

# SPORTS TOURISM FACILITY ANALYSIS

## VISIT SEBRING



June 10, 2025

POWERED BY THE HUDDLE UP GROUP



June 10, 2025

Casey Hartt  
Tourism Director  
Visit Sebring  
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Dear Casey,

Thank you for your continued partnership throughout this project. Your team's insight and responsiveness were invaluable in helping us evaluate and reimagine the future of sports and recreation venues across Highlands County.

Enclosed is the report detailing our findings and recommendations. This document includes a full audit of 37 facilities throughout Highlands County, narrowed through in-person evaluations to highlight 12 high-potential sites, ultimately focusing on the top six (6) with the most promise for near- and mid-term sports tourism investment. The analysis for each of the top facilities includes a breakdown of current conditions, enhancement opportunities, potential event uses, community benefits, and a five-year economic impact outlook.

These insights are intended to guide next steps in facility planning and investment prioritization, supporting Highlands County's continued growth as a sports tourism destination.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions about the enclosed recommendations. We look forward to ongoing conversations and supporting the next phase of your planning efforts.

Thank you again for your trust in our team.

Yours in Sport,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon Schmieder', is positioned below the text 'Yours in Sport,'.

Jon Schmieder  
Founder + CEO  
Huddle Up Group, LLC

**Visit Sebring (VS)**  
**Sports Tourism Facility Analysis**  
**Executive Summary**

In the opinion of the Huddle Up Group (hereafter the “Consultant” or “Consultant Team”), there is an opportunity for Visit Sebring (“VS”) to improve its position among sports tourism destinations in the region. This can be achieved by executing a focused sports tourism development strategy. Throughout the process, VS’s community leaders expressed a clear interest in expanding sports tourism and strengthening engagement with local stakeholders, both encouraging signs of the region’s readiness to elevate its impact in this space.

The Consultant Team conducted a comprehensive audit of 37 venues throughout Highlands County, followed by in-person evaluations of 12 facilities selected for their potential to attract tournament-based events. Six of these emerged as top priorities based on factors such as infrastructure condition, geographic balance, and readiness for enhancement. These include:

- Max Long Complex (Sebring)
- Highlands County Sports Complex (Sebring/County)
- Fairgrounds/Alan Jay Arena (Sebring)
- Lake June Park (Lake Placid)
- Lake Verona/Donaldson Park (Avon Park)
- H.L. Bishop Park (Lake Placid)

For each, the report provides detailed recommendations, proposed capital improvements, community benefit analysis, and five-year tourism impact projections.

Facility opportunities were professionally ranked based on criteria including economic return, development feasibility, and alignment with countywide goals. The proposed expansion of the Max Long Complex stands out as the highest-impact investment, with the potential to generate more than \$60 million in five-year economic impact and position Highlands County as a regional leader in diamond sports and multi-sport hosting.

This report is intended to serve as a roadmap for smart, phased facility development. With the right investments and stakeholder alignment, Highlands County can build a sports tourism platform that delivers measurable economic benefits, supports local programming, and enhances the quality of life for residents throughout the region.

**Visit Sebring (VS)**  
**Sports Tourism Facility Analysis**  
**Synopsis**

The sports tourism industry has grown consistently over the past 30 years. A study by the Sports Tourism and Events Association – *State of the Industry Report 2023*, states that the participant driven portion of the domestic sports tourism sector was responsible for more than \$52.2 billion in direct spending as of the end of 2023. This direct spending generated a total economic impact of \$128 billion to local economies, driving over 750,000 jobs and \$20.1 billion in taxes. Each of these numbers demonstrates a significant increase in the grass roots sports tourism sector over 2021. Add to this industry growth the increased popularity of emerging sports such as pickleball, BMX, and Esports, the opportunity for the continuing expansion of economic development through sports tourism is tangible and ever-expanding.

For Highlands County and Visit Sebring, the research process revealed a clear opportunity: to grow as a player in this space by strategically enhancing and activating the community’s existing sports and recreation assets. With strong leadership, intentional facility investment, and coordinated stakeholder alignment, Highlands County is well-positioned to carve out a unique and competitive niche in Florida’s sports tourism landscape. The key will be developing and supporting tournament-ready venues that reflect both the County’s strengths and the evolving needs of event organizers. With the right plan in place, Highlands County and Visit Sebring can elevate its profile in the sports tourism marketplace and generate measurable returns for the community for years to come.

**Methodology**

The Consultant Team conducted an assessment on the current sports tourism work of VS and an analysis of the area’s sports venues. The project was led by Vice President of Partnerships Cole McKeel (West Palm Beach, FL), Airstream Ventures Founder + CEO Alan Verlander (Jacksonville, FL), Synergy Sports Global Founder + CEO Jason Boudrie (Charlotte, NC), with support from Huddle Up Group Founder + CEO Jon Schmieder (Phoenix, AZ), and Data and Communications Manager Kevin de Lange (Somonauk, IL). The project followed a six (6) step process that included:

1. An evaluation of Visit Sebring and the destination using the Sports Tourism Index™, a proprietary benchmarking tool developed by the Huddle Up Group (summarized in Appendix E). This tool provides a foundational assessment of the destination’s overall sports tourism positioning, organizational readiness, and competitive advantages.
2. A high-level desktop review of Highlands County’s sports and recreation facility inventory. The Consultant Team compiled a comprehensive list of 37 existing venues across the county. Each was assessed remotely using tools such as the Sports Tourism Index™, Google Maps, satellite imagery, and public domain resources to evaluate general facility conditions, accessibility, and potential alignment with tournament-level sports tourism standards.
3. A multiple day market visit (March 24 – March 25) that consisted of a sports tourism facility audit. The audit included tours of 12 existing sports and entertainment venues.
4. A multiple day market visit (April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 1st, 2025) that consisted of one TDC presentation meeting and a sports tourism facility audit. The audit included tours of 12 existing or planned sports and entertainment venues.

5. The creation and delivery of a strategic plan (the “playbook”) for an improved sports tourism facility inventory.
6. A follow-up conversation with VS staff 30 days following the delivery of the playbook and presentation of the findings to discuss new developments and next steps.

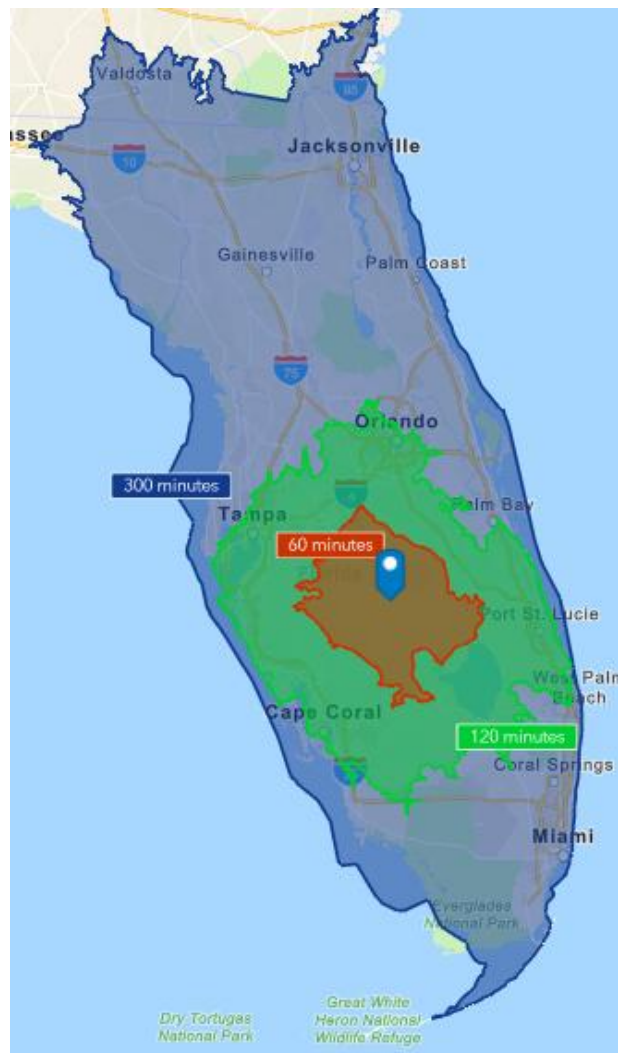
The scope of the project focused on five (5) key areas:

1. Evaluating Visit Sebring’s current positioning within the sports tourism industry using the proprietary Sports Tourism Index™ to benchmark organizational readiness, destination appeal, and competitive standing.
2. Conducting a high-level inventory of 37 sports and recreation venues across Highlands County, including remote desktop reviews and an in-person site audit of 12 priority venues identified as having high potential for tournament-based sports tourism.
3. Providing facility-specific recommendations for enhancements at each venue, with a focus on infrastructure upgrades, layout improvements, and amenity additions needed to meet tournament-quality standards and improve community access.
4. Conducting detailed economic impact modeling for the top six facility projects, including projected visitor counts, hotel room nights, community benefits, and five-year ROI estimates.
5. Prioritizing facility investment opportunities based on economic impact potential, feasibility, alignment with community goals, and geographic distribution within Highlands County.

Discussions included national best practices in each focus area, with specific attention given to how they could be applied to Visit Sebring. The goal of this process was to build community support for expanded sports tourism and venue development by engaging local stakeholders, elevating their input, and encouraging a collaborative, team-oriented approach across the region.

## Visit Sebring (VS) Sports Tourism Facility Analysis Market Analysis

Sebring’s geographic location brings with it a wealth of opportunities to attract visitors to the area. The map below highlights several large population centers that can reach Sebring within a five-hour drive, including Cape Coral, Coral Springs, Daytona Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Gainesville, Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Palm Coast, Port St. Lucie, Sarasota, Tampa, Valdosta, West Palm Beach.



Utilizing data from the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), the table on the next page provides insights into the markets that are reachable within a day's drive. It outlines key demographic factors such as the number of households, median household income, as well as the attendance and participation rates in sporting events throughout 2024. Additionally, it includes each market's Market Potential Index (MPI), where an MPI of 100 represents the national average. Markets with an MPI above 100 indicate a higher-than-average potential for demand, while those below 100 suggest lower-than-average potential, offering a clear picture of regional opportunities.

<b>Driving Distance</b>	<b>Households</b>	<b>Attended a Sporting Event in 2024</b>	<b>Sports Attendance MPI</b>	<b>Participated in any Sport in 2024*</b>	<b>Sports Participation MPI</b>
60 Minutes	139,462	39,917	87	216,971	90
120 Minutes	2,937,384	921,476	96	4,979,677	99
300 Minutes	8,539,619	2,654,616	96	14,313,388	98

\* - Participants may be counted double if they engaged in multiple sports during the year.

The data highlights a strong regional foundation for sports tourism growth in Sebring and Highlands County. Within a 60-minute drive, nearly 40,000 individuals attended a sporting event in 2024, and over 216,000 individuals participated in a sport, indicating solid local engagement. While the MPI for this radius is slightly below the national average (87 for attendance and 90 for participation), this presents a strategic growth opportunity. With the right mix of events, facilities, and outreach, there is room to activate untapped potential in the local market and boost regional participation and attendance rates.

Looking outward, the opportunity becomes even more compelling: within a two-hour drive, there are more than 920,000 sports-attending individuals and nearly 5 million active participants, aligning closely with national norms (MPIs of 96 and 99). At the broader five-hour range, Sebring is positioned within reach of over 8.5 million households and 14 million sports participants. This strong regional demand, paired with the chance to grow local engagement, places Highlands County in a highly advantageous position for sports tourism expansion.

The tables on the next page highlight the top 20 recreational sports within a 60-, 120-, and 300-minute drive of Sebring, based on MPI data. MPI scores measure the likelihood of households within a geographic area participating in a given sport compared to the national average (baseline = 100). An MPI above 100 indicates higher-than-average participation, while a score below 100 indicates lower participation rates. Importantly, a low MPI does not necessarily suggest low interest or irrelevance, it can also signal unmet demand due to limited access to facilities or programming, meaning residents may be opting for alternative activities due to infrastructure constraints. These trends help identify areas of strength as well as emerging opportunities for new facility development and event targeting.

### 60 Minute Radius

Sport	MPI
Hunting w/Rifle	144
Fishing (Salt Water)	130
Hunting w/Shotgun	126
Fishing (Fresh Water)	123
Motorcycling	120
Boating (Power)	112
Horseback Riding	110
Target Shooting	108
Archery	108
Canoeing or Kayaking	101
Golf	100
Swimming	99
Softball	97
Studio Aerobics	91
Roller Skating	89
Baseball	89
Volleyball	89
Bowling	87
Rock Climbing	85
Hiking	85

### 120 Minute Radius

Sport	MPI
Fishing (Salt Water)	109
Golf	107
Studio Aerobics	106
Boating (Power)	104
Swimming	100
Soccer	100
Rock Climbing	99
Target Shooting	99
Motorcycling	99
Bicycling (Road)	99
Bicycling (Mountain)	99
Archery	99
Roller Skating	98
Hunting w/Rifle	98
Horseback Riding	97
Bowling	97
Tennis	96
Skiing (Downhill)	96
Ping Pong	96
Hiking	96

### 300 Minute Radius

Sport	MPI
Fishing (Salt Water)	107
Golf	105
Studio Aerobics	105
Boating (Power)	102
Soccer	100
Rock Climbing	99
Bicycling (Road)	99
Swimming	98
Bicycling (Mountain)	98
Target Shooting	97
Roller Skating	97
Motorcycling	97
Horseback Riding	97
Tennis	96
Skiing (Downhill)	96
Ping Pong	96
Hiking	96
Bowling	96
Archery	96
Basketball	96

#### 60-Minute Radius Analysis

Within the local 60-minute radius, outdoor recreation and individual sports dominate the participation landscape. Activities such as hunting with rifles (MPI 144), saltwater fishing (130), and freshwater fishing (123) rank among the highest, showcasing the area's affinity for nature-based and self-directed sports. Sports like motorcycling, power boating, horseback riding, and archery also perform well above national norms. Traditional team sports such as softball (97), baseball (89), volleyball (89), and bowling (87) appear lower on the list, not necessarily due to lack of interest but potentially due to limited field space or event access in the region. These findings suggest that there is local enthusiasm for active recreation and room to grow team sports participation through targeted investment in facilities and programming.

#### 120-Minute Radius Analysis

In the broader regional market, participation trends remain strong across a wide mix of recreational activities. Fishing, golf, and studio aerobics continue to lead, while sports like soccer, swimming, and archery show solid alignment with national averages. This suggests a balanced market with diverse interests and ample room to attract event organizers across both traditional and emerging sports.

#### 300-Minute Radius Analysis

High engagement in fishing, golf, and studio aerobics remains consistent, while sports like basketball, soccer, and swimming stay within competitive range. This reinforces Highlands County's opportunity to attract regional tournaments by offering accessible, high-quality venues that meet the expectations of a large and diverse drive market.

**Visit Sebring (VS)**  
**Sports Tourism Facility Analysis**  
**National Best Practices**

The chart below outlines the fundamental benchmarks for some of the most common types of facilities that event rights holders are looking to book. “Tournament friendly” facilities are defined as those that can host most state and regional level events but would need to be paired with additional nearby venues to host top-tier national level competitions. “Anchor” facilities are defined as those that can host the largest national level tournaments **all in one location**. Beyond the pure field/court counts shown below, true “tournament friendly” and “anchor” facilities also require various amenities that provide rights holders the ability to host events. Those amenities are described later in this report.

Facility Type	Tournament Friendly	Anchor	Current VS Inventory (Highest scoring facility)
Flat Fields	8-15 fields	Minimum 16 fields	<b>Highlands County Multi-Sports Complex</b> (4 Fields)
Diamonds	8-11 fields	Minimum 12 fields	<b>Max Long Recreational Complex</b> (10 Diamonds)
Diamonds	8-11 fields	Minimum 12 fields	<b>Highlands County Sports Complex</b> (5 Diamonds)
Diamonds	8-11 fields	Minimum 12 fields	<b>Lake June</b> (7 Diamonds)
Pickleball	8-16 Courts (Local) 24-32 Courts (Regional)	40-60 Courts (National)	<b>Sun ‘N Lake Racquet Club</b> (14 Courts)
Tennis	Minimum 6 courts	Minimum 12 courts	<b>Thakkar Tennis Center</b> (6 Courts)

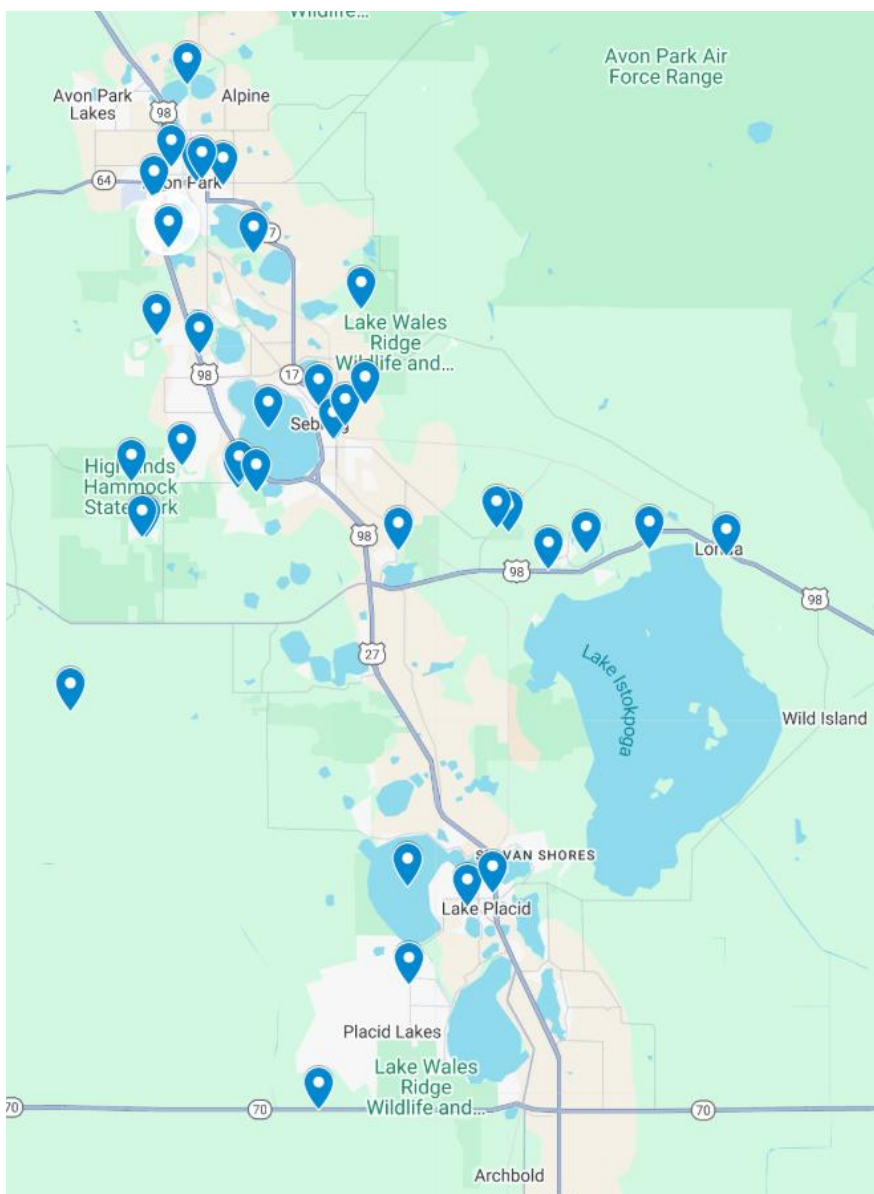
## Visit Sebring (VS)

### Sports Tourism Facility Analysis

### Full Venue Inventory Analysis

To begin the evaluation process, the Consultant Team compiled a comprehensive list of 37 existing sports and recreation venues across Highlands County. Each location was assessed remotely using the proprietary Sports Tourism Index™, supplemented with tools such as Google Maps, satellite imagery, and public domain data. This desktop audit provided a baseline understanding of the county's overall venue landscape, highlighting general facility conditions, accessibility, surrounding infrastructure, and potential alignment with sports tourism standards. The purpose of this phase was to identify which venues merited further on-site evaluation and to establish a broad context for facility enhancement opportunities countywide. The 37 venues included in this inventory are listed below and shown on the accompanying map.

- Alan Jay Arena at Fairgrounds
- Avon Park Senior Activities Center
- Charlie Brown Park
- Country Club of Sebring
- Desoto City Park
- Durrah Martin Baseball Complex
- Fireman's Field
- Golf Hammock Country Club
- Head Field Complex
- Highlands County Multi Sports Complex
- Highlands Hammock State Park
- Highlands Ridge
- Joe Franza Stadium
- Lake Istokpoga Park
- Lake Jackson
- Lake June
- Lake Placid High School
- Lake Verona
- Lincoln Heights
- Lorida Softball Field
- Max Long
- Mosquito Creek Disc Golf
- Pinecrest Golf Course
- Placid Lakes Golf Course
- River Greens Golf Course
- Roger Scarborough Memorial Stadium
- Sebring Golf Club
- Sebring International Golf Resort
- Sebring International Raceway
- Seven Sebring Raceway Hotel
- South Florida State College
- Skipper Ranch
- Spring Lake Pickleball Courts
- Square 1 Shooting Range
- Sun 'N Lake
- Tanglewood Pickleball Courts
- Thakkar Tennis Center



To better understand the composition of Highlands County’s recreational infrastructure, each of the 37 identified venues was categorized by its primary facility type. However, several of these venues include more than one venue within the same location. For example, some complexes combine diamond fields and flat fields, or feature a mix of courts and water-access areas. As a result, while 37 individual venues were reviewed, the total number of discrete facility types observed across the county was 47.

The table below illustrates that Sebring, and the broader Highlands County area have a solid foundation of diverse sports and recreation facilities. With a notable presence across both traditional and niche facility types, the region is well-positioned to support a range of community programming and tourism-driven events. At the same time, this inventory highlights several areas where additional investment could enhance the county’s competitiveness in the sports tourism space, opportunities that will be explored in more detail later in this report.

Facility Type	Number of Facilities
Golf Course	9
Diamonds	7
Pickleball Courts	5
Water Sports	5
Baseball Stadium	4
Football Stadium	3
Other	3
Flat Fields	2

Facility Type	Number of Facilities
Convention Center	2
Arena	1
Disc Golf Course	1
Motor Sports Racing Track	1
Shooting Range	1
Softball Stadium	1
Tennis	1
Theater	1

**Visit Sebring (VS)**  
**Sports Tourism Facility Analysis**  
**In-Person Venue Analysis**

Following the full venue inventory, the Consultant Team identified a subset of 12 venues for in-person site visits based on their initial tourism-readiness indicators. These venues were selected due to their scale, location, infrastructure, and potential to attract or expand tournament-based sports programming.

**Venues Visited in Person:**

- Fairgrounds/Alan Jay Arena/Fireman Field
- Max Long/Municipal Golf Course
- Highlands County Sports Complex
- Lake June Park
- H.L. Bishop Park
- Lake Verona/Donaldson Park
- South Florida State College (SFSC)
- Sun 'N Lake – All sports facilities
- Lake Jackson – Veterans Beach / Civic Center / Rotary Park
- Country Club of Sebring / Thakkar Tennis
- Square One Shooting Range
- Lake Istokpoga (fishing)

Each of these venues is profiled in the remainder of this section, with a high-level summary focused on current usage, infrastructure conditions, and opportunities for enhancement. Collectively, these sites represent the most viable facilities for short- and mid-term development into tournament-quality assets, based on a combination of layout flexibility, surface quality, spectator accommodations, adjacent amenities, and their geographic positioning within Highlands County.

Of these, six venues were identified as top-tier opportunities and are explored in greater detail in the next section, including deeper feasibility assessments and tourism impact modeling.

## Fairgrounds/Firemen Field (Sebring)

### Current Conditions & Usage Patterns

The Fairgrounds complex in Sebring includes a 28,000 square foot multi-purpose event center featuring retractable bleacher seating for approximately 2,200 spectators. While the arena has potential for hosting select indoor sporting events, its relatively low ceiling height and box-style layout limit the types of tournaments and competitions that can be accommodated.

Also located on the grounds are a community-use baseball stadium and a football stadium. These outdoor venues serve local teams and recreational programs and are valuable assets for community programming. However, their current infrastructure and layout offer limited utility for attracting regional or national sports tourism events.

### Facility Enhancement Needs

Enhancement opportunities at the Fairgrounds center on improving the site's versatility and positioning it for broader event use. Potential upgrades include the addition of an artificial turf multipurpose field and a turf baseball field to increase playability and reduce maintenance. Further, modernizing the two open-air buildings, such as installing HVAC systems and reconfiguring walls, would allow for more year-round and weather-resilient programming. Defining parking areas outside of fair-specific events could also improve the site's usability for tournaments and other visitor-focused activities.

The conceptual site plan illustrates how these elements can be integrated into the existing footprint to create a more functional, flexible, and connected event campus, balancing visitor flow, field access, and support amenities.

#### Sebring, Florida Sport Improvements

April 24th, 2025

#### Highlands County Fairgrounds

1. New Artificial Turf Multipurpose Field
2. New Artificial Turf Baseball Field
3. Modernize both open air buildings (add HVAC, remove wall, etc.) and create more defined parking for non-fair events



## Community Benefits

The proposed upgrades at the Fairgrounds would provide significant year-round value for Highlands County residents. For the county's Livestock Show & Sale, improvements to the buildings and site layout would reduce fragmentation, offering more consolidated and functional space for animal housing and exhibition. With participation in the program continuing to grow, the enhanced facilities would better accommodate both exhibitors and attendees.

The renovated venue would also support a broader range of large-scale community events beyond the Alan Jay Arena, giving Firemen expanded rental opportunities to help sustain long-term site maintenance. Additionally, with strategic planning and local partnerships, the improved facility could serve as a venue for after-school programming, summer camps, indoor pickleball, and other family-oriented activities.

Importantly, the site could also function as a more effective emergency shelter during regional weather events or crises, thanks to improved indoor spaces, accessibility, and site infrastructure. Finally, the addition of turf fields would reduce maintenance burdens while improving the quality and reliability of play for local leagues and recreational users.

## Tourism Impact Potential

With the proposed enhancements, the Fairgrounds complex could become a versatile host site for a variety of emerging and non-traditional sports tourism events. Its layout and central location make it a candidate for hosting regional and national competitions such as 7v7 football, spike ball, cornhole, horseshoe pitching, and catch ball. The indoor space, once modernized, could support events from organizations like the American Cornhole League, USA Table Tennis, and National Axe Throwing League, as well as national-level billiards and wrestling tournaments. These event types represent growing niches in the sports tourism market and offer year-round activation potential.

## Capital Investment & 5-Year Impact

The proposed upgrades to the Fairgrounds complex are expected to deliver both local community value and measurable tourism-driven returns.

- **Estimated Capital Investment:** \$1M–\$2M (depending on final scope, materials, and phasing)
- **Estimated Annual Visitors:** 20,000
- **Estimated Annual Hotel Room Nights:** 8,000
- **Average Annual Economic Impact:** \$1.7M
- **Cumulative 5-Year Economic Impact:** \$8.5M
- **Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue:** \$650,000

These figures reflect the facility's growing potential as both a community hub and a driver of regional sports tourism activity.



Economic Impact		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Non-Local Participant Days		21,739	22,391	23,063	23,755	24,468
Non-Local Spectator Days		28,261	29,109	29,982	30,881	31,808
Total Non-Local Days		50,000	51,500	53,045	54,636	56,275
Average Daily Spending Per Non-Local Person		\$ 95.00	\$ 96.90	\$ 98.84	\$ 100.81	\$ 102.83
Annual Direct Spending		\$ 4,750,000	\$ 4,990,350	\$ 5,242,862	\$ 5,508,151	\$ 5,786,863
Annual Indirect/Induced Spending	63%	\$ 2,992,500	\$ 3,143,921	\$ 3,303,003	\$ 3,470,135	\$ 3,645,724
Total Annual Economic Impact		\$ 7,742,500	\$ 8,134,271	\$ 8,545,865	\$ 8,978,285	\$ 9,432,587
State Sales Tax	6.00%	\$ 461,700	\$ 485,062	\$ 509,606	\$ 535,392	\$ 562,483
County Sales Tax	1.5%	\$ 115,425	\$ 121,266	\$ 127,402	\$ 133,848	\$ 140,621
Tourist Development Tax	5%	\$ 118,750	\$ 124,759	\$ 131,072	\$ 137,704	\$ 144,672
<b>Total County Tax Impact</b>		<b>\$ 234,175</b>	<b>\$ 246,024</b>	<b>\$ 258,473</b>	<b>\$ 271,552</b>	<b>\$ 285,292</b>

## Max Long (Sebring)

### Current Conditions & Usage Patterns

The Max Long complex includes ten grass diamond fields (eight regular fields and two designated T-Ball fields) and one large flat field, alongside the adjacent Municipal Golf Course and Mosquito Creek Disc Golf Course. The diamonds are equipped with covered dugouts, lights, and permanent concessions, making the site well-suited for hosting local and regional baseball and softball events. While the disc golf and golf amenities offer additional recreational value, the single flat field does not currently contribute to the complex's sports tourism potential.

### Facility Enhancement Needs

Max Long's development potential can be pursued through a two-tiered approach, each offering scalable benefits and infrastructure improvements.

- **Option 1 – Core Diamond Complex Enhancements:**

This option focuses on upgrading the existing 8 field complex by converting all fields to uniform 200' layouts, five with permanent fencing and three with adjustable fencing that can extend to 300'. Turfing all infields would improve durability and reduce maintenance costs. Additional improvements include new scoreboards, batting cages, expanded playgrounds, upgraded restrooms and concessions, netting for spectator safety, and enhanced site-wide infrastructure such as lighting, sound systems, and Wi-Fi. These changes would elevate the complex's ability to host mid- to large-scale baseball and softball events year-round.

### Sebring, Florida Sport Improvements

April 24th, 2025

#### Max Long Baseball Complex

1. All New Turf Infields
  2. All Turf T-Ball Fields
  3. 200' Temporary Fencing
  4. Batting Cages
  5. New Playground
  6. New Concession/Restroom Building
  7. New Parking Lot
- All New LED Lighting Throughout



- **Option 2 – Expansion via Municipal Golf Course Acreage:**

Building on the improvements outlined in Option 1, this more transformational vision includes repurposing 30–40 acres of adjacent Municipal Golf Course land to develop four multipurpose “super fields.” These fields could flex between flat field and diamond sport configurations, allowing for cross-sport usage. The expansion plan also includes dedicated parking, concessions, and event infrastructure, along with a direct connection to the existing Max Long layout to form one unified tournament complex. If completed, this project would result in the second-largest diamond complex—and the largest all-turf diamond complex by field count—within a 5+ hour radius, establishing Highlands County as a regional leader in diamond sports hosting capacity.

## Sebring, Florida Sport Improvements

April 24th, 2025

### Sebring Municipal Golf Course

#### Max Long Baseball Complex and Municipal Golf Course Improvements

1. All New Turf Infields
  2. All Turf T-Ball Fields
  3. 200' Temporary Fencing
  4. Batting Cages
  5. New Playground
  6. New Concession/Restroom Building
  7. New Parking Lots
  8. New Baseball/Multiuse Superfields
- All New LED Lighting Throughout



## Community Benefits

Both redevelopment options at Max Long offer important quality-of-life improvements for Highlands County residents. Upgrades to the existing diamond complex would directly address current needs, resolving parking challenges and expanding access for youth baseball and soccer programs that are experiencing continued growth. Enhanced facilities, including shaded seating, concessions, and flexible field configurations, would allow more practice time and local programming opportunities throughout the year.

The expanded “super field” vision in Option 2 creates even greater long-term value by diversifying the types of sports and experiences available to local families. The introduction of multi-use fields opens the door for sports like lacrosse, 7v7 football, and flag football, while also creating space for community festivals, concerts, and summer camps. The central location of Max Long, already a hub for families, makes it an ideal setting for integrating new amenities that blend recreation with entertainment.

Repurposing part of the Municipal Golf Course into a 9-hole layout would preserve traditional golf while reducing operational strain on the City’s budget. The freed-up acreage can be reimagined into a revenue-generating sports tourism asset while still aligning with community identity and recreational access. This hybrid model is already proving successful at facilities like The Cove at Paradise Coast Sports Complex, which blends sports, dining, and social spaces for both residents and visitors. Max Long has the potential to follow a similar model, balancing performance with play.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

Max Long is already active in local and regional tournament play, and with targeted enhancements, it could attract a range of high-profile baseball and softball events. Potential future partners include organizations such as USSSA, Perfect Game, USA Softball, Cal Ripken, Prospect Wire, The Alliance Fastpitch, and US Fastpitch Softball. These types of events would generate meaningful hotel stays and visitor spending while raising the county’s profile as a destination for diamond sports.

Two distinct development paths are proposed for the Max Long Complex, each offering different levels of investment, activation, and return. Both options focus on enhancing sports tourism potential while supporting community access and long-term venue sustainability.

### **Capital Investment & 5-Year Impact Overview**

- **Option 1 – Core Complex Upgrade**

This scenario focuses on modernizing the existing diamond fields and surrounding infrastructure.

- **Estimated Capital Investment:** \$3M–\$4M
- **Estimated Annual Visitors:** 25,000
- **Estimated Annual Hotel Room Nights:** 24,000
- **Average 5-Year Economic Impact:** \$21M
- **Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue:** \$1,650,000

This approach would improve Max Long’s ability to host mid- to large-scale baseball and softball tournaments year-round, offering immediate regional competitiveness with modest investment.

Economic Impact		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Non-Local Participant Days		54,348	55,978	57,658	59,387	61,169
Non-Local Spectator Days		70,652	72,772	74,955	77,204	79,520
Total Non-Local Days		125,000	128,750	132,613	136,591	140,689
Average Daily Spending Per Non-Local Person		\$ 95.00	\$ 96.90	\$ 98.84	\$ 100.81	\$ 102.83
Annual Direct Spending		\$ 11,875,000	\$ 12,475,875	\$ 13,107,154	\$ 13,770,376	\$ 14,467,157
Annual Indirect/Induced Spending	63%	\$ 7,481,250	\$ 7,859,801	\$ 8,257,507	\$ 8,675,337	\$ 9,114,309
Total Annual Economic Impact		\$ 19,356,250	\$ 20,335,676	\$ 21,364,661	\$ 22,445,713	\$ 23,581,466
State Sales Tax	6.00%	\$ 1,154,250	\$ 1,212,655	\$ 1,274,015	\$ 1,338,481	\$ 1,406,208
County Sales Tax	1.5%	\$ 288,563	\$ 303,164	\$ 318,504	\$ 334,620	\$ 351,552
Tourist Development Tax	5%	\$ 296,875	\$ 311,897	\$ 327,679	\$ 344,259	\$ 361,679
<b>Total County Tax Impact</b>		<b>\$ 585,438</b>	<b>\$ 615,061</b>	<b>\$ 646,183</b>	<b>\$ 678,880</b>	<b>\$ 713,231</b>

### • Option 2 – Full Complex Expansion via Golf Course Reuse

This transformational concept combines the upgrades from Option 1 with a large-scale expansion into adjacent Municipal Golf Course acreage to create a multi-sport super complex.

- **Estimated Capital Investment:** \$10M–\$15M
- **Estimated Annual Visitors:** 140,000
- **Estimated Annual Hotel Room Nights:** 45,000
- **Average 5-Year Economic Impact:** \$60M
- **Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue:** \$4,600,000

Option 2 would result in the second-largest diamond complex and the largest all-turf diamond complex within a 5+ hour radius, significantly increasing Highlands County's ability to attract high-volume tournaments across multiple sports. The scale and flexibility of this option also open the door for broader event formats, weekend-long festivals, and greater national reach.

Economic Impact		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Non-Local Participant Days		152,174	156,739	161,441	166,285	171,273
Non-Local Spectator Days		197,826	203,761	209,874	216,170	222,655
Total Non-Local Days		350,000	360,500	371,315	382,454	393,928
Average Daily Spending Per Non-Local Person		\$ 95.00	\$ 96.90	\$ 98.84	\$ 100.81	\$ 102.83
Annual Direct Spending		\$ 33,250,000	\$ 34,932,450	\$ 36,700,032	\$ 38,557,054	\$ 40,508,040
Annual Indirect/Induced Spending	63%	\$ 20,947,500	\$ 22,007,444	\$ 23,121,020	\$ 24,290,944	\$ 25,520,066
Total Annual Economic Impact		\$ 54,197,500	\$ 56,939,894	\$ 59,821,052	\$ 62,847,997	\$ 66,028,106
State Sales Tax	6.00%	\$ 3,231,900	\$ 3,395,434	\$ 3,567,243	\$ 3,747,746	\$ 3,937,382
County Sales Tax	1.5%	\$ 807,975	\$ 848,859	\$ 891,811	\$ 936,936	\$ 984,345
Tourist Development Tax	5%	\$ 831,250	\$ 873,311	\$ 917,501	\$ 963,926	\$ 1,012,701
<b>Total County Tax Impact</b>		<b>\$ 1,639,225</b>	<b>\$ 1,722,170</b>	<b>\$ 1,809,312</b>	<b>\$ 1,900,863</b>	<b>\$ 1,997,046</b>

## Highlands County Sports Complex (Sebring/County)

### Current Conditions & Usage Patterns

The Highlands County Sports Complex features five diamond fields and four flat fields, all of which are well-maintained with high-quality playing surfaces. The diamonds are equipped with lights and covered dugouts, while the flat fields are grass-based and currently used for soccer, football, and other field sports. Only one flat field is lit, limiting the facility's ability to host extended or evening events. Support amenities, including concessions, restrooms, meeting space, and a press box, are in excellent condition, and parking is generally sufficient for current use.

### Facility Enhancement Needs

The complex is already a strong asset for Highlands County, but strategic expansion and modernization could significantly increase its tourism value. Planned improvements include the addition of new “super fields,” turf replacements for flat fields, and upgrades to the existing football stadium and softball amenities. Acquiring adjacent land to support these enhancements is already in motion, with a state grant application submitted. These upgrades would expand tournament capacity, improve playability across multiple sports, and elevate the overall event experience.

#### Site Concept Version 2

1. New Multi-purpose Fields
2. New Parking
3. Playground
4. Existing Ballfield Diamond Complex
5. Existing Multi-purpose Fields
6. New Youth Baseball/Softball diamonds with multipurpose fields



### Community Benefits

The proposed enhancements to the Highlands County Sports Complex would deliver lasting value to residents across the region. Upgraded turf fields and improved lighting would extend usability throughout the year, allowing local leagues, schools, and recreation programs to maximize scheduling flexibility and increase participation. Expanded amenities, including modern restrooms, concessions, and spectator areas, would create a more comfortable and inviting environment for families and community members.

The addition of super fields and multipurpose spaces would also broaden the scope of local programming,

supporting sports like lacrosse, flag football, and rugby that currently lack sufficient facilities. These improvements position the complex as a central hub not only for competition but for community gatherings, wellness events, and after-school activities.

Strategically located and already well-utilized, the complex is poised to become a cornerstone of Highlands County's recreational landscape. The upgrades would strengthen civic pride, support youth development, and ensure that residents benefit from the same improvements driving sports tourism growth.

## Tourism Impact Potential

With its flexible layout and multi-sport capability, the Highlands County Sports Complex has the potential to host a broad range of high-impact events. Potential partners include USA Handball, USA Rugby, USA Archery, and governing bodies for spike ball, cricket, and lacrosse. The facility is also well-positioned to support college recruiting showcases, USL and MLS training camps, and cross-country events. These event types not only align with the complex' field configurations but also represent strong opportunities for visitor spending and overnight stays.

## Capital Investment & 5-Year Impact Overview

The proposed redevelopment of the Highlands County Sports Complex represents a high-impact opportunity to expand both the scale and versatility of Highlands County's sports infrastructure. With multipurpose upgrades, additional turf fields, and surrounding site improvements, the complex would be positioned as a premier regional host for diamond and flat field events.

- **Estimated Capital Investment:** \$10M–\$15M
- **Estimated Annual Visitors:** 85,000
- **Estimated Annual Hotel Room Nights:** 50,000
- **Average 5-Year Economic Impact:** \$51M
- **Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue:** \$3,900,000

This level of investment would significantly elevate the County's tourism profile while offering flexible programming space for community use. The project is designed to accommodate year-round tournaments, training camps, recruiting showcases, and additional activation across multiple sports disciplines.

Economic Impact		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Non-Local Participant Days		130,435	134,348	138,378	142,530	146,805
Non-Local Spectator Days		169,565	174,652	179,892	185,288	190,847
Total Non-Local Days		300,000	309,000	318,270	327,818	337,653
Average Daily Spending Per Non-Local Person		\$95	\$97	\$99	\$101	\$103
Annual Direct Spending		\$28,500,000	\$29,942,100	\$31,457,170	\$33,048,903	\$34,721,178
Annual Indirect/Induced Spending	63%	\$17,955,000	\$18,863,523	\$19,818,017	\$20,820,809	\$21,874,342
Total Annual Economic Impact		\$46,455,000	\$48,805,623	\$51,275,188	\$53,869,712	\$56,595,519
State Sales Tax	6.00%	\$2,770,200	\$2,910,372	\$3,057,637	\$3,212,353	\$3,374,898
County Sales Tax	1.5%	\$692,550	\$727,593	\$764,409	\$803,088	\$843,725
Tourist Development Tax	5%	\$712,500	\$748,553	\$786,429	\$826,223	\$868,029
Total County Tax Impact		\$1,405,050	\$1,476,146	\$1,550,838	\$1,629,311	\$1,711,754

## Lake June (Lake Placid)

### Current Conditions & Usage Patterns

This multi-sport facility includes five diamond fields, one accessible dream field, and three full-size flat fields. The diamonds are in good condition with lighting, covered dugouts, and concession support. The dream field, while unlit, serves as a valuable inclusive asset for the community. The flat fields, however, are in need of attention, equipment is outdated, and the lack of lighting limits the hours available for competitive play

### Facility Enhancement Needs

The proposed enhancements at Lake June Sports Complex focus on transforming the site into a flexible, multi-sport tournament venue. The primary upgrade includes converting the existing soccer and baseball/softball fields into four turf super fields, designed to accommodate a variety of sports including baseball, softball, soccer, football, and lacrosse. These fields would significantly increase the site's versatility and playability across all age groups and competition levels.

Additional improvements include expanding and upgrading the boat ramp and beach area to better support water-based activities and open the door to dual land-and-lake events. There is also potential to acquire adjacent land to the north to further improve access to the lake and enhance overall functionality.

To fully activate the venue for tournament use, the plan also calls for increased parking capacity, upgraded concessions, and improved site infrastructure and amenities, including restrooms, pedestrian circulation, lighting, and spectator areas. These upgrades would ensure that the facility can accommodate larger crowds and extended event schedules while maintaining a high-quality experience for both visitors and local users.

## Sebring, Florida Sport Improvements

April 24th, 2025

### Lake June Park Sports Complex

1. New Baseball/Multiuse Superfield
2. New Restroom/Concession Building
3. New Parking
4. Existing Miracle Field



## Community Benefits

The transformation of Lake June would offer wide-reaching benefits to local residents. By converting the baseball fields into multi-use super fields, the facility would better serve both youth and adult programming across a broader range of sports. Expanded flat field capacity would help meet the growing demand for soccer and other outdoor team sports. Upgraded restrooms, concessions, and parking would significantly improve the user experience, while offering a more welcoming and functional space for practices, games, and community gatherings.

## Tourism Impact Potential

With strategic investment, Lake June Sports Complex could serve as a central tournament site for a wide range of events. Potential partners include USSSA, USA Softball, Prospect Wire, The Alliance Fastpitch, and other major baseball and softball organizations. The facility could also support tournaments in soccer, lacrosse, 7v7 football, spike ball, and flag football. Its multi-sport flexibility and proximity to water assets make it an ideal candidate for expanded regional sports tourism.

## Capital Investment & 5-Year Impact Overview

The proposed upgrades to Lake June Sports Complex are expected to deliver strong community benefits and long-term tourism returns. The improvements would create a highly flexible venue for hosting both diamond and flat field sports, with added potential for water-based activation through nearby lake access.

- **Estimated Capital Investment:** \$3M–\$5M (depending on land acquisition and waterfront enhancements)
- **Estimated Annual Visitors:** 20,000
- **Estimated Annual Hotel Room Nights:** 14,000
- **Average 5-Year Economic Impact:** \$17M
- **Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue:** \$1,300,000

These figures highlight Lake June's potential as a multi-use anchor for Highlands County's sports tourism strategy, while also expanding year-round access for local programming and community use.

## **H.L. Bishop (Lake Placid)**

### **Current Conditions & Usage Patterns**

H.L. Bishop Park is a lakefront facility well-suited for recreational and organized water sports. It features a scenic shoreline with ample viewing areas, a community center, and restroom facilities that support a variety of local uses. While the park provides a strong setting for lake-based events, its limited parking presents a constraint when accommodating larger tournaments or gatherings.

### **Facility Enhancement Needs**

Suggested improvements for H.L. Bishop Park aim to enhance its usability and appeal for water-based events. These include upgrading and refurbishing the boat launch areas, moving the beach closer to the launch zone to better support large-scale events, and renovating both the clubhouse and boathouse. Adding premier lighting would further increase the site's functionality and safety.

### **Community Benefits**

The suggested improvements to H.L. Bishop Park would enhance its value not just for event organizers, but for local residents as well. An upgraded clubhouse would provide a more welcoming and functional space for community programming, meetings, and small-scale events. Expanding the beach area would increase passive recreation opportunities and allow for safer, more comfortable use during peak times. The addition of premier lighting would improve visibility and bolster safety during early morning or evening hours. Refurbished boat launch areas would support both competitive events and everyday access for local boaters, strengthening the park's role as a community waterfront hub.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

H.L. Bishop Park is well-positioned to attract a variety of water-based sports tourism events due to its direct lake access and scenic viewing areas. With the suggested improvements, the site could support high-profile events such as Pro Water cross, open water swimming competitions, and tournaments sanctioned by the American Powerboat Association. Additional opportunities include Moto Surf, electric boat races, vintage boat exhibitions, and paddleboard events. These event types align well with the park's natural assets and offer potential for strong regional draw and overnight visitation.

### **Capital Investment & 5-Year Impact Overview**

H.L. Bishop Park presents a low-cost, high-return opportunity to expand Highlands County's capacity for water-based sports tourism.

- **Estimated Capital Investment:** \$250,000–\$500,000
- **Estimated Annual Visitors:** 7,000
- **Estimated Annual Hotel Room Nights:** 2,000
- **Cumulative 5-Year Economic Impact:** \$15M
- **Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue:** \$230,000

These projections demonstrate the strong return potential of modest infrastructure investments at one of the county's most scenic and strategically located lakefront venues.

Economic Impact		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Non-Local Participant Days		7,609	7,837	8,072	8,314	8,564
Non-Local Spectator Days		9,891	10,188	10,494	10,808	11,133
Total Non-Local Days		17,500	18,025	18,566	19,123	19,696
Average Daily Spending Per Non-Local Person		\$ 95.00	\$ 96.90	\$ 98.84	\$ 100.81	\$ 102.83
Annual Direct Spending		\$ 1,662,500	\$ 1,746,623	\$ 1,835,002	\$ 1,927,853	\$ 2,025,402
Annual Indirect/Induced Spending	63%	\$ 1,047,375	\$ 1,100,372	\$ 1,156,051	\$ 1,214,547	\$ 1,276,003
Total Annual Economic Impact		\$ 2,709,875	\$ 2,846,995	\$ 2,991,053	\$ 3,142,400	\$ 3,301,405
State Sales Tax	6.00%	\$ 161,595	\$ 169,772	\$ 178,362	\$ 187,387	\$ 196,869
County Sales Tax	1.5%	\$ 40,399	\$ 42,443	\$ 44,591	\$ 46,847	\$ 49,217
Tourist Development Tax	5%	\$ 41,563	\$ 43,666	\$ 45,875	\$ 48,196	\$ 50,635
Total County Tax Impact		\$ 81,961	\$ 86,108	\$ 90,466	\$ 95,043	\$ 99,852

## Donaldson Park/Lake Verona (Avon Park)

### Current Conditions & Usage Patterns

Donaldson Park sits on the shores of Lake Verona and offers passive recreation opportunities and scenic waterfront access. The park is used for community events and casual lakefront activities, though it currently lacks the infrastructure needed to support consistent sports tourism programming.

### Facility Enhancement Needs

Suggested improvements include extending and upgrading the beach area to better accommodate larger gatherings and water-based events. Building a clubhouse with concessions would enhance functionality for both daily use and visitor events. Additionally, converting the existing tennis court area into an RV park could generate steady revenue and increase accommodation options near downtown Avon Park—filling a current gap in overnight stay capacity. With average RV park rental rates ranging from \$500 to \$900 per week, this addition would create a new revenue stream for the city.

These proposed upgrades are intended to activate one of the city’s most scenic waterfront assets while also addressing existing service gaps in visitor accommodations and event infrastructure.

## Sebring, Florida Sport Improvements

April 24th, 2025

### Lake Verona Donaldson Park

1. New Community Center
2. New RV Parking
3. New Park/Picnic Areas
4. Restroom/Concession Building
5. Existing Parking



### Community Benefits

The proposed improvements to Donaldson Park would significantly enhance community access to Lake Verona and better activate one of Avon Park’s most scenic assets. Expanding and upgrading the beach area would improve public enjoyment of the lake and support year-round recreation, while a new clubhouse or

community center would create a versatile indoor-outdoor venue for both tourism events and local gatherings. Converting the existing tennis court area into an RV park would provide much-needed overnight accommodations within walking distance of downtown, creating new opportunities for weekend stays and longer visits.

The addition of RV hook-ups would also generate a steady stream of revenue for the City of Avon Park, while bringing more visitors into the local economy—supporting restaurants, retail shops, and service providers. More broadly, the improvements prompt important long-term questions about land use and resource planning, including how best to activate the waterfront with amenities that drive both community value and economic return. These upgrades aim to strike that balance, creating a multi-use lakefront environment that serves residents and visitors alike.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

With direct access to Lake Verona and proximity to downtown Avon Park, the park is well-positioned to support a variety of water-based sports tourism events. Suggested improvements could allow the site to host competitions such as Pro Water cross, open water swimming events, American Powerboat Association races, and exhibitions like Moto Surf, electric boat showcases, vintage boat parades, and paddleboard events. These event types align with the park’s natural features and would generate both day visits and extended stays, especially with the potential addition of RV accommodations.

### **Capital Investment & 5-Year Impact Overview**

The proposed improvements at Donaldson Park represent a moderate investment with the potential to unlock significant tourism growth and community value. By enhancing lake access, adding revenue-generating RV infrastructure, and creating a flexible event space, the park could become a destination for both water-based sports tourism and regional recreation. The projected return highlights strong alignment between capital investment and long-term economic impact.

- **Estimated Capital Investment:** \$1M–\$2M
- **Estimated Annual Visitors:** 12,000
- **Estimated Annual Hotel Room Nights:** 3,000
- **Cumulative 5-Year Economic Impact:** \$5.1M
- **Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue:** \$395,000

## **South Florida State College (Avon Park)**

### **Current Conditions & Usage Patterns**

The SFSC campus includes multiple sports facilities across several disciplines. The baseball and softball stadiums offer solid playing surfaces and include lighting, scoreboards, and covered dugouts, supporting collegiate-level play. The tennis courts are equipped with lights and are used for campus and local programming. The recreation pool features several diving boards but is limited in competitive application due to its size and lane count. Indoors, the gymnasium provides a flexible space with two volleyball courts or up to two basketball courts and retractable spectator seating. The campus also offers ample parking and auxiliary rooms that support event hosting.

### **Facility Enhancement Needs**

To elevate its sports tourism potential, several facility upgrades are suggested across the SFSC campus. The baseball and softball stadiums would benefit from additional spectator seating to support tournament championship games and collegiate-level events. The tennis courts require maintenance and modernization, including the addition of scoreboards to align with competitive standards. While the indoor gym offers a solid multi-purpose layout, the limited number of courts restricts its viability for larger tournaments. Enhancing indoor court capacity and expanding on existing auxiliary space could increase the site's usability for select indoor sports events.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

SFSC's facilities, particularly the baseball, softball, and tennis amenities, provide a strong foundation for targeted tournament and showcase events. With enhancements, the campus could attract events affiliated with collegiate summer leagues, recruiting showcases, and regional tennis tournaments. While the gymnasium's court capacity limits large-scale tournaments, its quality and auxiliary space offer potential for smaller-format or rotational play events. The college setting, combined with existing infrastructure and parking, positions SFSC as a capable partner venue for sports tourism when paired with strategic improvements.

## **Sun ‘N Lake (Sebring)**

### **Current Conditions & Usage Patterns**

Sun ‘N Lake is a well-maintained golf and racquet facility that includes 36 golf holes, a short-range practice area, two putting greens, four tennis courts, and eight pickleball courts. The golf course has a proven track record of hosting tournaments and special events. Its newly renovated clubhouse features a full-service restaurant and ample indoor meeting space, making it well-suited for hospitality functions and event hosting. The tennis and pickleball courts are relatively new and in good condition, contributing to the site's appeal for racquet sport activities and community play.

### **Facility Enhancement Needs**

While upgrades can always improve user experience, the existing golf course and associated facilities are currently well-equipped to support a range of tournaments. The layout, condition, and amenities are sufficient to maintain the venue’s ability to host multiple events throughout the year.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

The golf course already contributes to the region’s tourism economy by serving as a host for several tournaments annually. These events bring in visitors, generate overnight stays, and support spending at nearby hotels, restaurants, and shops, demonstrating a sustained and positive impact on local tourism.

## **Lake Jackson/Veterans Park (Sebring)**

### **Current Conditions & Usage Patterns**

Lake Jackson is a recreational lake located in the heart of Sebring, offering a prime waterfront setting for community events and outdoor activities. Veterans Park, positioned along the shoreline, serves as a gathering space and is frequently used for festivals and smaller-scale programming. The site’s central location makes it easily accessible, though limited parking nearby presents a challenge for larger events. Continued investment in infrastructure and amenities would enhance its utility for both local use and visitor-oriented programming.

### **Facility Enhancement Needs**

To increase the tourism and event-hosting capacity of this lakefront venue, suggested improvements include expanding parking access and upgrading general site infrastructure. Enhancing shoreline access, adding shaded seating or event staging areas, and improving restroom and utility access would all support larger-scale activations such as races, festivals, or water-based competitions.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

The site already hosts notable events such as Pro Water cross, demonstrating its viability as a competitive venue. With the recommended enhancements, Donaldson Park could attract larger-scale events from organizations like the American Powerboat Association and others. Its proximity to downtown Avon Park’s hotels and restaurants adds to its appeal, offering convenient access for both participants and spectators.

## **Country Club of Sebring/Thakkar Tennis (Sebring)**

### **Current Conditions & Usage Patterns**

The Country Club of Sebring has invested in a significantly upgraded dining experience that enhances both member satisfaction and visitor appeal. The course features five tee distances, with a maximum length of 6,700 yards and a par of 71. Parking capacity is ample, allowing the venue to comfortably accommodate players and spectators during tournaments and regular play.

The Thakkar Tennis & Pickleball Complex, located at the Country Club, includes six clay tennis courts and eight pickleball courts. These courts serve both country club members and the general tennis and pickleball community. Per USTA standards, the six tennis courts can accommodate a 24-player draw.

### **Facility Enhancement Needs**

To meet the standards of modern tournament play, especially given the capabilities of today's high-level amateur and junior golfers, the course will need to be lengthened by approximately 400 yards to reach the 7,000-yard benchmark. While well-maintained by county standards, the course falls short when compared to other tournament-ready venues in Florida. Key enhancements include lengthening select holes and elevating greens to improve overall playability and prestige.

While the club has made significant improvements to its clubhouse, restaurant, and parking, its six existing tennis courts limit its capacity to host small- to large-scale tourism events. To be competitive, the facility would need 6 to 12 additional courts. Additionally, most tourism-driven tennis events prefer hard courts over clay due to weather concerns, particularly in South Florida.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

With the right upgrades, the Country Club of Sebring could position itself as a complementary high-level tournament venue alongside Sun N Lake. The course could then be a viable host for events organized by the American Junior Golf Association (AJGA), Hurricane Junior Golf Tour, and potential invitational tournaments for women. Its proximity to hotels and restaurants makes it logistically favorable for multi-day events. However, the single-course layout does mean that club members would be displaced during major events. Despite this, the economic impact from hosting several tournaments per year could deliver several thousand hotel room nights and notable tourism-driven returns for the community.

On the racquet side, tennis is a highly popular sport in Florida, and many competing facilities feature 16 or more courts. If the Thakkar Complex were expanded to that level, its tourism impact could mirror the success of golf events already hosted in the Sebring area. The complex's close proximity to lodging, dining, and regional attractions makes it well-positioned for multi-day racquet sports events as well.

## **Square One Shooting Range and Outdoor Venue (Lake Placid)**

### **Current Conditions & Usage Patterns**

Square 1 Shooting Range and Outdoor Venue is set in a scenic oak hammock within the Square 1 Cattle Ranch, a family-owned property since the late 1970s. Currently operating as an active cattle range, the site also includes three distinct gun ranges: sporting clay, rifle, and pistol. The venue already plays host to various events throughout the year, offering a unique blend of recreational and competitive shooting in a rural, natural setting.

### **Facility Enhancement Needs**

To elevate Square 1's potential for sports tourism, targeted upgrades would be necessary. These include developing better and more defined parking areas and enhancing facilities to meet the standards of Olympic-affiliated National Governing Bodies like USA Shooting and USA Archery. Specific needs include improved restroom and concession facilities, centralized registration areas, and the installation of amplified sound systems to support large-scale competitions.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

Square 1 presents a compelling opportunity to add a unique, outdoor-driven sports venue to Highlands County's tourism portfolio. Its picturesque setting and existing usage make it a natural candidate for larger events. However, the site's remote location and lack of nearby lodging and dining pose challenges for tourism scalability. With targeted marketing and necessary infrastructure improvements, the venue could become a major draw for niche shooting and archery events, potentially delivering significant economic impact.

## **Lake Istokpoga (County)**

### **Current Conditions & Usage Patterns**

Lake Istokpoga is a nearly 27,000-acre freshwater lake with an average depth of approximately four feet, making it well-suited for bass fishing and other flatwater recreational uses. It has a strong reputation in the sport fishing community and was recently named one of the top lakes of the decade by *Bassmaster Magazine*. The lake has a successful history of hosting regional and national bass fishing events, drawing anglers and visitors from across the country. While its natural setting provides a strong competitive advantage, infrastructure enhancements are needed to support larger-scale event operations.

### **Facility Enhancement Needs**

To sustain and grow its role as a host site for competitive fishing events, several infrastructure enhancements are suggested for Lake Istokpoga. These include the development of a dedicated weigh-in area, improved docks for participant and spectator access, and expanded parking to better accommodate tournament crowds and trailers. Additional amenities such as shaded areas, restrooms, and vendor space would also increase the site's functionality for multi-day events. These enhancements would help the lake remain competitive in attracting high-profile tournaments and are discussed further in the following section.

### **Tourism Impact Potential**

Lake Istokpoga is already well-known among anglers for its excellent fishing conditions, and it holds strong

appeal within the national bass fishing community. With strategic enhancements, the lake could be positioned to host high-profile tournaments such as those from Bassmaster, Major League Fishing, Kayak Bass Fishing, and Kayak Bassmaster. Its proximity to restaurants and hotels provides the necessary support infrastructure for event participants and spectators.

While the most noticeable tourism spikes would align with major tournament weeks, the increased exposure and reputation from hosting such events could drive year-round visitation. This residual effect would benefit the broader Highlands County tourism economy beyond the immediate timeframe of specific competitions.

**Visit Sebring (VS)**  
**Sports Tourism Facility Analysis**  
**Facility Enhancement Ranking**

To support strategic decision-making for Highlands County’s future investments in sports and recreation, the following facilities have been ranked based on their potential for economic impact, implementation feasibility, and alignment with broader regional goals such as expanding overnight stays, enhancing community access, and supporting tourism diversification.

**1. Max Long / Municipal Golf Course Expansion**

This site presents the most transformative opportunity. The scale of the proposed multipurpose “super field” concept, combined with its central location and existing community usage, supports high feasibility and alignment with both tourism and local recreation goals. With the potential to generate 140,000 annual visitors and \$60M in five-year economic impact, it stands out as the flagship project.

**2. Highlands County Sports Complex**

With strong existing infrastructure and multipurpose field layouts, this site is well-positioned for growth through modest but strategic enhancements. The projected \$51M five-year economic impact and its capacity for hosting national-level events make it a near-peer to Max Long, with slightly lower scalability due to space constraints.

**3. Fairgrounds / Alan Jay Arena**

A central community asset with untapped potential for non-traditional indoor sports. Modernization and added turf fields would improve year-round utility and make it a viable host for events in niche markets like cornhole, wrestling, and axe throwing. Its flexibility and downtown location elevate its impact potential.

**4. Lake June Park**

This site offers strong multi-sport and water-access potential. The proposed enhancements would create a flexible, all-season venue for both land- and lake-based sports tourism. The balanced return (\$17M projected five-year impact) and community benefits support its high placement.

**5. Lake Jackson / Veterans Beach**

Already a host to Pro Water cross events, this central lakefront site offers valuable exposure and access. Infrastructure investments would increase its viability for larger-scale water-based competitions. Its proximity to hotels and restaurants adds to its strategic importance.

**6. H.L. Bishop Park**

With relatively low capital needs, this park can serve as a high-return, niche venue for water sports events. It offers \$15M in potential impact with just \$250K–\$500K in investment, making it a budget-efficient opportunity that also improves public access and recreation.

## **7. Lake Istokpoga**

Already a respected bass fishing destination, Lake Istokpoga needs modest improvements to boost capacity for major national tournaments. Infrastructure gaps like parking and weigh-in facilities need to be addressed to unlock its full tourism potential.

## **8. Square One Shooting Range**

This facility has unique appeal for shooting and archery events, though its rural setting and lack of nearby lodging reduce its scalability. With focused investment and targeted event partnerships, it could add valuable diversity to the county's portfolio.

## **9. Lake Verona / Donaldson Park**

The combination of lakefront beauty and the potential for RV accommodations adds long-term value. However, competition with similar venues and the scale of needed upgrades place it mid-tier in this prioritization.

## **10. Country Club of Sebring**

Though it supports high-level golf, its limitations as a single-course venue and required course lengthening make it more suitable as a secondary asset rather than a lead tournament host.

## **11. Sun 'N Lake**

Already operating at a high standard for golf and racquet sports, this venue requires little to no investment to maintain its current level of contribution to local tourism. Its role remains steady but less expandable.

## **12. South Florida State College**

As a partner venue, SFSC offers valuable facilities for collegiate-level events, but space limitations and shared use constraints mean it serves best as a complement to larger, primary sites rather than a focus of investment.

The ranked list of facility enhancement opportunities reflects a strategic blend of ambition and pragmatism. Projects like the Max Long expansion and Highlands County Sports Complex rise to the top due to their capacity to catalyze substantial economic returns and elevate the region's visibility within Florida's competitive sports tourism market. Mid-tier projects like Fairgrounds, Lake June Park, and Lake Jackson offer strong upside with manageable investments, supporting both community engagement and tourism activation.

Lower-tier rankings do not reflect a lack of value but instead signal more focused or niche roles in the broader strategy, often excelling in specific disciplines or needing more phased, incremental development. Each site plays a part in a balanced, countywide approach to sports tourism growth. The path forward should involve aligning public and private resources, phasing investments based on readiness and return, and continuously evaluating community impact as projects evolve.

By taking a coordinated and data-driven approach, Visit Sebring can transform these facilities into engines of economic growth, community pride, and regional distinction in the sports tourism arena.

## Visit Sebring (VS)

### Sports Tourism Facility Analysis

### Conclusion

Highlands County has a unique opportunity to strengthen its sports tourism economy through smart, community-driven investment. With a strong central location, rich natural amenities, and a supportive base of local stakeholders, the region is well-positioned to attract more tournament play, extend visitor stays, and elevate its reputation within Florida’s competitive sports tourism market.

Through this process, the Consultant Team assessed 37 sports and recreation facilities across the county, ultimately identifying 12 venues that offered the most promise for near- and mid-term development. From that group, six facilities stood out based on their infrastructure, layout flexibility, expansion potential, and alignment with regional tourism goals. Each of these venues was analyzed in detail across a set of consistent criteria, including current conditions, enhancement needs, community benefits, tourism potential, and a five-year economic outlook.

The following chart summarizes the projected impact and investment profile for each of these top-tier venues:

	Fairgrounds/ Alan Jay	Max Long	Max Long/ Muni	Highlands County Sports Complex	H.L. Bishop	Lake June Sports Complex	Donaldson Park/ Lake Verona
Estimated Renovation Cost	\$1M- \$2M	\$3M- \$4M	\$10M- \$15M	\$10M- \$15M	\$250k- \$500k	\$3M- \$5M	\$1M- \$2M
Avg. 5-Year Economic Impact	\$8.5M	\$21M	\$60M	\$51M	\$15M	\$17M	\$5.1M
Cumulative 5-Year TDC Revenue	\$650,000	\$1,650,000	\$4,600,000	\$3,900,000	\$230,000	\$1,300,000	\$395,000
Avg. Annual Visitors	20,000	25,000	140,000	85,000	7,000	20,000	12,000

Each of these projects would contribute to Highlands County’s sports and recreation strategy in meaningful ways. However, if the Consultant Team were King For A Day (KFAD), our recommendation would be to pursue the Max Long / Municipal Golf Course expansion project as the county’s flagship investment. This site presents the most scalable impact, highest long-term return, and greatest opportunity for transformation, both in the tourism space and in how residents interact with their recreational assets.

With an estimated 140,000 annual visitors and \$60 million in projected five-year economic impact, the Max Long / Muni concept would establish one of the largest all-turf diamond complexes in a five-hour radius, while also introducing multipurpose super fields that support a wide range of events. The project would resolve long-standing facility gaps, activate underused acreage, and create a regional tournament destination that benefits athletes, families, and the hospitality sector alike.

Moving forward, the County’s next steps should focus on aligning capital resources, securing stakeholder consensus, and establishing a phasing plan that prioritizes impact without losing momentum. The foundation is in place, now is the time to build something transformative for Highlands County’s future in sports.

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