



Northwest Florida Tourism Experiences a Record Summer

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TALLAHASSEE, FL – Summer 2011 has been a season of remarkable recovery for the tourist destinations of Northwest Florida, which are recording all-time highs in bed-tax revenue on the heels of major marketing initiatives funded by a \$30 million grant from BP secured in April by Governor Rick Scott for the seven-member Northwest Florida Tourism Council (NWFTC).

"All across Northwest Florida the evidence is clear that tourists who love our pristine beaches and unique inland communities have returned in record numbers to enjoy what has been a beautiful vacation season," said NWFTC Chairperson Dawn Moliterno, the executive director of Visit South Walton. "Governor Scott's leadership and the partnership he forged with BP have enabled us to show the world that Northwest Florida has recovered, that our destinations are as beautiful as ever, and that it is time for visitors to come back to their favorite beach."

As a whole the region's June figures show collections were up 27.42 percent over 2010, according to the University of West Florida Office of Economic Development and Engagement. "This is clearly an economic development story," said Moliterno. "Tourism and hospitality are the economic engines of our region."

After struggling through summer 2010, tourism organization reports include:

An 85 percent increase in July bed-tax collections over the previous year ... registering Okaloosa County's best month ever, according to Executive Director Mark Bellinger of the Okaloosa County Tourist Development Council & Emerald Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau;

A 53 percent increase over July 2010 in South Walton tax collections, on the heels of record numbers in June, according to Visit South Walton's Moliterno, who said the July tax revenue is the largest in her organization's history;

A 63 percent increase over July 2010, according to Ed Schroeder, director of the Pensacola Bay Area Convention & Visitors Bureau;

A 51 percent increase over July 2010 in Panama City Beach, according to Panama City Beach CVB and Bay County TDC President Dan Rowe, who noted "the more interesting statistic is that we were up 27 percent over the single-highest month in the history of Panama City Beach (July 2007);" and,

A 67 percent increase over July 2010 in Santa Rosa County, according to Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Executive Director Kate Wilkes.

Other evidence indicating a region-wide recovery includes:

Gulf County anticipates 2011 will be the greatest revenue year on record, reporting collections are up 11 percent over July 2010 and up 13 percent from its previous three-year average, according to Tim Kerigan, Gulf County Tourism Development Council director; and,

Franklin County won't have July results until next month. However, all indications are that lodging partners experienced significant increases according to Curt Blair, Executive Director Franklin County Tourist Development Council.

"This was truly a collective team effort and in addition to Gov. Scott and BP, we are grateful to our business partners who added their marketing muscle to this effort," said Bellinger. "The future is bright."

"We are working diligently to meet our commitments on the Gulf Coast," said Lamar McKay, President of BP's Gulf Coast Restoration Organization. "We have been pleased to work in partnership with the State of Florida and local communities. The Northwest Florida Tourism Council's dedication in promoting the economic success of the region is truly impressive."

In addition to the \$30 million grant to Northwest Florida, BP has just launched a new ad campaign centered on promoting Gulf Coast Tourism and seafood in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. The campaign highlights all 4 states with a message about returning to the Gulf Coast. It is airing in over 26 states for the next 2 months. You can view the two spots at <http://www.youtube.com/bp#u/1/onGNrC67RQA>.

The NWFTC was created by seven tourism development councils (TDCs) many years ago for the purpose of marketing Northwest Florida through a regional partnership. The seven-county coalition reunited after the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in an effort to overcome misperceptions about the conditions of Florida beaches. Its members include tourism development organizations in Bay, Escambia, Franklin, Gulf, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa and Walton counties. To date, the NWFTC, a not-for-profit 501(C)6, has received three grants from BP designed to reinvigorate the region's tourism-based economy.

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The above was released Friday by the Northwest Florida Tourism Council.

Governor Scott Issues Statement on Northwest Florida's Record Tourism Season

"I'm thrilled to see tourism in our panhandle doing so well—with revenues up nearly 30 percent from a year ago. With the hard work of the Northwest Florida Tourism Council, and our negotiations to get \$30 million from BP for marketing the area, we're now seeing record high levels of economic impact from tourism. Florida's pristine beaches, world-famous fishing and delicious seafood are part of what makes our state the greatest place to live, work and play."

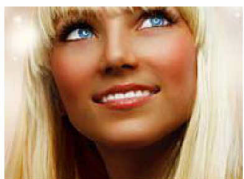
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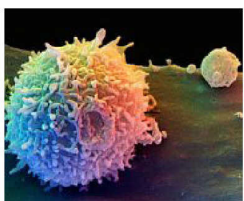
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