

GRAND COUNTY TOURISM REVITALIZATION PLAN

DECEMBER 2024



Acknowledgments

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Thank you to the stakeholders involved in this project:

Bureau of Land Management

Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Colorado Tourism Office

Destination Granby

Devil's Thumb Ranch, Resort & Spa

Fraser Valley Recreation

Granby Ranch

Grand County Board of County Commissioners

Grand County Economic Development Department

Grand Lake Chamber of Commerce

Headwaters Trail Alliance

Hot Sulphur Springs Chamber of Commerce

Kremmling Area Chamber of Commerce

Miles Partnership

Open Lands, River, and Trails Advisory Committee

Rocky Mountain National Park

Town of Fraser

Town of Granby

Town of Grand Lake

Town of Hot Sulphur Springs

Town of Kremmling

Town of Winter Park

U.S. Forest Service

Winter Park - Fraser Chamber of Commerce

Winter Park Resort

YMCA of the Rockies – Snow Mountain Ranch

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A Note to the Reader

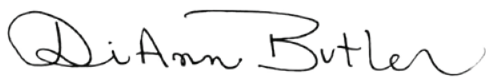
Dear Partners and Visitors:

As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 East Troublesome Fire, and the changes those events brought, Grand County officials recognize that a strategy that both helps us to recover and to plan for our future is essential. Thus, Grand County, Grand County Tourism, and many stakeholders and residents worked to build this first of its kind **Grand County Tourism Revitalization Plan**—a strategic blueprint designed to ignite sustainable tourism, enhance visitor experiences, and foster economic vitality across our beautiful county. Grand County has long been a destination for those seeking adventure, relaxation, and connection with the great outdoors, but we recognize that now is the time to reimagine how we engage visitors in a way that benefits both our economy and the quality of life for residents.

Grand County has been my home for more than 30 years. I have worked in and visited every corner of the county and appreciate the uniqueness of it all. As someone who owned and operated a tourism-related business in Grand County for several years, I appreciate the challenges of both working and playing in a mountain community. I was pleased to provide support throughout this planning initiative, as we were able to focus energy on the many opportunities and concerns I experienced in my previous career as well as my current role as the Grand County Economic Development Coordinator. The purpose of this plan is to strengthen our tourism industry through innovation, sustainability, and collaboration. We aim to balance growth with conservation, ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism support our local businesses, protect our environment, and respect the culture that makes Grand County so special. Through this plan, we seek to expand year-round tourism, diversify our offerings, and create new opportunities for our community.

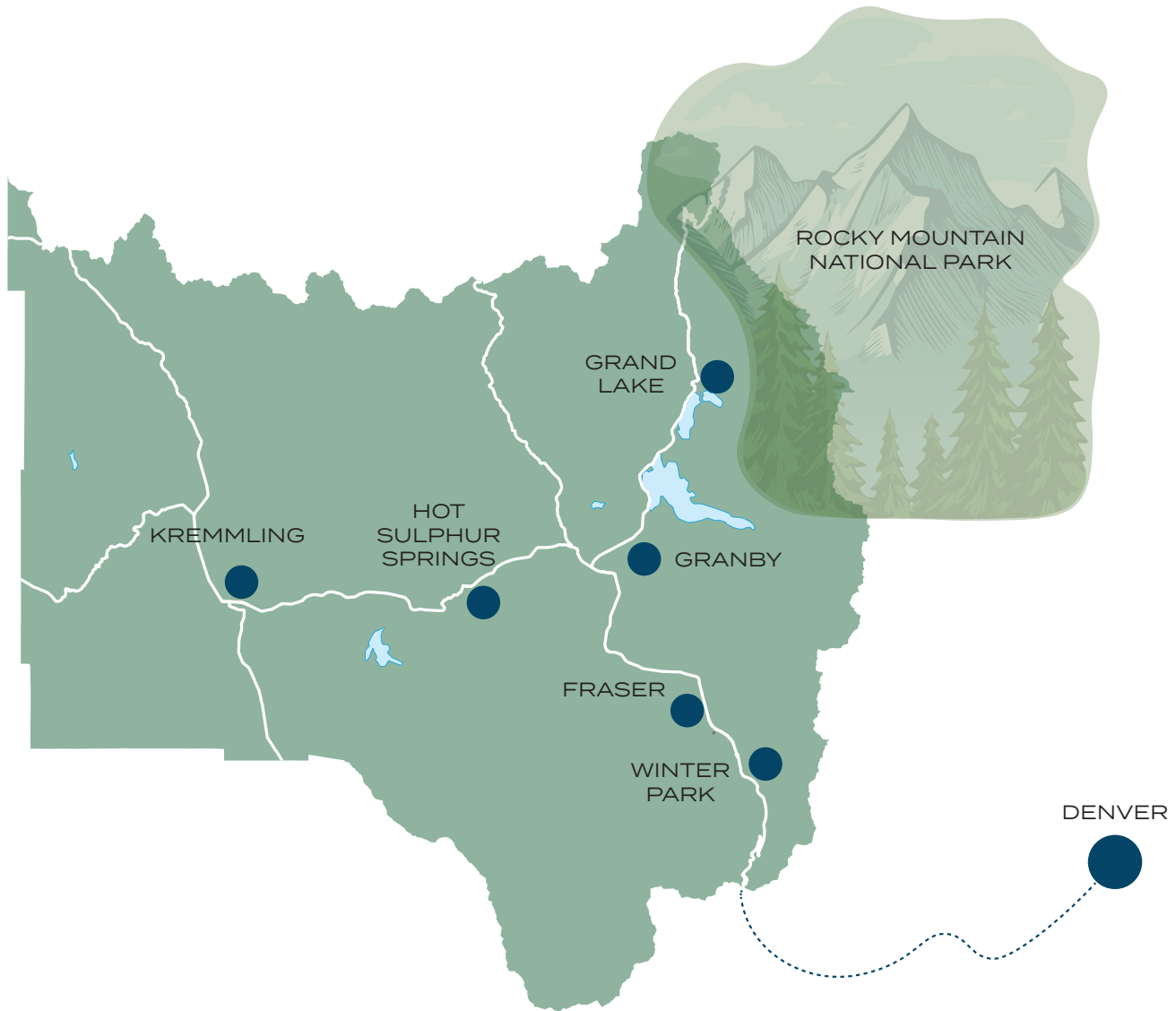
As you explore the tools, goals, and strategies outlined in this document, I encourage you to consider the vital role you play in shaping the future of tourism in Grand County. Whether you are a local business owner, a resident, or a visitor, your input, involvement, and enthusiasm are essential to the success of this initiative. Together, we can strengthen our tourism economy, ensuring that it is sustainable and that it reflects the values and aspirations of our community, as outlined in this document.

Sincerely,



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Executive Summary



Grand County, renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and outdoor recreational opportunities, has built an economy largely reliant on tourism. Located just 70 miles west of Denver, Grand County attracts visitors from across the globe. Visitors to Grand County have access to Rocky Mountain National Park, Arapaho National Forest, and the headwaters of the Colorado River. Several towns are located within the County, including Fraser, Granby, Grand Lake, Hot Sulphur Springs, Kremmling, and Winter Park. Each town possesses its own unique charm, attracting nature enthusiasts, adventure seekers, and those seeking a tranquil escape. This Executive Summary outlines the **Grand County Tourism Revitalization Plan (“Plan”)** project process and outputs in a summary fashion.

Grand County's access to outdoor recreation is a significant draw for tourism, with travel peaking in both summer and winter, as these seasons are prime for sunny adventures and winter sports. This seasonal economic model, while beneficial, makes the County vulnerable to external disruptions such as natural disasters, pandemics, and other uncontrollable factors. The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 East Troublesome Fires, which damaged nearly 200,000 acres, severely impacted the local economy. While COVID-19 delivered a blow to the travel industry, Colorado's decline in visitors was short-lived since it was one of the first states to safely reopen. The pandemic also spurred increased demand for outdoor activities, resulting in a surge of visitors that continued post-pandemic. In 2023, Grand County saw a record 7.3 million total trips, far exceeding pre-pandemic levels. This rapid visitor growth, paired with workforce instability, creates significant challenges in Grand County. The County's infrastructure and local communities are under strain, jeopardizing both the quality of life for residents and the very essence of the visitor experience.

In 2022, Grand County was awarded an U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grant that was matched with funds from the Grand County Colorado Tourism Board to support strategic planning efforts to address the challenges that have developed in this new tourism landscape. The result of these efforts is this ***Grand County Tourism Revitalization Plan***, which addresses these pressures and promotes sustainable growth in the tourism sector. The Plan promotes year-round tourism by providing recommendations and implementation strategies to extend the visitation season into the less-frequented shoulder seasons of spring and fall. By doing so, the County aims to mitigate the pressures of seasonal employment and support workforce stability by strengthening the local economy, promoting environmental stewardship, and enhancing the quality of life for residents.

The first steps in this planning process involved stakeholder engagement and data collection. Grand County Economic Development Department and the Grand County Colorado Tourism Board provided valuable insights and materials to guide the direction of the Plan. The towns within the County have unique personalities with their tourism goals. Understanding each town by reviewing past planning efforts and engaging with local Chambers of Commerce and Town officials presented a holistic view of the many pieces that make up Grand County's tourism landscape. A significant portion of the tourism data collected for this Plan was the result of collaboration with Grand County Colorado Tourism Board (GCCTB) and the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO). Tourism data is fluid and requires consistent monitoring. For this Plan, visitor data platforms like Datafy and AirDNA provided insights into visitor demographics, trends, and patterns specific to Grand County. This Plan also utilized tourism insights from state-wide and national trends.



Photo: Antero Group

Guided by extensive data collection, community input, and stakeholder engagement, the Plan identifies key values and goals to steer future tourism development. These include prioritizing community well-being, fostering economic prosperity, protecting the environment, and maintaining the County's authenticity and unique character. The Plan envisions a future where tourism supports both economic stability and environmental sustainability, benefiting residents and visitors alike while preserving the County's natural and cultural heritage. To achieve this vision, the following goals were identified:

1. **Improve data collection, maintenance, and communication methods.**
2. **Promote economic diversification and business attraction.**
3. **Create a more stable annual economy.**
4. **Promote the authentic "Grand Experience" year-round.**
5. **Cultivate and attract a strong workforce.**
6. **Promote sustainable visitor best practices.**
7. **Improve the quality of life for current and future residents.**

Each goal includes strategic action items, recommended partners, estimated cost, anticipated timeline, and potential funding sources. By implementing the strategies outlined in this Plan, Grand County can achieve a balanced and resilient tourism economy, ensuring its residents a high quality of life and a positive experience for its visitors.

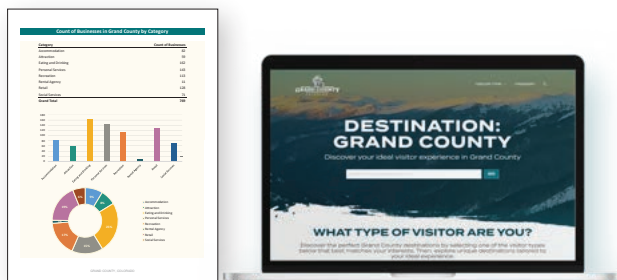
To further aid Grand County in promoting a balanced tourism economy, this Plan includes a suite of resources. Referred to as the "Toolbox," each "tool" can be customized for a given community or organization, including Chambers of Commerce, non-profits, and local leaders. It is important to note that these tools include dynamic data sets, such that they can and should be updated to align with changing tourism trends and business activity in Grand County. The Toolbox includes:

- **Accommodations Summary:** The Accommodations Summary outlines the County's lodging options, including hotels, resorts, cabins, unique stays (e.g., tipis and covered wagons), campsites, RV parks, and short-term rentals. It provides the number of units for each type and includes an editable spreadsheet of available accommodations.
- **Hotel Attraction Package:** The Hotel Attraction Package is a marketing tool for hotel developers that features data on Grand County's tourism. It includes a digital and printable booklet, brochure, and customizable template pages for towns to showcase their amenities and available sites.
- **Market Analysis Summary:** The Market Analysis Summary provides insights into trends, spending patterns, economic impacts, and business opportunities in Grand County, covering sectors like restaurants, social services, personal services, recreation, attractions, and retail.



- ▶ **Economic Asset Inventory:** The Economic Asset Inventory is a customizable, searchable list of tourism-related businesses in the County, designed to help identify industry gaps and track businesses. It includes details like name, address, type, and website, which can be regularly updated.
- ▶ **Business, Lodging, Workforce, and Community Surveys:** Survey templates have been created to gather data from business owners, lodging owners, local workforce, and the community. The surveys were developed to collect insights into business operations, staffing, needs and concerns, and the impacts of tourism.
- ▶ **Sensitivity Indicator:** The Sensitivity Indicator helps the County assess areas based on vulnerability to economic, workforce, environmental, social, and infrastructure challenges. It evaluates five categories using specific criteria, generating a sensitivity score from 0 (least vulnerable) to 5 (most vulnerable). Users input responses and geographic data to identify key vulnerabilities.
- ▶ **Online Visitor Experience Tool:** The “Explore Grand County: Online Visitor Experience Tool” helps visitors discover attractions based on their travel preferences, offering tailored recommendations for different profiles, such as experienced travelers, families, or those seeking a peaceful retreat.

Collectively, these tools can effectively attract and retain businesses, support grant applications, and guide key policies and transportation decisions that enhance residents’ quality of life and improve the visitor experience. Since the data driving these tools is dynamic, they should be reviewed and updated routinely with relevant information.



This **Grand County Tourism Revitalization Plan** provides a strategic framework for Grand County and its local partners to foster sustainable tourism, enhance visitor experiences, and drive economic growth. It offers tools and insights to help the County reimagine its approach to tourism, benefiting both the local economy and the quality of life for residents and businesses.

By embracing new trends, encouraging innovation, and preserving local cultures and the environment, Grand County can turn emerging challenges into opportunities for sustainable development. With the growth of tourism comes increased demand for resources like workforce, infrastructure, and services. This Plan serves as a roadmap to ensure these resources are managed sustainably and that growth is effectively controlled.

A revitalized tourism sector will invigorate local businesses, create diverse employment opportunities, and strengthen connections between visitors and the community. This Plan presents an opportunity to build a resilient tourism ecosystem that celebrates Grand County’s uniqueness while preserving its beauty and cultural richness for future generations.

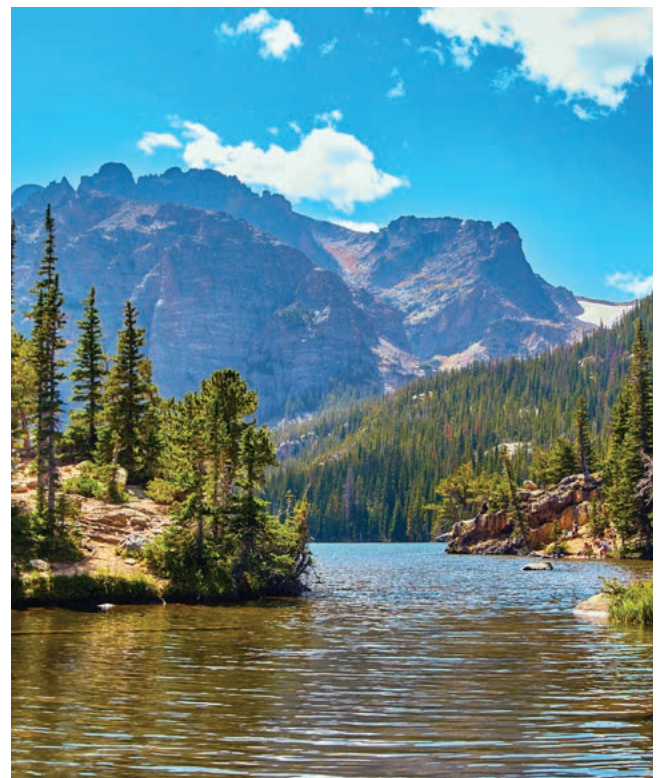


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Acronyms

CDOT	Colorado Department of Transportation
COTREX	Colorado Trail Explorer
CTO	Colorado Tourism Office
DOLA	Department of Local Affairs
EDA	Economic Development Administration
GCCTB	Grand County Colorado Tourism Board
GCED	Grand County Economic Development Department
HTA	Headwaters Trails Alliance
NWCCOG	Northwest Colorado Council of Governments
OEDIT	Office of Economic Development & International Trade
RMNP	Rocky Mountain National Park
USFS	United States Forest Service

01 MOUNTAIN PASS:

Setting the Stage for Success



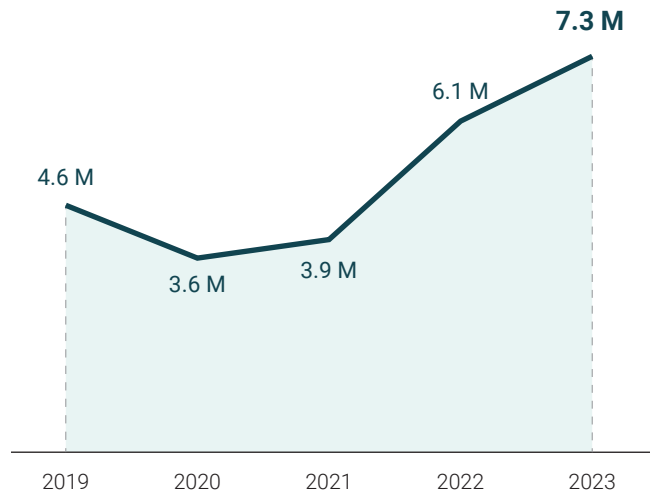
Photo: GCCTB

Overview

With its mountains, rivers, lakes, and friendly residents, Grand County (“County”) has long been a destination for adventure seekers, ranchers, and nature lovers alike. As such, it has built an economy that is largely dependent on tourism and agriculture, encouraging a seasonality that those who make it their home have come to appreciate and accept as part of living in a mountain environment. However, an economic dependency on seasonal industries makes the County especially sensitive to natural disasters, pandemics, and other economic factors outside of its control. The COVID-19 pandemic and East Troublesome Fire—a fire that damaged nearly 200,000 acres—had a significant impact on Grand County’s economy, further exacerbating the pressures on businesses that were already challenged with seasonal employment and workforce housing challenges. Even so, the demand for outdoor activities as a safer recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic increased visitors to Grand County, many of whom have continued to visit in the post-pandemic period. Consequently, Grand County is now seeing record numbers of visitors, far surpassing pre-COVID numbers. In 2019, there were just over 4.5 million total trips. Those numbers dipped in 2020 and 2021 and skyrocketed to over 6 million in 2022. In 2023, Grand County saw a record number of visitors with over 7.3 million total trips (**Figure 1.1**). The growing number of visitors paired with workforce instability threatens the quality of life for residents, the quality of experience for visitors, and the natural environment that makes the County so unique. To address these growing challenges, the County facilitated the development of this **Grand County Tourism Revitalization Plan** (“Plan”).

In 2022, Grand County was awarded a U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grant that was matched with funds from the Grand County Colorado Tourism Board to support strategic planning efforts to revitalize the tourism industry within the County. Recognizing that tourism seemed to be growing faster than recovery rate of many businesses from

Figure 1.1. Grand County Total Trips, 2019-2023



Source: Datafy.

the COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires, Grand County Colorado Tourism Board (GCCTB) and Grand County Economic Development Department (GCED) shared the responsibility of managing this new grant program. The goal was to build on previous planning initiatives, such that much-needed tools, data, and implementation targets could be identified and developed.

Because Grand County’s tourism is currently concentrated in the summer and winter seasons, much of the workforce has been transient by nature. However, the increase in tourism and rising cost of living in Grand County has made it difficult to attract and retain an adequate number of seasonal workers. There are a number of reasons for this. According to Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG), over the past decade, the County has seen a 17.7% increase in job growth, yet wages have remained stagnant, and the cost of living has surged. As a result, workers are spending a larger portion of their income on housing and living expenses, reducing their participation in the local economy. Housing affordability is a major

hindrance not only to seasonal worker retention but to those who hope to make Grand County their primary home. Communities with many resorts, like Grand County, have experienced an influx of second homeowners whose primary residence lies elsewhere. As a result, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, home values have soared by 84% since 2010, while median household incomes have increased by just over 31%. This disparity makes it increasingly difficult for first-time homebuyers to find affordable housing and for seasonal workers to continue living in Grand County during the slower shoulder seasons.

The purpose of this document is to present the tools, resources, feedback, and initiatives that were developed throughout the planning process. These were built on a set of goals that make up the framework for this Plan. These goals include summarizing and evaluating data points, promoting sustainable tourism practices, strengthening the local economy, supporting the workforce, and improving the quality of life for Grand County residents. This Plan also highlights strategies for expanding and extending visitor experiences into the less frequented shoulder seasons of spring and fall in order to mitigate their economic impact. By addressing these areas, the Plan aims to alleviate localized pressures and extend the tourism season, helping to reduce challenges related to seasonal employment. The result is a Plan that includes data analysis, ideas, and tools that will inform local officials, organizations, and businesses as they seek to encourage sustainable tourism throughout the region and throughout the year.

This introductory chapter sets the stage for the planning process, stakeholder feedback integration, and the visioning and values that guide the Plan. Because so much work has been done, the reader is encouraged to look at this as a summary of the research, tools, and implementation goals established throughout this process, the details of which can be found in the **Appendix**, for ease of reference.

THE MOUNTAIN PASS: Setting the Stage for Success



Planning Approach and Process

The process to develop this Plan included interviews, surveys, document review, data collection, and the development of tools that respond to these efforts. Throughout the project, a series of workshops and interviews were conducted to capture diverse perspectives and identify common goals. Additionally, the project team reviewed existing comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and many other documents that allowed the Plan to better reflect the needs of the communities as it relates to the tourism economy. The result has been a Plan that seeks to integrate this information and feedback into a useful resource for the County.



Photo: Antero Group

Team Members

The planning advisory team included Grand County Economic Development Department (GCED), and the Grand County Colorado Tourism Board (GCCTB), with support from project consultant, Antero Group. Headwaters Trails Alliance (HTA) provided useful feedback throughout the project, while the chambers of commerce, elected officials, and community managers were consulted at various points to collect ideas and needs for the communities they serve.

Outreach

In addition to the core team, various stakeholders across the County provided feedback to help shape planning goals and implementation strategies. A concerted effort was made to involve local officials, business owners, workers, and community members throughout the planning process to create an implementable Plan that would prove useful for towns, businesses, and visitors.

Outreach efforts included:

- ▶ Community survey
- ▶ Presentation at Grand County Economic Development Summit
- ▶ Public input meeting
- ▶ Business owner workshop
- ▶ Various interviews
- ▶ Presentation to Board of County Commissioners

The input gathered during these workshops and meetings was helpful in determining the direction of the Plan. From seasonal fluctuations to labor shortages, participants identified key obstacles to growth while also sharing ideas for fostering innovation and sustainability in the industry. These discussions emphasized the need for enhanced infrastructure, eco-friendly practices, and a diversified range of tourism experiences.

Community Input

Let's create birding, wolf catching, and dark sky Colorado related activities to aid in extending the shoulder seasons.

Instill business incubators or business incentives to help the year-round economy

Let's build a stronger partnership with RMNP and capitalize on being the "quiet side."

Make data accessible.

We need a chain, boutique, or conference center style hotel.

Provide more workforce and attainable housing

Preserve nature, historic places, and buildings.

Comments received during the planning process

Stakeholder List

- ▶ Bureau of Land Management
- ▶ Colorado Tourism Office (CTO)
- ▶ County Commissioners
- ▶ Destination Granby
- ▶ Devil's Thumb Ranch
- ▶ Fraser Valley Recreation
- ▶ Granby Ranch
- ▶ Grand Lake Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Grand Lake Marina
- ▶ Hot Sulphur Springs Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Kremmling Area Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Open Lands, River, and Trails Advisory Committee
- ▶ Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP)
- ▶ Town of Fraser
- ▶ Town of Granby
- ▶ Town of Grand Lake
- ▶ Town of Hot Sulphur Springs
- ▶ Town of Kremmling
- ▶ Town of Winter Park
- ▶ U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- ▶ Winter Park - Fraser Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ YMCA of the Rockies – Snow Mountain Ranch

Data Review

To better understand the economic effects of Grand County's seasonal tourism, the project team collected and analyzed a significant amount of data. For example, two helpful annual reports are referenced frequently, herein. These are the Dean Runyan Economic Impact Report and the Longwoods Travel USA Report, both released by the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO). The project team also reviewed visitor data from platforms such as Datafy and AirDNA to better understand visitor demographics and short-term rental data. Further outreach to local businesses and stakeholders was necessary in some instances to fill gaps or make connections. The data collected for this Plan will be further discussed in **Chapter 3**, and a comprehensive summary is included in the Grand County Tourism Conditions Memorandum in **Appendix A**. This rigorous review of data helps to provide a uniform, data-driven understanding of the County's economic trends. It also helps to validate or dispel notions about the County, thereby creating a more accurate depiction of County's economy and trajectory relative to tourism. It is important to note that annual reviews of trends would be useful to inform future decisions regarding the tourism economy.

Plan Review

The project team considered several past plans in the process to ensure any future planning aligned with County goals and values. The goal was to avoid plan redundancy, while capturing key items and data points already covered by other documents. The plan review included, but was not limited to:

- ▶ Grand County Colorado Tourism Board: Sustainable Tourism Plan (2023)
- ▶ Grand County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (2022)
- ▶ Fraser River Valley Housing Needs Assessment (2022)
- ▶ The Economic Impacts of Outdoor Recreation in Grand County (2021)
- ▶ Grand County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)
- ▶ Grand County Study Area and Fraser River Valley Housing Needs Assessment (2018)
- ▶ Housing Needs Assessment for the Study Areas of Granby, Grand Lake, Kremmling, and Hot Sulphur Springs (2018)
- ▶ Colorado Tourism Roadmap (2017)
- ▶ Grand County Master Plan (2011)



Vision and Values

After extensive research, data analysis, conversations with stakeholders, and review of community input, a vision statement was developed by the planning team to capture the aspirations of Grand County in regard to tourism:

Grand County will encourage sustainable tourism to bolster economic stability, foster new opportunities, and promote responsible environmental practices, while offering a unique experience that inspires visitors and contributes to a high quality of life for its residents.

Additionally, tourism planning values were identified through the above efforts. These values speak to what is important to the people of Grand County and are at the root of the goals and strategies discussed later in this Plan. These values, in no particular order, are as follows.

Community Well-Being

In addition to being a beautiful place to visit, Grand County is a place where many people live and work. Grand County residents deserve a high quality of life that includes opportunities for prosperity, safety, connection, and happiness.

Authenticity

From its charming small towns to its vast natural spaces, Grand County offers visitors and residents a true “Western” experience. Through turbulent times, Grand County has remained steadfast in its identity as a welcoming and peaceful place to live and visit.

Sustainability

Tourism is one of the key drivers of Grand County’s economy and the number of visitors has increased significantly post COVID-19. Tourism should be promoted in a way that enhances residents’ quality of life, benefits the economy, and preserves the natural environment.

Environmental Stewardship

The natural splendor of Grand County is one of its greatest assets. As the number of visitors increases, it is important to ensure the protection, preservation, and enhancement of the environment.

Economic Prosperity

Tourism is a key economic driver in Grand County. However, it can be unpredictable, as seen by the impacts on tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Diversifying and encouraging new business growth will create a stable and resilient community.

Open to Opportunity

While the tourism industry has saturated certain areas of the County, there is plenty of room for growth. The awe-inspiring views and welcoming communities of Grand County are poised to attract innovators, entrepreneurs, and creators.

A Look Ahead

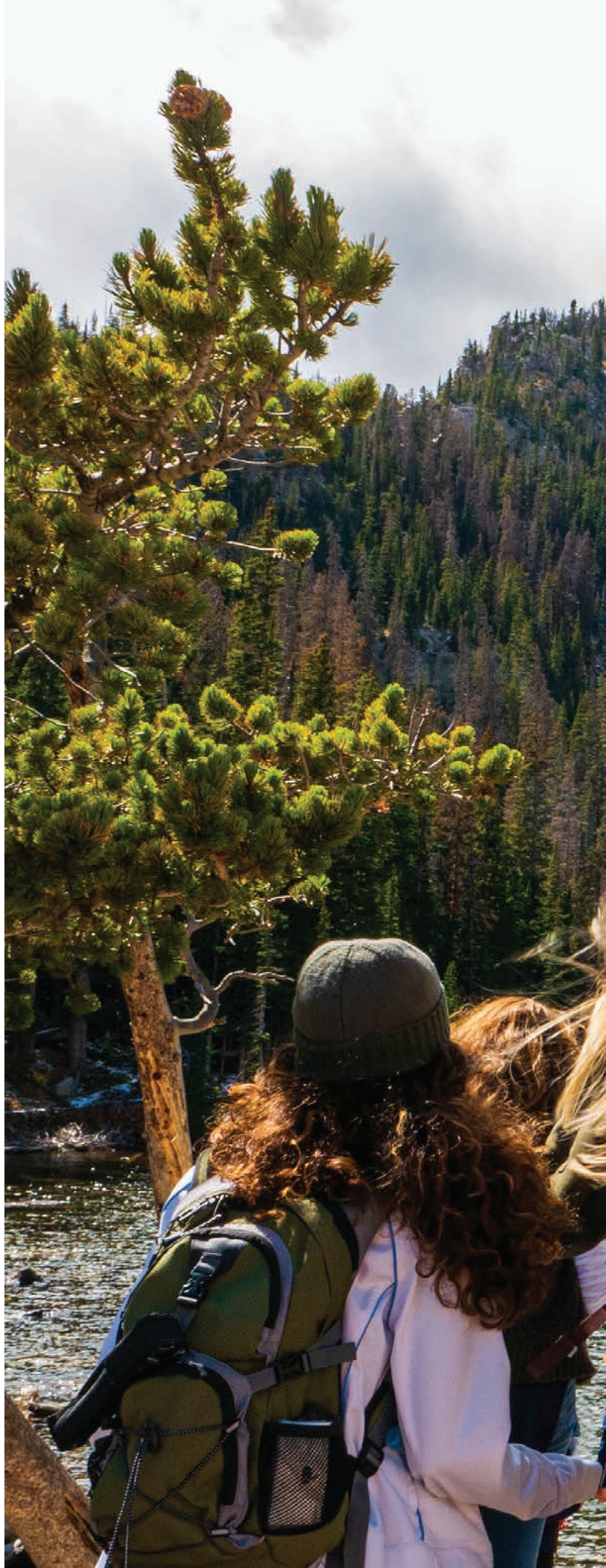
This Plan is intended to be a resource for government officials, local businesses, and community members. While this chapter outlined the purpose and process, **Chapters 2 and 3** detail tourism trends and the current conditions of Grand County, highlighting conditions outlined in more detail in the data collection phase of this project, **Appendix A**.

As previously mentioned, various tools have been developed for this Plan. These can be used by County officials, Grand County Tourism, local Chambers of Commerce, and stakeholders. Overviews of each tool are included in **Chapter 4** and the tools themselves are in **Appendices B-H** and available on Grand County 365 (grandcounty365.com), a project-specific website.

Chapter 5 includes guidance for implementation. Successful implementation of this Plan and the action items within will require ongoing strategic engagement with local stakeholders and the community.

Lastly, **Chapter 6** offers a summary of the project and some recommendations regarding next steps and Plan maintenance.

When referenced and utilized, this **Grand County Tourism Revitalization Plan** provides a baseline set of data points, goals, and strategies to diversify and strengthen Grand County's tourism economy. Regularly revisiting this Plan will help to ensure the data, goals, and tools remain relevant and that users are aware of the information and resources, herein.







02 PARKVIEW:

The Tourism Landscape



This chapter explores emerging tourism trends at both international and domestic levels, focusing on how Grand County can revitalize its tourism. While the County thrives in summer and winter, it faces declines in fall and spring, resulting in an uneven economic landscape. As the tourism sector continues its resurgence, modern travelers are increasingly seeking authentic experiences that prioritize exploration and novelty. Shifting demographics, including more active seniors, provide an opportunity to promote tourism during the traditionally slower spring and autumn seasons. Additionally, the rise of remote and hybrid work has given birth to a new breed of traveler, “bleisure” travelers, who seamlessly blend business with leisure. By adapting to evolving trends, Grand County can extend its tourism season and promote year-round visitation, benefiting local businesses and workforce.

Photo: GCCTB

Tourism Trends and Insights

Grand County attracts visitors from all over the world thanks to its iconic landscapes, charming towns, and opportunities for recreation. As Grand County sees a resurgence in tourism post-COVID, it must adapt to the changing preferences of travelers. There are a number of international travel trends that Grand County can consider when attracting visitors. This section provides a highlight of some of those trends that would be especially beneficial to Grand County as they seek to diversify their tourism offerings and expand their tourism season.

“Bleisure” travel is gaining popularity



As business travel recovers, “bleisure” (business combined with leisure) is rising, especially with remote and hybrid work options. These travelers aren’t traveling for work, rather, they are working while they travel. Situated ninety minutes from Denver, Grand County is a convenient option for such workers. There are also a growing number of lodging options that include offices and meeting spaces, like Winter Park’s Gravity Haus. These types of travelers are more likely to look for local activities and take guided tours. Given that business travel is not limited to one particular season, attracting this demographic may help better balance Grand County’s tourism economy.

Unique, authentic experiences are inspiring travel decisions



Travelers are becoming increasingly aware of the negative impacts of over-tourism, so they are being more selective with the types of trips they take. Hilton’s *2024 Trends Report* highlights a shift towards unique and unconventional experiences. Condé Nast Traveler’s article on 2024 travel trends noted several experiential travel trends:

- ▶ Astrotourism (traveling to see astronomical phenomena or stargaze)
- ▶ Eco diving (sustainable scuba diving)
- ▶ Wild feasting (curated culinary experiences in a natural environment)
- ▶ Frontier tourism (remote and rugged destinations)

Grand County offers many off-the-beaten-path activities appealing to travelers seeking unique experiences. As some communities pursue dark sky designation, astrotourism could bring in visitors during the shoulder seasons, while wild feasting and other culinary driven experiences complement the area’s pristine wilderness.

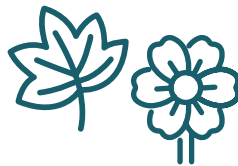
Tourists turn their focus to wellness travel



Health, wellness, and longevity amenities are growing in popularity at hotels and resorts. The wellness economy, valued at \$5.6 trillion in 2022, is expected to grow 8.6% annually through 2027, according to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI). Hotels are capitalizing on this trend by expanding spa and wellness services for guests. These types of resorts highlight relaxation, health, and spirituality through programs such as yoga, meditation, nature-based experiences, spa treatments, and “no tech” retreats.

Grand County is well-positioned to capitalize on these trends, as wellness retreats and activities are not weather-dependent, attracting visitors year-round. While some lodging in the County already offers wellness amenities, there are more opportunities to expand these options and help disperse tourism throughout the area.

Shoulder seasons are warming up



Economic, environmental, and social factors are driving travelers to book their trips during the less busy shoulder seasons. As the cost of living continues to rise, consumers seek value. Flights and hotel rates dip during shoulder seasons, making it more affordable for individuals and families to take a trip. Rising temperatures are also shifting travel plans, prompting travelers to avoid heatwaves in favor of milder weather. Shoulder seasons are typically less crowded, which is especially attractive to the growing number of travelers looking for a more tranquil experience. This new travel trend could be promising for Grand County as it seeks to disperse tourism throughout the shoulder seasons. However, to take advantage of this trend, Grand County must create marketing materials that resonate with this value-seeking demographic, emphasizing the economic and experiential benefits of visiting during the shoulder seasons.

International travel shows signs of recovery



The decade leading up to the pandemic was a time of significant growth for the travel and tourism industry in the United States. Although the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily impacted international travel, the industry has shown remarkable resilience in its recovery. According to a 2023 report by the International Trade Administration and the Department of Commerce, international visitation rebounded by 15% in 2021, reaching 22.1 million, and by 2022, it had surged to 50.9 million.

Tourism in Grand County is primarily domestic, with many visitors coming from other parts of Colorado. While international visitors will continue to be an important segment, Grand County is well-positioned to capitalize on its strong appeal to domestic and local travelers through enhanced marketing of its natural beauty and outdoor attractions.

Sports tourism is drawing a crowd



Sports tourism involves attracting visitors for adult and youth sporting events, including large-scale tournaments. According to a report from the Sports Events and Tourism Association, more than 175 million Americans traveled for sports-related reasons in 2021., contributing \$39.7 billion in direct spending, \$12.9 billion in tax revenue, and a total economic impact of \$91.8 billion in the U.S.

Sports tourism is a substantial opportunity for Grand County. While Grand County benefits from winter sports events, where skiing, snowmobiling, and other sporting infrastructure are readily available, other seasons currently offer fewer opportunities. By building sports tourism year-round, especially through targeted marketing and strategic planning, Grand County could boost lodging and dining revenue. Expanding non-winter events could further attract sports visitors and distribute tourism across the seasons.

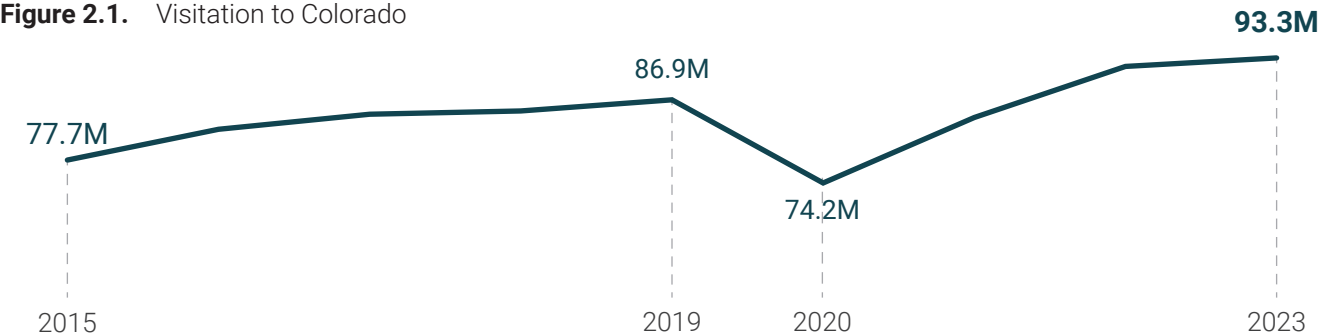
Colorado's Tourism Landscape

Over the past twenty years, tourism in Grand County and across Colorado has steadily increased. However, the COVID-19 pandemic delivered a blow to that momentum. In 2020, the Colorado travel industry experienced an estimated decline of 36.3% in travel spending, from a record \$24.2 billion in 2019 to \$15.4 billion in 2020.

This decline was short-lived, as Colorado was one of the first states to begin to safely re-open, allowing recovery to start as early as June 2020. Colorado was desirable by many travelers due to its inviting natural and open spaces that allowed for social distancing.

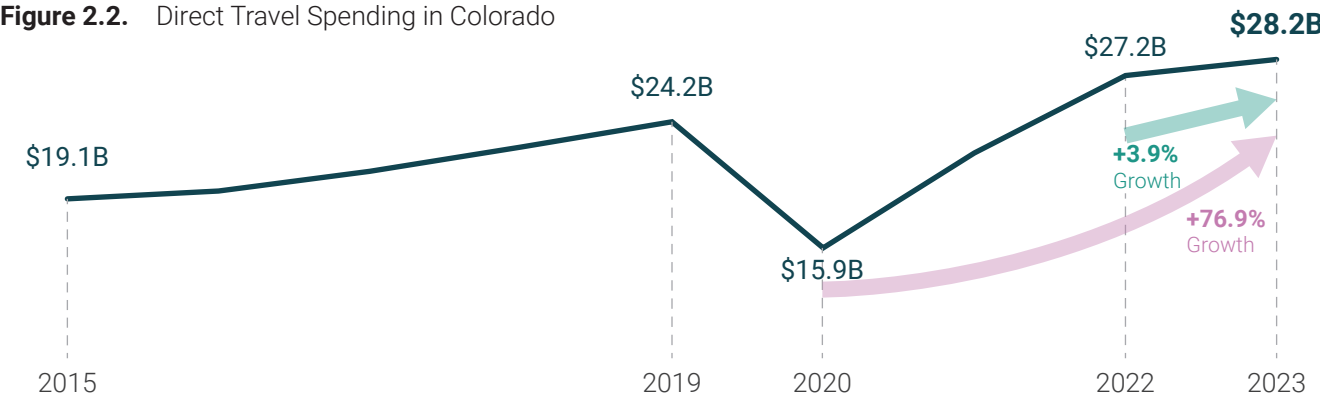
Colorado tourism has recovered tremendously since 2020. According to the Colorado Tourism Office's (CTO) annual tourism reports from Dean Runyan Associates and Longwoods International, Colorado saw a record-high of 93 million visitors and more than \$28 billion in travel spending in 2023. Travel spending grew 3.9% from 2022 to 2023 and 76.9% from 2020 to 2023 (**Figure 2.1** and **Figure 2.2**).

Figure 2.1. Visitation to Colorado



Source: Colorado Tourism Office.

Figure 2.2. Direct Travel Spending in Colorado



Source: Colorado Tourism Office.

Destination Stewardship

Due in part to the tourism economy and its rapid growth, Colorado is focused on sustainable tourism, both for the environment and local communities.

The Colorado Tourism Office is integrating “destination stewardship” as a key tenet of all tourism work and programming. Destination stewardship is a “collaborative, community-centered approach to tourism designed to enhance residents quality of life and experience for visitors while protecting and supporting our environment, communities, and cultural heritage.” Destination stewardship works to support a balance between the quality of life for residents and quality of experience for visitors, while enhancing the environment and communities. The three main goals of CTO’s Destination Stewardship program are to:

- ▶ Protect the integrity of Colorado’s natural and cultural resources
- ▶ Advance inclusiveness and pursue ways that Colorado can share a welcoming experience for all travelers
- ▶ Foster a regenerative and community-focused approach to tourism

To accomplish these goals, CTO has created a state-wide Destination Stewardship Plan in collaboration with regional industry thought leaders. The Destination Stewardship Plan is set to be completed in 2024.

Grand County Colorado Tourism Board’s Sustainable Tourism Strategic Plan includes many of the same principles as CTO’s Destination Stewardship program. The plan encourages a collaborative and community-focused approach to tourism, environmental stewardship, and strengthening and diversifying experiences throughout the County. Thanks to their foresight, Grand County is well-equipped to implement key outcomes of the Destination Stewardship Plan.

These larger travel trends represent the bigger picture of what is happening at the national and state level. Grand County is well-positioned to capitalize on emerging tourism trends by developing offerings that cater to the evolving preferences of travelers. By focusing on unique experiences, wellness tourism, and targeted outreach to new travel demographics, the County can enhance its tourism economy year-round.



Tourism in Grand County

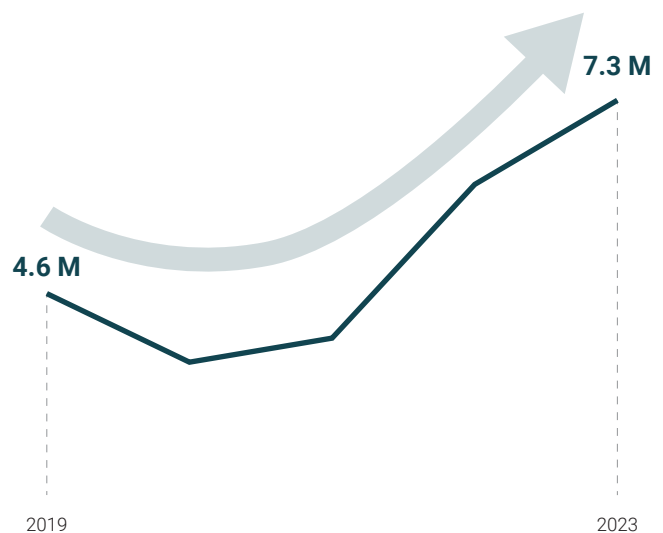
Grand County is known for its stunning alpine views, abundant recreational opportunities, and charming mountain towns. Most of the County's land is public, covered in pristine wilderness. An important feature is Rocky Mountain National Park, the fifth most visited national park in the nation. The western entrance to the park is in Grand Lake and welcomed over 400,000 visitors through that entrance in 2022. Stretching 3,100 miles from Mexico to Canada, the Continental Divide Trail takes travelers through Arapaho Forest and Rocky Mountain National Park. These world-class natural amenities attract both locals and tourists throughout the year.

Visitors to Grand County enjoy a wide range of activities like hiking, skiing, and fishing. For those wanting to experience a classic mountain community, towns like Grand Lake, Granby, Fraser, and Winter Park are popular destinations. Each community, from the peaceful retreats of Hot Sulphur Springs to the outdoor haven of Kremmling, adds to the County's overall appeal.

To better understand current Grand County visitors, the project team collected and analyzed visitor data from platforms such as Datafy and AirDNA. Another influential data source were the *Dean Runyan Economic Impact Report* and the *Longwoods Travel USA Report*, both released by the Colorado Tourism Office. These reports shed light on tourism's impact on Grand County's economy.

Grand County saw over 7 million total trips in 2023 (**Figure 2.3**), significantly rebounding from 2020 when tourism dropped due to COVID-19. Visitation typically peaks in July, followed by August, September, and December. However, the shoulder seasons of April/May and October/November see a decrease in visitation. Visitors to Grand County stay on average 2.2 days, with nearly 30% staying over six days.

Figure 2.3. Total Trips



Source: Datafy.

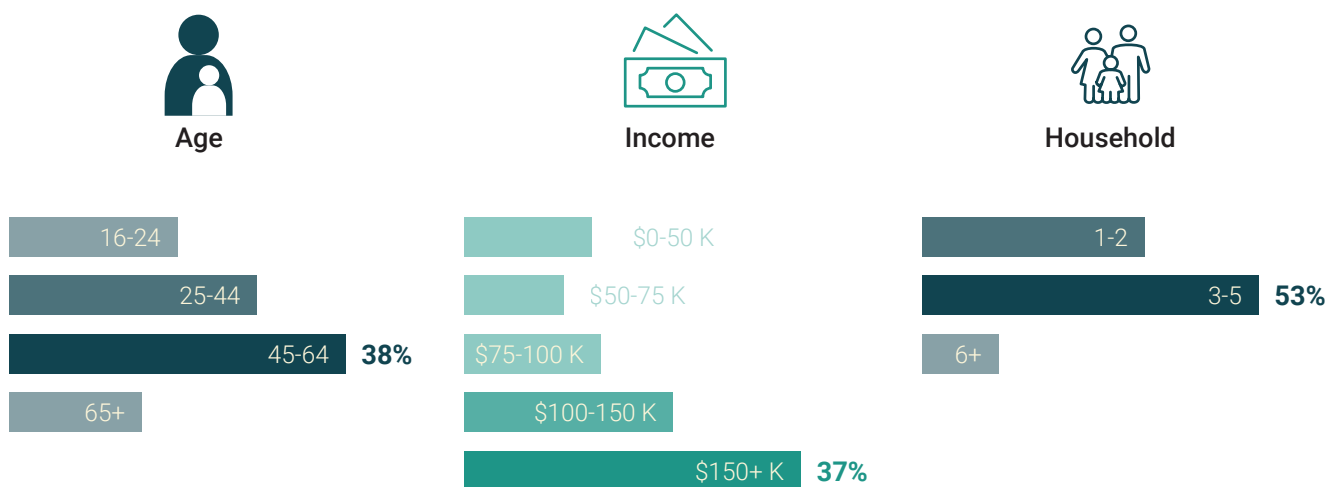
Promoting Sustainability

According to Datafy, the majority of visitors to Grand County in 2023 were between the ages of 45 and 64, earned more than \$150,000 annually, and were in households of 3-5 people (**Figure 2.4**).

While understanding the social demographics of visitors to Grand County can lend insights on how to better attract and manage tourism, an understanding of the values and interests of visitors is equally important. Other tourist destinations are simply looking to recover their tourism numbers post-COVID, but Grand County has recovered significantly. Rather than bringing more visitors, Grand County's goal is to understand how to better manage tourism, promote sustainability, improve the quality of experience for visitors, and also protect the quality of life for Grand County residents.

To better understand and manage the tourism landscape, Grand County and the Grand County Colorado Tourism Board developed the *2023 Sustainable Tourism Strategic Plan* which prioritizes the preservation of natural environments and the residents' quality of life. Housing shortages, overdue road maintenance, and wildfire mitigation, are critical areas of concern as the County seeks to balance growth with sustainability. The Strategic Plan focuses on managing visitor impact through education, promoting responsible recreation practices, and enhancing emergency response systems to better prepare for future natural disasters. As Grand County continues to attract visitors with its natural beauty and recreational opportunities, there is an increasing emphasis on protecting these resources while fostering economic growth. This Plan supports and builds on the sustainability efforts put forth by the County.

Figure 2.4. Visitor Demographics



Source: Datafy.

Who is visiting Grand County?

The *Sustainable Tourism Strategic Plan* developed three profiles for visitors Grand County would like to preserve or attract. This included profiles for Experienced Travelers, Off-Peak Weekend Warrior Families, and Young Reconnectors.

After reviewing international and regional trends detailed earlier in the chapter, popular activities for Grand County tourists, and feedback from stakeholders, additional visitor profiles emerged. The remaining profiles are developed from an analysis of visitor demographics, patterns, and national trends. These profiles were used to create the *Explore Grand County: Online Experience Tool*, which helps visitors plan their trip to Grand County based on their values and desires. The Experience Tool allows users to “choose their own adventure” by selecting a visitor profile that most aligns with their interests. Each visitor profile includes a list of recommended activities and lodging that the user can add to an itinerary.

Regular collection and assessment of visitor data from platforms like Datafy and through surveys is necessary to monitor shifts in visitor behavior and preferences. Maintaining an inventory of data is also helpful in setting specific, attainable goals to expand tourism across the shoulder seasons and mitigate negative impacts from overtourism. To assist Grand County in collecting this data, the project team developed a series of tools that can be used by the County, Chambers of Commerce, and area organizations. These tools are detailed in **Chapter 4**.



Looking Forward

By embracing emerging trends and focusing on sustainability and visitor engagement, Grand County can enhance its tourism offerings, attract diverse traveler demographics, and extend its tourism season. Tourism has been the key economic driver in Grand County for decades. As the tourism landscape shifts, Grand County is paying close attention to its effects on the quality of life for residents. The following chapter explores the impacts and opportunities that tourism brings to Grand County.

Visitor Profiles



Experienced Travelers are often empty nesters who are well-established in their careers and enjoy a stable income. They seek out unique experiences and don't hesitate to splurge on them. Typically opting for week-long or more getaways, they view vacations as an opportunity to escape or explore potential retirement destinations.



Off-Peak Weekend Warrior Families seek budget-friendly dining and accommodation choices and often travel from the Front Range by car. Every getaway serves as an opportunity for the family to strengthen their bond through adventurous activities such as hiking, biking, skiing, rafting, and other off-season pursuits.



Young Reconnectors typically consist of couples and small groups seeking a break from their urban routines. They eagerly pursue opportunities to reconnect with nature and fully immerse themselves in a community setting. Many of these individuals opt for longer stays, typically lasting a week or more, preferring to explore one area rather than hopping between multiple locations for brief intervals.



Master of the Wild is an experienced traveler skilled in activities like hunting, fishing, camping, and hiking. They thrive in remote, rugged landscapes, seeking solitude and adventure in nature. Driven by a passion for outdoor challenges, they deepen their connection with the natural world.



Backcountry Trailblazer is an adventurous traveler who loves exploring remote, rugged terrains. Passionate about adventure sports like skiing, snowboarding, climbing, and hiking, they seek challenging environments to push their limits. Driven by a love for nature, they crave the thrill of pure outdoor adventure.



Tranquil Trekker embodies a traveler who seeks peace, serenity, and connection with nature during their journeys. They are drawn to destinations known for their idyllic landscapes, such as secluded mountain trails, serene lakeshores, or quiet forest paths. They may engage in activities like hiking, camping, or wildlife observation, seeking moments of solitude and reflection along the way.



Shoulder Season Seeker is a traveler who plans trips during the shoulder seasons, between peak times, to avoid crowds and high prices while enjoying good weather. Flexible and resourceful, they seek unique experiences and hidden gems off the beaten path, prioritizing value in their travels.



Nomadic Worker is a tech-savvy traveler who blends work with exploration, using remote work and technology to support their lifestyle. They value flexibility, autonomy, and the ability to stay productive while immersing themselves in new environments. Drawn to places with good internet, coworking spaces, and vibrant communities, they prioritize personal growth, meaningful connections, and memorable experiences.



03 **AT ALPENGLOW:**

Grand County Overview



This chapter provides a comprehensive snapshot of Grand County, presenting key data and trends that inform the region's tourism economy and workforce needs. It covers important demographic information, such as population growth, aging trends, and educational attainment, as well as the impact of tourism on local economy. The chapter also highlights the challenges posed by workforce shortages, housing affordability, and environmental concerns, which are exacerbated by the seasonal nature of tourism. By examining these factors, this chapter sets the foundation for the goals and action items that follow.

Community Snapshot

Within this section is a summary of various community data points and trends based on available data, including state and federal resources. According to the U.S. Census, in 2020 the population of Grand County was approximately 15,700, showing nearly 26% growth since 2000. The Colorado State Demography Office projects **Grand County's population will continue to rise**, reaching nearly 19,500 by 2050 (**Figure 3.1**).

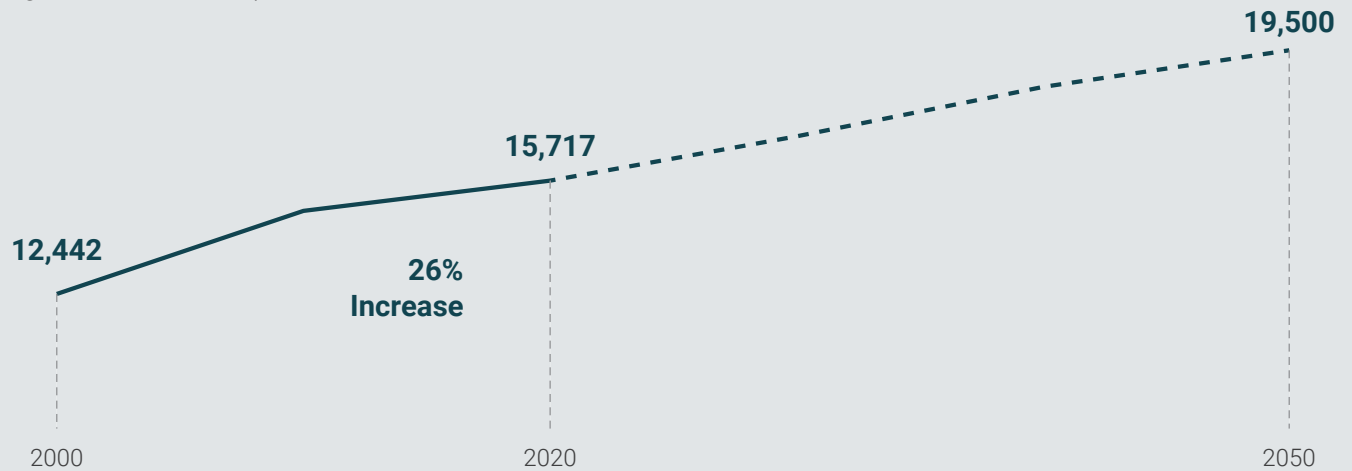
However, **Grand County's population is aging**. In 2000, the median age was 36.9 and in 2022 it increased to 44.6 years (**Figure 3.2**). In contrast, Colorado's median age in 2022 was 37.3. A higher median age could indicate that a higher proportion of the population is more advanced in their careers. As a result, there are fewer applicants for entry level jobs. This can be especially impactful for a tourism-based economy, where many of the jobs are both entry level and seasonal.

Additionally, nearly 20% of the population is 65 years or older. With an aging population, new services may be needed, especially those related to healthcare. This demographic shift, accompanied by a steady increase in tourism activity, points to the need address workforce attraction and retention to provide necessary services.

Grand County's population is well-educated. The majority of residents have achieved a high school diploma or higher, and over 66% have pursued some form of higher education (**Figure 3.3**). Since there are limited local opportunities for continuing education beyond high school, residents typically leave the area to pursue higher education and training. Establishing educational institutions like trade schools or community colleges could help to retain local talent and encourage them to stay in the County. Additionally, diversifying the economy to include high-paying and specialized jobs would benefit the County by attracting and retaining residents that would typically leave to find work beyond the tourism industry, which currently dominates the economic landscape.

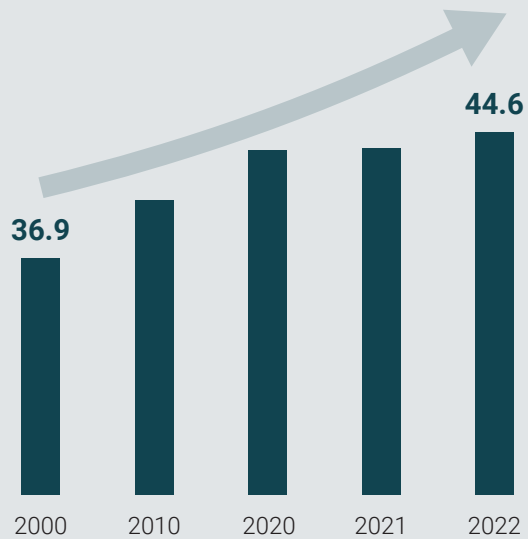


Figure 3.1. Total Population



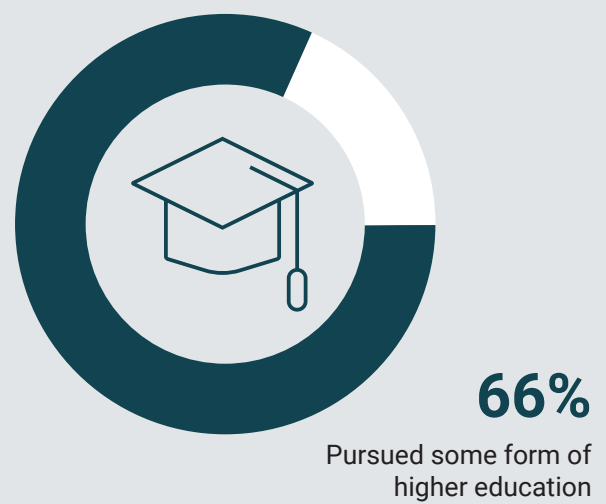
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Colorado State Demography Office.

Figure 3.2. Median Age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 3.3. Educational Attainment



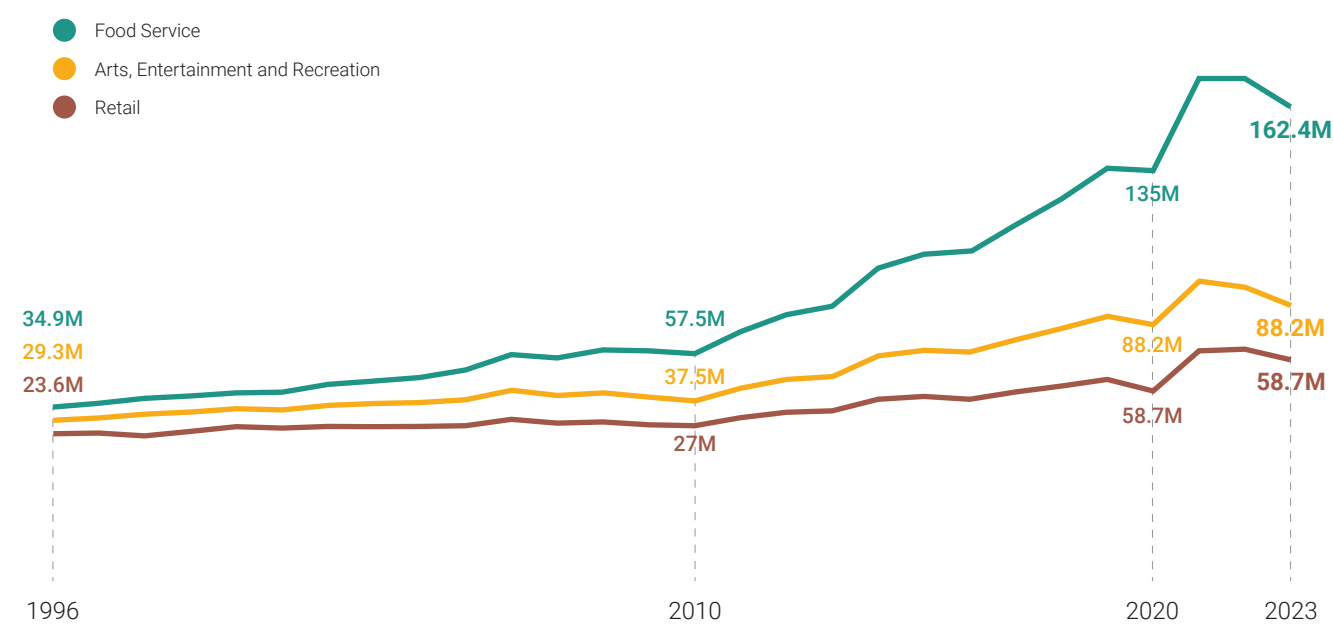
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

The Impact of Tourism

Tourism has been the main economic driver in Grand County for nearly 100 years. According to the *2024 NWCCOG Regional Economic Update*, tourism-related businesses account for nearly 70% of all jobs in the County. The top three industries by number of jobs are Accommodations and Food Service, Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, and Retail Trade.

Collectively, these businesses generated over a billion dollars in sales revenue in 2023, according to NWCCOG. Visitor spending has rebounded since the pandemic, with 2021 and 2022 being the highest recorded years of visitor spending in the County's history. Visitor spending on food has seen an increase of about 20% since 2019. Spending on arts, entertainment, and recreation has also increased, with a rise of about 34% since 2020. Retail expenditure has remained relatively stable, with a notable dip in 2020 during the pandemic. In total, since 2020, retail spending has increased by almost 32% (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Visitor Spending



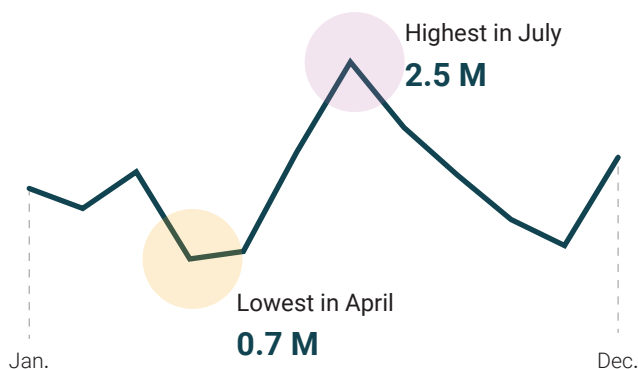
Source: NWCCOG.

Tourism at a Glance

Visitor numbers to Grand County vary depending on the season, with summer and winter providing the most activity. Expanding visitor activity throughout the year, especially in the shoulder seasons (spring and autumn) is a primary objective of this study. According to data taken from Datafy, a proprietary visitor tracking resource, July is typically the busiest month of the year in Grand County, followed by August, September, then December (**Figure 3.5**).

Higher visitation in the warmer months aligns with a broader set of visitor activities and events. For instance, visitors can enjoy hiking, mountain biking, boating, and ATV riding during the summer. The summer is also when most of the town festivals are held, such as the Winter Park Jazz Festival, Grand Lake Folk Festival, and various rodeos. Another factor that contributes to high visitation in the summer is access to Trail Ridge Road. Covering 48 miles between Rocky Mountain National Park's east entrance at Estes Park and Grand Lake on the west, Trail Ridge Road offers visitors spectacular views. This road is typically open from the end of May through October, weather permitting. These events and the availability of Trail Ridge Road bring in thousands of visitors each week during the summer months.

Figure 3.5. Visitor Activity by Month 2023



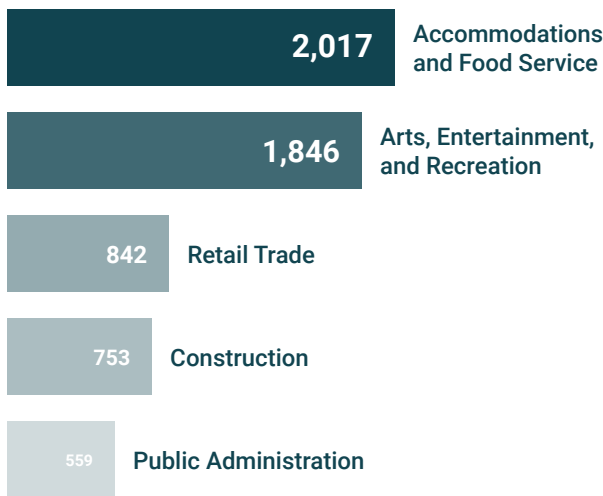
Source: Datafy.

The winter months also attract many visitors to Grand County, mostly due to its access to recreation and the ski industry. Grand County has a storied history with winter sports. Hot Sulphur Springs hosted its first Winter Carnival in 1911, which included winter sports such as ice-skating, cross-country skiing, and ski jumping. This event is considered the beginning of skiing in Grand County and is credited with bringing the ski industry to Colorado. Winter Park Resort has been attracting visitors since the 1930s, when it started as a mountain resort community. At just 70 miles away, Winter Park is among the closest major ski resorts and mountain destinations to Denver. Visitors have plenty of winter sport options across the County, including skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and more.

For Grand County, the shoulder seasons are April/May in the spring and October/November in the fall. It can be difficult to attract visitors during these months due to the unpredictability of the weather and, to some extent, inconsistencies with business hours. Some lodging options in the County close and many businesses change their hours during these shoulder seasons. However, as discussed in **Chapter 2**, shoulder seasons are becoming more popular with travelers. These seasons are typically less expensive, which is attractive to travelers on a budget. There are also some travelers who prefer to skip the big crowds typically seen during peak seasons. A coordinated marketing effort promoting shoulder season visits by Grand County Economic Development Department, Grand County Colorado Tourism Board, and local Chambers of Commerce could bring new visitors to the area, especially local Coloradans who can easily come for a night or weekend stay.

Building and Retaining a Strong Workforce

Figure 3.6. Top Industries by Number of Jobs



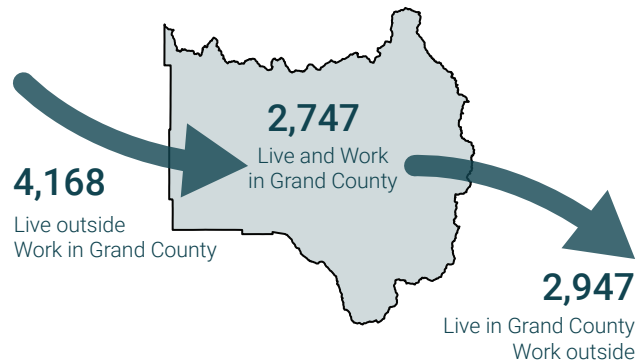
Source: NWCCOG.

As mentioned earlier, tourism-related industries account for most jobs in Grand County. The top industry based on number of jobs is accommodations and food service, followed by arts, entertainment, and recreation (**Figure 3.6**). Jobs in these sectors are often entry level and potentially seasonal, especially those related to accommodation since many lodging businesses downsize their offerings during shoulder and off seasons.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, most of Grand County's workforce does not reside in the County. More than 4,000 workers commute into Grand County for their jobs. Meanwhile, nearly 3,000 people who live in Grand County work outside of the County. Approximately 2,750 people both live and work within Grand County (**Figure 3.7**).

Grand County's uneven commuting patterns are largely caused by the lack of diversity in employment opportunities. Most jobs are tourism-based jobs, which can fluctuate with the seasons, offering limited career growth and stability. Another factor that affects Grand County's workforce is access to social services

Figure 3.7. Workers Inflow/Outflow



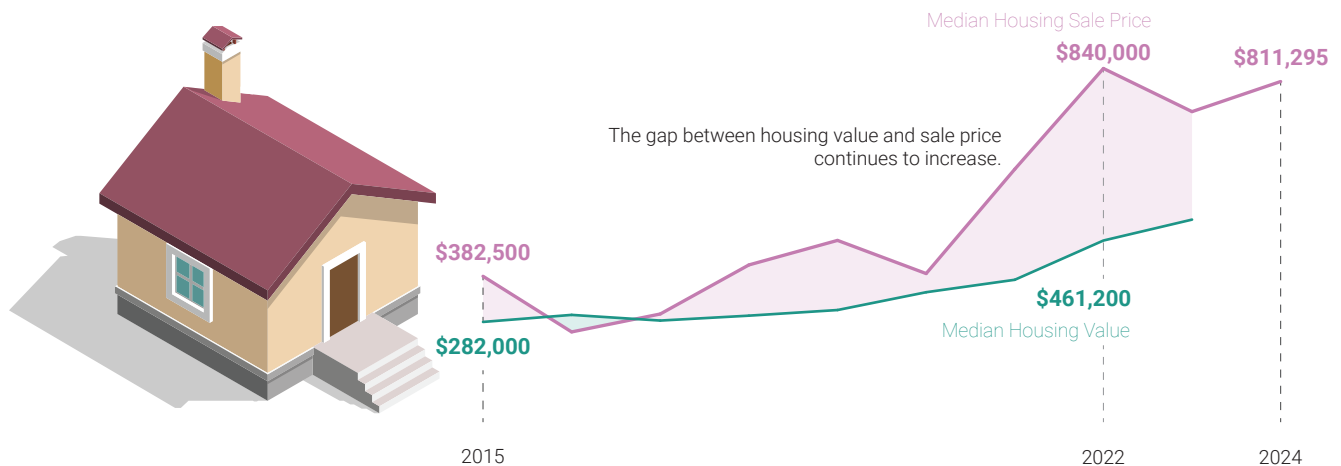
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

and support. Throughout this project, stakeholders expressed a pressing need for mental health facilities, childcare services, and more medical centers. The need to seek out such support services and more stable income sources drives residents to travel outside of the County for jobs, while encouraging others who reside elsewhere to drive into the County during the summer and winter months for seasonal jobs, creating an unstable employment situation.

Grand County also has a shortage of affordable workforce housing. The cost of housing in Grand County is a barrier to both current and potential new residents. According to the 2022 *Fraser River Valley Housing Needs Assessment*, 170 employees left their employment because they lacked housing they could afford in the area, and 530 individuals rejected job offers due to the unavailability of affordably priced housing. This situation has consequences for Grand County's tourism industry, such as staffing difficulties, reduced contributions to the local economy, and diminished service quality. This is discussed in more detail on the next page.

Housing Availability and Affordability

Figure 3.8. Median Housing Value and Sale Price



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Orchard.

Housing is a concern for the tourism industry and the Grand County community as a whole. Home values and median home sale prices in Grand County have increased significantly. According to a 2024 report from Orchard (a real estate brokerage that offers housing market insights) home values have surged by 84% since 2015, while incomes have only risen by 31%, creating affordability issues, particularly for first-time homebuyers. The median sale price has also increased. Between 2015 and 2024, median sale prices have doubled. The gap between median housing values and median sale prices continues to widen. The median housing value in 2022 was \$461,000 but the median sale price in the same year was \$840,000 (**Figure 3.8**). With homes being sold at prices higher than the median value, home ownership has become increasingly unaffordable.

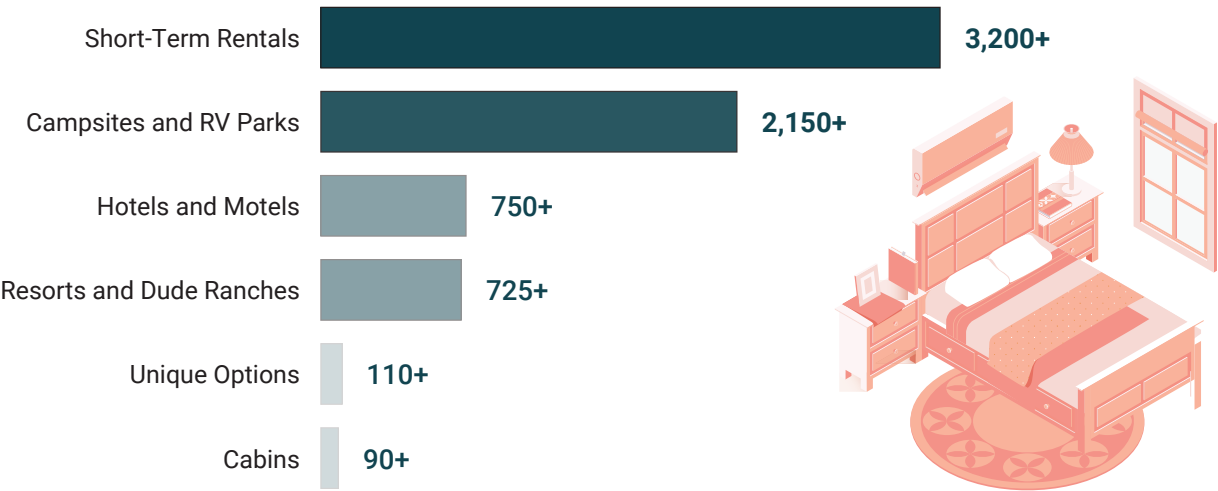
The *2018 Grand County Study Area and Fraser River Valley Housing Needs Assessment* identifies several challenges to attaining housing in the County, such as income disparity, rising home costs, and a significant

housing shortage. A significant portion of extant housing units are used seasonally, recreationally, or occasionally and thus are often vacant. Vacant housing contributes to housing shortages, volatility in housing costs, and a greater community strain since these owners are not contributing to the economy on a year-round basis.

Grand County is actively addressing these issues by investing in workforce housing. According to the *2022 Fraser River Valley Housing Needs Assessment*, there are several current and planned developments underway throughout the County. These developments include a variety of housing options such as apartments, townhomes, duplexes, and single-family homes. Some units are available for purchase, while others are rental properties, catering both to employees and local families. While these new developments are a step in the right direction, sustained efforts by the County, including development regulations, would be very impactful. Recommendations on how Grand County can continue these efforts are in **Chapter 5**.

Lodging Demands Vary

Figure 3.9. Number of Lodging Units in Grand County



Data collected is an estimate of Grand County's available accommodations, data was collected through ESRI Community Analyst, U.S. Census Bureau, advertised accommodations, and online searches.

As a tourism-based economy, understanding the lodging types and availability is important to sustaining both the economy and the workforce. Winter Park and Grand Lake have the highest lodging capacity, most of which can be attributed to Winter Park Resort and Grand Lake Lodge. Lodging types include resorts, cabins, dude ranches, hotels, motels, and camping (Figure 3.9). While many lodging options are open year-round, some of the lodging closes during the slower seasons, usually April-May and October-November. This variation in lodging availability makes it difficult for the County to plan events, identify lodging opportunities, and assess the capacity for short-term rentals.

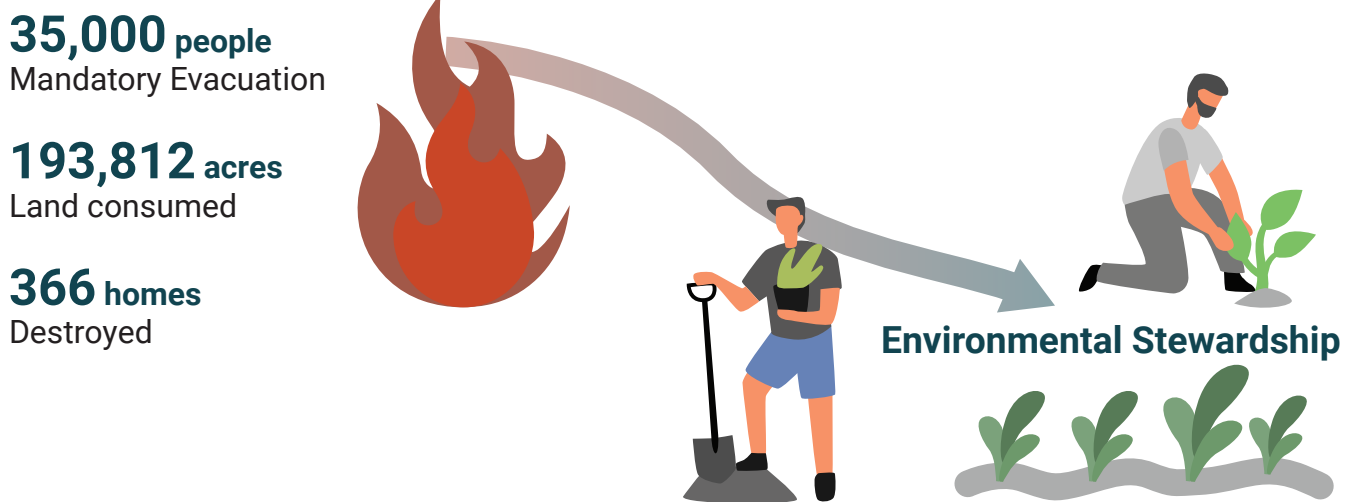
There are an estimated 1,600 lodging units or rooms across the County. While short-term rentals outnumber other lodging options significantly, with over 3,400 active listings reported in 2024. To help track lodging numbers more effectively, this Plan includes an **Accommodations Summary**, which the County should

periodically update and the communities can tailor to their needs. This template is available in **Appendix B** and explained further in **Chapter 4**. This is especially useful for any festivals or events that may be interested in coming to Grand County and want to know the lodging capacity.

While the diversity of lodging types meets the various travel styles of visitors, Grand County has few traditional hotels, especially major national brands. There are only three branded hotels in Grand County and thirteen within a 60-mile radius, most of which are rated 2-stars. Grand County's hotels have an overall rating of 2.5 out of 5 stars. An established, highly rated hotel would introduce a new lodging opportunity for guests who may be interested in hotel amenities and taking advantage of brand perks. To help attract more hotel development, this Plan contains a **Hotel Attraction Package**, see **Appendix C**, that can be used by the County, Towns, and local economic developers to market to hotel developers.

Environmental Stewardship Remains a Priority

Figure 3.10. East Troublesome Fire of 2020



Environmental care and preservation are a high priority for Grand County. With fire and flood threats, as well as increased tourism that threatens fragile ecosystems and water systems, Grand County's tourism-based economy must be balanced with protection of resources and infrastructure. For example, the East Troublesome Fire of 2020, Colorado's second-largest recorded fire, had devastating effects on the County. The fire consumed 193,812 acres, prompted a mandatory evacuation of 35,000 people, destroyed nearly 366 homes and 189 structures, and claimed the lives of two people (**Figure 3.10**). In addition, popular tourist attractions have become increasingly popular, creating stress on trail systems, waste management, and staffing. Combined, these threats to both the built and natural environments, create a consideration that informed the tools and recommendations outlined in **Chapters 4 and 5**.

The data included in this chapter is intended to highlight some important considerations that inform the effort to stabilize and expand Grand County's economic base. To accomplish this, it is important to consider the following, as evidenced by the information provided above:

- ▶ Managing visitor patterns to encourage year-round tourism
- ▶ Strengthening the workforce
- ▶ Diversifying the economy
- ▶ Increasing attainable housing
- ▶ Protecting the environment

To help address some of these challenges, this Plan includes tools that the County, Towns, and local stakeholders can use. The tools are detailed in the following chapter, and recommendations on how to use the tools are further discussed in **Chapter 5**.

04 DOWN THE COLORADO:

Tourism Development Toolbox



This chapter presents a range of tools designed to support the ongoing management and promotion of year-round tourism in Grand County. These tools address key needs, including streamlined data collection, market analysis, and public feedback. The tools are dynamic and customizable, enabling Grand County to stay responsive to changing tourism conditions and community needs. Together, these tools offer valuable resources that capture the current state of tourism, including opportunities and trends. By maintaining them annually, Grand County and other stakeholders will be able to adapt to changes in the local economy, enabling timely policy updates and addressing emerging needs.

Photo: GCCTB

Tourism Toolbox

This chapter outlines the variety of resources and tools that were created to facilitate ongoing efforts in managing and promoting year-round tourism in Grand County. These tools help address several needs for Grand County tourism. Among these is the County's need for streamlined data collection. Data collection and management can be difficult due to the dynamic nature of tourism and business data, two aspects of a community that are in constant flux. Additionally, a set of other helpful resources were collected. They include:

- ▶ Accommodations Summary
- ▶ Hotel Attraction Package
- ▶ Market Analysis Summary
- ▶ Economic Asset Inventory
- ▶ Business, Lodging, Workforce, and Community Surveys
- ▶ Sensitivity Indicator
- ▶ Explore Grand County: Online Visitor Experience Tool

Each of these tools and resources can be customized for a given community or organization, including chambers of commerce, non-profits, or other entities wherein having updated and searchable data sources would be helpful. The important thing to note is that these data sets are dynamic and customizable, such that they can and should be updated and modified to meet a given user's needs, as well as to align with the changing business and activity environment within Grand County.

The **Market Analysis Summary** and **Accommodations Summary** provide insight into the current business and lodging trends in Grand County. The **Economic Asset Inventory** contains a list of tourism-related businesses across the County. These tools can help the County collect, manage, and analyze tourism-related data year after year to better understand gaps in the market and opportunities for future development and investment.

Another important component of data collection is public feedback. **Business, Lodging, Workforce, and Community Surveys** were developed and can be used by the County, Towns, and Chambers of Commerce. These surveys can be distributed at different points throughout the year to gather insightful information on the perception and impact of tourism on the Grand County community.

By having a collection of relevant data, the County will be better positioned to apply for various grants that require data summaries. The County will also be prepared to perform targeted data analysis. To aid this analysis, a **Sensitivity Indicator** tool was built. This can assess a given community's strength or weakness relative to specific factors in areas such as workforce, economy, environmental, social, and infrastructure. It currently is set up to be customized at the County and Town level. This will enable officials and businesses to better understand shifting dynamics, trends, and needs within a given area, or throughout the entirety of Grand County.

In addition to data collection, marketing and communication for visitors and investors is an opportunity for Grand County. Targeted marketing for investors is also an opportunity that has been addressed with an important resource, the **Hotel Attraction Package**. With an increase in visitors that is nearly double the pre-pandemic levels, the opportunity to cultivate new lodging offerings is ideal. Further, Grand County is unique as a tourist destination in that it has few spaces for larger conferences, weddings, and other events, especially those that can accommodate several hundred guests. Given these factors, Grand County is ideally positioned to encourage additional hotel development, including hotels that could provide an integrated experience for visitors; one that includes spas, conference space, dining, and more. The **Hotel Attraction Package** is a marketing tool that can be distributed and used for the development community, hoteliers, and others to inform them of market opportunities in Grand County.

To encourage visitors to explore more parts of Grand County at various times of the year, an **Online Visitor Experience Tool** has been built, one that guides visitors to choose an adventure that best suits their needs and interests. This tool allows visitors to pick their visitor profile, which leads to a list of various activities, restaurants, and lodging options that may suit their interests and abilities. Visitors can add these recommendations to an itinerary for their trip. For example, someone who is primarily interested in scenic vistas and fine dining can build an itinerary that suits those needs, while a more activity-oriented visitor may choose hiking or skiing alternatives. They can then select from various opportunities and build a personalized plan for their visit.

Collectively, these tools provide important resources that offer a snapshot of the current tourism conditions, opportunities, and trends. If maintained on a consistent basis, Grand County and others will be able to respond to changes within the local economy, allowing for policy updates and other needs that may be needed or considered. Following are brief descriptions of each tool, their intended audience, and maintenance suggestions. These can be found in the **Appendices** as listed below.

- ▷ **Appendix B:** Accommodations Summary
- ▷ **Appendix C:** Hotel Attraction Package
- ▷ **Appendix D:** Market Analysis Summary
- ▷ **Appendix E:** Economic Asset Inventory
- ▷ **Appendix F:** Business, Lodging, Workforce, and Community Surveys
- ▷ **Appendix G:** Sensitivity Indicator
- ▷ **Appendix H:** Explore Grand County: Online Visitor Experience Tool

Accommodations Summary



Description

The Accommodations Summary provides an overview of the various lodging options available across the County, detailing the number of units for each type. The summary covers different accommodations, including hotels/motels, resorts/dude ranches, cabins, unique stays (such as tipis and covered wagons), campsites, RV parks, and short-term rentals. The summary also includes an active and editable spreadsheet detailing lodging options within the County.

Purpose

This overview offers insights into the County's lodging capacity and presents a snapshot of the current accommodation landscape within the County.

Target Audience

Grand County Economic Development Department, Chambers of Commerce, and Grand County Colorado Tourism Board

Overseen By

Grand County Economic Development Department

Hotel Attraction Package



Description

The Hotel Attraction Package is a marketing tool for prospective hotel developers, containing data concerning potential site selections. It includes a digital and printable booklet and brochure which can be distributed at conferences, linked to websites, or sent to prospective hotel developers. There are also template pages that can be used by individual towns to highlight their amenities and available sites.

Purpose

This resource enables the County to engage with hoteliers, offering a concise overview of local demographics, market competition, and highlighting the assets that make Grand County an attractive location for hotel development.

Target Audience

Potential hotel developers

Overseen By

Grand County Economic Development Department

Market Analysis Summary



Description

The Market Analysis Summary offers valuable insights into current trends, spending patterns, economic impacts, and business opportunities across Grand County. It includes data on various sectors such as restaurants, social services, personal services, recreation, attractions, and retail.

Purpose

This summary serves as a key resource for tracking economic growth and identifying business opportunities, needs, or gaps within the County, helping to inform strategic decisions and future planning efforts.

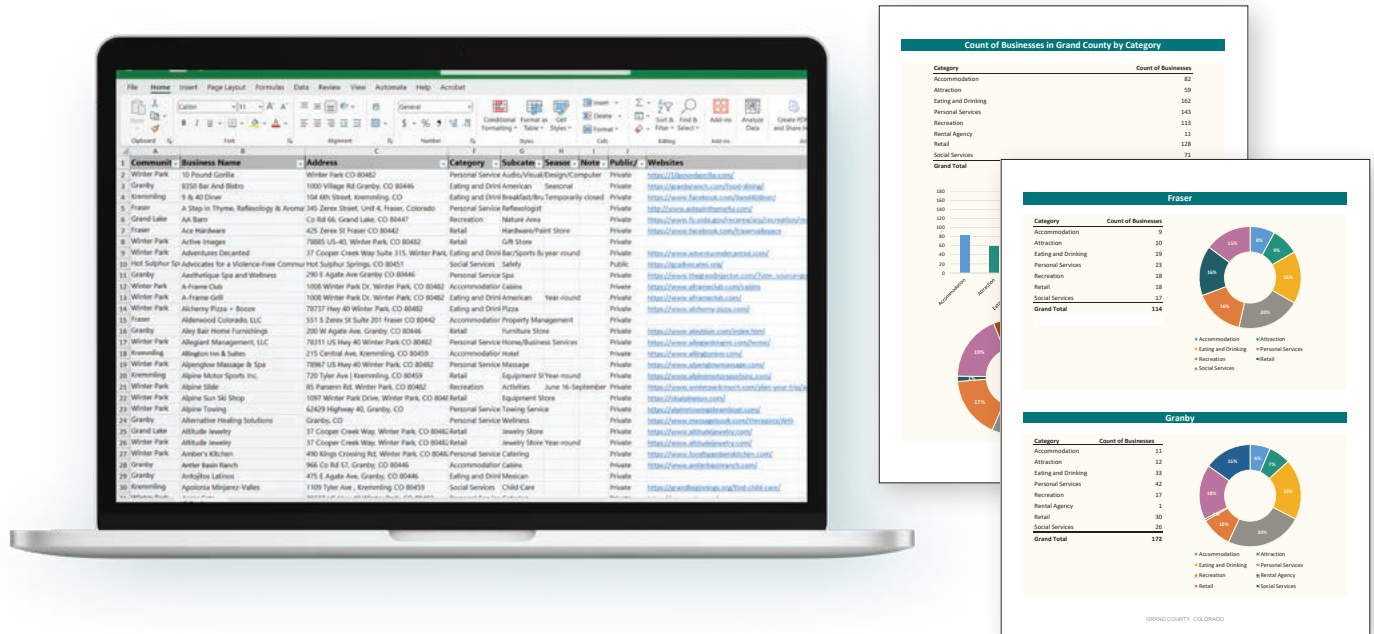
Target Audience

Grand County Economic Development Department, Grand County Colorado Tourism Board, Chambers of Commerce

Overseen By

Grand County Economic Development Department or Grand County Colorado Tourism Board

Economic Asset Inventory



Description

The Economic Asset Inventory compiles a list of tourism-related businesses, serving as a tool to identify industry gaps and monitor businesses across the County. This customizable and searchable resource includes details such as the business name, address, type, and website. It can be updated regularly to add or remove businesses and modify information as needed.

Purpose

The purpose of this spreadsheet is to provide the County with current information regarding tourism-related businesses and attractions. This resource can be a starting point for the County to build a comprehensive database of economic assets, as well as track existing and new businesses.

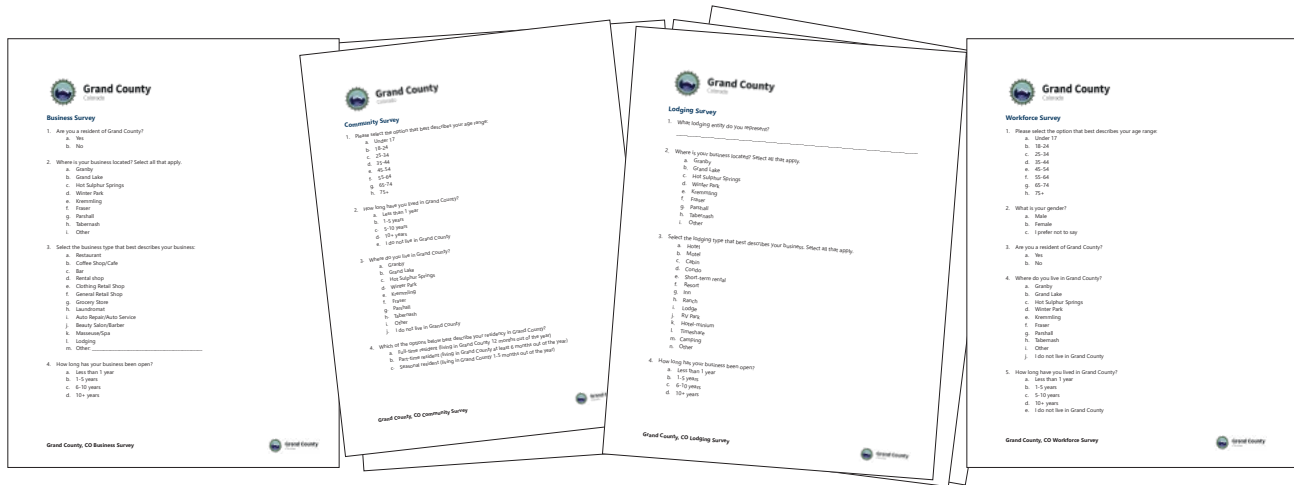
Target Audience

Grand County Economic Development Department, Chambers of Commerce, and Grand County Colorado Tourism Board

Overseen By

Grand County Economic Development Department

Business, Lodging, Workforce, and Community Survey



Description

A series of survey templates have been developed to collect data from the local population.

- ▶ **Business Survey:** This survey collects valuable insights into business operations, staffing, needs, and concerns, while also exploring the connection between local businesses and tourism.
- ▶ **Lodging Survey:** This survey gathers data on lodging operations, staffing, needs, and concerns, with a focus on understanding the relationship between local lodging and tourism.
- ▶ **Workforce Survey:** This survey helps capture workforce demographics and identify key workforce needs and challenges.
- ▶ **Community Survey:** This survey gauges the community's perspective on tourism and any concerns related to its impact.

Purpose

The information gathered can help identify challenges and opportunities faced by various groups, enabling the County to take targeted actions through policy, regulation, and support services. These surveys can assess the status of local business, lodging, workforce, and community needs, helping to guide support and development efforts. These surveys should be distributed annually if not more frequently.

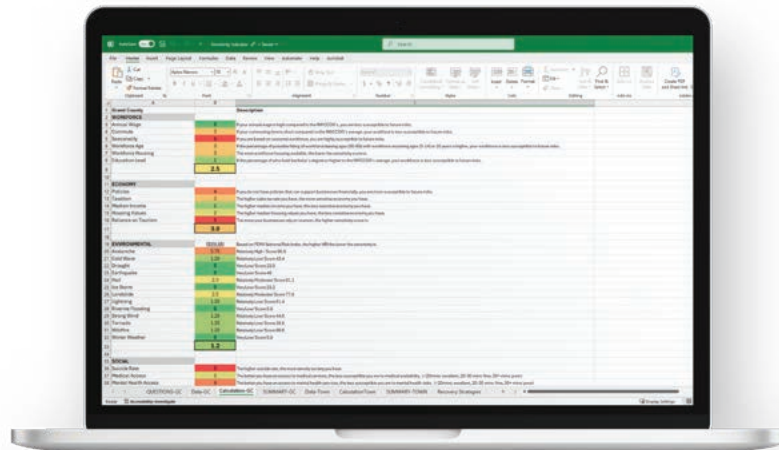
Target Audience

Grand County's community members, local business owners and managers, lodging owners and managers, and workers

Overseen By

Grand County Economic Development Department, Grand County Chambers of Commerce, or Grand County Colorado Tourism Board

Sensitivity Indicator



Description

The Sensitivity Indicator is a tool designed for the County to assess and rank areas based on their susceptibility to potential economic conditions, such as workforce availability, economic conditions, environmental challenges, social dynamics, and infrastructure stability. The Indicator evaluates the County and its towns across five key categories: workforce, economy, environmental, social, and infrastructure. Each category is assessed using specific criteria, resulting in a “sensitivity score” ranging from 0 (least vulnerable) to 5 (most vulnerable). Users input responses to a set of questions along with geographical data, which then generates scores for each category, highlighting the most pressing vulnerabilities.

Purpose

Results from the Indicator help the County identify priority issues that require immediate attention, whether through policy adjustments, regulatory changes, or targeted support services. There are also formulas for each town. This tool is an Excel spreadsheet that can be updated as new data is released.

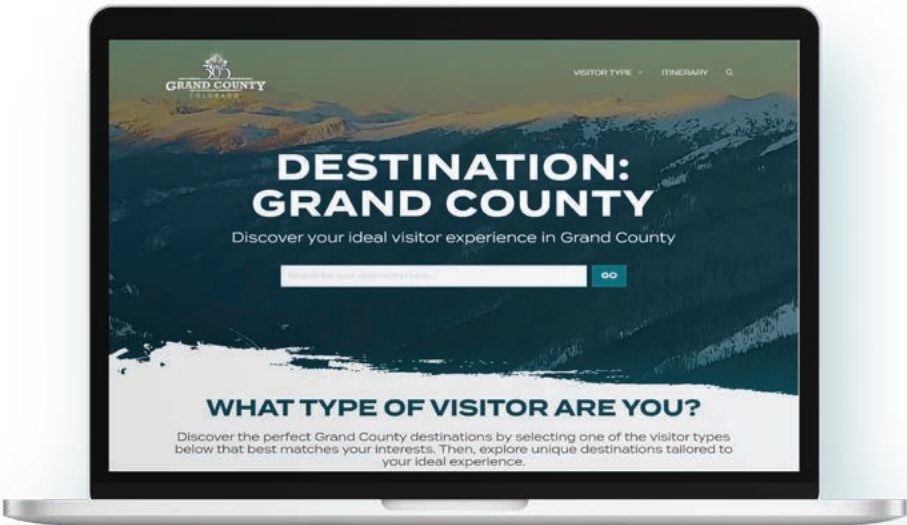
Target Audience

Grand County Economic Development Department and Town Managers

Overseen By

Grand County Economic Development Department

Explore Grand County: Online Visitor Experience Tool

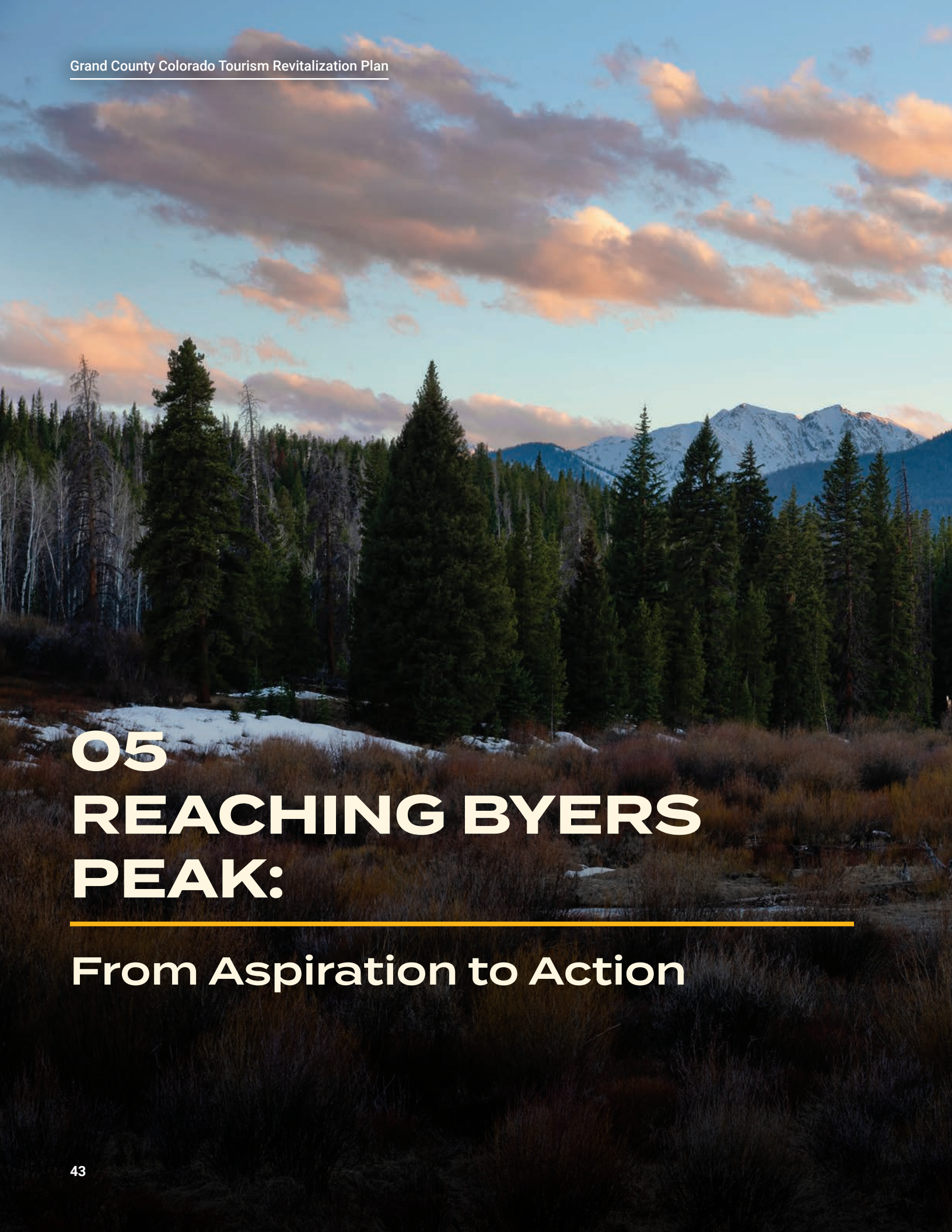


Description	The "Explore Grand County: Online Visitor Experience Tool" is a guide designed to highlight the County's attractions based on different visitor profiles. Potential visitors can visit the site and determine which visitor profile suits them best. Whether you're an experienced traveler, a family seeking a weekend adventure, or someone looking for a peaceful retreat, this tool offers tailored recommendations based on your travel preferences.
Purpose	This online tool helps visitors plan their trips by recommending restaurants, hotels, resorts, hiking trails, shops, lodging, and more. Visitors can add these recommendations to an itinerary. This tool not only aids visitors in discovering hidden gems but also promotes the diverse experiences Grand County has to offer.
Target Audience	Visitors to Grand County
Overseen By	Grand County Colorado Tourism Board

Photo: GCCTB

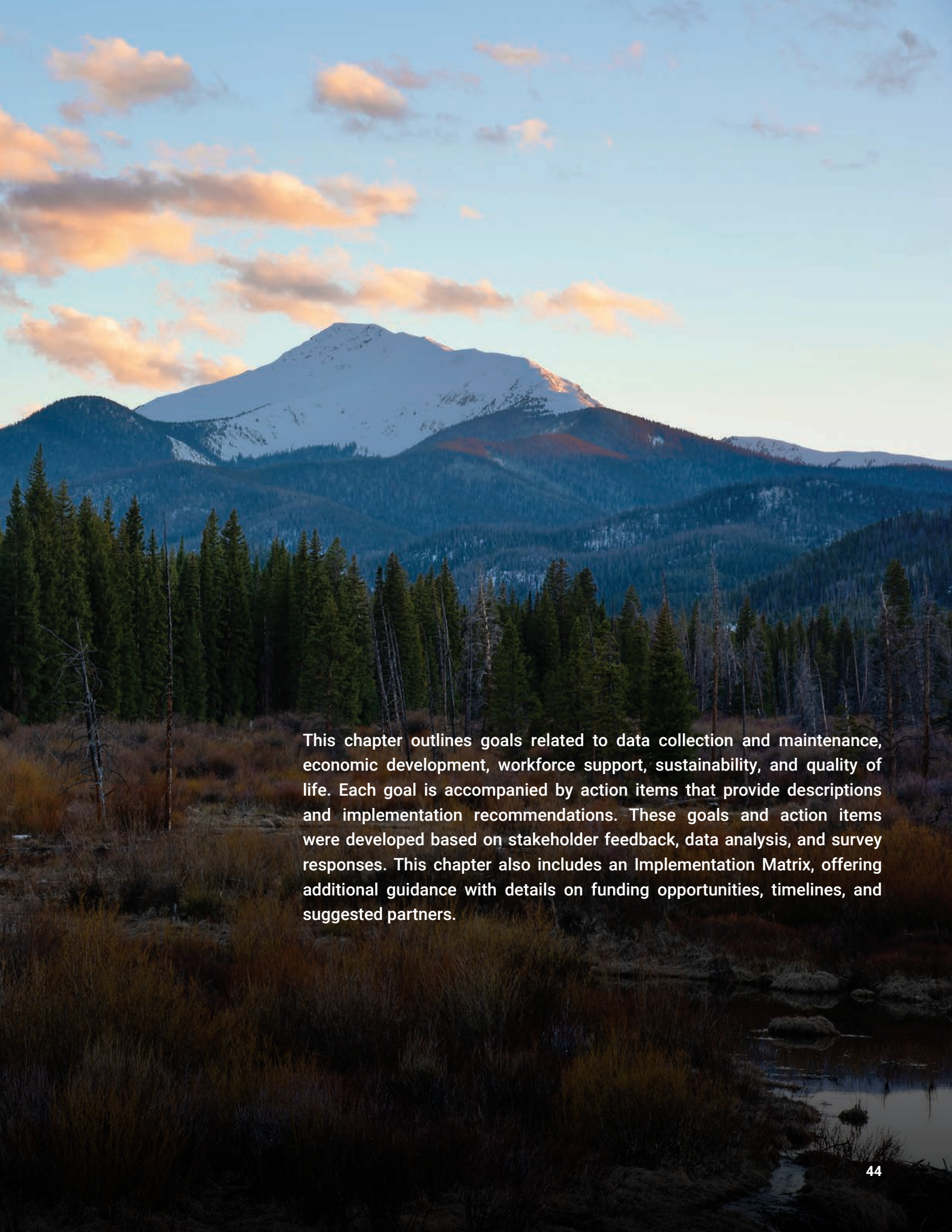
Together, these tools can help attract and retain businesses, support grant applications, and guide policies and decisions that enhance residents' lives and improve the visitor experience. Since the data is dynamic, these tools should be updated annually. The following chapter will provide goals and strategies for managing tourism in Grand County.





O5 REACHING BYERS PEAK:

From Aspiration to Action



This chapter outlines goals related to data collection and maintenance, economic development, workforce support, sustainability, and quality of life. Each goal is accompanied by action items that provide descriptions and implementation recommendations. These goals and action items were developed based on stakeholder feedback, data analysis, and survey responses. This chapter also includes an Implementation Matrix, offering additional guidance with details on funding opportunities, timelines, and suggested partners.



Goal 1

**Improve data collection,
maintenance, and
communication methods**

1.1 Update the County Economic Asset Inventory as needed.

The Economic Asset Inventory includes information on tourism-related businesses, such as their location, type, public or private status, and website, as available. This data can be organized to create visual tools and charts for grant applications or marketing purposes. It also helps monitor business openings and closures and spot business gaps throughout the County. To ensure accuracy, it is recommended that the County or Chambers of Commerce regularly update this data. While Grand County Economic Development Department can maintain this inventory, input from local Chambers of Commerce is essential for its reliability. The Economic Asset Inventory is in **Appendix E**.

1.2 Regularly distribute, collect, and assess survey data from business owners, workforce, accommodation owners, and community members.

A set of surveys has been created for distribution to business owners, the workforce, lodging owners, and community members. These surveys will help assess the needs of the community and local businesses, as well as identify any necessary policy or land use/zoning adjustments regarding the impacts of tourism. This Plan recommends that the County distribute these surveys through the Grand County Chambers of Commerce annually. They can also be made available on the Work in Grand website. The surveys can be found in **Appendix F**.



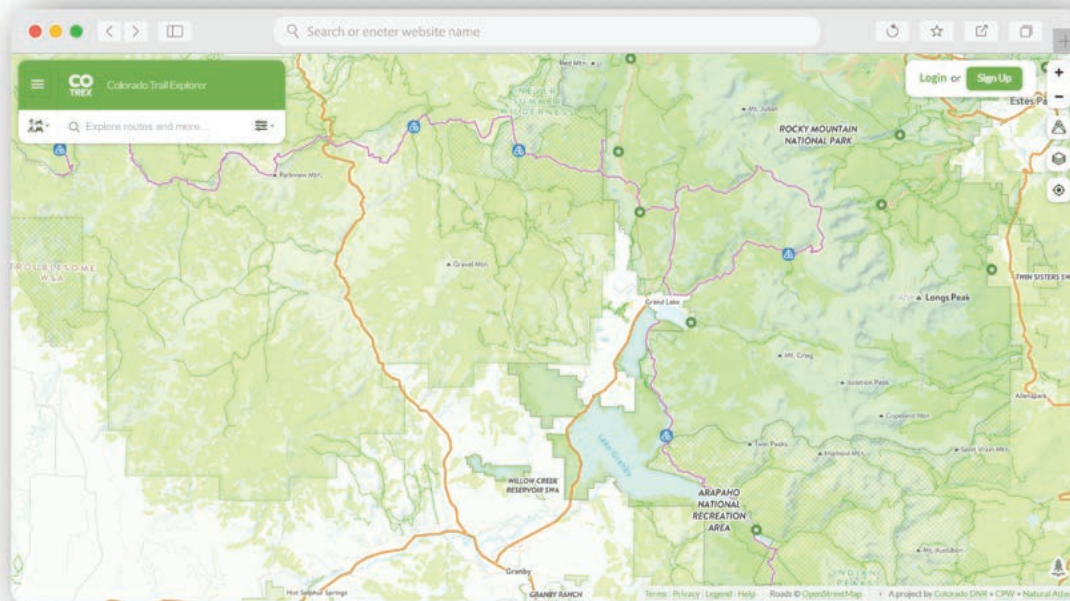
Photo: GCCTB

1.3 Install electronic signage along high-traffic routes to alert the public of road closures, emergencies, and public information.

Grand County has a limited number of roadways so when a major weather event or natural disaster occurs, it can heavily disrupt travel. Digital signage along high-traffic routes like US-40 and US-34 can inform locals and visitors of emergencies, road closures, and other important updates. We recommend that the County, in partnership with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), implement this initiative by 2026. Federal and state funding sources are available to support this project and are included in the Grant Matrix in **Appendix I**.

1.4 Integrate COTREX Map into broader mapping initiatives with the Bureau of Land Management and National Parks Service.

COTREX Maps are a valuable tool for visitors to explore various parts of the County, helping to expand tourism to less-visited areas. Promoting these maps on the Visit Grand County website help visitors plan their trail routes and keep them informed about trail closures and activities permitted on specific routes. Coordinating with Headwaters Trails Alliance, Bureau of Land Management, and National Parks Service will ensure that visitors receive the most up to date information.



COTREX Map website

1.5 Evaluate the economic impact of short-term rentals and revise regulations, accordingly, ensuring updates respond to changes in revenue, occupancy rates, and community impact.

Grand County's current policy for short-term rentals within unincorporated Grand County requires an annual permit costing \$100 per occupant capacity of each unit. Towns within the County have their own policies and fee structures. It is recommended that the County perform an annual review of the impact of short-term rentals and consider placing a cap on available permits. It would also be beneficial for the County to assess the best practices from other mountain communities when piloting new policies.

1.6 Use geolocation-based data to assess capacity and visitor flows and guide decision-making insights into visitor and resident behaviors and use of trails, parking, events, and other spaces and amenities.

Geolocation-based data refers to information collected from devices like smartphones that track the location of individuals. This data can be used to monitor how people move through different areas in real-time. By analyzing geolocation data, Grand County can identify patterns in movement, peak visiting times, overcrowded areas, and underutilized locations. This information helps guide better planning for infrastructure, crowd management, and resource allocation. This Plan recommends monitoring geolocation-based data across various public amenities in Grand County, including trails, parking, events, and recreational spaces. To implement this, partnerships with mobile application developers, local businesses, and tourism platforms could be established to access and analyze geolocation data.

1.7 Inventory and assess existing physical and digital wayfinding across the County.

It is important that wayfinding be clear, current, and in the correct location. Understanding the current conditions of wayfinding county-wide and for each Town can help assess what needs to be upgraded and what needs to be added or removed. It is recommended that each Town collaborate with the County to build an inventory of current wayfinding. Then, a County-Wide Wayfinding Plan can be created to assess the current wayfinding situation and guide wayfinding improvement efforts.



Goal 2

Promote economic
diversification and
business attraction

2.1 Create an Economic Development Plan that includes business attraction and retention strategies.

An Economic Development Plan can serve as a strategic tool to attract new businesses to the County, such as grocery stores, hotels with conference centers, car rental services, and other enterprises that bolster the local economy. By providing a clear roadmap, this plan can guide both the County and Towns in fostering economic opportunities, stimulating local business growth, and enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

2.2 Conduct a feasibility study for a business incubator.

Expanding business opportunities beyond the tourism industry provides the County with a more diverse range of employment opportunities, helping to create a more resilient local economy. Establishing a centrally located business incubator would play a key role in supporting this growth by giving new and startup businesses a place to establish themselves. These incubators offer not only physical space and meeting rooms but also essential resources such as mentorship and networking opportunities, which can be crucial for long-term success and sustainability. Additionally, they foster innovation and collaboration, encouraging entrepreneurship within the community.

2.3 Identify hotel and business development sites based on proximity to attractions, utility connections, and community demand.

To successfully attract new hotels and businesses, developable properties within the County must be identified. Utilizing GIS mapping to show the location of existing utilities can further aid in determining viable areas for development, as well as highlight where infrastructure improvements may be necessary. This approach not only streamlines the planning process but also ensures that new developments are both efficient and sustainable, making the County more appealing to potential investors.

2.4 Update zoning and code requirements to allow for more creative business types and mixed-use areas.

Updating the zoning code in tandem with developing a County Comprehensive Plan will allow the County to set a clear vision for the next decade. This coordinated effort would ensure that the Towns' and County's land use, zoning, and development goals are aligned, fostering a more cohesive and sustainable approach to growth.

Goal 3

Create a more stable
annual economy

3.1 Conduct a feasibility study for small business improvement incentives.

Many businesses in Grand County would greatly benefit from financial support to modernize and upgrade aging infrastructure. To assist small businesses with expenses like façade improvements, utility upgrades, and interior modernization, establishing a small business fund, loan program, or grant initiative could make a significant impact. Conducting a feasibility study to assess where Grand County could offer targeted support is a key first step. It is recommended that this feasibility study be conducted to identify opportunities for collaboration and funding, which will ultimately improve both the local and tourism economies.

3.2 Host annual industry-specific workshops.

Industry-specific workshops can attract participants from various sectors, such as outdoor recreation, hospitality, environment and sustainability, tourism, and other industries. Hosting these workshops not only fosters collaboration and knowledge-sharing but also has the potential to boost local sales by drawing visitors who will spend on accommodations, dining, and other services. It is recommended that the County host a series of targeted workshops across different industries, with each focusing on sector-specific trends, innovations, and challenges. This will not only attract a diverse group of attendees but also create an ongoing stream of economic activity, benefiting local businesses and enhancing the County's reputation as a hub for professional development.

3.3 Perform a transportation analysis to determine where and how transportation options, including public transportation and rental service offerings, and access can be improved.

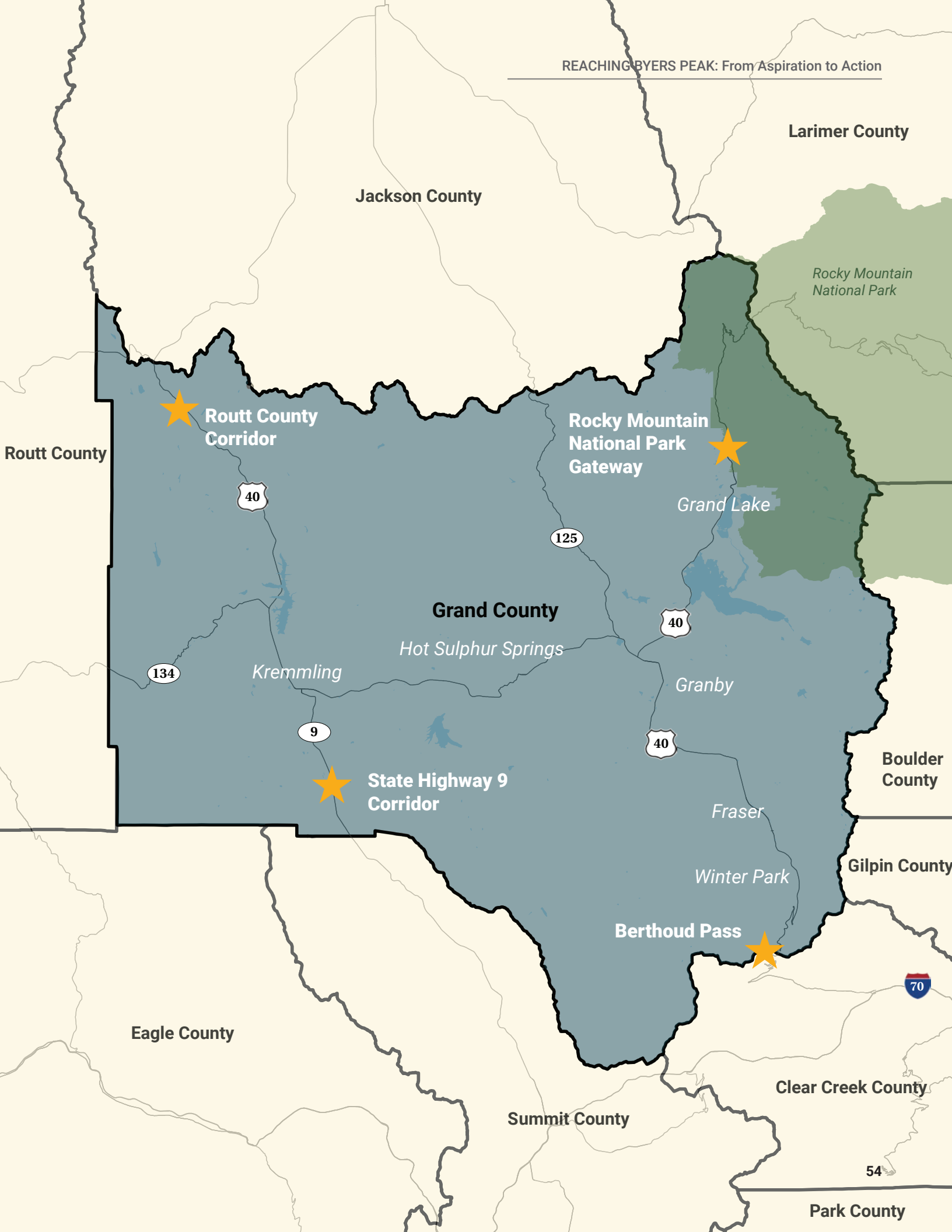
Driving is the most common mode of transportation in Grand County, though train and bus services are available with limited destinations. It is recommended that a transportation analysis be conducted to assess how these transportation options can be enhanced and where more transportation options are most needed.

3.4 Create a Grand County Gateways Development Project to establish plans for Berthoud Pass, Rocky Mountain West, and Kremmling to welcome and orient people to Grand County.

The County is situated within four primary gateways, or entry points, that are poised to welcome visitors into all that Grand County has to offer. They can guide visitors not only into Grand County, but also offer reciprocal guidance into adjacent counties, such as Clear Creek, Routt, and Summit Counties. It is recommended that the Grand County Gateways Development Project build a vision, concept, and preliminary implementation strategy that will develop gateways at the following locations:

- ▶ **Berthoud Pass:** Located on US Highway 40 (“The Main Street of America”), Berthoud Pass is a major Colorado jumping-off point for all things outdoors. With easy proximity to Colorado’s front range, this site is ready for a clear vision that communicates to visitors and residents alike how to best engage with both Clear Creek and Grand Counties.
- ▶ **Rocky Mountain National Park Gateway:** Located in one of the country’s most iconic national parks, a gateway at Rocky Mountain National Park could expand on what is offered at the park visitor center by creating kiosks, bathrooms, and other economic activity guidance as an important and needed gateway feature.
- ▶ **Kremmling:** The Town of Kremmling’s two entry points into the County would benefit from better gateway identification and visitor direction. These include:
 - **Routt County Corridor:** This busy corridor between Grand County and Routt County is frequented by outdoor enthusiasts and tourists moving between Grand County and Steamboat Springs, or those visiting Rabbit Ears Pass. This corridor has limited directional indicators and needs to better announce visitor opportunities in Kremmling and elsewhere in the region.
 - **State Highway 9 Corridor:** Another busy route, this north-south connector between Summit and Grand Counties includes significant employee commuting as well as visitor traffic. Developing a gateway plan for this area will help to announce Grand and Summit Counties, better-orienting travelers in the region.

These gateways are noted in the map on the following page.



Larimer County

Jackson County

Rocky Mountain
National Park

Routt County

 Routt County
Corridor

40

Rocky Mountain
National Park
Gateway



Grand Lake

125

Grand County

Hot Sulphur Springs

Kremmling

134

9

 State Highway 9
Corridor

40

Granby

40

Boulder
County

Fraser

Gilpin County

Winter Park

Berthoud Pass



70

Eagle County

Summit County

Clear Creek County

54

Park County



Goal 4

Promote the authentic
“Grand Experience”
year-round

4.1 Plan a Restaurant Week that features restaurants across the County.

A Restaurant Week could spotlight a diverse selection of restaurants from across the County. Beyond highlighting the wide range of dining options available, it would serve as a valuable opportunity for local restaurant owners to network, collaborate, and strengthen relationships within the culinary community. This event could also generate increased visibility and foot traffic for participating establishments, driving both immediate business and long-term customer connections.

4.2 Plan shoulder-season festivals and conferences.

Hosting festivals and conferences during the spring and fall can help smooth out the fluctuations in Grand County's tourism, reducing the dip in visitors during the shoulder seasons. These events could focus on a variety of topics that align with the region's strengths, such as environmental sustainability, outdoor recreation, or other Colorado-specific themes relevant to Grand County's culture and natural assets.

4.3 Create an ecological tourism guide.

An ecological tourism guide would highlight a variety of outdoor activities and natural attractions across Grand County. This guide could showcase prime spots for birdwatching and exploring other areas of ecological interest. Each brochure would offer insights into the best times of year to observe different species, blooms, and migration patterns ensuring that visitors have the most rewarding experience possible.

4.4 Set shoulder season tourism goals and metrics.

Establishing clear goals and metrics for the shoulder seasons would better position Grand County to effectively monitor and assess tourism trends during these quieter periods. By tracking measurable data, the County can evaluate which initiatives are successfully attracting more visitors during the shoulder seasons and which programs may need adjustment or improvement.

4.5 Promote night sky education and resources.

Grand County boasts numerous locations that could qualify as "Dark Sky" areas, which are ideal for stargazing due to their minimal light pollution. However, obtaining official recognition as an International Dark Sky Place requires certification from the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). Currently, Grand Lake is in the process of applying for this prestigious designation. The program's goals include reducing energy consumption, raising awareness about the importance of preserving dark, visible night skies, supporting migratory bird patterns, and minimizing light pollution.



5.1 Create a Workforce Retention Plan.

A Workforce Retention Plan could encompass a variety of initiatives, such as employee incentive programs, training and professional development opportunities, mentorship initiatives, team-building activities, and improved onboarding processes. By adopting such a plan, businesses can foster a more stable and motivated workforce, reduce the high costs associated with employee turnover, and create a positive, productive work environment. In the long term, a strong retention plan not only boosts employee satisfaction but also enhances operational efficiency and business growth.

5.2 Quantify workforce needs for social services.

Quantifying the community's needs for social services is crucial to identifying gaps and ensuring that the County can make strategic, data-driven decisions. Collected data should include housing, childcare, mental health services, transportation, healthcare, and education and training. By gathering and analyzing this data, the County will be better equipped to allocate resources effectively, prioritize critical areas, and direct funding where it's most needed. This approach will not only help reduce existing service gaps but also enable the setting of clear, measurable goals for long-term improvements in service delivery and community well-being.

5.3 Develop a program to guide and support businesses' transition to employee ownership.

Grand County is full of small, locally owned businesses that are beloved by residents and tourists alike. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Annual Business Survey, in 2021, over 47% of businesses in Colorado were owned by people 55 and older. As business owners approach retirement, they often do not have a clear transition plan. In order to retain more employees and ensure a smooth transition as business owners and managers retire, the County could pilot a program that helps business owners develop a transition plan that includes the possibility of employee ownership. By doing so, the County can help strengthen both employee retention and the continuity of local businesses.

5.4 Collaborate with regional institutions of higher learning to support skill-building for entrepreneurship.

Currently, higher education or trade school opportunities in the County are limited, which may contribute to residents seeking education and career advancement elsewhere. Expanding access to higher education programs within the County could play a key role in retaining local talent and reducing the outmigration of residents who move away in search of educational opportunities.



Goal 6

**Promote sustainable
visitor best practices**

6.1 Display “Leave No Trace” principles at popular tourist destinations.

To support statewide efforts in promoting the “Leave No Trace” principles, which encourage visitors to minimize their impacts on nature, the County can strategically display these guidelines at popular tourist destinations. By reinforcing these principles locally, the County contributes to a unified and consistent environmental stewardship message across the state. Posting these reminders in high-traffic areas encourages responsible tourism, fostering a culture of respect for the environment. Additionally, aligning with state initiatives can enhance the County’s reputation as a destination that prioritizes sustainability and the preservation of its natural beauty for future generations.

6.2 Install electronic visitor kiosks at visitor centers and high-volume areas.

Installing electronic visitor kiosks at key locations enables visitor centers to provide real-time, up-to-date information about attractions, events, and services throughout the County. These kiosks give visitors easy access to essential information, allowing them to explore their options and plan their stay without relying solely on staff assistance. By offering self-service options, the kiosks reduce the workload on visitor center employees, allowing them to focus on more personalized interactions. Additionally, these kiosks enhance the overall visitor experience by providing interactive tools for trip planning, ensuring that everyone can access relevant details efficiently, even during peak tourism times.

6.3 Support municipalities on localized branding that highlights each town’s character.

Each town in Grand County possesses its own distinct charm and character. By emphasizing these unique traits in the design of wayfinding systems and branding elements throughout the Towns, the County can collectively foster a strong sense of place for both residents and visitors. Implementing cohesive yet distinct branding for the County itself will reinforce its overarching identity, while still allowing the Towns to maintain their individuality. This dual-level approach creates a more vibrant and recognizable regional identity, benefiting the local economy and tourism.

6.4 Support collaboration between Rocky Mountain National Park, U.S. Forest Service, local Chambers of Commerce, and Grand County Colorado Tourism Board to streamline the visitor experience.

There are many stakeholders that contribute to the tourism experience in Grand County. To better streamline sustainability and marketing efforts, it is recommended that the County hold quarterly meetings with representatives from Rocky Mountain National Park, the U.S. Forest Service, Chambers of Commerce, and Grand County Colorado Tourism Board to openly discuss current tourism trends and challenges. Additionally, this group could continue discussions on the feasibility of a shared visitor center that can provide guidance to visitors about all areas of the County.

A photograph of two people in winter sports gear. One person is lying on a snowboard, wearing a red jacket, blue helmet, and purple boots. Another person is leaning over them, wearing a black jacket, goggles, and a pink beanie, appearing to assist or help them. The background is a snowy, hazy mountain slope.

Goal 7

**Improve the quality of life
for current and future
residents**

7.1 Host town-hall-type events focusing on topical issues for residents, especially tourism and entrepreneurship.

Hosting town-hall-style events that center on specific topics during each meeting can serve as an effective way to keep residents informed and engaged. These gatherings provide a platform for community members to learn about the various impacts of tourism in their area, both the positive, economic benefits and the challenges they may bring. Additionally, these events can highlight potential entrepreneurial opportunities that arise from the growing tourism industry, offering residents insights into how they might participate in and benefit from the sector's expansion. By fostering open discussions, these meetings encourage transparency, collaboration, and proactive involvement in shaping the future of the County.

7.2 Collaborate regionally with resorts, local public school districts, employers, and non-profits to expand housing opportunities and access to childcare.

Collaborating regionally with resorts, local public school districts, employers, and non-profits can help expand housing opportunities and address childcare needs. By forming a task force, these groups can develop solutions such as employer-sponsored housing, zoning incentives, and public-private partnerships to increase affordable housing for local workers and families. Additionally, they can create subsidized childcare programs or shared facilities, funded through contributions from employers and non-profits, ensuring more accessible childcare. Leveraging grants and regularly assessing progress would support long-term community development and workforce retention.

Implementation Matrix

The goals and action items in this Plan were developed to help Grand County achieve their vision of encouraging sustainable tourism to bolster economic stability, foster new opportunities, and promote responsible environmental practices, while offering a unique experience that inspires visitors and contributes to a high quality of life for its residents. The following Implementation Matrix expands upon these goals and action items by including an expected timeframe, partners, estimated cost, and potential funding support. This Matrix can be used independently to prioritize and track progress on goals and action items. More information about funding resources for Grand County can be found in **Appendix I**.

Goal	Action Item
Improve data collection, maintenance, and communication methods	1.1 Update the County Economic Asset Inventory as needed.
	1.2 Regularly distribute, collect, and assess survey data from business owners, workforce, accommodation owners, and community members.
	1.3 Install electronic signage along high-traffic routes to alert the public of road closures, emergencies, and public information.
	1.4 Integrate COTREX Map into broader mapping initiatives with the Bureau of Land Management and National Parks Service.
	1.5 Annually evaluate the economic impact of short-term rentals and revise regulations, accordingly, ensuring updates respond to changes in revenue, occupancy rates, and community impact.
	1.6 Use geolocation-based data to assess capacity and visitor flows and guide decision-making insights into visitor and resident behaviors and use of trails, parking, events, and other spaces and amenities.
	1.7 Inventory and assess existing physical and digital wayfinding across the county.

TIMEFRAME

Near-term: 0-2 years

Mid-term: 2-5 years

Long-term: 5+ years

COST

\$: \$1 - \$499,999

\$\$: \$500,000 - \$999,999

\$\$\$: \$1,000,000+

Timeframe	Partners	Cost	Funding Resources
Near-term	Local Chambers of Commerce, Towns, GCCTB	\$	
Near-term	Local Chambers of Commerce	\$	
Mid-term	CDOT	\$\$\$	CDOT
Mid-term	RMNP, USFS, GCCTB	\$	
Near-term	Towns, Local Chambers of Commerce, Grand County Planning Commission, Grand County Housing Authority	\$	
Near-term	Towns, Local Chambers of Commerce, GCCTB	\$	
Near-term	Towns, Grand County Planning Commission, CDOT	\$	

Goal	Action Item
Promote economic diversification and business attraction	2.1 Create an Economic Development Plan that includes business attraction and retention strategies.
	2.2 Conduct a feasibility study for a business incubator.
	2.3 Identify hotel and business development sites based on proximity to attractions, utility connections, and community demand.
	2.4 Update zoning and code requirements to allow for more creative business types and mixed-use areas.
Create a more stable annual economy	3.1 Conduct a feasibility study for Small Business Improvement Funds, loans, and grants.
	3.2 Host annual industry-specific workshops.
	3.3 Perform a transportation analysis to determine where and how transportation options, including public transportation and rental service offerings, and access can be improved.
	3.4 Create a Grand County Gateways Development Project to establish plans for Berthoud Pass, Rocky Mountain West, and Kremmling to welcome and orient people to Grand County.

TIMEFRAME

Near-term: 0-2 years

Mid-term: 2-5 years

Long-term: 5+ years

COST

\$: \$1 - \$499,999

\$\$: \$500,000 - \$999,999

\$\$\$: \$1,000,000+

Timeframe	Partners	Cost	Funding Resources
Mid-term	Grand County Community Development Department, Grand County Planning Commission	\$	DOLA Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI); USDA Rural Business Development Grant
Near-term	Grand County Community Development Department, Grand County Planning Commission	\$	U.S. EDA Planning and Local Technical Assistance Program
Near-term	Grand County Planning Commission, Towns	\$	
Mid-term	Grand County Community Development Department, Grand County Planning Commission, Towns	\$	
Mid-term	Local non-profits	\$	
Mid-term	Local Chambers of Commerce, Local non-profits	\$	
Long-term	Grand County Planning Commission, CDOT	\$	U.S. Department of Transportation – Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A); Department of Transportation (DOT) The Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program; Department of Transportation (DOT) – RAISE Grant
Mid-term	RMNP, Clear Creek County, Routt County, CDOT, USFS	\$\$	U.S. EDA Planning and Local Technical Assistance Program

Goal	Action Item
Promote the authentic “Grand Experience” year-round	4.1 Plan a Restaurant Week that features restaurants across the County.
	4.2 Plan shoulder-season festivals and conferences.
	4.3 Create an ecological tourism guide.
	4.4 Set shoulder season tourism goals and metrics.
	4.5 Promote night sky education and resources.
Cultivate and attract a strong workforce	5.1 Create a Workforce Retention Plan.
	5.2 Quantify workforce needs for social services.
	5.3 Develop a program to guide and support businesses transition to employee ownership.
	5.4 Collaborate with regional institutions of higher learning to support skill-building for entrepreneurship.
Promote sustainable visitor best practices	6.1 Display “Leave No Trace” principles at popular tourist destinations.
	6.2 Install electronic visitor kiosks at visitor centers and high-volume areas.
	6.3 Support municipalities on localized branding that highlights each town’s character.
	6.4 Support collaboration between Rocky Mountain National Park, U.S. Forest Service, local Chambers of Commerce, and Grand County Colorado Tourism Board to streamline the visitor experience.
Improve the quality of life for current and future residents	7.1 Host town-hall-type events focusing on topical issues for residents, especially tourism and entrepreneurship.
	7.2 Collaborate regionally with resorts, local public school districts, employers, and non-profits to expand housing opportunities and access to childcare.

TIMEFRAME

Near-term: 0-2 years

Mid-term: 2-5 years

Long-term: 5+ years

COST

\$: \$1 - \$499,999

\$\$: \$500,000 - \$999,999

\$\$\$: \$1,000,000+

Timeframe	Partners	Cost	Funding Resources
Near-term	Towns, Local Chambers of Commerce, Local non-profits, Grand County Community Development Department	\$	
Mid-term	Towns, Local Chambers of Commerce, Local non-profits, Grand County Community Development Department	\$	OEDIT Tourism Management Grant
Mid-term	GCCTB, Grand County Natural Resources, USFS, HTA	\$	OEDIT Tourism Management Grant
Near-term	GCCTB	\$	
Mid-term	Towns, Grand County Natural Resources, DarkSky Colorado	\$	
Mid-term	Grand County Department of Human Services, Grand County Housing Authority	\$	DOLA Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)
Near-term	Grand County Department of Human Services, Grand County Public Health	\$	
Near-term	Local non-profits	\$	
Mid-term	Colorado State University Extension	\$	
Mid-term	USFS, RMNP, HTA, Towns	\$	
Long-term	USFS, RMNP, HTA, Towns	\$\$\$	T-Mobile Hometown Grant
Near-term	Towns, Local Chambers of Commerce, GCCTB	\$	
Long-term	RMNP, USFS, Local Chambers of Commerce, GCCTB	\$	OEDIT Tourism Management Grant
Near-term	GCCTB, Local Chambers of Commerce, County Commissioners	\$	
Long-term	Grand County Department of Human Services	\$	



06 HEADWATERS AND HORIZONS



This Tourism Revitalization Plan provides a blueprint for Grand County and local stakeholders to cultivate sustainable tourism, enhance visitor experiences, and bolster economic vitality. While Grand County has long been a sought-after destination for adventure, relaxation, and outdoor exploration, recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 East Troublesome Fire, and changes in the tourism market have led local leaders to prioritize the strategies set forth in this Plan to better support the changing tourism landscape. This Plan and related tools help Grand County reimagine how it welcomes visitors in a way that both strengthens the economy and enriches the quality of life for residents and businesses, alike.

The development of this Plan incorporates rigorous data analysis and key stakeholder input from various entities, including county and town officials, the Colorado Tourism Office, Rocky Mountain National Park, the United States Forest Service, Headwaters Trails Alliance, local Chambers of Commerce, local businesses, and community members. This information reflects what is important to the people of Grand County and serves as the foundation for the goals and action items identified by this Plan. The key findings have been summarized below.

Key Findings

By improving its data collection, maintenance, and communication methods, Grand County could have a clearer vision of the needs and opportunities around the tourism economy.

This Plan includes several tools to help with data collection and maintenance, including the **Economic Asset Inventory**, and **Business, Workforce, Lodging, and Community Surveys**. In addition to communicating tourism data, improvements to visitor communication methods, such as comprehensive mapping and electronic signage, would improve the visitor experience.

Expanded economic resources that are not seasonal will help stabilize the economy.

Additionally, updated zoning and a business incubator could pave the way for entrepreneurship and more creative business types. Businesses related to tourism should still be prioritized for attraction. For example, a new hotel with conference space could attract a new demographic of visitors and create more jobs in the County. The **Hotel Attraction Package** developed for this Plan could help with that goal.

Affordable housing, homebuying assistance, access to childcare, and mental health resources would address some of the most pressing concerns from the community.

Tourism affects everyone in Grand County, which is why improving the quality of life for future and current residents is a goal in this Plan.

Addressing workforce needs, including housing, will stabilize the area's economy and allow for business expansion.

Workforce attraction and retention has become a concern as the growing number of visitors puts pressure on local businesses and the rising cost of housing makes it difficult for workers to move to Grand County.

The promotion of sustainable visitor best practices will help prevent the effects of overtourism.

As the number of visitors continues to increase, environmental degradation becomes a growing concern. Educational programming, signage, and kiosks could include information about the East Troublesome Fire, environmental hazards, and "Leave No Trace" principles.

Extending tourism into the shoulder seasons and during the weeks will have a substantial benefit.

These goals will help the County assess the impact of events, marketing campaigns, and resources. Shoulder season events that do not solely rely on the cooperation of weather include a restaurant week, festivals, and conferences. Resources such as ecological guides and night sky tourism are beneficial because they can be used by visitors at any time of year.

By embracing new trends, fostering innovation, and honoring local cultures and the environment, Grand County has an opportunity to transform challenges into sustainable growth. With increased tourism comes increased demand on resources, including workforce, infrastructure, and services. This Plan provides a road map to ensure that those resources are sustainable and that growth, which Grand County is poised to experience, is managed appropriately. A revitalized tourism sector can breathe new life into local businesses, create diverse job opportunities, and inspire meaningful connections between people and the places they visit.

This Grand County Tourism Revitalization Plan is a chance to build a tourism ecosystem that not only celebrates what makes Grand County unique but also ensures that future generations will continue to experience its beauty and richness.



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APPENDIX A

Grand County Tourism Conditions Memorandum

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APPENDIX B

Accommodations Spreadsheet and Summary

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APPENDIX C

Hotel Attraction Package

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APPENDIX D

Market Analysis Summary

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APPENDIX E

Economic Asset Inventory

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APPENDIX F

Business, Lodging, Workforce, and Community Surveys

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APPENDIX G

Sensitivity Indicator

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APPENDIX H

Explore Grand County: Online Visitor Experience Tool

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APPENDIX I

Grant Matrix

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