

Tourism in Newton County, 2017

Prepared by Buffalo River Watershed Alliance

In April, 2018 the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance updated its tourism report of Newton County for calendar year 2017. Data for this report was gathered from several public sources, including the Arkansas Department of Revenue, the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, the National Park Service, and online sites including Arkansas.com, the Jasper/Newton County Chamber of Commerce, the Buffalo River Chamber of Commerce, VRBO.com, AirBnB.com and others. Cabin rental numbers are conservative and represent the minimum number of businesses in operation as of the date of this study. New businesses are popping up on a regular basis.

Visitors are attracted from across the country to one of the last free-flowing rivers in the continental U.S., our country's first National River, the Buffalo. They come to canoe, hike, camp, fish, and swim in its cool, clean waters. They stay in local lodging, eat in local restaurants, shop and buy gas and groceries locally. **1.5 million tourists visited the Buffalo National River in 2017, supporting 911 jobs and generating a cumulative benefit to the local economy of over \$71.1 million.**¹

The Buffalo River Watershed Alliance tourism research showed that in 2017 **Newton County had over 100 lodging businesses, which includes 170 cabins or lodges, over 200 camp sites and 100 motel rooms. Collectively, these businesses can accommodate over 1,240 guests per night.** A sizeable labor force is required to manage, clean and maintain these businesses year-round. 5 canoe concessionaires in Newton County provide 564 vessels for rent and they also provide shuttle services for paddlers and hikers.

These businesses all pay a special 2% "tourism tax". These monies are managed by the Tourism Trust Fund and are used for promotion by the state Department of Parks and Tourism. **In 2017, \$130,368 in "tourism taxes" was collected from Newton County businesses**², part of a total of 10%, or \$650,598.00, in combined state and county sales taxes. **This represents gross revenue related to tourism in Newton County of over \$6.5 million.** Of this amount, 1.5%, or almost \$100,000 goes directly to Newton County coffers.

Tourism is obviously a significant industry in this, the 10th poorest county in Arkansas, especially considering the multiplier effect as these business owners spend their income with other local businesses, such as hardware stores, cleaning services, automotive repair and gas stations, etc. In addition to sales tax, these 100 tourism businesses paid annual real estate and property taxes directly to the county. **In 2017 the National Park Service itself paid \$470,415 to Newton County in lieu of taxes.**³

By contrast, the swine CAFO, C&H Hog Farm, threatens the tourism economy of Newton County because of the risk it poses to the ecology and beauty of the Buffalo and to the human health of those who use it. As evidence of this risk, see *American Rivers* 2017 list

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<http://buffaloriverwatershedalliance.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/BNR%202017%20Tourism%20Report.pdf>

² Source; Tourism.research@arkansas.gov

³https://www.nbc.gov/pilt/counties.cfm?term=county&state_code=AR&fiscal_yr=2017&Search.x=29&Search.y=8&Search=Search

of “*America’s Most Endangered Rivers*” which includes the Buffalo due to the increasing risk by the swine facility ⁴.

In 2016, C&H paid approximately \$9,000 in real estate and property taxes and JBS-USA (owner of the swine) paid approximately \$1,700 in property taxes to Newton County⁵. C&H reportedly employs only 6-12 people. This one business contributing less than \$11,000 to the county is putting at risk over 100 businesses which add nearly \$100,000 to the county, (not counting their real estate and property taxes) plus over \$550,000 to the state. The \$71.1 million generated by the Buffalo National River during 2017 benefits not only Newton, but Marion, Searcy and Baxter counties as well and their tourism economies, including over 900 tourism related jobs, are likewise at risk.

Our elected officials must take swift action to insure this vital and flourishing tourism industry isn’t damaged or destroyed because a state agency wrongly permitted a swine CAFO in such an inappropriate location. This mistake can and must be corrected.

⁴ <https://www.americanrivers.org/endangered-rivers/buffalo-river-ar/>

⁵ Source: Newton County Tax Collector