Greenville News

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Average gas prices in state lowest in U.S.

Greenville area lowest in state

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Although the recession has taken a big bite out of leisure travel, low gas prices are a boon to in-state destinations, and on Tuesday the average gas prices in South Carolina were the lowest in the nation, according to AAA Carolinas.

At $2.31 per gallon of regular, the Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson area had the lowest average price in the state, according to AAA's Brendan Byrnes. Some other metro areas nationwide had lower prices, however. For instance, Tucson, Ariz., had an average per-gallon cost of $2.26, Byrnes said.

Last summer, gas prices hovered around $4 per gallon, knocking down long-distance travel. Yet the high gas prices encouraged travel close to home.

"Last year was the largest year for state park revenue we've ever had," said Marion Edmonds, spokesman for the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. "This year, it looks like it'll be the second highest."

Diane Wilson, director of information services for the Greenville Convention & Visitors Bureau, said, "Overall, because of the state of our economy right now, travel is down in our area."

Greer resident Melissa Hewitt said, "I have to agree the economy is really bad. I'm laid off, and my husband was just laid off. Right now, if we do travel, it'll be close to home. A tank of gas there and a tank of gas back, maybe, because if you're any farther than that, it'll break you."

Wilson said, "We are a drive destination, so gas prices definitely affect travel to this area." She sees leisure travel picking up in this area, although the economy has dampened business travel, which accounts for 45 percent of Greenville hotel stays.

AAA's Web site inquiries for both Carolinas show the top five destinations as Myrtle Beach and Charleston and Asheville, Boone and Wilmington, N.C., Byrnes said.

South Carolina's gas tax at 16.8 cents per gallon is the fifth-lowest in the nation, behind Alaska, which has none; Georgia at 12.4 cents; Wyoming at 14 cents; and New Jersey at 14.5 cents, Byrnes said.