

Where do people want to live? Near national parks

Rocky Barker
Idaho Statesman
March 14, 2011

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/2011/03/14/v-print/1565015/where-do-people-want-to-live-near.html>

It shouldn't be a surprise that Teton County was the fastest-growing county in Idaho.

It lies on the west slope of the Tetons, where a two-hour walk can get you into Grand Teton National Park, and a two-hour drive can get you into Yellowstone National Park. A 20-minute drive takes you to Grand Targhee's deep powder for skiing in the winter.

Teton County grew by 69.5 percent in the past decade, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Even adjacent Fremont County, which lies on Yellowstone's boundary with only a gravel road entrance, grew by 11 percent.

People able to choose to move where they can work and play. That's why 80 percent of the state's growth since 2000 occurred in the state's metropolitan areas, much as it has since 1990.

None of the urban areas are far from public lands for hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and boating. I can walk a quarter mile from my house to fly fish on the crystal clear Boise River.

If I head north into the Foothills, I could cross as few as nine roads between here and Canada, 400 miles north. A 100-mile drive can take me into the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, the Owyhee Canyonlands, the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, Payette Lake, Hells Canyon and yes, the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

I can be floating on the Payette River in a little over an hour. There's great snowmobiling around Idaho City.

Until 2007, the Treasure Valley had some of the lowest unemployment in the nation. That has changed now that Idaho is lagging in job recovery, at around 9.7 percent compared to the nation's 8.9 percent.

Teton County was down to 7.6 percent in December, reflecting the resilience of its diverse economy, which is tied to agriculture, tourism and commuting to both Rexburg and Jackson,

Wyo. Its economy also is tied to second-home development, so it may come out of the recession faster since high-income people, its primary market, are doing better than the rest of us.

A new study released this month by Headwaters Economics of Bozeman, Mont., shows how much communities around national parks benefit. The local areas around Yellowstone have 5,155 jobs tied to the national park, with visitors spending \$302 million in 2009, the Headwaters report showed.

Grand Teton anchors 6,238 jobs and generates another \$2.5 million in visitor spending. Idaho gets a piece of both of these, but the state also benefits from other public lands managed by the National Park Service.

City of Rocks National Preserve south of Burley, a climber and camping mecca managed by Idaho's Parks and Recreation Department under contract for the National Park Service, creates 86 jobs. It generated \$6.4 million in visitor spending to the local area in 2009.

Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve near Arco supports 104 jobs and creates \$5.8 million in visitor spending in Idaho. Imagine how much more it could tap with visitor centers accessing unique ice caves along its southern boundary near Interstate 84.

Nez Perce National Historic Park, which has 38 sites in Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Montana and is headquartered in Lapwai, creates 140 jobs and generates \$6 million from visitors.

Rural Idaho as a whole continues to lose population. But those places next to our national land treasures continue to thrive.