



Humboldt County Visitors Bureau (HCVB)

The Official Destination Marketing Organization

Report to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

December 10, 2019

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HCVB Interim Executive Director



We respectfully submit the following report, requested by the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors at the May 10, 2019 funding meeting. This report comprises the work undertaken by the Humboldt County Visitors Bureau (HCVB) Board of Directors and staff during the past six months in response to the January 2019 events: the defunding of the Bureau by the City of Eureka for \$390,000 per annum (43% budget cut) and the sudden passing of the Bureau ED of twenty years.

The Bureau's revitalization and future is based upon a change of focus. As the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Humboldt County, the Bureau shall promote and market, to visitors and residents alike, County areas and assets without prejudice, including towns and communities, all categories of experiences and businesses, arts and cultural opportunities. The positive economic impact of these efforts will benefit all members, stakeholders and partners.

The Board of Directors and Staff thank the Board of Supervisors for their support, past, present and future and, acknowledging the decades accomplishments, trust in the Bureau's capability to succeed.

Mission

The Humboldt County Visitors Bureau develops and maintains, for its stakeholders, partners and communities, marketing programs and experiences that keep Humboldt County and our Redwoods as a premier travel destination.

Vision

A vibrant, proactive Bureau with a strong Board and membership committed to the successful marketing of all Humboldt County's assets to attract national and international tourists.

2018–2019 Board of Directors

Marc Rowley, *Chair*, Chris Ambrosini, Paul Beatie, Lowell Daniels, Barbara Groom, Cathy Kunkler, Laura Lasseater, Justin Legge, Meredith Maier, Libby Maynard, Pete Oringer, Aaron Ostrom, John Porter. Rex Bohn, *Supervisor*, Scott Adair, *County*

Tourism Partners

Visit California, North Coast Tourism Council, California Travel Association, Brand USA, Humboldt Regional Lodging Alliances, Save the Redwoods League, California State Parks, Redwood Parks Conservancy, Redwood National Park, Humboldt-Del Norte Film Commission, Fly Humboldt, San Francisco Travel Writers

Regional Tourism Partners and Beneficiaries

The City of Arcata, Arcata Chamber of Commerce (Visit Arcata), Ferndale Chamber of Commerce (Visit Ferndale), Eureka Visitors Center-Humboldt Made, The City of Fortuna, Fortuna Chamber of Commerce, Garberville Chamber of Commerce, Southern Humboldt Business & Visitors Bureau, Willow Creek Chamber of Commerce, Orick Chamber of Commerce, Humboldt Lodging Alliance, Eureka Lodging Alliance

1: Overview

Rising to the challenge and creating a climate for success.

During this period of transition, the Bureau has continued to successfully market Humboldt County at the same substantial level as previously. The results can be seen on pages 4-6. An in-depth external audit, focusing on Marketing and Tourism (aligned with CEDS¹) is being undertaken by the recently convened marketing committee to develop the new Marketing Strategy & Plan.

The Board has diligently undertaken an internal audit of all aspects of the organization, reevaluating governance, policies and procedures, relationship to the County, membership and funding models, communications with stakeholders and responsiveness to their needs. (See page 8).

To accomplish these tasks, an Ad Hoc Restructuring Committee was formed, and the Executive Committee and Board are now scheduled to meet monthly.

2: Outreach (completed)

Bureau Reputation and Value

Goal – strengthen relationships and partnerships

With over four decades of experience, the Bureau has a successful track record of achieving consistent national and international media coverage for Humboldt through outreach to media, personal interactions with reporters, photographers, videographers, influencers, bloggers etc., and industry relationships. The Bureau has an exceptional record for global reach through the website (www.visitredwoods.com).

In these areas the Bureau excels. As other County groups and organizations have neither the relationships, marketing expertise nor dollars to support sustained efforts, the Bureau will continue to be the lead DMO, and support the efforts of all other entities.

The Board recognizes that the Bureau has a poor reputation in the business community and certain areas of Humboldt County. Reasons include the lack of understanding as to what the Bureau does; its relationship with the Humboldt Lodging Alliance and focus on “heads in beds”; the shift towards favoring Eureka at the expense of other county relationships and destinations; and its lack of clear procedures and policies regarding membership and stakeholder collaborations. These important issues are being addressed with community input.

The Bureau initiated meetings with stakeholder and partners to gain feedback into past challenges and future marketing expectations and needs. To develop strong, collaborative, and respectful relationships throughout the county and state with tourism stakeholders and partners, the Bureau hosted two meetings and made a presentation to Visit California.

a: Humboldt County Tourism Stakeholders meeting. October 10, 2019²

The meeting was a candid exchange of pertinent opinions about the Bureau’s performance, however there was unanimous agreement of its value and success in external marketing and impact on County tourism. The Bureau’s internal County reputation was assessed as poor, but all

1 Humboldt County's 2018 - 2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, pp 41 & 42.
2 In attendance: Donna Huffman (Orick), Marc Rowley (Willow Creek), Jeff Durham (Fortuna) Lowell Daniels (Ferndale), Mike Reiman (Arcata), Emily Kirsch (Eddy Alexander), Gregg Foster (RREDC), and Scott Adair (County). Absent: Chris Ambrosini (Eureka), John Porter & Laura Lasseter (Southern Humboldt).

agreed that the Bureau has a very strong and positive reputation outside the County, and with the travel, tourism and media industries.

The group acknowledged the number of organizations, chambers etc. currently marketing their own areas of Humboldt County. It was agreed that the original model—the Bureau marketing the whole county as a destination and supporting the local orgs to market their unique assets—should be adopted as the future operational model.

To re-establish inactive relationships and create new ones, the Bureau is engaged in personal outreach and meetings with partners, stakeholders and agencies, and is collaborating with county-wide organizations and businesses working towards the shared goal of attracting visitors and increasing tourism revenue throughout Humboldt County.

b: [North Coast Tourism Council³ \(NCTC\)](#)

Humboldt County is one of four northern rural California counties (Del Norte, Mendocino and Lake) that comprise the NCTC and receives matching funds from Visit California to promote the region. This annual meeting, hosted by the Bureau, brought together the ED's and one representative from each county, and the Senior VP of Marketing for Visit California, to meet in person, address organizational concerns and discuss effective marketing strategies for the future. As 80% of Visit California funds are designated for state and national outreach (including Canada and Mexico), NCTC agreed that representatives from two counties (on a rotating basis) will attend trade events and industry conferences to promote our regional assets. Original content and multi-county itineraries are being developed to support increased web traffic. Bureau ED, Julie Benbow, is Co-Chair of the Council.

c: [Visit California⁴](#)

As the state DMO, Visit California markets the state to the world. An invaluable Bureau resource, they connect Humboldt with media and marketing opportunities and are the source of up-to-date tourism data. Each month, one organization or business makes a presentation to their staff of 70, and the Bureau was invited to present in July. Staff gave a very strong, educational, inspirational and fun presentation. Each attendee received a redwood sapling, and all participated in a quiz to win prizes that represented the County's culinary and business diversity. Feedback was very positive, and this strong relationship is crucial to the Bureau's success.

3 Marketing and Tourism

The most significant percentage of the Bureau's budget is invested in multiple channels to market Humboldt County to the world.

- In 2018 Humboldt County was featured and appeared in 50+ major travel publications with an audience reach of **49 M** and an advertising value of **\$3 M**.
- In 2018, these efforts resulted in the [Lonely Planet](#) naming California's Redwood Coast, primarily Humboldt County, the number one destination in the country to visit.

³ www.northcoastca.com

⁴ www.visitcalifornia.com For County Tourism Impact stats:

<https://industry.visitcalifornia.com/research/economic-impact?sort=county®ion=Humboldt>

The Bureau worked extensively with Lonely Planet providing the nomination team with content, images, and videos, and coordinated and led the editorial team advance trip. The result? International recognition from a campaign that generated more than **1 billion** impressions the equivalent of **\$ 1.4 million** in publicity benefiting all Humboldt County stakeholders.

Despite popular belief, our ancient forests, windswept coastlines, and budding regional tourist centers can't speak for themselves until tourists are already visiting the Northcoast. Multi-million dollar campaigns are underway from San Diego through the Pacific Northwest, designed to win a cut of Humboldt's **\$453.2 M** in travel-related spending (Visit CA 2018 estimates).

No other organization or group within Humboldt County has the relationships, media reach and reputation for delivering marketing results at this level.

Bureau staff coordinate press trips, pitch and provide creative and dynamic messaging and story ideas to engage future tourists with desirable original experiences and adventures. Staff furnish images, videos, information and stats on request, and host media representatives, bloggers, writers, editors, and photographers.

During this transition and restructuring period and notwithstanding the significant cut in budget, the Bureau's marketing efforts have continued with noteworthy results and successes.

Recent Marketing Successes & Outreach

The following are four examples of national & international press since May 2019 secured by the Bureau with an estimated audience reach of **7+M**:

- i: Wall Street Journal, Travel Section front page (+ page 3). Published May 2019
2.8 million national & international readership, including digital.
"The Quintessential California Road Trip – Only Better!" By Ryan Haase
- ii: AAA VIA Magazine, Travel Section, Published May 2019
1+ million statewide readership, including digital.
*"Searching for Bigfoot in Northern California
In the verdant, wild landscape of the Klamath Mountains, the legend of Bigfoot is alive and well."* By Robert Earle Howells
- iii: New York Times, Leisure Section front page (+page 3). Published August 2019
2.8 million digital, 487,000 weekly subscribers
*"On California's Lost Coast: Sea Lions, Surf and Squiggly Roads
Just 225 miles north of San Francisco, on a remote and rugged shoreline, crowds are sparse and cellphones are useless (and you won't care)."* By Elaine Glusac
- iv: Bartells Backroads, Article and video footage, ABC TV 10, September 2019.
500,000 National & International readership.
*"Chainsaw artists make the redwoods their work of art
If you visit Humboldt Redwoods State Park, you won't be able to miss the chainsaw art that lines the road."* By John Bartells

Bureau staff have organized and hosted the following reporters, writers, influencers , bloggers and photographers since September 2019.

- i: Jessica Wright: @bontraveler - Influencer, US : 87.1k followers:
7 Humboldt posts-engagements: 11, 015

Michelle Halpern @livelikeitsthekwnd - Influencer, US : 73.4k followers. 9 Humboldt posts engagements: 7,775
Activities: Avenue of the Giants, Explore Old Town Eureka, Lost Coast Brewery, Harbor Cruise on the Madaket, Moonstone Beach, Trinidad, Fern Canyon, Redwood National Park
Lodging: Inn at 2nd and C, the Historic Eagle House
- ii: Ulrike Wirtz – UW Media, Journalist – German Readership
Focus on World Travel (US/Canada) with the angle of Lifestyle and Entrepreneurs
Activities: Humboldt Bay Oyster Tour, Humboldt Bay Provisions, Main Street Ferndale, Humboldt Historic Society, Samoa Cookhouse, Maritime Museum, Trinidad State Beach, Stone Lagoon, Yurok Redwood Canoe Experience
Lodging: Victorian Inn, Ferndale
- iii: Ian Anderson – Moon Travel Guides and San Diego Reader, Domestic Journalist – US & International readership. Moon Travel Guides (Berkley), print and online Travel Guide to Pacific Coast: SanDiegoReader.com articles focus on Food, Beer & Coffee
Activities: Lost Coast, Mateel, Gyppo Ale Mill, Ferndale, Trinidad, Orick, Stone Lagoon. Guided tour of Redwood Parks
Lodging: Inn of the Lost Coast, Victorian Inn – Ferndale, Old Steeple
- iv: Jim Gallagher – Journalist commissioned by Irish Sunday World -the largest Sunday News Magazine in Ireland, and TheTaste.ie an online international award-winning food website with over 400,000 hits monthly.
Activities: Old Town Eureka, Dick Taylor Chocolates, Eureka Fringe Festival, Arcata Plaza, Restaurant 301, Fern Canyon, Redwood National Park, Avenue of the Giants,
Lodging: Carter House Inns
- v: Neel Wanders – writing as Flunking Monkey. UK based. Social media & blog posts, international readership. 155,000 followers on Instagram.
Social media posting on California’s sustainability angle, eco trends and wildlife

Kyle Miller – San Francisco-based freelance travel photographer www.kmilphoto.com
Activities: From Lassen on 299, stop-over in Willow Creek, 2 nights in Eureka, visited Trinidad, Arcata, private tour of Redwood National Park, Avenue of Giants & Garberville.
Lodging: Inn at 2nd and C, the Historic Eagle House
- vi: Indian Media – Content and Asset Creation: A production team of 5 visited the Redwoods and Coastline to promote the Pacific Coast to the India Market. The images & video will be a VC campaign directed at India’s fly-drive market.
Activities: Avenue of the Giants, Eureka-Arcata walking tours, Redwood National Park.
Lodging: Elk Meadow Cabins

The Bureau has significantly increased its social media presence and its digital marketing reach in the past months:

- Website traffic since May 2019
 - o 819,000 page views (1.3M+ 2019)
 - o Visitors from 179 countries
 - o 29% ages 24 – 33, 22% 35 – 44
- Facebook interactions for October 2019
 - o 80,429 reach (240% increase)
 - o 353 followers (20% increase)
 - o 1,235 unique page views
- Recent Instagram interactions
 - o Account @redwoodcoaster = 8,750 followers on Nov 10th, 2019
 - o @redwoodcoaster Nov 10th post = 14.8% engagement (1,300+ likes and comments) in 12 hours
 - o Global average engagement rate for “Travel” in 2019 = 4.7%
- Meetings & Conferences:
 - InSync Consulting, Healthcare Staffing (two weeks notice)
Confirmed 200 rooms in Eureka, 75 rooms Fortuna for one week: November 15 – 22, 2019
 - International Society of Arboriculture-Western Chapter - June 2021, 200 attendees
Coordinated by HCVB. Site visit (Board of Directors & Planning Committee) December 2019
 - Family Nature Summit - July 2020 – 175 attendees, HSU & HCVB
Site visit (Board of Directors & Planning Committee) December 2019
- In May, the Bureau updated the very popular Redwood Coast Map & Guide, printed and distributed 125,000 throughout the California and Oregon. Visitors can request a guide to be mailed or download one from the website.

New Marketing Strategy and Plan *(in process)*

The new marketing committee⁵ has been convened, and a marketing consultant hired to guide this multi-component process. A significant outcome will be to develop unique messaging and marketing campaigns distinct from other counties and destinations. A clear understanding of visitor demographics, tourism data, impact, trends and projections will form the foundation of the new marketing plan.

The Bureau is taking the lead in researching relevant tourism trends, markets and the profile(s) of the 21st century tourist's interests and intents.

⁵ Members: Aaron Ostrom, *Chair*, Ben Brown, Lowell Daniels, Barbara Groom, Marc Rowley, Julie Benbow, *Staff*, Jason Baxter, *Consultant*.

The current external marketing/tourism audit includes research into:

- How Humboldt County performs in comparison to other similar counties, budgets;
- What can be learned from other DMO's successes & challenges;
- Comparison of scope of work undertaken in-house, contracted out, size of budget.
- Opportunities for Humboldt-branded pop-ups and other experiential marketing concepts with target markets throughout North America.
- Research into the value (ROI) of the four current marketing components:
 - Website
 - Media / digital / social
Instagram, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest
 - Online Advertising
 - Printed Materials
*Print and distribute 250,000 Redwood Coast Maps & Guides
Humboldt County Adventure Guides (12 by topic)
25 Best Things-to-do Map*
 - Trade / Travel Shows & Conventions

2018 Humboldt County Travel-Related Stats⁶

\$ 453.2 M Travel-Related Spending in Humboldt County alone

\$ 39 M State & Local Tax Revenue

5.5 K Industry-related Employment

Humboldt County has a 36.6% share of total regional spending for the North Coast⁷.

The top three industry segments for travel spending within Humboldt County are:

\$ 124 M Food Service

\$ 96 M Accommodations

\$ 57 M Arts, Entertainment & Recreation

As part of developing the Marketing Plan, the Committee will take into account the directives to promote Tourism & The Arts as described in CEDS⁸.

While it is not the Bureau's role to promote one area of business or experience over another, promoting the rich and diverse arts and cultural landscape is an important component of the Bureau's marketing of Humboldt County. Dell'Arte, HSU Center Arts programs, the Mural Festival, Kinetic Sculpture Race, Redwood Coast Music Festival, big name concerts at the Arkley Center and the Casino's, and newer cultural destinations like the Old Steeple in Ferndale, attract out-of-area tourists.

⁶ Visit California/Dean Runyan Assoc. See Appendix A for Mendocino, Sonoma and Santa Cruz stats and comparisons.

⁷ North Coast: Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino and Lake Counties.

⁸ CEDS Strategy TAC2: Create a Cohesive Regional Brand & Plan to Promote Tourism & The Arts
Though Tourism does not meet the criteria to be considered a "target industry," it is recognized as an essential part of the region's basic economic foundation, providing significant (if lower wage) employment opportunities and importing significant revenue.

In the *2018 Economic Impact of Travel in California* report⁹, Arts, Entertainment and Recreation ranked fourth of seven industry revenue segments, with a \$58 M spending total. (See *Appendix A* for details and a multi-county comparison).

Internal Audit

An action plan with stated timelines and outcomes was developed in response to a comprehensive internal audit.

Governance - Board of Directors (completed)

With the objective of establishing clear and respectful internal communication channels, the Board meets on a monthly (not quarterly) schedule. There is regular reporting between Board Members, Executive Committee, Committees and Staff.

The By-Laws were reviewed, updated and brought into legal compliance. This included the number of Directors, terms of service, and duties, frequency of meetings. It was also agreed that the Board shall include representation from all fields of business including the Tribes and HSU.

- The By-Laws were presented to the Bureau membership for adoption. The membership voted to adopt on November 1, 2019 and are currently being submitted to the State.
- The Board voted to change the name that the Bureau does business under, from “Eureka-Humboldt Visitors Bureau”, to the more fitting title reaffirming its countywide focus “Humboldt County Visitors Bureau”.
- A review of staff job descriptions and staffing needs is currently being undertaken to ensure they align with the new focus and marketing efforts of the Bureau.

It was agreed that funding and membership be assessed, to ensure the Bureau is able to be a sustainable and successful County DMO. The following action items are currently in progress:

Funding

Goal – develop a new funding model to fully support and sustain all Bureau operations and a vigorous marketing plan.

Process – To focus on three main areas of support (a) Lodging Alliances, (b) City/Towns, and (c) Corporate Sponsorship. The Bureau is working with the HLA’s and ELA to help support and reach-out to the individual municipalities throughout the county. The Marketing Committee is exploring unique sponsorship opportunities with likeminded brands to fund special campaigns promoting Humboldt County to national, and international travelers.

Membership

Goal – develop a new inclusive membership model.

Process - A review of the current membership policies has been completed. To gain a better understanding of the strengths and challenges of the existing program and the perceived and real benefits of membership, input from both current and non-members is being gathered. The Bureau is changing its membership focus to a model inclusive of all areas of commerce, including previously non-affiliated groups and organizations throughout the county (Tribes, HSU). Other DMO models are being researched.

⁹ California Travel Impacts 2010 – 2018: Dean Runyan & Associates: April 2019 for Visit California.
<https://industry.visitcalifornia.com/research/economic-impact>

The Future

As the official Humboldt County DMO, the Bureau Board of Directors and Staff are committed to the process of revitalization and continuing to market the County statewide, nationally and internationally.

To provide unique, compelling and consistent marketing services and support the County chambers and organizations with their efforts, the Bureau will make the necessary internal organizational and procedural changes in response to community input.

As discussed earlier, the HCVB team is currently working on developing a comprehensive, scalable marketing plan and budget, expected to be completed by Spring 2020.

Although the overall scope-of-work for a two-to-three year plan will ultimately be decided by the Bureau's resources and community support, we're actively driving tourists to Humboldt County as you read this. That said, new partnerships and modern campaigns are already underway.

Thank you for your time and continued support!

Board of Directors
Humboldt County Visitors Bureau

Submitted on November 11, 2019

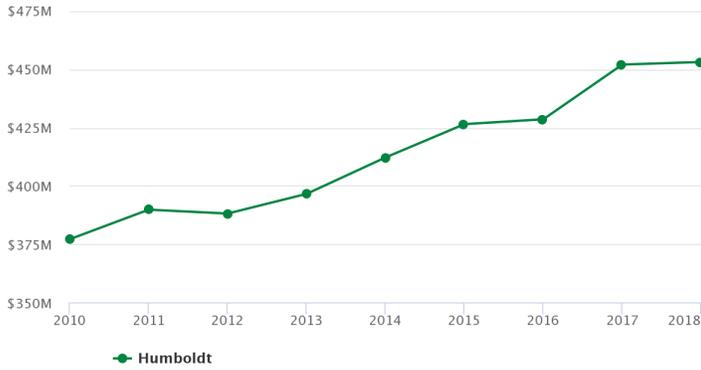


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www.visitredwoods.com

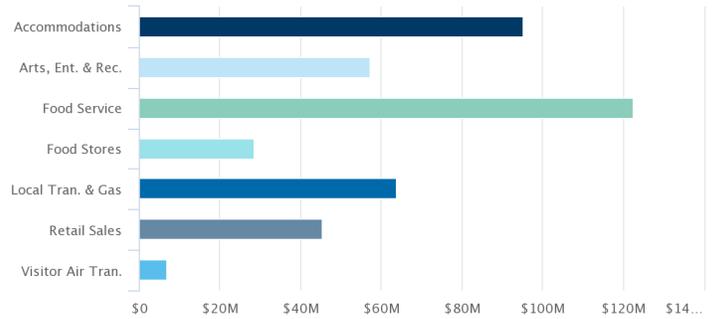
APPENDIX A

Visit California tourism stats and statements

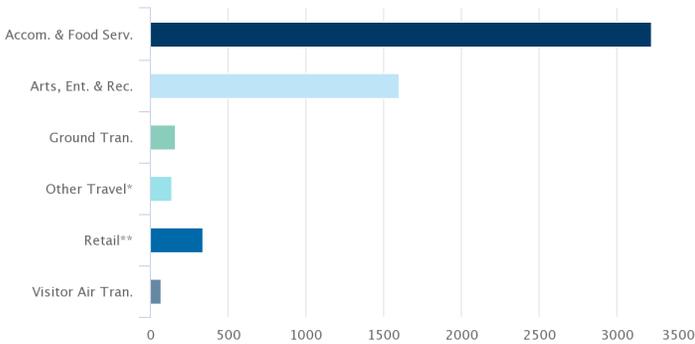
HUMBOLDT HISTORY OF TRAVEL SPENDING IN CALIFORNIA



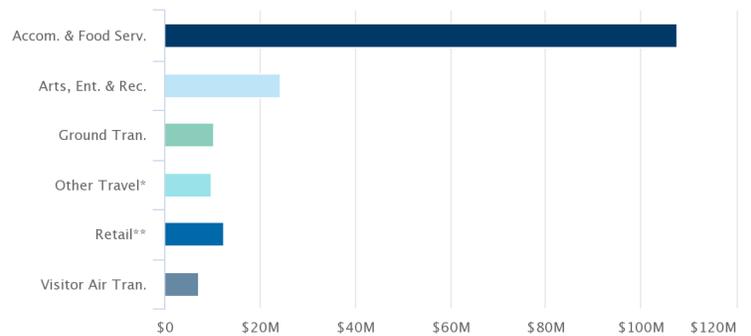
HUMBOLDT TRAVEL SPENDING BY INDUSTRY SEGMENT



HUMBOLDT TRAVEL-RELATED EMPLOYMENT



HUMBOLDT JOB EARNINGS DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY TRAVEL



2018 Travel Tourism Impact Comparison

	\$ Total	State & Local Tax Revenue	Industry-related Employment	% Total Regional spending	Travel spending by Industry Segment	Food Service	Accommodations	Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	Retail Sales
Humboldt	453.2 M	39.1 M	5.5 K	36.6		123 M	95 M	58 M	46.1 M
Mendocino	484.2 M	43.7 M	6.9 K	39		140 M	132.4 M	65 M	51.3 M
Siskiyou	201.9M	15.9 M	1.9 K	17.4		58 M	50.2 M	27 M	24.5 M
Shasta Cascade	519.6 M	41.8 M	4.9 K	52.2		132.1 M	118.4 M	61 M	67 M
Santa Cruz	1.1 B	96.9 M	11.4 K	2.9 (Bay Area)		288 M	300 M	130M	143 M

California Travel Impacts 2010 – 2018: Dean Runyan & Associates: April 2019 for Visit California.
<https://industry.visitcalifornia.com/research/economic-impact?sort=county®ion=Humboldt>