




CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL COALITION

A person wearing a blue shirt, tan pants, and a brown hat is fly fishing in a river. The river flows over rocks, creating rapids. The background is a dense forest of evergreen trees under a clear sky.

2022 CDT SMALL BUSINESS SURVEY



About this Report

As a connector of landscapes, communities, and cultures, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT) provides a setting for community members, decision makers, conservationists, outdoor enthusiasts, and everyone connected to the lands and waters of the Divide, to come together to discuss how to steward the vital natural, cultural, and historic resources found across its entirety. With this report, the Continental Divide Trail Coalition hopes to highlight the role of the cooperative stewardship model in the management of the CDT, what we accomplished in 2021, and what we are looking forward to in 2022.

Acknowledgements

The Continental Divide Trail Coalition would like to thank all the small business owners who took the time to complete our survey and provide valuable feedback that will inform our work in the future.



INTRODUCTION TO CDTC

Mission

The mission of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC) is to complete, promote, and protect the CDT. With a growing trail community which includes 19 designated CDT Gateway Communities and over 2500 active members, CDTC is re-imagining the future of cooperative landscape stewardship, building strong partnerships with diverse communities, and supporting access to the enjoyment and economic benefits provided by the lands and waters along the Divide.

Overview of Work

In its mission to complete, promote, and protect, the CDT, CDTC engages with Gateway Communities, agency staff, members, recreationists, volunteers, conservationists, local leaders, members of Congress, and others to help ensure that the holistic benefits of the CDT are available to all. Through stewardship programs, trail completion efforts, community connections, advocacy, and educational programs, CDTC continues to build on the promise made by Congress over four decades ago to protect and provide access to the natural, historic, and cultural resources of the Divide landscape.

A Decade of Stewardship

CDTC celebrated its 10th anniversary in May 2022. To learn more about CDTC and events highlighting 10 years of trail stewardship, you can visit: continentaldividetrail.org.



The stewardship of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and the surrounding landscape continues to be critically important to the economy, life, and overall well-being of rural communities in the Rocky Mountain West. As we continue to collectively shape the future of our public lands and our communities, the recreational, cultural, and scenic resources of the CDT are more important to protect than ever. Protection of the Continental Divide Trail ensures that business owners, residents, local decision-makers, and visitors can continue to explore and connect on the Continental Divide and enjoy the myriad economic, health, mental, educational, and physical benefits that it provides.

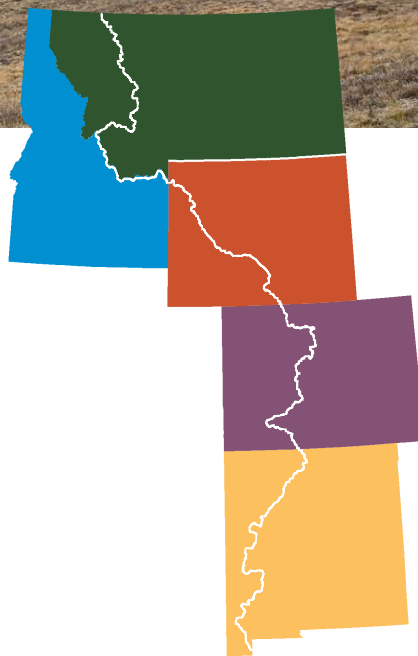
— *Andrea Kurth (she/her),
Gateway Community Program
Manager, CDTC*

THE BASICS

The State of the Outdoor Recreation Economy on the Divide

According to a Headwaters Economics report released in November 2021, the outdoor recreation economy contributed **\$374 Billion to the GDP in 2020**. The outdoor recreation economy provides over 5.2 million jobs nationwide, and contributes to employment in the arts, entertainment, hospitality, food service, retail trade, manufacturing, transportation, and other industries.

Established as a National Scenic Trail in 1968, the Continental Divide Trail is U.S. Forest Service-administered trail that protects the natural, cultural, and historic resources along its length, while providing increased access to the Divide landscape, including the 20 National Forests, 25 Wilderness areas, 3 National Parks, 1 National Monument, and 13 BLM resource areas the trail connects.



The CDT offers myriad hiking, equestrian, fishing, birdwatching, skiing, and other recreational opportunities along its 3,100 miles. As it runs from the border with Mexico to the border with Canada along the Continental Divide, it traverses through and near mountain communities whose economies are increasingly bolstered by visitors and recreationists accessing nearby public lands. Outdoor recreation is an economic powerhouse along the CDT.

820 miles of trail in NM

750 miles in CO

510 miles in WY

1020 miles in ID and MT

CDT States' Outdoor Recreation Economies

Rankings amongst all 50 states, outdoor recreation as a percentage of state GDP

Source: Headwater Economics

#1

Montana: 3.8% of the state GDP, Jobs: 44K

#4

Wyoming: 3.4% of the state GDP, Jobs: 14K

#8

Idaho: 2.7% of the state GDP, Jobs: 30K

#11

Colorado: 2.5% of the state GDP, Jobs: 120K

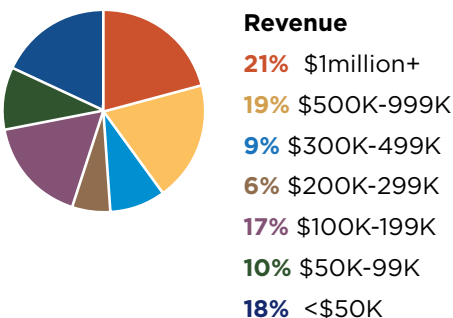
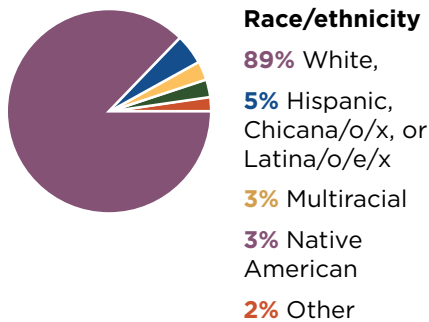
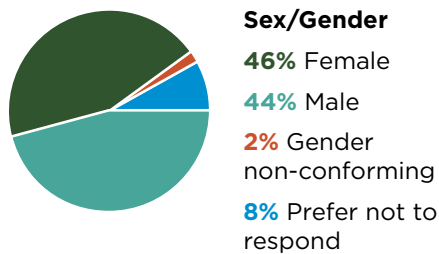
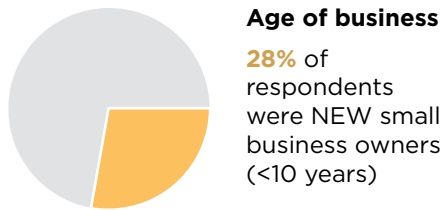
#27

New Mexico: 1.9% of the GDP, Jobs: 26K

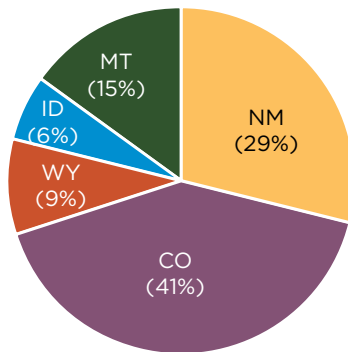
WHO WE SURVEYED

From August to December 2021, CDTC surveyed 136 small business owners in 38 communities located along the Continental Divide Trail to learn more about how the CDT impacts their businesses, the local economy, and their support for public lands.

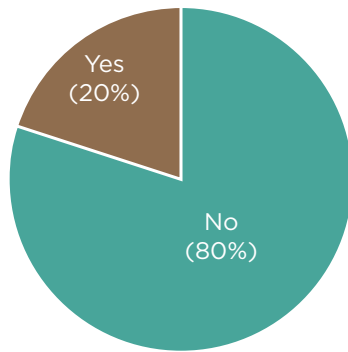
Overview of demographics data



Q: In which state is your business located?



Q: Is your business located in a designated CDT Gateway Community?

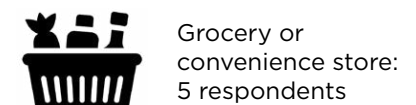
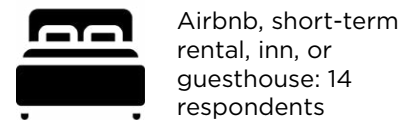
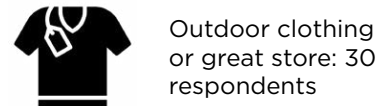


Respondents not in Gateway Communities were located in

- Taos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Embudo, Farmington, Gila Hot Springs, Pie Town, and Hillsboro in **NM**
- Clark, Creede, Golden, Nathrop, Kremmling, Gunnison, Rabbits Ears Pass, and Rio Grande County in **CO**
- Atlantic City and Jackson in **WY**
- Ovando and Seeley Lake in **MT**

Q: How would you categorize your business?

(Business could mark more than one.)



CDT GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

CDT Gateway Communities are welcoming destinations along the Continental Divide Trail for visitors from around the world. Towns and counties designated as official CDT Gateway Communities are those that CDTC recognizes as friendly to trail users and dedicated to the completion and protection of the trail. We partner with Gateway Communities to give visitors a great experience and to continue our work completing, promoting, and protecting the Continental Divide Trail. From the high desert of New Mexico to the snow covered mountains of Montana and everywhere in between, CDT Gateway Communities span the length of the trail.

The impact of CDT Gateway Community Designation

Of respondents in CDT Gateway Communities:



70% reported that trail users spend money and have a positive impact on their revenue



60% reported they'd seen an increase in trail users coming through town since designation



54% saw an increase in awareness of the Continental Divide Trail among business owners and residents of their city or town



49% felt there was an overall increase in awareness of their city or town as an outdoor recreation hub or destination



41% saw an increase in traffic from trail users at their business

Gateway Communities

Community	Population
Silver City, NM	9,386
Grants, NM	8,968
Cuba, NM	755
Chama, NM	995
Pagosa Springs, CO	2,147
South Fork, CO	349
Lake City, CO	391
Salida, CO	6,373
Leadville/Twin Lakes, CO	10,586
Grand Lake, CO	516
Steamboat Springs, CO	13,764
Encampment & Riverside, WY	462
Rawlins, WY	8,122
Pinedale, WY	1,788
Lemhi County, ID	8,027
Butte, MT	33,964
Anaconda, MT	7,632
Helena, MT	33,124
Lincoln MT	898



Overwhelmingly, business owners in CDT communities have experienced a positive impact from the CDT and support enhancing and protecting the trail and the surrounding landscape.



78% believe protecting, promoting, and enhancing the Continental Divide Trail is important to the well-being of businesses, jobs, and their community's economy.



80% have seen growth in business in their community at large due to use of the Continental Divide Trail since 2014.



60% have experienced growth in their business in particular due to use of the Continental Divide Trail since 2014.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

50% saw a decrease in business revenue in 2020, while 32% experienced an increase in business. 15% reported no change in revenue.

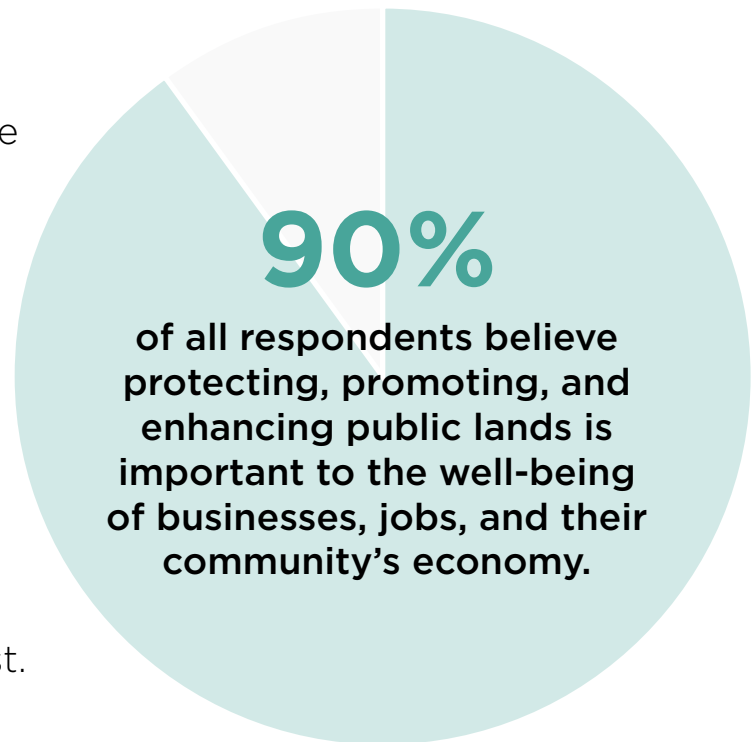
Colorado Economic Impact

In 2021, CDTC partnered with the University of Wisconsin Whitewater's Fiscal and Economic Research Center to conduct a study on the economic impact of the CDT in Colorado. The report identified the current state of, and the potential of, the CDT as an economic driver for jobs, revenue, and other local industries in the rural economies of the Divide by looking at factors such as the main user groups visiting the lands and waters around the CDT, the average dollars spent on single or multi-day trips, popular hotspots along the trail, and the impact of the pandemic. The study found that:

- More than half of respondents came to Colorado to experience the Continental Divide.
- Responses demonstrated that the most appealing characteristics of the CDT were the scenery, the adventurous wilderness, and the peaceful, quiet terrain.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that protecting public lands in Colorado was very or extremely important.

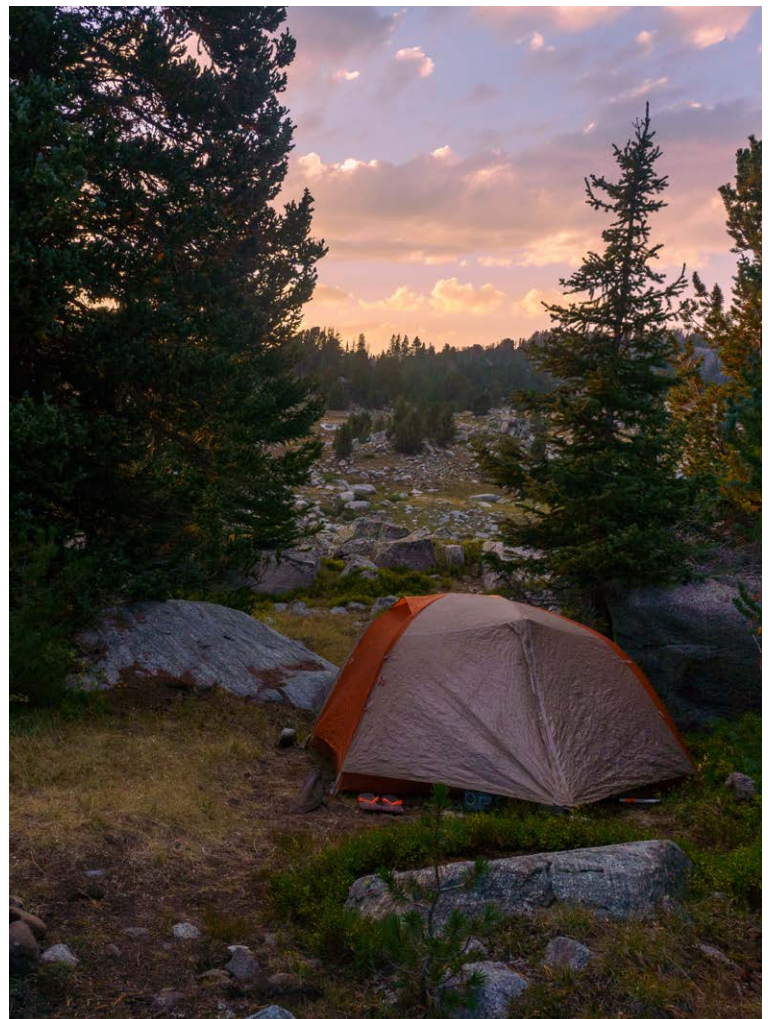
THE VALUE OF THE DIVIDE LANDSCAPE

The Continental Divide is the backbone of the North American continent. It is home to thousands of species of wildlife, the backyard for many growing communities, and the watershed for over 180 million people. In addition to being a place for all to explore, learn, and connect, the Divide is home to thousands of small businesses and entrepreneurs growing the outdoor recreation industry and bringing new opportunities to the Rocky Mountain West.



The new federal **“America the Beautiful Initiative”** commits to conservation priorities that create new jobs, provide good wages, and build new career pathways. The Principles of America the Beautiful include:

1. Pursue a Collaborative and Inclusive Approach to Conservation
2. Conserve America's Lands and Waters for the Benefit of All People
3. Support Locally Led and Locally Designed Conservation Efforts
4. Honors Tribal Sovereignty and Support the Priorities of Tribal Nations
5. Pursue Conservation and Restoration Approaches that Create Jobs and Support Healthy Communities
6. Honor Private Property Rights and Support Voluntary Stewardship Efforts of Private Landowners and Fishers
7. Use Science as a Guide
8. Build on Existing Tools and Strategies with an Emphasis on Flexibility and Adaptive Approacheshe Beautiful Principles



Mike Fuhrmann; opposite: Matthew Morelli

SUPPORT FOR 30x30



A key component of the America the Beautiful Initiative that the Biden administration has committed to is the protection of at least 30% of lands and waters by the year 2030. This action is necessary in the fight against climate change in order to stop the loss of natural lands and support natural systems that communities and wildlife depend on for clean air, water, food, and their way of life. Of business owner respondents, **70% support the 30x30 initiative.**

Respondents believe that increased land and water protections, aligned with 30x30, could:

59%

Increase awareness of my community as an outdoor recreation hub or destination

58%

Increase the number of outdoor enthusiasts coming through my community

56%

Provide outdoor recreation opportunities for residents

49%

Increase stewardship engagement such as volunteerism and outdoor learning opportunities

46%

Improve the quality of life in my community

46%

Preserve cultural traditions like hunting and fishing

45%

Increase business in my community

42%

Improve public health and wellness in my community

35%

Provide greater access to green spaces for historically underserved communities (Black, Indigenous, Latinx, LGBTQ+, disabled, low socioeconomic status etc.)

BUSINESS MEMBER FOCUS GROUP

CDTC's Business Member Program

CDTC's Business Membership Program is a great way to demonstrate businesses' commitment to preserving the nationally significant Continental Divide Trail, and to contribute to the positive feedback loop of trail users visiting and benefiting gateway communities. Almost 90% of small business owners along the CDT report that trail users contribute substantially to their community's economy. By raising awareness of the trail as a CDTC Business Member, members situate their business at the center of the growing outdoor recreation economy.

In November of 2021, staff from CDTC sat down with a focus group composed of nine businesses across the trail with the intent to gain greater insight into how local economies are impacted by the stewardship of the CDT. From that conversation, these are the top concerns and challenges impacting the CDT trail community, as well as the opportunities businesses see in continuing to expand their communities' connection to the CDT experience.

Mike Fuhrmann

Challenges

#1 Trail Connectivity

Gap sections of the trail pose a significant barrier to recreationists seeking a continuous footpath and locals exploring the trail in their own backyard. Incomplete sections and roadwalks are not the scenic experiences that travelers desire on the CDT, and often raise concerns regarding navigation and safety which can be a deterrent.



Clif Reeder

#2 Extreme Weather Events

Wildfires, flooding, windstorms, and other extreme climate events created obstacles for tourism and access to public lands. Communities across the West are on the frontlines of these unprecedented conditions, which pose a threat to businesses, public health, and the way of life for many in small rural towns.



The biggest threat right now is fires because fire season is a fifth season in the Western United States. That's certainly stopped people from going out, and it makes people divert on their hikes, segment hikers and thru-hikers alike."
— Steve R. Hill, he/him, owner of Pintler's Portal Hostel in Anaconda, Montana

#3 Creating Connections

A top priority for businesses is ensuring that travelers on the CDT have information on all the amenities, means of support, and businesses located in Gateway Communities, as well as information on changing conditions on the ground impacting routes and points of access.



The access point is not the problem...it is the distance (to town). That's where my shuttle comes into play. Most folks, they'd much rather be on a dirt trail surrounded by trees and woods, so I get them quickly up there without taking away from the experience of being on the CDT."
— Gina Evans, she/her, owner of Linked Adventures in Butte, Montana



Heidi Zhang

“

What we're doing locally with our trails group is working on trailheads to encourage people to do local hiking on the CDT so they have more of a connection to it locally, which I think is important.”

— Lucy Whitmarsh, she/hers, Director of Sales at the Murray Hotel in Silver City, New Mexico

“

We own a restaurant and have a lot of young people working there. They love the hikers and many times end up hanging out with them after we close for the evening. We've also had hikers come off the trail and work for us for a month or two. It is a very nice relationship and I've heard nothing but nice things about all the hikers.”

— Ashlyn Perry, she/her, owner of Chama Local in Chama, New Mexico

Opportunities

#1 Trail Completion:

Completing the CDT remains a top priority for many business owners, particularly those in close proximity to gap sections. A path to completion, for many, is a means to increase revenue, create jobs, and create more opportunities to connect with recreationists.

#2 Infrastructure & Transportation

As the popularity of the CDT and public lands increases, business owners see investing in shuttle programs, sidewalks, alternative transit like biking, and downtown revitalizations as a critical component to increase foot traffic in their towns. By creating greater connections between trail and town, communities are more able to experience all the holistic benefits the CDT has to offer.

#3 Promotion and Education

Awareness of the CDT has steadily grown, particularly in the last decade. Business owners believe that educating locals and travelers alike about the CDT is a critical opportunity to build the reputation of their community as an outdoor recreation destination and to make a positive impact for locals looking to explore and connect in the outdoors.



Teresa Martinez

Executive Director
TMartinez@continentaldivide trail.org
303-996-2759

Luke Fisher

Trail Policy Program Manager
LFisher@continentaldivide trail.org
406-272-6179

Morgan Anderson

Director of Field Programs
MAnderson@continentaldivide trail.org
513-600-8053

Dan Carter

Trail and Lands Conservation Manager
DCarter@continentaldivide trail.org
575-323-1323

Allie Ghaman

Communications Coordinator
AGhaman@continentaldivide trail.org
734-277-6540

Lauren Hendricks

GIS Program Manager
LHendricks@continentaldivide trail.org
218-461-0408

Andrea Kurth

Gateway Community Program Manager
AKurth@continentaldivide trail.org
720-893-2495

Lauren Murray


Director of Development
LMurray@continentaldivide trail.org
720-378-0106


Cornell "Corey" Torivio

New Mexico Regional Representative
CTorivio@continentaldivide trail.org
505-252-6652

CDTC General Information

Info@continentaldivide trail.org
303-996-2759

 continentaldivide trail.org

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