

Outdoor show draws big crowds despite freezing weather, wind

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AUGUSTA — Frigid temperatures and blustery winds didn't keep folks away from the fairgrounds last weekend for the first-ever Potomac Highlands Sports and Outdoor Show.

Hampshire County Convention and Visitors Bureau director – and event organizer – Tina Ladd said she was “very pleased” with the turnout.

“It was freezing, people were patient and waited and I appreciate that very much,” she said.

The line was out the door for the show, which mostly took place in the exhibit buildings on the fairgrounds. The interior of the building was packed with vendors and the chatter of passionate hunters, anglers and people who were just plain passionate about the outdoors.

“We had so many people, they couldn't get in the building!” Ladd laughed. Wristband numbers on Saturday totaled 1,501, with 284 more on Sunday.

Ladd said if it weren't for the winter precipitation and flurries that swirled through the air Sunday, there probably would have been more.

Many vendors said they were looking forward to returning next year; they had just as much success at this smaller, inaugural show in Hampshire County as they did at some of the bigger shows statewide, Ladd said.

While the weather didn't stop attendees from rolling their pickups onto the fairgrounds, it was definitely something Ladd considered when planning the event for March. But March, she said, is a great time of year to hold an event like this for two main reasons.

The first, she said, is tourism-related. March isn't a time of year where there's a huge flow of people into the county, so having a larger-scale event like the outdoor show can help to bring people into the area and get them to stay for a weekend.

The second reason is that in early March, Ladd said, many hunters and anglers aren't doing anything outdoors. It's a sort of "off-season," which would make an event like this one an attractive thing to attend in preparation for the spring season.

Overall, Ladd said, the event was a smash. The turkey calling competition brought in people from all over, there was plenty for kids to do, and there were lots and lots of opportunities for attendees to purchase items and also an educational element with the Laurel Fork falconer, who held several sessions on the fairgrounds over the weekend to teach folks about raptor birds.

The second-ever Hampshire County Farm Crawl is next on the docket for Ladd and the HCCVB, scheduled for July. Visit cometohampshire.com/events/hampshire-county-farm-crawl/ for more information.