

Bears Ears National Monument

A summary of economic performance in surrounding counties



Photo courtesy Friends of Cedar Mesa

BACKGROUND

The 1.36-million-acre Bears Ears National Monument was designated in 2016 to protect lands of exceptional ecological, cultural, and archeological value, including more than 100,000 Indigenous ancestral sites and diverse desert ecosystems. Located in San Juan County, Utah, the monument is jointly managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Monument designation was led by the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, and Ute Indian Tribe.

PUBLIC ACCESS AND USES

The monument allows livestock grazing and numerous recreation activities, including hiking, backpacking, rock climbing, river rafting, and riding off-highway vehicles. In 2022, the monument attracted 445,937 visitors.¹

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Travel and tourism are important to communities in the Bears Ears region, representing about 26% of total private wage and salary employment, or 698 jobs, in 2022.² Outdoor recreation contributed more than \$9.76 billion to Utah's economy in 2023.³

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Research shows that conserving public lands like the Bears Ears National Monument helps to safeguard and highlight amenities that draw new residents, tourists, and businesses to surrounding communities.⁴

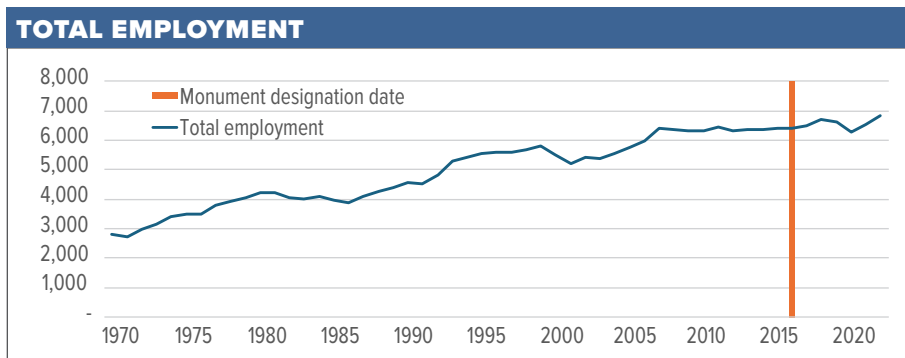
Western counties with protected public lands, like national monuments, have been more successful at attracting fast-growing economic sectors and as a result grow more quickly, on average, than counties without protected public lands. In addition, protected natural amenities—such as the towering sandstone cliffs, deep canyons, expansive desert landscapes and ancient archeological sites found at Bears Ears National Monument—also help sustain property values and attract new investment.

ECONOMY IS STEADY AFTER DESIGNATION

The communities in San Juan County, Utah, neighboring the Bears Ears National Monument (the Bears Ears region) held steady after the designation of the monument, but saw large gains in personal income and per capita income.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Bears Ears region:⁵

- Population grew by 6%.
- Jobs grew by 31%.



SERVICE JOBS INCREASING

Service jobs—such as doctors, restaurant workers, and teachers—account for the majority of employment growth in the Bears Ears region in recent decades. These jobs are increasingly mobile, and many entrepreneurs locate their businesses in areas with a high quality of life.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Bears Ears region:⁵

- Service jobs grew from 2,657 to 3,604, a 36% increase.
- Non-service jobs grew from 1,161 to 1,591, a 37% increase.

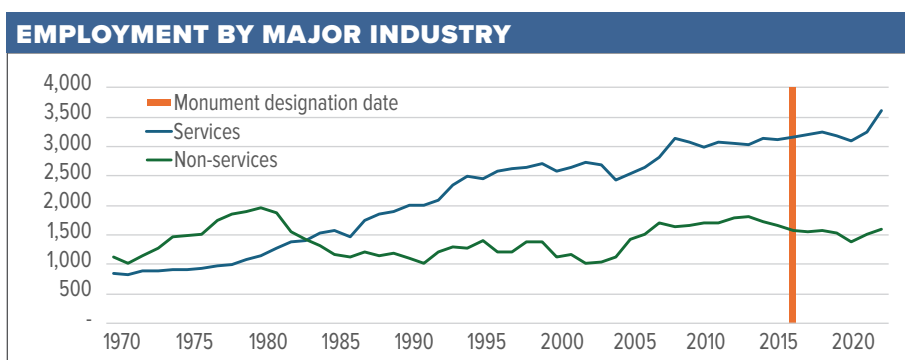




Photo courtesy Jeremiah Watt

The communities in San Juan County neighboring the Bears Ears National Monument experienced strong growth since its designation in 2016. The increases in personal income and per capita income mirror other Western counties with national monuments or other protected lands.

ABOUT

This fact sheet is part of a series created by Headwaters Economics that assesses the economic performance of local communities adjacent to national monuments. For more information, see <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/economic-performance-national-monuments>.

1. Bureau of Land Management. (2022). Bears Ears National Monument Annual Manager's Report, 2022. Monticello, UT: Bureau of Land Management, Monticello Field Office. Retrieved from https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2023-09/BearsEars_NM_2022_ManagersReport_508.pdf

2. U.S. Department of Labor. 2023. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington, D.C.

3. U.S. Department of Commerce. 2024. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, Washington, D.C.

4. Headwaters Economics. (2021). National Monuments Can Boost Local Economies. Bozeman, MT: Headwaters Economics. Retrieved from <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/national-monuments-studies/>

5. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2023). Regional Economic Accounts. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from <https://www.bea.gov/data/economic-accounts/regional>

6. Lawson, M. (2019). Non-Labor Income in the Rural West. Bozeman, MT: Headwaters Economics. Retrieved from <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/papl-lawson/>

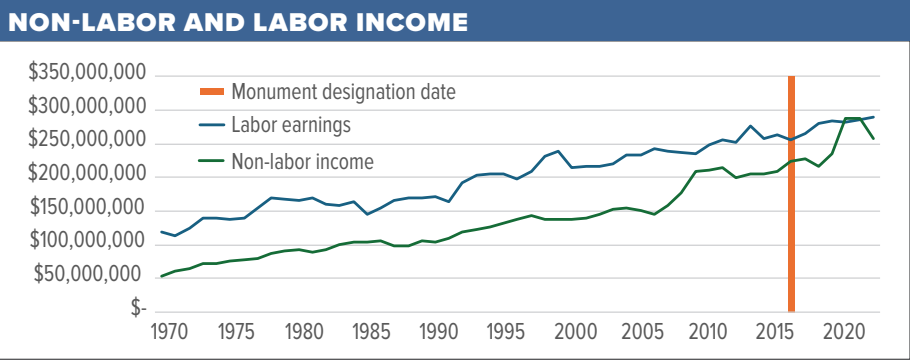
NON-LABOR INCOME GROWS FASTEST

One of the largest and fastest growing sources of new personal income in the Bears Ears region is non-labor income, which is made up of investment income such as dividends, interest and rent, and government transfer payments such as Social Security and Medicare.

For people with investment income and many retirees, protected public lands and recreation provide important aspects of a high quality of life. Non-labor income already represents more than a third of all personal income in the West—and will grow as the Baby Boomer generation retires.⁶

From 2001 to 2022 in the Bears Ears region:⁵

- Non-labor income grew from \$140 million to \$257 million, an 84% increase.
- As a result, in 2022 non-labor income made up 47% of total personal income.



TRADITIONAL JOBS HOLD STEADY

Long before the monument's creation, commodity industries (agriculture, mining, timber) were becoming a smaller share of the overall economy in the Bears Ears region. These industries remain part of the region's economy today.

In 2022 in the Bears Ears region:

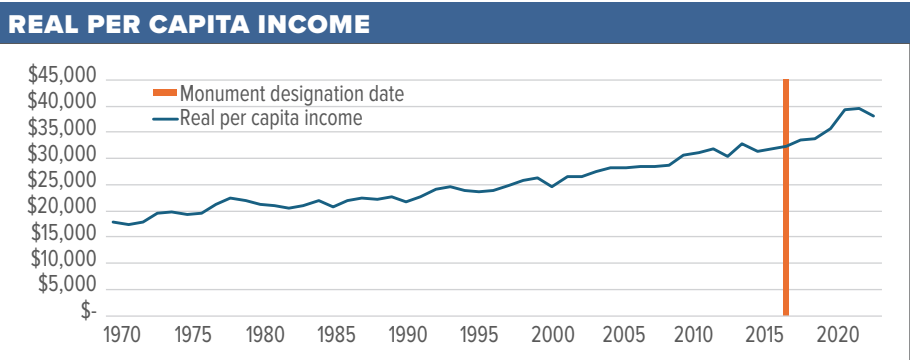
- Agriculture accounted for 10% of total employment⁵
- Mining accounted for 11% of total employment²
- Timber accounted for 0.3% of total employment²
- Services accounted for 53% of total employment.⁵

PROSPERITY ON THE RISE

As the economy has grown since designation of the Bears Ears National Monument, per capita income has risen as well. This indicates growing prosperity in the region.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Bears Ears region:⁵

- Real per capita income grew from \$26,438 to \$38,160, a 44% increase.
- Real earnings per job grew from \$45,558 to \$49,304, an 8% increase.



Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group that works to improve community development and land management decisions.