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CONTACT:

Chris Mehl, Headwaters Economics, [chris@headwaterseconomics.org](mailto:chris@headwaterseconomics.org), 406-570-8937



## **Report: 47% of Private Jobs in Grand County Supported by Tourism, Recreation on Public Lands**

*Economic Analysis Includes Recommendations for  
How Local Leaders Can Maximize Benefits from Nearby Public Lands*

**MOAB, Utah** – Travel, tourism, and recreation has further increased in Grand County during the past several years, leading to strong increases in economic activity. Today these sectors help drive the local economy—accounting for 47 percent of private employment in the county, according to a report, *The Economic Value of Public Lands in Grand County, Utah*, by Headwaters Economics, an independent research group.

The economic analysis also showed that the tourism and recreation sectors have driven other sectors, and related earnings gains. Grand County employment in finance and insurance (+61%), health care (+56%), and professional and technical services (+32%), all grew faster than the overall increase in employment (+25%) from 2001 to 2013.

At the same time, per capita income rose, in real terms, from \$28,514 in 2000 to \$40,545 in 2013; while average earnings per job, also in real terms, increased as well (\$34,429 in 2013 compared to \$29,332 in 2000). Non-labor income, much of it retirement related, grew by more than 77 percent, or nearly \$77 million new dollars, in real terms, from 2000 to 2013—which helped increase per capita income while providing stability to the local economy and stimulating health care, construction, and other sectors.

*“Grand County’s picturesque and high-profile public lands—and the environmental and recreational amenities they provide—are closely linked to population growth and other economic benefits,”* said Chris Mehl, the report’s author. *“One key challenge facing Grand County leaders is how to maximize the long-term return from this valuable asset. To continue to capitalize on the competitive advantage that these lands provide, the county and local groups should work collaboratively with state and federal officials to implement policies that sustain existing uses and also anticipate future development and protection needs to provide for long-term growth.”*

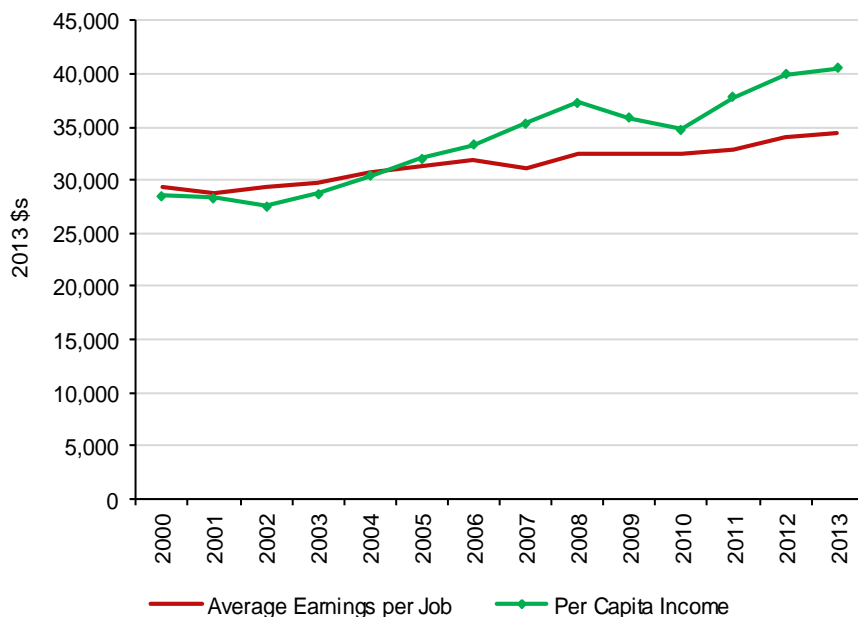
To conduct the report, Headwaters Economics, a non-profit research group based in Bozeman, examined a wide range of public lands uses, including mining and agriculture, but focused on recreation because this type of use represents the largest, most complex, and least well-understood activity on public lands in the county.

The report is available online at: <http://headwaterseconomics.org/land/economic-grand-county/>.

*“What’s clear is to me is that if we want to maintain a diverse and growing economy, we have to make a long-term investment in protecting public lands and the tourism and recreation opportunities that those lands provide,”* said Brett Sutteer, owner of Moab Cliffs and Canyons. *“Mining and drilling also add to the economy, but we shouldn’t sacrifice the bread and butter of our local economy – our amazing public lands.”*

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Average Earnings per Job & Per Capita Income, Grand County, UT

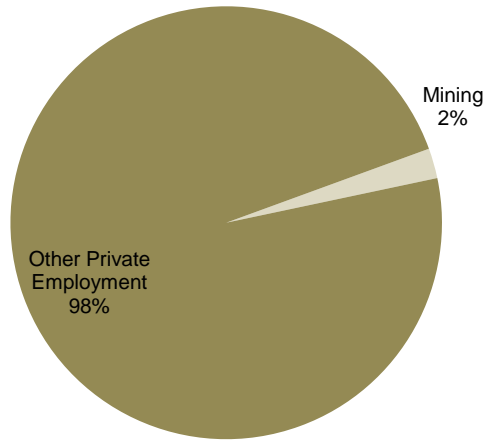


In October 2011, Headwaters Economics released the first version of this report, which was commissioned at the request of a number of local interests—including representatives from Trail Mix, Ride With Respect, Red Rock 4-Wheelers, Moab Lodging Association, Moab Trail Alliance, Moab Area Chamber of Commerce, and local officials—to help inform discussions about how to develop, protect, and manage nearby public lands so that they benefit businesses, the county, and diverse users into the future.

Now, more than three years later, Headwaters Economics updated its report with two broad goals: first, to review and analyze the various sectors and drivers of Grand County’s economy in light of the ongoing recovery from the Great Recession. Second, Grand County has a history of working to balance recreational and energy uses on public lands. New proposals—ranging from whether to further increase the recreation and tourism sector, encourage energy development, or emphasize other economic opportunities—should be considered in light of the current economy’s performance and opportunities for sustainable future growth.

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mining activities played a significant role in the region’s economy. Since peaking in 1981, however, the share of Grand County residents employed in mining fell rapidly and plateaued at 2 to 3 percent of total employment for the past 15 years. This sector’s employment share dropped slightly since our last study in 2011.

## Employment in Mining, Share of Total and Details, 2012



Grand County, UT	
<b>Total Private Employment</b>	<b>3,565</b>
<b>Mining</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Oil &amp; Gas Extraction</b>	<b>45</b>
Oil & Gas Extraction	3
Drilling Oil & Gas Wells	28
Support for Oil & Gas Operations	14
<b>Coal Mining</b>	<b>0</b>
Coal Mining	0
Support Activities for Coal Mining	0
<b>Metal Ore Mining</b>	<b>36</b>
Metal Ore Mining	0
Support Activities for Metal Mining	36
<b>Nonmetallic Minerals Mining</b>	<b>2</b>
Nonmetallic Minerals Mining	2
Support for Nonmetal Minerals	0
<b>Mining Related</b>	<b>0</b>
Oil & Gas Pipeline & Related Const.	0
Pipeline Transportation	0
<b>Non-Mining</b>	<b>3,485</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2014. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns. This table does not include employment data for government, agriculture, railroads, or the self-employed because these are not reported by County Business Patterns. Estimates for data that were not disclosed are shown in *italics*.

*“This report underscores the need for a diverse local economy. With oil prices at their lowest point in nearly 10 years, we can’t afford to rely on one sector when jobs go bust,”* said Drake Taylor, owner of Neighborhood Suites. *Tourism and recreation have proven to be extremely resilient in the face of recession, and the overall quality of life that public lands afford can help attract a diversity of employers.”*

The report ends with a discussion of possible steps that the county, local groups, businesses, and state and federal agencies should consider to provide for the region’s long-term economic health.

Specific tourism and recreation issues to consider include:

- How to best accommodate different users so they do not crowd each other out and diminish one another’s experience—which could drive away visitors or create the impression that the county favors one form of recreation;
- How to sustain the quality, diversity, and uniqueness of the outdoor landscape and recreational offerings; and,
- How to compete with rival destinations in the outdoor recreation market that have constructed new signature trail systems or are benefiting from newly created public lands protections.

To help ensure Grand County’s future economic health, several steps are worthy of consideration:

- Educate the public to better understand the important economic role that public lands play in Grand County, including a periodic update on the county’s economic health and trends—especially focused on tourism and recreation, but including all core sectors;
- Partner closely with public land managers on planning and decisions that impact public lands in Grand County, including funding to maximize protection and access to public lands;

- Utilize the national and international visibility created by public lands and recreation—such as national parks, the Colorado River, mountain biking, and jeep events—to attract visitors, entrepreneurs, or retirees who bring new businesses and wealth to the region;
- Work with local businesses as well as local, state, and federal officials to make sure that uses on public lands do not crowd out or harm existing economic benefits; and,
- Build on the region’s high quality of life by providing other assets—such as expanded education and training, more housing, and increased airport service—to retain or grow local businesses while increasing the county’s attractiveness to new businesses and investments.

***About Headwaters Economics***

*Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group based in Bozeman, Montana that has the goal of improving economic development and land management decisions across the West,*

<http://headwaterseconomics.org/>.

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