

Public lands boost local, state, and national economies

Our public lands provide substantial economic benefits at the local, state, and national levels. Counties in the United States with more public lands outperform similar places without public lands when it comes to economic opportunity, job growth, and overall growth. However, climate change threatens our ability to enjoy public lands as hikers, anglers, hunters or for other types of outdoor recreation, while also jeopardizing these lands' broader economic and health benefits. This risk underscores how conserving and protecting public lands will benefit Americans' finances, health, and future.

Public lands can boost the local, state, and national economy.

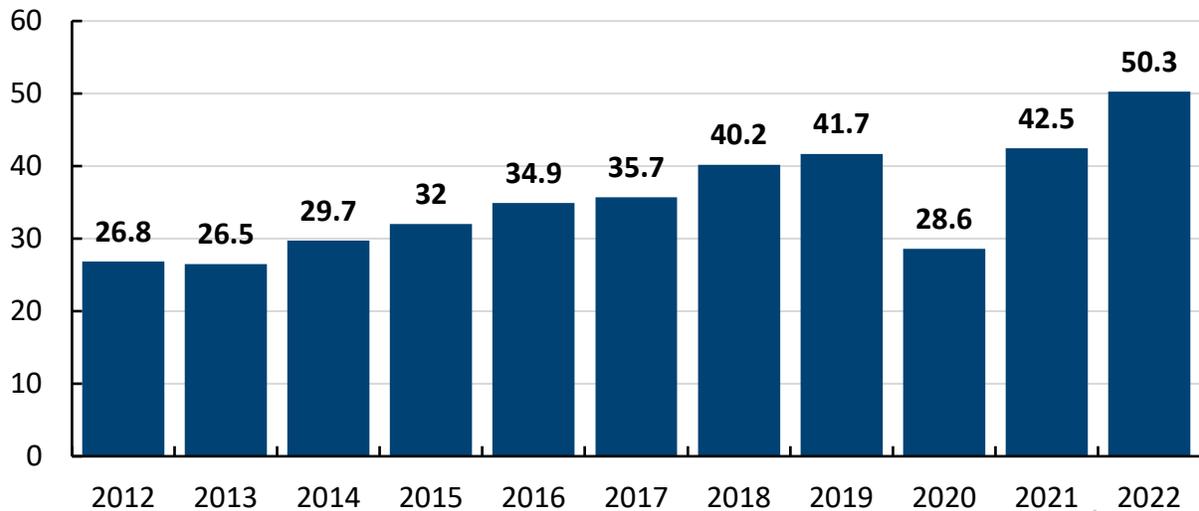
Conserving [public lands](#) supports state and local economies, with particular benefits for rural areas through outdoor recreation and tourism. Public lands, including national parks and monuments, can boost nearby economies by providing a draw for both permanent residents and visitors seeking recreation opportunities and the improved quality of life tied to access to the outdoors. In 2021, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for [1.9% \(\\$454 billion\) of US GDP](#).

The outdoor recreation manufacturing economy is strong and has seen continued growth in recent years. After retail ([\\$119.9 billion](#) in 2021) and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services (\$111.6 billion in 2021), manufacturing was the [third largest contributor](#) to the outdoor recreation economy at \$61.8 billion in 2021. Across the nation, [boating and fishing](#) were the largest conventional activity with \$27.3 billion in 2021, and RVing was the second largest at \$25.1 billion. The National Marine Manufacturers Association, a trade organization representing North American recreational boat, marine engine, and accessory manufacturers, showed that the economic impact of the recreational boating industry [grew from \\$170 billion](#) in 2018 to \$230 billion in 2023 with associated jobs also increasing 14% from 691,000 jobs in 2018 to 812,000 in 2023.

At the state and local level, outdoor recreation generates [\\$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue](#) annually. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) estimated that hunting, fishing, and other wildlife related activities contributed an estimated [\\$156.3 billion](#) to the U.S. economy in 2016, in part through 7.3 million hunting and fishing visits to BLM-managed public lands. National Parks contributed [\\$50.3 billion](#) to the national economy in 2022 by creating jobs, increasing tourism, and revitalizing nature. In fiscal year 2022, appropriations for the National Park Service (NPS) [totaled](#) \$3.3 billion, meaning each \$1 investment in national parks provided more than \$10 boost for the US economy.

Total National Parks Economic Contributions to the U.S. Economy

Estimated economic output of national parks, in billions



Source: Department of the Interior



Counties with public lands see faster employment and income growth amid other economic benefits.

Public lands provide better paying jobs for local residents, increase recreational spending (including billions of dollars per year from hunting-related expenditures), while attracting entrepreneurs and retirees.

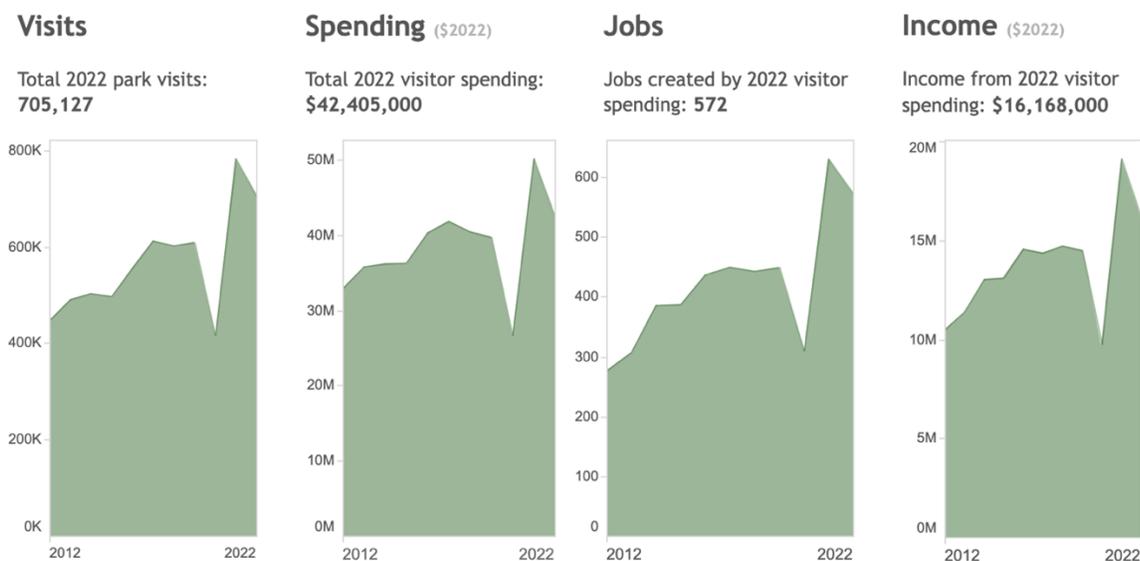
- Western rural counties that include or neighbor public lands have substantial competitive advantages in terms of [income growth, employment, and migration](#) compared to western rural counties further from public lands.
- Additionally, western, non-metropolitan counties where more than 30% of the land is federally protected saw [jobs increase by 345%](#) over the last 40 years, compared to only 83% growth in counties with no federal public lands.
- The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that job earnings in rural counties where recreation is a key industry are \$2,000 [more per worker](#) annually than workers in rural counties not focused on recreation.
- These same counties with large shares of public lands also saw faster [population and personal income growth](#) on average.

While these many examples may not necessarily reflect a causal relationship between public lands and economic growth, the best performing counties are benefitting from nearby public lands in several ways.

Analyses also show that newly designated [National Monuments](#) generally increase population, employment, and income in nearby areas. For example, Joint Economic Committee Chairman Martin Heinrich led efforts to designate the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, which drove major economic impacts after President Obama named it a Monument in 2014. The monument saw a three-fold increase in visits after the designation, which created new jobs and added millions more in tax revenue. In 2022 alone, visits supported 305 local jobs, generated \$35 million in positive economic benefits, and \$1.9 million in tax revenue. The Bureau of Land Management, which manages the Monument, increased its operations and staff budget by a factor of six since the designation, which has led to enhanced conservation, research, and recreational activities.

Shifting from a National Monument to a National Park designation can also have positive economic impacts, as shown by the local economic growth that followed White Sands National Park’s redesignation in 2019 due to legislation led by Chairman Heinrich. Data from the NPS and Headwater Economics shows that following redesignation, the park saw [\\$13 million](#) more in total economic output, 100 new jobs, and about \$10 million in increased visitor spending. These impacts matched or surpassed [projections](#) of economic growth associated with new public land protection. This example follows [trends](#) seen by other Monuments turned Parks where redesignation spurred large economic and labor growth.

White Sands’ Associated Benefits During Transition from National Monument to Park



Source: Headwater Economics, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/protected-lands/economic-impact-of-national-parks/>

The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act will enhance economic growth in multiple ways. The bipartisan [Recovering America’s Wildlife Act](#) (RAWA) would support economic growth tied to public lands by encouraging public-private partnerships that support wildlife conservation. RAWA

would invest \$1.4 billion in state fish and wildlife agencies and another \$97.5 million in Tribal wildlife conservation efforts. Through this investment, RAWA would generate [33,600 direct jobs](#) every year in industries ranging from construction to forestry, in addition to bolstering the outdoor recreation sector.

The proactive investments made by RAWA would also save money in the future by preserving species' populations and habitats before they become endangered or otherwise designated under the Endangered Species Act. The recovery efforts necessary to bring a species and its habitat back from the brink are significantly more [expensive](#) than the work needed to prevent designation in the first place. Absent proactive funding for prevention and recovery from RAWA, state and Tribal wildlife agencies are often [forced](#) into relying on reactive and more restrictive steps to rescue species after they are listed as threatened or endangered. Conserving public lands and protecting native species through bills like RAWA play an integral role in stabilizing the climate, reducing weather extremes, supporting local economies, and sustaining food systems.

Climate change poses a risk to continued health of US public lands and the economic benefits they provide.

Extreme events exacerbated by climate change, like increasingly severe fires and hurricanes, pose risks to the physical infrastructure and integrity of public lands and the ecosystem services they provide. For example, climate-fueled fires are estimated to cause \$12 billion in [timber losses](#) annually. These fires also cause [closures](#) of public lands, such as [Yosemite Valley](#) during peak tourism season, which leads to at least [\\$118 million](#) in tourism losses per year, while other disasters can hinder access to public lands by compromising transportation options. [Sportsmen and anglers](#) are on the frontlines of these impacts, directly observing and feeling the impacts of how climate change is reducing big game populations, stressing cold-water fish, and threatening waterfowl reproduction – among many other impacts. Hotter temperatures also limit the quantity of days when outdoor recreation is feasible and healthy. Efforts to address climate change will, therefore, have added benefits of protecting public lands and their associated economic benefits.

Continued federal investments in maintaining public lands and prioritizing our climate are essential to realizing these economic benefits. The bipartisan [Great American Outdoors Act](#), which was enacted on August 4, 2020, and championed by Chairman Heinrich, is making record investments in our outdoor economy. It is putting people to work, reigniting local economies, creating jobs, and helping small businesses get back on their feet. More action like this is needed to ensure that the economic benefits from these lands are available into the future and extend to everyone.

The economy, labor market, and health are inextricably linked, so the JEC Democratic staff has also provided a companion piece that discusses the public health benefits provided by public lands. Increasing access to these vital public resources will both improve people's health and have positive effects on the broader economy.