

The Economic Future of Outdoor Recreation in Cibola and McKinley Counties

Trail use in the mountains and mesas of Cibola and McKinley counties, New Mexico, has been increasing in recent years, attracting residents and visitors and contributing to the local economy. In partnership with Cibola Trails Alliance, Cibola Outdoors, the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments, Adventure Gallup, and the U.S. Forest Service, Headwaters Economics modeled the trail use and associated economic impact.

Trails in Cibola and McKinley Counties are in high demand.

Hikers, bikers, and horseback riders were measured through a combination of infrared trail counters and statistical analyses from June 2023 to May 2024.



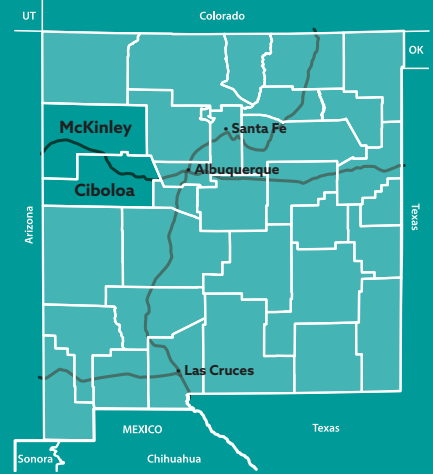
114,000 annual trail trips.

This is more than the combined population of Cibola and McKinley counties and amounts to more than 300 trips per day.



30% of trail users are visitors.

About 33,000 trail trips were made by visitors who came from at least 50 miles away. Most visitors come from Albuquerque.



Outdoor recreation diversifies the local economy.

Visitors who use trails in the region spend money in local businesses, stay in hotels, and eat in restaurants. This translates into local economic benefits as these businesses employ residents, pay taxes, and support other businesses. As trail use grows, so will the outdoor recreation economy.



\$1.7 million in visitor spending at local businesses by people who come for outdoor recreation. This spending represents new money brought into the community.



\$249,000 in labor income generated by trail users across diverse businesses, including retail, lodging, restaurants, and professional services.



\$127,000 in state and local tax revenue generated due to economic activity created by trail users.

Trails connect the community.

More than two-thirds of trail users are local residents. Trails contribute to community cohesion, business development, and public health.



▶ Trails help attract and keep residents and businesses.

People want to live close to trails, and business owners see trail access as a recruitment tool.¹

▶ Trails benefit community health.

Community trails have been shown to help increase residents' levels of physical activity.²

▶ Trails create community connections.

Trails can create opportunities for social connection and safe places for recreation, improving a community's quality of life.³



"Cibola County is primed to be the next hot spot for low key, high value outdoor recreation opportunities. It's why we started our business here."

**-Kendra Brown,
Rinconada Adventures**



For more information about the outdoor recreation economy in Cibola County, NM, please contact Les Gaines, Cibola Outdoors: plesant74@gmail.com.

For more information about the methods used in this analysis, please contact Megan Lawson, Ph.D.: megan@headwaterseconomics.org.



Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group whose mission is to improve community development and land management decisions. <https://headwaterseconomics.org>

Methods & Definitions

Trail trips are the number of times someone travels in one direction along the trail. Due to out-and-back use, the number of people using trails is less than the number of trail trips.

Trail trips do not include motorized use due to methodological limitations. Trail trips were estimated using advanced statistical methods that combine data from infrared trail counters with data from cloud-based sources like apps. For more details, see: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/outdoor-recreation/measuring-trail-use-w-new-mexico/>.

Economic impacts were modeled in IMPLAN in partnership with the Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research at the University of Montana.

Labor income includes the ripple effect created by trail use. Trail visitors spend money at local businesses (direct income). In turn, those businesses purchase supplies from other businesses (indirect income), and employees of those businesses spend their wages on everyday needs (induced income), creating a ripple effect.

References

1. Sage JL. (2020). Using Tourism to Recruit New Business: Tourism's Role in Economic Development. Pub. 7-2020. Missoula, MT: Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research. https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1410&context=itrr_pubs
2. Lawson M. (2016). Measuring Trail Benefits: Public Health. Bozeman, MT: Headwaters Economics. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/trails-library-public-health-overview.pdf>
3. Lawson M. (2016). Measuring Trails Benefits: Quality of Life. Bozeman, MT: Headwaters Economics. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/trails-library-quality-of-life-overview.pdf>