of total economic impact to the area – the largest total of all the event surveyed.

EC Fairfax Invite 6/28/14 – Event 15

The Eau Claire YMCA Marlins Swim Team hosts the Fairfax Invitational. This is an incredibly fun meet held outdoors at the Fairfax Pool in Eau Claire. Teams from all over the Midwest come to the meet, as it is a quality, outdoor, 50-meter competition. The Fairfax Meet is a great way for swimmers to begin to build their portfolio of Long Course Meter times, and to swim against some very talented athletes. Most of the respondents again were under 18, and between 35-44. There were roughly 400 people in attendance and we surveyed 30, 28 visitors and 2 residents. Most of the money spent by the visitors was on food and beverage, and shopping. Of the 28 visitors we surveyed, there was an average of one hotel room, for two nights, at \$114 a night. This event brought roughly \$380,105.87 of total economic impact to the area.

Tuesday Night Blues #1 7/1/14 – Cancelled due to weather – Event 16

EC Express Game #2 7/4/14 – Event 17

The Eau Claire Express Game was against Mankato, MN and held at the Carson Park Baseball Field. This game was decided upon because it was a home game, against an out of town opponent, and held on the Fourth of July – a very popular night in Carson Park. A large turnout was expected thus hoping to get a large response rate. It was found to be extremely difficult to get results at the Eau Claire Express games as the majority of attendees are solely interested in getting in to the game. This tended to be a common issue at all the games we attended. There were roughly 4,000 people in attendance at this game. The Eau Claire Express games are an obvious economic driver in the Eau Claire Community. Results of our survey were negligible.

Fairfax Pool #2 7/5/14 – Event 18

We decided to attend Fairfax Pool on the weekend of July Fourth assuming there would be many people going to pool over a popular holiday weekend. This time we were outside the front entrance of the pool and found there to be 7 residents, and 1 visitor willing to do the survey. There were 30 people in total at the pool during the time we were there. The majority of respondents were under the age of 18. Most of the money spent in the area was on shopping. This event brought roughly \$2,136.00 of total economic impact to the area.

Fairfax Pool #3 7/9/14 – Event 19

We decided to attend Fairfax Pool during the week to get a gauge for how many people go to the pool during the week. This time we decided it would be better to get into the grounds of the pool and walk around to survey people. There were 50 people in total at the pool during the time we were there, 4 visitors and 31 residents were surveyed. The majority of respondents were under the age of 18. Most of the money spent in the area was on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$2,098.00 of total economic impact to the area.

Farmer's Market #1 7/12/14 – Event 20

The first time we attended the Farmer's Market was on a normal Saturday during the summer. The market is held on every Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday of the week throughout the summer and fall at Phoenix Park. We were positioned out in front of the market entrance, but were not able to walk around in the actual market itself to survey people. The age groupings were quite sporadic showing that all age groups attend the Farmer's Market. There were roughly 85 residents, and 19 visitors that we were able to survey out of roughly 1,000 people at the market that day. We found that those surveyed spent the most on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$67,423 of total economic impact to the area.

U.S. Kubb Championships– Event 21

The U.S. Kubb Championships is a new and up and coming event that has been happening the last few years at the Eau Claire Soccer Park. Teams come from all over the U.S., and the world to compete for the National Kubb Title. This event is a huge driver for economic impact because many people come from miles away to attend this tournament and do many other things in the area. It was found that the majority of people in attendance were 18 and under, and between 35-44. It seemed that this event was most popular for teams playing, and their families, but there was a good crowd of people there just to watch. We surveyed just on the Saturday of the three-day tournament and were able to survey 12 residents, and 9 visitors. There were roughly 500 people at the tournament during the time we were surveying. It was found that the majority of people spent their money on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$52,973.37 of total economic impact to the area.

Gus Macker Tournament 7/13/14– Event 22

The Gus Macker Tournament is a tournament that has been happening for many years in downtown Eau Claire on First Avenue. This tournament brings in many visitors from all around the state, and is one of the staple events for the summer. There were roughly 500 people in attendance during the time we were surveying, and we were able to survey 31 visitors and 7 residents. It was found that the majority of people were 18 and under, or 35-44. Most of the money was spent on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$298,764.58 of total economic impact to the area.

Sounds Like Summer Concert Series – 7/17/14 – Event 23

The Volume One Summer Concert Series has been a huge hit for the Eau Claire and surrounding areas. These concert series are now a trademark on an Eau Claire summer. The concerts are held every Thursday night at Phoenix Park and we decided on picking a random Thursday during the summer that had decent weather, and a good chance at a high turnout. It was found that people of all ages were at the concert this Thursday night, but the majority were people 24 and under. The money was spent mainly on food and beverage. There were roughly 1,000 people at this concert series, and we were able to survey 59 residents and 11 visitors. This event brought roughly \$20,519.78 of total economic impact to the area.

Eau Claire Municipal Band 7/23/14 – Event 24

The Eau Claire Municipal Band has been a historic show to attend in the Eau Claire Area for many years. We attended many concerts over the summer, but selected this specific one due to a good chance at a high response rate later in July when the weather was better, and the word got around about the concerts happening. This event is one of the most popular events for the older crowd. The majority of people in attendance were 55 and older. There were roughly 250 people at this show and we were able to survey 9 residents and 5 visitors. It was found that the majority of people spent their money on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$766.00 of total economic impact to the area.

Fairfax Pool #4 7/24/14 – Event 25

We decided to attend Fairfax Pool during the week to get a gauge for how many people go to the pool during the week. Once again we decided it would be better to get into the grounds of the pool and walk around to survey people. There were 100 people in total at the pool during the time we were there, 2 visitors and 12 residents were surveyed. The majority of respondents were under the age of 18 again during the week. Most of the money spent in the area was on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$200.00 of total economic impact to the area.

Farmer's Market #2 – 7/26/14 – Event 26

The second time we attended the Farmer's Market was again on a normal Saturday of the market. It was found that the majority though was 18 and under, and between 35-44. There were roughly 45 residents, and 15 visitors that we were able to survey out of roughly 1,500 people at the market that day. We found that those surveyed spent the most on food and beverage and shopping. This event brought roughly \$177,945.47 of total economic impact to the area.

Eau Claire 3v3 Live Soccer 8/3/14 – Event was cancelled

EC Express Game #3 8/10/14 – Event 27

The Eau Claire Express Game was against Mankato, MN and held at the Carson Park Baseball Field. This game was decided upon because it was a home game, against an out of town opponent, and one of the last games of the season. Being the last game of the season we were hoping for a large turnout to get a large response rate. Once again however, it was found to be extremely difficult to get results at the Eau Claire Express games as the majority of attendees are solely interested in getting in to the game. This tended to be a common issue at all the games we attended. There were roughly 2,500 people in attendance at this game. The Eau Claire Express games are an obvious economic driver in the Eau Claire Community.

Tuesday Night Blues #2 8/12/14 – Event 28

Tuesday Night Blues has been an extremely popular event that has been an important part of any Eau Claire summer. The concerts occur down at the Owen Park Band Shell every Tuesday night. Like the Municipal Band, Tuesday Night Blues draws an older crowd. We found that the majority of people were between 45-64. We were able to survey 16 residents and 3 visitors out of the roughly 300 people at the show. The majority of dollars was spent on food and beverage. This event brought roughly \$10,584.00 of total economic impact to the area.

Buckshot Run 8/30/14 – Event 29

The Buckshot Run has been one of the most popular runs in the Eau Claire area for years. The Buckshot Run is held down at Carson Park every year for a two mile, and five mile run where money donated stays locally to help more than 1,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities participate in sports and health programs year-round. While at the buckshot run there were roughly 2,800 people there and we were able to survey 27 residents and 12 visitors. The majority of people in attendance for the run were between 25-44 and many of them spent their money on food and beverage after the race, and shopping. This event brought roughly \$311,709.80 of total economic impact to the area.

Riverview Boat Launch 8/30/14 – Scratched due to low response - Event 30

Mt. Simon Boat Launch 8/30/14 – Event 31

The Mt. Simon Boat Launch and park is a very popular area throughout the summer with access to the water, a great park, and a disk golf course all in one convenient area. Many people decide to have their graduation parties, work parties, anniversaries, and many other gatherings at this park. We picked the Labor Day weekend as a good time to try and get some respondents for this survey. There was a large group of people in town from Georgia to celebrate a family anniversary. We surveyed a few of the people and found that the majority of them were spending their money on food and drink, and shopping. This event brought roughly \$6,542.00 of total economic impact to the area.

Final Summary

Surveys had a total of 31 questions including demographic information and detailed questions on spending. Throughout the course of the survey there were roughly 29,000 attendees at the events we attended where we were able to survey roughly 832 people for a 3% response rate. Overall the study went very well. We found that it was difficult at times to get people to take the survey because they didn't want to take the time to do it, or just weren't interested. We had 1-4 data collectors at an event gathering responses for the surveys and walking around at each event rather than waiting for people to come up to us. Promotional items were used to entice survey responses and a random final drawing will be held for three hotel stays and/or packages as further incentive.

Final Conclusions

In total, the 31 events that were targeted brought in an estimated economic impact of \$3,669,399, equaling roughly \$118,368 per event. Based on the results found through the survey we can conclude that many of the most popular events that bring in the most economic impact are youth and adult summer tournaments such as the Eau Claire Youth Hockey Association Hughes Tournament, Eau Claire United Soccer Tournament, Eau Claire Fastpitch Classic Tournament, US National Kubb Championships, and the Gus Macker Basketball Tournament. All of these events drew in significant visitor traffic and high economic impact dollars at not only the specific event, but at other areas in Eau Claire as well. Further, we found that Phoenix Park and Carson Park are extremely popular to residents and visitors alike. The Eau Claire Express, Crush and Predators, Taste of The Valley, Downtown Farmer's Market and Sounds Like Summer Concert Series events maintain large local audiences while also generating visitor traffic.

The Farmer's Market we have is incredible and should be able to easily draw in traffic from miles away with the variety and programs we have setup with it. We can conclude that the Crush and Predators have lower than anticipated attendance. Of the two games we attended there were only 80 people at the games, which is very low for the amount of time, and money that is put into the teams.

The Eau Claire Express games proved to be a disappointment during our survey period, not because of low attendance, but because of low interest from fans entering the stadium. As a final note, we would recommend looking at a potential economic impact study for the Express and/or the baseball stadium in the future to properly gauge the impact of these events. We know that roughly 250 tickets are sold to out of town fans at each home game. Perhaps an online survey could be conducted, or a survey kiosk could be placed inside the stadium for increased response.