

# Explore Minnesota Tourism Council Meeting

June 3, 2025



# Agenda

- 10:00 a.m. Welcome
- Approval of Minutes
- 10:05 a.m. Team Updates and Updates from Council Committees
- Destination Marketing
    - Marketing / Livability Committee Update
  - Livability Marketing
  - Destination Development
    - Education / Industry Resources Committee Update
  - Outdoor Recreation
    - Outdoor Recreation Committee Update
  - Tribal Relations
  - Film
  - Legislative/Administrative
    - Legislative Committee Update
- 11:30 a.m. Adjourn





# Explore MN Updates

- Livability and Marketing
  - Marketing / Livability Committee Update
- Destination Development
  - Education / Industry Resources Committee Update
- Outdoor Recreation
  - Outdoor Recreation Committee Update
- Legislative/Administrative
  - Legislative Committee Update
- Tribal Liaison
- Film





# Marketing

- >> Committee update
- >> Department look-ahead

Presented by: Kat Sutton, *Deputy Director*



# Canada update

- Canceled early social buys in Winnipeg & Thunder Bay; re-engaged for June
- Industry partner survey: **60% expect Canadian visitation and spend to be down relative to 2024;** however, many reported Canada comprises a small share of customer base
- Will conduct another survey in July and September







# 2025 summer campaign

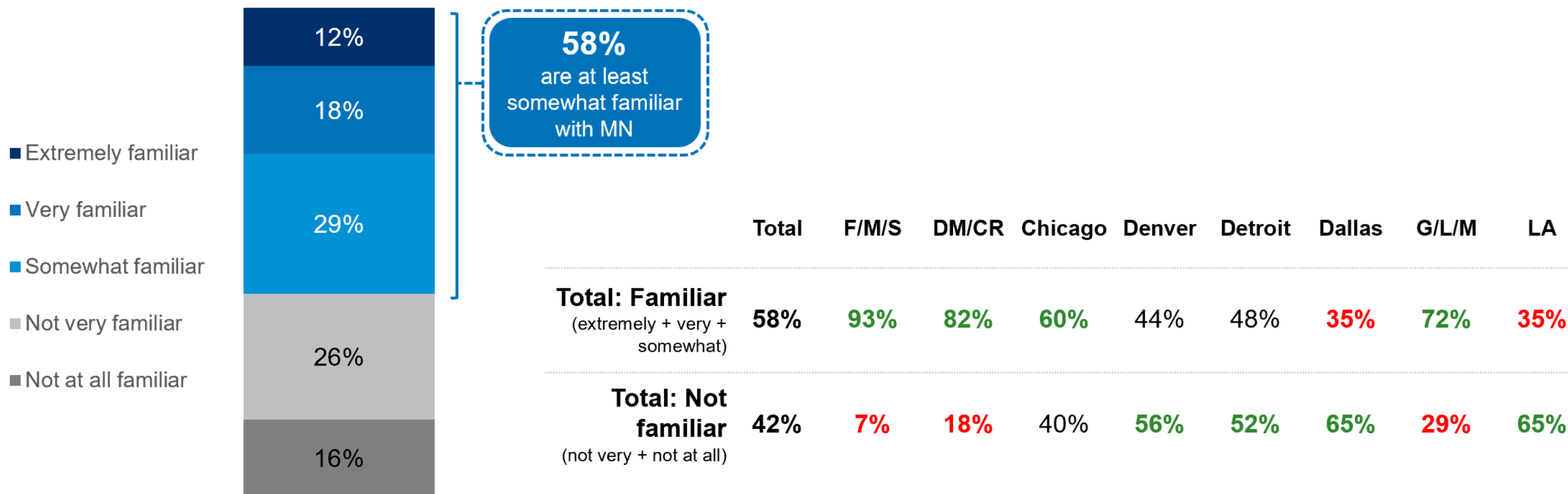
- Mar. 10 (niches Apr. 14) through Jun. 30
- Highlights: Voyageurs 50th, Prince's Purple Rain
- Niches
  - Lake Life
  - Music Live Events/Food & Drink
  - National & State Parks
- Key partnership articles:
  - "8 Ways to Live Your Best Lake Life in Minnesota" - Travel and Leisure
  - "Minnesota's Ultimate Summer Festival Lineup" - Food and Wine
  - "Discover Unique Adventures at These Five Minnesota State Parks" - Smithsonian
  - "Lake life leisure and fun in Minnesota" - National Geographic
  - "7 Minnesota Lakes Perfect for Relaxation and Fun" - AFAR
  - "12 Lakes to Visit Near Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota" - AFAR
  - "The Ultimate Adventure through Minnesota and its National Park" - AFAR
  - "Where to Find the Best Restaurants in Minnesota Right Now" - AFAR



## Nearly 6 in 10 prospective travelers are familiar with Minnesota.

- Travelers from more proximate areas like Fargo/Moorhead/Sioux Falls, Des Moines/Cedar Rapids, Green Bay, LaCrosse-Eau Claire/Madison, and Chicago are naturally most familiar with Minnesota as a travel destination.

### Familiarity with MN

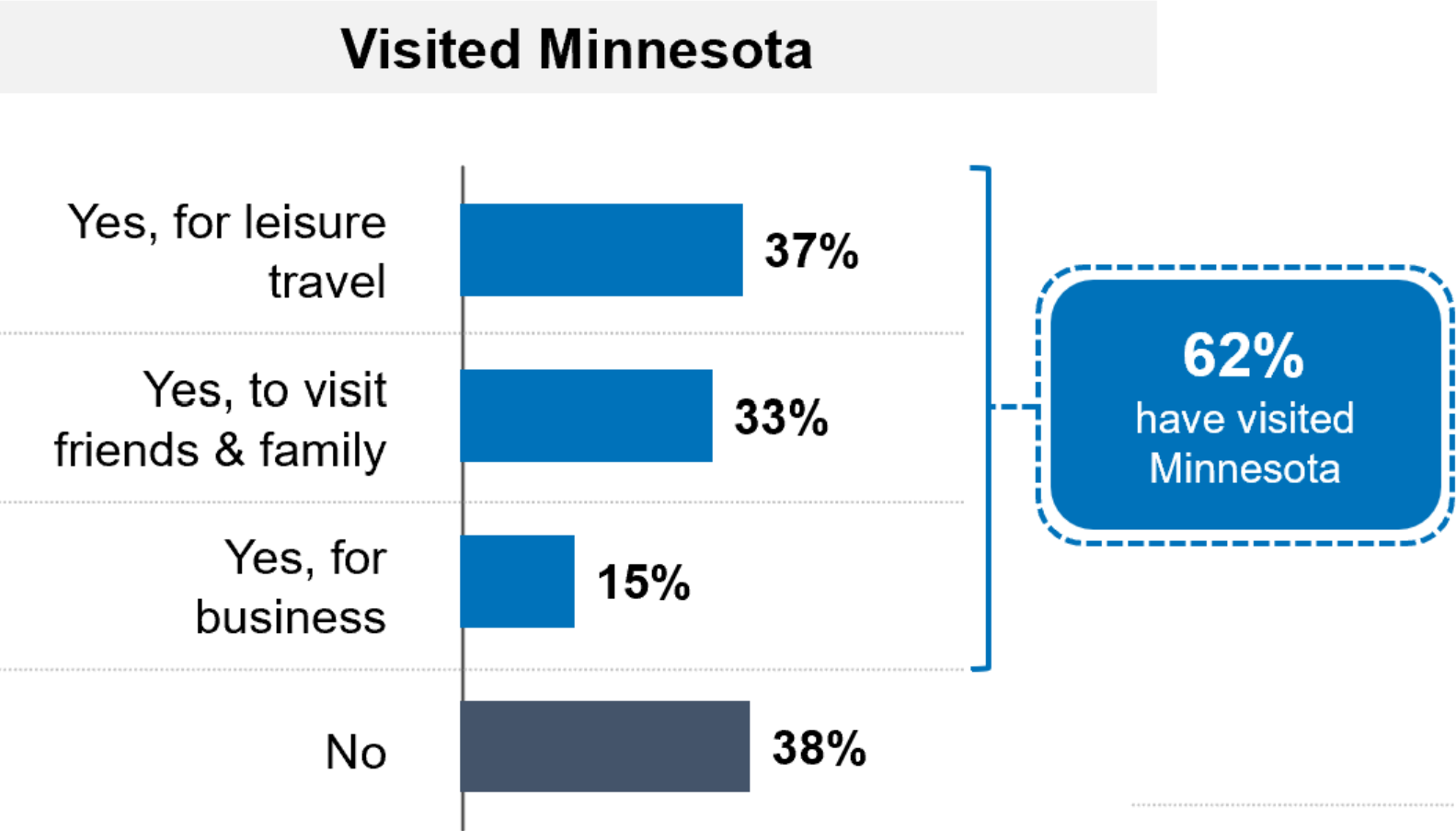


  > 5 pt increase vs. 2021

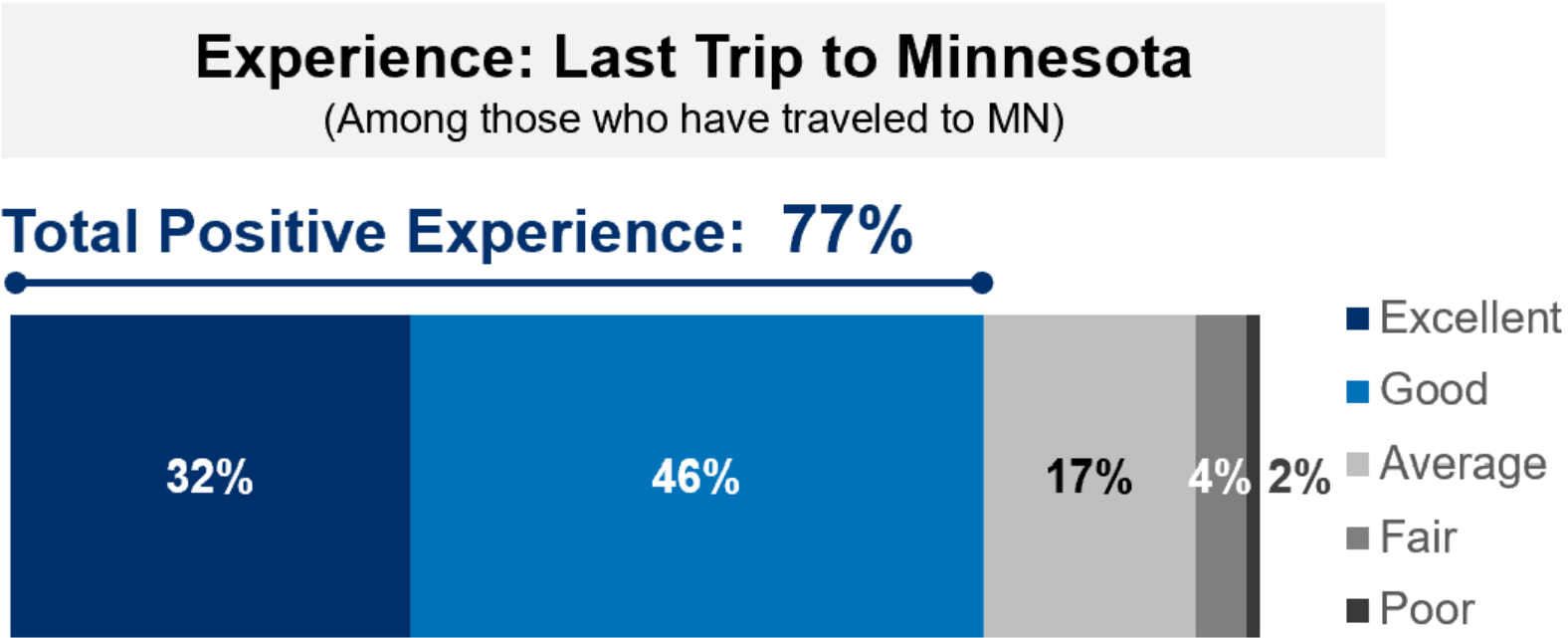
  > 5 pt decrease vs. 2021

# Among the two thirds of travelers who have visited Minnesota, the vast majority had a positive experience.

- Naturally, fewer travelers from farther regions have visited Minnesota.



**only 40%** of travelers from markets not in proximity to Minnesota have EVER been to the state (LA 30%, Dallas 37%, Detroit 44%).



	F/M/S	DM/CR	Chicago	Denver	Detroit	Dallas	G/L/M	LA
Excellent/good	83%	78%	77%	72%	74%	80%	75%	73%
Average	13%	18%	19%	20%	19%	11%	19%	17%
Fair/poor	3%	4%	3%	8%	7%	9%	6%	10%



# Niche planning & research

- What are we known for? What can we own?
- What is the highest ROI investment?
- Strategy complete by July
  - ✓ Lake life
  - ✓ Winter outdoor recreation
  - ✓ Fishing, incl. ice fishing
  - ✓ Performing arts
  - ✓ Shopping (MOA)
  - ✓ Biking
  - ✓ Food culture (emerging)
  - ✓ State & national parks
  - ✓ Live sporting events
  - ✓ Live events







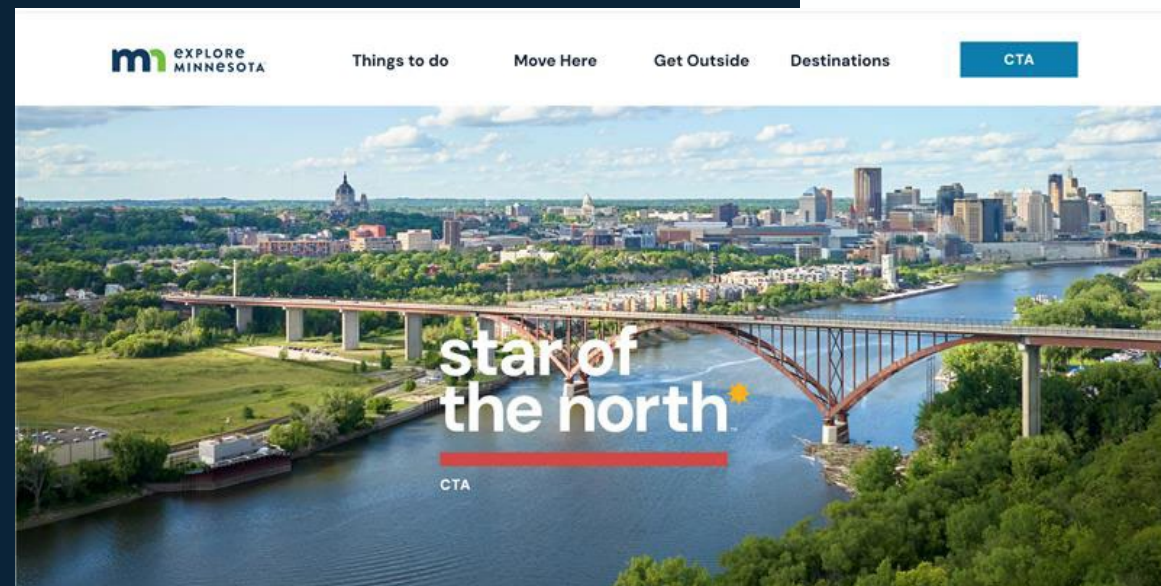
# Special comms projects

- April IPT with *Elite Daily* on Minneapolis as a music and weekend travel destination
- June IPT with Freelance Journalist (*Nat Geo, AFAR*) on Voyageurs National Park anniversary
- Summer national morning shows
  - Dallas: June 10
  - Chicago: June 13
  - Des Moines: June 25
  - Cedar Rapids: June 26
  - Denver: July 30
- Purple Rain the Musical press trip in partnership with Meet Minneapolis Oct-Nov



sneak peek: fall





#### Plan Your Trip



Things To Do



Festivals & Events



Outdoor Adventures



Food & Drink



Family Fun

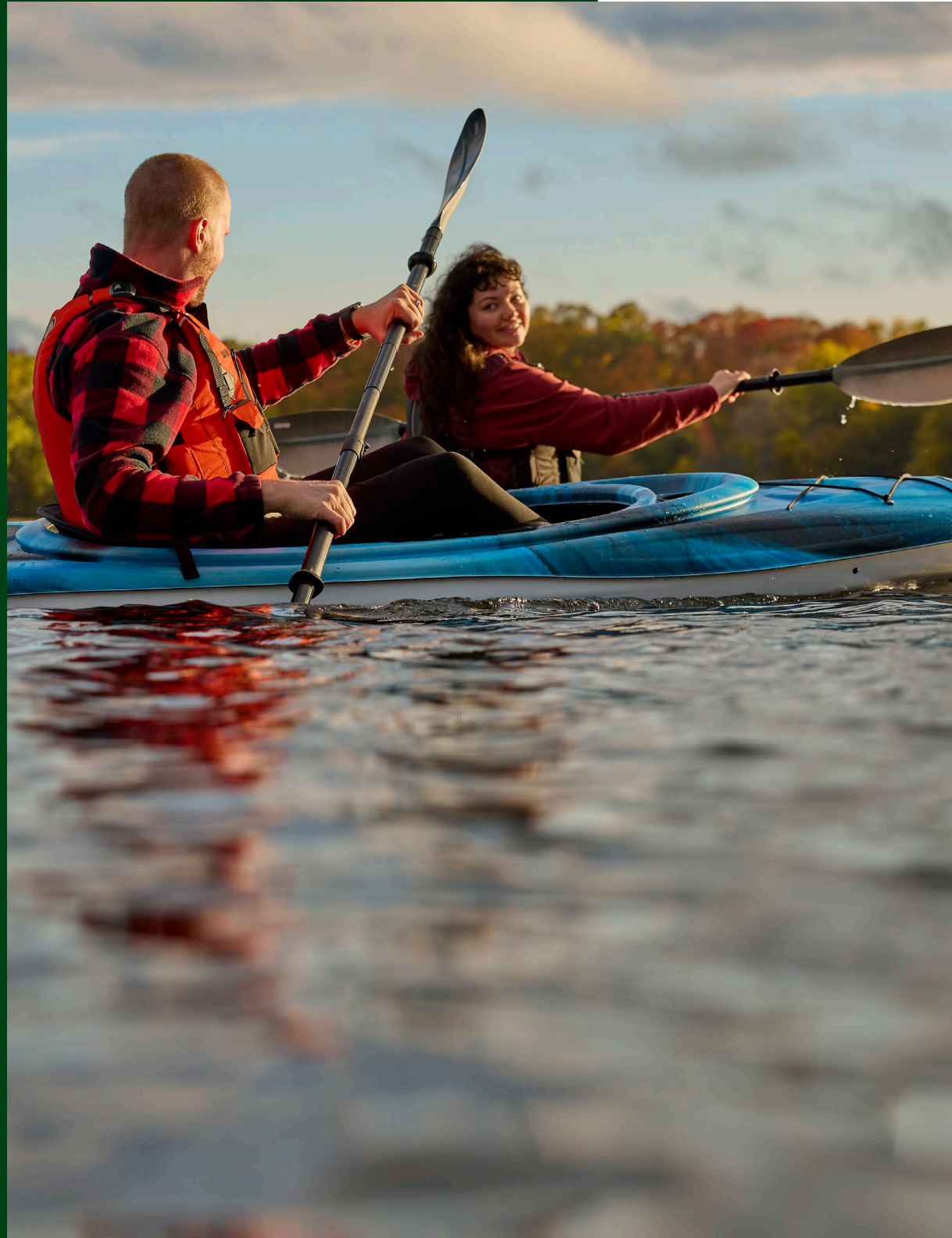


Arts & Culture

# Website “facelift”

- Aging codebase, end-of-life version of Drupal + out-of-date design elements, branding → Refresh (but not rebuild)
- Overall priority of creating an updated, sleek design alongside an improved user experience
- Will be complete by August 2025 and ensure a well-working website until the next legislative biennium (FY28)





# FY26 planning

- New media buying partner begins July 1
- New niche, targeting and SEM strategy go-live
- Organic web content investment: Minnesota Places, Tribal Nations content (informed by Consultations)
- PR partner RFP (issued ~Aug/awarded Dec)
- Investing in more concerted YouTube strategy
- Explore Minnesota More podcast revamp and pilot



# FY26 events

- **2025 Minnesota State Fair** Aug 21 - Sept 1 (MSP)
- **Farm Aid** Sept 20 (MSP)
- **Purple Rain Pre-Broadway World Premiere** Oct 16 - Nov 16, 2025 (MSP)
- **World Junior Hockey Championships (US)** Dec 26, 2025 - Jan 5, 2026 (Across MN)
- **Special Olympics** June 20-26, 2026 (MSP)
- **2026 KPMG Women's PGA Championship** June 25-28 (Hazeltine)
- **2026 WWE SummerSlam** August 01 - 02, 2026 (MSP)







# Halo effect runs both ways

- Target states from our Star of the North livability campaigns “light up” in our tourism niche campaigns:
  - From FY24 to FY25, engagement rates outside of the regional area appear to have expanded, with concentrations on the West Coast, and scattered across the Southeast and New England—likely boosted by livability campaigns.
- While DMOs often tout the benefits of tourism advertising to livability and workforce attraction, our unified message indicates that the reverse is also true: **livability marketing positively influences tourism.**





# Resident retention pilot

- **Goal:** identify messaging / creative most compelling to young Minnesota graduates, drive awareness of value of building a life in Minnesota
- **Targets:** Minnesota residents ages 20-25 who are graduates or graduating juniors/seniors of higher education institutions
- **Run:** May 5 - June 30
- **Tactics:** focusing on social media channels (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), digital OOH around college campuses in the state, as well as targeted buys with Gen Z-focused publications (e.g., Bustle and Elite Daily).
- **Creative:** four short videos ([Video 1](#) and [Video 2](#) as examples) and directs individuals to a new article sharing “5 reasons why you should build your life in Minnesota”



# resident retention pilot



[Five of the 10,000 Reasons to Build Your Future in Minnesota | Explore Minnesota](#)

# resident retention pilot



**REASON #10,001  
FOR LIVING IN MN**

[Five of the 10,000 Reasons to Build Your Future in Minnesota | Explore Minnesota](#)



# Resident retention

## Results so far

- 13k users; 2 min average onsite

## What's next?

- Full pilot results will be available in the August timeframe
- Engaging this audience post-pilot
  - Social strategy (TikTok/YouTube)
  - Higher-education messaging sessions
  - Greater MSP partnership opportunities







# Paid campaigns winddown

- Current livability/business paid campaigns end Jun. 30
- Great library of assets to continue using
- Reviewing “lights on” strategy to focus on organic content, earned media, and other channels
- Working with our PR agency to develop outreach toolkits; rolling out this summer/fall
  - Goals are to **drive awareness and better inform advocates** about our workforce attraction/retention work across the state





# Destination Development

- >> Committee update
- >> Department look-ahead

Presented by: Beth Helle, *Deputy Director*





# Education Subcommittee

- Educational Resource Bank: Higher Ed is complete; continue to gather other resources
- Incorporating more education-based questions in the upcoming Industry Survey
- Continuing Education Series: Fall schedule
- U of M Tourism Center programs
  - Customer service portal
  - Festivals & Events course revamp



# Industry Relations

## Upcoming Meetings & Events

- 6/5-6 MN Association of CVBs Education Summit 2025 (Stillwater)
  - 6/11-12 Southern Minnesota Tourism Association Board Meeting (Northfield)
  - 6/26 Inaugural Outdoor Industry Summit (Bloomington)
  - 7/10 MN River Valley Scenic Byway Meeting
  - 7/17 Southern Minnesota Tourism Association Marketing meeting
  - 7/31 Community Economic Development Annual Meeting (Winona)
  - 8/21 Southern Minnesota Tourism Association Marketing meeting
- 
- Annual Industry Survey, July 2025
  - Tourism Conference 2026





# Market Development

- IPW, Jun. 15-19; post-fam with Mississippi River Country
  - *A cooperative international marketing association that includes a collection of 10 states that border the Mississippi. Marketing focuses on Europe and Asia.*
- Jul. 30, 2025 - Save the Date, Market Development Industry Meeting
- RMI (agency of record) FY26 marketing plan and tactics for key international markets
- Group Tour: Two articles (special section) for the October Issue of Leisure Group Travel Magazine with industry buy-in opportunity



# Welcome Centers & Visitor Services

- St. Croix Welcome Center targeted new facility opening June 18
- Worthington, St. Cloud and Grand Portage partnership contract renewals for FY26
- Continue to expand working with AI to service customer requests





# Outdoor Recreation

- >> Committee update
- >> Department look-ahead

Presented by: Randolph Briley, *Deputy Director*





# First-Annual Outdoor Industry Summit

- Jun. 26 at Hyland Hills Chalet
- Purpose: Networking and professional development
- 80 RSVPs so far — goal is 100
- Presentations from ORIP, MNSOBA, RRC Associates





# Economic Impact Report

- Final Draft due this week
- Releasing at the Summit
- Topline numbers include gross output for the state (gap in annual BEA reporting)
- The report will also include economic numbers broken down by county
- Developing communications plan for release





# Outreach Campaign 2025-26

- 10 months, 10 cities
- “Mini-Summits”
- Purpose: share the findings of the report, promote ORIP, gather feedback for strategic roadmap
- Collaborating with partners to identify venues and attendees





# Explore Minnesota More

- 26 episodes so far
- Upcoming episodes include:
  - ✓ Camping tips/tricks
  - ✓ The Value of Public Lands
  - ✓ The Invention of Waterskiing
  - ✓ Profile of Wilderness Inquiry
- Begin transition to more video content in Fall 2025





# Additional Updates

- Confluence of States 25 in 25 Campaign
- Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights marketing and promotion
- BWCAW Permit issuance for the summer season
- Business Development Toolkit for website
- NORC Development





# Tribal Relations

Dawn Blanchard

*Tribal Liaison*

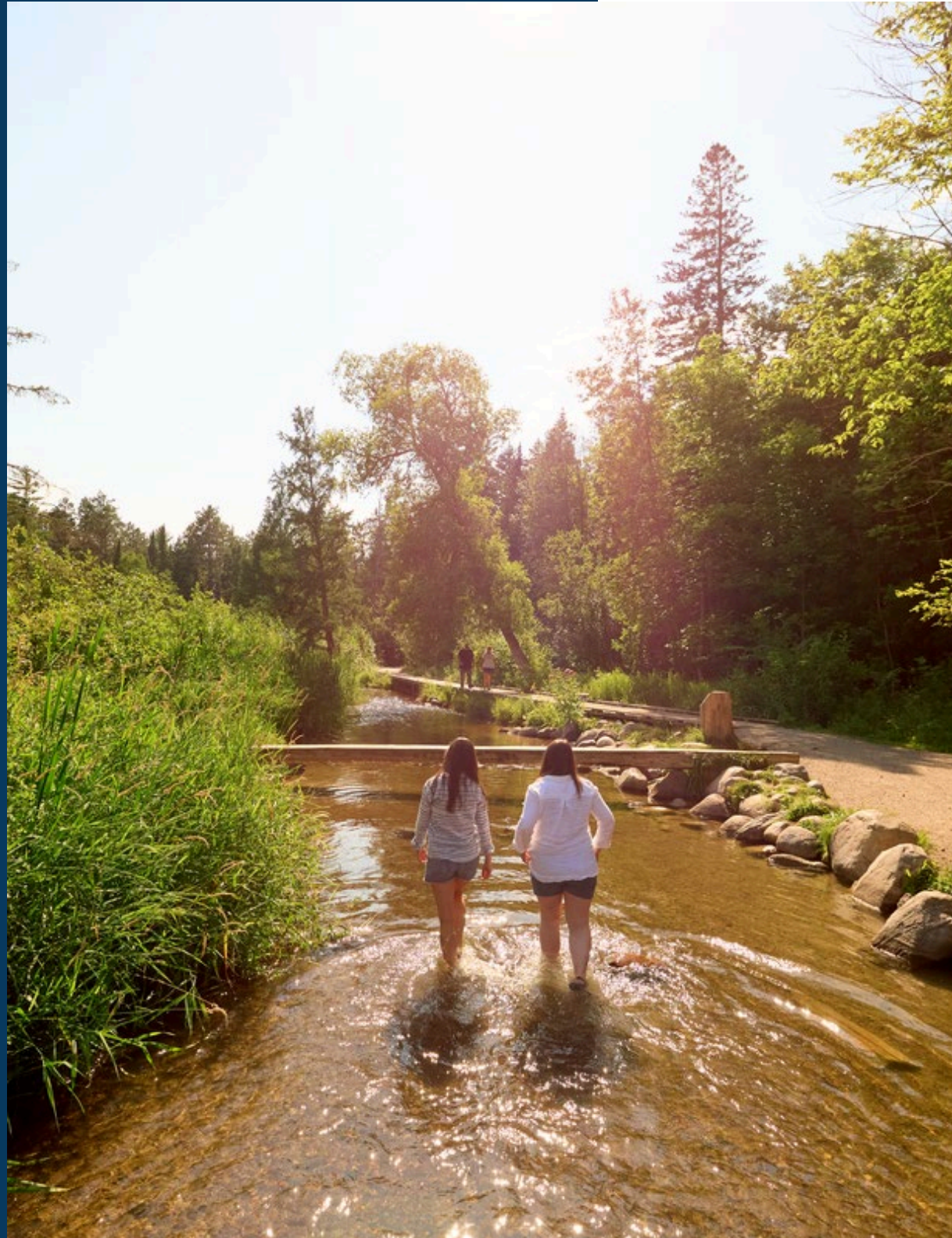




# Tribal Consultations

- First formal Tribal consultations:
  - Upper Sioux Community, June 23
  - Lower Sioux Community, June 23
  - Mille Lacs Band, June 25
  - Grand Portage, July 8
  - Bois Forte, July 9
  - Red Lake Nation, August 5
  - Leech Lake Band, August 6
  - White Earth Nation, August 6
- Prairie Island and Fond du Lac will be this fall; Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community has declined consultation this year





# Tribal Relations

- Continue to work with EMF on adding Indigenous film professionals and creatives to the directory
  - Insights from Navajo Film Office and Cherokee Film Office
- Internal team engagement – Tribal Liaison review/approval of content as needed, educational materials for public-facing teams
- Adding more Native events to the website calendar; confirming historically accurate details with Tribes when needed





# Explore MN Film

Nell Augustin

*Deputy Director*





## Coming up

- Film Ready Communities launching July 2025
- Updated Crew Database launching Winter 2026
- Pitching Minnesota at major Film Festivals and Talent Marketplaces including Cannes, Tribeca Film Festival, and Gotham Week
- Connecting with Film Commissioners across the USA to learn best practices and promote our competitive tax credit program





# Legislative / administrative updates

- >> Committee update
- >> Department look-ahead

Presented by: Lauren Bennett McGinty, *Executive Director*





# Our role in government

- Statewide marketing programs
- Provide research, technical assistance, training to communities & stakeholders
- Aid various local communities to improve their travel, tourism, and livability marketing
- Generally gather, compile, and make available statistical information relating to Minnesota travel, tourism, workforce and economic development, overall livability, and related areas in this state.
- Collaborate and disseminate information to other state agencies, the legislature and the administration





# We can and do...

- **Produce statewide marketing programs**
  - Take a seasonal & niche approach to marketing efforts
  - Trying to cover as much geographical territory as possible in a single season; supplementing with niche advertising, social media marketing, and newsletters to be more specific and help amplify where needed
  - Increased photography & videography resources
- **Provide research, technical assistance, and training**
  - Explore MN Tourism Conference, ongoing webinars, individual consultations, regular research studies
  - Conduct and purchase marketing surveys for state, national and international tourism and related topics
- **Aid various local communities to improve their travel, tourism, and livability marketing**
  - Provide grants and co-ops
  - Provide access to marketing assets & research
- **Generally gather, compile, and make available statistical information relating to Minnesota travel, tourism, workforce and economic development, overall livability, and related areas in this state.**
  - Survey industry stakeholders on the state of travel, tourism and related areas; disseminate findings to the industry and administration





# We cannot...

- **Influence municipal-level legislation, rules or regulations**
  - We are unable to provide feedback, direction, support, or oppose local legislation
- **Change or influence change on policy outside of our statutory responsibilities**
  - We cannot support or oppose legislation or laws outside Explore Minnesota's designated policy.
  - We **can** provide feedback to the administration on critical issues and, as permitted, testify or write letters to the legislature regarding the impact of proposed legislation.
  - It is the role of this council and statewide advocacy associations to work with EMN to share critical issues so we can inform the administration; statewide associations should also advocate for specific statute changes at the legislature.





# We cannot...

- **Market individual businesses**

- We have programs aimed to help individual business and DMOs amplify their marketing messages to state and regional customers, we encourage individual businesses to see what kind of help their DMO can provide.
- We aim to market broadly and may highlight different businesses in a listicle to help elevate specific industries (i.e. best burgers or top ice cream shops)

- **Provide additional funding or incentives to DMOs outside of the grant, co-op or other pre-approved support programs**

- **Increase in-state marketing to target Minnesotans only**

- Our role is to attract new travelers to increase economic impact. Approximately 10% of our marketing efforts focus on Minnesotans, with the remaining specifically focused on bringing in new dollars.





# What's in it for you?

- **FREE featured content on website**
  - Free event & business listings – all statewide associations should ensure their members know about this resource.
  - New form makes it easier than ever to add items
- **Grants & co-ops**
  - Ongoing, permanent matching grant program for the next two years. DMOs should use this funding to increase travel to their destination and increase traffic to local businesses
  - Continuing to increase co-op funding & finding the best vendors for you and your destination's businesses
- **Data, research and feedback opportunities**
  - Free-to-use statistical information, EMN state and county-level data, and marketing
  - Participate in surveys and data-collection opportunities; the council can share feedback from the industry area they represent
- **Increased traffic & targeted promotions**
  - Promotions focus on bringing NEW money to your destinations
  - We adjust our marketing to drive traffics to places or industries that need it most
  - Focus on affordability, ease of access, outdoor recreation, supporting local businesses/restaurants





# How can you help?

- **If you are part of a statewide association...**
  - Work with us to set up regular meetings to ensure we hear and understand issues critical to your market segment. We regularly share feedback with the administration and need to hear from you!
  - Encourage leadership of the association to communicate more frequently with us before and during the legislative session.
  - Support our budget during the legislative session.
  - Share what you learned here with the rest of the association.
  - Request guest speakers to share all about Explore Minnesota.
- **If you have feedback or questions...**
  - Council meetings are designed for just that! We have a LOT to share, but we also need to hear from you. No time is a bad time to ask questions or share feedback.
- **If you want to learn more...**
  - Participate in the various educational sessions put on by the Industry Relations team
  - Participate in the Executive Director's Forum, held at least three times per year.





# 2025 council meeting schedule

- ✓ Tuesday, Mar. 4 (virtual – 10 a.m.)
- ✓ Tuesday, Jun. 3 (virtual – 10:30 a.m.)
- Tuesday, Sep. 16 (virtual – 10 a.m.)
- Tuesday, Dec. 9 (virtual – 10 a.m.)



# thank you!

