

Economic Review

Theodore Roosevelt National Park (“TRNP” or “Park”) had nearly 800,000 visitors in 2021, higher than the 700,000 in previous years. (Irma.nps.gov). These visitors stayed at hotels and campgrounds, ate at local restaurants, purchased gas at local gas stations, and bought merchandise at local stores. While TRNP provides a wide range of visitor attractions a recently conducted survey suggested the wild horses at the Park are a major attraction. As such, the removal of the horses from the Park could have a wide range of economic impact on not just Medora, but also on other communities in proximity to the Park.

For instance, the North Dakota Tourism Division published statistics on visitor spending by county in the North Dakota County Tables, October 2022 (ND Tourism). Statistics for Billings County, the North Dakota county in which the Park is located, reflected \$16,160,000 in visitor spending in 2021. (ND Tourism). With only 839 people in Billings County in 2021, this expenditure represents \$19,261 per capita. The \$19,261 is substantially more than other low population counties in the state (for instance, Slope County - \$1,161 per capita; Golden Valley County - \$1,120 per capita; Steele County - \$807 per capita; and Adams County - \$2,856 per capita). Clearly the Park provides substantial economic gain to the area.

Using the numbers from ND Tourism, the table below provides an idea of the potential impact to the local Billings County economy (mainly the community of Medora) should the Park decide to remove the horses from TRNP and visitors with an allegiance to the results the survey hold true. Billings County would incur significant losses in revenue.

	Visitors in 2021	Expenditures made in Billings County
2021 Totals:	796,085	\$16,160,000
If a 5% reduction	756,281	\$15,352,000
If a 20% reduction	636,868	\$12,928,000
If a 93.7%	50,153	\$1,018,080

The potential loss for Billings County could range between \$808,000 and just over \$15 million. While the potential impact could be felt by other counties as well, it is not as likely to be as great as in Billings County.

As mentioned above, the basis for raising concerns about the economic impact of removing the horses from the Park was derived from an informal survey of visitors to TRNP, questioning their spending habits, and frequency of visits. Of the 1,364 responses only 75 people had not yet been to the Park. The average number of visits by each respondent was nearly three (3) with a low of 0 and a high of 616.

When asked why they visit the Park, 68.8% of the respondents said it was because of the horses. The average cost per trip reported by the visitors was \$881 which represents a more inclusive representation of actual costs. For the 1,364 respondents this would total \$1,201,684 per visit. When asked, 93.7% of the respondents (1,278) said removal of the horses from the park would impact their

decision to make future trips to the TRNP. This would represent \$1,125,918 in lost dollars for each trip of the respondents.

Extrapolating those average costs to the total visitors at the Park could result in a loss of between \$35 million and \$657 million per trip.

	Visitors	Avg. Cost per Trip	Total Expenditures per Trip	Loss of Expenditures per Trip
TOTAL	796,085	\$881	\$701,350,885	
If a 5% reduction of visitors	756,281	\$881	\$666,283,340	\$35,067,324
If a 20% reduction of visitors	636,868	\$881	\$561,081,265	\$140,269,620
If 93.7% reduction of visitors	50,153	\$881	\$44,184,793	\$657,166,092