

New NFIB Survey: Small Business Optimism Rises

The NFIB Small Business Optimism Index rose 1.7 points in July to 100.3, slightly above the 52-year average of 98. Contributing most to the rise in the Optimism Index were respondents reporting better business conditions and reporting that it is a good time to expand. In contrast to the Optimism Index, the Uncertainty Index increased by eight points from June to 97. Twenty-one percent of small business owners reported labor quality as their single most important problem, up five points from June and ranking as the top problem.

“Optimism rose slightly in July with owners reporting more positive expectations on business conditions and expansion opportunities,” said NFIB Chief Economist Bill Dunkelberg. “While uncertainty is still high, the next six months will hopefully offer business owners more clarity, especially as owners see the results of Congress making the 20 percent Small Business Deduction permanent and the final shape of trade policy. Meanwhile, labor quality has become the top issue on Main Street again.”

“North Dakota’s small businesses are experiencing a slight uptick in

optimism, but many owners still express concerns about the impact of inflation,” said NFIB North Dakota State Director Don Larson. “Congress making the 20 percent small business tax deduction permanent has helped boost confidence. North Dakota’s lawmakers and leaders must consider more ways to give our small businesses relief.”

Key findings include:

- In July, there was a notable improvement in overall business health. When asked to rate the overall health of their business, 13 percent reported excellent (up five points), and 52 percent reported good (up three points). Thirty-one percent reported the health of their business was fair (down four points), and 4 percent reported poor (down three points).
- The percent of small business owners reporting poor sales as their top business problem rose one point to 11 percent. This is the highest level of poor sales since February 2021.
- The net percent of owners expecting better business conditions rose 14 points from June to a net 36 percent (seasonally adjusted). This reading is comfortably above the historical average.
- In July, 16 percent (seasonally adjusted) reported that it is a good time to expand their business, up five points from June.
- Eleven percent of owners reported that inflation was their single most important problem in operating their business, unchanged from June’s lowest reading since September 2021.
- The net percent of owners expecting higher real sales volumes fell one point from June to a net 6 percent (seasonally adjusted). Though expected real sales are higher than actual sales, the current reading is also comfortably below the 52-year average.
- Twenty-two percent (seasonally adjusted) plan capital outlays in the next six months, up one point from June, but seven points below the historical average of 29 percent.

As reported in NFIB’s monthly jobs report, a seasonally adjusted 33 percent of all small business owners reported job openings they could not fill in July, down three points from June and the lowest level since December 2020, though still well above its monthly historical average of 25 percent. Of the 57 percent of owners hiring or trying to hire in June, 84 percent reported few or no qualified applicants for the positions they were trying to fill. A seasonally adjusted net 14 percent of owners plan to create new jobs in the next three months, up one point from June.

The percent of business owners reporting labor costs as the single most important problem fell one point from June to 9 percent.

Seasonally adjusted, a net 27 percent reported raising compensation, down six points from June. A seasonally adjusted net 17 percent plan to raise compensation in the next three months, down two points from June.

Fifty-five percent of small business owners reported capital outlays in the last six months, up five points from June’s lowest reading since

August 2020.

Of those making expenditures, 38 percent reported spending on new equipment, 23 percent acquired vehicles, and 15 percent improved or expanded facilities. Twelve percent spent money on new fixtures and furniture and 5% acquired new buildings or land for expansion.

A net negative 9 percent of all owners (seasonally adjusted) reported higher nominal sales in the past three months, down four points from June.

The net percent of owners reporting inventory gains remained at a net negative 8 percent, seasonally adjusted. Not seasonally adjusted, 12 percent reported increases in stocks, and 17 percent reported reductions. A net negative 3 percent (seasonally adjusted) of owners viewed current inventory stocks as “too low” in July, two points higher than June’s negative 5 percent reading.

Seasonally adjusted, a net 28 percent plan to increase prices, down four points from June. As with actual price changes, this is well above its historical average and is a signal of continued inflation. The net percent of owners raising average selling prices fell five points from June to a net 24 percent, seasonally adjusted. Unadjusted, 12 percent of owners reported lower average selling prices, and 37 percent reported higher average prices.

The frequency of reports of positive profit trends remained at a net negative 22 percent (seasonally adjusted) in July. Among owners reporting lower profits, 34 percent blamed weaker sales, 13 percent cited the rise in the cost of materials, 11 percent cited labor costs, and 9 percent cited price change for their product(s) or service(s). For owners reporting higher profits, 48 percent credited sales volumes, 30 percent cited usual seasonal change, and 10 percent cited higher selling prices.

Four percent of owners reported that financing and interest rates were their top business problem in July, up one point from June. Twenty-five percent of all owners reported borrowing on a regular basis, down one point from June and a historically low reading. A net 4 percent reported their last loan was harder to get than in previous attempts, down one point from June. A net 5 percent reported paying a higher rate on their most recent loan, down four points from June and matching the monthly average.

Seventeen percent of small business owners reported taxes as their single most important problem, down two points from June and ranking as the second top problem. The percent of small business owners reporting government regulations and red tape as their single most important problem fell one point to 8 percent, making it the fifth most important issue overall. Six percent reported competition from large businesses as their single most important problem, down one point from June.

The NFIB Research Center has collected Small Business Economic Trends data with quarterly surveys since the fourth quarter of 1973 and monthly surveys since 1986. Survey respondents are randomly drawn from NFIB’s membership. The report is released on the second Tuesday of each month. This survey was conducted in July 2025.

Lake Bottoms Suffer When Wakesurf Boats Rev Up, Study Finds

By Mike Moen, Public News Service

Boat dealers in North Dakota sell wakesurfing watercraft, as its popularity spreads. But before you buy one of these power boats, a regional study suggests careful operation to protect the health of lakes. Wakesurfing appears to be perfect summer fun that can be taken up by most age groups. It involves riding a surfboard behind a boat and being pulled along by the wake.

But because of the powerful waves created, conservationists worry about the possibility of shoreline erosion.

The University of Minnesota’s Saint Anthony Falls Lab has been studying this, and lab Researcher Andy Riesgraf said in certain situations, their new findings show significant disturbance to the lake bottom. “There’s processes at the lake bed where nutrients are involved,” said Riesgraf, “and if you disturb those sediments, it could release nutrients that are now available for things like algal growth.”

And force from the boat kicking up cloudy sediment can make it hard for fish to see, disrupting their search for food. The worst impact

was recorded at depths of nine and fourteen feet, when the boats are at high speed.

Study authors aren’t taking sides, but they say surf mode should only be used when the water depth is at least twenty feet. The boating industry has disputed the growing body of research.

In 2022, Saint Anthony Lab issued the first phase of this study. That data indicated wakesurf boats require a distance of at least 500 feet from shore to minimize the potential for environmental harms. Industry voices say that’s too extreme.

Whether or not states adopt new restrictions, Riesgraf said he hopes boat operators keep these findings in mind.

“Just having people be aware that there are impacts,” said Riesgraf, “and trying to make you know, conscious decisions of what depth to operate the boat.”

Next up, he said, lab officials are looking at the difference between wind-driven waves and the ones generated by powerboats, in hopes of providing clarity about another sticking point in this debate. Those results could be ready by next summer.

Dakota Datebook: Frances Densmore

By Carol Wilson

In the summer of 1912, two peculiar figures trekked across the Ft. Berthold Reservation wearing high-collared dresses and heavy petticoats in the hot summer sun. Ms. Frances Densmore and her sister Margaret stuck out like a sore thumb as they hauled ungainly machinery such as a typewriter, a phonograph and camera equipment across the natives’ land.

It was unusual for any woman of the time to travel to a reservation unescorted. But Frances Densmore was not a typical woman. She was an amateur anthropologist who traveled throughout the United States to gather wax cylinder recordings of Native American songs for the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology.

Ms. Densmore’s interest in Native American music was sparked as a young child when she and her family lived across the Mississippi River from a tribe of Sioux in Red Wing, Minnesota. “We could hear the throb of the drum when they were dancing,” wrote Densmore, “And sometimes we could see the flickering light of their campfire.”

Densmore went on to receive a formal education in piano and organ music at a conservatory, yet her fascination with Native American music never faded. At a time when Indians were considered strange and their music uncivilized, Densmore recognized the importance of music in understanding native culture. “Indian song, in my observation, is far from being a spontaneous outburst of melody,” wrote Densmore. “On the contrary there is around it the dignity and control which pervade

the whole life of the race.”

On September 4, 1912, Ms. Densmore was recording and preserving tribal songs of the Indians at the Ft. Berthold reservation. While at the reservation, she transcribed the phonograms into sheet music, and with the help of a native woman named Scattered Corn, she was also able to provide the English translation of the songs.

During her visits to North Dakota, Densmore recorded songs and interviews with such tribes as the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Teton Sioux. Some of Densmore’s best work came out of her research on the Dakota Sioux. For example, she managed to convince Sioux tribal members at the Standing Rock Reservation to talk on the phonograph about their sacred Sun Dance, a ceremony that had been outlawed by the U.S. government in 1882.

Densmore’s work is an early example of oral history recordings, an increasingly important part of historical preservation. Much of her North Dakota collection was donated to the State Historical Society, where it remains today.

Dakota Datebook: Return To The Elkhorn Ranch

By Jack Dura

On September 2 in 1890, Theodore Roosevelt returned to Medora for his last substantial visit to his Elkhorn Ranch. Arriving with his wife Edith, two sisters and three other companions, the party was met with heavy rain at the train station. Roosevelt’s ranch managers Sylvane Ferris and Bill Merrifield were there to meet them.

After a visit to Joe Ferris’s store, the group made its way at dawn to the ranch, 33 miles north across rugged badlands. This was Edith Roosevelt’s first and only visit to her husband’s ranch, built in 1884 along the Little Missouri River. With no road, the party had to cross the river 23 times.

By noon the ranch was in sight, and Edith’s initial attitude about the landscape improved with the better light. The ranch house was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide with two stories and a sloped roof. The house featured eight rooms, including Roosevelt’s master bedroom, containing a rubber bathtub and library.

Bill Merrifield’s wife provided lunch, and then Theodore gave a tour. They climbed the countryside and encountered rattlesnakes and prairie dogs. Theodore’s sister Corinne tried to wrangle a calf while Edith rode a horse named Wire Fence. They watched cowboys lasso heifers for branding, and explored the meadows and the scenic landscape.

Like her husband, Edith Roosevelt came to appreciate the badlands, though the area impacted the future president much more. Through living, ranching and hunting in North Dakota, Theodore Roosevelt gained a respect for the outdoors and conservation. The West’s landscape and people helped him recover following the twin deaths of his mother and first wife, and he later credited North Dakota with enabling him to be president.

The Roosevelt party left the ranch one week later, heading west to Yellowstone Park. While Edith would never return, her husband came back for brief hunting trips.

In December 1897, as he was about to enter the Spanish-American War, he sold his ranch and remaining cattle to Sylvane Ferris. In 1901, the ranch house was dismantled by scavengers.

All told, Roosevelt lost over \$20,000 ranching in the badlands, but his experiences were a defining chapter of his life.



PUBLIC NOTICE

The Mountrail County Planning & Zoning Board will hold a Public Hearing on **Monday, September 22nd, 2025 at 8:35 A.M.** via GOTOMEETING or in the Commissioners room in the Mountrail County Courthouse located at 101 North Main Street, Stanley, North Dakota, for the purpose of discussing a conditional use request filed by Landon & Cheryl Stern-Applcant/Landowner, for the purpose of placing a mobile home in an agricultural zone on a tract of land described as the NW1/4 of Section 9, Township 154 North, Range 94 West (**Unorganized Township**).

The provision regarding a conditional use is contained within the Mountrail County Zoning Land Development Code. The Land Development Code may be viewed at the Mountrail County Planner’s Office during office hours or online at www.co.mountrail.nd.us under the Planning & Zoning section.

If you are unable to attend the public hearing, written comments can be mailed to Mountrail County Planning & Zoning, PO Box 248, Stanley ND 58784-0248 and will be accepted until **Noon** on Friday, September 12th, 2025. Phone: 701-628-2909 or Email: melissav@co.mountrail.nd.us.

Mountrail County complies with Title VI Nondiscrimination Standards and the Americans with Disabilities Act. These policies can be viewed at the Mountrail County Human Resources Office. If any special accommodations are required, please contact: Mountrail County Title VI Compliance & ADA Coordinator, Randi Schumaier, P.O. Box 69, Stanley, ND 58784-0069, phone: 701-628-8980, Fax: 701-628-2276, email: rschumaier@co.mountrail.nd.us.

September 22nd, 2025 P&Z meeting
Monday, September 22nd, 2025, 8:30 AM - 1:30 PM (CDT)

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Dated at Stanley, North Dakota this 29th day of August, 2025,
Charlie Sorenson, Chairman
Planning & Zoning Commission

ATTEST:
Melissa Vachal
Planning & Zoning Administrator
Sept. 3, 10, 2025

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Mountrail County Planning & Zoning Board will hold a Public Hearing on **Monday, September 22nd, 2025 at 8:38 A.M.** via GOTOMEETING or in the Commissioners room in the Mountrail County Courthouse located at 101 North Main Street, Stanley, North Dakota, for the purpose of discussing a conditional use request filed by Smartlink Group o/b/o AT&T-Applcant in concurrence with Mountrail-Williams Electric Cooperative-Landowner, for the purpose of modifying existing cell tower in an agricultural zone, on a tract of land described as Outlot 1 of the NE1/4SE1/4 of Section 13, Township 153 North, Range 92 West (**Knife River Township**).

The provision regarding a conditional use is contained within the Mountrail County Zoning Land Development Code. The Land Development Code may be viewed at the Mountrail County Planner’s Office during office hours or online at www.co.mountrail.nd.us under the Planning & Zoning section.

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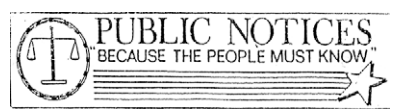
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The Mountrail County Planning & Zoning Board will hold a Public Hearing on **Monday, September 22nd, 2025 at 8:41 A.M.** via GOTOMEETING or in the Commissioners room in the Mountrail County Courthouse located at 101 North Main Street, Stanley, North Dakota, for the purpose receiving comments on a subdivision plat filed by WSB LLC-Applcant in concurrence with Three Affiliated Tribes of Ft Berthold Reservation-Landowner, for the future sale of residential lots. Legal Description: A tract of land known as Parshall Bay Subdivision 2nd Addition consisting of lots 1-7 Block 1, located in part of the S1/2SE1/4 Section 1, Township 151 North, Range 91 West (**Liberty Township**).

The provision regarding a subdivision is contained within the Mountrail County Land Development Code. The Land Development Code may be viewed at the Mountrail County Planner’s Office during office hours or online at www.co.mountrail.nd.us under the Planning & Zoning section.

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Planning & Zoning Administrator
Sept. 3, 10, 2025



PUBLIC NOTICE

The Mountrail County Planning & Zoning Board will hold a Public Hearing on **Monday, September 22nd, 2025 at 8:50 A.M.** via GOTOMEETING or in the Commissioners room in the Mountrail County Courthouse located at 101 North Main Street, Stanley, North Dakota, for the purpose of receiving comments on a conditional use filed by Terry Clayton-Applcant in concurrence with LVH-15 LLC-Landowner, for the purpose creating a retail space in a commercial zone, a tract of land described as a Replat of Outlot 4 being portions of Outlot 4 & Outlot 6 located in the SE1/4SE1/4 of Section 17, Township 152 North, Range 91 West (**Van Hook Township**).

The provision regarding a conditional use is contained within the Mountrail County Zoning Land Development Code. The Land Development Code may be viewed at the Mountrail County Planner’s Office during office hours or online at www.co.mountrail.nd.us under the Planning & Zoning section.

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