

# Traffic less than expected during Cabela's opening

*Officials say no problems expected for grand opening*

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TOWN OF RICHFIELD - Traffic tie-ups at Cabela's soft opening this past weekend were scarce, local law enforcement officials said Tuesday.

"Ultimately there were no problems," Jackson Police Chief Jed Dolnick said.

Cabela's officials had been expecting more than 100,000 visitors during the store's opening weekend. Even more are expected when the national retailer of outdoor gear celebrates its grand opening Oct. 6 through Oct. 8 and Oct. 14 through Oct. 16.

Washington County Sheriff Brian Rahn said estimates for the opening weekend show about 20,000 visitors on Friday, 25,000 on Saturday, and somewhere in between those two figures on Sunday.

Official estimates for Sunday were not available yet, he said.

"We didn't want it (traffic) backing out onto the freeway, but that never happened," Rahn said. "Overall it was a pretty uneventful weekend."

At issue was whether the Cabela's location, situated in a 60-acre triangle between the intersections of highways 41, 45 and 145, could adequately handle the number of cars expected opening weekend.

The soft opening was accompanied with little advertising, but an aggressive marketing push is expected for the grand opening festivities, which may draw 130,000 to 150,000 customers each weekend.

Cabela's had said prior to the weekend that three customers occupied an average carload. That means up to 33,000 cars were expected to swarm the area during the initial weekend.

The Washington County Sheriff's Department scheduled six to eight additional officers to direct traffic for the soft opening, and planned to schedule even more for the grand opening.



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***Cabela's customers mingle in the main lobby at the Richfield supercenter's VIP Day shopping event last week. Law enforcement officials were concerned the number of cars expected last weekend would create overflow problems along the three highways that surround the complex.***

But Rahn said that shouldn't be necessary because there were no problems directing traffic this past weekend.

Cabela's incurred the overtime costs for staffing the officers, Rahn said.

"We'll probably schedule what we were planning to schedule for the soft opening," he said. "We'll start out with what we planned and if it doesn't escalate (to heavier traffic), we can always start to scale back. It's a lot easier to send someone home than try to find additional officers to come in."

John Castillo, a spokesman for new Cabela's store openings, said opening weekend projections were based on experiences opening past supercenters. He said the opening weekend was "consistent with what we projected for the Wisconsin market."

Castillo would not disclose a specific number of visitors for the opening weekend.

Dolnick said it helped that traffic patterns were "scattered throughout the weekend," as opposed to, say, a Milwaukee Brewers game that can attract 20,000 to 50,000 people in a very tight time frame. The Jackson Police Department moved shifts around and also scheduled a handful of overtime shifts throughout the weekend.

Dolnick was most concerned with a scenario that could have seen heavy rerouting of traffic in the event of ramp closures if "things would've gotten bad." Highway 145, the only route leading to Cabela's Way, is only two lanes.

A closure of either on-ramp could have seen more traffic sent to the highway 60 and 45 area in Jackson, Dolnick said.

That never happened, Dolnick said, but he scheduled one or two extra law enforcement officers just in case. Jackson typically will have one to three officers on patrol at a given time, depending on the time of day.

"I didn't want to take the chance of having the officers on duty tied up there," he said. "We try to be prepared but at the same time we don't want to incur too many overtime costs."

Dolnick said there are no plans at this time to staff additional officers for either of the two grand opening weekends, but he will keep a watchful eye on any developments and staff accordingly, he said.

Officials were afraid traffic tie-ups might mirror a typical night at the Washington County Fair, such as the performance of rock band Poison last July that drew 35,000 people and slowed traffic in the area for hours.