Sue Fearon, who with her husband owns Escalante Canyon Outfitters in Boulder, Utah, lives on the edge of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. After the Monument was declared in 1996, they saw their business more than double in the first two years:

"Shining the national spot light on this area was important in so many ways," she says. "People came, some stayed, and they all helped transform this town of Boulder into what it is today. Sometimes I think about the Boulder we started this business in; the one with three rooms to rent, one cafe and one pay phone; and then I think about what greets our clients today. It has been an amazing transformation."

Design: Ixtla Vaughan Photo credits: Lin Alder, John Byorth

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SONORAN INSTITUTE

A nonprofit organization established in 1990, the Sonoran Institute brings diverse people together to accomplish their conservation goals.

The Sonoran Institute works with communities to conserve and restore important natural landscapes in western North America, including the wildlife and cultural values of these lands. The lasting benefits of the Sonoran Institute's work are healthy landscapes and vibrant communities that embrace conservation as an integral element of their quality of life and economic vitality.

Through community stewardship, the Sonoran Institute contributes to a day when:

• Healthy landscapes, including native plants and wildlife, diverse habitat, open spaces, clean air, and water extend from northern Mexico to Western Canada.

• People embrace stewardship as a fundamental value by caring for their communities, economies, and natural landscapes.

• Resilient economies support strong communities, diverse opportunities for residents, productive working landscapes, and stewardship of the natural world.

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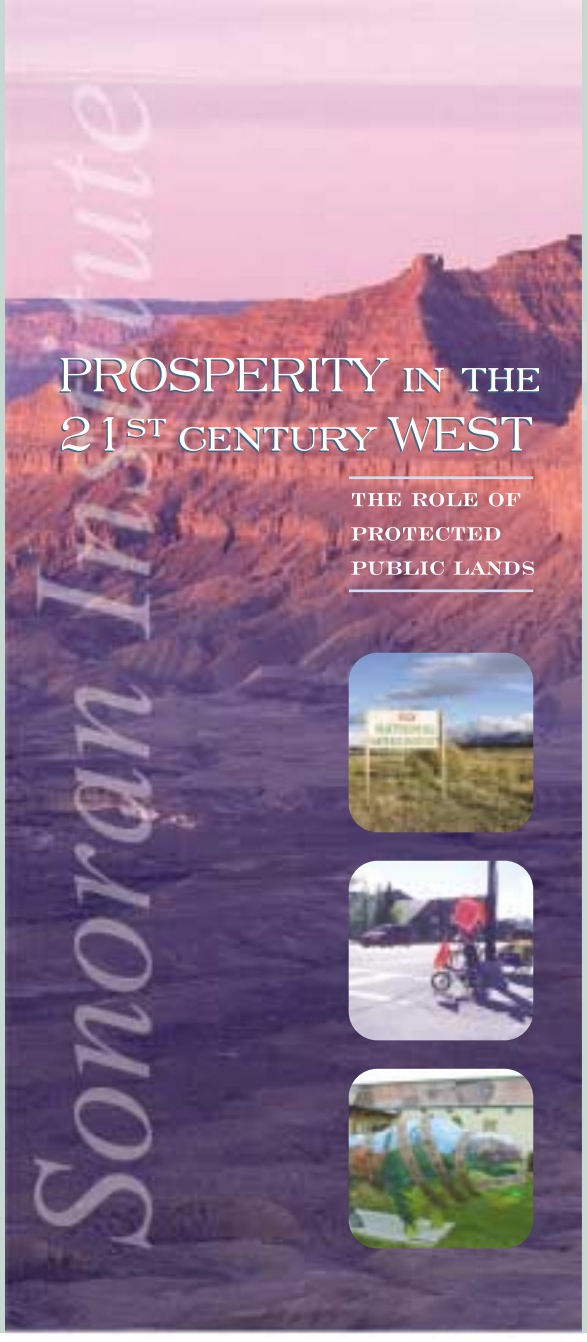

SONORAN INSTITUTE

Prosperity in the 21st Century West is a study investigating whether Wilderness, National Parks, National Monuments and other protected public lands, set aside for their wild land characteristics, play a positive or negative role in the economic health of adjacent communities.

This study is available from **www.sonoran.org**

An in-depth version of the study–Public Lands Conservation and Economic Well-Being– with detailed statistical methods and results, four case studies and a thorough literature review, is also available at the Sonoran Institute web site.

Produced by:
Ray Rasker
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July 2004

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"The economic health of Blaine County depends on wilderness and roadless areas that provide for high-quality recreation opportunities."

—Sarah Michael,
County Commissioner,
Blaine County, Idaho

"All Americans, not just residents of Utah, will pay dearly in the long run for the unnecessary federal environmental extremism that sets up unreasonable roadblocks to productive uses of natural resources."

—Alarik Myrin,
Utah State Senate,
commenting on
President Clinton's
decision to create the
Grand Staircase-Escalante
National Monument.

PROTECTED PUBLIC LANDS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN STIMULATING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST

Vast expanses of open space are the defining characteristic of the West. More than half the region's land is in public ownership and in some counties over ninety percent of the land is publicly owned. It is no surprise then that another distinguishing characteristic of the West is the debate over how these lands should be managed.

Which form of management, conservation or commercial uses such as logging, oil and gas development and mining, are the most effective in stimulating the economy of rural communities?

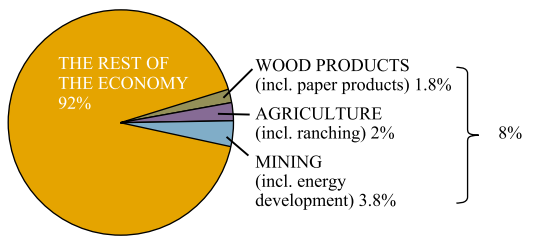
We discovered that Wilderness, National Parks, National Monuments, and other protected public lands, set aside for their wild land characteristics, can and do play an important role in stimulating economic growth – and the more protected, the better.

Public lands in the west.

BUT, OTHER FACTORS ARE ALSO IMPORTANT

There are many other important pieces of the economic development puzzle, and not all communities benefit equally from protected lands. Access to metropolitan areas, via road and air travel, is extremely important. The education of the workforce, the arrival of newcomers, and a number of other factors allow some areas to flourish and to take advantage of protected lands as part of an economic development strategy. Communities without these economic assets, in spite of being surrounded by spectacular scenery, tend to struggle.

Personal income in the rural west, 2000.



OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The economy of the West has changed significantly. Only eight percent of personal income in the rural West is from the industries that historically supported the economy: mining, oil and gas development, logging and other lumber and wood products sectors, farming and ranching. Today only a few communities are dependent on natural resource development from public lands.

The West's competitive advantage in a global marketplace is its unique landscape and quality of life. Counties with historic dependence on resource extraction industries have the slowest long-term growth rates. Diverse economies – especially those with high-end service industries like finance, engineering, real estate and business services – grow the fastest. Some areas of the West – those with easy access to larger markets and with nearby protected public lands – are ideally positioned to attract these types of industries and therefore stay competitive in the global economy. Those communities that are not diverse, are isolated, without nearby protected lands and highly specialized in resource extraction, are the most vulnerable to global competition.

There is no evidence that setting aside public lands for conservation is detrimental to growth and well-being. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that rural communities in the West can benefit substantially from Wilderness, National Parks, National Monuments and other forms of land protection. However, if protective land designations include strategies for economic development, then more rural communities will benefit. Conservation is not enough; also needed are educational institutions, transportation infrastructure, the arts, and other factors that attract high-wage occupations.

"I like the idea of linking Wilderness designation with economic development."

"Here in Custer County, we are definitely a gateway to the surrounding public lands. The [proposed] Boulder White Clouds Wilderness bill is an opportunity to initiate a thoughtful discussion on where we want to go, and how to market who we are and want to become."

—Gynii Gilliam, director of the
Lemhi/Custer Economic
Development Corporation