



## National monument communities show continued growth, study says

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Communities surrounding national monuments in the West have experienced continued economic growth since the lands were designated by the president or Congress, according to a report by a Bozeman, Mont.-based research firm.

The findings by Headwaters Economics show consistent increases in population, employment and personal and per-capita income in communities surrounding some of the largest national monuments in nine Western states.

The data do not prove a cause-and-effect relationship between the monuments and growth, said Ben Alexander, the firm's associate director. But they do show that monuments and economic growth are "highly correlated."

"In no case did we find that the creation of a national monument led to an economic downturn," he said.

Instead, all communities surrounding the 17 monuments studied showed uninterrupted growth, he said. In the case of New Mexico's El Malpais National Monument, downward trending economic indicators actually reversed after the monument was created, he said.

Circulation of the study comes a day before the group's executive director, Ray Rasker, is set to testify before a House Natural Resources panel at a hearing to review six bills that would curb the president's power to designate national monuments under the 1906 Antiquities Act ([E&E Daily](#), Sept. 12).

The proposals are necessary, sponsors say, to prevent the federal government from "locking up" federal lands from energy development and other uses. Some of the bills would give Congress the sole authority to designate national monuments -- as it did in the case of some of the monuments in the Headwaters study -- while others would require the president to obtain the approval of states before designating a monument or to provide a month's notice to Congress and allow public hearings before making a monument proclamation.

The Headwaters study included monuments that have been created since 1982 and are at least 10,000 acres in size. An interactive [website](#) allows visitors to view publicly available economic data from each gateway community.

Headwaters, which produces both independent reports and commissioned work for state and federal agencies and conservation groups, will next conduct interviews with business owners near monuments for insight on what role the monuments played in the communities' economic growth.

"How is it that protecting landscapes in some specific way -- adding visibility to it -- how is it that you've created new business opportunities?" Alexander said.

Alexander said Western economies have changed dramatically over the past generation, trending away from commodities like timber and agriculture to service jobs including tourism, doctors, lawyers and telecommunications. Outdoor recreation now also plays a larger role, he said.

"As communities across the West emerge from the recent recession, nearby national monuments can play several important economic roles," the report concludes. Those include economic diversification, increased quality of life and greater recreational opportunities that make communities attractive to new residents and businesses, it says.

The report comes as the president faces increased scrutiny from Western Republicans, ranchers and drilling and mining groups over national monument designations. Critics say designations should be small and only in areas that face imminent threats from development.

Some monuments have spurred battles over how they should be managed and which uses, such as transportation or oil and gas drilling, should be allowed.

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