



RECREATION

Report Card

November 16, 2020

GOAL: SUSTAIN THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION



Key Indicators

1. Economic benefit trend **A**
2. Recreation job growth trend **A-**
3. Community support for recreation and tourism growth **C**

OVERALL GRADE

B

GOAL: MAINTAIN HEALTHY FORESTS, WATERS, WILDLIFE & WORKING LANDS



Key Indicators

- 4A. Forest Health - Public perception trend **C**
- 4B. Forest Health - Dispersed campsite impact trend **F**
5. Wildlife - Population Trends **C**
6. Impact of recreation to agricultural operations trend..... **D**

D+

GOAL: RETAIN EXCEPTIONAL MULTI-USE EXPERIENCES



Key Indicators

7. User Experience Trends **B-**
- 8A. Management resources per visitor - Agency funding..... **F**
- 8B. Management resources per visitor - Volunteer hours..... **A**
- 8C. Management resources per visitor - City funding **D**
- 9A. Recreation facilities per visitor - Public Lands **D**
- 9B. Recreation facilities per visitor - Towns **B**

C

Executive Summary

Residents and visitors recreating in Chaffee County prize the beautiful natural places that provide opportunity to disconnect and discover solitude. Chaffee provides easy access to lots of recreation opportunities while retaining a small-town and pristine feel, according to data from 3,836 participants in the Chaffee Recreation Survey.

Recreation is at the center of our culture and quality of life. The most-rafted river in America, skiing, hunting, fishing, biking and more 14,000-foot peaks than any other Colorado county, plus 390 miles of trails and 440 miles of roads on public lands; the wonderful variety of recreation opportunities also make Chaffee special, according to survey participants. The word cloud shows what residents and visitors say they love most about recreating here.



Outdoor recreation use in Chaffee County grew 13% every year from 2015 to 2019, according to analysis of visitor spending data from the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO)¹. The data shows that up to 4 million people are visiting our county each year. Continued growth is inevitable, as the state is projected to add millions of new residents. If growth continues at the pre-pandemic pace, recreation use will double in the next six years. Data is not yet available for 2020, but anecdotal information from public land and city recreation managers indicate that a step change in growth occurred well above 13%.

Residents and visitors understand that outdoor recreation growth delivers economic benefits by supporting local businesses, jobs, tax revenues and amenities. Outdoor recreation supports 33% of the local economy. Retirees attracted by the special quality of life generate another 27%.

Residents and visitors are concerned about the impacts of rapid recreation growth, according to the survey. Roughly 80% of residents and half of visitors say the health of local forests and wildlife are declining. The top reason cited is resource damage and pollution associated with over-use and/or irresponsible use, followed by beetle epidemics and drought.

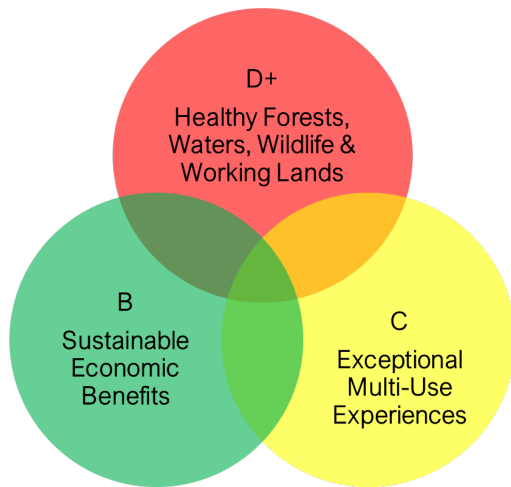
Half of residents and about a third of visitors say the quality of their recreation experiences has declined. The top three reasons are increasing numbers of users, degradation of natural resources with increasing trash and human waste, and increased ATV/Side-by-Side vehicle use resulting in concern about noise, dust, safety and road damage. The other half of residents and two-thirds of visitors indicate their experiences are better, primarily due to improved recreation assets and amenities in and around towns and along the Arkansas River.

HOW we grow matters. During the 2017 Envision Chaffee County planning effort, citizens noted that Chaffee County is at a tipping point, and planning for “smart growth” is urgent. One of the four Envision community visions is: “Healthy forests, waters and wildlife in balance with outdoor recreation.” What does “in balance” mean? The Recreation Taskforce, a group of leaders from 30 organizations, listened to community feedback and defined three Community Recreation goals. The goals include maintaining a thriving economy, environment and experiences, as shown in the bubble chart at right. **“Balance” means achieving all three goals as we grow.**



Community Recreation Goals

Achieving all three goals is the focus of the Chaffee Recreation Plan, an all-lands effort led by 23 community members representing agencies, local governments, business and citizens.



Community Recreation Goals – Current Grades

As a first step in Chaffee Rec Plan development, the council asked, “How are we doing now on the three goals?” To arrive at a fact-based answer, the council developed this Chaffee Recreation Report, providing indicators and grades to show current trends relative to achieving each goal. The grades range from B to D, as summarized in the graphic at left. The Chaffee Recreation Plan intent is to move all grades to “B” or better. The grades are summarized as follows:

Sustainable economic benefits – B. Tourism-related spending increased 53% and direct earnings of wages and business income from tourism grew by \$8.6 million from 2015 to 2019¹. However, broad support for continued recreation growth is lacking, as 70% of residents and 54% of all survey respondents disagree that the benefits of recreation growth outweigh negative impacts. Responses also indicate animosity toward visitors, with comments such as “too many people coming here to enjoy and destroy” and “more people means more crap (literally and physically) in our backyards.”

1. The [Colorado Tourism Office Impact Reports](#) include direct economic impacts of travel to and through Colorado counties, based on applicable taxes (lodging, food and beverage service, retail goods and fuel) paid by travelers at the point of sale.

Healthy forests, waters, wildlife and working lands - D+. As noted, survey respondents expressed concern about declining natural resource health associated with recreation growth. Data confirm reason for concern. 65% of key wildlife species have declining populations, according to USFS and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) data. Impacts associated with dispersed camping, such as erosion, trash, human waste and tree damage, are increasing from backcountry areas to towns. In some areas, impacts have doubled in the last 7 years. Negative interaction with recreation users, such as cut fences and damaged stock tanks, cost local agricultural producers \$75,000 a year, according to the 2020 Chaffee County Agriculture and Recreation Survey. These impacts threaten the sustainability of open lands that 97% of residents feel are important to their quality of life, according to [2017 Envision Chaffee County Survey](#) data.

Exceptional Multi-Use Experiences - C. Local experiences remain amazing. However, as noted above, a significant number (42%) of outdoor users feel the quality of their experience is declining. A key challenge in addressing this trend is declining management resources, as land agency dollars-per-visitor has dropped 40% since 2016.

The community's goal of maintaining environment AND economy AND experiences is hard. It will require tradeoffs. It will require innovation, collaboration, planning and expedient action.

Fortunately, the Chaffee Recreation Survey data show much common ground. Everyone (98%) agrees that trash, human waste and damage to natural areas diminish experiences. There is agreement that protecting natural resources matters. A strong majority of residents and visitors support ideas that could improve grades, such as limiting recreation development in areas most critical to wildlife (88% support).

The Chaffee Recreation Council and the Recreation Taskforce, working with citizens, will deliver a plan to make the community goals a reality by mid-2021. ***But the magic ingredient is you!*** Stay engaged and get informed by visiting envisionchaffeecounty.org. Sign up for the e-newsletter. Send your comments to info@envisionchaffeecounty.org.

The Chaffee Recreation Council thanks the many people involved in creating the Community Recreation Report, listed at the end of the report. The report is part of the Envision Recreation in Balance program, a partnership among Envision, the USFS Salida Ranger District and the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA) that includes 34 community groups, agencies, governments, universities and non-profit organizations, 130 community volunteers and input from thousands of residents and visitors to date.

The future awaits, we look forward to shaping it together.
Sincerely, *The Chaffee Recreation Council*

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Rick Hum	Common Ground Council Vice Chair
Tom Waters	AHRA Park Manager

The Chaffee Recreation Report

Over the past year, the Envision Recreation in Balance program and the Recreation Taskforce listened to the community to develop three goals for the future of Chaffee County recreation. These goals are the focus of the Chaffee Recreation Report:

- Sustain the economic benefits of outdoor recreation,
- Maintain healthy forests, waters, wildlife and working lands, and
- Retain exceptional multi-use experiences.

The work of that team is available at: <https://envisionchaffeecounty.org/recreation-in-balance/>. The Chaffee Recreation Report summarizes 3 years of Envision data plus important new information:

- The [2020 Chaffee County Recreation Survey](#) with 3,836 respondents, including 2,977 complete surveys,
- The [2020 Chaffee Recreation and Agriculture Survey](#), with input from 60% of local major agricultural operations, and
- New data from agency and state experts.

Measuring how we are doing relative to our goals is essential to understand where action is needed. With this in mind, the Chaffee Recreation Council developed a series of key indicators (see report cover). Each indicator is graded based on how it is trending relative to the goal: “A” indicates improving; “B” indicates no apparent change; “C” denotes some concern or negative trends up to 0.5% per year; “D” indicates a strong concern or a decline of 1.5% to 5% per year; and “F” marks grave concern or a decline greater than 5% per year. The key indicators are combined to provide overall grades for each of the three community goals, summarized in the table below.

Chaffee County Recreation Report Grades

Goal: Sustain the economic benefits of outdoor recreation	B
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Goal: Maintain Healthy Forests, Waters, Wildlife and Working Lands	D+
Goal: Retain Exceptional Multi-Use Experiences	C

Goal: Sustain economic benefits of outdoor recreation

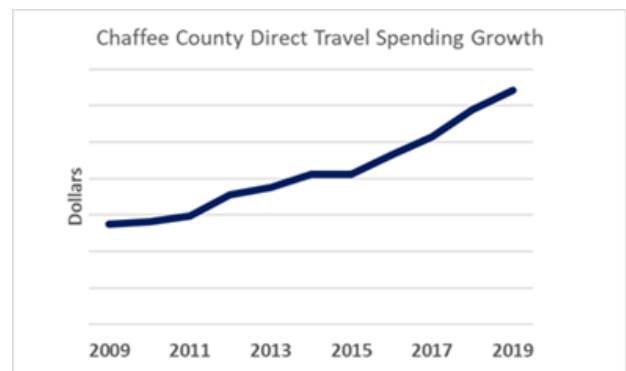
The tourism sector — driven by outdoor recreation — is the county’s largest economic driver. Travelers spent \$128.4 million in Chaffee County in 2019. The sector accounts for 25% of jobs and 33% of the economic product, according to the State Demographer. Residents and visitors recognize the benefits of increased outdoor recreation use. The top three benefits are: 1) Economic growth supporting local jobs, business and tax revenues; 2) improved recreation access and amenities, and 3) physical and mental health benefits, according to the Chaffee Recreation Survey.

One of the three community recreation goals is to sustain these benefits. Indicators measuring current status on the goal are: Economic benefit, job growth and community support. Indicator grades are described below. **The overall grade is a “B.” Indicators for economic benefit and job growth are trending up (A’s), but broad community support for continued recreation growth is lacking.**



Indicator 1 - Economic benefit trend.....A

Tourism in the years leading up to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic grew in Chaffee County more than twice as fast as the rest of the state, according to the CTO economic analysis¹. Spending was up an average of 13% a year from 2016 to 2019, resulting in a 53% increase in tourism activity over that time, as shown in the graph at right. The county’s direct earnings of wages and business income from tourism grew by \$8.6 million in that same timeframe. This indicator is graded as an “A.”



Economic benefits are supported by diverse recreation opportunities. For some recreation types, studies estimate total economic contribution to Chaffee County, including direct, indirect and induced economic activity. Direct effects are the expenditures visitors make at restaurants, hotels and gas stations. Indirect effects are related to business-to-business purchase, such as hotels buying linens. Induced effects include spending of labor income, such as a local rafting guide buying groceries. As available, these estimates provide a deeper sense of economic benefits and are summarized in the table on the next page.

An economy strongly dependent on recreation tourism faces some risk, such as potential impact from a national economic recession. Additional risks include potential impacts from the COVID-19 virus, our aging population and climate change, according to a June 2020 outlook report by the Chaffee County Economic Development Corp (CCEDC). A severe wildfire could impact all recreation opportunities, and drought, increasing temperatures, and extreme weather events could impact the number of skiable and raftable days in Chaffee County, the CCEDC said.

Indicator 2 – Recreation Job Growth Trend.....A-

The second indicator for sustainable economic benefit is the trend of recreation-related jobs. Recent growth in this sector boosted the county’s employment by 8% in 2018 and 9% in 2017 for a total addition of 2,300 jobs. Because jobs are expanding, the metric is rated an “A” with several concerns.

Travel- and tourism-related wages average \$21,000 per year, compared to the county average wage of \$38,000, according to 2019 Colorado Bureau of Labor statistics. The predominance of tourism-related jobs contributes to a county average wage well below the state average of \$60,000. Low wages create affordability challenges for the workforce. Many local workers spend more than a third of their income on housing, according to the 2016 Chaffee County Housing Needs Assessment.

Estimates of annual recreation economic impact to Chaffee County

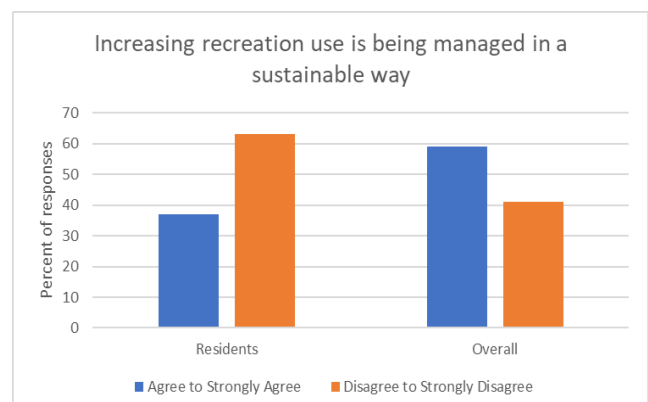
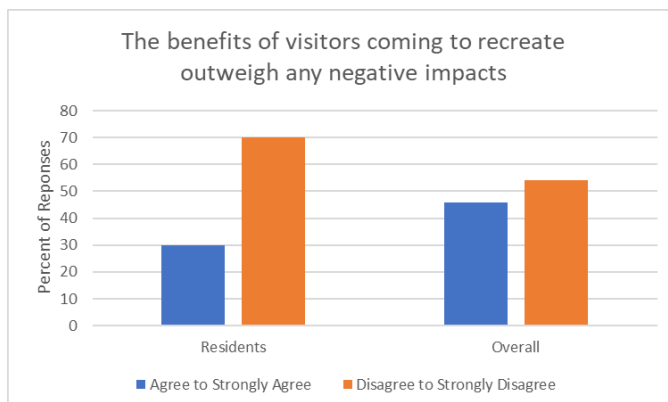
Opportunity	Users	Total Economic Contribution	Jobs	Data Source
Wildlife-Related (fishing, hunting, viewing)		\$70 Million	400	The Economic Impacts of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife Watching in Colorado report, prepared for Colorado Division of Wildlife, 2008. This county-specific estimated was factored for growth and the addition of wildlife watching based on the 2017 Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation in Colorado report for CPW.
Commercial River- Related (Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area – AHRA)	900,000	\$66 Million*	675	Colorado River Outfitters Association data, 2019. *Note this covers commercial use only on the entire AHRA area, and so overestimates Chaffee-specific impact. Chaffee County contains 52 of the 152 river miles in the AHRA.
Monarch Ski Area	200,000	\$57 Million	175	USFS data

Motorized Recreation (OHVs, 4-Wheel Drive and Snowmobiles)		\$24 Million		Economic Contribution of Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation in Colorado report, prepared for the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, 2016. The study estimates contribution for the nine county Central Region. The contribution for Chaffee County is estimated based on the county's percentage of direct tourism spending from 2019 Colorado Tourism Office data.
Fourteeneres	50,000-73,000	\$14-\$20 Million		Colorado 14er Initiative data for 2018.
USFS Developed Campgrounds	50,000	\$10 Million	23	USFS data
USFS Guided Visits	50,000	\$6 Million	18	USFS data Note: Data covers the Salida Ranger District and may overestimate Chaffee impact.
Mountain and road biking, kayaking and other private boating, and other sports are significant contributors but do not have equivalent data available at this time.				

Indicator 3 - Community Support for Recreation and Tourism GrowthC

The third indicator of economic sustainability is community support for continued tourism and outdoor recreation growth. In resource-dependent industries, this is called “social license,” or the level of acceptance an industry has from local stakeholders. The indicator is graded as a “C.”

Chaffee Recreation Survey respondents recognize that outdoor recreation tourism supports meaningful jobs (86% agree), better shopping and dining (90% agree), and local business (96% agree). However, 70% of residents and 54% of all respondents disagree or strongly disagree that “the benefits of visitors coming to recreate outweigh any negative impacts.” Similarly, 63% of residents and 41% of all respondents disagree or strongly disagree that increasing recreation is being managed sustainably, as shown in the graphs below.



A sense of concern, and even animosity, toward visitors is also observed from comments in the Chaffee Recreation Survey. When asked what things diminish the quality of natural resources and experiences in Chaffee, hundreds of comments express frustration with visitors. For example: “Careless tourists starting fires and leaving trash,” “Waaaaaay too many disrespectful, selfish, entitled people,” “Area being overrun with tourists who do not follow rules and are rude!” and others using harsher language.

A significant number of survey respondents also indicate concern that growth is damaging Chaffee County’s sense of place or “brand,” including comments about the area becoming “like everywhere else,” “losing its sense of small town,” and beginning to feel “touristy,” “overused” and “over promoted.”

Spending on promotional marketing is currently at least 15 times higher than spending on efforts that could encourage better visitor behaviors. The Chaffee County Visitors Bureau’s 2019 budget was about \$770,000. These revenues generated from the county lodging tax are mandated for expenditures that attract visitors. Local chambers of commerce and independent local businesses spend additional funds to promote tourism and special events. Promotion is further supported by the Colorado Tourism Office’s “Come to Life” marketing campaign that spent roughly \$8.5 million marketing the state in 2019.

Goal—Maintain Healthy Forests, Waters, Wildlife & Working Lands

Inspiring landscapes, clean waters, thriving wildlife, green hay meadows — these are the “gems” that both visitors and residents come to see and stay to enjoy. One of the three community recreation goals is to maintain these natural resources. The three indicators of current trends relative this goal are: forest health, wildlife population trends and the trend of recreation impacts to agriculture. The overall grade is a “D” with negative to strongly negative trends on all Chaffee Recreation Council indicators as shown in the report card below.

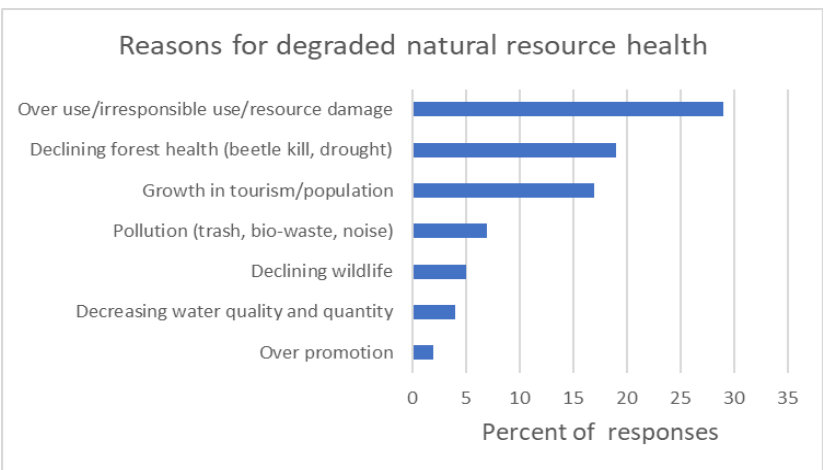
GOAL: MAINTAIN HEALTHY FORESTS, WATERS, WILDLIFE & WORKING LANDS		
	Key Indicators	
4A. Forest Health - Public perception trend	C	
4B. Forest Health - Dispersed campsite impact trend	F	
5. Wildlife - Population Trends	C	
6. Impact of recreation to agricultural operations trend.....	D	

Indicator 4 – Forest Health

4A Public perception trend.....C

79% of residents and 50% of visitors say the quality of forests, waters and wildlife in Chaffee County has somewhat to greatly declined, according to Chaffee Recreation Survey data. Because a majority perceive a negative trend, the indicator is graded as a “C.”

The primary reason cited for the decline is resource damage caused by recreation over-use and irresponsible use. This is followed by the general forest health decline associated with beetle kill and drought. Full survey results are shown on the graph at right.



4B Dispersed Campsite Impact Trend.....F

Another indicator of forest health is the trend in impacts associated with dispersed campsites. Dispersed campsites are free, undeveloped sites located on public lands throughout Chaffee County. They are generally in areas that are also popular with residents for day use such as hiking and biking. Envision’s research shows concern about impacts at dispersed camping areas include human waste, trash, human-caused wildfire risk, denuded ground soils, impacts to wildlife and, in a few locations, concerns associated with long-term residential use of public lands.

The number of dispersed campsites has doubled in the past 7 years at the 100,000-acre Fourmile Recreation Area area near Buena Vista. The number of sites increased from 180 to 358, according to data collected by Friends of Fourmile. **This is an increase of 14% every year.** During the same time, half of the sites have increased in size by 2 to 5 times. Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) has experienced similar growth in the use of dispersed camping areas over the last three years. Agency staff report that increased use, coupled with education shortfalls, has caused erosion and degradation of native grasses, shrubs and trees along riverbanks, as well as human waste and oil/gasoline deposits into the river. **These recreation-related water quality issues could threaten Gold Medal Trout Waters status, the agency concluded.** USFS Leadville Ranger District staff express similar concern about increasing campsite impacts in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness Area, especially associated with popular lakes and areas where fourteeners climbers camp. Based on the 14% per year increase in sites, the measure is graded as an “F.”

To measure the impacts, community volunteers collected data on 1,054 campsites in 2019, estimated to be about a fifth of the total number of sites in the county. Recorded information includes:

- **132** acres of barren, vegetation-denuded ground (100 football fields),
- **30%** of sites with more than a gallon of trash or human waste,
- **38%** of sites less than 100 feet from water, where Wilderness Area setback guidance is 100 feet and Leave No Trace recommends 200 feet,
- **6%** of sites have limits to expansion, such as boulders or buck-and-rail fencing erected by management agencies to contain vehicular activity, and
- **2,000** trees damaged by firewood collection, including iconic Krumholtz fir trees at timberline.

The risk of human-caused wildfire at these sites is also a concern. Salida Ranger District staff responded to 32 unattended, abandoned or illegal campfires in the first six months of 2020. AHRA staff report additional abandoned smoldering campfires as well as large bonfires and fire rings constructed in high risk places under trees. Nearly 85% of wildfires in the United States are caused by people, according to the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Beyond campsites, roads and trails may be a source of sediment entering waterways and threatening trout and other aquatic life. Water providers are concerned about such sediment filling water storage vessels. Work is in progress to further assess this risk and potential need for management, such as culverts and hardened stream crossings.

Land management agencies and the community are addressing some challenges through projects and programs that mitigate impacts. An example is a Campsite Adopter group formed by community members to help track and address use impacts in the Browns Creek area. The level of volunteer

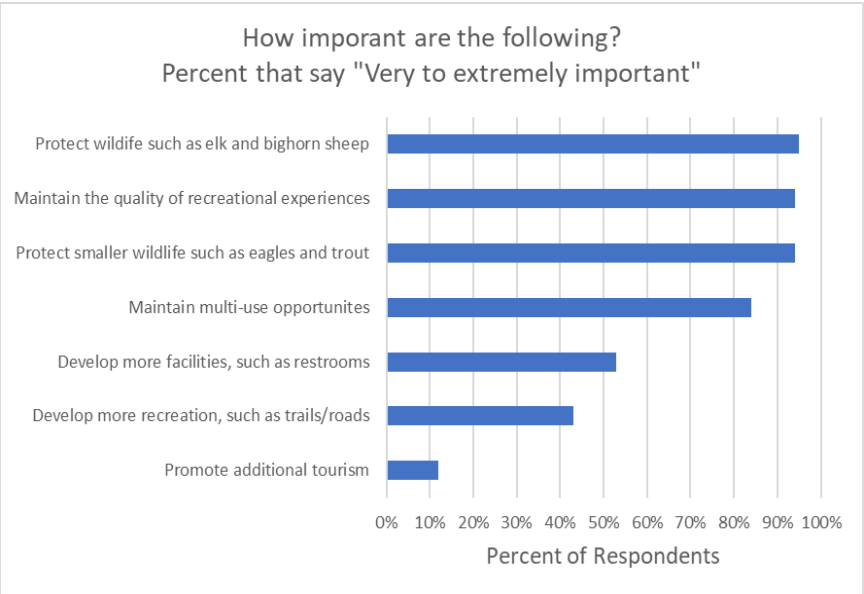
stewardship is impressive, but our small community of 20,000 people will be challenged to keep up with the impacts of 4 million users increasing each year. Broader strategic solutions are needed.

Indicator 5 – Wildlife - Population trends.....C

The second natural resource health indicator is wildlife population trends. **95% of Chaffee Recreation Survey respondents indicate that managing recreation to protect wildlife is important**, with similar strong support for big game and smaller sensitive species (see graph below for full results). Both residents and visitors rated protecting wildlife as the top priority, even before protecting the quality of their multi-use experiences and well ahead of developing additional recreation opportunities or facilities.

Wildlife also contributes to a resilient economy. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) data indicate that hunting, fishing and wildlife watching contribute \$5 billion a year and 40,000 jobs to the Colorado economy.

The indicator is rated based on population trend data for fourteen types of wildlife. The species were selected on the basis of rarity and economic impact. Of the fourteen, 3 introduced species and 2 species with local habitat protection in place have stable or increasing populations. Nine others (65%) have declining population trends, as summarized in the table below. The indicator is graded a “C.”



Local populations of **bighorn sheep**, **mountain goat**, and **elk** have declined 11% to 32% over the last twenty years. CPW biologists indicate that habitat loss from development, increasing recreation pressure, and possibly drought and climate change are working in combination to cause the declines. Elk require large blocks of un-fragmented habitat, according to CPW biologists. A 2018 study indicates that elk avoid areas where people are recreating. All-terrain vehicle use was most disruptive, followed by mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding. When exposed to these activities, elk spent more time escaping rather than feeding and resting. Human disturbance has particularly been shown to reduce elk calf survival in production areas. Increased recreation use is partially responsible for a 50% decline in Roaring Fork and Eagle valley elk populations, according to a study by Rocky Mountain Wild that concludes residential development and people using more toys to push further into the woods at all times of the year overwhelmed the ability of elk herds to adapt.

Mule deer populations have been stable over the last 20 years, due to efforts to protect and enhance habitat. However, numbers remain 32% below the bottom end of CPW’s target population. Populations are attributed to losses in winter range and agricultural lands to development, combined with impacts

from recreation, particularly in critical winter habitats. Local winter habitat is regionally important, since CPW collar data show that deer wintering in Chaffee County migrate to nine adjacent counties from Eagle to Westcliffe in summer months.

In terms of smaller sensitive species, Chaffee County has one of the most important populations of threatened **Boreal Toads** in Colorado. The population is in serious decline due to spreading chytrid fungus and habitat loss. Recreation impacts at breeding sites (trampling) and collection of tadpoles/toads also contribute to the decline, according to USFS biologists.

Chaffee County Wildlife Population Trends – Report Card

Wildlife	Grade	Data
Overall	C	Declining populations of concern in 9 of 14 key species
Declining		
Bighorn Sheep	C	29% decline from 2000 to 2019; 1.4% per year
Mountain Goat	D	32% decline from 2000 to 2019, 1.6% per year
Mule Deer	C	1% decline from 2000 to 2019; 32% below CPWs target
Elk	C	11% decline from 2000 to 2019; 0.5% per year
Boreal Toad	F	Number of active breeding sites decreased 63% and the number of young toads decreased 72% from 2013 to 2019
Ptarmigan	C	Declining throughout range
Black Swift	C	Single Chaffee County location at risk from recreation use
Susan's Purse Making Caddisfly	F	Not documented in 2017 at only known location in Chaffee County
Stable or Improving		
Pronghorn	A	Increasing population of 150 to 200
Moose	A	Local numbers increased from about 20 to 50 since 2000
Canada Lynx	B	Numbers increasing throughout range; remains Threatened
Raptors	B	Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Osprey, Peregrine, Prairie Falcon, Northern Goshawk populations are relatively stable
Townsend's Big-Eared Bat	B	Population trends are unknown, some action taken to protect habitat
Population data for big game species provided by CPW biologist Jamin Grigg. Population counts are tallied from the game management units for each species that best represent Chaffee County. Population data for other sensitive species provided by Stephanie Shively, Salida Ranger District Wildlife Biologist.		

White-tailed ptarmigan, black swift, Townsend's Bat and Susan's Purse-Making Caddisfly images



White-tailed ptarmigan are declining across their range. The US Fish & Wildlife Service is reviewing their status to determine if they require more protection. Locally, wildlife biologists express concern about the impact of dogs off leash which may kill young birds, and potential impact of snowmobile activity in winter habitat. **Black Swift** are declining across the U.S. The single known nesting site in Chaffee County is threatened by unmanaged recreation use.

Local population trends of vulnerable **Townsend’s Big Eared Bat** are uncertain. Local habitat protection activities, such as the installation of bat gates on abandoned mines, have likely improved trends. The species is sensitive to human activity near roosts during hibernation and reproduction.

Studies show that recreation activities displace wildlife, moving them out of high quality to lower quality habitats. This reduces the area wildlife use, decreasing the number of animals the landscape can support. Recreational disturbance to birthing or nesting habitats also can result in less success raising young. **CPW biologists say that if current trends continue, local herds of elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goat could be substantially reduced in the next decade.**

Indicator 6 – Impact of recreation to agricultural operations trendD

The third key indicator of healthy landscapes is the trend in recreation impacts to working agricultural lands. 97% of citizens say working lands contribute to their quality of life, providing open landscapes, ground water recharge, wildlife habitat, local foods and local jobs, according to data from the [2017 Envision Community Survey](#). County land in agricultural production has decreased 30% since 1982, according to USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service Survey Data.

The indicator is measured with data from the [2020 Chaffee County Recreation and Agriculture Survey](#), which collected information from the owners of roughly 60% of major agricultural operations, or 18 businesses. The indicator is graded a “D” based on the following:

- **89%** of producers report an increase in negative interactions with recreation users from 2015 to 2020.
- **17%** report an increase in positive interactions with recreation users over the same time.
- **\$75,000 to \$125,000** in direct economic impacts result from the negative interactions each year.
- Recreation is cited as the 4th greatest economic challenge facing working lands, after conflicts with new neighbors, increasing operating costs and drought.
- **56%** of Ag owners indicate increasing recreation use may cause them to stop operations in Chaffee.

The top impacts include:

- **Damage to assets.** Gates left open and fences cut, resulting in repair cost and time to round up livestock. Damage to stock tanks and pumps. Damage to ditches blocked by trash or other objects.

- **Damage to stock.** Livestock harmed or chased by uncontrolled dogs, ATVs, motorcycles and mountain bikes on public and private lands.
- **Damage to forage.** Decreased grass forage on public lands associated with increasing denuded dispersed campsite footprints and off-road ATVs use. Stock displaced from traditional grazing areas and water sources by increased dispersed camping sites and trails.

Goal - Retain Exceptional Multi-Use Experiences

Outdoor recreation ranks with “natural beauty” and “small-town community” among the top 3 values that make Chaffee County special, according to the Envision Community Survey. Our exceptional outdoor recreation encompasses the most-rafted river in America, a fifth of the state’s 14ers, diverse motorized opportunities, hunting, Gold Medal fishing, skiing, mountain biking, river parks, the Colorado Trail and much more.

The third and final community recreation goal is to retain these exceptional multi-use opportunities, from areas offering high-density use to opportunities for primitive solitude. The indicators for this goal are: User experience, management funding per visitor and recreation facilities per visitor. Overall, the goal is graded a “C.” Chaffee Recreation Survey data indicates that experience has decreased for some users and improved for others. However, funding for management, education and facility development such as restrooms is not keeping pace with growth, and could lead to further declines in experience quality.

GOAL:
RETAIN EXCEPTIONAL MULTI-USE EXPERIENCES



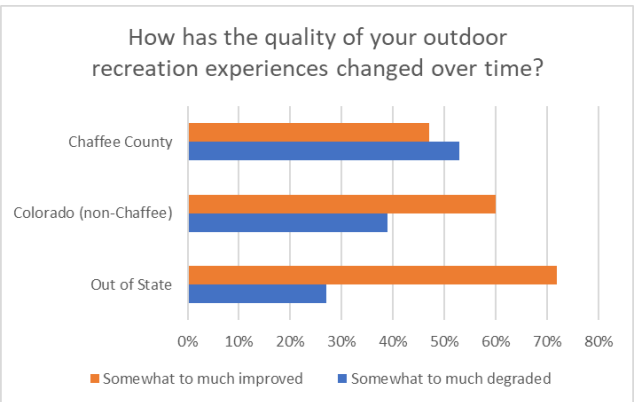
Key Indicators

7. User Experience Trends	B-
8A. Management resources per visitor - Agency funding.....	F
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8C. Management resources per visitor - City funding	D
9A. Recreation facilities per visitor - Public Lands	D
9B. Recreation facilities per visitor - Towns	B



Indicator 7 – User experience trends.....B-

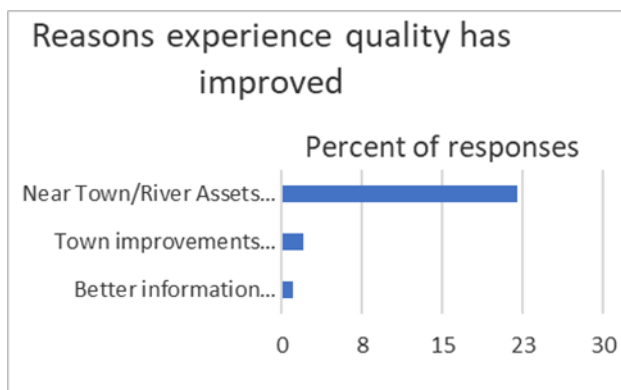
Survey respondents agree on the three things they love most about the places they recreate in Chaffee. First is Chaffee County’s beautiful and natural places. Second is the opportunity to disconnect and find solitude. Third is the convenient access to a wide variety of recreation activities. The trend in how the quality of those experiences is changing over time, however, is mixed, as shown on the graph at right. Therefore, the indicator is graded a “B-.”



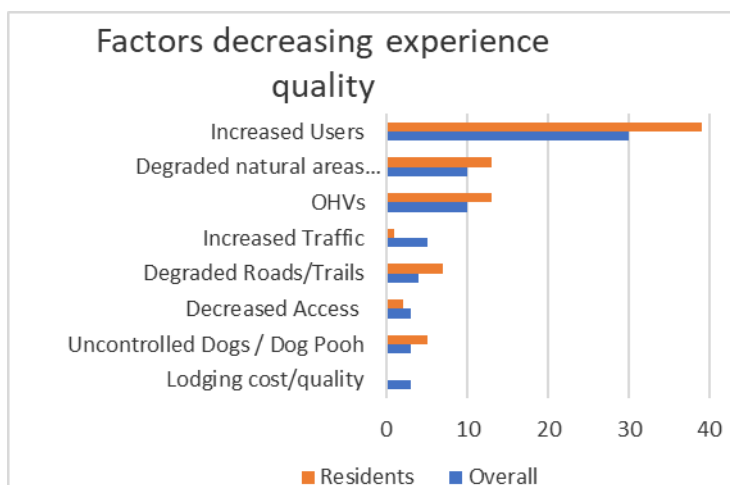
For more than half of residents and about a third of visitors, quality is declining. Declining experience is most common for people using backcountry and

primitive areas. For the rest of residents and about two-thirds of visitors, experiences have improved. Improvements are most common among people recreating on the river and in and around towns.

The top factor that has enhanced experiences are new trails, put-ins and signage along the river and in and around towns. New well-maintained mountain bike trails accessible from town lots are popular. Improvements in town amenities and improving ability to access information about recreation opportunities were also positive themes, as shown in the graph at right.



The top three factors that have diminished experiences are increased number of users, trash/human waste and increased ATV/Side-by-Side vehicle use resulting in concern about noise, dust, safety and road damage, as shown in the graph and word chart below.



Increasing numbers of users is the top concern for both residents and visitors, who cite not only concern about growth but also the behavior of users, with words like “rude” and “disrespectful.” Conflicts between user groups such as people vs dogs are also part of this theme. A sense of crowding in town, on the highway and on the river was commonly cited. Some respondents also expressed concern that Chaffee County is losing its “small town” feel and is at risk of feeling “over-promoted” and “touristy.” 88% of all respondents indicate the number of users encountered has a major to extreme impact on the quality of their experiences.

The second most-common factor affecting user experiences is damage to natural areas, especially the presence of trash and human waste. 98% of all survey respondents indicated that seeing trash, human waste and damage to natural areas has a major to extreme impact in the quality of their experience. The third most-common factor is Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs), with 10% of respondents citing concerns about noise, dust, safety (excessive speeds), off road/trail use and negative impact to/erosion of

roads as a result of increased OHV use. A smaller group of respondents (3%), conversely indicated that decreased access and/or rules applying to OHVs was detrimental to their experience quality.

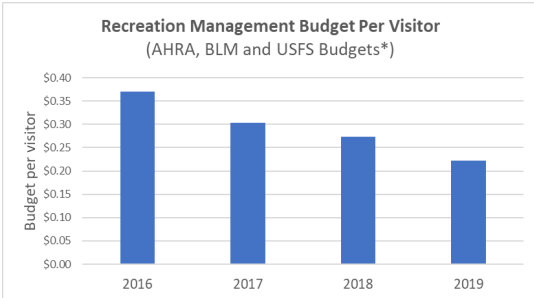
For visitors, increased traffic and the affordability, availability and quality of local lodging were also cited as detrimental. For residents, degraded roads/trails and uncontrolled dogs or dog waste are included in the top 5 factors causing declining experience quality.

Indicator 8 - Management Resources Per Visitor

As the number of recreation users increases, the need for recreation management also grows. As use grows, the cost to maintain assets such as roads, trails and restrooms, enforce rules, educate users, address natural resource damage, clean up trash and answer visitor questions all increase, too. Therefore, the second indicator of user experience trends is recreation management resources per visitor. Considering sharply declining agency resources, increasing volunteer efforts and declining city per-visitor recreation budgets, the indicator is graded a “D.” **Management resources are not keeping pace with increased use.**

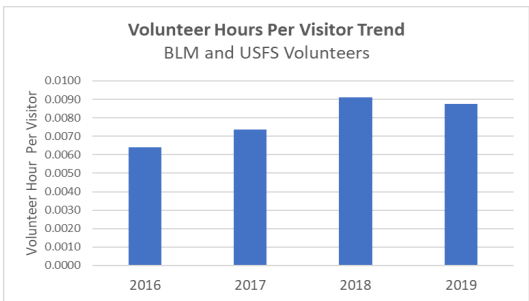
8A. Management resources per visitor - Agency funding.....F

Combined management recreation budgets for the USFS, BLM and AHRA **declined 11% from 2016 to 2019**, or about 3% a year, according to agency data. At the same time, visitor use increased up to 13% per year, based on CTO data. As a result, agency **recreation management budget per-user declined 40% from 2016 to 2019**, or about 10% each year. Based on a greater than 5% per-year trend, the indicator is graded an “F.”



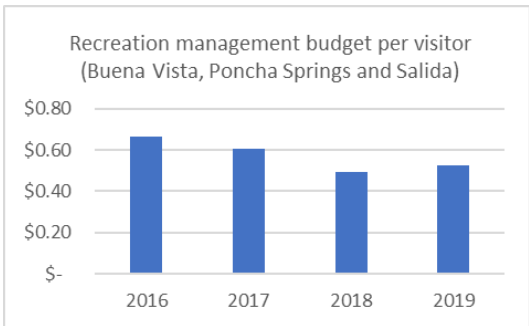
8B. Management resources per visitor - Volunteer hours.....A

To offset funding declines in funding per-visitor, agencies have partnered with the community. Volunteer hours for the USFS and BLM combined increased 103% from 2016 to 2019. Volunteer hour per-visitor increased 37% from 2016 to 2019, providing the equivalent of 8 full-time positions to the BLM and USFS. This sub-indicator is rated an “A.”



8C. Management resources per visitor - City funding.....D

Municipal recreation management needs are also influenced by the number of visitors to town parking areas and restrooms, river and city parks, trails, etc. Combined recreation budgets for the towns of Buena Vista, Poncha Springs and Salida increased 18% from 2016 to 2019, or about 4% a year. This



steady increase does not offset the rate of visitor growth, and so recreation funding per-visitor decreased by 5% a year and the metric is graded a “D.” Town recreation managers observe that most visitors stop in town at some point on their trip. In fact, in 2020 during the pandemic, City of Salida recreation staff report that emptying trash bins required full time attention.

Indicator 9 - Recreation facilities

As the number of recreation users increases, facilities that directly support them such as restrooms and campgrounds also must expand to handle volume. Assets can be “hardened” to prevent resource damage, such as containing campsites or cementing river put-ins. For example, containment of dispersed camping areas on USFS and BLM lands increased from roughly 200 feet of fencing or boulder barriers in 2016 to more than 20,000 feet in 2019. Total containment is currently estimated at 3-6% of all county campsites. The final report card indicator is growth in restroom and developed campground facilities.

9A. Recreation facilities per visitor – public lands.....D

Permanent restroom facilities on BLM and USFS land increased 25% (12 to 15), while porta-johns increased 50% from 2016 to 2019. However, total restroom facilities per visitor decreased 11% from 2016 to 2019, or about -3% per year. Developed camping facilities can help manage issues associated with growing visitation. The number of developed campgrounds on public lands has remained steady at 12 in Chaffee County, and so sites per visitor have decreased 54% since 2016. The indicator is graded a “D.”

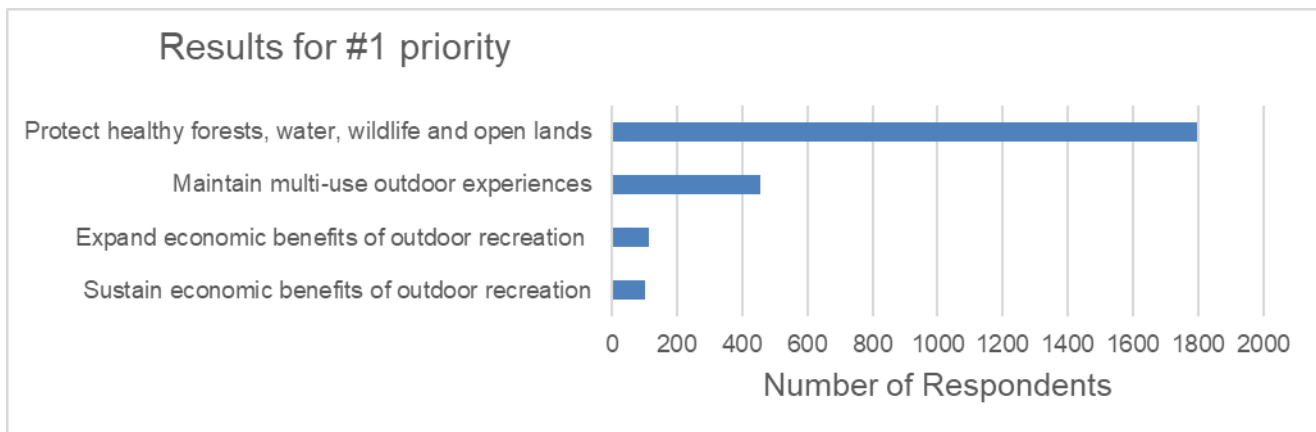
The cost-versus-benefit of adding additional trails and roads is more complex, and so is not included in the indicator grade. The miles of roads on public lands has remained steady at 440, while official USFS and BLM trail miles increased 6% from 2016 to 2019, from 364 to 386 miles.

9B. Recreation facilities per visitor – municipalities.....B-

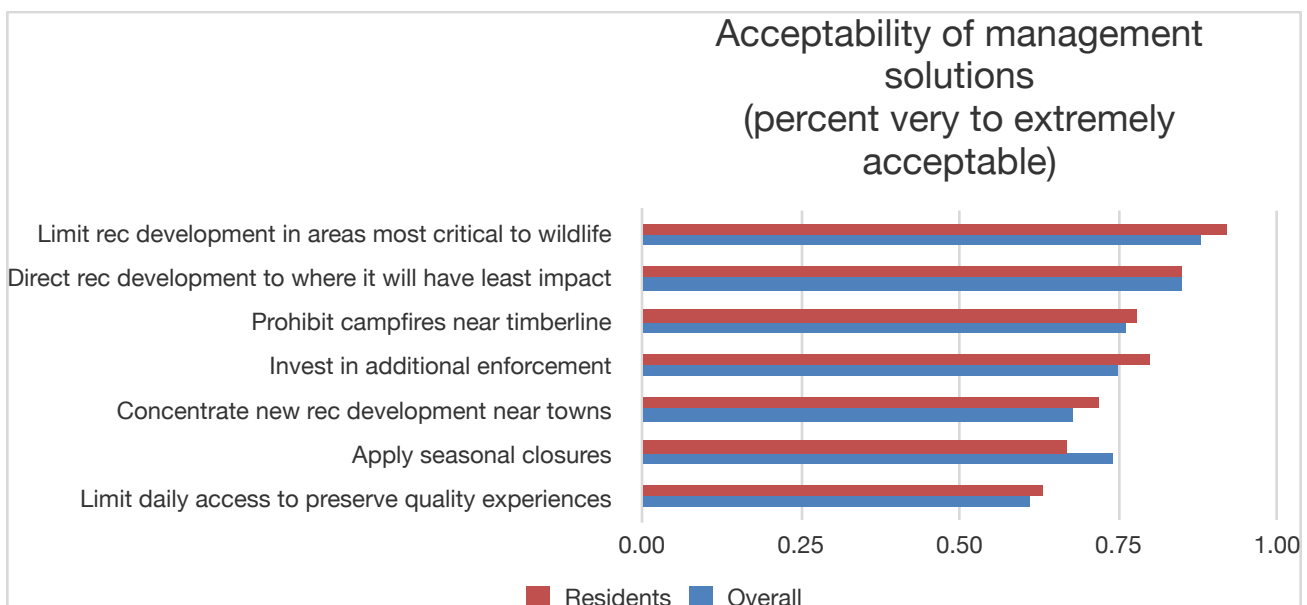
Data for the three Chaffee County Municipalities indicate they have collectively added more recreation facilities from 2016 to 2019, as compared to public lands. New city assets include: 2 parking areas, 1 restroom facility, 4 playgrounds, new water park features, a river park changing facility, 1 baseball field, 3 pickleball courts and expanded skate park facilities. Combined trails for all towns nearly doubled in length from 2016 to 2019, from 18 to 35 miles. New and well-maintained trails in and around towns are the most commonly cited factor that has increased recreation experience quality for visitors and residents, according to Chaffee Recreation Survey data. Town recreation managers indicate some assets are keeping pace with demand while others, such as parking, are not. The indicator is graded a B-.

Resident and Visitor Support for Management Action

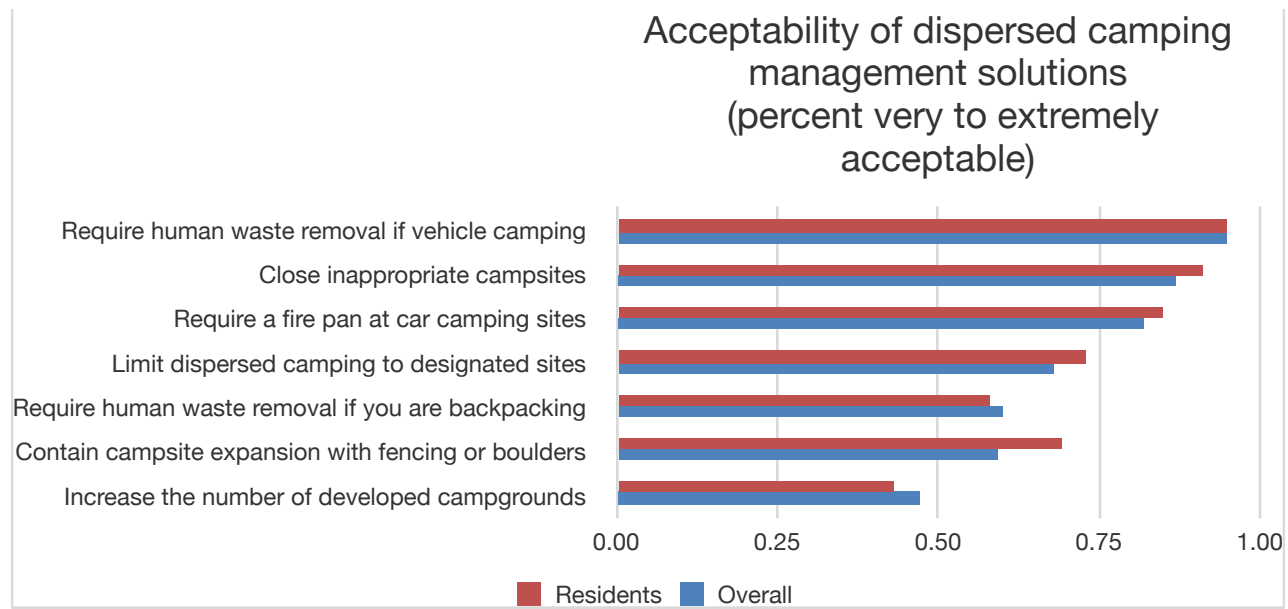
Indicator grades below B are a call for action. The grades themselves prioritize action, with greatest need on the poorest grades. To further test priorities, Chaffee Recreation Survey participants were asked to rank their priorities for management action. 73% of respondents ranked healthy forests, waters and wildlife as the top priority, with full results shown in the graph below.



Residents and visitors are strongly supportive of more management action. Over 60% indicate all tested strategies are very to extremely acceptable, as shown in the graph below. Solutions that explicitly protect wildlife are most strongly supported. For example, 88% of all survey respondents indicate limiting recreation development in areas that are most critical to wildlife is very acceptable.



Considering dispersed camping trends (one of only two “Fs” in this report card) residents and visitors are, again, strongly supportive of management actions, as shown in the graph below. The strongest support is for requiring waste removal for vehicle camping (95%), closing inappropriate campsites (87%), requiring fire pans (82%) and transitioning from open dispersed camping to camping only in designated sites (68%). The only management strategy showing less than 50% support is the development of new campgrounds on public lands.



What happens next – The Chaffee Recreation Plan

The Recreation Report Card reflects current trends on the three community recreation goals of sustaining economy, environment and experience. The data show some bright spots and areas that require action. For the community goals to become a reality, all grades need to be “B” or better. In talking with citizens, agency and local government staff and nonprofit profit leaders, one message is clear. The difficult work of managing recreation growth in ways that achieve all three goals requires energized, engaged and enabled people from all groups working together. Some of the grades in this report are a call to action to develop new solutions and work together to build a future based on common ground, to allow future generations to enjoy the same fabulous resources, experiences and economic benefits as this generation.

The Chaffee Recreation Council and the Recreation Taskforce will deliver an action plan by mid-2021. Stay engaged and get informed by visiting envisionchaffeecounty.org. Sign up for the e-newsletter and send your comments to info@envisionchaffeecounty.org. All data used in this report is available upon request to Envision Chaffee County. Ideas to improve the measures and data presented are welcome at the same email address.

Acknowledgements

Envision Chaffee County would like to thank the many people who made this report possible. A few key contributors are listed below, and our apologies to anyone we miss.

- Envision Recreation in Balance project partners, Dominique Naccarato – GARNA Executive Director and Ben Lara, USFS Recreation Staff.
- The Chaffee Recreation Council (listed in the executive summary).
- 100+ volunteers who collected data on dispersed campsites during the 2019 field season.

- Jamin Grigg (CPW Biologist), Stephanie Shively (USFS Biologist) and Tom Sobal (ED Quiet Use Coalition) for research on recreation and wildlife and development of wildlife population data.
- Town recreation leaders Earl Richmond, Diesel Post and Brian Berger for providing municipal rec data.
- Ben Lara, Kalem Lenard, Linda Skinner, Tom Waters and Jamin Grigg for supplying agency recreation data.
- The report was compiled and edited by Cindy Williams and Kim Marquis at Envision, and any errors are ours alone.

Appendix A - [The Chaffee County Recreation Survey](#)

Appendix B – [The Chaffee County Recreation and Agriculture Survey](#)