

St. Louis County approves \$1 million film production incentive

Brooks Johnson | December 15, 2020



DULUTH — St. Louis County will be offering up to \$1 million to film and TV crews as an incentive to bring productions, and jobs, to the region.

The program, approved by county commissioners on Tuesday, will allow productions to apply for rebates on eligible expenses. It's the first county-based film incentive in the state and will be run by the Upper Midwest Film Office (formerly the Upper Minnesota Film Office).

"I'm so, so thrilled that our leadership in St. Louis County is so

forward-thinking — they get it," said the group's director, Riki McManus. "It's truly the fastest form of job creation post-pandemic."

McManus said she has more than two dozen productions interested in filming in the region. She said it could take expanded state incentives to get the big-money productions, however.

Minnesota's "Snowbate" incentive has fallen from \$6 million in 2017 to \$500,000 per year.

The state missed out on a chance to host production on the Disney film "Clouds" and a "Mighty Ducks" series due in part to a lack of incentives.

The county incentive caps efforts by the Upper Midwest Film Office and Catalyst Story Institute, which brought its indie TV festival and ongoing outreach to Duluth last year. The Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board has a small incentive as well.

County officials expect it would take time before any refunds are issued, which would occur after a project wraps up and total no more than a quarter of production costs.

"Even with the establishment of the program now, significant use of the program would not be expected to take place for a period of time due to the length of time necessary to coordinate production locations," county documents say. "The critical aspect of establishing the program now is the marketing and messaging necessary to promote its availability." ■

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