Seneca Daily Journal

2/19/2010

Big bucks: Tourism means $18 billion to state

CHARLESTON (AP) — Sun and fun mean more than ever to South Carolina as new figures show tourism now pumps $18.4 billion into the state economy.

That's up from about $16 billion in 2006, according to the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

The latest numbers are for 2008, before the worst of the recession hit. Numbers from last year, modeled for economic impact, won't be available until early 2011, said Chad Prosser, the department's director.

Prosser told The Associated Press he expects this season to show a rebound from 18 months of recession.

Long winters in the northern U.S., pent-up vacation demand and South Carolina's reputation as an economical place to vacation should all help, he said, adding that bookings tend to increase after a bad winter up north.

"You see it very profoundly in the golf market. When they can't golf up north it does increase our numbers," said Prosser, who was a managing partner in a golf club before he came to Columbia.

Last year, even people who had jobs stopped spending. Now those people are starting to carefully spend again on things such as leisure travel, he said.