

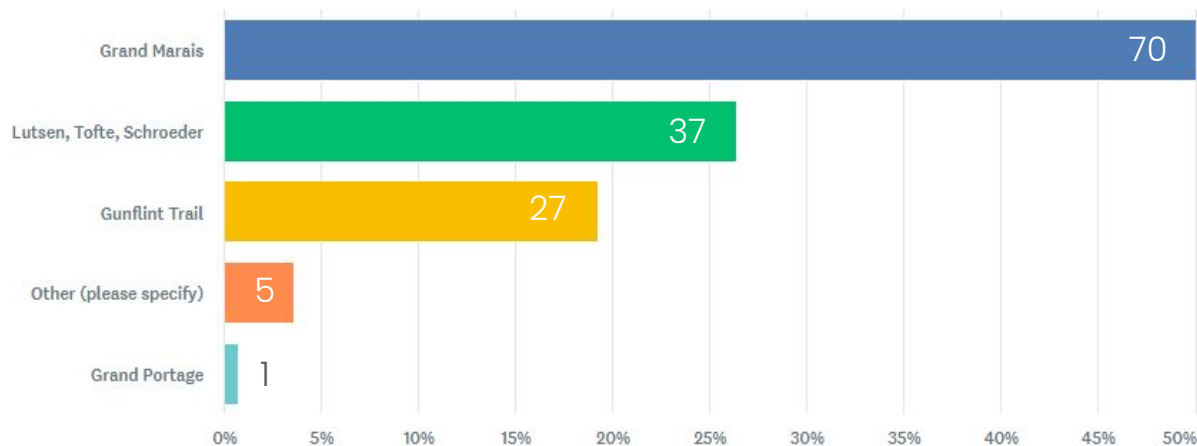


Survey Results

of the Economic Impact of 2026 Wildfires & Closures

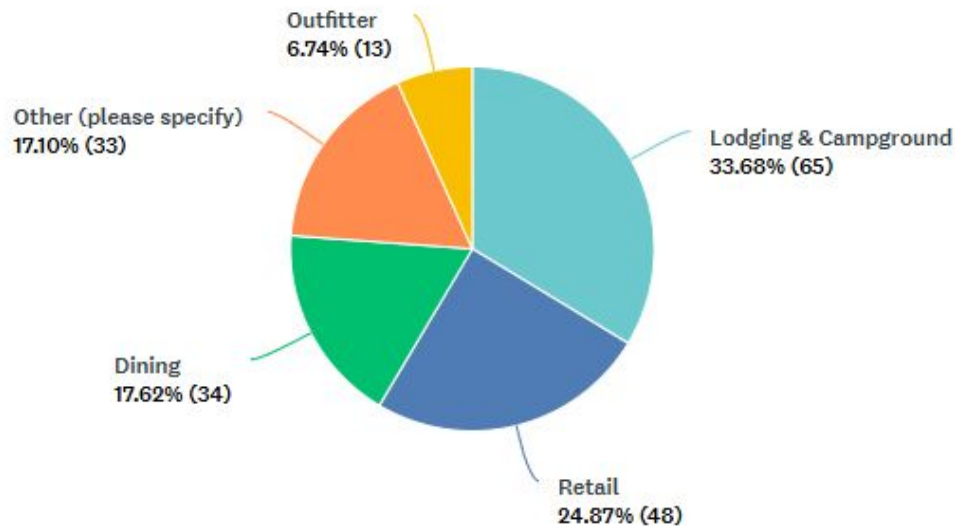
Where is your business primarily based?

140 responses

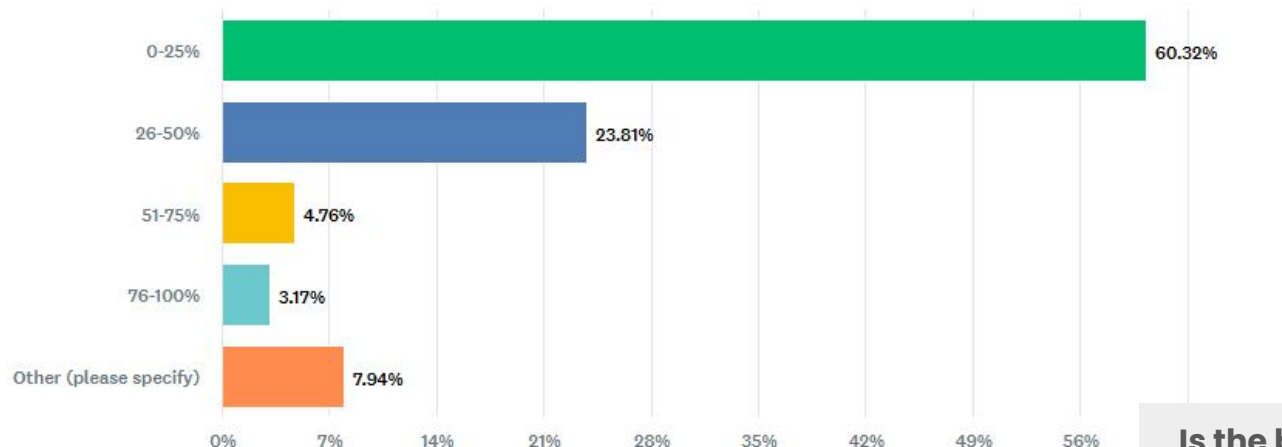


What kind of business(es) do you operate?

140 responses



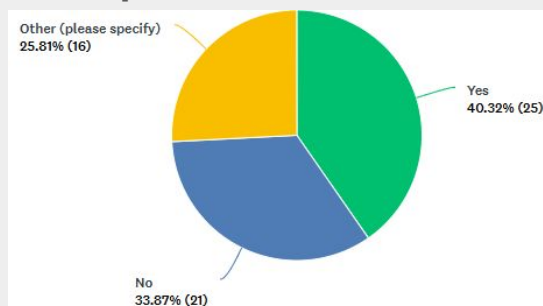
What is your current cancellation rate or drop in advanced bookings for the upcoming months (August/September)? 63 responses



Beyond the July impact, **63 respondents** indicated that August & September bookings are also negatively impacted with **32% stating the cancellation rate is at least 25% or greater**. By industry, campgrounds and outfitters saw the highest number of advanced cancellations.

Looking forward, the booking rate is slow to fill in the gaps with the general consumer sentiment to be very hesitant to book due to perceived wildfire danger and/or concerns about air quality.

Is the booking rate starting to improve?



By business type, please share how much your business revenue has been impacted by percentage for July 2026 vs 2025.

95 responses

Type	Average Percentage Decrease
Lodging & Camping	-29%
Outfitting	-52%
Dining	-27%
Retail	-31%
Other	-34%

Estimated financial impact countywide is:

- Decrease of -\$2.4 million in lodging sales
- Decrease of -\$9.4 million in total sales

Calculated based on using [lodging tax](#) and [sales tax data](#) reported from July of 2025 and applying the projected average percentage decrease.

By business type, please share how much your business revenue has been impacted by percentage for July 2026 vs 2025.

By Community

Gunflint Trail	%
Lodging & Camping	-27%
Outfitting	-49%
Dining	-25%
Retail	-38%
Other	-30%

Grand Marais + Other	%
Lodging, Camping, Outfitting	-30%
Dining	-28%
Retail	-16%

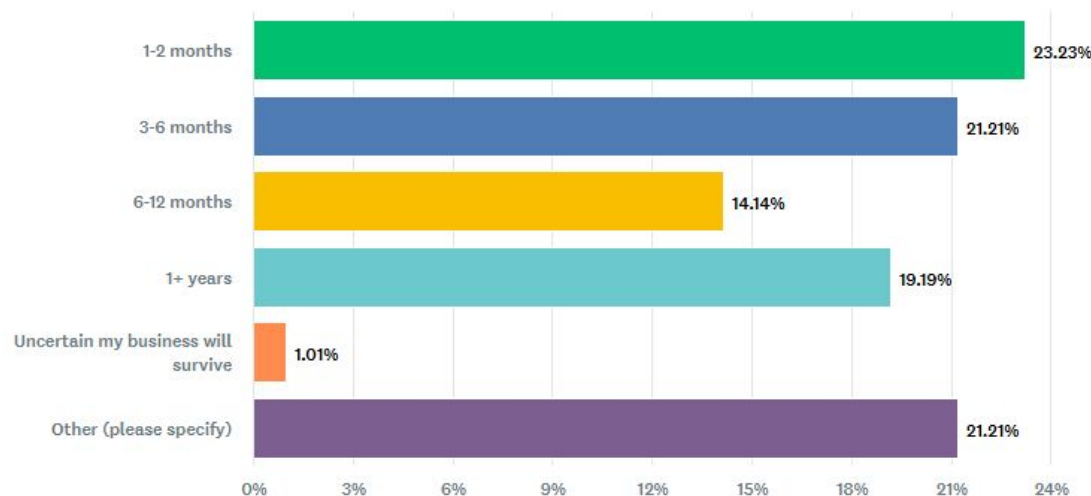
Lutsen, Tofte, Schroeder	%
Lodging, Camping, Outfitting	-29%
Dining	-15%
Retail	-23%
Other	-26%

Businesses that entered dollar amounts in lieu of percentage ranged from:

- A decrease of \$2,000 – \$85,000 in lodging revenue
- A decrease of between \$25,000 – \$34,000 in dining revenue

How long do you anticipate it will take your business to financially recover?

99 responses



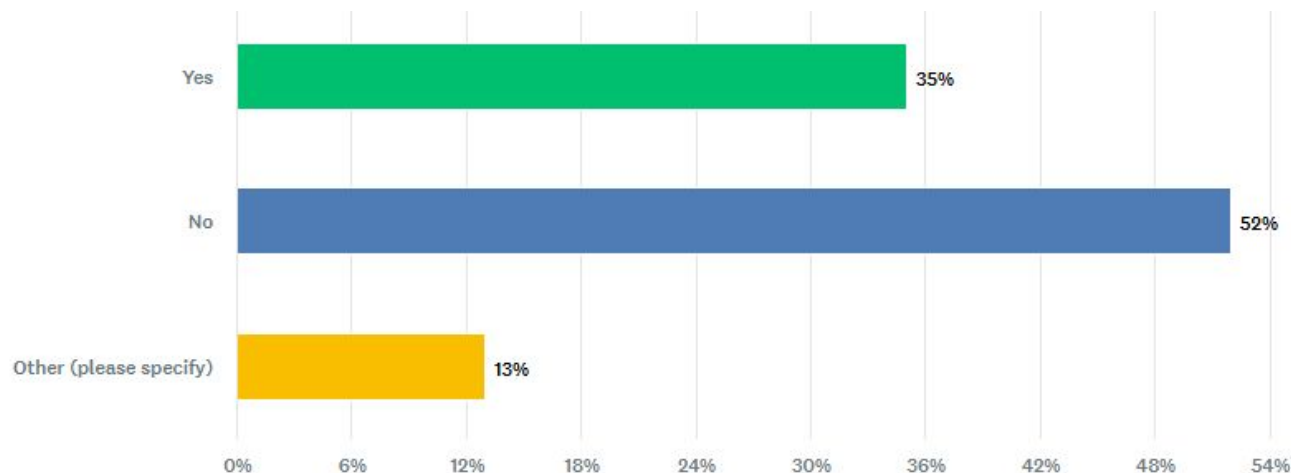
34% indicated it will take at LEAST 6 months – over 1 year to financially recover.

Several comments stated still too early to tell the complete financial impact this has had to the season with most indicating being down year over year.

[View live dashboard results here](#)

Have you had to lay off any employees?

100 responses

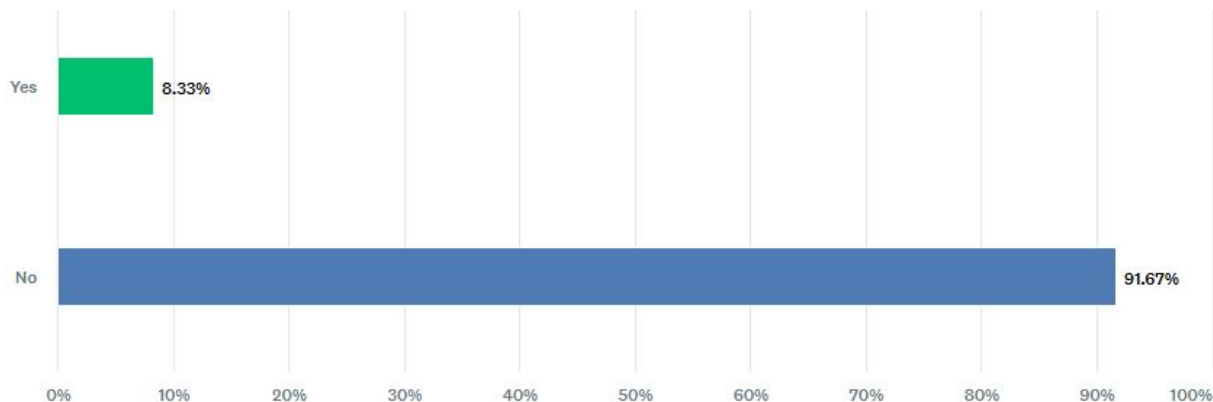


35% reduced employee hours or staffing levels.

Comments also indicated that subcontractors were reduced as well.

Do you have insurance that could help offset your losses?

96 responses



Only 8 out of 96 respondents have business interruption insurance.

0% have been able to submit a claim.

What type of support or resources would be most beneficial to your business right now?

76 responses

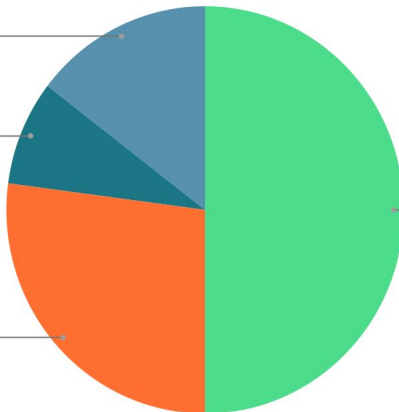
General Support Requested

Misc.
14.6%

Improved Emergency Communication Systems
8.3%

Marketing & PR Campaigns
27.1%

Financial Relief, Loans, Grants & Support
50.0%



The majority of responses centered around **financial relief** in a variety of ways from **tax reductions** to **low interest loans** and **grants** were among the top responses.

Additionally, increased marketing and public relations was suggested to counteract the negative narrative.

[View live dashboard results here](#)

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Tourism is a major driver of revenue and tax dollars in Minnesota and Cook County. Our businesses depend on a very short season and most are small family-owned businesses that don't have outside resources to help us in a time of need. We need financial support from the state so these small businesses can survive the winter and return to providing vacation and tourism opportunities, jobs, and tax revenue in future years.

This \$25,000 shortfall may have more of an impact in January if our winter season is not good. The aftermath might result in layoffs and other reductions in service in order to preserve the business until next peak season.

If I compare the week of July 5-11 (which was the week before smoke/fires) to the week of July 12-18 are sales were down 40% that week. That was the biggest hit for us. We have started to see normal numbers again.

Don't make this the 90 day wonder and forget us and go back to the get nothing done wrangling of the past few sessions. These are fragile on the edge businesses where a natural event can wipe out an industry that has been here for a hundred years. We need long term support or in another ten years many of us will not be here.

Drop the disparity tax on commercial businesses, we need it here and don't need to send it to Hermantown!!!

The businesses in Ely who are facing the most limited opportunity for salvaging an outfitting season this year are going to need the most generous support so that they can bridge the cash flow needs-gap spanning this season to next.

Remember that losing 17% of confirmed July reservations in the peak of our summer season has a major impact on businesses like ours that are somewhat seasonal.

Keep in mind that for businesses that take payment at the time of reservations the impact of this hits double - thousands of dollars in refunds to pay out plus lost future bookings as people decide not to take future trips.

Any assistance, the local area can receive for money lost during peak season would be greatly appreciated! And as important, making statements in public appearances, stating that there is no air quality issues in our area

Any assistance to get more accurate messaging out the public as outlined in question 9.

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Still affecting reservations. Guest still questioning air quality and if fires are still going. Information is not helping our area. People tell me they haven't seen very much on the news about specific towns. News releases need to name towns. Lots tell me they see "up north or the boundary waters area". They need to be more specific.

We started our rentals in downtown Grand Marais this Spring so it's tough to compare. Definitely we had 3 cancellations and 1 that wanted to but didn't give a refund so they still came. It's tough to say how much it has affected future bookings but new ones have definitely slowed.

A few more days of smoke/fire danger would have had much more significant impact. I feel like at my shop at least, we narrowly avoided a very serious problem! Big thanks to all the firefighters! Fund them! Fund them more!!

We have business interruption insurance but they are saying we would need to be within one mile of the flames to qualify, which would have been incredibly irresponsible of us. As a summer camp, tuition payments are spent during the summer to hire staff and buy food. Having to evacuate our busiest session on arrival day and send campers home could represent nearly a quarter of a million dollars in lost revenue for us should families all request full refunds. That will either bankrupt us or put us deep into debt. We are hopeful that some of our camp families will either donate a portion, ask for a partial refund, and/or roll over their tuition to 2027, but we've got a rocky road ahead no matter how you look at it.

Although our business has been less affected than others in Cook County, we fully support legislative action that helps those seasonal businesses affected by the smoke conditions and the continued and slow reopening of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Just that I think locally we do an Amazing job of getting positive news and driving tourists to GM!!!! 😊 But we need to have a better way of offsetting negative news from bigger outlets. Yes things were bad up the trail but that should not have affected the greater GM area nearly as much as it did. Considering it was literally only a couple days that things were truly bad. Considering air quality and what not, but hotels lost weeks of reservations. Since, we didn't have a good response or at least a quick one that reached more people!

The poor coverage by the press made this so much worse than it needed to be. People panicked and canceled plans well into the fall... and now things are fine up here!

While the wildfires are not the government's fault, the news that is shared with the media and the media's views directly impact the general public's is based on what the government shares.

It would be really nice if the Twin Cities media would report factual news. They scared so many people away with their doomsday reporting. I understand this is devastating to businesses who do BWCA outfitting but using video of the fires in Canada and then showing the Grand Marais Harbor absolutely ruined business for that week and we are still trying to dig out of it with our lodging side of the business.

Our economy is almost entirely tourist based and the impacts of the BWCA closures and the intense media coverage have had negative effects in many ways.

The communication between government agencies and the population sucked and was confusing. We need better communication on emergency actions, such as camping closures and fire restrictions.

While on the one hand, I am so grateful for apps such as "Watch Duty" as a means of spreading awareness of wildfires and evacuation information, I also see the damage done by apps such as those. For example, with the entire BWCA marked as "GO" red, so many folks are not aware of how much land the BWCA encompasses, so it made it look as though we had fire right at our doorstep. I would also like to add that mainstream media (disappointingly, MPR was a major resource in this) made it seem like we were living in an orange sky, ash falling, dystopian nightmare for WEEKS, when in reality, it was a couple of really terrible days, then only moderately unpleasant for a couple more days (still scary for at-risk health population) and then back to normal. The fear was (and is!) strong out there against the (non-existent) smoke up here.

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

The Cook County Community YMCA is a collaborative effort with Cook County, who owns and manages the buildings, while the Y manages operations. Our Y is a branch of the Lake Superior YMCA Assoc. with branches in the Twin Ports as well. We are the designated emergency evacuation shelter, clean air shelter and cool air shelter for the County, meaning that our building has a need for clean air that goes beyond members working out. We also served as an information and mask distribution hub during the fires, staffed by Cook County Public Health staff. We also offer both day camp (school age childcare) and early ed childcare. When the air quality in our building and the attached school building (whose classrooms serve as base for our day camp program) was poor, we were moving two homemade korsi-rosenthal (box fan filter) units between those rooms and our lobby to try to improve filtration and air quality. Additional high quality portable filtration units are needed during times of poor air quality if we are to effectively serve as a clean air space and evacuation shelter. I also learned from our Building Services Director for our Twin Ports branches that our HVAC fan motor failure was likely caused by smoke coating components inside the motor (such as windings) that caused a similar failure in Hermantown. Filters that would normally be changed quarterly need to be changed weekly in times of extreme AQI. At our Hermantown branch that's \$2k in filters weekly. Cook County's population skews older. We are hearing from many people whose primary or sole form of exercise is swimming, due to age and health complications that preclude them from other types of exercise. There is a high level of frustration for these folks. Staffing any business in Cook County is a challenge due to our small population size. Staffing lifeguards, for us, is even more difficult. We are worried that we may lose guards to this long period in which they've been unable to work. Then we will struggle to reopen even after the HVAC is working. Thanks for listening!

I appreciate the focus and support to our friends and neighbors in Cook County. We are all connected and impacted by the slightest ripple or smallest spark.

We support our local businesses who support us too, so we support their statements as well

We have been very fortunate. Other than a couple of cancellations during the worst of the smoke, we have not had a measurable impact.

This is going to happen again. Lets get it right the first time.

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Not unlike having a resident volunteer fire department with trucks and equipment, could we not do the same with tanker planes at our airport? According to my internet search Minnesota owns no planes and contracts out for this. Versus California that owns 70 planes (again according to an internet search and AI search) and positions them across the state so that they can be at any fire site within 20 minutes and nip it in the bud. I personally witnessed this last year near Joshua Tree. I fire in a nature area suddenly blossomed with black smoke a mile high. Within 20 minutes it looked like an air show overhead. 2 planes and one helicopter criss crossing the fire dumping retardant and water. The fire was out shortly. The local I was visiting said "We take fire very seriously here". It would seem to me that with the great amount of standing dead balsam and other spruce trees resulting from the spruce budworm and the incredible amount of fuel this represents that we need to expand our firefighting capability and vision to include a more proactive approach- instead of waiting for fires to approach valuable structures. It may be irresponsible for our town under the current circumstances (climate change and addition of so much fuel) to try to fight a fire under the old methods. Portage just created their own "Coast Guard" in the absence of the actual coast guard by investing in a cutter of their own. Can we not do the same up here with an expansion of our fire department to include airborne assets? Can we have planes such as the Airboss (similar in cost to a fire truck- only 800 gallons and only good for small fires) or similar ready on the tarmac with volunteer pilots in the community ready to respond in the similar arrangement and culture as our current volunteer fire department? I do believe that the best way to protect our economy, our structures and of course our woodlands is to adopt a new "nip it in the bud" approach like California with planes and personnel positioned and ready to go.

Please make sure everyone that is helping with the wildfires are very well compensated!

Please buy a water bomber aircraft to suppress fires quickly, without having to wait for, or depend on, the federal government.

The forest should be open up to loggers to clear dead timber in the wilderness area and create fire breaks to protect from further closures!

This report was developed in partnership with Visit Cook County, the Cook County Chamber of Commerce, Cook County EDA and the Cook County Government and shared with the greater business community associated with these entities.

The collection of information was managed and analyzed by Visit Cook County & the Cook County Chamber of Commerce.

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