

Doña Ana County's Public Lands and Economic Prosperity



Protected public lands are a competitive economic advantage in southern New Mexico and Doña Ana County. These lands safeguard important natural assets and cultural landmarks, stimulate tourism and recreation jobs, and attract new people and businesses.

Southern New Mexico's competitive strengths and mix of economic activities have evolved in recent years. People are moving to the region because of its high quality of life. Services industries that employ a wide range of people—from doctors and engineers to teachers and accountants—are driving economic growth and make up the large majority of jobs today. These industries are raising wages and, along with rapid increases in non-labor income from investment and retirement sources, are helping to elevate per capita income.

Looking ahead, protecting the world-class public lands that surround Las Cruces should be an important part of any economic development strategy for the region.



Clockwise starting at left: Organ Mountains, Sierra de las Uvas Mountains, Las Cruces Farmers and Craft Market

BENEFITS OF PARKS, MONUMENTS, AND WILDERNESS

National parks and monuments are particularly important in New Mexico. In 2009, for example, National Park Service units in the state attracted 1,659,574 visitors who spent more than \$62 million and supported 1,452 jobs in adjacent communities.⁷

In the same year, Carlsbad Caverns National Park and White Sands National Monument in southern New Mexico attracted the highest visitation and had the largest economic impact in the state. Carlsbad had 432,639 visitors who spent \$23 million and supported 433 jobs. White Sands had 471,167 visitors who spent \$16 million and supported 275 jobs.⁸



Mount Riley, Potrillo Mountains Complex

WHAT STUDIES SAY ABOUT THE ECONOMIC ROLE OF PROTECTED PUBLIC LANDS

A large and growing body of literature demonstrates that protected public lands assist western communities working to promote a more robust economic future.¹

· Outdoor recreation is important to western economies. In New Mexico, for example, the Outdoor Industry Foundation reports that active outdoor recreation contributes \$3.8 billion annually to the state's economy, supporting 43,000 jobs.²

· Services jobs such as engineers and architects are increasingly mobile, and many entrepreneurs locate their businesses in areas with a high quality of life. Conserving lands, while also creating a new visibility for them through protective designations, helps safeguard and highlight the amenities that attract people and businesses.³

· For many seniors and soon-to-be retirees, protected public lands and recreation provide important aspects of a high quality of life. Non-labor sources of income already represent more than a third of all personal income in the West—and will grow as the Baby Boomer generation retires.⁴

· The counties in the West 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.⁵

· Protected natural amenities—such as pristine scenery and wildlife—help sustain property values and attract new investment.⁶

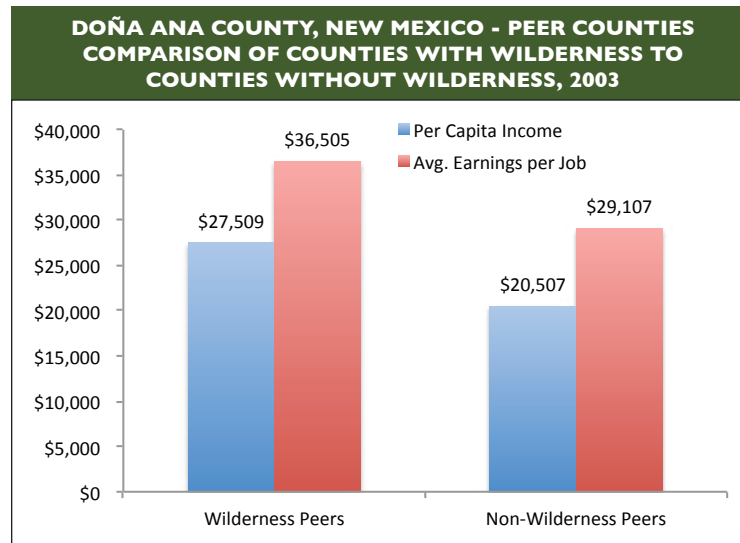
Recent research on the economic contributions of large national monuments in the West created in the last generation (a total of 17 monuments) found that adjacent economies grew, adding new jobs, and per capita income increased, in real terms, in every case after the creation of these national monuments.⁹

In more than two-thirds of monument communities, economies grew faster than the comparable portion of the rest of the state where the national monument was located. In the case of El Malpais National Monument outside of Grants, New Mexico, designation coincided with a reversal of declines in leading economic indicators (population, employment, personal income, and per capita income).

The growth of tourism and recreation is part of this success story. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, recreation benefits include "increasing local employment, wage levels, and income, reducing poverty, and improving education and health." The Economic Research Service also found that job earnings in recreation counties are \$2,000 higher than for non-recreation counties.¹⁰

In Doña Ana County specifically, a 2006 study found that the Las Cruces area would likely benefit from additional protections to its dramatic public lands. The report concluded that the combination of shifting demographics, employment growth in new economy sectors, ready access to larger markets, and presence of a major university would allow Doña Ana County to experience "positive effects on future prosperity—and that the more public lands afforded these protections the better for the area economy."¹¹

This same study found that Doña Ana County’s peers around the West with and without Wilderness had different performance characteristics. As the figure below shows, Doña Ana’s peers with Wilderness had higher per capita income and earnings per job than peers without Wilderness.¹²



DOÑA ANA COUNTY: PRIMED FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Doña Ana County’s economy is one of the fastest growing in New Mexico, and has added significant new jobs and personal income during recent decades. A mix of service-related industries account for most of this growth, along with a dramatic expansion of investment and retirement related income. Average earnings per job and per capita income, established measures of well-being, also are on the rise.¹³

Las Cruces is the main population center of Doña Ana County. The city lies in the Mesilla Valley at the junction of Interstates 10 and 25, and is flanked by the Rio Grand River to the West and the scenic Organ Mountains to the east.

The federal government owns more than 1.8 million acres, or 75 percent of all land in Doña Ana County. The Bureau of Land Management is the largest land manager with 1.1 million acres, followed by the U.S. military at just less than 430,000 acres.

Of these federal lands, 104,314 acres, or 5.7 percent, currently have some level of special protection.¹⁴ Examples include the Organ Mountain National Recreation Area, San Andreas National Wildlife Refuge, and part of White Sands National Monument. In addition, there are a number of popular state parks.

In part because of these appealing lands, a growing number of people are attracted to Doña Ana County. In the last decade, the county added more than 31,000 new residents, making the greater Las Cruces area one of the fastest growing in the state.

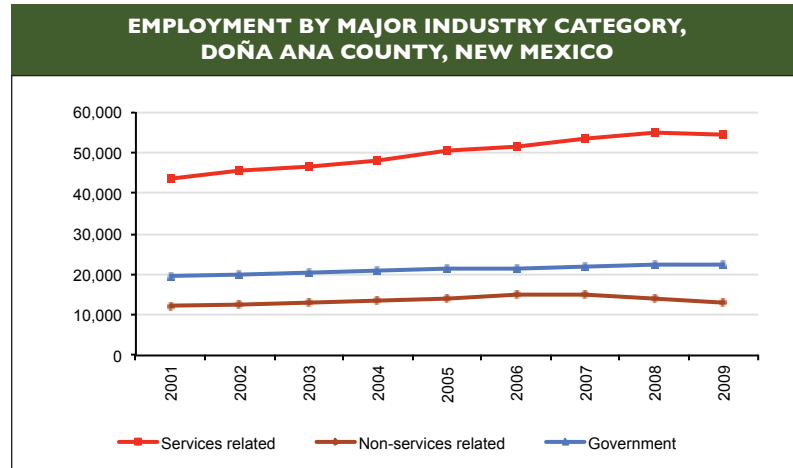


East Potrillo Mountains

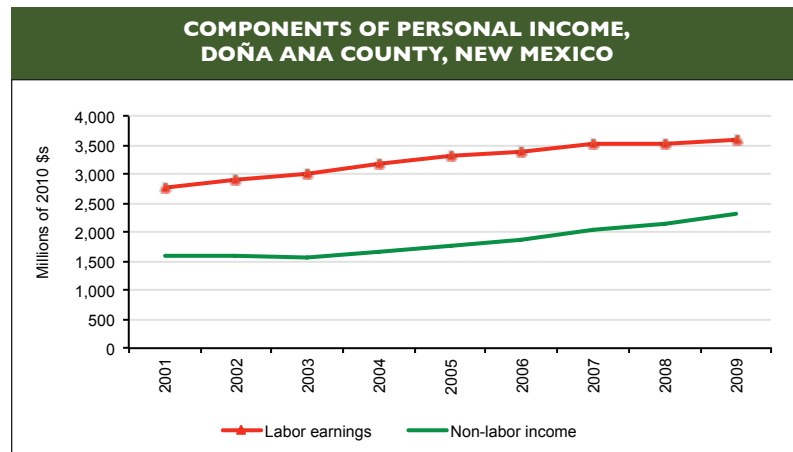
KEY FEATURES OF DOÑA ANA COUNTY’S PUBLIC LANDS

Doña Ana County is home to a range of unique cultural, historic, ecological, and recreational areas in close proximity to Las Cruces, New Mexico. It contains eight wilderness study areas that include the Organ Mountains, Aden Lava Flow, and American and pre-American history, including the Camino Real Trail and Butterfield Stage Coach Trail. The county features a variety of pinon-juniper woodland, mixed mountain shrubs, ponderosa pines, native chihuahuan desert grasslands, and rugged mountainous terrain with steep-sided crevices, canyons, and spires.

Doña Ana County also has one of the fastest growing economies in New Mexico. In the last decade the county created almost 14,000 new jobs, an 18.4 percent increase in employment. Most of these new jobs—more than 10,000—are in services-related sectors. The most substantial growth occurred in health care and social assistance (3,842 new jobs), professional and technical services (1,356 new jobs), and accommodation and food services (1,258 new jobs).



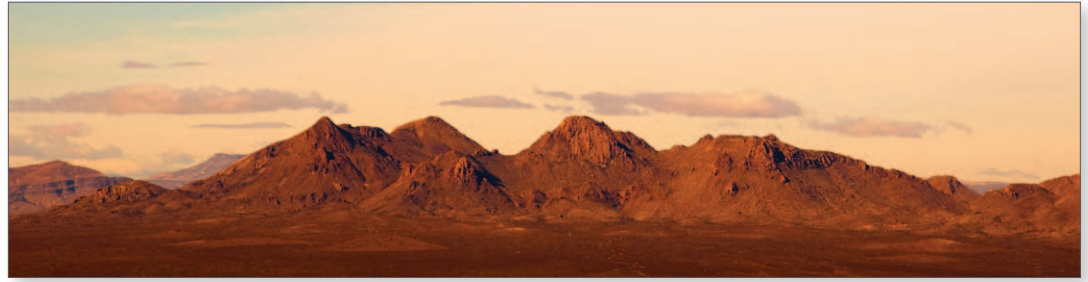
In addition, real personal income has grown significantly faster than employment in the county. Higher earnings per job and the dramatic increase in non-labor sources of income account for this rapid growth.



Non-labor income added \$866 million, in real terms, to the Doña Ana County economy in the last decade, a 60 percent increase. It now accounts for \$2.3 billion, or 39 percent of total personal income in the county. Non-labor income consists of investment income from dividends, interest and rent, and government transfer payments, a large portion of which is retirement-related from programs like Medicare and Social Security.

One significant reason people and new businesses are moving to Doña Ana County is the quality of life the region supports. As a result, Las Cruces sits atop many “best places” lists.¹⁵ The county’s favorable mix of climate, scenic public lands, transportation connectivity, excellent health care facilities, and New Mexico State University make it a popular destination for tourist and outdoor enthusiasts, a top retirement site, and a competitive site for high tech and footloose businesses.

Activities that degrade this quality of life, such as threats to scenic public lands and popular recreation areas, could undermine the region’s ability to compete for people and businesses in the future.



Doña Ana Mountains

BENEFITS TO LOCAL BUSINESSES

Some public lands have unique and special characteristics that qualify them for consideration for some form of protection. In Doña Ana County, this is the case for BLM lands that surround Las Cruces but for the most part remain classified as multiple use lands.

In order to better understand how the greater Las Cruces economy currently benefits from surrounds public lands and how it might benefit if these lands were protected and branded as such, we interviewed a number of individuals and business owners.

HOSPITALITY

Sylvia Byrnes and her husband are long-time owners of Happy Trails Inn in Old Mesilla, which caters both to vacationers and people who are considering relocating to southern New Mexico.

Sylvia says her clients “come for the open spaces, the pristine land, and the views, especially of the mountains—these are our ocean views.” Her guests often remark that they love the ability to hike in the mountains and the desert close to Las Cruces, and enjoy the feeling of freedom from this experience.

To Sylvia, the Mesilla Valley with its surrounding public lands is the opposite of Disney World, a contrived and crowded experience where you have to wait in line. She

thinks back to an earlier Phoenix before it was overdeveloped and believes Las Cruces occupies an unusual niche. “People come for the peace and quiet; you feel good here,” she says.

Happy Trails Inn often hosts families with young kids, who, according to Sylvia, “love hiking, a simpler experience, and the gentle climate.” Many guests are also seniors who come to investigate Doña Ana County as a potential retirement spot. Sylvia reports that these early retirees are an active and resourceful group, who also help out in the community. “The land is what they come for; that’s what drew me here and so many others.” When asked whether protecting the surrounding public lands that she and her guests enjoy would help her business, Sylvia says “yes” without hesitation. “If you develop those public lands, you lose everything. This is what we have here that is unique. My guests keep coming back year after year because of it.”



In the last decade, real personal income has grown more than twice as fast as employment, and in 2009 retirement-related income in Doña Ana County amounted to \$622 million. Accommodation and food services accounted for 6,667 wage and salary jobs in the county that same year.

RECREATION

David Crider has worked in the travel industry for years and opened Southwest Expeditions in Old Mesilla and Las Cruces last year. The company “offers unique local nature tours, as well as Kayak, river tubes and bike rentals for you to enjoy the pristine outdoors. As a local eco-nature touring company, we provide nature hikes and adventure throughout the beautiful Southwest for the outdoor enthusiast.”



Natural Water Tanks (Tinajas), Broad Canyon

In 2009, travel and tourism related industries in Doña Ana County amounted to 9,683 jobs in 2009, or 19.2 percent of total private wage and salary employment.

His focus is delivering outdoor and educational experiences to locals as well as visitors to the Southwest and the Las Cruces area specifically. David and his staff provide a guided experience, handle meal and travel logistics, and offer equipment rentals. He is proud that Southwest Expeditions is able to provide access to unique outdoor landmarks including rivers, deserts, petroglyphs, and ghost towns that the public otherwise might not access.

David’s target market is middle-income families with kids. He has seen the same trends as the broader pleasure travel business in his own business: fewer “fly away” vacations and more local and regional tourism that are affordable for families who can drive to a destination.

The wide-open spaces, dramatic views, and pristine lands and river corridors are the core of David’s livelihood. He says, “This is the quintessential West. This is what people expect, what they are looking for.” It’s also the reason David located his business in Doña Ana County.

Asked whether protecting the natural resources he guides the public to would make a difference for his business, he says “Protective designations lend credibility to the trips we’re running. The public does not pay as much attention to regular, multiple-use BLM lands. But if they are protected and signed, it is easier for us to sell trips.” He adds, “While I am not an advocate for more rules per se, regulations minimize damage and that’s good for my business.”



Top of the World Ridge, Sierra de las Uvas Mountains

REAL ESTATE

Renee Frank is a realtor in Las Cruces. In her work she regularly meets people who are thinking about moving to the Las Cruces area.



Sonoma Ranch Golf Course

In the last decade, net in-migration added 13,752 new people to Doña Ana County, or 44 percent of population growth for this period. Real estate and rental and leasing sectors in the county supported 2,581 jobs in 2009.

“It wasn’t until I got into real estate that I realized how important the local attraction of an area is,” according to Renee. “People are looking for quality of life. And this is what we’re all about, what pulls people here, and keeps them here.”

“We’re all interested in growth and development,” she says, “but at the same time we want to make sure the very things that make our community stand out—make it a great place to live—are protected.”

Renee says that for many of her clients quality of life centers on “the tremendous vistas here. You can see clear skies, mountains in all directions, and open, high desert landscapes.” Real estate values reflect the premium people accord these views.

She also notes, “People like seeing the land in its natural state, the way it’s been for centuries; and knowing there is a rich human history here that goes with the landscape.”

Natural assets are part of the competitive position for Las Cruces, according to Renee. They appeal to a wide range of people, including young families, retirees, and business owners.

HIGH TECH

Richard Majestic is President of the High Tech Consortium (HTC) of southern New Mexico, which focuses on the retention and growth of technology companies in the region and whose goal is “to make New Mexico a regional technology leader and national center for technical excellence.”

Richard says the public lands surrounding Las Cruces are an important plus for the region—they are why he moved the area and a tool HTC uses to recruit new businesses.



View of Mesilla Valley and Organ Mountains

Professional and technical services industries in Doña Ana County accounted for 4,884 jobs, representing 5.5 percent of total employment in 2009. In the last decade, these industries added 1,356 new jobs, an increase of 45 percent

He sees a number of resources fitting integrally together as foundations of Las Cruces’ future: strong engineering programs at New Mexico State University, a vital community of high technology businesses that hire graduates and export knowledge and products, and a world class quality of life that helps to retain the best faculty, students, and entrepreneurs.

HTC supports new protections for surrounding public lands, and not only because alongside more traditional business incentives they give Las Cruces a competitive edge. The Jornada Aquifer, which lies below the city is one of the cleanest in southern New Mexico, could easily be degraded by development on surrounding BLM lands. According to Richard, “Water is the scarcest resource in southern New Mexico, and the quality and quantity of water is a primary concern for HTC as we pursue our business-focused mission.”



Petroglyphs, Sierra de las Uvas Mountains

SUMMARY

Doña Ana County's public lands give it a competitive advantage compared to many other western communities. These lands today make important contributions to the region's in-migration, economic growth, and rising salaries and wages.

Doña Ana County's pristine and culturally rich public lands also are an important economic foundation for future prosperity. They support a growing travel and tourism sector, and will help attract new residents and businesses across a range of industries.

Protecting these resources is a smart decision that capitalizes on the competitive benefits of distinctive public lands in today's modern economy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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1 For a summary of recent literature, see: http://headwaterseconomics.org/wphw/wpcontent/uploads/Protected_Lands_Economics.pdf.

2 The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: A \$730 Billion Annual Contribution to the U.S. Economy. 2006. Outdoor Industry Foundation, Boulder, Colorado.

3 Lorah, P. R. Southwick, et al. 2003. Environmental Protection, Population Change, and Economic Development in the Rural Western United States. *Population and Environment* 24(3): 255-272; McGranahan, D. A. 1999. Natural Amenities Drive Rural Population Change. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Washington, D.C.

4 Frey, W.H. 2006. America's Regional Demographics in the '00 Decade: The Role of Seniors, Boomers and New Minorities. The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.

5 Rasker, R. 2006. An Exploration into the Economic Impact of Industrial Development versus Conservation on Western Public Lands. *Society & Natural Resources* 19(3): 191-207.

6 Deller, S. C., T.-H. Tsai, et al. 2001. The Role of Amenities and Quality of Life in Rural Economic Growth. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 83(2): 352-365.

7 For full citation and additional information, see: <http://headwaterseconomics.org/headwaters/economicimpact-of-national-parks/>.

8 Ibid.

9 For full citation and additional information, see: <http://headwaterseconomics.org/land/reports/nationalmonuments/>.

10 Reeder, R.J., D.M. Brown. 2005. Recreation, Tourism, and Rural Well-Being. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Washington, D.C.

11 The Potential Economic Impacts of Wilderness in Doña Ana County, New Mexico. 2006. Sonoran Institute, Tucson, Arizona.

12 Ibid. For details on peer counties and selection criteria, see report pages 25-26.

13 Demographic and economic data on Doña Ana County here and below from: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2010. Census Bureau, Population Division, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce. 2011. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Information System, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce. 2011. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, Washington, D.C.

14 These acres include some of the following: National Parks and Preserves, Wilderness, National Conservation Areas, National Monuments, National Recreation Areas, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, Waterfowl Production Areas, Wildlife Management Areas, Research Natural Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and National Wildlife Refuges.

15 http://www.lascrucescvb.org/html/las_cruces_awards_and_recognit.html.