



Institute of Outdoor Recreation & Tourism
UtahStateUniversity.

Stewarding a Growth Engine

Outdoor Recreation, the Central Wasatch, and Utah's Economy



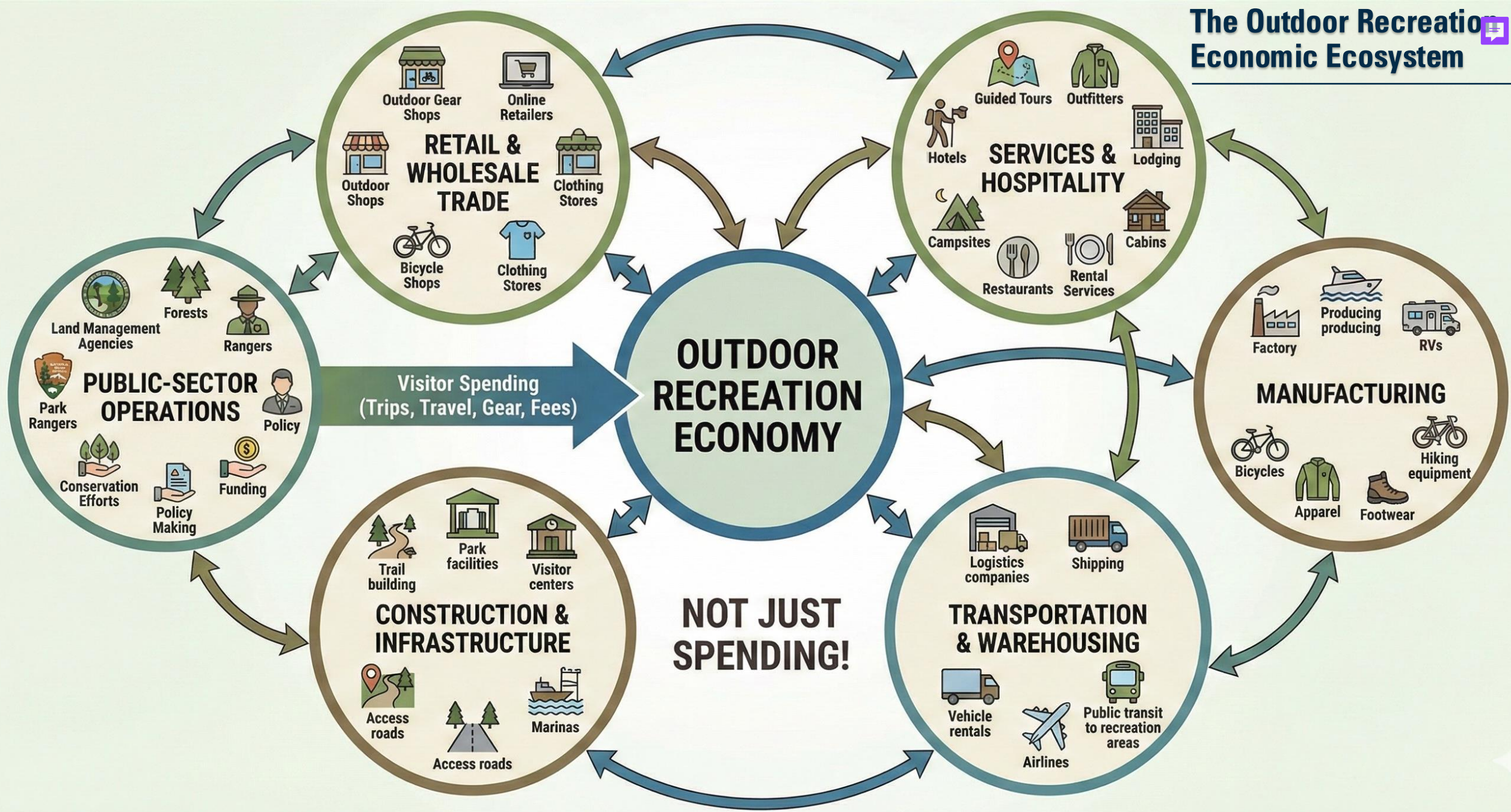
2026 Central Wasatch Symposium
Millcreek, UT
January 8, 2026

Jordan W. Smith (jordan.smith@usu.edu)





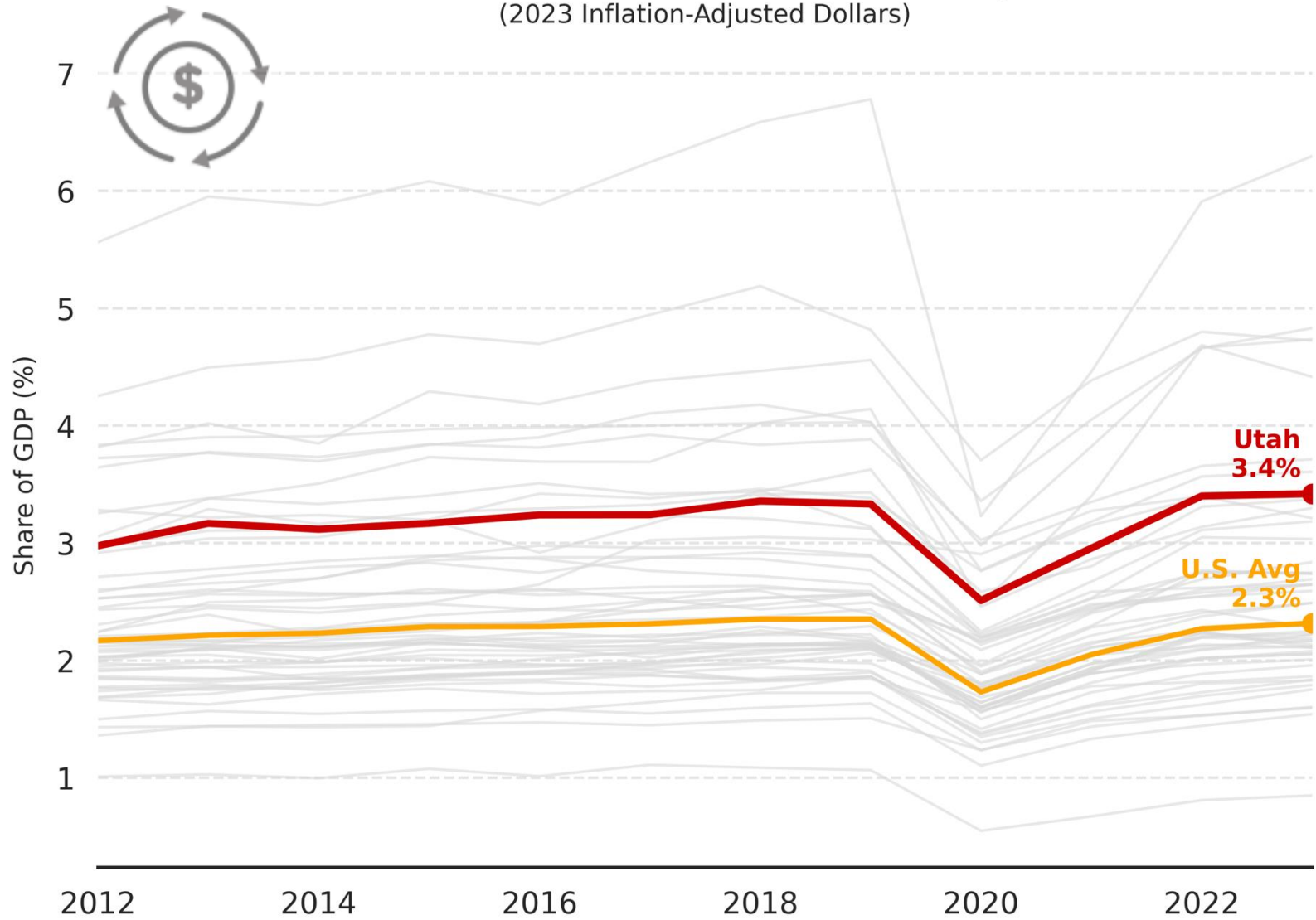
Four Utah's, One Landscape



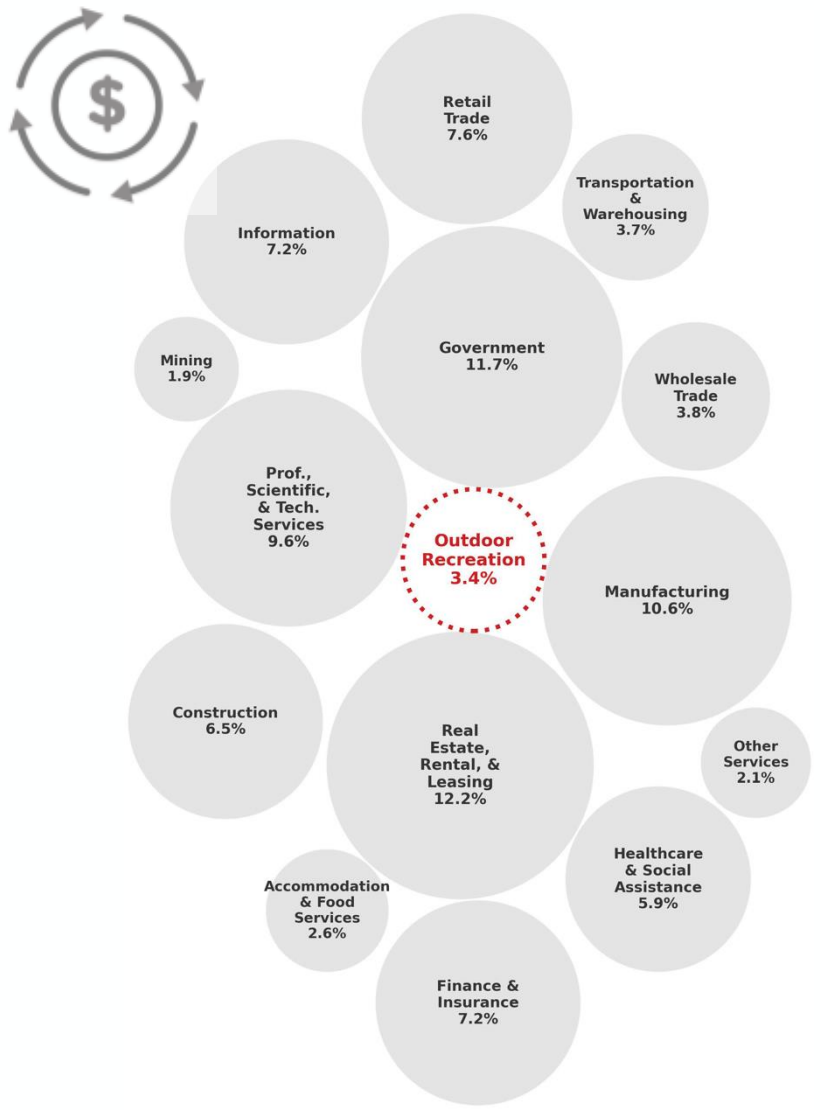
A Core Economic Sector

Outdoor Recreation Share of GDP by State

(2023 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)



Share of Utah's GDP by Industry

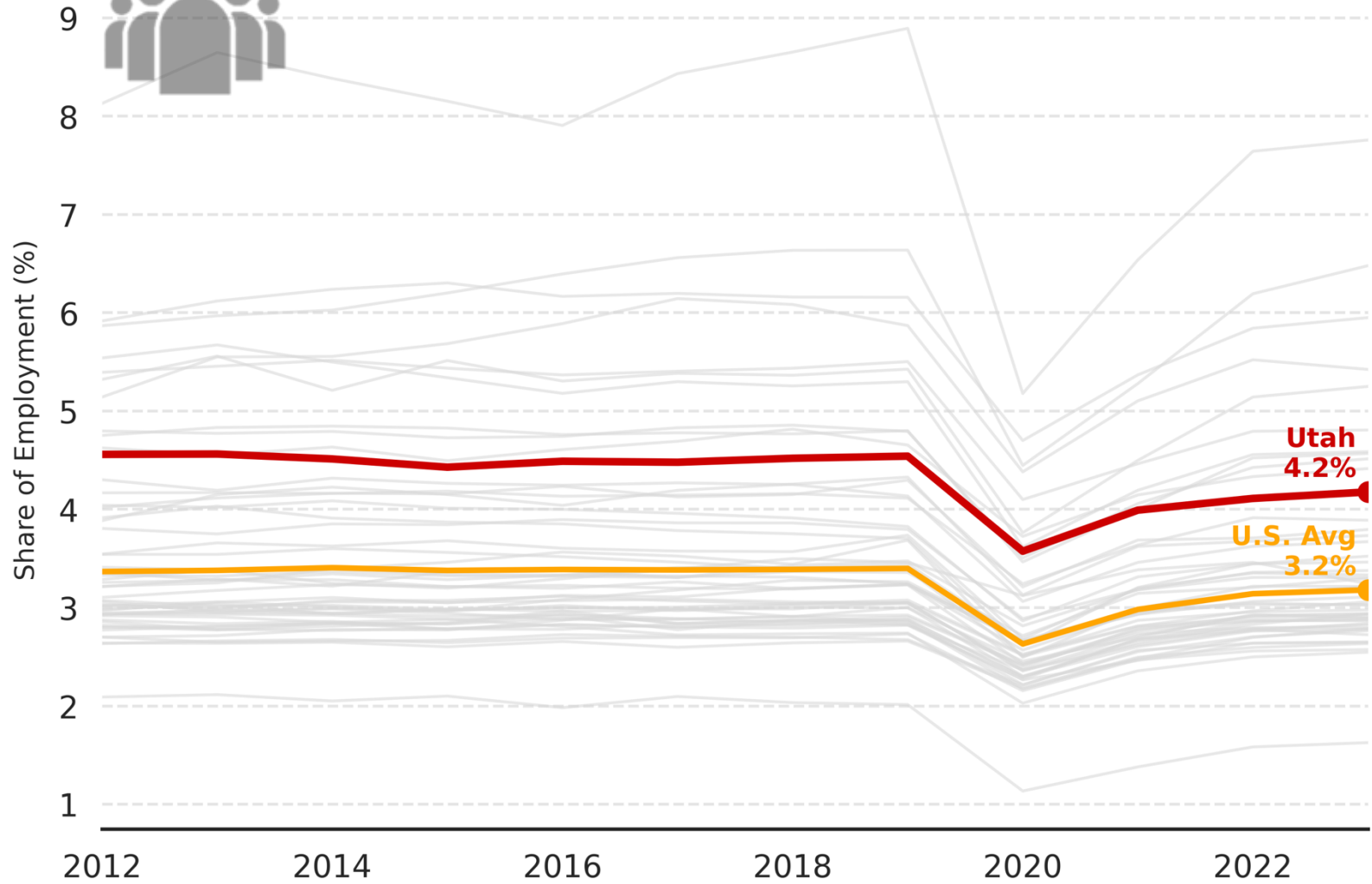


Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism analysis of Bureau of Economic Analysis data

A Core Economic Sector

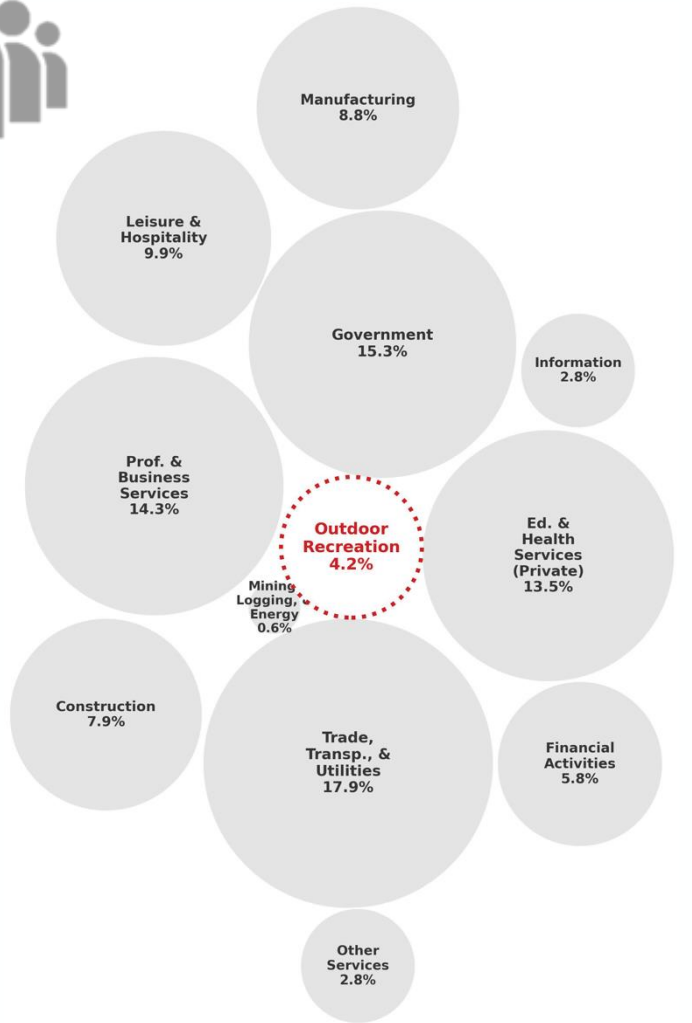
Outdoor Recreation Share of Employment by State

(Percentage of Nonfarm Jobs)



Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism analysis of Bureau of Economic Analysis and Bureau of Labor Statistics Data

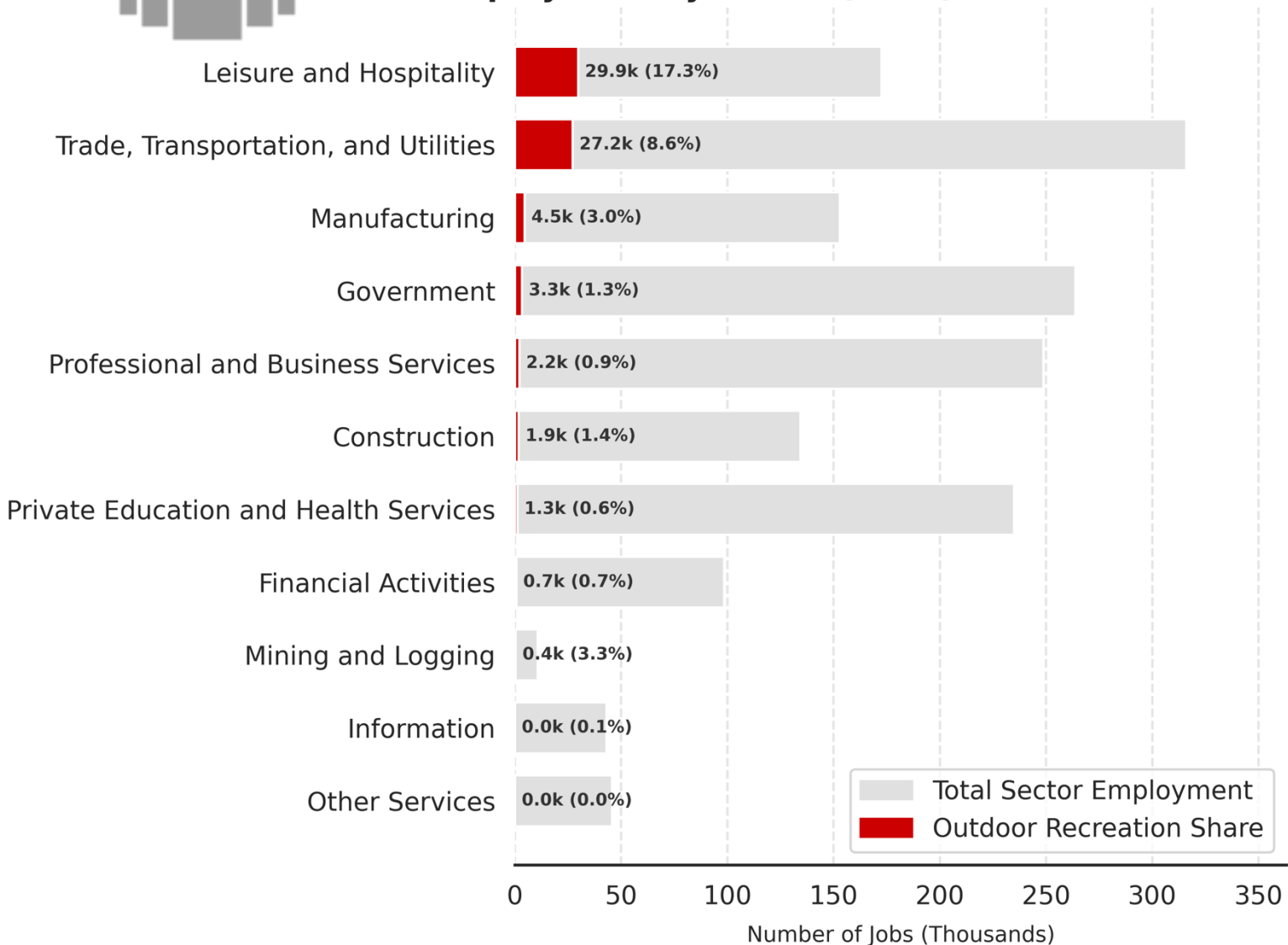
Share of Utah's Employment by Industry



A Core Economic Sector



Utah Employment by Sector (2023)



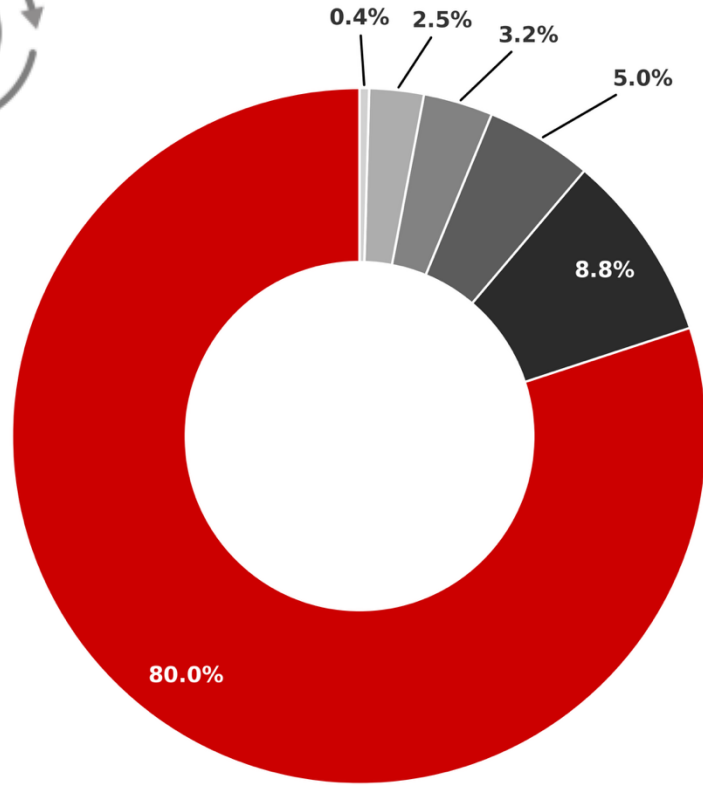
Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism analysis of Bureau of Economic Analysis and Bureau of Labor Statistics Data

Economic Contributions of the Central Wasatch

GDP Generated by the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache NF



(by Program Area)



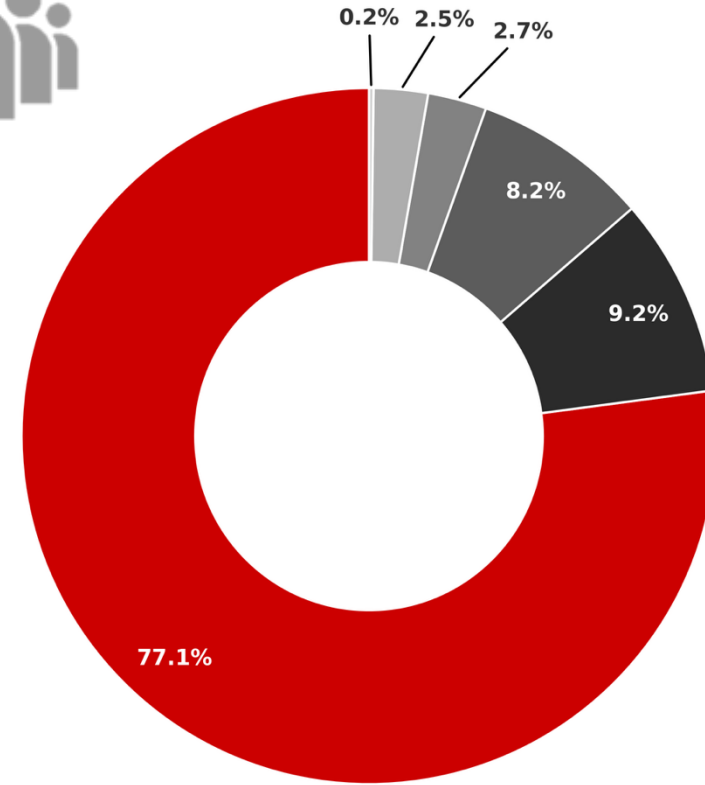
Program Area

- All Recreation (\$228,033,000)
- Agency Operations (\$24,988,000)
- Livestock Grazing (\$14,209,000)
- Payments to States & Counties (\$9,212,000)
- Forest Products (\$7,212,000)
- Minerals & Energy (\$1,263,000)

Jobs Supported by the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache NF



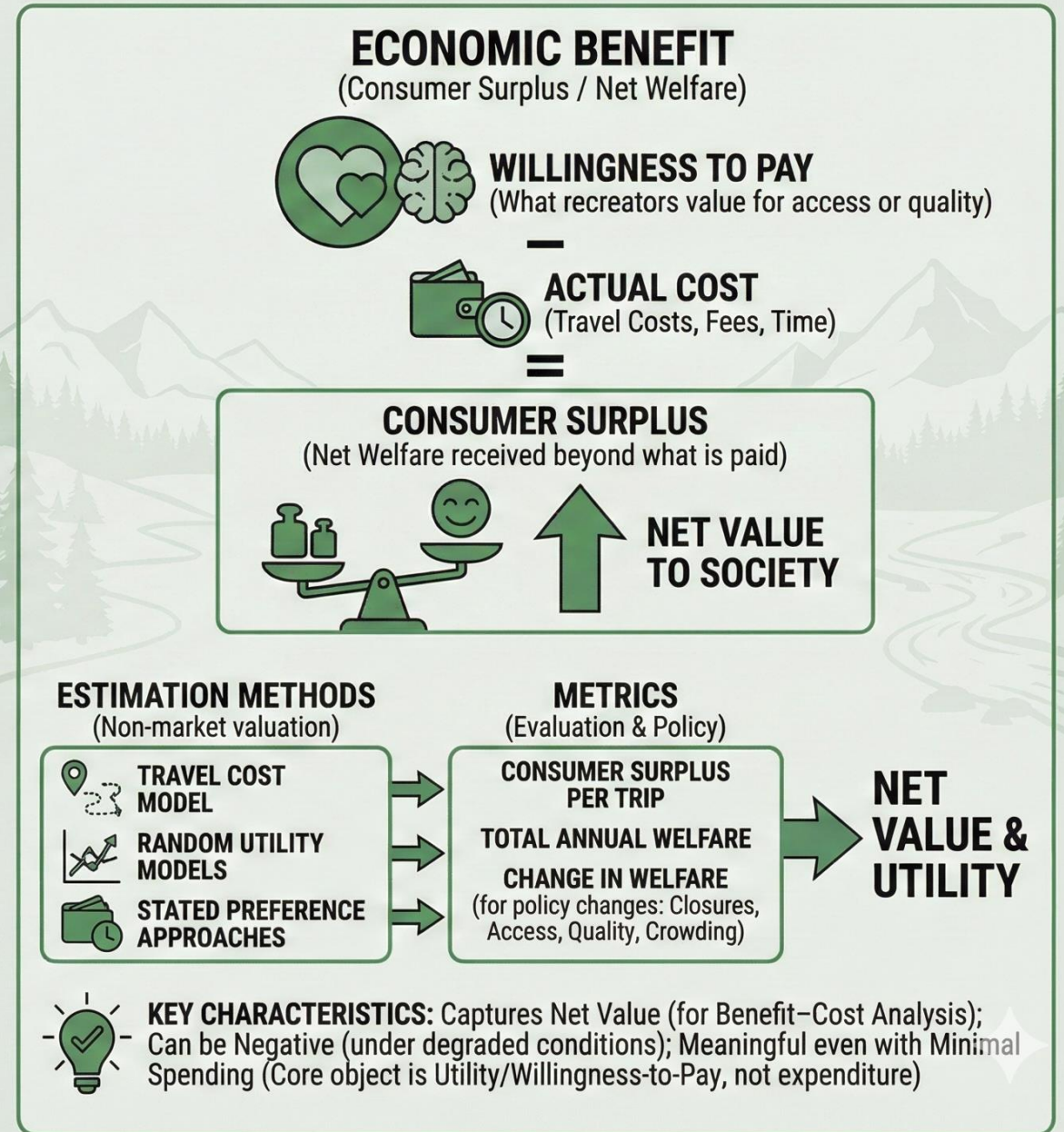
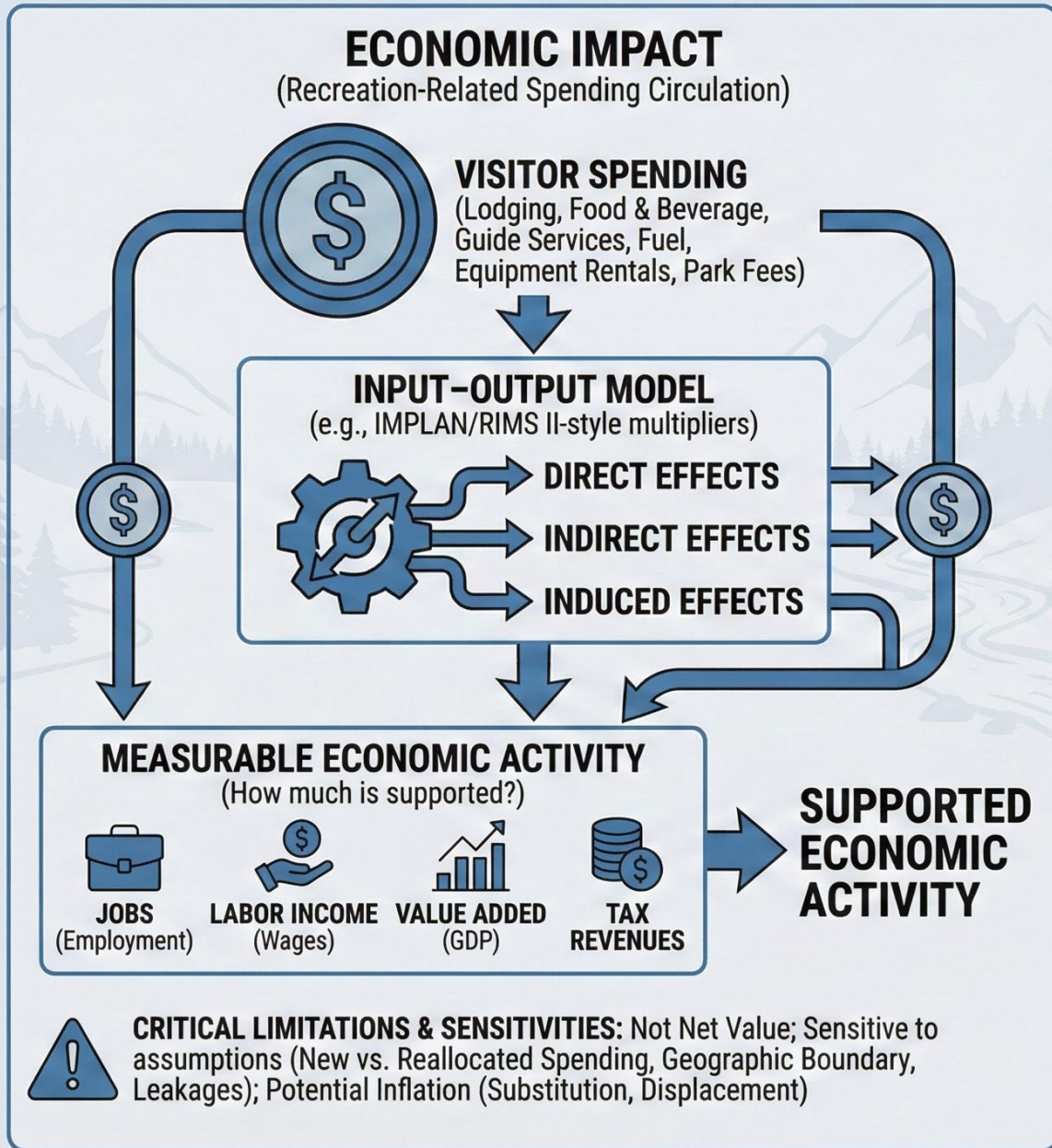
(by Program Area)



Program Area

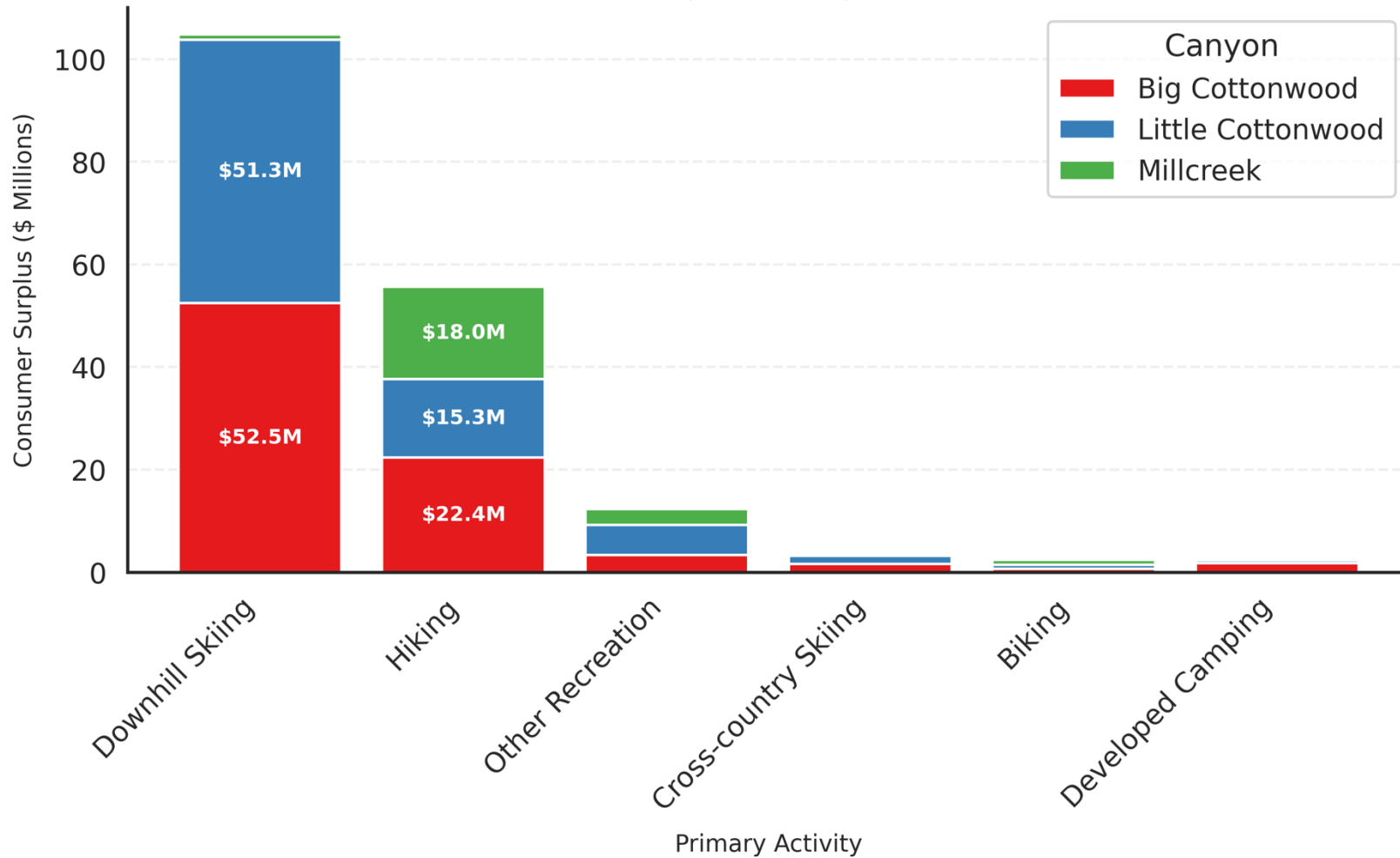
- All Recreation (3,670)
- Agency Operations (440)
- Livestock Grazing (390)
- Forest Products (130)
- Payments to States & Counties (120)
- Minerals & Energy (10)

Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism analysis of USDA Forest Service data



Economic Benefits from the Central Wasatch

Consumer Surplus Generated by Activity & Canyon (2025 Dollars)



Estimates using data from: Smith, J. W., & Lamborn, C. C. (2023). *Outdoor recreation use of the Central Wasatch: Results from the 2021-2022 visitor use survey*. Logan, Utah: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism. and inflation-adjusted region- and activity-specific consumer surplus estimates from Rosenberger, R. S., et al. (2017). *Recreation economic values for estimating outdoor recreation economic benefits from the national forest system*. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station.

Drivers



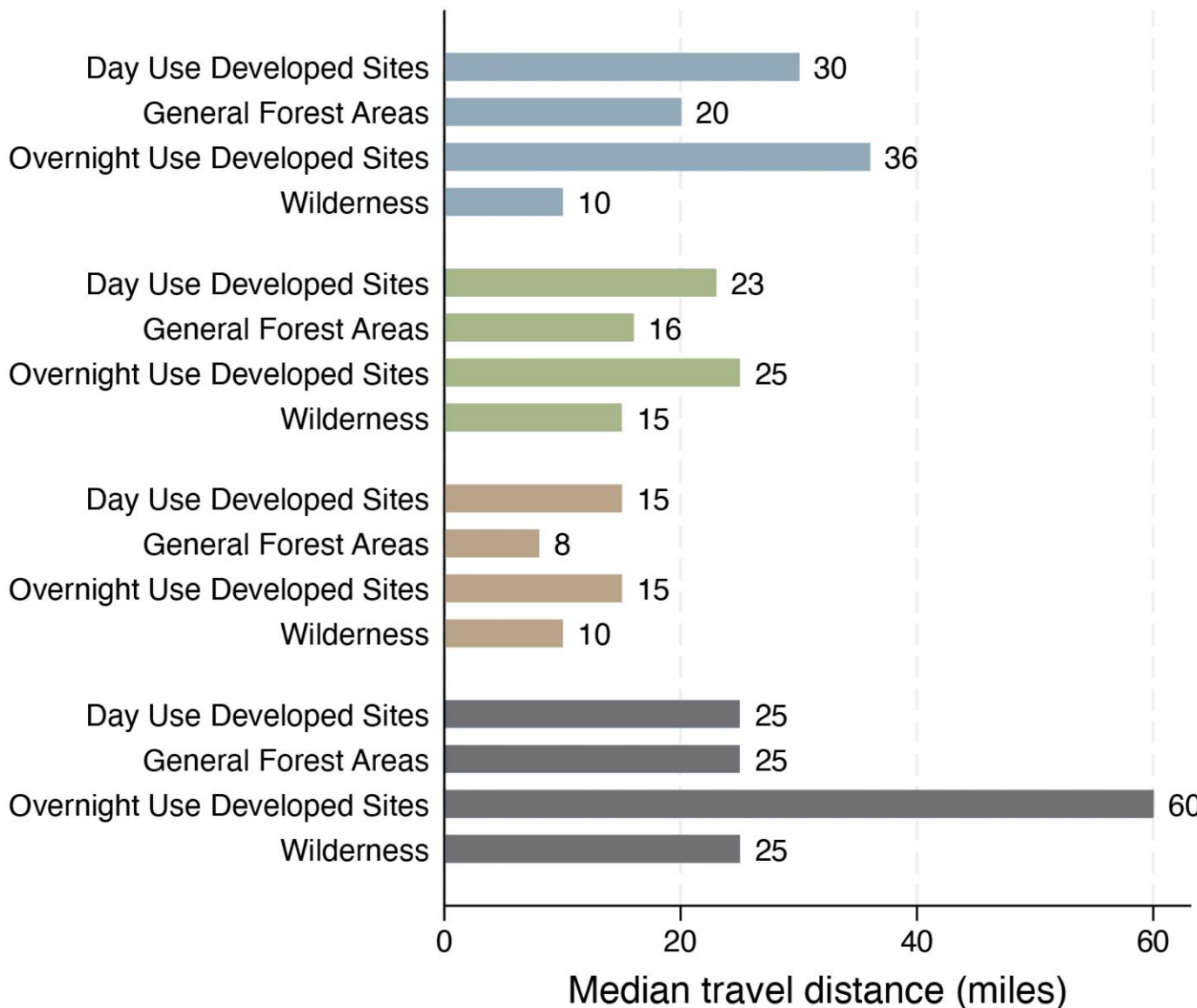
- Access
- Uniqueness
- Quality



Drivers

- Access
- Uniqueness
- Quality

LITTLE COTTONWOOD



Smith, J. W., & Lamborn, C. C. (2023). *Outdoor recreation use of the Central Wasatch: Results from the 2021-2022 visitor use survey*. Logan, Utah: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

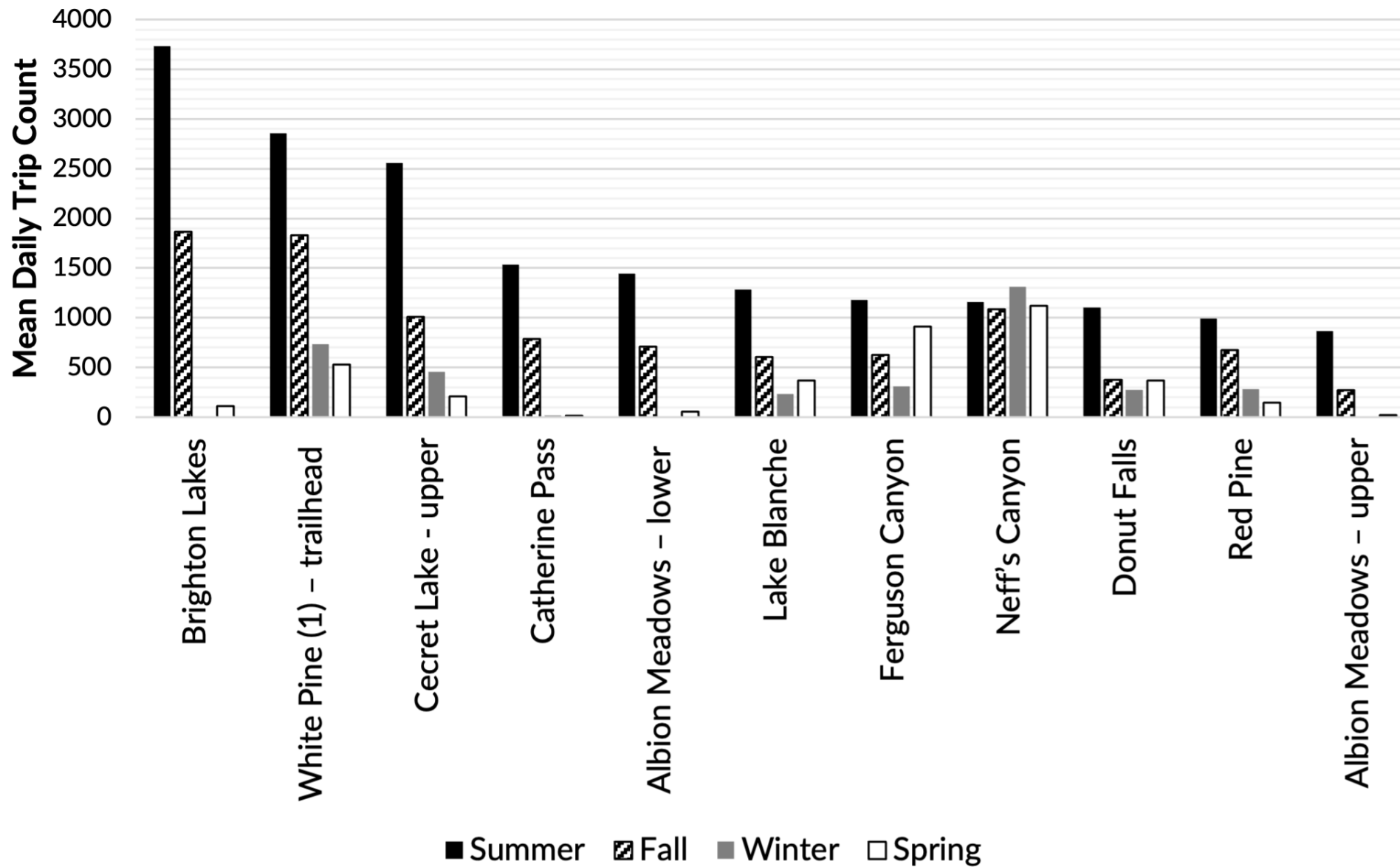


Drivers

- Access
- Uniqueness
- Quality

Drivers

- Access
- Uniqueness
- Quality



Smith, J. W., Spornbauer, B., & Lamborn, C. C., & (2023). *Outdoor recreation use and indicators of the ecological, physical, and social characteristics of recreation settings in the Central Wasatch: Phase 2 trail use report*. Logan, Utah: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

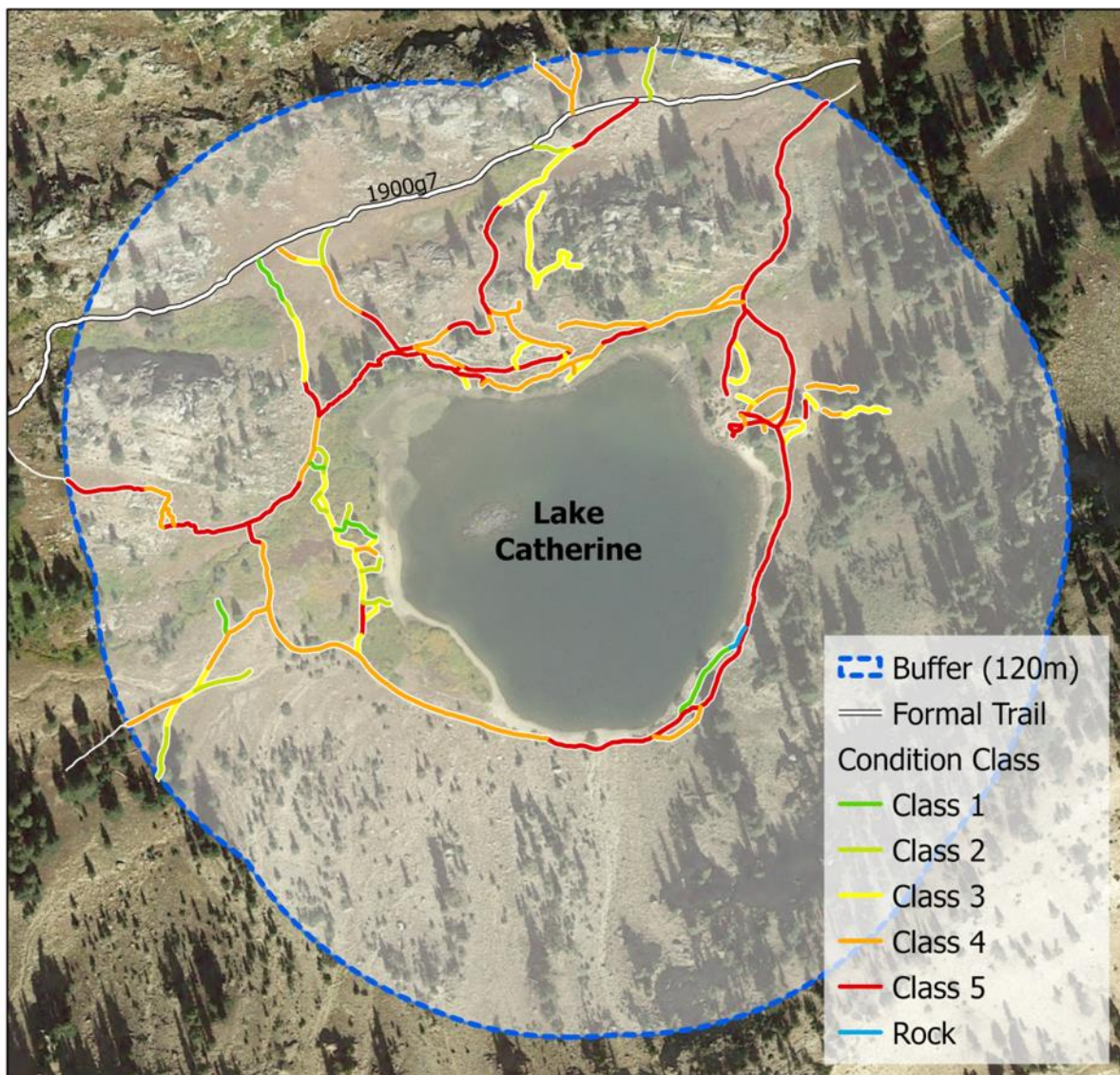
Drivers

- Access
- Uniqueness
- Quality

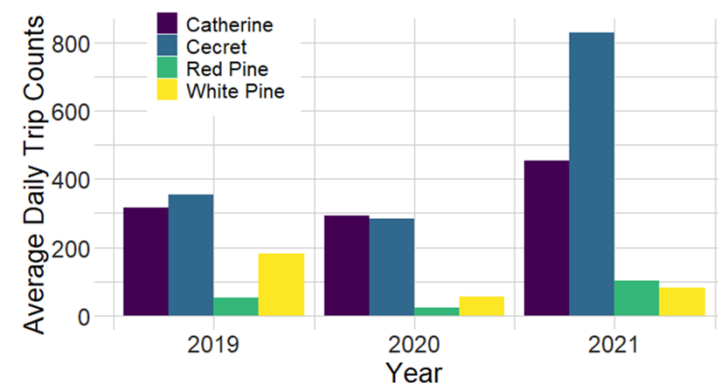
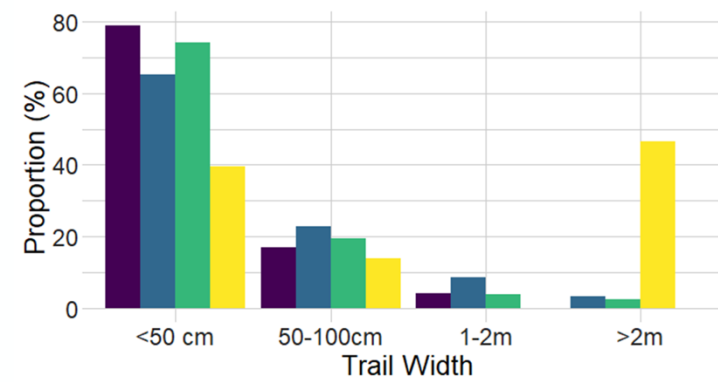
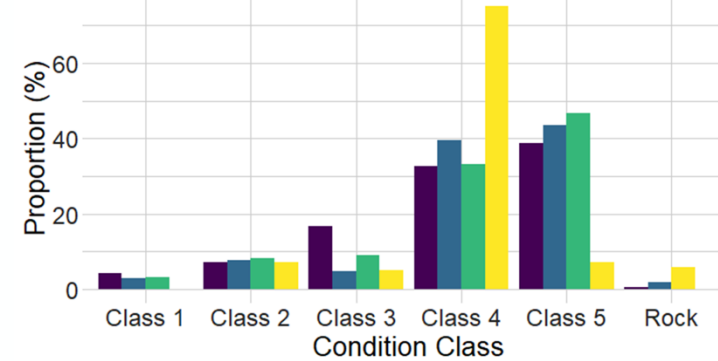


Drivers

- Access
- Uniqueness
- Quality



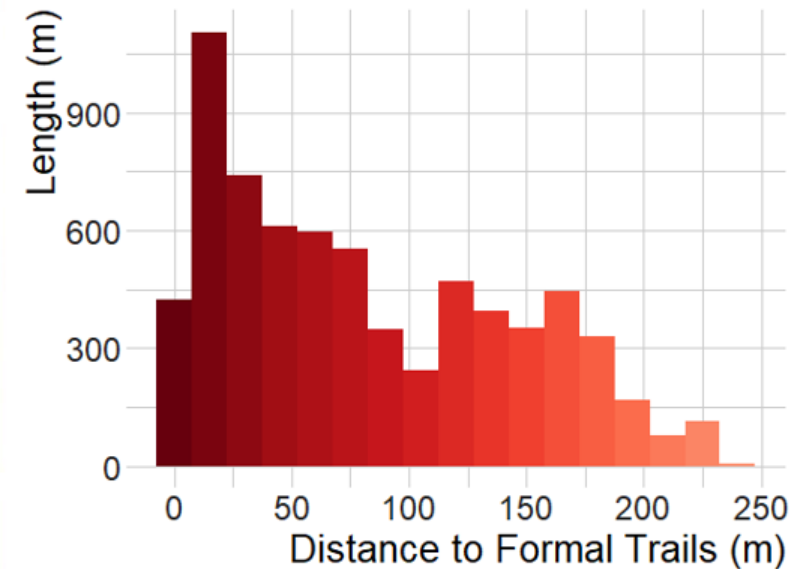
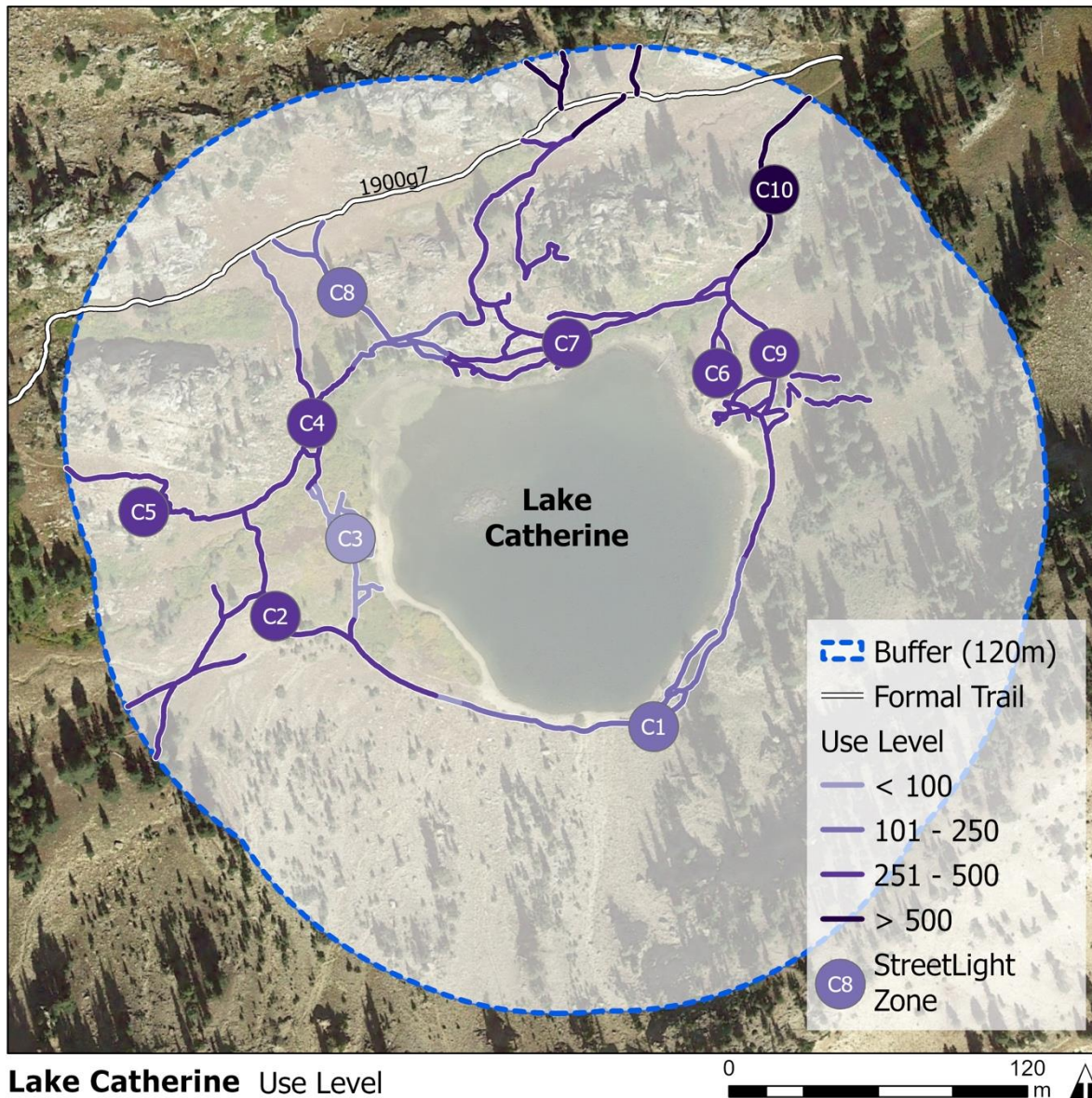
Lake Catherine Informal Trails - Condition Class



Spernbauer, B., Monz, C., D'Antonio, A., & Smith, J. W., & (2023). Factors influencing informal trail conditions: Implications for management and research in urban-proximate parks and protected areas. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 231, 104661.

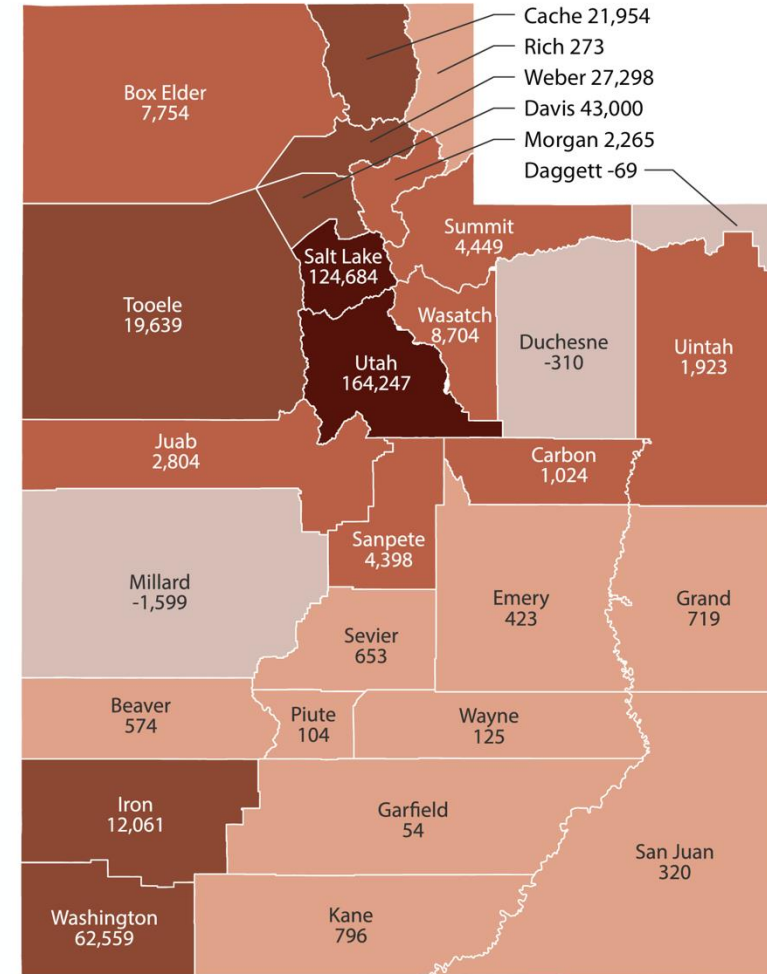
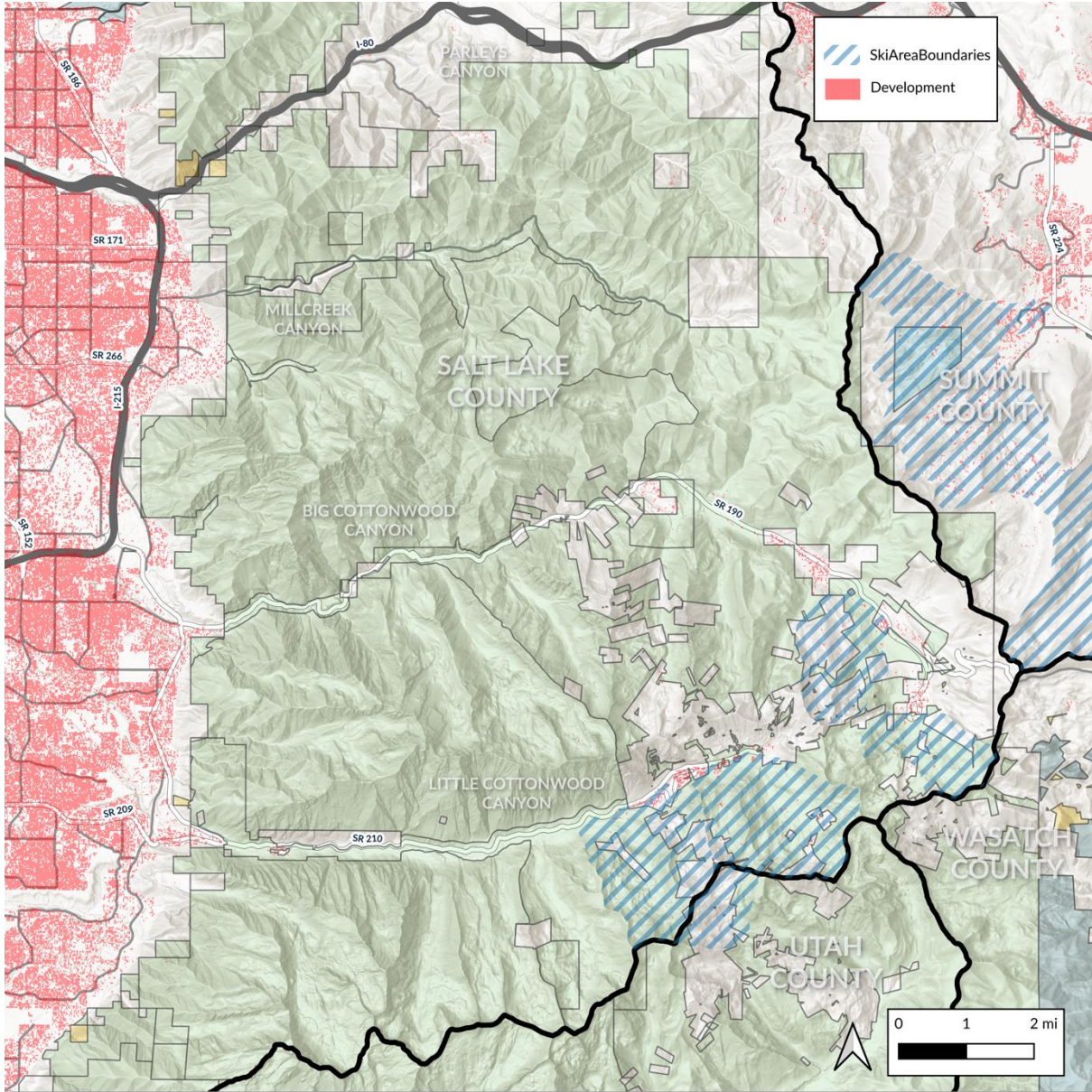
Drivers

- Access
- Uniqueness
- Quality



Spernbauer, B., Monz, C., D'Antonio, A., & Smith, J. W., & (2023). Factors influencing informal trail conditions: Implications for management and research in urban-proximate parks and protected areas. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 231, 104661.

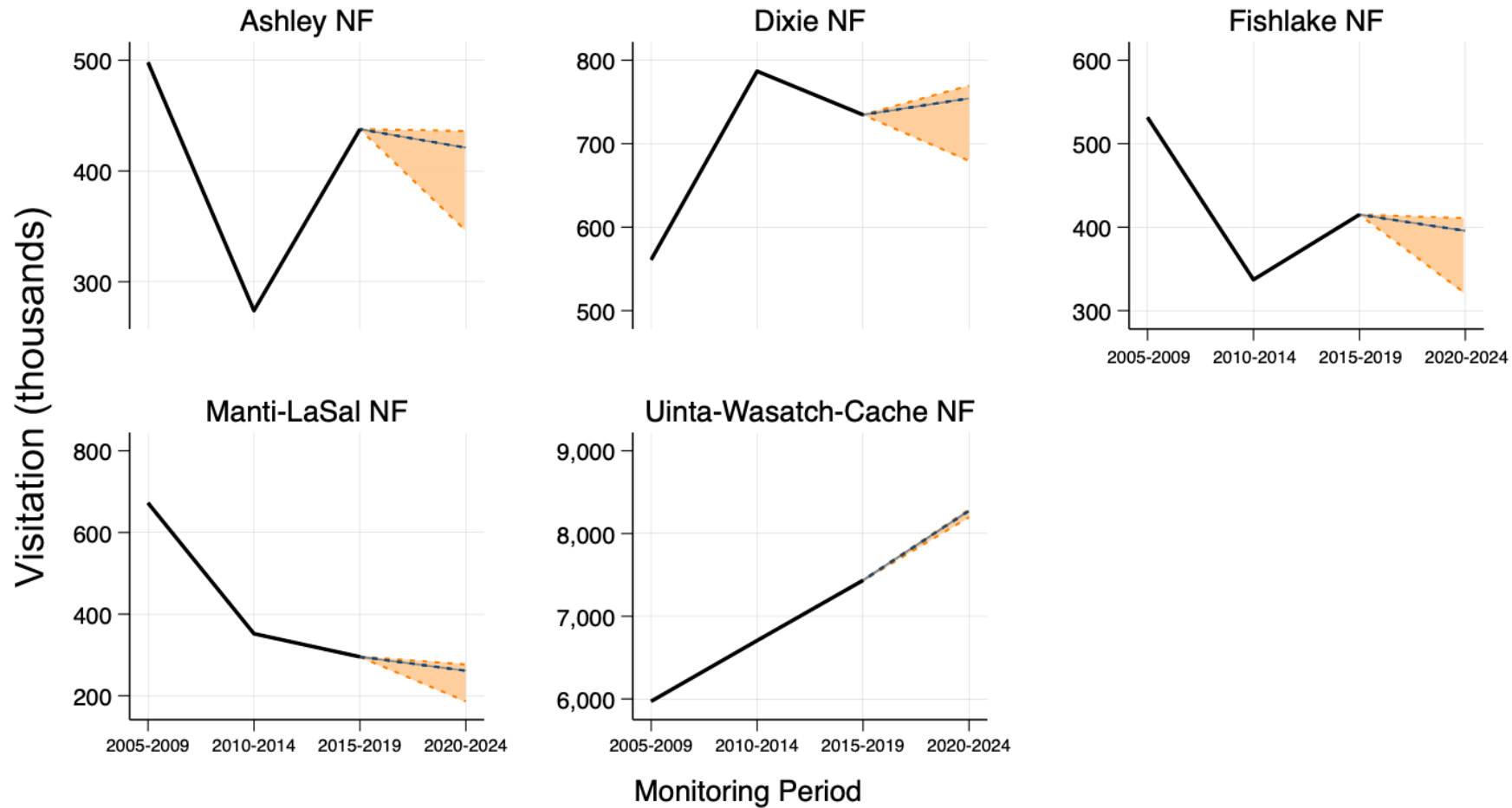
Urban Proximity – A Boon and Bane



Decline
 1,000 to 10,000
 75,000+
 0 to 1,000
 10,000 to 75,000

Hollingshaus, M., et al. (2024). *Utah state and county short-term planning projections, 2024-2033*. Salt Lake City, UT: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.

Urban Proximity – A Boon and Bane



- Status-quo forecast
- State economy (+/- 20%)
- - - Gas prices (+/- 20%)
- Historic annual attendance

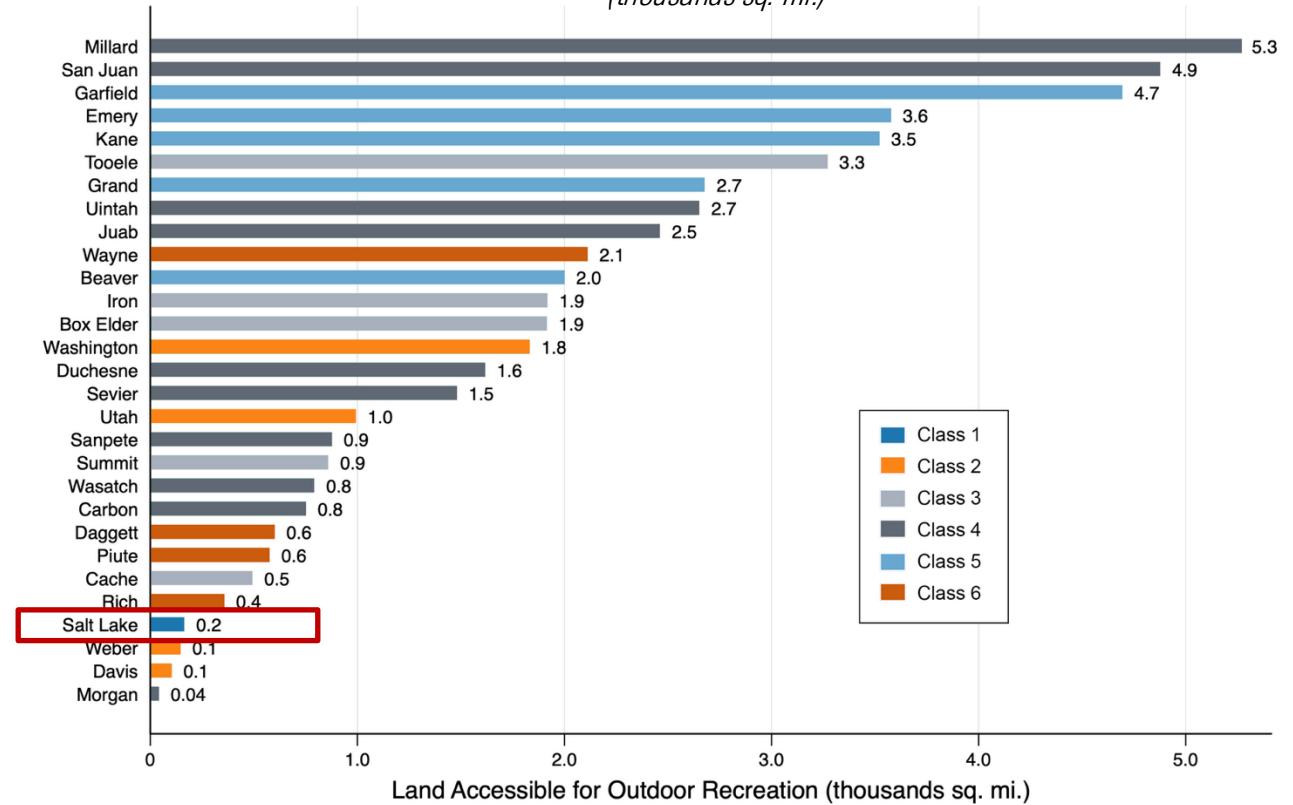
Smith, J. W., & Monz, C. (2024). *Supply, demand, and fiscal sustainability of outdoor recreation in Utah*. Logan, UT: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

Congestion is an Economic Signal



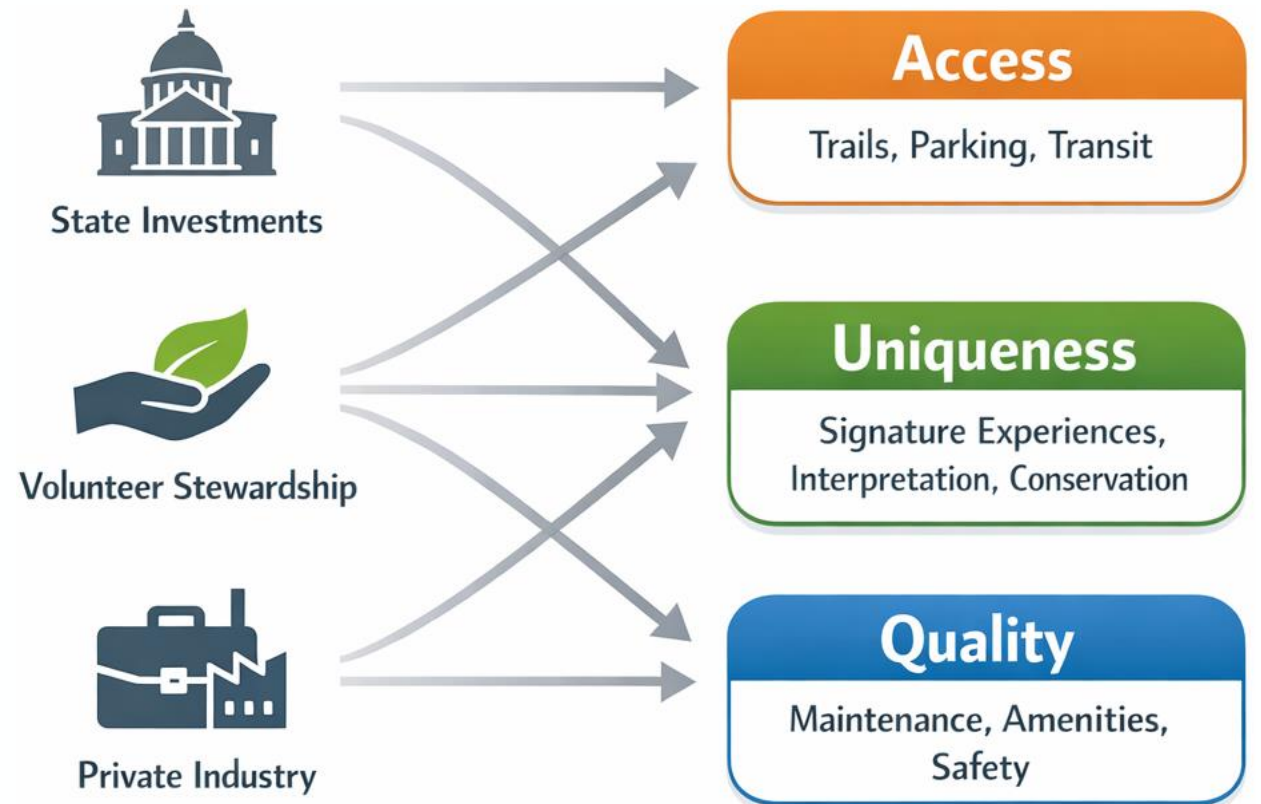
Land Accessible for Outdoor Recreation

(thousands sq. mi.)



Smith, J. W., & Monz, C. (2024). *Supply, demand, and fiscal sustainability of outdoor recreation in Utah*. Logan, UT: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

Stewardship Investments



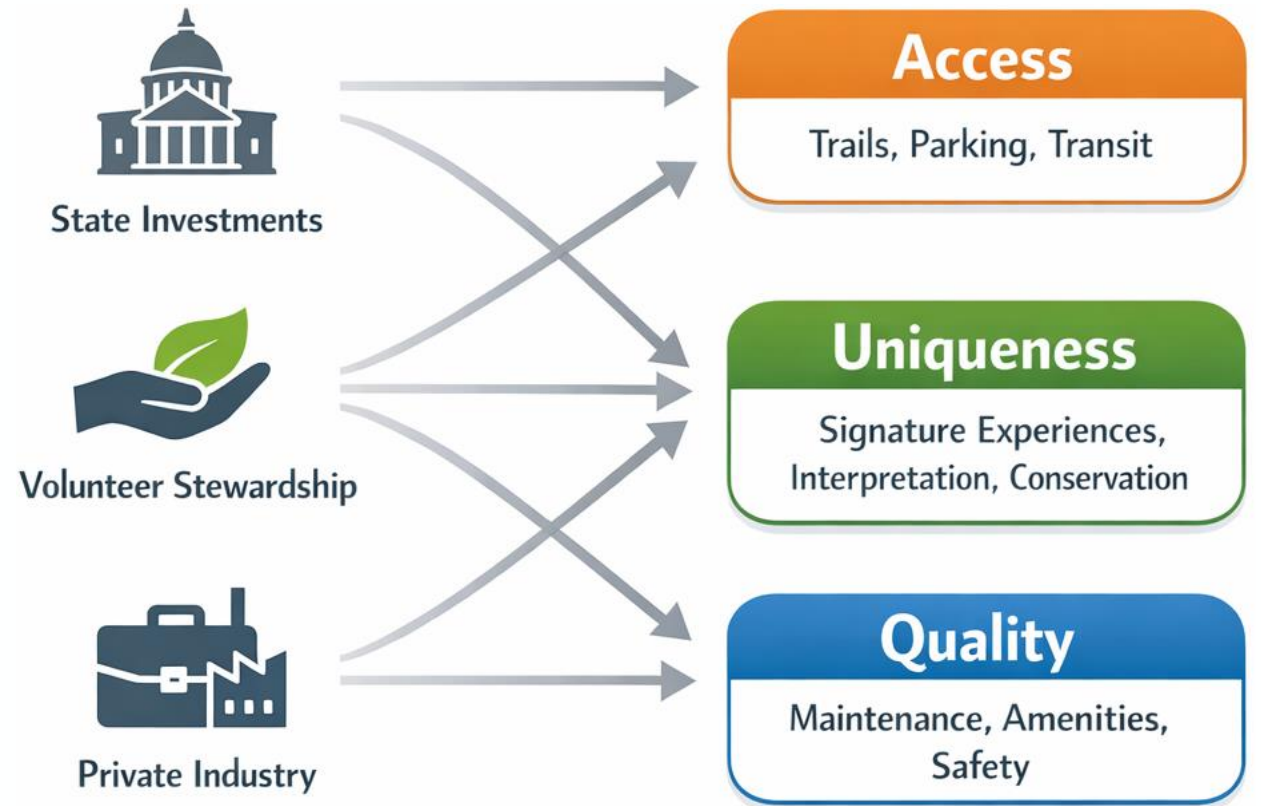
AN OVERVIEW OF STATE FUNDING FOR
OUTDOOR RECREATION AND TOURISM IN UTAH

Jordan W. Smith, Ph.D.
Casey Trout



Smith, J. W., & Trout, C. (2023). *An overview of state funding for outdoor recreation and tourism in Utah*. Logan, UT: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

Stewardship Investments





Smith, J. W., & Trout, C. (2023). *An overview of state funding for outdoor recreation and tourism in Utah*. Logan, UT: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

Public land, private partners: The role of private industry in outdoor recreation on public lands in the Western U.S.

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^{1*}S. J. & Jessie E. Quinney College of Agriculture & Natural Resources, Utah State University, 5215 Old Main Hill, Logan, 84322, Utah, USA.

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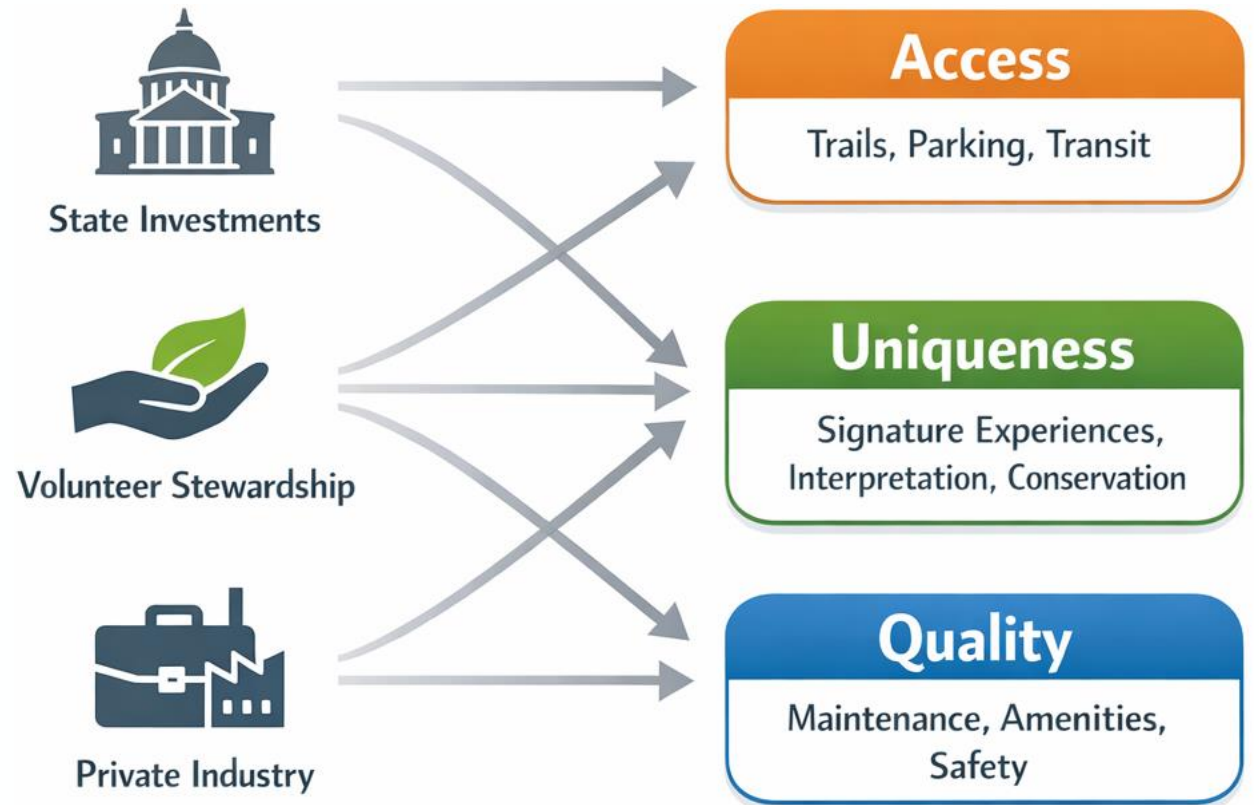
Abstract

Western public lands have become America's playground through an evolving partnership between public agencies and private firms. This chapter traces how those relationships evolved and how changing federal capacity, law, and public expectations reshaped private leverage. It begins with railroad and concession systems that turned the nation's first national parks into visitable destinations; then reviews the mid-century public investment programs—contrasting mandates across NPS, USFS, and BLM; then it examines the ability of the ski industry to establish operational leases and significant capital investments on public lands following the 1986 Ski Area Permit Act and its 2011 amendment, highlighting tensions over water and housing. The chapter also analyzes outdoor brands' mobilization against land transfers and monument reductions, while noting selective engagement on diffuse problems such as crowding and gateway community housing. Across eras, the chapter argues federal authority has set—and reset—the terms under which private capital participates; public dollars secure access and standards while private dollars add services and scale. The balanced, policy-relevant history is intended to inform future policy and management efforts.

Keywords: conservation politics; economic diversification; co-production; governance; infrastructure investment

Smith, J. W. (2026). *Public lands, private partners: The role of private industry in outdoor recreation on public lands in the Western U.S.* In: B. Rensink (ed.). *Outdoor Recreation History in the American West*. (pp. xxx-xxx). University of Washington Press.

Stewardship Investments





Four Utah's, One Landscape



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UtahStateUniversity.

Questions?

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