

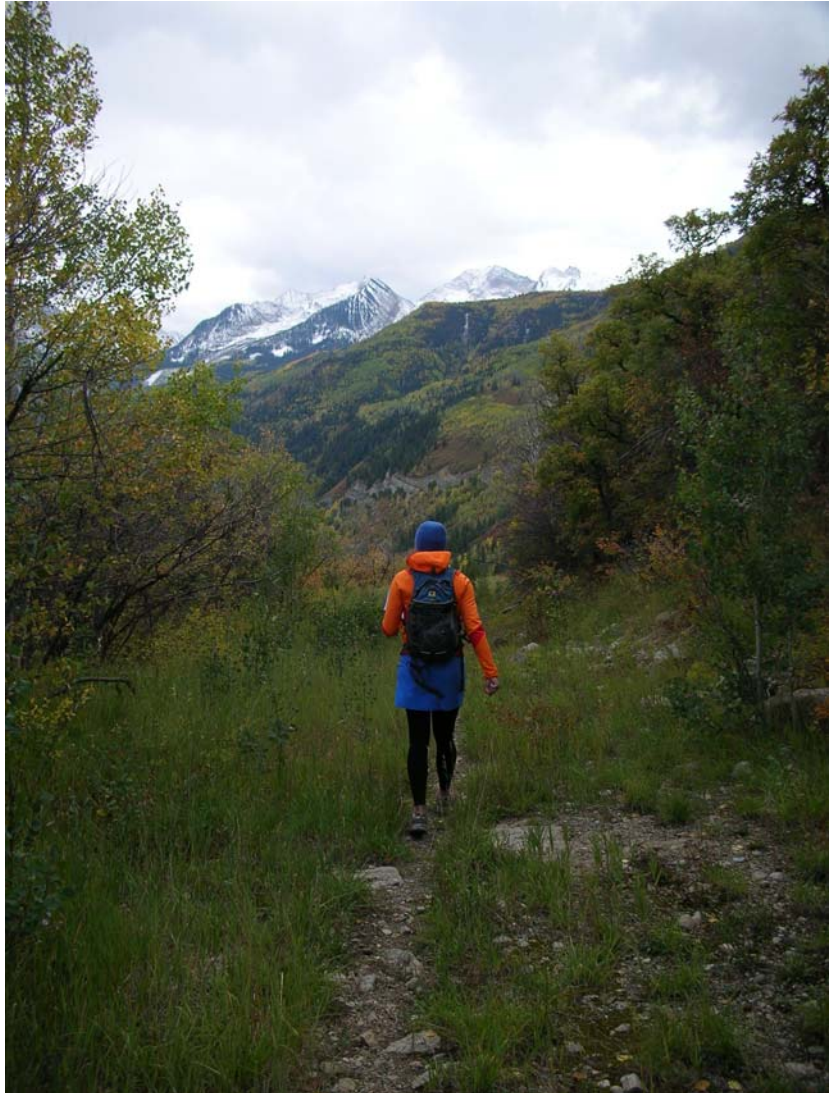
# Wilderness Economics 101

Paul Lorah, Professor of Geography at St. Thomas University in Minnesota, studied growth patterns in 113 western counties and found that counties with higher percentage of wilderness have faster total income, employment, per capita income, and population growth rates than counties without wilderness. Total employment in wilderness counties grew 65 percent faster than total employment in non-wilderness counties.

While Lorah's analysis shows that the presence of wilderness is associated with economic growth, it does not prove that wilderness causes economic growth. Some level of causation could however be inferred based on survey work by Dr. Gundars Rudzitis, Geography Professor at the University of Idaho. In a survey of residents in 227 counties with wilderness, Rudzitis found that the presence of wilderness was cited as an important reason why 60% of migrants moved to the wilderness county, and why 45% of long-term residents stay.

In an article published in the *Journal of Regional Science*, Kevin Duffy-Deno examined the effect of wilderness on growth patterns in 250 non-urban counties in the Intermountain West. He found no statistical evidence of a negative relationship between federal wilderness and county-level employment — suggesting that wilderness causes no economic harm to county economies. Furthermore, the study found no empirical evidence that counties heavily dependent on extractive industries (timber, mining, etc.) have been adversely affected by wilderness designation.

These studies show that claims that wilderness locks up resources and hurts local economies are *false*.



# The Economic Benefits of Wilderness

What is the economic value of wilderness? Logging companies can size up a timber stand and write a check based on the current market price; mining and oil and gas companies bid for leases based on commodity markets. But how do we put a price tag on the "non-market" benefits of wilderness? Where do we get information about the values of scenic beauty, watershed protection, our quality of life and the effects on our market economy?

Economists have struggled with this issue for years, and too often those non-market values have been overlooked in favor of the market values by resource managers charged with managing our national forests, parks, refuges and Bureau of Land Management lands.

That's why Dr. Pete Morton, resource economist for The Wilderness Society, has developed a framework for resource managers to use, which will allow them to account for the full array of goods and services provided by wild lands. The framework allows managers to carefully weigh the economic benefits of protecting wild lands versus the consequences of developing them. The framework includes:

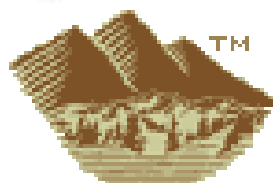
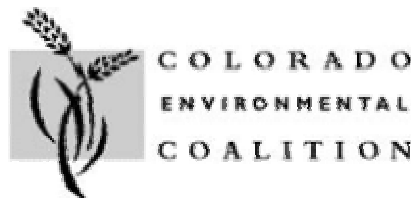
- Direct use benefits, such as recreation;
- Community benefits, such as new residents or business attracted to the high quality of life;
- Scientific benefits, such as research and education;
- Off-site benefits, such as increased property values;
- Biodiversity conservation;
- Ecological services, such as watershed protection; and
- Passive use benefits, such as the value of conserving wild lands for future generations.

Morton's framework has allowed wilderness economists to generate valuation estimates that better capture the true value of a given wilderness. These valuation studies can thereby show that designating more Wildernesses is actually to the greatest advantage in the long run versus destructive extractive land uses.

[www.WhiteRiverWild.org](http://www.WhiteRiverWild.org)



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