

Upper Peninsula tourism reckons with warm winter

Steve Hamilton estimates his snowmobile rental business has lost 99% of its revenue this winter. Hamilton North Coast Adventures only had about seven days where the snow was deep enough for snowmobilers to hit the trails. During that white week in mid-January, Hamilton was able to rent out snowmobiles and host guests at his cabin.

But outside of that brief winter spell, Ontonagon and Gogebic counties have been a ghost town.

“Here right now, there’s nobody on the roads. There’s no traffic. There’s no waits anywhere,” Hamilton said.

Everything from snowmobile rentals to ski hills and local eateries have been impacted by what’s being called the “lost winter.”

“You’re having businesses up here that are either tightening up their payroll, laying employees off or simply cutting operating hours for their businesses,” said Brad Barnett, executive director of Visit Keweenaw. “This has real impact to our community.”

A coalition of 43 western Upper Peninsula businesses are pushing for disaster relief after they lost an estimated \$3.1 million during the unprecedentedly warm December. This type of aid was recently made available to Wisconsin businesses that have suffered losses due to the mild winter.

— *mlive.com*



Cold-weather destinations see melting business

Climate change (often called global warming) has had an impact on domestic destinations that depend on cold temperatures and snow.

Northern Wisconsin has faced a snow drought this winter, with anywhere from 20 to 60 inches less snow than normal since November.

The dearth of snow has been devastating to the state’s winter tourism industry, as this winter is on track to become the warmest in 129 years.

That has forced organizers of events

like the American Birkebeiner Ski Race, outdoor enthusiasts and business owners to adapt.

If it weren’t for artificially made snow, it’s likely the race would have never happened.

The problem isn’t just a lack of snow. Without extreme cold, the regional economy of Bayfield along Lake Superior’s south shore loses out on a potential boost from the ice caves within the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Wisconsin.

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Study assesses significant losses in ski industry

Human-caused disruptions in the global climate system in recent years have significantly damaged the U.S. ski industry, resulting in billions of dollars in economic losses, a study has found.

Mountainous regions have been disproportionately affected by global warming, impacting snow cover and shortening the winter season. A recent

assessment of human influence on Northern Hemisphere snow loss found a significant correlation between anthropogenic climate change and snow cover decline over the 1981-2020 period.

Among the industries most affected by these changes is ski tourism, as

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An ice cave within the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Photo: Whitecap Kayak

Cold-weather sites see melting business

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A decade ago, the ice caves created an estimated \$10 to \$12 million economic boon when photos of ice formations on sandstone cliffs near Meyers Beach went viral on social media. The Apostle Islands drew in more than 290,000 visitors in 2014, of which more than half descended on the park during the first three months.

It's been nine years since the ice was safe enough to allow access to the caves on foot.

December 2023 was the warmest ever recorded in Wisconsin, and January was 8.5 degrees warmer than normal, according to federal data. Snowfall in northern Wisconsin was less than half its usual levels, and strings of warm days meant most of it melted in most places. While final data for February is not yet available, state climatologist

Steve Vavrus said the extremely warm winter is largely due to warming winds from El Niño and longer-term warming trends from climate change.

Elsewhere in Wisconsin, the unseasonably warm winter put a damper on this year's sturgeon spearing season on the Winnebago System as unsafe ice conditions kept anglers close to shore. In Lake Geneva, the popular ice castle attraction now known as Winter Realms started late and closed early amid warmer weather. And more than a dozen economic development and tourism organizations from a seven-county area asked the state for help to offset millions in lost revenues.

Now, businesses may be eligible for federal disaster relief in the form of low-interest loans.

– *wpr.org*

Study foresees significant losses in ski industry

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demonstrated in dozens of studies investigating the implications of climate change for ski operations sustainability and regional competitiveness.

According to the new study, which assessed more than 220 ski areas across four US regional ski markets, the average US ski season has shortened between 5.5 and 7.1 days in the 2000-2019 period, compared to 1960-1979, and it is expected to further shorten anywhere between 14-33 days and 27-62 days by 2050 in a low and high emissions scenario, respectively. This resulted in huge economic losses for the country's ski industry, amounting to an average of \$252 million a year and exceeding \$5 billion over the past two decades. The costs of snow shortage come primarily in the form of loss revenue due to late opening or early closure of ski slopes and machine-made snow.

A 2022 study by the University of Basel warned that ski resorts will have to increase their reliance on artificial snow as global warming progresses.

Last year was the hottest in history globally and 2024 is already breaking records with extraordinary levels of heat across the world.

The study was published in *Current Issues in Tourism*.

– *earth.org*