

Outdoor Recreation & Economic Diversification in Resource-Dependent Communities



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Published Online:

<https://headwaterseconomics.org/outdoor-recreation/diversifying-natural-resource-dependence>

About Headwaters Economics

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

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Cover image: View north along Buckhorn Draw Road (Emery County Route 332), about 22.6 miles north of Interstate 15 in Emery County, Utah.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the contributions and insights of many individuals. First and foremost, I am deeply grateful for the entire team at Headwaters Economics—particularly Kris Smith, Kelly Pohl, and Megan Lawson. They decided to answer an email in the fall of 2021 from a total stranger and had the trust and confidence to let me take on this project. I appreciate their insights, connections, and support in making this project a reality. I also want to thank my advisor, Jim Carras, and seminar leaders, Julie Boatright Wilson and Sheila Burke, for their assistance and guidance over the past several months.

Lastly, I want to thank the incredible and insightful people—listed below—whom I interviewed over the past six months. This report only exists because of their collective wisdom and contributions. I want to extend a special thanks to members of the Marquette community who welcomed me during my visit in the winter of 2022: Alex Kofsky, Meagen Morrison, Matt Johnson, Mark Bevins, Sven and Marcia Gonstead, and Joe Thiel.

Adriana Chimaras, *Emery County*
Alexander Kofsky, *AccelerateUP*
Brad Garmon, *Michigan Office of Outdoor Industry*
Courtney Farrell, *California State University, Chico*
Danny Twilley, *West Virginia University*
Dave Kronberg, *Innovate Marquette SmartZone*
Dave Nyberg, *Northern Michigan University Foundation*
Dave Ollila, *Shophouse Park*
Geri Gamber, *Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments*
Greg Williams, *Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship*

Jennifer Robinson, *Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute*
Jim Wilcox, *Plumas Corporation*
Joe Thiel, *Innovate Marquette SmartZone*

Julie Leonard, *Payson Economic Development*
Katie Klingsporn, *WyoFile*
Kyle Rodgers, *Sierra Institute*
Mayor Lenise Peterman, *City of Helper*
Leslie Edlund, *U.S. Forest Service*
Leslie Jefferson, *Carbon County Visitors Council*

Marcia Gonstead, *Big Bay Stewardship Council*
Mark Bevins, *Thunder Bay Inn*
Matt Johnson, *Lundin Mining*
Max Backlund, *Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute*
Meagen Morrison, *Lundin Mining*
Melissa Kovacs, *California State University, Chico*
Mike Armstrong, *Saratoga Sun*

Mike Kusiek, *Wyoming Pathways*
Missy White, *National Outdoor Leadership School*

Patrick Harrington, *Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation*
RaJean Strube Fossen, *City of Lander*
Samantha Bray, *CREST*
Rep. Sara Cambensy, *Michigan House of Representatives*
Saylor Flett, *Feather River College*
Shelton Douthit, *Feather River Land Trust*
Stephen Durrant, *City of Orangeville*
Susan Estler, *Travel Marquette*
Sven Gonstead, *Big Bay Stewardship Council*
Tara McKee, *Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation*

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Executive Summary

State and local governments across the nation are increasingly recognizing the potential and benefits of the outdoor recreation economy, but there are few resources available to help them develop this burgeoning industry. There is a particular need in communities which have historically been reliant on natural resource extraction and are facing the negative consequences of dependence and declining extraction industries. Many of these places have the natural amenities, talent, and drive to build an outdoor recreation economy, but lack the guidance and resources.

Diversification can reduce dependence on a single-industry, limit the negative impacts of boom-and-bust cycles, and bolster economic resiliency. Developing an outdoor recreation industry is a way for communities to diversify their local economies while utilizing existing assets: their natural amenities. While recreation often requires building some new infrastructure, growing this sector is typically more manageable and less costly than other forms of economic development. Investing in recreation boosts the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Prior research has found it can result in new jobs, higher wages, higher property values, improved public health, and a greater sense of place.¹

Methods

- Focus on four communities with historical dependences on oil, coal, timber, and mining
- ~35 interviews with mayors, state representatives, state offices of outdoor recreation, business owners, economic development organizations, etc.
- Synthesis of patterns and notable best practices based on interviews and literature review

Using case studies of four communities which are or have been dependent on exaction industries, this report offers nine best practices to develop a thriving, sustainable outdoor recreation industry. These strategies emerged out of nearly thirty-five interviews with stakeholders, government officials, and other community leaders. The communities profiled here—which include Marquette County, MI; Carbon and Emery Counties, UT; Fremont County, WY; and Plumas County, CA—have varying levels of institutional capacity, a diversity of challenges, and a range of natural amenities. The recommendations reflect that diversity. They have been designed to apply to communities with a wide range of capacities to implement them.

Above all, the findings from this report make clear **the importance of a regional approach**. Visitors and residents rarely know when they cross a jurisdictional boundary. Resources go further with collaboration. Larger, more ambitious, more impactful plans become possible with more minds, more geography, and more resources. The most successful communities we profiled collaborate on grants, planning, and initiatives to grow and sustain their outdoor recreation economies. While collaboration does not *guarantee* success, it creates the *conditions* that allow for it later.

The report also emphasizes the **importance of patience and setting realistic expectations**. Building the institutions to harness the potential of outdoor recreation takes time. In Marquette County, which has a thriving outdoor recreation economy, civic leaders first began pushing outdoor recreation as a way to diversify their resource extraction-based economy in 1911.

Jobs in the resource extraction industries tend to be high-paying—a fact which can compromise attempts to diversify a local economy. It is not reasonable to expect outdoor recreation to “replace”

¹ “Economic Diversification and Outdoor Recreation in Bonner County” (2018)

these jobs overnight. It is crucial to **frame diversification efforts as a way to add to the local economy, rather than transition it.** Words like “transitioning” or “replacing” can spark defensiveness and unproductive arguments. Diversification, meanwhile, accommodates the pride and context of a community while also encouraging the growth of new industry.

Finally, it is important to note that these recommendations are observational, not causal, in nature. They do not encompass all the strategies available to communities and do not guarantee success. They merely **provide a framework for communities to build a recreation economy.** Inside this report, you can find detailed descriptions of these recommendations. In the appendices, you can find profiles on each of the four communities that offer even more comprehensive analysis of interviews and discussions of best practices and strategies.

1. Develop Structures Focused on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

Standalone organizations exclusively centered on outdoor recreation can help a community focus on cultivating sustainable development that respects their existing ethos and prevents over-tourism.

2. Build Relationships with Higher Education

Higher education institutions (including community colleges, flagship universities, and more) can provide resources, connections, and facilitation to spur diversification efforts.

3. Empower Local Leaders

Removing bureaucratic obstacles, providing connections, and offering fiscal support to ambitious local leaders and their ideas can jumpstart economic diversification efforts.

4. Create Consensus around Economic Diversification

Widespread buy-in to economic diversification efforts can increase their effectiveness and efficiency.

5. Treat Outdoor Recreation as Quality of Life

Communities with abundant outdoor recreation opportunities see more in-migration than those without them. Investing in outdoor recreation can attract and retain jobs and talent not directly connected to the industry.

6. Cultivate Outdoor Recreation Jobs Beyond Tourism

Outdoor recreation increasingly means more than just traditionally lower-wage tourism jobs. Investing in manufacturing or other recreation sub-industries can create high-wage careers.

7. Identify and Bridge Cultural Divides

Growing too fast can often create tensions between locals and visitors. Finding ways to assuage these culture clashes can create deeper connections, social capital, and newfound vibrancy.




















































































































8. Plan and Act Regionally

Recreation opportunities are rarely confined to the boundaries of one county or city. Regional collaboration leaves all communities better off and allows for more efficient, more ambitious thinking.

9. Capture Revenue and Create Value for the Community

Ensuring the right policies are in place to capture the growth from tourism and recreation is an essential component of diversification through outdoor recreation.

Table of Recommendations

	Cost	Time	Feasibility	Partnership Requirements	Potential Stakeholders Involved
Develop Structures Focused on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism	\$ \$	    	   	    	Community members, local government, philanthropic organizations, local businesses
Build Relationships with Higher Education	\$	   	   	    	Universities, local government, economic development organizations (EDOs)
Empower Local Leaders	\$	 	 	    	Community members, philanthropic organizations, EDOs, local government
Create Consensus around Economic Diversification	\$	    	    	    	Community members, universities, EDOs, extraction industries, local government
Treat Outdoor Recreation as Quality of Life	\$	   	  	    	Local government, EDOs
Cultivate Outdoor Recreation Jobs Beyond Tourism	\$ \$ \$	   	   	   	Local government, state government, EDOs
Identify and Bridge Cultural Divides	\$ \$	    	    	    	Community members, community-based organizations
Plan and Act Regionally	\$ \$ \$	   	  	    	Local government, regional government, state government, EDOs
Capture Revenue and Create Value for the Community	\$ \$	    	   	   	Local government, state government

Scale of 1-5. More symbols mean higher cost, more time, more difficulty, and more intense partnership requirements

Outdoor Recreation, Resource Extraction, and Bridging the Gap

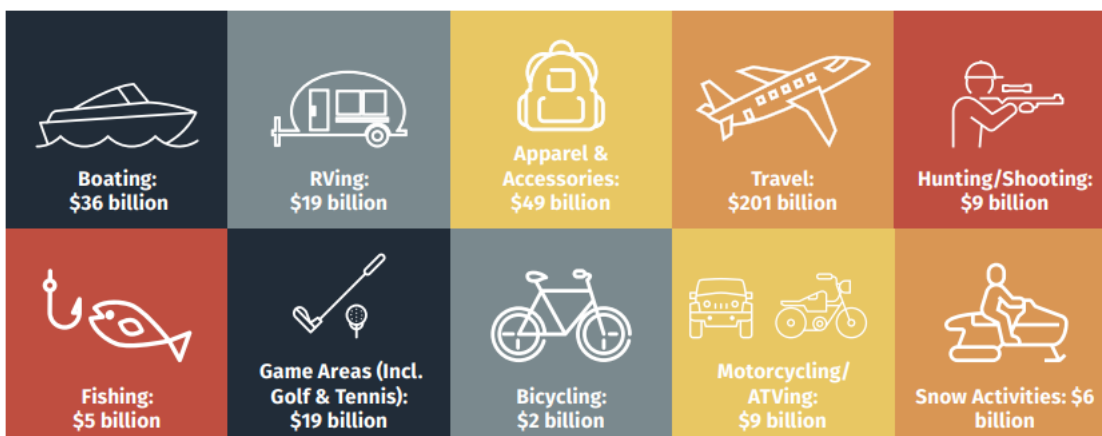
The Growing Outdoor Recreation Economy

Outdoor recreation is a significant and growing contributor to state and local economies. Increasingly, communities are recognizing the potential for recreation as an economic development strategy and a major contributor to community identity. One of the advantages of the outdoor recreation economy is that it utilizes a community's existing assets. While recreation often requires infrastructure and maintenance (trails, fishing docks, campsites, etc.), these types of investments are often far more manageable and less costly than traditional development incentives and other infrastructure projects. They also boost the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. And because outdoor recreation includes so many different types of activities, any community can develop this sector, regardless of their geography and whether they happen to be near a major asset like a national park.



Source: Outdoor Recreation Association

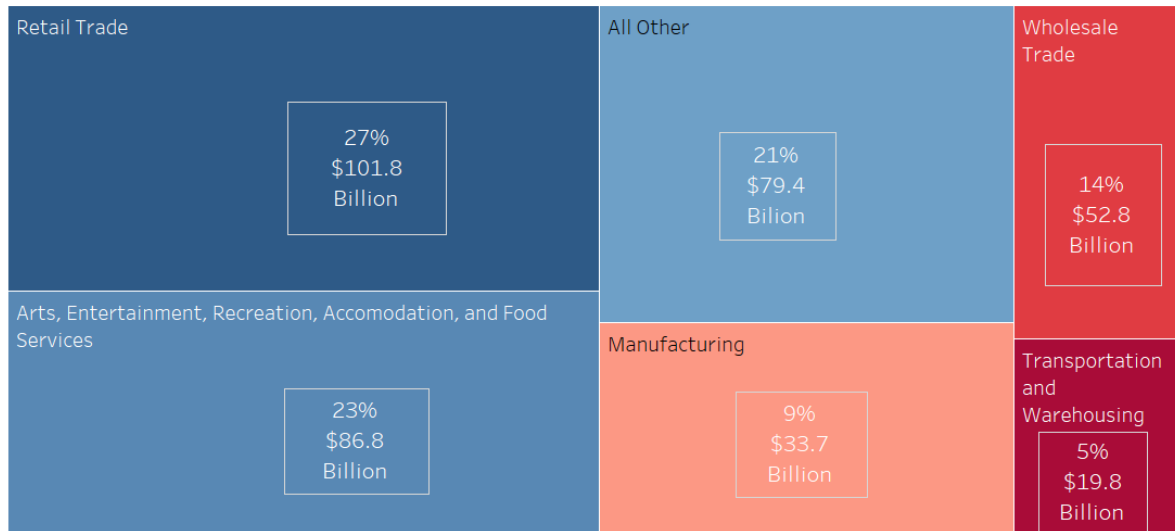
Value-added (or GDP) contribution by activity in 2019



Source: Headwaters Economics and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. (n.d.). Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and Prototype for States, 2019.

Outdoor recreation is also not just a tourism-driven sector, as it is traditionally depicted. Rather, it includes a variety of sub-sectors and types of businesses that drive growth.

Industry Composition of Outdoor Recreation: Nominal Value Added, 2020



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis,

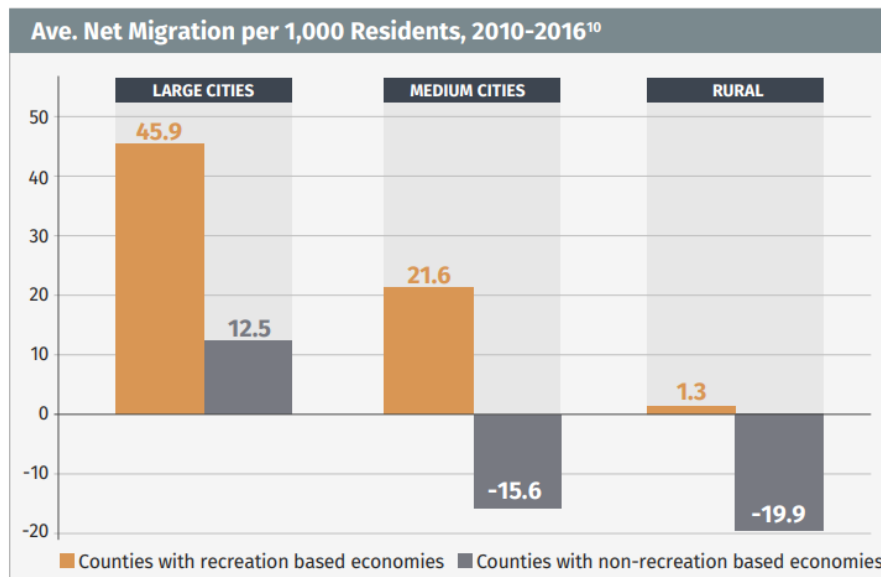
Outdoor Recreation Sub-Sector	Description
Outdoor Gear and Product Makers	Manufacturers, designers, or innovators of outdoor gear, clothing, etc.
Outdoor Gear Retailers (Brand Reps, Dealers, etc.)	Retailers that sell outdoor recreation gear, clothing, supplies, including brand representatives, dealers, wholesalers, online and physical retail
Outdoor Access Facilitators	Organizations and businesses that provide access to outdoor destinations and equipment or provide knowledge and tools to encourage outdoor recreation (e.g., ski resorts, kayak liveries, outdoor education nonprofits)
Outdoor Lifestyle Event Coordinators	Organizers of large outdoor fitness related events
Outdoor Lifestyle Content Creators	Media professionals specifically creating outdoor recreation content including film, photography, and design
Site Selectors	Consultants hired by large corporations (industry makers or retailers) to assist in finding new locations

Source: Brad Garmon, Michigan Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry

Many of these industries are growing as participation in outdoor recreation increases. A study conducted by Penn State's Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management found that nearly half of adults from across the United States participate in outdoor recreation on at least a

monthly basis. More than 20% of the sample—and roughly 40% of recreators generally—did not participate in outdoor recreation prior to the pandemic but do now. As the authors of the study noted, “this creates a tremendous opportunity to engage this group of new recreationists in life-long healthy recreation and conservation behaviors that promote the preservation of the resources, sustaining outdoor recreation.”²

Previous research from Headwaters Economics has found that counties with abundant natural resources and recreation opportunities tend to outperform their peers, on average. The impact of recreation opportunities is particularly stark in medium cities and rural communities. After the Great Recession, counties with recreation-based economies tended to gain population, especially compared to those with non-recreation-based economies.³



Outdoor recreation has a bevy of other benefits for communities. Trail networks can be associated with higher property values, improved public health outcomes, and improved quality of life and community identity.⁴

Harnessing the potential of outdoor recreation is one of many strategies a community can adopt to diversify their economies. Many of the communities that have legacies of resource extraction are well-positioned to diversify through outdoor recreation. They have abundant opportunities for activities like mountain biking, climbing, and OHVing, which provide a solid foundation for growth.

The Costs of Resource Dependence

Extraction industries—coal, oil, gas, mining, timber, etc.—have played an important role in the local economies of many communities across the country. But dependence on these industries creates vulnerability and economic insecurity due to the boom-and-bust cycles. Many communities with extraction-based economies have learned to adapt to the ups and downs, but the boom-and-bust cycles ultimately threaten long-term prosperity and economic security. A Headwaters Economics

² Taff et al., “Who Started, Stopped, and Continued Participating in Outdoor Recreation during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States? Results from a National Panel Study,” 6.

³ “Recreation Counties Attracting New Residents and Higher Incomes,” 1.

⁴ “Economic Diversification and Outdoor Recreation in Bonner County” (2018)

report found that energy-focusing communities grow more slowly than the economies of their peers that do not pursue a strategy focused on energy-based industries. These communities have lower economic resiliency, lower levels of education in the workforce, more inequality, and a lower ability to attract investment and retirement dollars compared to those with more diverse economies.⁵

Extractive industries may very well continue to provide communities with an important source of revenue. However, between mounting pressure for political leaders to address climate change and emerging technologies like electric vehicles, there is considerable risk to the long-term prospects of extractive industries like oil and gas. Amid this uncertainty and the negative impacts of dependence on a single industry, communities should increasingly look to alternatives to build in economic resilience and better prepare for the future.

State and Local Dependence on Fossil Fuels

Many states and communities continue to heavily rely on revenue generated from extraction industries. A 2021 report from Resources for the Future (RFF) reveals how states continue to draw much of their own-source revenue from fossil fuels.

If the fossil fuel industry declines or goes through a protracted bust, states and local communities that have this dependence will struggle to generate revenue to provide essential government services and maintain quality of life for residents and businesses. [An interactive tool](#) from RFF visualizes areas of the country that may be particularly impacted by transitions away from fossil fuels.

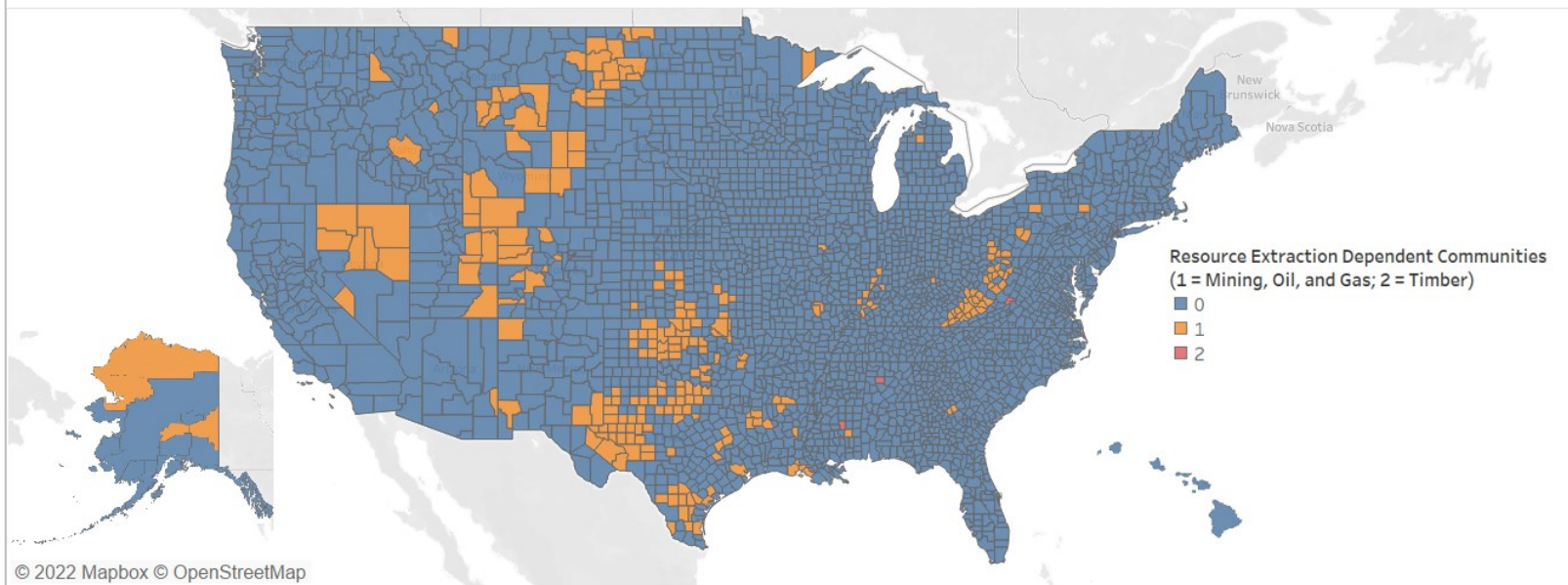
State	Government Fossil Fuel Revenue as share of state and local own-source revenue	Per Capita Government Fossil Fuel Revenue
Wyoming	59.0%	\$7,339
North Dakota	31.0%	\$3,854
Alaska	21.0%	\$2,713
New Mexico	15.0%	\$1,303
West Virginia	9.4%	\$698
Montana	7.9%	\$613
Oklahoma	7.7%	\$550
Louisiana	7.2%	\$540
Texas	7.0%	\$516
Colorado	4.1%	\$356

Column 1: Fossil fuel revenues are divided by total state and local own-source revenues (US Census Bureau 2020), which consist of all local and state internal revenue (i.e., excludes intergovernmental transfers) averaged from 2015 to 2019. Column 2: Fossil fuel revenues divided by state population from the 2017 Census. Source: RFF

⁵ Alexander, "Fossil Fuel Extraction as a County Economic Development Strategy," 2.

Over 19 million people live in the 260 counties which are currently dependent on oil, gas, and mining or timber (defined as counties where the mining industry accounts for an annual average of 13 percent or more of total county earnings or 8 percent or more of total county employment during 2010-12 or where at least 20 percent of personal income comes from timber).

Resource Extraction Dependent Communities



Source: USDA ERS

The increasing risk of extraction industries and the overall negative consequences of dependence point towards the benefits and urgency of economic diversification. By diversifying their economies, communities can remain competitive independent of trends that are largely outside of their control, such as technological innovations, federal policy, and price fluctuations.

Building the Institutions and Foundation for Outdoor Recreation

While the economic impacts of outdoor recreation and risks of resource extraction communities are evident, the actual concrete steps communities can take to realize those impacts are poorly documented. Many communities, including those with legacies of natural resource extraction, have a strong foundation to build an outdoor recreation economy. They may exist in a region well known for outdoor recreation. But how do they bridge the gap that spans their natural amenities and a thriving outdoor recreation economy? What strategies can and should they adopt to capitalize on their assets and realize success? What does success even look like?

This report will explore these questions by examining how other communities that historically have been or currently are reliant on resource extraction are developing their own outdoor recreation economies. Many of the strategies outlined here could be generally applied to any community looking to develop outdoor recreation, regardless of their relationship with extraction industries. But other approaches will take into consideration the unique environmental, cultural, and economic challenges facing communities which have a past or present connection to natural resource extraction.

Data and Methodology

We used a case study analysis and interviews to draw out relevant lessons for other communities. In selecting our four case study locations, we aimed to select communities that:

- Lack proximity to a major recreation destination like a National Park or ski resort (to be most relevant to other communities, most of whom lack this type of asset).
- Are currently reliant on outdoor recreation as determined by the USDA county typology codes or have a strong reputation and commitment to growing an outdoor recreation economy. We also wanted to represent a diversity of recreation activities.
- Have a historical or current dependence on extraction industries. We also wanted to represent a diversity of types of extraction industries (coal, mining, oil, timber, etc.).
- Have made varying levels of progress on their economic diversification efforts. We also wanted to ensure we selected communities with different levels of capacity.

These criteria helped ensure that we captured a wide spectrum of types of communities and levels of sophistication of economic diversification efforts in order to be most applicable to a variety of communities across the country. The four case study locations are:

- Plumas County, CA, a community historically reliant on timber in Northern California
- Fremont County, WY, a community historically reliant on coal, oil, and other mining in Central Wyoming
- Marquette County, MI, a community historically reliant on mining in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan
- Emery and Carbon Counties, UT, communities historically reliant on coal in Southeastern Utah

Over the course of six months, we interviewed approximately thirty-five community members, leaders, and experts in the field to learn more about how communities are building their outdoor recreation industries and spearheading economic diversification processes. Our interviewees included:

- Mayors
- State representatives
- Regional government organizations
- Offices of outdoor recreation
- Business owners and entrepreneurs
- Community leaders
- Tourism organizations
- Nonprofit leaders
- Staff from economic development organizations
- Journalists
- Academics and university staff

Based on these interviews, we synthesized some of the key lessons and strategies. Some of these strategies, like partnerships with universities, emerged as patterns in each of the communities we profiled. In other instances, only one or two communities might be engaged on a particular strategy, but we felt it was innovative and important enough to highlight.

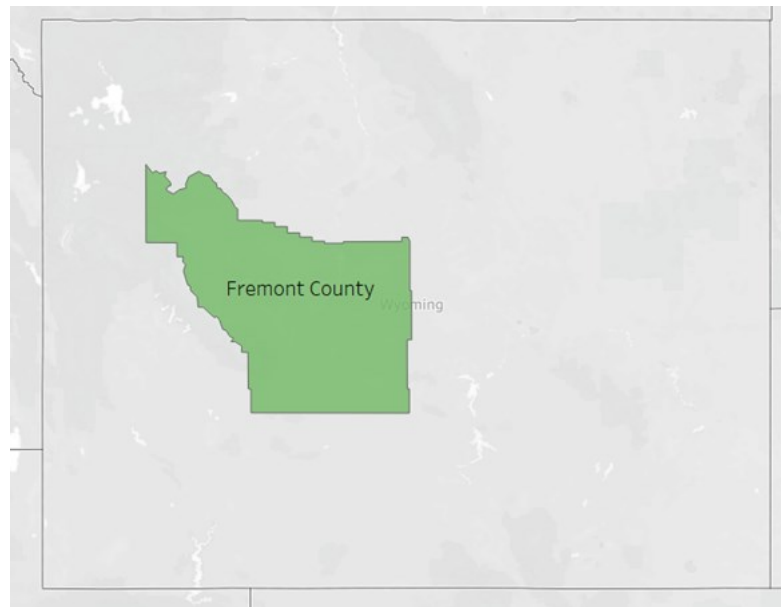
Overview of Case Study Communities



Location: Plumas County, CA

Extraction Industry: Timber

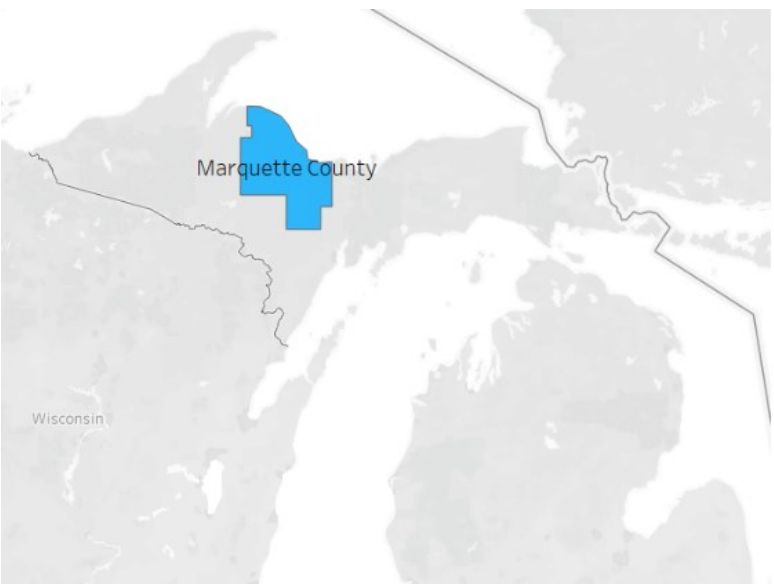
Major Recreation Activities: Mountain biking, downhill skiing, whitewater rafting, hunting, fishing, hiking, OHVing



Location: Fremont County, WY

Extraction Industry: Oil and gas

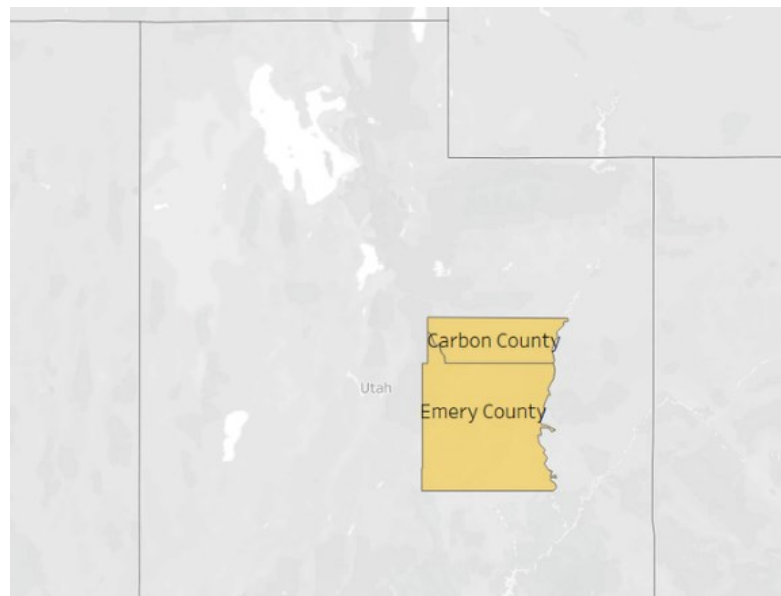
Major Recreation Activities: Mountain biking, climbing, cross-country skiing, hiking, OHVing, hunting, fishing



Location: Marquette County, MI

Extraction Industry: Ferrous and non-ferrous mining

Major Recreation Activities: Mountain biking, cross-country skiing, hiking, hunting, fishing, OHVing



Location: Carbon and Emery Counties, UT

Extraction Industry: Coal

Major Recreation Activities: Climbing, mountain biking, OHVing, canyoneering, hunting, fishing

Strategies for Building the Outdoor Recreation Economy

1. Develop Structures Focused on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

We found that community members in all four case studies prioritized balancing growth and community character and sustainably managing development. Local leaders want new visitors and investment, but negative side effects like over-tourism can reduce the quality of life for residents, displace workers from local housing, and create sustainability and maintenance issues for trails and other recreation amenities. In every community featured in this report, multiple interviewees expressed a desire for their community to not become like another community in the region that they felt had become crowded and lost its essential character. Fears of becoming a place like Moab, UT or Jackson, WY—which are known for their high housing prices and large crowds of tourists—are common in places that have the *potential* for high outdoor recreation but not the *reputation*. Communities want to grow, but not for the sake of other people.

Growth also has impacts on recreation infrastructure like trails. Communities stressed the importance of finding resources to maintain their recreation infrastructure which has been chronically underfunded. Many parks and recreation areas saw record usage during the pandemic, and visitation numbers remain high. It remains to be seen if this represents a new normal, but even without heavy pandemic-levels of visitation, maintaining infrastructure remains a top priority.

We found that formal and informal structures focused specifically on tourism and outdoor recreation are an effective way to manage growth. Creating these systems is especially important in communities that lack the reputation and infrastructure for outdoor recreation but are in a region already well-known for recreation opportunities. These places have the potential to grow quickly, which presents both opportunities and challenges. Diversification without deliberation can create a vacuum. Attempting to draw visitors and advertising the community too quickly without developing proper infrastructure, systems, and policies for managing growth risks overwhelming the community. Two models in Michigan and Wyoming offer a blueprint for addressing this challenge.

Destination Stewardship Councils (DSCs)

[The Global Sustainable Tourism Council](#) defines destination stewardship as a process by which local stakeholders can take a holistic approach to maintaining the cultural, environmental, economic, and aesthetic integrity of their community. Powell Township, on the edge of the Eagle Mine in Marquette County, MI, worked with the CREST (the Center for Responsible Travel) to develop a local DSC called the Big Bay Stewardship Council (BBSC). The BBSC coordinates tourism, development, and outdoor recreation efforts in the small community. Lundin Mining hired the Washington, D.C.-based CREST through an initiative to promote economic diversification in the community to prevent negative impacts after the Eagle Mine's imminent closure.

"[The Big Bay Stewardship Council] brought all the stakeholders to the table. That didn't exist before – everyone was totally separate, there was no framework. [The process] helped us start to understand this is all for the same community even if we have different belief systems and desires. There were a lot of similar goals, but we didn't have that level of organization to get things done. The church did church things, the township did township things. Even in parks and rec, we never took on big projects."

-Sven Gonstead, Chair of the BBSC

The proximity to other outdoor recreation hubs like Marquette and Munising is an opportunity and challenge for Powell Township. On the one hand, the community can easily draw in new visitors who are already visiting the Upper Peninsula. On the other hand, they may not have the infrastructure or systems (hotels beds, outfitters, trail maintenance funding) to adequately handle an influx of new visitors. Without that infrastructure, they risk some of the negative consequences of tourism.

BBSC aims to address this challenge by uniting tourism and outdoor recreation efforts under one organization. While many communities—including Marquette County—have an organization that coordinates tourism and markets the region, few have a community-led organization like a DSC that guides tourism in accordance with a community vision and focuses on sustainability. These organizations help ensure efforts to grow tourism have local buy-in and enable the community to plan more holistically by bringing together previously siloed groups. While CREST was instrumental in putting together the BBSC, the community-driven process provides a blueprint for other communities who have a legacy of resource extraction and want to grow while not losing their fundamental identity. Samantha Bray, who facilitated the BBSC's development, [outlines the philosophy and methodology behind DSCs on their website](#).

Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives

Wyoming's Office of Outdoor Recreation facilitates seven outdoor recreation collaboratives—another model for communities to build structures around recreation and tourism. The Collaboratives help the Office of Outdoor Recreation understand community priorities and what projects to fund. These collaboratives also have united what used to be disparate user groups and organizations working in their own silos. [The meeting notes of the Wind River Outdoor Recreation Collaborative](#)—which coordinates recreation opportunities in Fremont County and the surrounding region—give important insight into how effective the collaborations are in bringing different groups together and creating coordination around outdoor recreation.

Their meetings create space for different user groups and stakeholders to provide feedback and maximize the impact, creating a better climate of outdoor recreation for all. There is no indication about where and how these conversations might happen without the collaborative.

"We want to make sure we're representing what the community wants. I'm really cautious to send ideas out. The ideas need to come from the community...Anecdotally, five years ago, we went from having disparate groups to having everyone at the same table. So, when we have a gravel road bike race, we're getting the whole collaborative to sign the course, rather than just the user group."

-Patrick Harrington, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, on the collaboratives

How Can Communities Use this Information?

Tourism and outdoor recreation often get pushed into other departments like parks and recreation. Tourism organizations themselves rarely have a dedicated focus on *sustainable* tourism and managing growth. Separate organizations exclusively focused on outdoor recreation fill that gap by thinking more strategically about how tourism and recreation can be cultivated in a specific setting and in a specific way.

Communities don't need an outside consultant or an office of outdoor recreation to begin this process themselves. Collaborations can begin informally, as in Lander, WY, where different activity user groups have joined together to promote the region and support trail management. Communities can also take steps to formalize the process: meeting at a regular cadence, developing a cohesive vision for outdoor recreation and tourism, hosting events together, even applying for 501(c)(3) status and grants.

2. Build Relationships with Higher Education

Higher education, whether a flagship university or community college, can play a large role in building the outdoor recreation economy. In our research, we found universities offered four main types of services related to economic development and outdoor recreation.

Higher Education & Outdoor Recreation Typologies	
Outdoor Recreation Certifiers	<p>Many schools offer programs that offer certifications in outdoor recreation. Students often go on to work as guides or in outdoor leadership. Each year, these programs produce young, skilled graduates. Communities can strive to find ways to attract and retain these students as a foundation for growing their outdoor recreation industry.</p> <p><i>Examples: Feather River College, Northern Michigan University, Central Wyoming College</i></p>
Conveners and Collaborators	<p>Universities can play a large role in uniting different stakeholders in the county, especially in places where resources are limited. At CSU-Chico, the North State Planning and Development Collective brings together local communities to think regionally about economic development and offers resources and technical assistance.</p> <p><i>Examples: California State University, Chico</i></p>
Capacity Builders	<p>We found public universities played a large role in filling capacity gaps and providing resources. The Coal Strike Team at the University of Utah provides data, financial backing, and other capacity building support to struggling communities in Utah's coal country. The University of Wyoming offers a program for land management and recreation professionals to learn about how to adopt a more collaborative approach to their work.</p> <p><i>Examples: The University of Utah, The University of Wyoming</i></p>
Innovation and Entrepreneurship Facilitators	<p>Universities can serve as incubators for innovation and entrepreneurship. Invent@NMU, for instance, offers entrepreneurial support services for students. This is especially relevant in the growing outdoor recreation products and technology sectors, a recreation-based industry that is far more lucrative than tourism-based jobs. Communities with ample natural amenities are logical testing grounds for these types of jobs.</p> <p><i>Examples: Northern Michigan University (NMU), Oregon State University</i></p>

How Can Communities Use This Information?

The programs offered by local higher education institutions will inevitably vary. Communities can begin by taking inventory of their own higher education assets and what services they offer that could intersect with growing the outdoor recreation economy. Depending on what institutions and programs exist, some ideas to create better connections include:

- **Outdoor Recreation Certifiers:** These programs graduate potential guides, retailers, and entrepreneurs for the region. Identify ways to gaps and opportunities to keep graduates in the region and part of the local labor force.
- **Conveners and Collaborators:** If a higher education institution already plays a role in bringing stakeholders together in the region to discuss economic development, suggest a meeting specifically focused on cultivating outdoor recreation. These meetings can be an effective way to jumpstart conversations about outdoor recreation's future in the region and take stock of resources.
- **Capacity Builders:** Research the available professional development, capacity building, and technical assistance programs at higher education institutions. Connecting with local leaders with these programs can be an important first step. Ambitious programs like the Coal Country Strike Team in Utah take time to develop, but also serve as a blueprint for other forward-thinking communities and universities.
- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship Facilitators:** Investigate the opportunities available for entrepreneurs at local higher education institutions. These can look like technical assistance programs, networking events, start-up space and venues, and other programs designed to support small business owners.

Additionally, it's important to stay connected to larger networks. [Oregon State University's new Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy](#) is pioneering work around expanding perceptions about what the outdoor recreation economy can include and equipping universities to be leaders in that space. They are leading an [Outdoor Recreation Workforce Development Consortium](#) with other universities to unite academia and the outdoor industry to fill workforce gaps.

Even beyond the programs a school can offer, young people also tend to highly value outdoor recreation. By building up outdoor recreation, communities can leverage their local assets to attract and retain young graduates. Anecdotally, community leaders in Marquette have felt they have been able to retain recent graduates from Northern Michigan University in large part because of their recreation opportunities. For communities that suffer from "brain drain" or declining population, this can be an important first strategy to reverse those trends and diversify their economies.

3. Empower Local Leaders

We found that local leaders, with bold, innovative, even risky ideas, have been instrumental in transforming the trajectory and reputation of resource extraction communities. Extraction-dependent communities often struggle to reinvent themselves. As Amy Kelly writes in a case study about coal communities in Appalachia, "I found that the most difficult thing in this resource dependent community was to imagine they could be successful at anything other than their past

accomplishments.”⁶ Communities should look to identify and empower bold innovative leaders who aspire to change this paradigm.

Plumas County and the surrounding region exemplify this dynamic. The decline of the timber industry and forest fires have damaged an area already substantially weakened by the Great Recession. Since then, Plumas County has had no single individual or organization focused on economic development.

Greg Williams, founder of Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship (SBTS), originally owned a bike shop (then Coyote Adventure Company and now Yuba Expeditions) in Downieville and hosted a major mountain bike called the Coyote Classic. Williams worked with the local chamber of commerce and the county to attract mountain bike tourism as the timber and mining industries waned. Over time, he began funneling profits from the bike shop and the Coyote Classic into a new nonprofit, SBTS, which focused on sustaining, restoring, and managing the trails in the region.

SBTS recently started a \$40.3 million dollar initiative called The Connected Communities Trail Project. The project’s scope is ambitious. It aims to connect 15 towns in the region through multi-use trails. SBTS has undertaken comprehensive community engagement efforts to create buy-in, reduce friction as the project proceeds, and gather feedback to improve the project.

The massive scope of the project has meant SBTS has had to negotiate with a variety of landowners to build and connect the trails. SBTS does not own any of the land they are building trails on. Rather, they are working with different landowners—primarily the U.S. Forest Service—to construct trails on their lands. The Connected Communities project involves four different national forests and twelve districts. Each ranger has their own priorities and has different requirements, complicating the process. Williams noted that their aim is to operate at the forest supervisor level in order to create consistency. Their ability to do that, according to Williams, comes from thirty years of being in the community, long-standing credibility (SBTS’s involvement in maintaining trails on Forest Service land, for instance), and lots of communication and efforts to get buy-in up front.



“[The Connected Communities project] will create a vision for a recreation-focused lifestyle through community investment, shared stewardship, economic opportunity, and important new local jobs, all benefiting economically disadvantaged communities in California’s Plumas, Sierra, Butte, and Lassen Counties...it is the intent of this project to diversify recreation throughout the region, provide economic stability as well as support fire recovery and prevention efforts.”

-Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship

⁶ Kelly, “Diversifying Appalachian coal-dependent economies: A case study using participatory action research for community engagement,” 4.

Not every community currently has the capacity, ability, or interest to embark on a project with the scope and scale of SBTS's Connected Communities Trails Project. But SBTS's initiative and the Forest Service's cooperation exemplifies how a community can uplift and promote an ambitious idea. SBTS highlights how transparency, communication, and comprehensive planning facilitate that process.

How Can Communities Use this Information?

This process will look different in every community, but a first step is to identify local leaders and organizations who have the potential and ambition to grow outdoor recreation and economic development efforts. In our research, we found some key enablers of success:

- **Finding Funding:** Finances can be one of the first stumbling blocks to local leaders in implementing their project. They might lack the capacity or ability to apply for some funds. Communities can support local leaders and their vision by identifying sources of funding to develop their initiatives.
- **Eliminating Bureaucracy:** One of the key elements of success to SBTS has been the cooperation and collaborative spirit of the forest service. While these sorts of factors are rarely in communities' control, using connections and relationships to break down barriers is an important step.
- **Starting Small and Setting Aside Skepticism:** Ambitious ideas are inherently risky, and skepticism is often warranted. But reinvigorating a local economy often takes these sorts of ideas like the Connected Communities project. To create momentum, communities can work with local leaders to try pilot projects to explore strengths and weaknesses of the idea before pursuing deeper commitments.
- **Creating Connections:** Another enabler of success with the Connected Communities project has been the number of partnerships. Creating that buy-in makes ideas more resilient, stronger, and more holistic. Communities can try to find ways to connect an innovative organization or individual to others in the area to strengthen an idea.

4. Create Consensus around Economic Diversification

Creating buy-in and consensus around reducing dependency on natural resource extraction can be a significant challenge. Resource extraction jobs are typically high-paying—especially relative to other industries—and hold a deep-seated cultural influence. While some stakeholders may want to take proactive action, communities with legacies of resource extraction often struggle to create enough momentum to take proactive steps to reduce dependence.

Our research suggests that an effective tool in combating local reticence about diversification efforts is the intervention of a trusted, unbiased group or third party. They can provide a more objective assessment that can be more persuasive than community members sharing the exact same data. To be most effective, they should have some attachment to the community, long-standing relationships, and an established track record and credibility.

Marquette County in Michigan provides one instructive example of this dynamic. Lundin Mining, which owns the local Eagle Mine, has taken a leading role in encouraging economic diversification

and breaking down that reticence. When the mine opened in 2014, company officials repeatedly highlighted the short lifespan of the mine. That alone creates pressure and incentives for local leaders to find new ways to diversify the economic and eliminates the illusion that mining jobs will be abundant and available forever. Lundin has also funded a variety of economic diversification programs in the community.

Because the message and these initiatives come from the mining company, it's possible the community has received them more openly than they might have otherwise. Oftentimes, communities can see economic diversification programs as a threat to extraction industries—a threat to their lives and livelihoods—and oppose them. But Lundin is the extraction industry itself. Lundin's credibility allows them to frame their initiatives as additive in nature. They focus on building economic resiliency by *adding to* mining, not by *replacing* mining. Community members are much more likely to accept this framing, and they are much more likely to accept the credibility of this framing because it comes from the mining company. Message and messenger are inextricable. An identical program by a different organization might be perceived entirely differently and rejected.

The University of Utah's involvement in Carbon and Emery Counties is another example. Their Coal Country Strike team provides financial and capacity-building support to communities who are dependent on the coal industry and are particularly vulnerable to declines in that sector. While the idea originated at the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, its implementation occurs at the local level. The Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments (SEUALG) houses and manages the program.

One of the major roles of the Strike Team has been to persuade local leaders about coal's uneasy future. More intimate conversations also create space for people to ask specific questions, familiarize people with the data and where it comes from, and build trust in the analysis to break through reservations.

Once again, the emphasis is not necessarily on the message itself but the presentation of the message. Many organizations could provide officials in Emery and Carbon Counties with similar information about the future of coal. But because of the Strike Team's connection to SEUALG and their efforts to cultivate relationships and explain the data in-depth, they can garner more credibility.

How Can Communities Use this Information?

Unfortunately, the single most effective way for communities to embrace the importance of economic diversification is likely the bottoming out of an extraction industry. Local leaders in Carbon County, where essentially zero coal mines remain open, are more open to diversification than in Emery County, where coal mines are active. The short-term nature of the Eagle Mine in Marquette County provides an incentive for communities there to start planning what happens next. Nevertheless, communities can still take proactive steps to cut through the reluctance.

- **Message Matters:** How economic diversification gets talked about matters immensely. Discussing an economic *transition*, for instance, emphasizes that an extraction industry is

"We brought in a lot of data and analysis that counterbalances the idea that coal is going to be here forever...we're doing a lot of work to familiarize it, do a long roll-out, and break through the reservations...We don't say 'we know what to do.' We come in with the data and help them ask questions"

-Max Backlund, Coal Country Strike Team

dying or unimportant. Communities may resist this message, viewing it as threatening or even insulting. We found that successful messaging:

- Uses words and phrases like “diversification”, “reducing dependency”, “building resilience” rather than “transitioning.”
 - Honors and respects the contributions of extraction industries and their workers.
 - Emphasizes economic diversification and resilience and reducing dependency, rather than transitioning away from extraction industries.
 - Uses data effectively to build an argument for diversification.
 - Asks communities for their suggestions for alternatives, rather than foisting solutions upon them.
- **Messenger Matters:** Regardless of whether a community can bring in a third party, we found that it’s crucial that whoever delivers the message be seen as trustworthy and unbiased. An environmental or conservation organization, for instance, while well-meaning, lacks credibility or buy-in to persuade a community to pursue economic diversification. As the Coal Country Strike Team experience reveals, 1-1 conversations can be more effective than group conversations for persuasion and consensus-building. The Strike Team also shows how a potentially untrustworthy urban partner with resources can partner with a more trustworthy organization at the local level to lead policies around diversification.
 - **Patience Matters:** Creating consensus around economic diversification takes time. In the Upper Peninsula of Michigan—where diversification is a comparatively uncontroversial—the first organization focused on diversifying the economy started in 1911. While communities shouldn’t necessarily expect to wait over a century for their work to pay off, consensus-building, especially around a controversial topic, is time intensive. The Coal Country Strike Team’s approach emphasizes this: 1-1 conversations are most effective, but they are slow. They create space for communities to ask questions and provide the research.

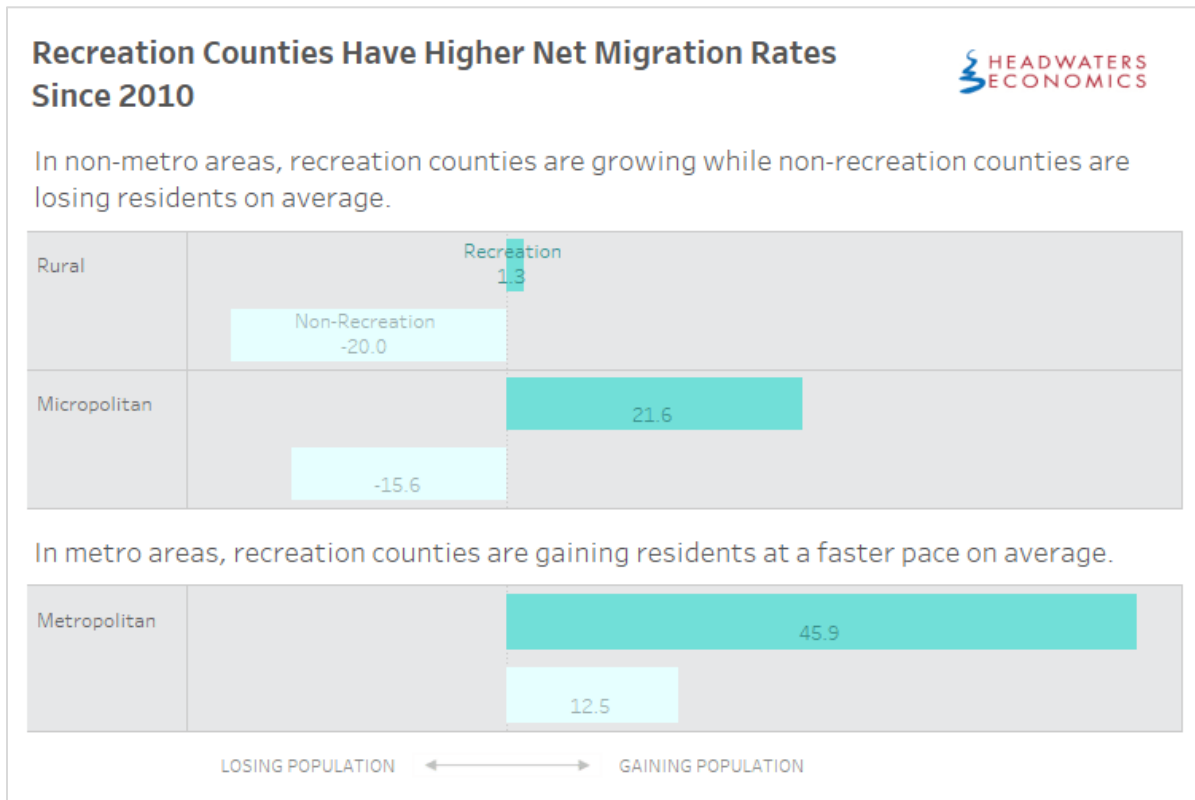
Examples of Effective Messengers

- The extraction company itself
- A local university or higher education institution
- A community organization or nonprofit
- A trusted government agency
- A local leader with a form of credibility like experience working in the extraction industry

5. Treat Outdoor Recreation as Quality of Life

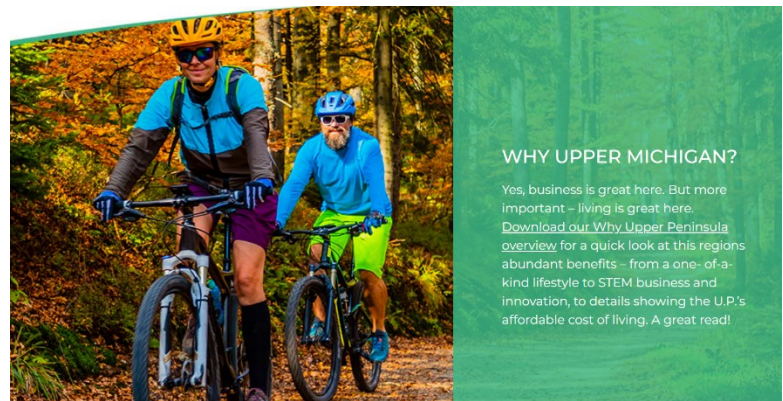
Historically, diversifying the economy using outdoor recreation has meant using tourism to generate new economic activity. But for some time now, rural communities with natural amenities and outdoor recreation opportunities have seen larger population increases compared to those without them. Many of these communities are seeing an additional opportunity to combine increasing broadband access, the rise of remote work, and their natural amenities to draw high-wage workers and diversify their economy. A previous Headwaters Report found that between 2010 and 2016, people have been more likely to move to recreation counties. This is particularly true for rural

counties, in which the average non-recreation county lost 20 people per 1,000 residents due to out-migration while the average recreation county gained just more than 1 person per 1,000 residents.⁷



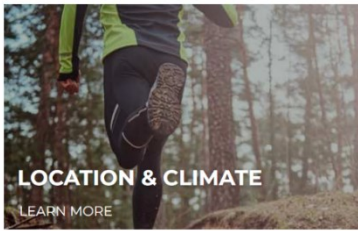
This strategy is particularly evident in Marquette County, where economic development organizations highlight the quality of life and opportunities for recreation on their websites. InvestUP, one of the main economic development organizations for the region, puts the quality of life and outdoor recreation opportunities front in center in their business recruitment efforts.

For civic leaders, the county’s outdoor recreation *opportunities*, as opposed to strictly outdoor recreation *jobs*, distinguish the region and help the community thrive economically. They aim to highlight and continually augment the Upper Peninsula’s abundant network of trails, access to water, and access to recreation opportunities during all four seasons to attract and retain talent and bring companies into the region.



Source: InvestUP

⁷ “Recreation Counties Attracting New Residents and Higher Incomes,” 1.



Our vibrant, active communities ooze grit and determination. People here live strong in the natural beauty that surrounds them.

Source: InvestUP



The U.P. workforce is rock-solid reliable, and ready to work. From manufacturing to high-tech STEM communities, the labor force is diverse and



Friendly towards business and business growth, U.P. communities and their leaders are strong collaborators in growing the U.P.

[Wyoming Pathways](#), an organization that advocates for and builds trails throughout the state, demonstrates another approach to this philosophy. One major initiative for Wyoming Pathways is the construction of in-town trails that connect cities with outlying trails on public lands or in more rural areas. The ability to utilize trail networks to travel within town and easily access the trails outside of town benefits visitors and tourists alike. Mike Kusiek, Executive Director, said that these trails are “great for the tourists *and* quality of life. I don’t leave town if I can leave my hotel and get out of town on the trails. It keeps people anchored.”

How Can Communities Use this Information?

Communities should frame investing in outdoor recreation as investing in themselves. An essential first step is to make recreation opportunities as easy and accessible to use. Wyoming Pathways provides a model for that work—focusing on connecting in-town trails with out-of-town trails to create a seamless recreation experience for tourists and locals alike. Ensuring that all recreation users have easy access to opportunity is a crucial investment.

Building signage, effective advertising, and ensuring information is up to date is crucial too. Word-of-mouth plays an important role in drawing user groups, but visitors also want to know about trailhead locations, trail length, and trail conditions whenever possible.

Communities also cannot overlook the importance of trail maintenance and management. Many interviewees in different communities identified major challenges around maintenance, especially as they look to add more trails. The Noquemenon Trail Network (NTN), an organization focused on trail stewardship in the Central Upper Peninsula, has gotten local businesses to pledge financial support through sponsorships to maintain their trails. In their pitch for support, NTN has emphasized to businesses the important role trails play in attracting and retaining talent and drawing new businesses to the region. If the trails were not well maintained that system would fall apart and the region would be worse off.

In every community we profiled, volunteer user groups (the mountain biking club, the ATV club, etc.) play an enormous role in trail maintenance by donating their time to help manage trails and keep them in working conditions. Other communities can look at utilizing these two methods—business support and user groups—as well.

Creating an outdoor recreation economy should also fit into a broader effort to cultivate a sense of place and boost livability. We found that successful outdoor recreation efforts in the case studies

we examined often went hand-in-hand with main street revitalization efforts, investments in an entrepreneurial ecosystem, and small business support. Communities should remember the importance of “halo businesses”, a phrase used by the Michigan Office of Outdoor Industry to refer to institutions like restaurants and breweries, which recreators often patronize. Investing in outdoor recreation and in small businesses or main street should not be seen as either/or, but rather as complimentary. In some communities, supporting the halo businesses might simply mean trying to make sure businesses post their hours, stay open consistently, and have a visible web presence so tourists and locals can find them. In others, that might mean beautification efforts and façade improvements.

6. Cultivate Outdoor Recreation Jobs Beyond Tourism

In 2016, Congress passed the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act, which directed the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) to better document the impact of the outdoor recreation economy. Their data underscored the depth of the outdoor economy and its value to the overall economy, as well as the diversity of the industry. Over 75% of the outdoor recreation economy’s value comes from sectors beyond traditional tourism.

Communities should take these distinctions into consideration. Brad Garmon from the Michigan Office of Outdoor Recreation breaks down the types of contributors in the outdoor recreation economy that communities can identify and cultivate.

Outdoor Recreation Sub-Sectors	Description
Outdoor Gear and Product Makers	Manufacturers, designers, or innovators of outdoor gear, clothing, etc.
Outdoor Gear Retailers (Brand Reps, Dealers, etc.)	Retailers that sell outdoor recreation gear, clothing, supplies, including brand representatives, dealers, wholesalers, online and physical retail
Outdoor Access Facilitators	Organizations and businesses that provide access to outdoor destinations and equipment or provide knowledge and tools to encourage outdoor recreation (e.g., ski resorts, kayak liveries, outdoor education nonprofits)
Outdoor Lifestyle Event Coordinators	Organizers of large outdoor fitness related events
Outdoor Lifestyle Content Creators	Media professionals specifically creating outdoor recreation content including film, photography, and design
Site Selectors	Consultants hired by large corporations (industry makers or retailers) to assist in finding new locations

Source: Brad Garmon, Michigan Office of Outdoor Industry

Precision around developing the outdoor recreation economy is crucial. Communities have different capabilities, capacities, and assets that should inform their approach. In Marquette County, economic development organizations have collectively identified the potential for building around

outdoor recreation manufacturing, technology, and innovation. They aim to create the infrastructure that can bring in companies like Polaris and Omeo to test their equipment on the trails in the Upper Peninsula.

One extension of this aspiration is Shophouse Park, a project proposed by local entrepreneur Dave Ollila. Ollila owns a piece of property along Lake Superior and intends to develop it into a hub for recreation technology and innovation. “There’s a housing component, a placemaking component, access to trails, and an innovation center. If you are a first-time inventor, you can bring a product through this property. If you’re at the very highest level too, you can bring your vehicles into the UP [and test them]. Art, food, community, housing, innovation, prototyping, manufacturing, workforce development—it tackles every single issue and puts it into an experimental petri dish that drives future opportunity.”

Marquette County’s focus on technology and Ollila’s Shophouse Park project exemplifies how a community can think beyond the traditional scope of outdoor recreation jobs. The region has a solid foundation of local assets which make their approach possible: four seasons, plentiful trails, fresh water, two nearby universities, a supportive State Office of Outdoor Industry, and a variety of local EDOs. But it is the community vision and shared commitment towards recreation technology that animates those assets.

How Can Communities Use this Information?

Each community has different abilities to grow and cultivate these sub-industries within the outdoor recreation economy. The first step is to identify the current stock. Who are the retailers and guides? What are the major events? What are the companies who support and rely on outdoor recreation? Where is their slack to grow? Answering these questions can give communities a strong sense of their baseline. Garmon’s table can spark that asset-inventory process.

Through deliberate planning and stakeholder engagement, communities can then decide how and where to grow their outdoor recreation economy. In Michigan, Garmon has had challenges with this at times: “We’ve had such a strong tourism bent to outdoor recreation for so long, it’s hard to make the connection to manufacturing,” he said. “That’s a missed opportunity because these are higher wage jobs. Convincing people of that and showing them how to move in that direction is really hard. It requires some cultural change. You have to break through some assumptions about what outdoor recreation is to a lot of key stakeholders.”

Not every community has the potential to be a manufacturing and innovation hub. But they don’t have to benefit from an outdoor recreation economy. Leaders in Plumas County, CA are more focused on building out quality trail infrastructure and putting on catalytic events that draw people to the region. Their plans to expand the recreation economy has taken considerable planning and stakeholder engagement. These efforts begin with identifying the region’s strengths, where it realistically has capacity to grow, and coalescing around a vision for growth.

7. Identify and Bridge Cultural Divides

Residents in resource extraction communities often have divergent political and cultural views from the outdoor recreation enthusiasts who want to visit them, creating the potential for culture clashes. Those clashes can lead to missed opportunities that would benefit both groups and even harm the recreation economy. In some places, like Marquette County, locals and tourists have overlapping recreation interests, even if they have different cultural and political viewpoints at times. In these sorts of places, investments in natural amenities simultaneously improve the experience for year-round residents and short-term visitors.

But what happens when the locals and the visitors have wildly different interests, politics, and cultures? Rural communities can often be more conservative than the visitors who come there to recreate. In Emery County, UT, local climbers began to fear that tensions with the more conservative locals might lead to reduced access to climbing areas. A fundamental lack of understanding between the two groups can also lead to missed opportunities that would otherwise create benefits for both groups.

Joe's Valley Fest in Emery County exemplifies how to unite two groups that might otherwise seem to have little in common. Tensions had become high in Emery County, but locals and climbers alike played a role in defusing it. Steven Jeffery, a prominent member of the climbing community, first sought to ease tensions by attending town clean-ups as a gesture of goodwill.

Later, Amanda Leonard, Emery County events coordinator (and a local non-climber), proposed an event that would bring together climbers and locals and speak to both their varied interests. Leonard, Jeffery, and Adriana Chimaras, Director of Tourism for Emery County, created Joe's Valley Fest, which features a rodeo, ghost tours, yoga, climbing events and clinics, a jerky making class, and more. What ultimately made the event successful was the combined input of locals and climbers alike. In doing so, the team was able to create a new asset that incorporated all perspectives.

Empathetic listening and conflict resolution has become a large part of Chimaras' job. And she insists that it ought to be part of the training and focus for others who manage tourism. At the center of Joe's Valley Festival is that ethic: taking the time to listen to the needs, perspectives, and interests of others and finding common ground and creating ways to bring seemingly disparate groups together.

How Can Communities Use this Information?

Communities can draw several key lessons from the experience of Emery County and the Joe's Valley Fest.

- **Be proactive**
 - In Emery County, the situation between locals and climbers devolved to the point that Jeffery thought that access to climbing areas might be reduced. Locals and outsiders alike can work together to make sure their own environments do not reach this point. User groups like climbers should find ways to demonstrate a commitment

to the community and locals should create opportunities for outsiders to volunteer and participate.

- **Altruistic acts go a long way**
 - Jeffery's act of joining the town cleanup did not immediately reduce tensions, but it sent a message of goodwill. It demonstrated to locals that the climbers weren't just using their community as a playground. Recreators can participate in trail cleanups, maintenance projects, or other efforts that convey respect. Meanwhile, communities don't have to wait for user groups to do this themselves. Sometimes it can be intimidating for outsiders to volunteer. Locals should simultaneously create space for outsiders to participate. Examples include trail clean-ups, mural paintings, town clean-ups, or civic organization meetings.
- **Bring locals and outsiders together**
 - In Emery County, the combined efforts of Leonard, Jeffery, and Chimaras have made Joe's Valley Fest a success. Locals and outsiders often speak different languages. They hold different values and political beliefs. But they usually have a shared love of the place and community. Without genuine and respectful efforts to communicate across divides and find common ground. Whether communities want to create a similar sort of event or simply do a better job of uniting divergent groups, communities can only replicate the success and ethos of an event like Joe's Valley Fest with effective community engagement and by intentionally creating space for locals and outsiders to come together. The potential to create this space is much higher when outsiders have already found ways to demonstrate their good faith and a commitment to the community.

8. Plan and Act Regionally

We frequently found that a regional approach to outdoor recreation and economic development often helped communities achieve a level of success they might otherwise have not had. Some examples of regional approaches include:

- **Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship's Connected Communities Project** aims to connect 15 towns in Plumas, Butte, Sierra, and Lassen Counties in California through multi-use trails.
- **California State University, Chico** brings together local leaders from across the county to think about economic development efforts and coordinate them more effectively.
- **Travel Marquette**, the lead tourism organization in Marquette County, works with municipalities in the region to understand which areas are becoming over-run with tourists and facing congestion and tries to divert visitors to less-visited areas, reducing congestion on the trails and traffic on the roads.
- **Collaborative forest management in the Lost Sierra region** has been practiced in Plumas County since the 1990s and has enabled organizations to negotiate differences, pool resources, and have a better foundation to maintain the health and sustainability of local forest lands.
- **The Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation** coordinates seven different outdoor recreation collaboratives that bring together different user groups and community stakeholders to

combine resources, shape a collective vision, share information, and develop ideas to evolve, grow, and manage outdoor recreation in their community.

- **The Southeastern Utah Association of Governments** manages the Coal Country Strike Team initiative, a multi-county approach to economic diversification and development.

The regional approach has several clear advantages over a more siloed, local one.

- Visitors don't know where municipal boundaries and county lines are. Trails often cross jurisdictional boundaries, and a regional approach helps ensure the quality of amenities remains consistent across borders so the user experience remains seamless.
- Trails also often crisscross public and private lands. A regional approach helps communities streamline the process of navigating land easements and usage agreements.
- A regional approach allows communities to pool resources, apply for larger grants, and create more ambition and scale with their recreation projects. Bringing together different stakeholders also helps ensure ideas take into consideration the feedback of a variety of potential users and maximize their utilization.

How Can Communities Use this Information?

The examples above highlight a variety of types of stakeholders that can spearhead a regional approach. Regional models face many challenges—some bureaucratic and legal, others more personality-driven. Organizations that already have a more regional scope therefore are naturally the best fit to lead these efforts. Examples include:

- State offices of outdoor recreation
- Regional government organizations
- Economic development organizations
- Higher education institutions
- County governments

We observed that a successful regional approach often takes a combination of the right people and right timing. In Marquette County, local and regional economic development organizations have largely gotten on the same page due to turnover at their organizations the same time, allowing more collaboratively minded, innovative leadership to take over. SEUALG's adoption of the Coal Country Strike Team initiative stemmed from the urgency around the decline of coal in Southeastern Utah.

For communities that lack an organization that already focuses on regional development, even informal meetings between local leaders can be an effective way to start. In Plumas County, the Quincy Library Group began as an informal meeting between major stakeholders like conservation groups and the timber industry to determine how to manage forest resources. The meetings ultimately led to President Clinton signing the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act, a major piece of federal legislation. These sorts of conversations have the potential to quickly gain momentum as local leaders—and funders—increasingly realize the necessity of regional approaches.

9. Capture Revenue and Create Value for the Community

Communities that have historically been reliant on extraction industries may have a solid foundation for building an outdoor recreation economy but lack the policies to fully take advantage of it. They may find themselves with access to public lands, plentiful natural amenities, and proximity to other outdoor recreation hubs in the region. That presents an opportunity to easily draw in new visitors, but also creates challenges if the community does not have policies to generate revenue from visitation. Failure to do so is a missed opportunity and may leave the community with insufficient funding to maintain their natural amenities.

Tara McKee, Program Manager at the Utah Office of Recreation, noted in a conversation that this dynamic has happened in several cities in Utah. In some communities, local leaders “have let the hoteliers call the shots,” which has led to high housing prices, a general lack of planning and coordination, and a declining quality of life.

Other communities, she said, have been more forward-thinking but have still been unable to promote tourism and development that increases the quality of life for locals. One town on the edge of one of Utah’s national parks created an ordinance that mandated that developers build trails in conjunction with their new projects. But the town failed to specify what this meant in their code, effectively leaving it up to the developers to interpret. While some developers created high-quality trails, many went with the cheapest option available. McKee said that this can be a problem in smaller towns where well-resourced developers can out-manuever part-time city employees who lack the staff, resources, and capacity to get the full value out of new development.

Another common problem is finding ways to get value out of short-term rentals and second homes. In communities with many natural amenities, short-term rentals and second homes can be common, but governments may not be fully taxing them. Failing to tax short-term rentals and second homes not only deprives the city and county of a lucrative source of revenue, but also constricts the housing supply. Many communities we spoke with cited housing as a major bottleneck for growth, acknowledging that when they *are* able to attract new workers and residents, it can be difficult for them to find places to live with so much of the housing stock being used as short-term rentals and second homes.

How Can Communities Use this Information?

Wages in jobs in extraction industries tend to dwarf the wages of all other industries in rural communities. It is not reasonable to expect outdoor recreation jobs or jobs connected to outdoor recreation to replace or match these jobs immediately. But to come close to

It can be challenging to directly capture value at the local level directly from outdoor recreation alone. It’s important to build out the “halo businesses” (described above in the “Treat Outdoor Recreation as Quality of Life”) that do drive tax revenue for a city—bars, restaurants, breweries, hotels, etc. Communities should treat outdoor recreation and tourism as part of a broader vision to enhance the quality of life. The recreation and halo businesses feed into one another—people are more willing to visit a community when they can enjoy natural amenities and patronize local businesses at the same time.

It's also important to make sure that the right systems and policies are in place to capture value. Many urban communities have been working to find ways to better regulate the short-term rental market and realize value in this space. Rural communities generally have less capacity. While it's not within the scope of this report to lay out model ordinances, these resources may help communities gain better context and brainstorm solutions:

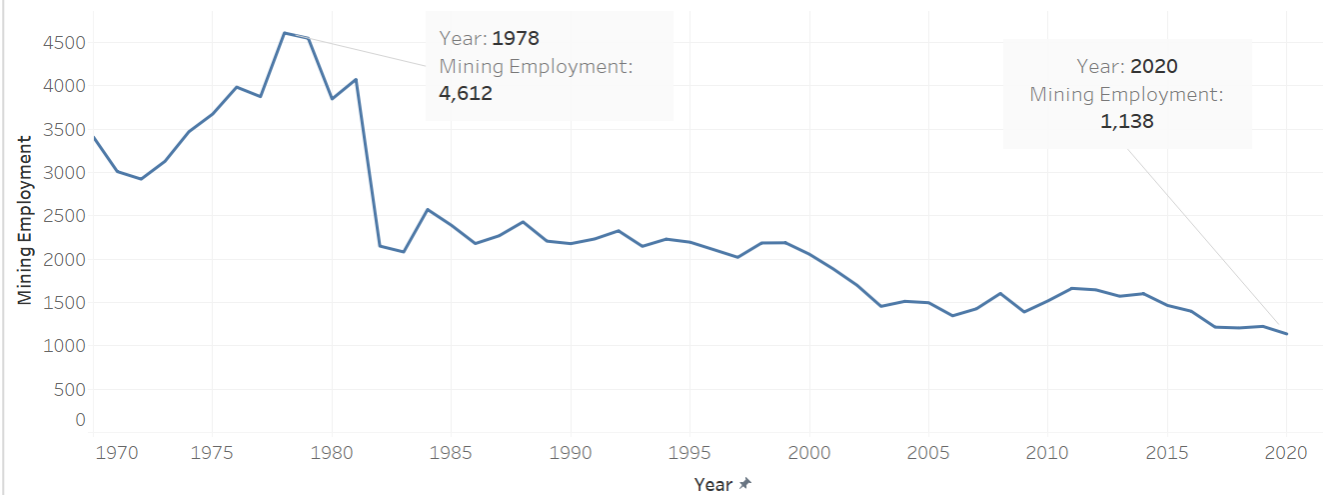
- [The Negative Consequences of Short-Term Rentals – Arizona's Recipe for Disaster](#)
- [Short-Term Rental Laws in Major U.S. Cities](#)
- [Airbnb Regulations by City](#)
- [The State of Short-Term Rentals in Montana](#)

Appendix A: Marquette County, Michigan Case Study

Mining in Marquette County

Marquette County is located in the Central Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In the mid-19th century, the region became known for its rich supply of iron and timber. A century of mining and two World Wars had depleted much of the high-quality iron in Marquette County and during the mid-20th century, many of the mines began to close. Since then, aside from a brief resurgence in the late 1970s, mining employment in Marquette County has trended downward. The Tilden Mine, an open pit surface mine near Negaunee, MI, is the only iron mine that remains open. The Tilden Mine is owned and operated by Cleveland-Cliffs Inc. and employs roughly 800. The closure date of the Tilden Mine is not known and may last at least several more decades.

Trends in Mining Employment: Marquette County, 1970-2020



Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2021. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

In 2014, Toronto-based Lundin Mining opened the Eagle Mine in Michigame Township and an accompanying mill in Humboldt Township—both in northern Marquette County—to produce and process copper and nickel ore. Company officials publicly noted the mine’s fairly short lifespan from the onset—an estimated 8 years upon opening—which has since been extended to mid-2025 with the potential for future extensions. The Eagle Mine currently has approximately 300 employees.

Mining jobs in Marquette County offer substantially higher average annual wages compared to any other industry. At an average of roughly \$109,000 per year, mining sector jobs offer over 60% higher average annual wages than the next most lucrative sectors, state government and federal government, whose long-term growth and average wages are likely constrained. No private sector industry comes close to replicating the impact of the mining sector in Marquette County in terms of wages.

Employment and Wages in 2020	Wage & Salary Employment	% of Total Employment	Avg. Annual Wages (2021 \$s)	% Above or Below Avg.
Total	24,491		\$49,313	
Private	19,425	79.3%	\$47,714	-3.2%
Non-Services Related	3,402	13.9%	\$73,088	48.2%
Natural Resources and Mining	1,197	4.9%	\$103,413	109.7%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	114	0.5%	\$50,510	2.4%
Mining (incl. fossil fuels)	1,083	4.4%	\$108,982	121.0%
Construction	1,194	4.9%	\$51,872	5.2%
Manufacturing (Incl. forest products)	1,011	4.1%	\$62,239	26.2%
Services Related	16,024	65.4%	\$42,323	-14.2%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	4,411	18.0%	\$37,680	-23.6%
Information	378	1.5%	\$41,278	-16.3%
Financial Activities	935	3.8%	\$59,523	20.7%
Professional and Business Services	1,754	7.2%	\$56,419	14.4%
Education and Health Services	4,910	20.0%	\$53,819	9.1%
Leisure and Hospitality	2,824	11.5%	\$18,961	-61.5%
Other Services	774	3.2%	\$29,721	-39.7%
Unclassified	37	0.2%	\$26,151	-47.0%
Government	5,066	20.7%	\$55,445	12.4%
Federal Government	288	1.2%	\$66,544	34.9%
State Government	1,908	7.8%	\$68,229	38.4%
Local Government	2,870	11.7%	\$45,833	-7.1%

Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2021. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

Despite the decline in mining jobs in recent decades, the industry remains a significant presence both economically and culturally in the region. The challenge for leaders in Marquette County has been and will continue to be identifying what comes next amid the continued decline of the mining industry.

Local Challenges

This list of local challenges is not exhaustive. It aims to highlight some of the unique challenges facing the community that we found through our interviews. Many communities, for instance, are having trouble finding and retaining a talented workforce. While important and relevant, this list aims to capture some of the specific problems this community is having especially related to economic development, outdoor recreation, and natural resource extraction.

How to sustainably maintain the quality of the recreation opportunities in the region:

One interviewee noted that in September 2021, the beginning of the off-season for tourism, he was driving along a road with multiple trailheads and every single parking lot was full. This was, according to him, essentially unheard of. While certain areas of the Upper Peninsula have grown in popularity, community members cited the pandemic as an inflection point for the region. The increase in activity since the pandemic has been a boon for the region but concerns about how to maintain trail quality amid the growth in popularity abound.

How to retain access to outdoor recreation opportunities in the region:

Another effect of the growing popularity of the Upper Peninsula is an increasing tenuousness in the access to trails. The trails in the region crisscross a mixture of federal, state, and private land. While local leaders have found ways to build in some sustainability into the access to trails, interviewees cited an urgency around finding more permanent solutions to ensure access in the future. In fact,

[stakeholders have been discussing the challenges of land ownership](#) for some years now without a clear resolution.

How to increase collaboration between different economic development organizations (EDOs):

Marquette County and the Upper Peninsula have a wide range of organizations focused on economic development. While this can be advantage for the region, coordinating these different efforts can prove challenging and create reduplicative programming, reducing their overall impact.

How to manage affordable housing in the region amid a boom in popularity:

Despite a decline in population, interviewees repeatedly cited access to quality, affordable housing as a major barrier to growth and economic resiliency. One contributing factor is the rise of people purchasing second homes in the area and the conversion of housing to short-term rentals, reducing the overall supply of housing for long-term residents. Many interviewees independently noted individuals from outside the Upper Peninsula buying homes sight-unseen during the pandemic.

Strategies and Policies to Support Recreation and Diversification

A Commitment to Economic Diversification

Mining has a deep, historical legacy in Marquette County and the Upper Peninsula. The oldest active mine in the county, the Tilden Mine, has been open for approximately a century. Community members noted that everyone in the community has some connection to the mines.

While research suggests that a prior history of mining can hinder a community's desire to pursue other economic development strategies, we observed a sense of honesty about mining's future and an openness to pursue other opportunities. The community has not abandoned mining, but at the same time, many recognize that mining is not the future for Marquette County.

It is hard to pinpoint one single reason why the community has coalesced around this vision, especially when so many other communities have not. One contributing factor may be the long history of economic diversification in the Upper Peninsula. The development of tourism and outdoor recreation as a diversification strategy in the Upper Peninsula dates to 1911, when declines in mining and timber industries inspired *Menominee Herald Leader* editor Roger Andrews to call for an organization focused on regional promotion and development, which ultimately culminated in the Upper Peninsula Development Bureau (UPDB).⁸ According to author and historian Aaron Shapiro, "The UPDB, along with other state agencies, individuals, tourists, and other public and private organizations, helped create the UP's tourist industry during the interwar years. Business interests and governmental interests, influenced by environmental benefits and constraints, made policy decisions and shaped a promotional rhetoric that gave the UP a new regional identity and economy focused on tourism."⁹

The pre-war history of the Upper Peninsula is littered with examples of economic diversification and outdoor recreation that still resonate today. Stewart Earle converted a former timber town into a resort town called Blaney Park. In Eagle Harbor, Alice Mitchell converted a warehouse that stored mining supplies into a hotel.¹⁰ The state promoted free road maps with state parks listed on them by 1922. In 1929, the state passed legislation that allocated funding to regional tourism associations, and these tourist organizations began aggressively collecting survey data to improve visitor experiences. Mining and timber would both rebound, but over a century ago civic leaders planted the seeds for economic diversification and tourism that continue to benefit the region.

The lesson for other communities is that building this sort of ethic to diversification and outdoor recreation specifically takes years to develop. Building consensus about diversification often comes after low-points and the success of investments may need to be measured in decades, not years. Building the capacity and infrastructure to fully capitalize on natural amenities is a long process.

Another key factor for success is likely the organizational and institutional in the Upper Peninsula. The cluster of organizations focused on a variety of components of economic development—from workforce development to entrepreneurship to technology and innovation—creates an environment that facilitates the exchange of ideas and economic diversification. State policy, like SmartZones, also supports this cluster. Each community with a state university has a SmartZone organization,

⁸ Shapiro, "Promoting Cloverland," 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

which often functions as a business accelerator and incubator. The Upper Peninsula has three SmartZones, including one with Northern Michigan University in Marquette. One of their major focuses is promoting outdoor recreation technology.

Lastly, the mining companies themselves have played a major role in pushing diversification. Even before Eagle Mine opened, Lundin (and Rio Tinto, the company which owned the mine before Lundin) publicly and repeatedly noted the short duration of the mine. The mine’s looming closing date creates pressure and incentives for local leaders to find new ways to diversify the economy and eliminates the illusion that mining jobs will be abundant and available forever.

Because the message and these initiatives come from the mining company, it’s possible the community has received them more openly than they might have otherwise. Oftentimes, communities can see economic diversification programs as a threat to extraction industries—a threat to their lives and livelihoods—and oppose them. But Lundin is the extraction industry itself, and their involvement can hardly be seen as antagonistic to mining in the Upper Peninsula. Lundin’s credibility allows them to frame their initiatives as additive in nature. They focus on building economic resiliency by *adding to* mining, not by *replacing* mining. Community members are much more likely to accept this framing, and they are much more likely to accept the credibility of this framing because it comes from the mining company. Message and messenger are inextricable. An identical program by a different organization might be perceived entirely differently and rejected.

Lundin Mining has also invested in economic diversification initiatives in Marquette County. An analysis of Lundin Mining’s social investments in other mine locations across the globe indicates a common theme of supporting economic diversification initiatives and entrepreneurship development programs.¹¹ This suggests that while the specific programs Lundin initiated may have been in response to community interests and demands, these initiatives fit in within a broader pattern of investments for the company.

Lundin-Funded Initiative	Mission
MarquetteAlger Technical Middle College	“To create opportunities for high-school students to earn college credits and develop local talent in high-demand career areas, such as skilled trades and health sciences.” ¹²
Big Bay Recreation and Economic Diversification Project	“To support economic diversification in Big Bay by leveraging recreational and tourism assets to promote economic opportunities for local businesses.” ¹³
AccelerateUP	“To contribute to the long-term economic development of Marquette County by providing free business coaching to new and expanding businesses in the region.” ¹⁴
Eagle Emerging Entrepreneurs Fund (operated in partnership with Northern Initiatives, a local Community Development Financial Institution)	“[To contribute] to the long-term economic development of Marquette County by creating and retaining jobs, supporting growth outside of the mining industry. The fund provides affordable financing to high-risk clients who would otherwise be ineligible for traditional financing.” ¹⁵

¹¹ “Lundin Mining 2020 Sustainability Report,” 66-69.

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁵ “Lundin Mining 2018 Sustainability Report,” 64.

Lundin provides almost the entirety of the funding to each of these organizations and initiatives. Their financial support will likely end with the closure of the mine.¹⁶ Future funding for these programs is uncertain and their future existence will depend on their ability to find additional financial resources. But the existence of these programs at all—and the fact that the mining company so overtly supports economic diversification—likely alters attitudes toward diversification.

Most recently, Lundin is preparing to lead conversations around sustainable trail management and access in Marquette County. Matt Johnson, External Relations Manager for Lundin Mining, spoke about how the pandemic put more of a pressure to find ways to ensure sustainable use and access into the future. Rapidly changing land ownership has put the future existence of some trails into question. Activity was up in 20% in one year in many areas of Marquette County. More users were accessing the trails but the revenue to support them was staying flat, putting strain on the system. Johnson spoke about being a convener to bring local stakeholders to develop a plan and find a long-term solution, rather than throwing money at temporary band-aids. Johnson mentioned that they're "not doing the heavy lifting...we're using our influence to convene the stakeholders, be in the background, and step in to manage any derailments."

Lundin's position in the community is quite different than most extraction industries. Johnson and Meagen Morrison, Social Responsibility Advisor with Lundin Mining, both note that they have long-term relationships within the community and are focused on legacy projects. They credit their ability to take on this convener role in the community in part to Lundin Mining's overall commitment to social investment in its locales and its flexible corporate-social responsibility policies—even as they have to justify their investments in the community. They also highlight the years of work they've put in to establish credibility and a reputation for community-driven work. The financial resources from Lundin back up that reputation and commitment. As Johnson said, when Eagle Mine ceases operations, he doesn't want this to be known as a community that had a mine, but one that's better off for having one. This, combined with the Upper Peninsula's long track record of economic diversification efforts, creates an easier climate for diversification efforts.

Outdoor Recreation, Quality of Life, and Regional Competitiveness

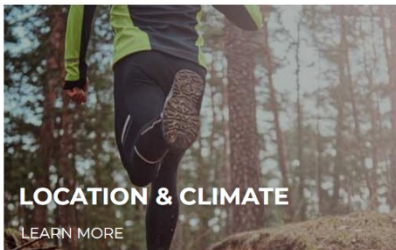
Our interviews with community members in Marquette revealed a focus on outdoor recreation not just for tourism purposes, but as a driver of broader economic development in the region. As workers increasingly prioritize quality of life in their decisions about where to live, work, and start a business, community leaders in Marquette County have accordingly been investing in quality-of-life initiatives.

The outdoor recreation industry has a reputation for involving seasonal and low-wage jobs. But for civic leaders, the county's outdoor recreation *opportunities*, as opposed to strictly outdoor recreation *jobs*, can distinguish the region and help the community thrive economically. They aim to highlight and continually augment the Upper Peninsula's abundant network of trails, access to water, and year-round recreation opportunities to attract and retain talent and bring companies into

¹⁶ Tudor, "CTE Committee Looking to Future of Middle College Program."

the region. The increasing ability for many high-skill, high-wage employees to work remotely adds even more incentive to this approach.

InvestUP, one of the lead economic development organizations for the region, has acknowledged recreation opportunities as a competitive advantage and highlights them throughout their business recruitment efforts.



Our vibrant, active communities ooze grit and determination. People here live strong in the natural beauty that surrounds them.



The U.P. workforce is rock-solid reliable, and ready to work. From manufacturing to high-tech STEM communities, the labor force is diverse and talented.



Friendly towards business and business growth, U.P. communities and their leaders are strong collaborators in growing the U.P.

Source: InvestUP

Data from the Department of Commerce also reveals large growth in higher-wage jobs like professional services and management of companies in Marquette County over the past twenty years.

	2001	2010	2020	Change 2010-2010	% Change: 2001-2020
Management of companies	48	81	354	273	638%
Professional and technical services	1,074	1,482	1,702	220	58%
Real estate and rental and leasing	754	1,129	1,186	57	57%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	513	670	617	-53	20%
Mining (including fossil fuels)	1,888	1,520	1,138	-382	-40%
Retail trade	4,695	4,398	3,883	-515	-17%
Accommodation and food services	3,308	3,356	2,839	-517	-14%

Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2021. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

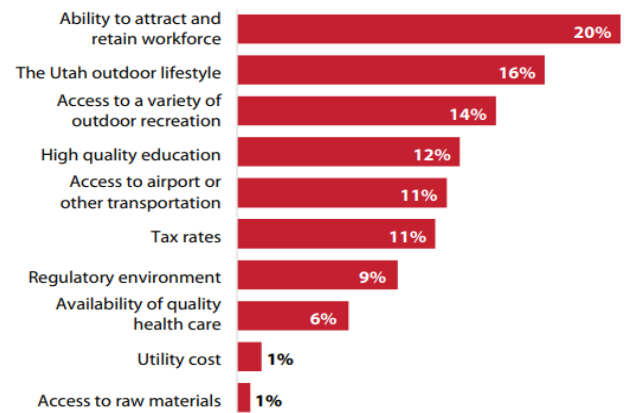
There are likely many reasons for growth in these sectors: a shift in lifestyle preferences of those who manage companies to be closer to outdoor recreation opportunities, investments in broadband, or programs at the local university, for instance. But recreation-based communities have seen far more population growth than their peers, on average.¹⁷ A survey of executives of the fifty fastest growing businesses in Utah conducted by the University of Utah revealed that outdoor recreation related answers were the second and third most cited considerations in their decision to locate in Utah. At the very least, the continued focus on outdoor recreation supports tourism and residents. At best, it helps the Central Upper Peninsula attract and retain talent, recruit companies, and distinguishes the region.

And even amid a decline in retail and service jobs, community leaders recognize the importance of these sectors to a thriving economy—particularly an outdoor recreation economy. While access to trails and water provides a solid foundation for economic growth, leaders stress that natural amenities alone will not create the quality of life that spurs economic growth and creates resiliency.

AccelerateUP, a nonprofit by Lundin as part of their economic diversification contributions to the community, supports many of these types of businesses. AccelerateUP functions as a community think tank and capacity builder. The organization works with entrepreneurs who own many of these types of businesses and connects them with a network of volunteers to support business growth and development. Alex Kofsky, the executive director of AccelerateUP, also emphasized the importance of the importance of an ecosystem that augments outdoor recreation, including retail, restaurants, and other businesses that contribute to the broader quality of life in the Upper Peninsula.

A report conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Stout found that businesses assisted by AccelerateUP have invested over \$4.5 million in new capital and earned over \$3.5 million in total sales as of 2021. The organization’s clients have created 70 new jobs and retained 16 that would have otherwise been lost.¹⁸ AccelerateUP’s work demonstrates the potential and importance of industries like hospitality and retail, especially if those businesses can receive proper technical assistance and capacity building support.

3. Which of the following factors were considered in your company’s decision to be located in Utah? (Respondent could choose all that apply)



Source: *Utah Outdoor Partners Survey of Businesses by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah (2018)*

¹⁷ “Recreation Counties Attracting New Residents and Higher Incomes” (2019)

¹⁸ “AccelerateUP Final Evaluation Report” (2021)

Marquette County and the Upper Peninsula is broadly served by a variety of organizations and institutions focused on entrepreneurial growth and economic development. A list of major EDOs in the region (Marquette County and Upper Peninsula-wide) follows below.

Organization	Focus Geography	Mission
Innovate Marquette SmartZone	Marquette County	"[To create] a world-class entrepreneurial ecosystem while supporting existing business innovation, tech-based and tech-enabled entrepreneurs, innovators, and start-ups in the Marquette community."
Lake Superior Community Partnership	Marquette County	"[To help] our partners make the connections that matter – between businesses, organizations, leaders and legislators, and provides a powerful legislative voice for programs and policies that strengthen our regional economy."
Upper Peninsula Michigan Works	Upper Peninsula wide	"[To promote and address the needs of businesses for current and future work-ready talent, in support of a strong and resilient economy."
AccelerateUP	Marquette County	"[To] empower entrepreneurs and propel small businesses to start, build, and expand through a system of business coaching, peer assistance, and community support."
Central Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD)	Alger County, Delta County, Dickinson County, Marquette County, Menominee County, and Schoolcraft County	"[To] foster cooperative analysis, planning and action for economic, social and physical development and conservation within the central Upper Peninsula"
The Upper Peninsula Economic Development Alliance	Upper Peninsula wide	"To provide] a forum for our members to connect to accomplish economic development activities in our region"
InvestUP	Upper Peninsula wide	"[To be] A private-sector led catalyst to drive prosperity across the Upper Peninsula."

Some interviewees noted that the number of organizations focused on economic development efforts from a variety of perspective can make collaboration and coordination challenging. For instance, multiple organizations are drafting plans to tackle the issue of trail accessibility and sustainability. Despite this, we found a strong commitment to collaboration between these organizations. The impact of this collaboration was apparent.

Many of the local EDOs (including SmartZone, AccelerateUP, and Travel Marquette, the lead tourism agency for the county) and some government offices will be moving into the same building in downtown Marquette. Leaders from these organizations hope that their proximity to one another will foster even deeper collaboration between them. Leaders from each of the EDOs sit on each other's boards and routinely partner with one another, further creating connections and alignment.

Recently, many of these organizations have collaborated on grants together as well. One partnership—which included CUPPAD, SmartZone, Northern Michigan University, Upper Peninsula Michigan Works, Marquette County, the Lake Superior Community Partnership, and the Keweenaw

Bay Indian Community—applied for a Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant. The project, known as the Upper Peninsula Recreation Innovation District, aims to “cultivate the growth of the emerging outdoor recreation industry.” While the coalition’s project was not selected as a finalist by the EDA, the coalition’s proposal reveals crucial alignment and collaboration.

Another partnership involving Northern Michigan University (NMU), the NMU Foundation and Alumni Association, Invest UP, and the Innovation Shore Angel Network (ISAN) was awarded an Economic Development Authority (EDA) Build to Scale Capital Challenge grant, “to drive significant capital resources to the region’s scalable tech startups.” And while this does not have a specific outdoor recreation focus—though a major focus for economic development organizations is outdoor recreation technology—it does underscore the degree to which organizations in the region are collaborating and working together.

Applying for these grants takes a significant amount of collaboration and alignment on key issues. Even though the BBB grant was unsuccessful, the coalition developed a clear, united vision about outdoor recreation’s centrality to the regional economy. The coalition can seek future funding opportunities, but perhaps most significant is the simple act of collaboration itself. This partnership and others increase the probability that the region will be successful in sustainable economic growth and development.

In our interviews, we asked how regional leaders achieved this level of collaboration. Finding this level of alignment on a specific vision for economic development growth is rare—especially those with long legacies of natural resource extraction. One interviewee noted that “the economic development ecosystem used to be a mess. People were overlapping in all their work, but now we write grants together. We’re on each other’s boards. Leadership change made that happen—a combination of turnover at key organizations and people realizing this was the only way forward.” Dave Kronberg of SmartZone noted that “there’s a lot of energy going into figuring out how all the EDOs fit together and carve their own space and find limited resources.” Rather than remain siloed or compete for limited resources—or even clash with one another—the EDOs are actively collaborating on shared goals and a common vision.

Outdoor Recreation Technology and Innovation

The Upper Peninsula Recreation Innovation District proposal, described above, highlights Marquette County’s highlights how civic leaders are thinking about outdoor recreation as more than just tourism jobs or even a key amenity to improve the quality of life and desirability of the region. While tourism and recreation spending can be a boon for a region, the jobs associated with these industries tend to be seasonal and lower wage. The average annual wage in Marquette County in Travel and Tourism in 2020 was \$19,754, according to wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Meanwhile, according to the Michigan Economic Development Authority, the roughly 5,000 outdoor recreation gear and equipment manufacturing jobs in Michigan paid an average of nearly \$67,000 dollars in 2021.¹⁹ The coalition’s efforts focus on growing these jobs and modernizing the region’s recreation assets to promote accessibility (such as adding WiFi capability and EV charging stations

¹⁹ “Cultivating Growth in Michigan’s Outdoor Recreation Business – the Michigan Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry.”

at various trailheads) and establishing the region as a test environment for electric outdoor recreation vehicle technology for companies like Toyota, Jeep, Omeo, and Polaris.

One extension of this initiative is Shophouse Park, a project proposed by local entrepreneur Dave Ollila. Ollila owns a piece of property along Lake Superior and intends to develop it to create a hub of technology and innovation called Shophouse Park. “There's a housing component, a placemaking component, access to trails, and an innovation center. If you are a first-time inventor, you can bring a product through this property. If you're at the very highest level too, you can bring your vehicles into the UP [and test them]. Art, food, community, housing, innovation, prototyping, manufacturing, workforce development—it tackles every single issue and puts it into an experimental petri dish that drives future opportunity.”

Marquette County's focus on technology and Ollila's Shophouse Park project exemplifies how a community can think beyond the traditional scope of outdoor recreation jobs. The region has a solid foundation of local assets which make their approach possible: four seasons, plentiful trails, fresh water, two nearby universities, a supportive State Office of Outdoor Industry, and a variety of local EDOs. But the community vision and shared commitment towards recreation technology animates those assets.

Building Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Tourism from the Ground Up: The Case of Powell Township

While natural amenities and outdoor recreation opportunities are evenly distributed throughout the county, the capacity—and willingness—to capitalize on them is not. Most communities in Marquette County have committed to a vision of outdoor recreation-driven economic development as the future. But the way that commitment has taken shape varies from city to city.

A city like Marquette, the largest city in the county, has a strong foundation to realize the potential of an economy oriented around outdoor recreation. The city has ready access to state parks and trailheads, a ski hill (Marquette Mountain), plentiful lodging, restaurant, and retail options, and the Lake Superior waterfront. Marquette also plays host to a variety of events that bring tourists—and, potentially, future residents and business owners—into the region like the UP200, an annual sled dog race that began over three decades ago.

But other, more rural areas of the county have much different needs and opportunities available to them. Not every community in the county can be, needs to be, or even wants to be like Marquette. While community leaders across the county have committed to the potential of outdoor recreation, this means different things for different communities.

Powell Township's economic diversification project represents a valuable case study in this regard. Powell Township is a small, civil township roughly 30 miles northwest of the City of Marquette with a population of a little more than 800, only about 350 of whom live there year-round. Much of the Township's population lives in Big Bay, an unincorporated community hugging the shore of Lake Superior, which has a handful of restaurants, two landmark hotels (the Thunder Bay Inn and the Big Bay Lighthouse Bed and Breakfast), and the Big Bay Health Camp (a nonprofit wellness camp for individuals with physical disabilities). Community members cite the rurality and ruggedness of the community as one of its key draws and defining features.

Big Bay and Powell Township have abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, but they are underdeveloped and underutilized especially in relation to other places in Marquette County. The numerous trails in the area are often unmarked, recreation opportunities have not been well advertised, most businesses lack websites and have inconsistent hours, it can be challenging to find something to eat for all meals of the day every day, and there are no outfitters or guides. One interviewee noted that it can be difficult to plan a trip to Big Bay because of these factors.

But because Powell Township is in a region with a strong, well-established reputation for outdoor recreation and a large visitor base, the community can tap into this existing ecosystem quickly—if it wants to. Many visitors who enjoy outdoor recreation value the serenity and solitude a place like Powell Township can offer. As other areas in the region become more crowded and populated, that solitude becomes more valuable.

As the Upper Peninsula grows in popularity as a tourist destination, the question is less *whether* more tourists will visit Powell Township but *how many* more will. The community's challenge is to determine how aggressively it wants to market itself, how to develop infrastructure and mechanisms to support increased levels of demand, and how to grow while also maintaining its own distinct rural, rugged identity.

Lundin Mining has provided a structure for the community to begin tackling these challenges. When the Eagle Mine opened in 2014, Powell Township did not receive any direct tax revenue from the mine despite its proximity (Powell Township's southern border is just outside the Eagle Mine). Due to frequent vehicular traffic on local roads, the Eagle Mine has supported the improvements and regular maintenance of County Roads 550 and 510. The presence of the mine has also supported improved connectivity with emergency medical technician availability.

Lundin also funded an initiative to support economic diversification efforts in the community to create economic resiliency and reduce dependency on the mine, given its impact on the community and short lifespan. Lundin hired Washington, D.C.-based CREST (The Center for Responsible Travel) "to grow the economic resiliency of Powell Township with sustainable, recreational tourism through marketing and branding as the Lundin owned Eagle Mine prepares for its eventual closure."²⁰

Meagen Morrison of Lundin Mining noted, "We're focused on the sustainability issue. We're not going to build a school or a hospital. We don't prioritize that because it's something you have to take care of, and if you can't take care of it, it's a burden on the community." Planning, on the other hand, doesn't guarantee long-term success but does increase the probability of it. It creates the foundation for growth, sustainability, and economic resiliency. Even beyond the contents of the plan itself, the planning *process* brings the community together, creates connections, and begins conversations about economic diversification.

Phase 1 of CREST's work involved a scoping study on tourism and other economic opportunities in Powell Township and provided guidance on how tourism can be leveraged from economic development in a sustainable fashion that doesn't compromise the ethos of the community.

²⁰ "Powell Township Parks & Recreation Plan: 2020-2025," 4.

CREST found that the closure of the mine will not directly impact jobs in the community. However, Powell Township will likely suffer from the loss of long-term renters at motels and privately-owned accommodations. Community members were most concerned about a potential decline in services provided directly by the mine (road maintenance and EMT availability). The initial findings identified tourism and recreation as easily the most promising economic opportunities for Powell Township. CREST noted that tourism is already occurring and, with strategic planning and partnerships, can be further enhanced.

Phase 2 included more in-depth visioning around what tourism in the community could and should look like in ten years. Based on that community engagement, CREST created a strategic plan centered around eight main goals:

- **Enhance Sense of Place:** “Maintaining and enhancing the small-town and rural atmosphere of Powell Township is of critical importance to residents. When considering placemaking, shared opportunities for beautification and curb appeal are of keen interest. A desire for additional wayfinding, interpretation, and branded signage creation has also been expressed to further the unified feel of the Township. The BBSC will be the manager of the Discover Big Bay brand and can pursue partnerships with the Marquette County Road Commission, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Marquette County Recreation, Planning, Community Development, and Forestry Division, among others... The success of these initiatives can be qualified and quantified through visitor and resident surveying.”²¹
- **Expand Outreach & Partnerships:** “Through open dialogue within the BBSC, intentional partnerships and a broad understanding of the different initiatives going on in Powell Township will enable the groups to support each other, through both joint projects and to enhance action plans that are already in place. Additionally, the BBSC will be an organization for everyone.”²²
- **Support Infrastructure & Asset Enhancement:** “Community members have indicated a keen interest in infrastructure improvements in Powell Township to enhance accessibility, connectivity, and both motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities... As makes sense, the BBSC can support new community assets and visitor attractions based on natural resources, while ensuring stewardship of those resources in collaboration with key partners.”²³
- **Provide Entrepreneurial Support:** “Strategic programs can be used to support existing businesses and enable new businesses. Strategic engagement and programs will be used to support existing businesses and enable new businesses. A unique asset available to all Powell Township residents, as well as those looking to do business in Powell Township, is AccelerateUP. AccelerateUP provides free confidential business consulting to new and existing businesses throughout Marquette County. There are a few key gaps in services that, if filled, would contribute to Powell Township’s self-sufficiency, create jobs, and enhance the visitor experience. Visitors who enjoy a satisfying and seamless stay are

²¹ “Big Bay Stewardship Council Strategy: 2021-2023,” 2.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

more likely to return and to recommend the destination to others based on these positive experiences.”²⁴

- **Create Authentic Experiences & Events:** “As appropriate, the Big Bay Stewardship Council can support existing events through coordinated “Discover Big Bay” promotion via regional or county organizations and Travel Marquette, and enhance those events through fostering community collaboration. A flagship event showcasing the community’s authentic spirit, hosted by the BBSC, can also bring in visitors, while raising awareness and funds for the BBSC’s work. A key challenge for events in Powell Township is that it is hard to identify and mobilize new volunteers. The BBSC can cultivate broad community involvement to hopefully bridge the gap, especially through involving interested young people.”²⁵
- **Measure What Matters:** “Measuring what matters through identified key metrics is of utmost importance, taking into account what is important to residents of Powell Township and balancing economic development with stewardship of resources. Annual data collection and analysis by the BBSC will help to ensure any infrastructure and asset development is done in alignment with community priorities and comfort level.”²⁶
- **Tell Powell Township’s story:** As part of placemaking, historic and natural interpretation can be used to provide a well-rounded narrative, which can be a point of pride and enrichment for the community. Through a strategic partnership with Travel Marquette, Powell Township will be able to shape the story told to visitors through diverse historic and current perspectives. This will allow Powell Township to effectively promote the community to visitors who appreciate Discover Big Bay’s authentic offering. Interest has also been expressed in cultivating cultural and historic interpretive assets in partnership with surrounding Townships.”²⁷
- **Secure Operations & Funding:** “Effective operational processes and funding is required to move forward both placemaking and tourism management projects as outlined in all seven above themes. Several representatives on the Big Bay Stewardship Council have significant experience writing grant proposals and effectively operating a business or organization. Because representatives on the Big Bay Stewardship Council are all volunteers with many other responsibilities, it may be necessary to identify funding for one part-time or full-time position to support the Big Bay Stewardship Council’s fundraising and administrative needs. Data collection and analysis will create key inputs for decision-making and funding proposals.”²⁸

Powell Township has been coordinating more heavily with Travel Marquette, the lead tourism agency for the county. Initially, Big Bay and Powell Township lacked content for Travel Marquette to market, so CREST worked with the community to develop materials that Travel Marquette could later disseminate. Travel Marquette currently features a write-up of Big Bay [on their website](#) and several blogs about recreation opportunities there, such as: “Getting to and Around Big Bay,” “Winter Sports in Big Bay,” “The Big Bay Family-Friendly Itinerary,” and “Your Guide to Big Bay’s Waterfalls.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Phase 3 focused on capacity building. Samantha Bray, who spearheaded CREST’s involvement with the BBSC, noted that “this is the crux of the work. Communities with extractive industries moving to tourism relies on [capacity building].” In Powell Township, this means building the capacity to create more economic growth through tourism and outdoor recreation while simultaneously maintaining the environmental and aesthetic integrity. Community members repeatedly highlighted the rurality of the community as a defining feature and didn’t want to sacrifice that in the name of growth. Some mentioned specifically not wanting to become like Munising, a city to the east known for being a major tourist destination and gateway to Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

CREST’s strategy for achieving this is through the creation of a Destination Stewardship Council. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council defines Destination Stewardship as “a process by which local communities, governmental agencies, NGOs, and the tourism industry take a multi-stakeholder approach to maintaining the cultural, environmental, economic, and aesthetic integrity of their country, region, or town.” Destination Stewardship Councils ensure that this work happens. They work to make sure tourism isn’t something that happens to a community, it’s something the community guides and cultivates. [CREST outlines a variety of approaches and strategies](#) for communities to consider when creating a Destination Stewardship Council.

In Powell Township and Big Bay, the Destination Stewardship Council CREST helped community members create is [the Big Bay Steering Committee](#). Their mission is “to facilitate the protection of the unique nature of the greater Big Bay area and promote community improvements in Powell Township through responsible, properly scaled economic development and stewardship of the natural resources and cultural enrichment.” Powell Township’s experience reveals several key lessons, many of which are critical for communities that have relatively little infrastructure or planning around outdoor recreation but aim to build develop the industry more.

Key Lessons from the BBSC

Strategic Timing

CREST notes that some sort of external pressure or desire to create economic resiliency usually creates the potential and opportunity to create a destination stewardship council. Absent this, it can be difficult for a community to coalesce. For Powell Township, the closure of the Eagle Mine and the opportunity provided by Lundin created that pressure and incentive to develop the Big Bay Steering Committee.

Identifying a Champion and Key Participants

Particularly in small communities, finding and empowering a local champion to drive the efforts of the council are critical for success. Without this, the council may fail to gain traction and accomplish its aims. For Powell Township, this was local leaders like Sven Gonstead and Mark Bevins, who currently serve as Chair and Vice Chair of the Big Bay Steering Committee

Developing Shared Goals, Objectives, and Strategy

One of the most important aspects of the BBSC’s work is identifying a clear, shared vision for the community: growth in the outdoor recreation and tourism sector while still maintaining their identity. That has translated to clear policies and points of emphasis—such as branding the community more but emphasizing Leave No Trace practices—that are customized to achieve

Creating Appropriate Structure

CREST notes that destination stewardship councils can take many different forms: a body within an existing organization, a separate organization entirely, a volunteer group with no nonprofit status, etc. The council can also take different shapes and focuses depending on their goals. In the case of the BBSC, they’ve decided to function as their own 501(c)(3) and break off into different committees (Marketing, Placemaking, and Steering)

those goals. Each community will have different goals and the planning process reveals and sharpens them.

Stakeholder and Asset Mapping

One of the key roles for a destination stewardship council is understanding the local assets and stakeholders that the council can collaborate with to preserve and enhance those assets. The Big Bay Stewardship Council identified several stakeholders who are involved with outdoor recreation in the area and worked with Travel Marquette to highlight particular ones as an initial step in boosting their tourism presence.

Council Mobilization

Having an outside influence can be useful. CREST staff noted that their involvement in the process likely has created an additional incentive for the BBSC committee to keep meeting, especially when enthusiasm waned. Based on their goals, the council can also decide to take on work and projects like trail cleanups or a catalytic event like a fall festival that boosts tourism in the area and begins establishing a brand.

to achieve their goals. The format of the organization raises important questions about funding and business planning as well.

Community Engagement

As Mark Bevins, Vice Chair of the Big Bay Steering Committee, said, “the more rural an area, the more important it is to get buy-in.” The aim of destination stewardship councils is to create a culture of tourism that benefits the community – the only way to achieve that is by incorporating the community’s vision into tourism policies and planning.

Ensuring Sustainability

Multiple interviewees indicated a concern about burnout. The downside of having a community champion, especially in a rural community with a limited population, is that they get asked to take on too much of a burden. Inevitably, this becomes unsustainable for them, and when they leave or diminish their role, the work of the council fades as well. Building a system in that distributes work—while also empowering those most eager—is essential.

According to Sven Gonstead, Chair of the BBSC, CREST’s facilitation and guidance broke down silos and empowered the community to plan at a higher level. The capacity building work “brought all the stakeholders to the table. That didn’t exist before – everyone was totally separate, there was no framework.” Gonstead highlighted how CREST’s intervention helped reframe the community around larger goals: “[The process] helped us start to understand this is all for the same community even if we have different belief systems and desires. There were a lot of similar goals, but we didn’t have that level of organization to get things done. The church did church things, the township did township things. Even in parks and rec, we...never took on big projects.” Matt Johnson of Lundin Mining noted how CREST’s work brought data and numbers to the table, which enabled Big Bay to take a more strategic approach to their planning efforts.

Still, while this facilitation process and the creation of the BBSC creates a platform for community members to discuss how tourism should evolve in Big Bay, it does not create total cohesion and agreement. Community members in this small rural town prefer varying levels of growth and tourism and have differing opinions about how much visitation the community can handle without losing its central ethos.

But as Marcia Gonstead, Sven’s wife and a member of the BBSC herself, noted, “[The BBSC] isn’t for tourism, it’s for the community to benefit *from* tourism. We’re not trying to bring more people

here, they're coming *anyway*. We didn't advertise at all and people are coming here.” And though it does not eliminate disagreements, it provides a forum for community members to discuss them.

While many communities—including Marquette County—have an organization that coordinates tourism, few have community-led organizations that cultivate and guide tourism in accordance with a community vision. While Powell Township is still in the early stages of building its recreation tourism economy, its community-driven process provides a blueprint for other communities who have a legacy of resource extraction, fear losing their identity, but simultaneously want to grow.

Powell's experience also underscores the idea that access to outdoor recreation opportunities does not immediately translate to the ability to capitalize and take advantage of those outdoor recreation opportunities. Building that up while maintaining the community's ethos requires intentional planning, coordination between stakeholders, investments in infrastructure and marketing, and a plan for sustainability.

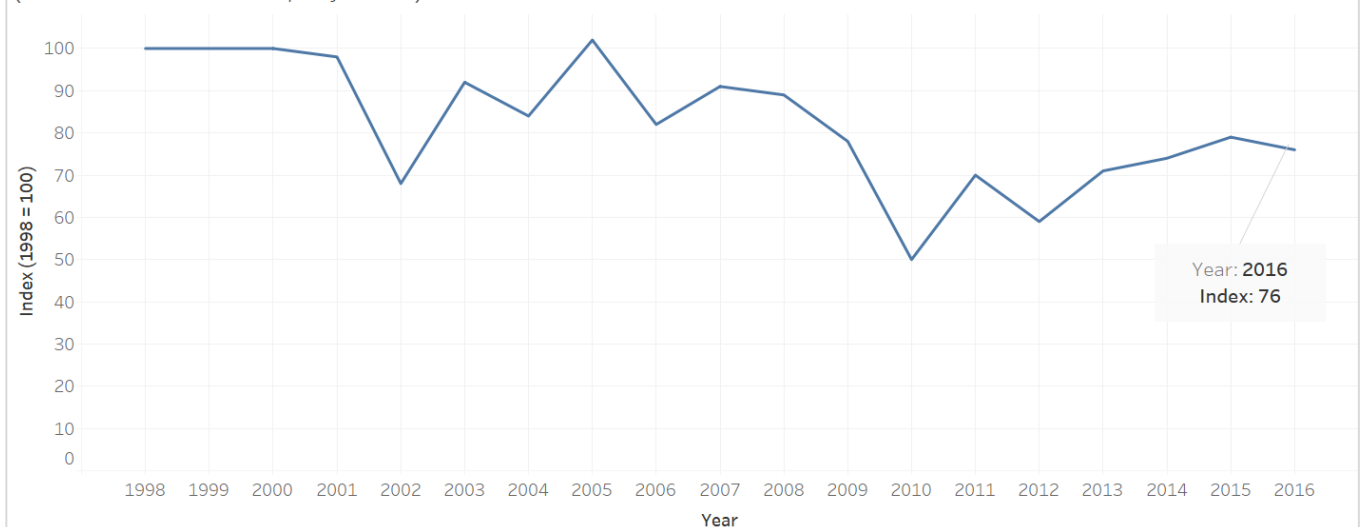
Appendix B: Plumas County, California

Timber in Plumas County

Plumas County is located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in a region known as the Lost Sierra west of Reno and Lake Tahoe. The Lost Sierra region has a long history of resource extraction, beginning with gold mining in the 19th century. While mining has long since declined in the area, the region still has an active timber industry led by companies like Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI). Most of the land around Plumas County is contained in the Plumas National Forest and timber companies operate both on private land and National Forest lands.

The timber industry in Plumas County has been faced with a variety of obstacles in recent decades. The industry has been in decline for a number of years now due to a variety of factors. As of 2016—the most recent year accurate data is available—Plumas County timber employment was at roughly 75% of its level in 1998.

Plumas County Timber Employment, 1998-2016
(Indexed to 1998 Employment)



Indexed numbers are compared with a base value. In the line chart, employment in 1998 is the base value and is set to 100. The employment values for subsequent years are expressed as 100 times the ratio to the base value. The indexing used in the line chart enables easier comparisons between locations over time.

One major challenge came in 1986, when environmentalists argued that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should list the spotted owl, which has historically made its home in the old-growth forests of the northwestern United States, an endangered species. Only about 10% of old-growth forests remained, which had caused the spotted owl population to dwindle. Declaring the spotted owl an endangered species would restrict the timber industry's activity in old-growth forests—a move strongly opposed by timber companies. In 1990, after years of negotiations, the spotted owl was declared a threatened species and timber companies are required to leave at least 40% of the old-growth forests intact within a 1.3 mile radius of any spotted owl nest or activity site.²⁹

²⁹ Santa Clara University, "Ethics and the Environment: The Spotted Owl Controversy"

More recently, Plumas County's reliance on timber as a dominant industry has been threatened by other forces. Automation and technological improvements at the mills have eliminated many jobs. Declines in the old growth forest meant that the average diameter of logs dropped below a point of profitability. Rather than re-orient and adjust their operations, many companies simply left.

Meanwhile, climate change—in particular the increasing frequency, volatility, and strength of forest fires—has severely compromised the ability of the timber industry to profitably operate. The 2021 Dixie Fire heavily burned much of the Plumas National Forest and surrounding national forests. While predicting the exact location of forest fires is impossible, many interviewees felt that it was a matter of when, not if, another major fire reaches Plumas County and the region. This near inevitability represents an existential threat to the timber industry as well as the communities in the area and those who live there.

Local Challenges

This list of local challenges is not exhaustive. It aims to highlight some of the unique challenges facing the community that we found through our interviews. Many communities, for instance, are having trouble finding and retaining a talented workforce. While important and relevant, this list aims to capture some of the specific problems this community is having especially related to economic development, outdoor recreation, and natural resource extraction.

How to support economic development without economic development organizations

Plumas County does not have a single individual or organization exclusively focused on economic development in the county besides local chambers of commerce, which have little funding and are almost entirely volunteer-run. The 2008 recession led to the defunding of the visitor's bureau, which has since not been re-established, and eliminated the remainder of any economic development focus in the county. The county government continues to struggle financially and has not been able to fund economic development work.

How to build outdoor recreation while navigating cross-jurisdictional boundaries

Land ownership in Plumas County creates challenges for developing consistent outdoor recreation opportunities. Roughly 70% of the land in Plumas County is part of the Plumas National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service, which manages these lands, lacks the full financial capacity to build trails to meet demand. Much of that land is also privately owned by individuals or timber companies. Building recreation opportunities amid a patchwork of land ownership and under-resourced organizations has proven challenging for the region. 90% of these lands are Type C federal lands, which means these lands have no special designation and allow a wide range of compatible activities including timber production, grazing, recreation, large-scale watershed projects, and fire management options.

A lack of well-resourced commercial outdoor recreation options

Feather River College has a robust outdoor recreation program where they offer a two-year associates degree in outdoor recreation. Now in its 22nd year, most cohorts are 15-20 students. According to Saylor Flett, an instructor of the program, students tend to come for a couple of years and then leave since industry-related employment is extremely limited. Yuba Expeditions in nearby Sierra County offers mountain bike rentals and shuttles. But by and large there are few options to work as guides or find consistent work in the recreation sector. And so, despite having abundant

natural resources and an academic institution that trains students to work in the outdoor recreation industry, the county is unable to fully capitalize on these resources.

The threat of forest fires

The 2021 Dixie Fire was just the latest in a series of devastating forest fires in the area. Populated areas in Plumas County have, on average, a greater wildfire risk than 95% of counties in the state. 100% of homes in Plumas County are exposed to wildfire from direct (adjacent flammable vegetation) or indirect (home-to-home ignition) sources according to Headwaters Economics. Wildfires impact the lives and livelihood of residents as well as the timber and outdoor recreation industries.

Strategies and Policies to Support Recreation and Diversification

Empowering Local Leadership: Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship and the Connected Community Trails Project

One of the major drivers of outdoor recreation in Plumas County and the Lost Sierra (including Lassen, Butte, and Sierra counties) is the Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship (SBTS). SBTS's founder, Greg Williams, had started a bike shop (then Coyote Adventure Company and now Yuba Expeditions) in Downieville and hosted a major mountain bike race called the Coyote Classic in the 1990s. Williams worked with the local chamber of commerce and the county to attract tourism through mountain biking as the timber and mining industries waned. As the event—and region—grew in popularity, sustainability and maintaining the trails became an increasing concern. According to Williams, the Forest Service was losing their budget for recreation. In 2003, Williams began funneling profits from the bike shop and the Coyote Classic into a new nonprofit, SBTS, focusing on sustaining, restoring, and managing the trails in the region.

Since then, SBTS's goals and ambitions have dramatically expanded. Rather than focus exclusively on mountain bike trails, they now are a multiuser trail organization (hiking, biking, motorbiking, and equestrian) that also constructs trails throughout the region. They employ 20 full-time and 5 part-time employees and have a number of volunteers who build and maintain trails. Since 2003, SBTS has built over 100 miles of new trails, maintained 1,238, and contributed 100,009 volunteer hours to trail maintenance and creation.

Williams sees SBTS's role and contribution as a major form of economic development. As the population ages and extractive industries decline in the region, "trails are tools to revive these communities," Williams said. "We're trying to create employment through trail work and bringing people in." For Williams, the trails both create employment opportunities and increase the quality of life, helping the region attract and retain residents. "We're not trying to replace any industry, we're just trying to add to what we have," he said.

SBTS has recently started a \$40.3 million dollar initiative called The Connected Communities Trail Project. The project's scope is ambitious. It aims to connect 15 towns in the region through multi-use trails. On their website, SBTS claims Connected Communities "will create a vision for a recreation-focused lifestyle through community investment, shared stewardship, economic opportunity, and important new local jobs, all benefiting economically disadvantaged communities in California's Plumas, Sierra, Butte, and Lassen Counties...it is the intent of this project to diversify recreation throughout the region, provide economic stability as well as support fire recovery and prevention efforts." SBTS is handling all planning, environmental review, trail creation, and maintenance.



Source: Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship

SBTS has also undertaken comprehensive community engagement efforts to create buy-in, reduce friction as the project proceeds, and gather feedback to improve the project. Williams said it was important to gather letters of support and answer questions before proceeding with the project. They contacted land managers, local organizations, and residents to schedule in-person and virtual meetings. They also built a webpage that lists ways for the public to participate in the project and featured histories of the towns that will be connected through the project. SBTS also conducted surveys to gather feedback. The results indicated broad support. 87% of the 237 retail/hospitality businesses surveyed “believe that an in-town trail system with a Main Street trailhead would help attract customers to their business.”³⁰

The massive scope of the project has meant SBTS has had to negotiate with a variety of landowners to build the trails. SBTS does not own any of the land they are building trails on. Rather, they are working with different landowners—primarily the U.S. Forest Service—to construct trails on their lands. The Connected Communities project involves four different national forests and twelve districts. Each ranger has their own priorities and has different requirements. Williams said that their aim is to operate at the forest supervisor level in order to create consistency. Their ability to do that, according to Williams, comes from thirty years of being in the community, long-standing credibility (formed by SBTS’s trail maintenance efforts, for instance), and lots of communication and efforts to get buy-in up front. SBTS’s commitment to transparency helps create an environment where negotiating with these different stakeholders becomes relatively streamlined.

Leslie Edlund, Public Service Staff Officer at the Plumas National Forest, said that SBTS’s approach has been to speak with each district office individually to proceed with the project in smaller chunks. “We have never sat down with all the staff from the different offices to say ‘this is the big picture,’” Edlund said. This approach has benefits (like making the project more manageable) but also trade-offs (a lack of large-scale coordination that may be necessary as the project proceeds). Edlund mentioned that SBTS “started with my district because we’re both based out of Quincy [the county seat of Plumas County] and we have a strong relationship because we’ve done projects like this at a smaller scale. They’re starting with us because they know how we operate and how we work.”

Williams, like other interviewees in Plumas County, stressed that he wanted the region to grow while not being over-run. “That’s why we’re trying to promote fifteen different communities—to spread it out. We’re not just putting the spotlight on one town.” Williams envisions the project and its main trail, The Lost Sierra Route, as a version of the Pacific Crest Trail or John Muir Trail but open to a variety of types of user groups. He sees them as traveling trails which will have high levels of accessibility and connect the main streets of the fifteen communities.

SBTS has funded this project through a variety of sources. State and federal grants are supplying roughly half of the necessary funds, while SBTS is provided 51% through an in-kind match (that includes \$9.5 million from SBTS and \$11 million from philanthropic sources)

Not every community currently has the capacity, ability, or interest to embark on a project with the scope and scale of SBTS’s Connected Communities Trails Project. But the lessons from SBTS’s initiative translate broadly for organizations and communities with and without their ambition. They’ve demonstrated transparency and communicated frequently and thoroughly with

³⁰ “Connected Communities Survey Report” (2021)

stakeholders; planned comprehensively and at a macro level, connecting and building trails within a broader ecosystem rather than several one-off projects; and thought of outdoor recreation as a form of economic development and quality of life enhancer.

Supportive Public Land Officials

The support from U.S. Forest Service staff in the region has been integral to the success of SBTS. That relationship began small, initially. The Forest Service's trail division has historically been under-resourced and SBTS offered to help. The trail-building efforts came shortly after that. SBTS wanted to add more connectivity to Mt. Huff and offered to build those trails themselves, and Edlund and her team jumped at that opportunity. As SBTS grew and added more trails, demand began snowballing: the public increasingly wanted more trails, and SBTS's scope has grown from there.

The Forest Service's relationship with SBTS is atypical, Edlund noted. Traditionally, they have partners like Friends of Plumas Wilderness and the Pacific Crest Trail Group who help with trail maintenance. They say, "How can we help?" Whereas, according to Edlund, SBTS says "'This is where we're headed. Hang on, you're coming along for the ride.'"

Partnerships have worked so well in Plumas County because each group recognizes their own strengths and limitations. According to Edlund, the Forest Service lacks the funding and capacity to build and then maintain more trails (though the Great American Outdoors Act has provided critical resources and they are increasing hiring soon). SBTS has that capacity. The Forest Service does not have a robust social media presence to promote the forest and recreation opportunities there. Rather than try to build their own social media presence, they rely on SBTS to promote the forest and its opportunities to a much broader audience. But ultimately, SBTS's focus is trails, and the Forest Service is the land manager, responsible for a much broader array of uses (campgrounds, utilities, timber, grazing, etc.) and accountable to a broader array of stakeholders (Caltrans, utility companies, timber companies, etc.). SBTS helps bring more people to the Plumas National Forest, but the Forest Service maintains the balance that helps the forest thrive.

The urgency to have this support began over the last 10 years, according to Edlund, and accelerated during the pandemic. Events like Williams' Coyote Classic, the Historic Long Board Revival Race, the Grand Duro mountain bike race, and music festivals have driven people to Plumas County. Plumas and the Lost Sierra have historically seen less tourism activity than other nearby areas like Truckee, CA, or Lake Tahoe because there is no major highway corridor access. When the pandemic hit, visitation skyrocketed, and the Forest Service began having issues with trail maintenance and management at a level they had not had before. Organizations like SBTS help fill that gap.

This relationship demonstrates the critical importance of having buy-in and a strong partner in public lands. As Saylor Flett, the instructor at Feather River College, said, the reason why the Connected Communities project is possible at all is because of a supportive and cooperative Forest Service. For communities without that support, it can be hard to get past the bureaucratic processes. Flett mentioned that the specialists at the district office are trail users themselves and see the value in growing and maintaining the recreation opportunities.

Collaborative Resource Management Practices: The Quincy Library Group and Beyond

Plumas County has a deep history of collaboration between different stakeholders—often with divergent interests—to effectively manage the surrounding forest. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, local officials had been disputing the allocation of land uses in the Plumas National Forest. Plumas County Supervisor Bill Coates realized that these continual disagreements would exacerbate the economic distress in the region and decided to convene a group of local stakeholders. He contacted Michael B. Jackson, an attorney representing local environmental groups, and Tom Nelson, director of timberlands for Sierra Pacific Industries, and found a shared concern about the future of Plumas County and the surrounding region.³¹

The group began meeting in the Quincy Library, a neutral site, to achieve a negotiated agreement and avoid litigation, and began known as the Quincy Library Group (QLG). After over a year of debating, the QLG came to a negotiated agreement, despite the Forest Service—which could not participate in QLG meetings due to legal restrictions—having reservations. Despite these misgivings, the QLG pushed a bill, the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act, through Congress which President Clinton signed into law in 1993. The legislation and process by which it came together has become a leading model of community-oriented forest management.

The QLG demonstrates a grassroots, community-driven approach to forest and resource management. As professors Charles Davis and M. Dawn King write in an analysis of the QLG, “the QLG Plan is a policy experiment that carries public participation and collaborative decision-making a few steps further than existing public policies. Instead of input that falls within the realm of ‘advise and recommend,’ it allows participants to develop projects that the Forest Service is obliged to accept if the proposed activities can be accommodated within the existing plan without violating existing laws or regulations. It is a form of shared governance that elevates QLG members to the rank of junior partner. The QLG is one of several groups nationwide that are depicted as “grass-roots ecosystem management.”³²

These days, while the QLG no longer meets, there is a clear through-line in its approach to resource management in the region. Kyle Rodgers, Operations Manager at the Sierra Institute, which facilitates some of these resource management groups, observed that collaboration is currently driven by a desire to pool resources and capacities rather than avoid the courtroom, as it was during the QLG days. The urgency of collaboration has also taken on new meaning in an era of rampant fire. “There are differences of opinion for sure,” he said. “But increasingly, there’s an acknowledgement, furthered by Dixie Fire, that we have to get past those differences of opinion because we rely on each other’s capacity. The fire put enormous strain on everyone—whether they’re a nonprofit, agency, or community member. The stress has created an urgency.”

For instance, the South Lassen Watersheds Group meets regularly to “identify, advance, support and enable projects on public and private land in the North Fork Feather River/Upper Deer Creek/Upper Mill Creek watersheds to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and improve ecological resilience, watershed condition and function, and local community health and

³¹ Davis and King, “The Quincy Library Group and Collaborative Planning Within U.S. National Forests,” 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

socioeconomic conditions.”³³ Together, the group is working together to apply for grants, complete projects that align with these goals, and coordinate NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) planning.

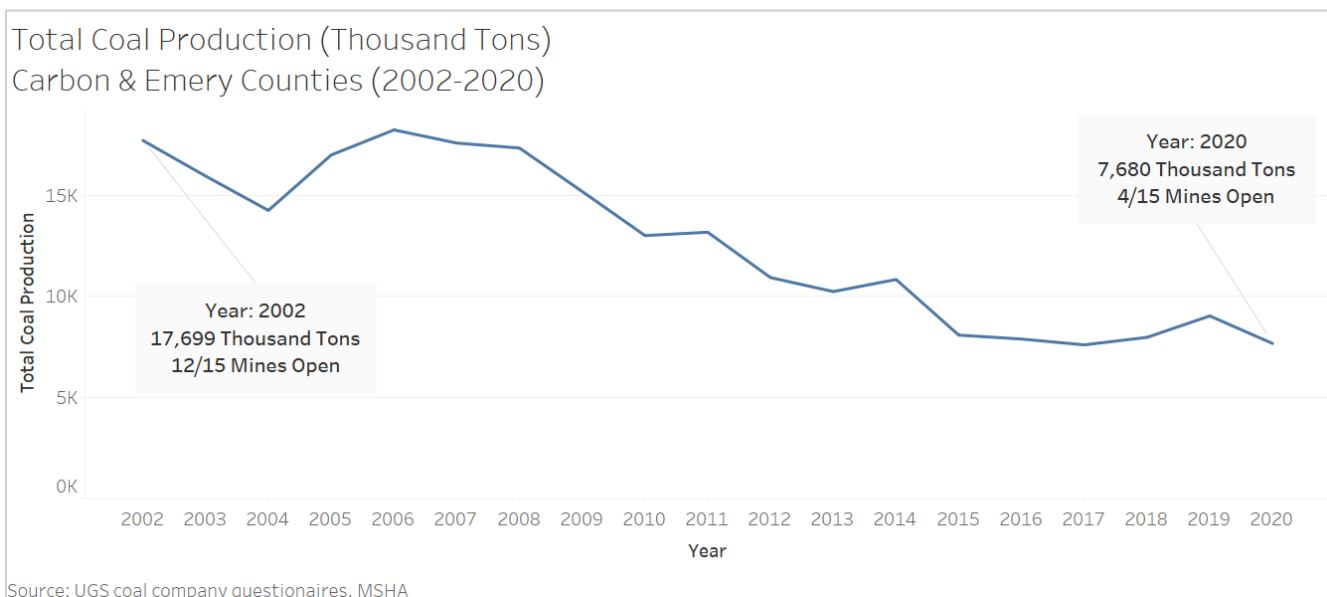
The QLG and the subsequent forest management initiatives in the Plumas County region demonstrate the importance and benefits of a collaborative approach not just to forest management but also more generally. These groups create a forum for stakeholders to negotiate their differences, find common ground, and pool resources to develop more ambitious and comprehensive plans than they would have been able to do independently.

³³ “South-Lassen Watersheds Group Memorandum of Understanding.”

Appendix C: Carbon & Emery Counties, Utah

Utah's Coal Country

Emery and Carbon Counties are located in Southeastern Utah. Coal mining began in the region in the mid-19th century, driven in large part by the demands Union Pacific and the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroads. In recent decades, mirroring larger trends in energy markets, coal has been in decline. By 2020, many of the mines in the region had either dramatically cut production or outright closed, with hundreds losing their jobs. Between the two counties, only four mines out of the fifteen that have been active at one point since 2002 are open as of 2022. In Emery County, PacifiCorp has scheduled the closure of two coal coal-fired power plants over the next two decades.



The decline of coal mining poses a significant challenge for the region. While Utah generally saw tremendous growth in the 2010s, between 2010 and 2020, the two counties were among the only counties in the state to lose population according to the U.S. Census Bureau. According to data from the University of Utah, over the span of 2008 to 2017, Emery and Carbon Counties experienced a 16% job loss.

Jobs in the coal industry tend to offer substantially higher wages compared to other industries. When these jobs decline, total wages, tax revenue, and the quality of services begin to decline as well. Many of these high-wage workers may simply decide to move from the region with no high-wage job tying them there.

Employment and Wages in 2020	Wage & Salary Employment	% of Total Employment	Avg. Annual Wages (2021 \$s)	% Above or Below Avg.
Total	8,495		\$47,016	
Private	6,535	76.9%	\$49,114	4.5%
Non-Services Related	1,622	19.1%	\$83,385	77.4%
Natural Resources and Mining	868	10.2%	\$109,570	133.0%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	22	0.3%	\$22,567	-52.0%
Mining (incl. fossil fuels)	846	10.0%	\$111,833	137.9%
Construction	318	3.7%	\$49,721	5.8%
Manufacturing (Incl. forest products)	436	5.1%	\$55,810	18.7%
Services Related	4,914	57.8%	\$37,792	-19.6%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	1,726	20.3%	\$41,829	-11.0%
Information	81	1.0%	\$32,180	-31.6%
Financial Activities	196	2.3%	\$40,908	-13.0%
Professional and Business Services	504	5.9%	\$47,151	0.3%
Education and Health Services	1,284	15.1%	\$41,563	-11.6%
Leisure and Hospitality	749	8.8%	\$13,734	-70.8%
Other Services	374	4.4%	\$41,358	-12.0%
Unclassified	0	0.0%	na	na
Government	1,959	23.1%	\$40,043	-14.8%
Federal Government	149	1.8%	\$70,215	49.3%
State Government	595	7.0%	\$41,839	-11.0%
Local Government	1,215	14.3%	\$35,464	-24.6%

Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2021. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

Local Challenges

This list of local challenges is not exhaustive. It aims to highlight some of the unique challenges facing the community that we found through our interviews. Many communities, for instance, are having trouble finding and retaining a talented workforce. While important and relevant, this list aims to capture some of the specific problems this community is having especially related to economic development, outdoor recreation, and natural resource extraction.

Avoiding cultural clashes and generating revenue from outdoor recreation

Climbing has become increasingly popular in Southeastern Utah. Climbers have a distinct culture that has oftentimes clashed with local communities in Carbon and Emery Counties. Climbing is not a form of outdoor recreation that locals traditionally enjoy. When local leaders don't understand climbers—and vice versa—that can lead to culture clashes and missed opportunities for investment and recreation-driven economic development. Additionally, it can be challenging for communities to generate revenue from climbers, who typically purchase their gear outside the region and anecdotally spend less than other user groups like ATVers or mountain bikers.

Creating momentum in rural areas amid urban Utah's boom

Much of Utah—particularly in the Salt Lake City metropolitan area—has seen tremendous growth over the past decade. But Emery and Carbon Counties have not, and in fact, rank among the lowest of all Utah counties in key metrics. Finding ways to shift some of that growth from the urban center to Southeastern Utah amid the decline of the coal industry represents a major challenge for local leaders.

Developing consensus about the importance of diversification

Utah's coal country has historically struggled to proactively plan for economic diversification and development after coal. As mines and powerplants shut down, creating consensus about coal's future in Emery and Carbon Counties—and what alternatives might look like—has been challenging for locals. While the steep decline of coal has convinced many local leaders and community members of the urgency to diversify the economy and find alternatives, others remain attached to the vision of a future driven by traditional industries like coal.

Bridging Cultural Divides: Joe's Valley Fest

While the economic potential of coal mining in Southeastern Utah has declined in recent decades, the promise of outdoor recreation has grown. Climbing began in earnest in this area of Utah, an area often called Joe's Valley, in the 1990s. In 1995, the climbing video *Three Weeks & a Day* highlighted the area. British climber Ben Moon helped popularize the area even further with his first ascent of the challenging Black Lung route in 2000. As of 2017, 15,000 climbers visit Joe's Valley annually.³⁴ But the growth and popularity of recreating in the area—namely, rock climbing and bouldering—bring their own challenges: the potential for cultural clashes and divisions.

In many of the communities we explored, locals and visitors have overlapping recreation interests, even if they have divergent cultural and political views. In Marquette County, for instance, locals and tourists alike share interests in snowmobiling, skiing, hunting, and mountain biking. Investments in natural amenities simultaneously improve the experiences of year-round residents and short-term visitors. While culturally, tourists and residents may come from different backgrounds, the similarity in recreation interests reduces the potential for cultural friction.

In conservative Southeastern Utah, locals who have backgrounds in coal mining, ranching, and agriculture have very different interests, priorities, and backgrounds than the climbers visiting from elsewhere who also dress, act, and talk dramatically differently. Quotations from a 2019 short film, "United States of Joe's", capture some of this dynamic:

- *Climber Jason Kehl*: "I think we were definitely outsiders moving in"
- *Climber Steven Jeffery*: "It would almost make me anxious sometimes. I was this naive kid from the city, and here was a whole different world. It was a different culture down there...I was actually scared even going to the grocery store to buy supplies because it's like, man, these are mean-mugging people."
- *Emery County high school student Cambrie Bennett*: "At Food Ranch, I'd be hanging out with my friends. These people would walk in and they'd look like vagabonds."
- *Food Ranch manager Lisa Scovill*: "They dressed a little different. They had the dreads, the man-buns. You know, we knew they were showering in our bathrooms."
- *Emery County Sheriff Greg Funk*: "Honestly, we thought we were being invaded by a bunch of potheads."
- *Castle Dale Mayor Danny Van Wagoner*: "I can remember seeing strange guys with the mattresses on their back, and I'm thinking 'what in the world?' I just couldn't imagine that being anything you'd really want to do."³⁵

Steven Jeffery mentions in the film that he worried that climbing access could be taken away or restricted. So he began helping with the town clean-up as a gesture of goodwill. Jeffery also presented to the city council, answering questions about the climbers. Food Ranch, the local grocery store, saw an opportunity to cater to the climbing community and began selling chalk, crash pads, and kombucha.

³⁴ Webber, "How Bouldering Changed Joe's Valley."

³⁵ Lowell et al., *Reel Rock 14*.

Perhaps the most innovative strategy the community has developed to bridge the divides between the two cultures has been the annual Joe's Valley Fest. Amanda Leonard, a local who was not part of the climbing community and worked as the Emery County Events Coordinator, proposed the idea of creating an event that would unite the two groups and speak to their varied interests. Leonard, Jeffery, and Adriana Chimaras, Director of Tourism for Emery County, created Joe's Valley Fest, which features a rodeo, ghost tours, yoga, climbing events and clinics, a jerky making class, and more.

Chimaras said that it would not have worked without Leonard's perspective. With her input and theirs, the team was able to create a tourism asset that earnestly incorporated the community's input and preferences. For instance, Leonard helped the climbers understand how a word like "environmentalism" rings differently to locals, but both respect the notion of being good stewards of the land. Meanwhile, Chimaras understood potential conflicts between the notion of a rodeo and climbers' opposition to perceived animal cruelty. So they removed some of the potentially controversial elements of the rodeo. In doing so, they created an event that met people where they were.

One day of the festival focuses more on "local"-oriented activities—the rodeo, the jerky making, etc.—whereas the second day focuses on climbing. During the first few years, locals and climbers did not overlap much between their respective days, frustrating the organizers. But, Chimaras said, persistence has paid off. Now locals look forward to both days and climbers are attending the rodeo. Because of the physically demanding and technically challenging nature of bouldering, it can be difficult to get locals to fully buy into that specific activity. But they still come to hang out with the climbers and participate in storytelling. Local high school students increasingly come out to participate in the climbing activities, showing the potential for a general shift in and mixture in cultures.

These days, according to Chimaras, the hostility has largely abated. Both groups have become accustomed to each other and stick up for one another. Chimaras told a story about how a local posted a picture on social media recently of a trashed, graffitied campsite and blamed climbers for it. Another local chimed in and defended the climbers, noting that they never camp in that area so it couldn't have possibly been them. On the flip side, a climber posted a critical comment on a picture of the rodeo at Joe's Valley about animal cruelty by the locals. Another climber responded criticizing the post and attested to the locals' deep love and respect for their animals.

Empathetic listening and conflict resolution has become a large part of Chimaras' job. And she insisted that it ought to be part of the training and focus for others who manage tourism. At the center of Joe's Valley Fest is that ethic: taking the time to listen to the needs, perspectives, and interests of others and finding common ground and creating ways to bring seemingly disparate groups together.

Creating Community Cohesion and Momentum Around Economic Diversification

Creating the consensus to move on from extraction-based industries can be one of the most difficult stumbling blocks for communities that are reliant on them. During our interviews, we found that policies and strategies taken at the state and local level in Utah have created an environment that encourages coal communities to pursue different economic strategies.

Helper, UT in Carbon County exemplifies how local leadership and policymaking can encourage economic diversification efforts. While Helper, like many communities in this part of Utah, owes its existence to the railroads and coal industry, it developed in a different fashion than many surrounding cities, which were largely settled by Mormons. By 1900, sixteen different ethnic groups were represented among Helper's 385 residents—most of whom were laborers and merchants tied to coal and the railroads.³⁶ Through the early to mid-20th century, Helper boomed with the coal industry and became a hub of activity in Southeastern Utah.

In the latter part of the century, with coal in decline and the community struggling economically, Helper began to take on a new identity as an artist enclave. David Dornan helped lead that transformation. In the late 1990s, he was an assistant professor at the University of Utah and bought studio space in Helper. Over the course of the next several years, more and more artists began coming to Helper, buying houses and starting galleries in downtown.

We traced Helper's success and commitment to economic diversification to three main strategies, the combination of which has helped shift the paradigm towards building resiliency and sustainability. Any of these strategies alone would not have been nearly as effective in building consensus around economic diversification.

Collaborative Projects that Bring the Community Together

Initially, according to Mayor Lenise Peterman—a non-local herself who came to the community because of her partner's connection to the arts scene—the coal miners saw the artists as outsiders, much like in Emery County with the locals and the climbers. Similar to Joe's Valley Fest in Emery County, a collaborative project helped bridge the two groups, create connections, and reduce tensions.

Mayor Peterman applied for the American Institute of Architect (AIA)'s Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) program, which brings architects into a community to help them develop a community-driven strategy to improve downtown. According to Peterman, "It was the first time that artists were working with the local community. I had young families working with artists and coal miners with contractors with teachers. It built 'positive proximity.' They began to value what they could collectively do together as opposed to what they could do individually."

Messaging that Honors and Respects the Community's Legacy of Coal Mining

Throughout the process and as the community begins its economic transition process, Mayor Peterman has worked to shift the paradigm around coal. "We should be historically proud of who we have been and what we did for the nation. Coal was integral to WWII and post-WWII growth. But I also temper that with 'coal is not the future.' If our desire is to have our kids come back to Helper and have jobs that they can work at, we've got to change what we're doing and where our focus should be."

Many of the artists explicitly reference and honor the town's coal and railroad history, both in their own art and creative placemaking. Artist Kate Kilpatrick-Miller has a reoccurring "Faces of Helper"

³⁶ "Utah History Encyclopedia."

series where she records the stories of locals and then paints them. Dornan helped the city design a neon sign of a locomotive honoring the city's legacy.

Rather than encourage the community to “just move on” from coal, local leaders have found ways to highlight and respect the positive legacy of coal mining in Helper. The “move on” message fails to properly acknowledge the contributions, sacrifices, and lifestyles of community members. It discourages participation in any efforts to find alternatives. So instead, the community has found ways to infuse Helper's past with its present and future.

The decline of coal mining in Helper—including the 2015 closure of a major coal-fired power plant in Carbon County—certainly creates additional incentive for the community to find alternatives beyond coal. But the way Helper has incorporated history into the present makes this process easier. Mayor Peterman and other leaders have intentionally focused on building upon assets and finding new goals, rather than wallowing in narratives of decline. She repeatedly mentioned how she emphasizes to community members the importance of creating opportunities to keep young families in Helper and making sure local youth have a reason to come back. This message helps supplant a message of nostalgia and decline.

Backing up Language with Opportunities and Tangible Hope

Meanwhile, Peterman has found ways to back up that messaging by bringing new resources and opportunities into Helper. Peterman estimated she'd brought in \$3 million worth of grants into the town of 2,000. Many of these have focused on revitalizing their main street, giving property owners funds to restore their buildings, and other beautification projects. One of her main initiatives has been the restoration of the river in Helper, which has needed serious remediation. According to Peterman, people used to throw their cars in the river. The debris made a species of fish go endangered. But over time and with plenty of resources they've been able to clean up the river, creating areas for fishing, kayaking, and tubing. These sorts of projects are also crucial for Peterman, a non-local, to establish credibility.

The All of the Above Approach

The experience of Helper demonstrates the importance of an “all of the above” approach to community revitalization and diversification efforts—whether it's focused on outdoor recreation or not. *Just* having the messaging, *just* having the collaborative projects, or *just* having the river clean-up would not be enough. Each one feeds into the other. The messaging creates the culture, the river clean-up and other projects give people hope, and the collaborative projects like the SDAT initiative create buy-in and investment.

Certainly, challenges remain. Utah's Public Health Indicator-Based Information System reports that Carbon and Emery Counties had the highest rate of drug-related deaths among all Utah counties from 2016-2020.³⁷ But progress and change does not happen overnight. The process remains important, and creating this foundation helps create a pathway for success and revitalization in the future.

³⁷ “IBIS-PH - Health Indicator Report - Drug Overdose and Poisoning Incidents.”

Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide: The Coal Country Strike Team

The Coal Country Strike Team offers both a cautionary tale about navigating the urban-rural divide and a model approach for statewide collaboration. Many rural communities, especially those with declining extraction industries, lack the resources and capabilities to invest in economic diversification. Diversification requires not just financial support, but planning, data, and the labor that many communities lack. The Utah Coal Country Strike Team—housed within the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah—addresses some of those gaps for communities in Carbon and Emery Counties.

The idea for the Strike Team originally started in Salt Lake City at the University of Utah. The initiative received philanthropic investment from Schmidt Futures—and later the Utah Legislature and University of Utah—to raise incomes in Carbon and Emery Counties by 10% and diversify the economy.

Hoping to secure local support for the project, the Strike Team originally began reaching out to local mayors in Carbon and Emery Counties. But in rural Utah, unlike the Salt Lake area, county commissioners, not mayors, typically hold more influence in local policymaking. At the time, the mayors and county commissioners in the region were not getting along. The initiative nearly fell apart because of a failure to include the county commissioners from the onset. According to Geri Gamber, Executive Director of the Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments (SEUALG), while well-intended, this approach exemplified the urban-rural divide and an urban misunderstanding of the dynamics of rural communities.

The commissioners saw potential in the idea but had reservations. The Strike Team had proposed four frameworks for investment, and the commissioners and other stakeholders didn't like the notion of an urban community telling them what to do. All too often, they'd seen ideas like this come down from Salt Lake only for the report to sit and collect dust on a shelf. They also didn't like verbiage around coal disappearing or being shut down. The commissioners' proposed solution was to house the Strike Team within SEUALG, keeping it both local.

Even though SEUALG was nearly at capacity managing other programs, Gamber felt that the opportunity to embrace the Strike Team was too important to pass up. "I knew our area needed to embrace something we've never done before. I wanted our agency to be a part of it. We needed something dynamic to start these conversations. We were walking a thin red line with the conversation, but I knew we needed to embrace things a little differently," she said.

Gamber worked with the Gardner Institute to help them understand the initial opposition and explained some of the cultural differences between urban and rural Utah. The Gardner Institute listened to the feedback and accepted the proposal to house the Strike Team within SEUALG.

These days, the relationship between the communities and the Strike Team is healthy because of the efforts to build trust and communication. The Strike Team provides a variety of services that Gamber feels are essential to the growth of their community and would not have happened without their involvement.

One way they support Emery and Carbon Counties is through data. The Strike Team provides projections about the economic impact when the two coal-fired powerplants, Hunter and Huntington, close. They can run scenario analyses that demonstrate what happens if the plants close as expected, sooner, or later. This sort of walkthrough helps local leaders better understand the anticipated impact on local communities, wages, and jobs.

Max Backlund, a Senior Research Associate at the Gardner Policy Institute, noted that they don't tell communities what to do with the data, but merely help frame a discussion about coal country's future, answer questions, and provide deeper context. Backlund said that these sorts of conversations are much more convincing less combative in one-on-one settings than in large group discussions. They build familiarity and comfort with the data.

For instance, the communities wanted to focus on manufacturing jobs as an alternative. Backlund was able to provide them with data that showed most of the growth in that sector is happening in northern, urban Utah and 93% of the growth happens by 2040, a relatively short window. The Strike Team then helps the community think through what it would take to capitalize on that opportunity and provides connections and funding.

Gamber deeply values these contributions and feels they have created a platform for success. Silicon Slopes, the advocacy organization for Utah's startup and tech community, has started an offshoot of the core organization called Silicon Slopes East. They plan to create coworking spaces throughout the region. The president of Silicon Slopes sits on the SEUALG board, furthering cementing that connection. SEUALG received \$250,000 from the Gardner Institute for main street revitalization projects like façade improvements and beautification projects. And while Gamber admitted it doesn't seem like a lot for two counties, she quickly noted that they were able to leverage this funding for additional revenue. While it was unclear where the Strike Team's involvement in Carbon and Emery Counties would lead them at first, participating has prepared them for opportunities that have come along later.

This is a crucial lesson for other communities. Partnerships and planning do not necessarily immediately create success, but they create the *conditions* for future success. They enable a community to find new opportunities and capitalize on them when they emerge.

Coal Country Strike Team Pillars

Workforce Training and Jobs

Diversify the economy by providing an array of opportunities with a pathway to jobs. We call this intervention Silicon Slopes East+

Housing Revitalization

Prioritize investment in Utah's Coal Country housing stock to increase wealth and create a more attractive community. We call this intervention Hearth and Home.

Tourism Infrastructure

Diversify the economy by investing in tourism infrastructure. Utah's Coal Country is the closest desert red rock to the Greater Salt Lake Area. We call this intervention Red Rock Gateway

Economic Development Incentives

Fix broken economic development incentives with customized tax policy. We call this intervention Custom Incentives.

Source: Utah Coal Country Strike Team Overview

The Strike Team's focus is organized around four main goals: Workforce Training, Housing Revitalization, Tourism Infrastructure, and Economic Development incentives. Each of these goals are connected to one another. The team and locals recognize that recruiting businesses and companies to the area depends in large part on the desirability of the area. They have a vision for Southeastern Utah as a launching point for access to Utah's "Mighty Five"—the five national parks in the state—as well as the local assets like Joe's Valley, the San Rafael Swell, Buckhorn Wash, Range Creek, and 9-Mile Canyon. Gamber said her focus is on building a technology and entrepreneurship ecosystem. But for a company, location matters, and economic incentives mean very little without the accompanying housing, amenities, and infrastructure.

An entity like the Strike Team can provide a framework and resources for communities that otherwise lack the capacity. Even as Helper sees revitalization through the arts and Orangeville and Castle Dale reap benefits from the influx of climbers, these communities and others in the counties often lack the capacity to do long-term visioning and planning and connections to the resources from urban areas.

The Strike Team's involvement in Carbon and Emery County has become a model for how to connect rural areas with urban resources and create effective partnerships. Without the Strike Team, SEUALG and other local governments would not have the capacity or the connections to create the momentum for success Gamber feels they're experiencing. And without SEUALG's input, guidance, and willingness to take this work on at the local level, the Strike Team would likely have fallen apart years ago. "[The Strike Team and SEUALG] have a really healthy relationship," Gamber said. "They're so genuine and thoughtful in helping us make connections any time we're working on something new. The mayors feel like it's incredibly healthy. The universities feel more connected." As coal jobs continue to dwindle in Carbon and Emery Counties, the Strike Team fills an important gap and creates the foundation for a better future in the region.

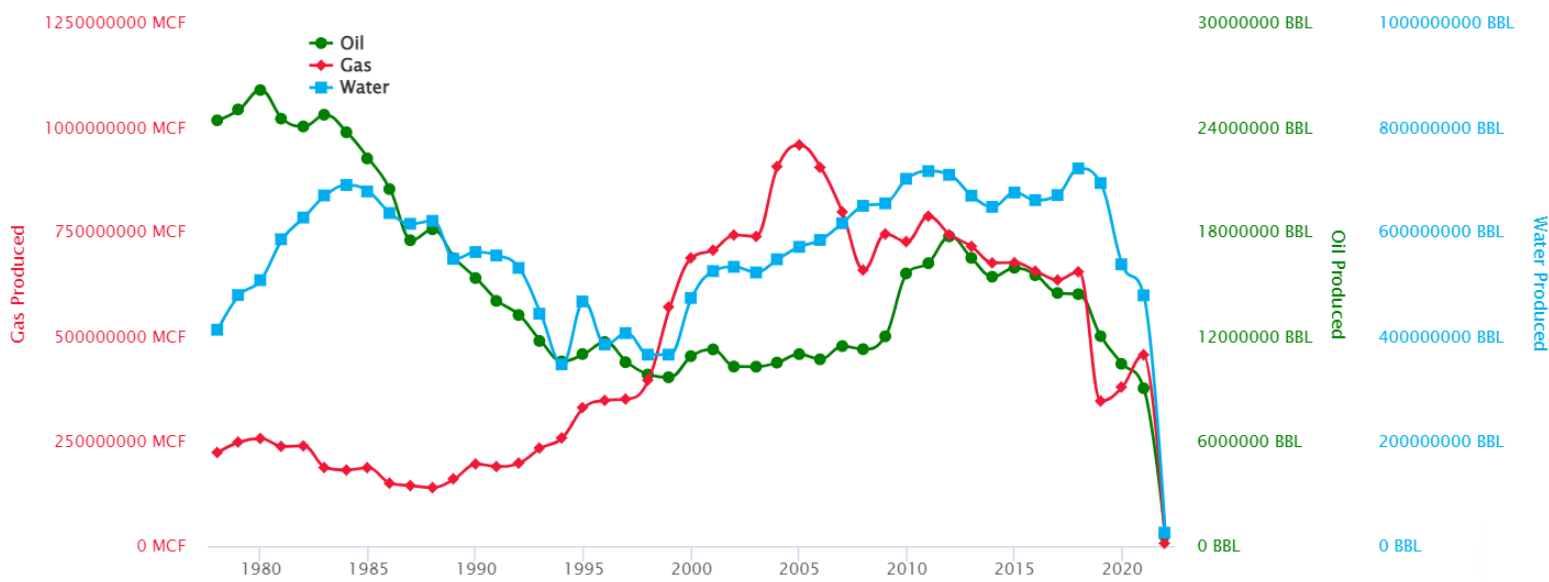
Appendix D: Fremont County, Wyoming

Oil and Gas in Fremont County

Natural resources have played a significant role in the development of Fremont County. Western settlers first began gold mining in the area in the mid-to-late 19th century. Later, the construction of the Chicago and North Western Railroad led to several large coal mining operations. The railroads also required large quantities of timber, which led to the development of several sawmills in Wyoming. After the railroads shifted to oil, the first oil well in Wyoming was drilled southeast of Lander in Fremont County in 1884. In 1953, uranium was discovered in the Gas Hills in Fremont County just east of Riverton.

By the late 1980s, the sawmills, uranium mines, and iron mines had all closed in Fremont County. Currently, oil and gas represent the dominant extraction industry in the county. Fremont County ranks 27th among all counties in the nation for oil and gas production.

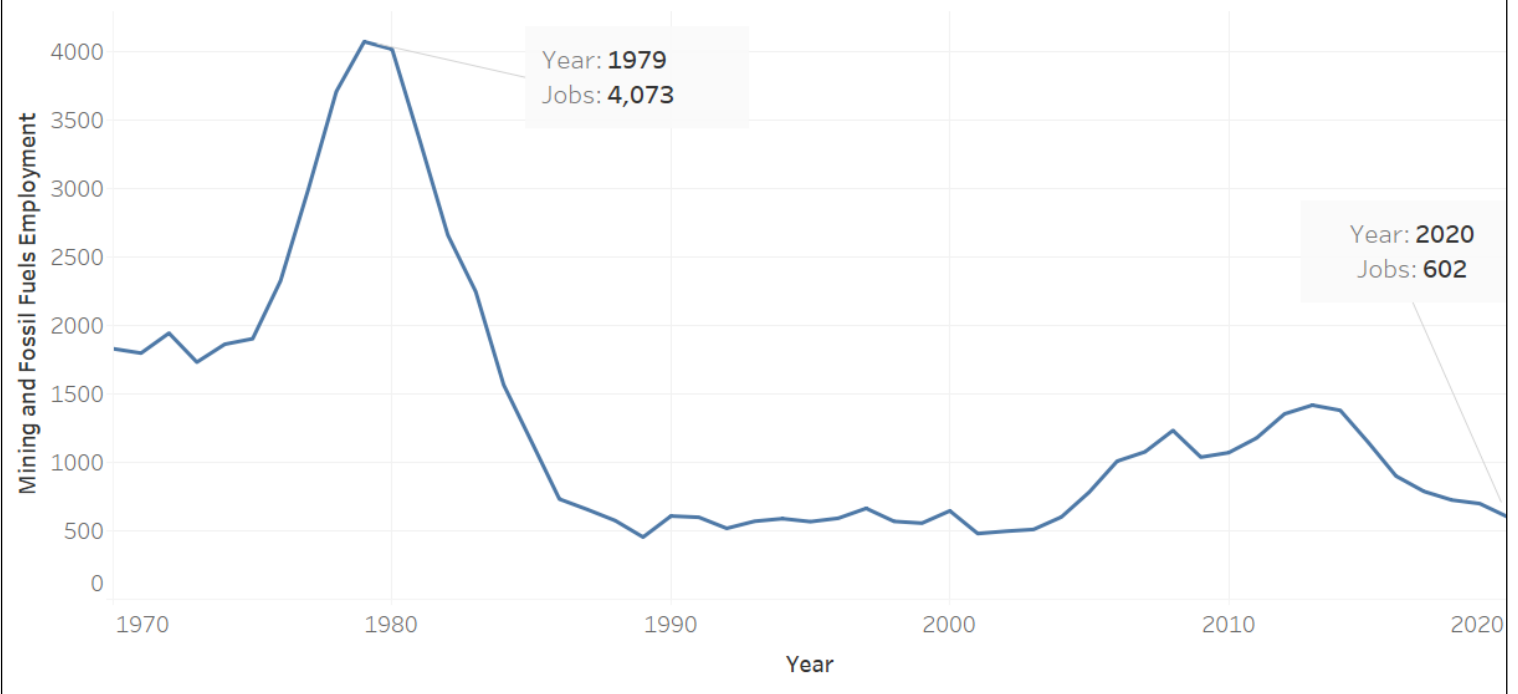
Fremont County, WY Oil & Gas Production by Year



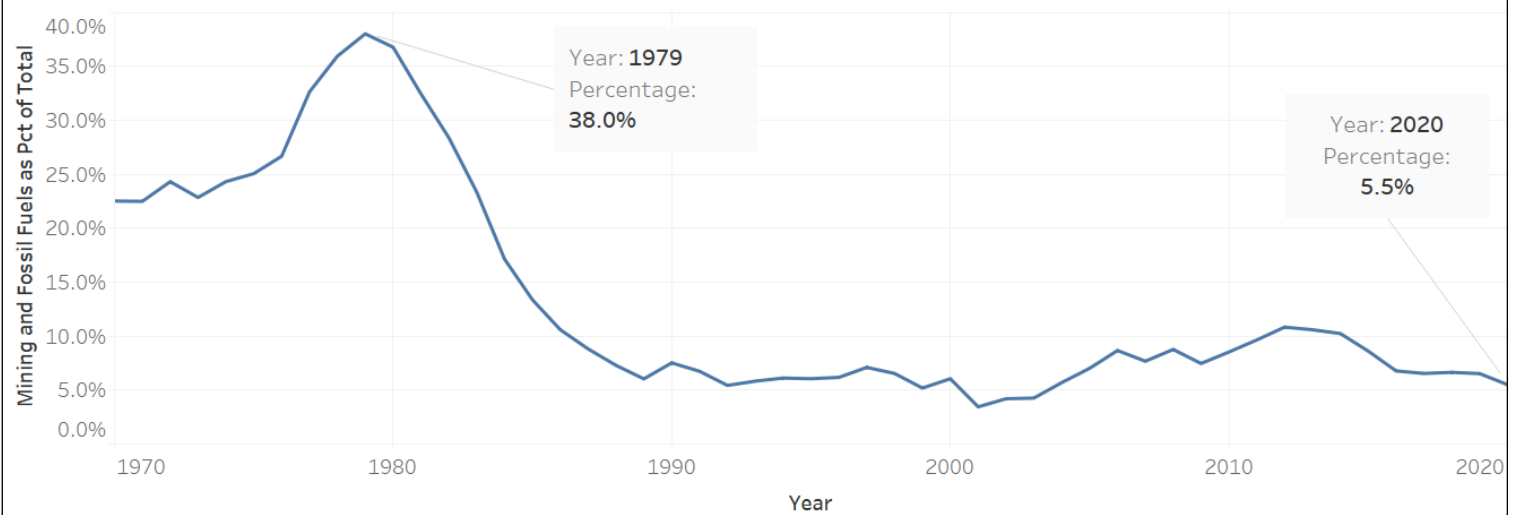
Source: *mineralanswers.com*. Note: 2022 data only YTD

Even as oil and gas production remain strong in Fremont County, its contributions in terms of actual jobs and percentage of wages has substantially declined since large booms in the 1980s.

Total Mining & Fossil Fuels Employment Fremont County (1970-2020)



Mining & Fossil Fuels Industry as a Percentage of Total Labor Earnings Fremont County (1970-2020)



Labor earnings in thousands of 2021 dollars

Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2021. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

Local Challenges

This list of local challenges is not exhaustive. It aims to highlight some of the unique challenges facing the community that we found through our interviews. Many communities, for instance, are having trouble finding and retaining a talented workforce. While important and relevant, this list aims to capture some of the specific problems this community is having especially related to economic development, outdoor recreation, and natural resource extraction.

Creating regional partnerships

The vast majority of Fremont County's population lies in Riverton, the largest city in the county, and Lander, the county seat and 25 miles away to the southwest. Riverton and Lander also represent two ends of the spectrum in terms of outdoor recreation and resource extraction. Interviewees described Riverton as an oil and gas town that booms and busts with the industry. Lander, meanwhile, is more insulated from shocks in commodity markets because its government jobs are more stable. Lander is also a large outdoor recreation mecca and a gateway to the Wind River Mountain Range. Creating a more cohesive connection between these two cities—the and the county as a whole—remains a challenge.

Building and maintaining recreation Infrastructure with limited resources

Wyoming's state and local government resources are relatively limited, meaning resources for accomplishing major goals around outdoor recreation have to be done without the same level of financial support from government as other states. While Wyoming has a strong Office of Outdoor Recreation and Fremont County's state legislators are heavily involved in outdoor recreation in the region, interviewees repeatedly highlighted the challenge of finding resources to both build and maintain outdoor recreation development amid growing popularity.

Managing rural gentrification

Multiple interviewees in Fremont County described a common fear of “becoming Jackson” or “becoming Colorado.” In Wyoming, the least populated state in the country, many communities value the open spaces and rurality. It drew them to the state. They want to find ways to diversify the economy and grow outdoor recreation, but many worry about the costs associated with growth and development: outsiders, a diminishing quality of life, a loss of rural identity, and displacement.

Dependence on oil and gas

Wyoming levies two main taxes on oil: the state severance tax and local government property taxes on gross production value. According to the Petroleum Association of Wyoming, the oil and gas industry's share of property assessed for taxation in fiscal year 2020 in Fremont County was roughly 40%, meaning nearly 17% of Fremont County's own-source revenue came from the oil and gas sector. The county and state remain highly dependent on the industry for providing government services.

Strategies and Policies to Support Recreation and Diversification

Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives and Collaborations

In 2017, Governor Matt Mead's Outdoor Recreation Task Force issued a report recommending that the state provide financial support and technical assistance to local outdoor recreation collaborative groups. Since then, Wyoming's Office of Outdoor Recreation has established and now helps manage these collaboratives. There are now seven of these Recreation Collaboratives, including the Wind River Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (WRORC), which is the collaborative for many Fremont County communities like Riverton, Lander, and Dubois. Currently, no representatives on the council come from the Riverton area, but according to Patrick Harrington at the Office of Outdoor Recreation, the collaborative is open to them, if they decide to rejoin. Harrington said the collaboratives serve a variety of functions. One is helping the Office of Outdoor Recreation understand community priorities and what projects to fund. "We use the collaboratives to pre-vet projects so that we know that we're getting projects that have broad community support," Harrington said. "They're made up of business owners, county commissioners, state legislators, nonprofit groups, back country horsemen, off road vehicle users, and more."

Harrington emphasized that in a state like Wyoming, the grassroots nature of these collaboratives is integral to their success. "We want to make sure we're representing what the community wants. I'm really cautious to send ideas out. The ideas need to come from the community." The locally led nature of the collaboratives creates buy-in. The role of the Office of Outdoor Recreation is to identify community leaders and facilitate and convene the meetings. Ultimately, the goal is for them to become independent.

These collaboratives have also united what used to be disparate user groups and organizations working in their own silos. Harrington said, "Anecdotally, five years ago, we went from having disparate groups to having everyone at the same table. So, when we have a gravel road bike race, we're getting the whole collaborative to sign the course, rather than just the user group." The collaboratives have created a platform for the various user groups to zoom out and see how different activities can support outdoor recreation more broadly. Rather than have the skiers just focus on skiing or the mountain bikers just focus on mountain biking, the collaborative allows them to think bigger about outdoor recreation and creates a structure for



Wind River Outdoor Recreation Collaborative

Stakeholders Representing:

- Central Wyoming Climbers Alliance
- ATV Association
- Wyoming Outdoor Council
- Lander Community Foundation
- NOLS
- Central Wyoming College
- Wyoming Catholic College
- Lander Chamber of Commerce
- City of Lander
- Lander Economic Development Association
- Water for Wildlife
- US Forest Service
- Wind River Tribal Game & Fish
- Wyoming Game and Fish
- Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments
- Bureau of Land Management
- Wyoming Business Council
- Wyoming State Parks – Bighorn District
- Wyoming State Parks – Shoshone District
- Sinks Canyon State Park
- Wyoming County Commissioners Association
- University of Wyoming
- Fremont County Commission
- Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation
- McCormick Marketing
- Wind River Visitors Council
- User groups of mountain biking, fishing, ATVing, hunting, ranching, climbing, and snowmobiling

them to move beyond small, one-off projects and go towards more transformative initiatives.

The [WRORC's meetings](#) give important insight into how effective these collaborations are in bringing different groups together and creating coordination around outdoor recreation. Some examples include:

- Updates from the Office of Outdoor Recreation about ARPA funding from the state
- A presentation about the Shoshone National Forest Travel Management Plan
- A conversation about Johnny Behind the Rocks, a trail system near Lander. Attendees discussed drainage issues, the possibility of adding horse trails in some locations, and updating the map on the kiosk more regularly.
- An update on efforts to get Lander and Dubois recognized as gateway communities on the Continental Divide Trail.

“The Wind River Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (WRORC) will explore and identify ways to promote outdoor recreation, develop new recreational opportunities, and provide recommendations to enhance outdoor recreation in the Wind River region in order to maximize all of its associated social and economic benefits. Recreational assets can be highlighted to attract visitors, recreationists, and new businesses while also supporting and retaining regional service providers and manufacturers of recreational products.”

-WRORC mission statement

These meetings create space for different user groups and stakeholders to provide feedback and maximize the impact, creating a better climate of outdoor recreation for all. It seems unlikely that these types of conversations, which tie in so many different stakeholders, would happen without the collaborative.

Informal collaborations have been instrumental to the success of outdoor recreation in Fremont County as well. Missy White, who has been a NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) instructor in Lander since 1987, noted that the land managers at the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service have been key partners in boosting outdoor recreation. “One thing that Lander has going on is that we’re small enough to solve our own problems. We’re too small not to,” she said. “I’m not a huge mountain biker, but I know people in that community, so if there’s issues, I can find them. It’s in no one’s interest to be competitive, and I’m really grateful that sentiment that exists.” The formal collaboratives are an outgrowth of that informal dynamic.

Other initiatives also inspire collaboration in Fremont County and across Wyoming and the intermountain west. [The University of Wyoming’s Collaboration Program in Natural Resources](#) takes a cohort roughly twenty natural resource professionals every year. These practitioners get training in collaborative leadership skills, facilitation, and problem-solving processes. The program has trained numerous professionals to be better collaborators around public lands and natural resources in Wyoming and the west.

Managing Rural Gentrification: The Via Ferrata

As communities with a strong reputation for outdoor recreation become more popular—as tourist, retirement, second home destinations, etc.—tensions often emerge between balancing growth and retaining character. This is especially true in rural communities that have not seen large new developments and changes in culture in generations. In Lander, the installation of a via ferrata in Sinks Canyon has become a prime example of the tensions between growth and preservation of character.

Sinks Canyon draws several hundred thousand visitors each year, many of whom are climbers. Wyoming State Parks reports the park drew 699,490 in 2020 — a 76% increase over 2019. Wyoming State Parks initiated a master plan process in 2019, proposing a vision that included better parking, more trails, a larger visitor’s center, and enhanced and expanded recreation opportunities. The plan focused on two principles: “Keep the Canyon Wild” and “Leverage Economic Development in the Valley.”

One of the opportunities for expanded recreation and economic development was a via ferrata—a climbing route that uses cables and rungs which allows users to climb steep faces. A via ferrata would increase the accessibility of climbing in Sinks Canyon, making it easier for those with less climbing experience to try steeper, more challenging routes. Via ferratas are fairly common in Europe in the Dolomites and Alps, but not in the United States.

Lander resident Sam Lightner, who has been climbing in the area since the 1980s, has established many routes in Sinks Canyon and began thinking about ways to expand opportunities to get more tourists to the area. The idea was to capture some of the tourists who pass through on the way to major national parks and other recreation destination to boost economic development efforts in Fremont Canyon. Lightner and other community members have raised over \$30,000 to build the via ferrata.³⁸

Opposition has been intense and driven along two different fronts. Some opponents claim that the increased activity along the face of the wall where the via ferrata has been proposed will negatively impact the peregrine falcons which routinely nest there. Others focus on the potential disruptions to the fabric of life in Lander.

Wyoming State Senator Cale Case (R-Lander) owns a hotel in the area but has also expressed concern about the negative impacts of heavy visitation. Senator Case feels the via ferrata would exacerbate that. In a WyoFile article, he spoke about the costs of real estate and labor shortages in Jackson Hole, saying “I’m like, ‘do we really want to be next?’ I don’t want to be next, and I’m in the tourism business.”³⁹

Another Lander resident, Ron Smith, said at a community meeting that “the via ferrata is not the problem. The issue for those of us concerned with keeping the canyon wild is simply the location of the proposed via ferrata and the lack of collaboration and transparency in the process by which the via ferrata was approved.”

³⁸ Klingsporn, “Falcons, a via Ferrata and the Clash of Recreation v. Conservation.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, Fremont County Commissioner Mike Jones summarized the pro-Via Ferrata position: “I have supported and continue to support the via ferrata as an opportunity to grow our outdoor recreational assets as well as economic development to Lander. [Over the past 10 years, Fremont County] has lost half of its tax base. We’ve dropped from \$1.1 billion to \$560 million currently in our property tax base.” Commissioner Jones noted that voters recently passed a lodging and asset tax. “This community recognizes the need for growth of our economy and tourism to replace lost revenue.”⁴⁰

Lander’s via ferrata debate, which is still being resolved as of writing, highlights many of the issues facing rural towns with strong recreation amenities. Growth and diversification are crucial in a resource extraction community like Fremont County. But growth brings uncertainty and anxiety. What will the growth look like? Who will benefit? What will be the unintended consequences? How can the community retain a connection to its identity while still benefiting from changes? Creating channels to discuss these questions—even if the community never reaches total consensus—is essential. In Lander, the WRORC and the community meetings provide that foundation. The process can be—and usually is—messy. But it is an essential step to ensuring buy-in and creating the most informed solution.

⁴⁰ Klingsporn, “Protest and passion mount around via ferrata proposal.”



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