

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

A summary of economic performance in surrounding counties



Photo courtesy Bob Wick

BACKGROUND

The 1.9-million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was designated in 1996 to protect lands that host unspoiled natural beauty from spectacular cliffs and terraces, to the rugged Kaiparowits Plateau, and the wonders of the Escalante River canyons. Located in Garfield and Kane counties, Utah, the monument is managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The Hopi Tribe, the Navajo Nation, the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Zuni Tribe helped to lead monument designation.

PUBLIC ACCESS AND USES

The monument allows grazing, rights of way, hunting, fishing, and many other activities. In 2022, the monument attracted 1.03 million visitors.¹

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Travel and tourism are important to communities in the Grand Staircase-Escalante region, representing about 51% of total private wage and salary employment, or 2,689 jobs, in 2024.² 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 Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument helps to safeguard and highlight amenities that draw new visitors, businesses, and residents to surrounding communities.⁴

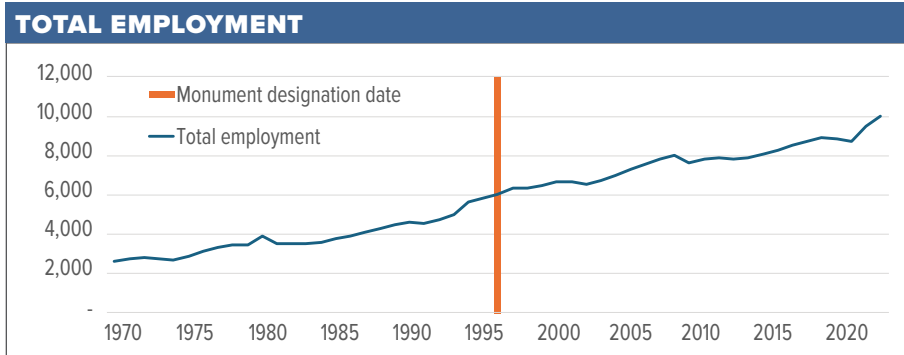
Western counties with protected public lands, like national monuments, have been more successful at attracting fast-growing economic sectors and as a result grow more quickly, on average, than counties without protected public lands. In addition, protected natural amenities—such as the multicolored cliffs, slot canyons, and remote desert vistas found at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument—also help sustain property values and attract new investment.

ECONOMY GROWS AFTER DESIGNATION

The communities in Garfield and Kane counties, Utah, that neighbor the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument grew after the designation of the monument, continuing previous growth trends.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Grand Staircase-Escalante region:⁵

- Population grew by 26%.
- Jobs grew by 51%.



SERVICE JOBS INCREASING

Service jobs—such as doctors, hospitality workers, and teachers—account for most of the employment growth in the Grand Staircase-Escalante 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 Grand Staircase-Escalante region:⁵

- Service jobs grew from 4,029 to 7,389 jobs, a 83% increase.²
- Non-service jobs grew from 1,009 to 1,260, a 25% increase.²

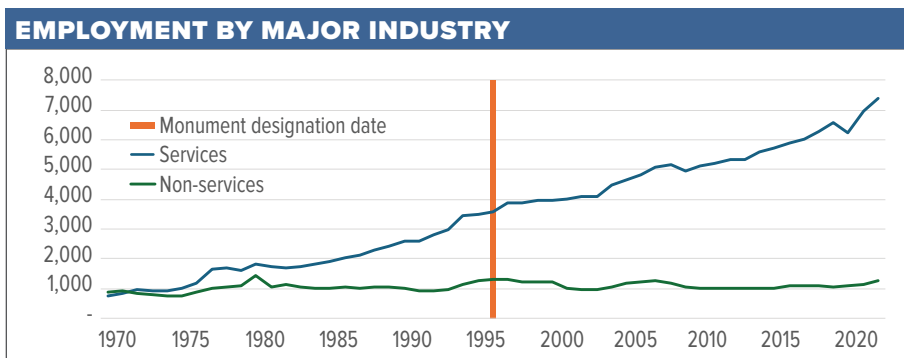




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The communities in Garfield and Kane counties neighboring the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument experienced strong growth since its designation in 1996. The increases in population, jobs, personal income, and per capita income mirror other 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). Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument Annual Manager’s Report, 2022. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. Retrieved from <https://nps.history.com/publications/blm/grand-staircase-escalante/ann-mgr-rpt-2022.pdf>

2. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/cew/>

3. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2024). Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

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/>

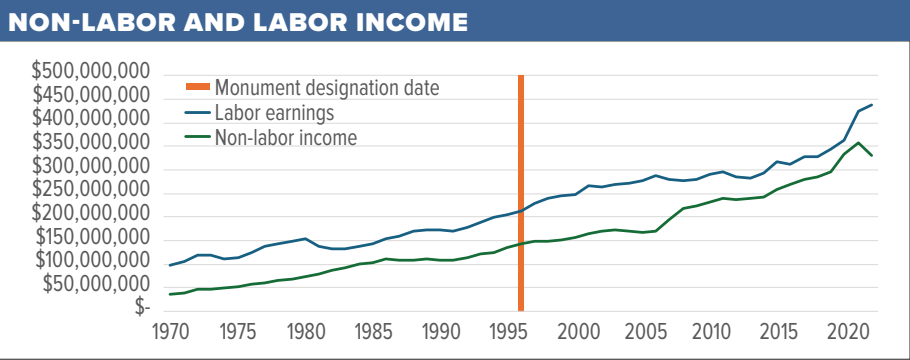
NON-LABOR INCOME GROWS FASTEST

One of the largest and fastest growing sources of new personal income in the Grand Staircase-Escalante 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 Grand Staircase-Escalante region:⁵

- Non-labor income grew from \$166 million to \$330 million, a 99% increase.
- In 2022, non-labor income made up 43% 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 Grand Staircase-Escalante region. These industries remain a small part of the region’s economy today.

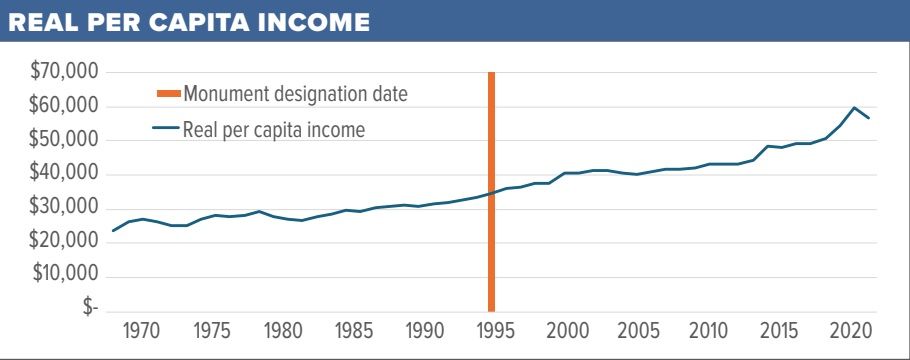
In the decade prior to monument designation, mining averaged 7 jobs annually in the region. In the decades since designation, mining averaged 24 jobs annually.²

PROSPERITY ON THE RISE

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

From 2001 to 2022 in the Grand Staircase-Escalante region:⁵

- Real per capita income grew from \$40,372 to \$56,780, a 41% increase.
- Real earnings per job grew from \$40,783 to \$51,279, a 26% increase.



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