



Chaffee Recreation and Agriculture Survey November 2020

Executive Summary

97% of citizens say working lands contribute to their quality of life, providing open rural vistas, ground water recharge, wildlife habitat, local foods and local jobs, according to 2017 Envision Community Survey data. However, Chaffee County agricultural land in production decreased 30% since 1982, according to county-level USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service Survey Data.

The Chaffee Recreation and Agriculture Survey was completed to assess the interaction of increasing recreation use and agricultural operations, as part of Chaffee Recreation Plan development. The 11-question survey was distributed to the thirty major agricultural operations in Chaffee County between August 2 and September 14, 2020, with a 60% response rate.

Survey results indicate negative interactions of agricultural operators with recreation users have increased since 2016 and have significant financial impact to agricultural operations, as follows:

- 56% of producers describe interactions with recreation users as negative.
- 89% of producers report increasing negative interactions with recreation users since 2015.
- Negative interactions result in an estimated cost of \$75,000 to \$125,000 for producers each year, according to the 60% of operations that provided data.
- Recreation is cited as the 4th greatest economic challenge facing working lands, following conflicts with new neighbors, increasing operating costs and drought.
- 56% of Agricultural owners indicate that increasing negative interactions with recreation users may cause them to stop operations in Chaffee County.

According to survey data, combined with information from Envision Chaffee County working sessions with agricultural operators from 2017 to 2020, top recreation-related impacts include:

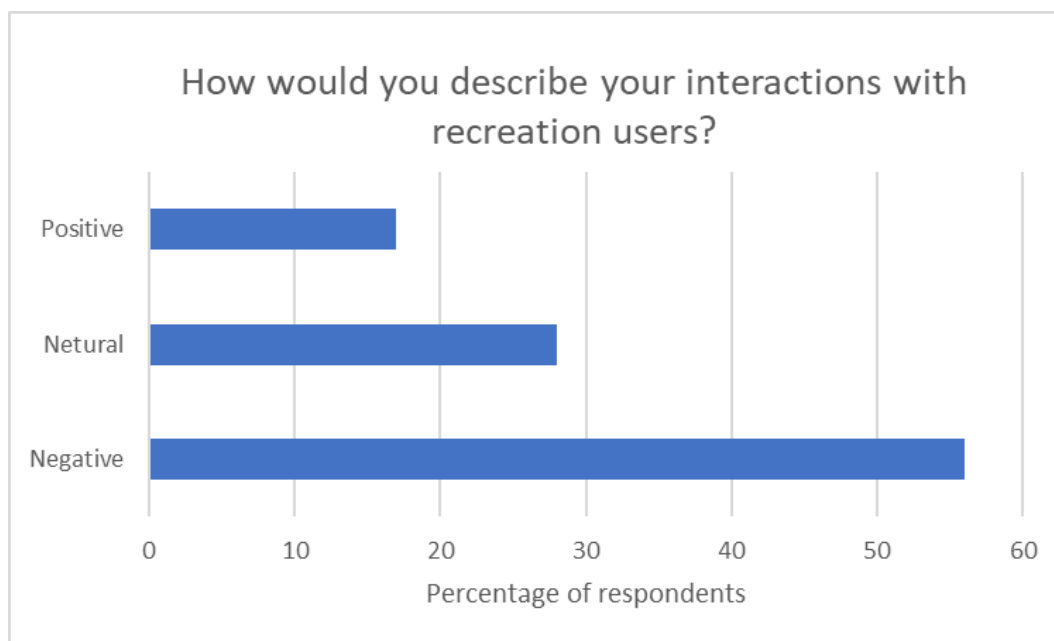
- Damage to assets such as fences, gates and stock tanks,
- Damage to/harassment of livestock by dogs, ATVs and bikes on public and private lands, and
- Damage to forage and impacts from dispersed campsites.

Interviews following up on survey data indicate single interactions can have cascading consequences. For example, in one anecdote, an operator installs an electric fence to keep livestock out of an area used by outdoor enthusiasts. A recreation user removes the power source from the fence, tossing it into the river. Livestock escape, causing damage to adjacent private landscaping. The rancher must round up the livestock, buy a new power source, repair the fence and engage with angry landowners.

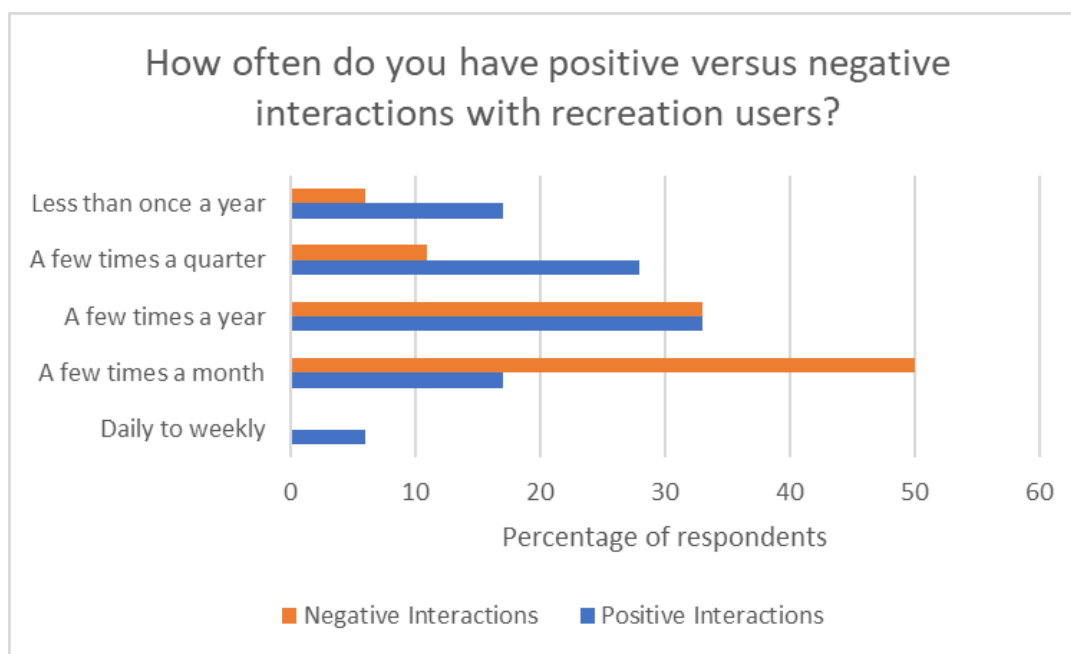
Survey results by question are described below. The data will be used to inform strategic solutions in the Chaffee Recreation plan.

Interactions with Recreation Users

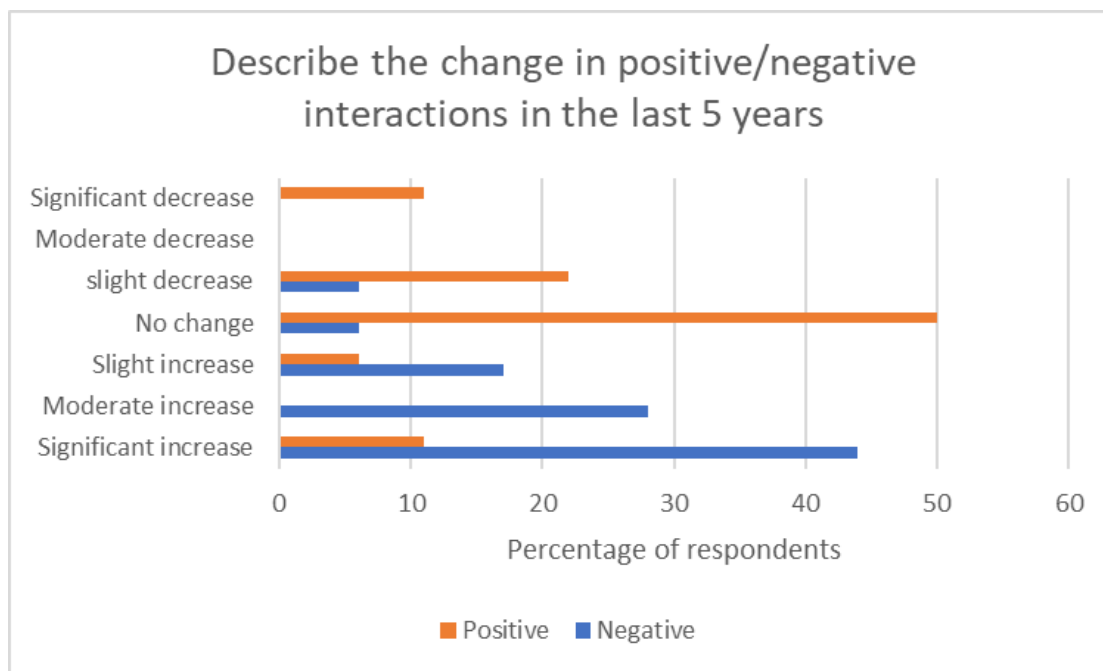
Operators were asked to describe their interactions with recreation users. A majority (58%) reported negative interactions, while 42% reported neutral to positive interactions as shown below.



Operators next responded to questions about how often they have both positive and negative interactions with recreation users. Both positive and negative interactions occur, but negative interactions occur more frequently as shown in the graph of results below.



When asked to describe the change in number of negative and positive interactions with recreation users over the last 5 years, **89% of respondents reported an increase in negative interactions**, while only 6% reported an increase in positive interactions, as shown in the graph below. Results indicate negative interactions with recreation users are increasing, while positive interactions are generally staying the same or decreasing.



Examples of Interactions

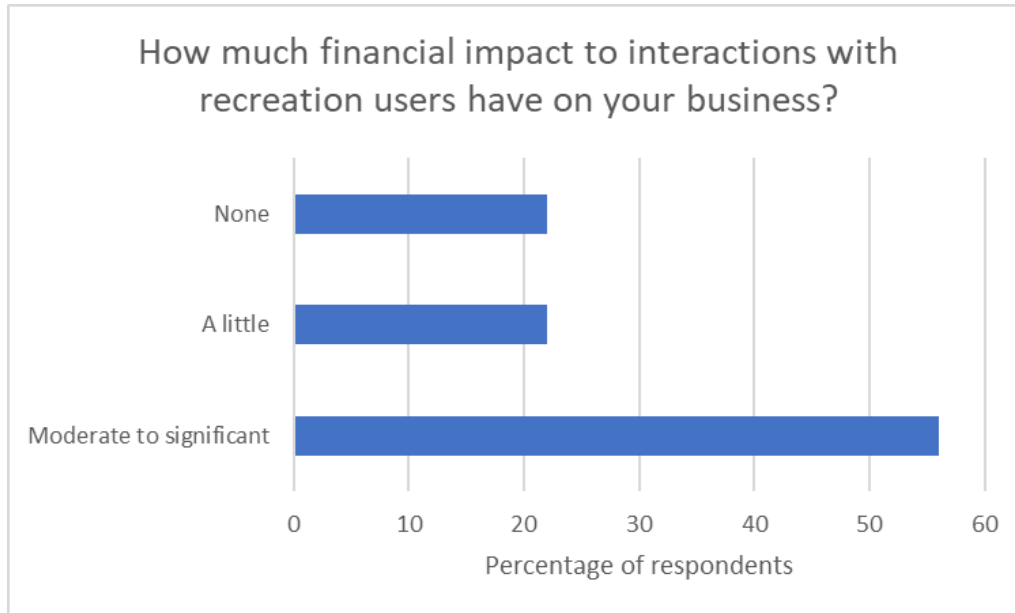
Ranchers were asked to provide their top one to three examples of interactions with recreation users and the impact they have had on their operations. Feedback to this open-ended question was categorized into themes, with the top 4 as follows:

- **Damage to assets**, including gates and fences damaged (resulting in repair cost and time to round up livestock), damage to stock tanks/pumps and damage to ditches blocked by trash or other objects.
- **Damage to stock**, including livestock harmed or harassed by dogs, ATVs, motorcycles and bikes on public and private lands.
- **Damage to forage and dispersed campsite interactions**, including decreased grass forage on public lands associated with denuded dispersed camping sites and off-road ATVs use, and stock displaced from traditional grazing/water sources by increased dispersed camping sites.
- **Positive interactions**, including cordial engagement.

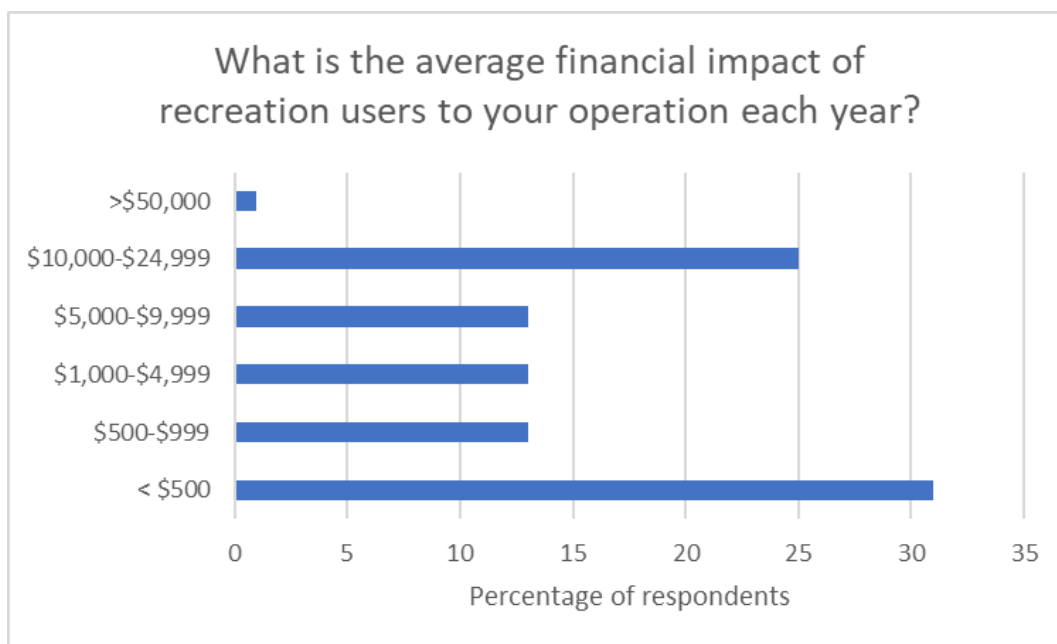
A list of comments entered in the survey is provided in Appendix A.

Financial Impact of Recreation User Interactions

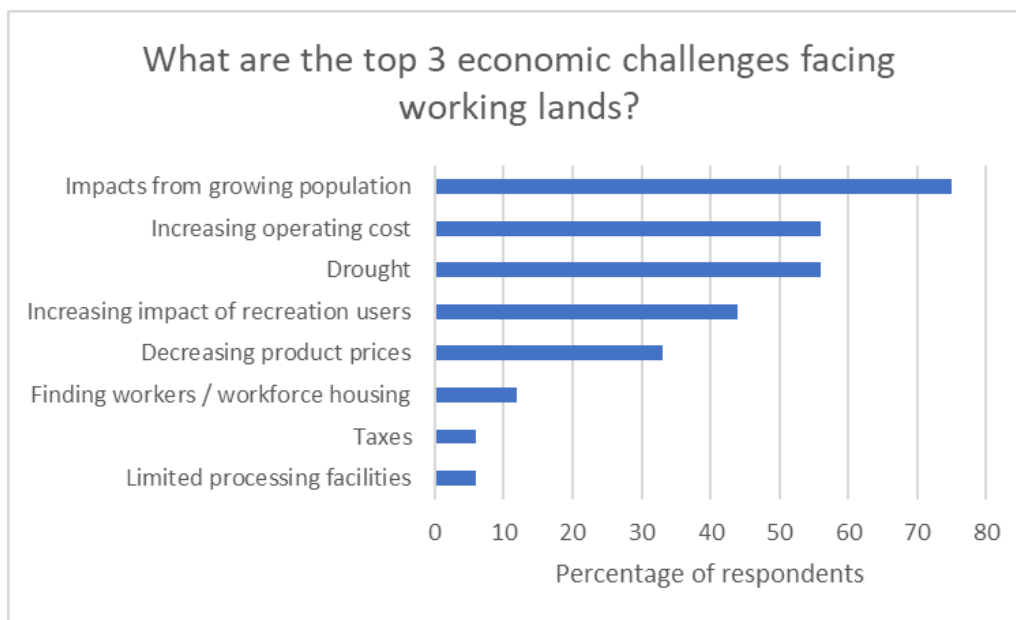
When asked **how much financial impact** interactions with recreation users have on their agricultural or ranching business, 88% indicate at least a little impact, and the majority indicate impacts are moderate to substantial as shown below.



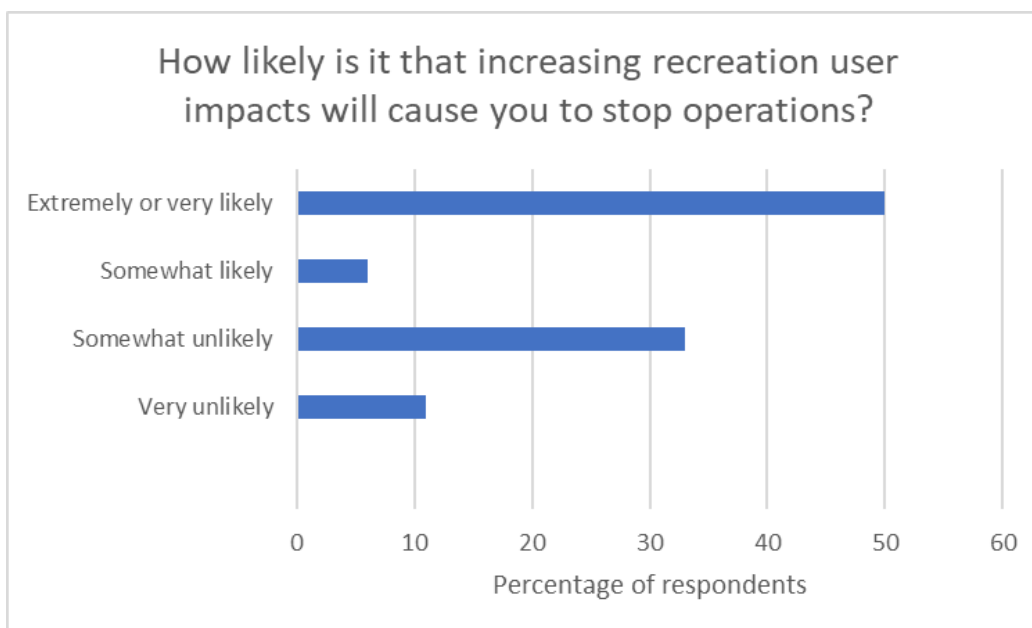
Participants were asked to give a financial estimate of this impact in dollars per year. **The results, summarized in the graph below, indicate a total annual impact of \$75,000 to \$125,000 for the 60% of operators who participated.** If the information is extrapolated to include 100% of local operators, the impact could be as great as \$125,000 to \$200,000.



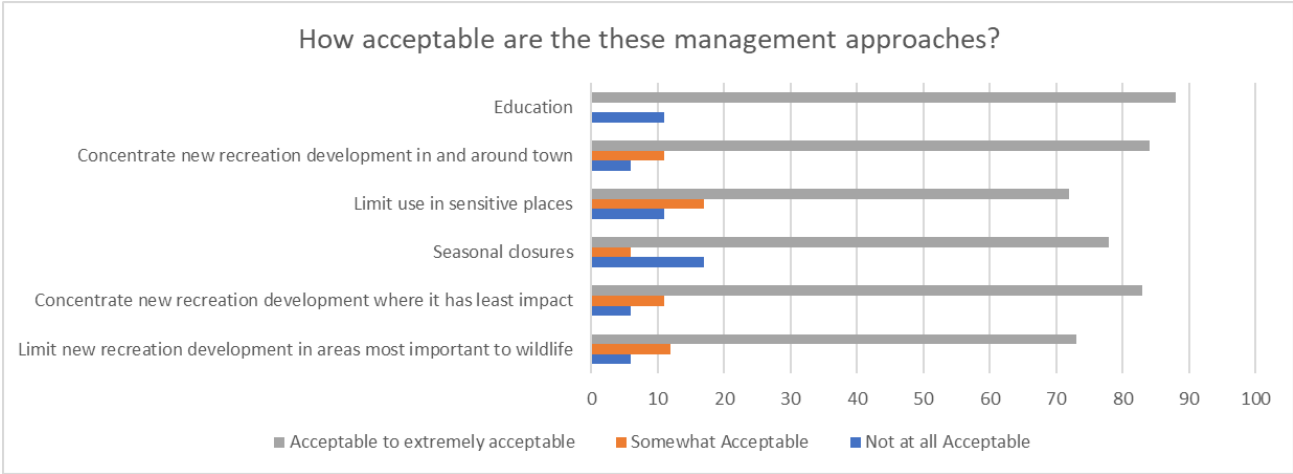
Local agricultural operators have indicated that maintaining economically viable operations is the biggest challenge in Chaffee County. When asked to rate the top challenges, economic impacts from growing population and from recreation user interactions are ranked as the #1 and #4 factors – competing with increasing operating costs and the impacts of sustained drought. Results are summarized in the graph below.



When asked to describe how likely it is that the impacts from increasing recreational use alone will cause them to stop operations in Chaffee County, 56% of respondents indicated it is somewhat to extremely likely, with data in the graph below.



Finally, participants were asked about the acceptability of several potential management approaches. Results indicate strong support for action, with more than 80% of participants indicating all of the approaches were somewhat to extremely acceptable. The most favored approaches were to educate users and to concentrate new recreation development in town or in areas where it will have the least impact, as shown in the graph below.



Conclusions and Next Steps

Citizens indicate that Chaffee County’s agricultural lands are essential to local quality of life. They support open rural vistas, provide essential wildlife habitat, help recharge local aquifers and provide local jobs and local foods. Envision data indicate that 9 in 10 local producers want to keep their lands in production and providing these many community benefits. However, sustaining economically viable operations is a challenge in Chaffee’s high desert climate. Survey results indicate that an increasing number of negative interactions with recreation users is acerbating this challenge to a very significant extent.

Results from the Chaffee County Recreation and Agriculture Survey will be used to inform the Chaffee Recreation Plan. The plan, convened in 2020 by Chaffee County Commissioners, will focus on developing new management solutions to better balance growth with protecting essential natural resources, including working agricultural lands. As the plan is implemented, the survey will be repeated at least each 3 years to measure the effectiveness of solutions.

Thank you to the Chaffee County agriculture community for your time in completing the survey and for the many benefits your working lands provide to the community.

Appendix A – Summary of comments describing interactions with recreation users.

Damage to assets:

- Cutting fence/leaving gates open leading to time spent looking for livestock.
- Cutting fence to drive through next to a locked gate. Time and materials required to repair fence and ensure livestock was contained.
- Coming thru gates on private property
- Damage to private property and water
- Damage to stock tanks
- Damage to electric fences
- (recreation use in/near ditches) Increases liability for ditch owners.
- We have to make special trips over to our range just to check if gates have been closed on many weekends. This cost in terms of time and expense adds up over a grazing season.

Damage to Stock

- Gates being left open that are posted to close, livestock get mixed
- Gates being left open on range lands
- Livestock being chased by motorcycles and ATVs
- ATV trespassing to drive in/on pastures through livestock herd
- Bicycles trespassing to drive in/on pastures through livestock herd

Conflict with dispersed camping and damage to forage

- I always cringe when I see multiple vehicles and campers spread out over a newly claimed camping area or an ever-expanding camping area.
- Group camping and fires during fire-bans
- Camping next to livestock water source
- Group camping
- Riding ATV's in a no access area damaging grazing.
- ATV's off road (damage forage)
- Loss of pasture, feed

Other Issues

- We have a lot of motorcycle traffic, and the problem is when they don't slow down going through our property
- They think they are entitled to go wherever they want
- When encountering bicyclists or hikers on trails or roads they have a tendency to act as if they have priority and have given verbal insults.
- I believe that new recreational users in our county think the land is for their use only (if it is hiking, ATV use or fishing, etc.) and have no knowledge of other legal uses like grazing. It is a lack of education.
- Generally unfriendly when riding bikes
- Enforcement, enforcement, enforcement. The agencies need to be encouraged to be present on busy weekends. They certainly have a presence if there is a risk of fire but when half of the

metro area moves in there is very little agency folk driving around keeping the campers/ATV folks honest.

- Liability and legal costs to defend against complaints of ag. practices to Federal and State agencies.
- Reduce our tourism marketing and incentivize manufacturing.

Positive interactions

- Most interactions with recreational users are a friendly wave as they pass me on their ATV/motorcycle.
- Most are well informed of the benefits of cattle on same lands. They are actually a pleasure to talk with.
- We let hikers come through our place and sometimes bicycles using our ranch roads. We have a couple of people who exercise their dogs out here, walking them or chasing sticks in our lakes