An aerial photograph of a large body of water, likely a lake, with a sandy beach and a paved road on the right side. The water is a deep teal color, and the beach is a light tan. Several small figures of people are visible on the beach and in the water. The road is lined with parked cars and some small structures, possibly picnic shelters or restrooms. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a clear day.

Reaching Across the Urban-Rural Divide

A snapshot of Utah's
rural counties

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Introduction

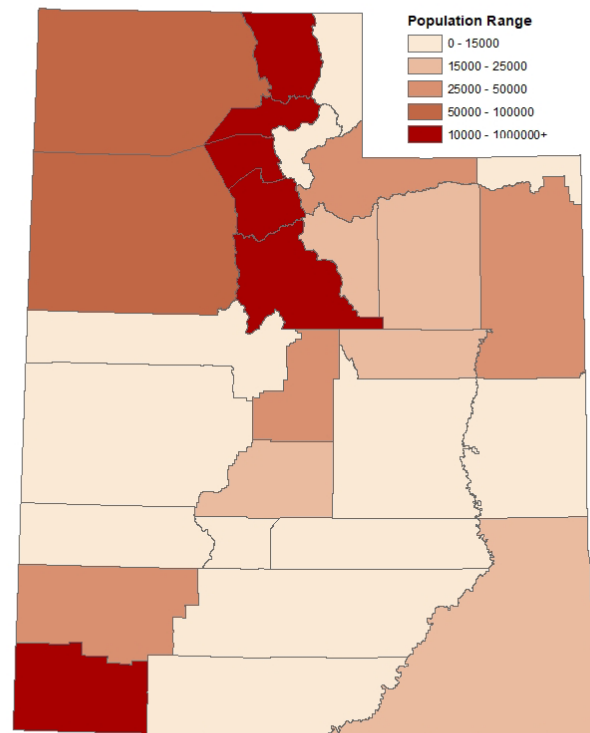
The story of Utah's urban-rural divide is, first and foremost, a story of lopsided growth. The urban side is home to most of the people, with three-quarters of the population living along the Wasatch Front.¹ It's also where much of the economic opportunity resides, with high-tech employment booming on the Silicon Slopes.² On the rural side of the divide, population is sparse and financial resources are more scarce.

As the ninth most urbanized state in the nation, Utah is a place where the urban-rural divide runs especially deep.³

This divide has become a key issue for our state, as “politically, economically, and even socially, the differences between these two groups of communities continues to widen,” according to a report by the Utah’s Rural Planning Group.⁴

But in fact and in principle, it’s important to remember that “we are all in this together,” said Natalie Gochnour of the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.⁵

County Population Density



“Urban Utah has its own set of challenges — congestion, air pollution, housing affordability, and a labor shortage, to name just a few. Rural Utah can help urban Utah with many of these challenges. In a similar way, urban Utah, which is currently experiencing its second longest expansion in our state’s modern history, can help rural Utah diversify and grow their economy.”⁶

Local leadership

Current efforts to bridge the economic gap include Gov. Gary Herbert's 25K Jobs Initiative, which aims to create 25,000 new jobs in the 25 counties outside of the Wasatch Front by the end of 2020.⁷ The initiative has called on each rural county to create its own economic-development plan,

with the state serving as a "facilitator" for connections and funding.⁸

The importance of local leadership in rural economic development cannot be overstated, because each rural county comes with its own, distinct resources and challenges. Counties' economies are also interconnected, with close proximity to urban areas giving some an economic edge.



Employment and job growth

Yet even with their individual differences, Utah's rural counties have much in common — socially, politically and especially, economically.

Employment and job growth, key measures for residents on either side of the divide, reveal a clear distinction between the urban and rural realities. Ten years after

the Great Recession, "Utah's employment has increased by 9.5 percent, third best in the nation," according to the Utah Department of Workforce Services.⁹ "The state's metropolitan areas have grown well, but many of Utah's rural areas cannot say the same. Nine counties have employment levels below their pre-recession peaks."¹⁰

By the beginning of 2018, Utah's unemployment rate was just 3.1 percent — a full percentage point below the national rate, and a number that's considered close to full employment for the state.^{11, 12} It's also a number that has employers worried about how they're going to grow their businesses in the midst of what's looking like a labor shortage on the Wasatch Front. "3.1 percent unemployment is fabulous unless you're looking to hire people," Utah Manufacturers Association President Todd Bingham told the New York Times.¹³ "Our companies are saying, 'We could grow faster, we could produce more product, if we had the workers.'"

That sounds like good news for job-seekers — and it is, for those living near the state's urban centers. For rural residents, unemployment has been higher across the board.¹⁴

Growth Industries

Some of the urban-rural gap in job growth can be attributed to the types of jobs being generated.

Construction — an industry that tends to be strongest in urban and suburban areas — has been leading the way in growth, followed by professional and scientific services.^{15, 16} Mining and utilities — industries with deep roots in rural Utah — are projected to land toward the bottom in terms of employment by 2065.¹⁷

Economic Diversity

These projections point to a fundamental weakness in rural counties: a lack of economic diversity. "Much of rural Utah has a narrow, specialized economic base that often is tied to the highly cyclical extractive industries," said the Utah Economic Council's 2018 Economic Report to the Governor.¹⁸

Mark Knold, senior and supervising economist for the Utah Department of Workforce Services, explained it this way: "An economy's ability to be consistently

positive has a strong foundation in a diverse mix of industrial employment. Think of it in terms of 'not putting all your eggs in one basket.' Economic diversity is spreading jobs across many baskets. Diversity is desirable because the overall economy is not dominantly influenced by one or a handful of industries whose poor performance weighs upon the whole."¹⁹ Not surprisingly, Utah's four urban counties offer the most employment diversity

in the state, while Utah's rural counties tend to have the least diverse employment.²⁰

Workforce Skills

To diversify and grow their economies, Utah's rural counties need to attract the industries that are primed for growth. And to attract those industries, rural Utah needs a skilled workforce.

Government, businesses and educational institutions all have a role in helping to close what has been called the “skills gap,” the difference between what employers need and what workers have been trained to do, in rural Utah.²¹

Of course, it’s the job-seekers who have the greatest role, and they have some factors in their favor. “Nothing compares to the work ethic and authenticity of rural Utahns,” Snow College business professor Josh Hale said in an opinion piece for the Salt Lake Tribune.²² “Studies also show that rural workers are more likely to be entrepreneurs than their urban counterparts, and rural businesses have a higher success rate than urban businesses.”

Education



In terms of secondary education, rural school districts actually have a slightly higher four-year graduation rate than urban districts.²³ Yet when it comes to higher education, “lower than average college enrollment rates pose a great challenge to rural communities,” according to the Utah Foundation.²⁴

Whether they leave home for college, an LDS mission or military service, rural youth seem to have one thing in common — they don’t come back to stay in their hometowns afterward. “Rural leaders often refer to children as their ‘greatest export,’” notes the State of Utah’s Rural Planning Group.²⁵ “Most youth are not returning.”

The exodus of educated young people can spark a chain reaction in their rural communities: There is a decline in overall population and more significantly, a deepening of the education gap in the already-depleted workforce. Fewer than 18 percent of rural Utah residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to over 30 percent of non-rural residents.²⁶ This makes it harder for rural areas to attract the jobs that would keep their college grads at home — a vicious circle that can close out future opportunity. As Gov. Gary Herbert said in his 2016 State of the State Address, “A high quality of life should mean parents don’t have to watch their children leave and go to another town or another state because there are no jobs available where they live ... Unfortunately, this is not the case in some of the rural areas of our state.”²⁷

Population Growth

Utah has been on the Top 10 list of fastest-growing states for years.²⁸ But this growth has largely been concentrated in and around the Wasatch Front, where Utah and Salt Lake counties contain 56 percent of the state’s population, giving them a real economic advantage.^{29, 30} “Attaining a critical mass of population is crucial to business growth and development, as well as economic prosperity,” noted the Economic Development Corporation of Utah.³¹ “Large businesses need access to a large, talented workforce, transportation and distribution infrastructures, and nearby companies with which to conduct business.”

In much of rural Utah, however, population figures tell a different story. In fact, seven rural counties saw their populations drop between 2016 and 2017, while all urban and

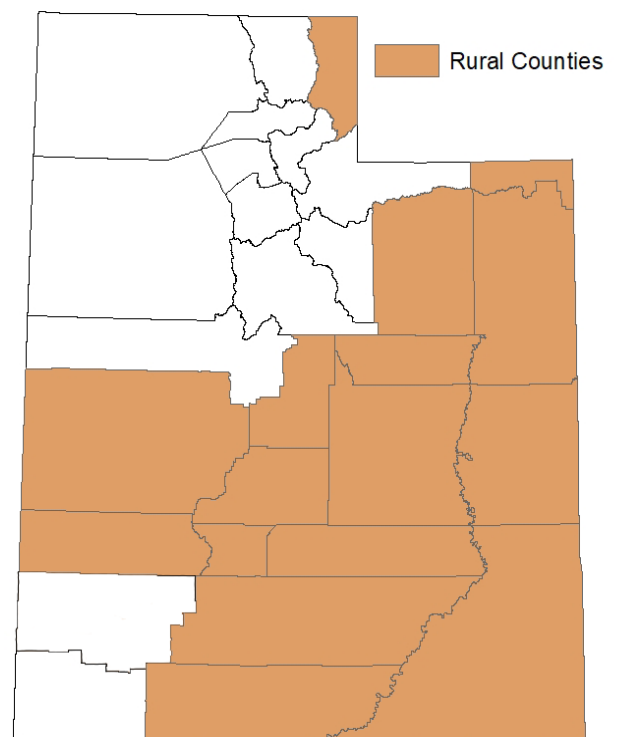
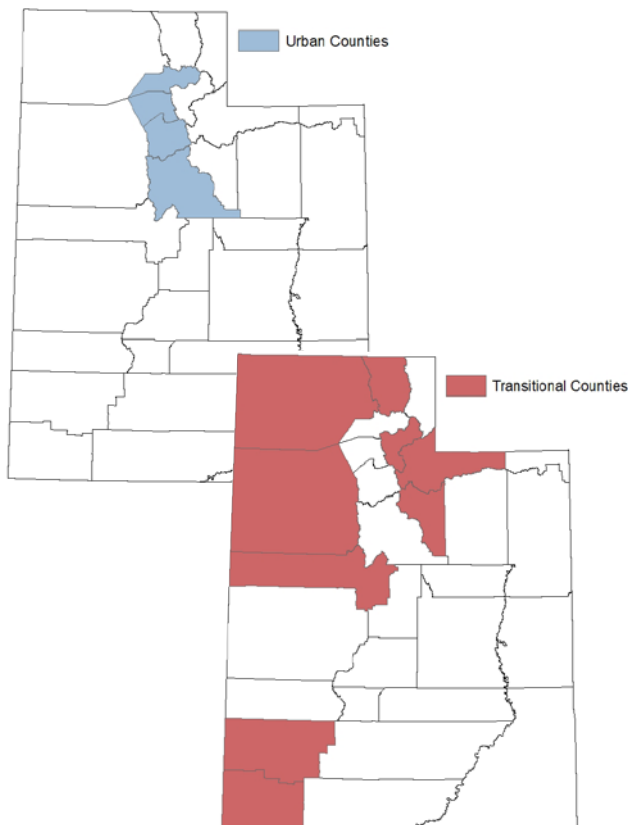
transitional companies saw increases.³² “Growth is uneven across the state,” said Pam Perlich, director of demographic research at the Gardner Policy Institute.³³ “Some of the population of those declining rural counties is probably moving into the urban core that is doing quite well.”

For all of Utah to do equally well, all of its citizens — urban and rural — will need to work together to build that prosperity and share in its rewards.

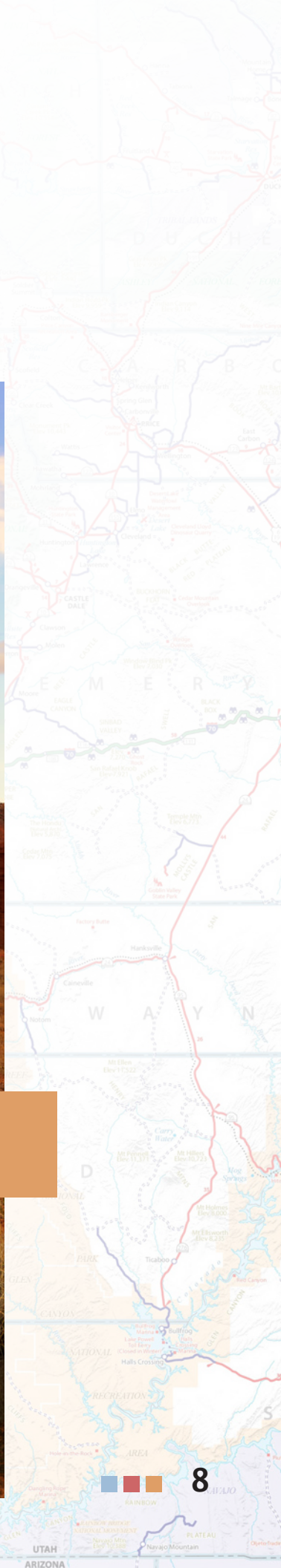
County By County

Taking a close look at the issues that affect individual counties can provide a more complete picture of the opportunities and challenges that affect rural Utahns.

Although most counties in Utah are likely to have some areas that could be considered rural, this report focuses on counties designated by Utah’s Rural Planning Group as “Rural,” as opposed to “Transitional” or “Urban.”³⁴



County Profiles



Beaver County



Fact: Inventor Philo T. Farnsworth, the “Father of Television,” was born in Beaver, Utah.

	Beaver County	Utah
Population	6,386	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$47,878	\$65,325
Unemployment	4.1%	3.2%
Poverty	9.2%	9.7%
Public Land	91%	78.9%

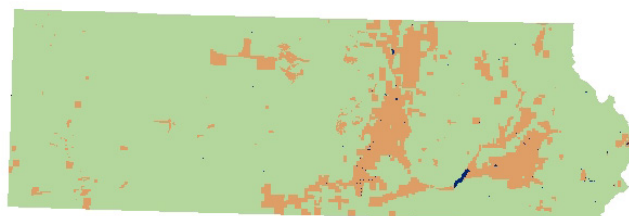
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, “Beaver County Resource Assessment”; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

Beaver County’s Economic Development office has a goal of “prospering while preserving culture” — fitting, considering the county’s strong presence in both agriculture and tourism.³⁵ Beaver ranks 10th in the state for jobs in leisure and hospitality, even without any national parks or monuments within its borders.³⁶ It is also a leader in agricultural productions and livestock revenues, while trade, transportation, and manufacturing are also significant industries.³⁷

County Seat



Land Ownership



■ Private Land
■ Public Land
■ Tribal Land
■ Water Bodies

Renewable Energy

“... the only location in the nation, and perhaps the world, where five different types of renewable energy [wind, solar, biomass, geothermal and hydroelectric] are commercially produced within a 50-mile radius of each other.”³⁸



Three Solar Energy Zones have been identified in Utah as “the priority development areas for utility-scale solar energy facilities,” based on an environmental-impact study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Department of Energy. Two of the three Solar Energy Zones are in Beaver County.⁴² The county currently has six small and three large utility-scale solar installations.⁴³

Some of the greatest hopes for economic growth in Beaver County are pinned on renewable energy. Designated as a “high-wind location,” Beaver county is currently home to 102 wind turbines.^{39, 40} And proximity to existing large power lines is another advantage for both the county and the state, with additional hi-capacity transmission lines being added to supply the energy to urban markets.⁴¹

Beaver County’s energy portfolio includes all three of Utah’s geothermal electric plants, and it recently got a huge boost: A \$140 million geothermal





research laboratory supported by the U.S. Department of Energy will be built near Milford.^{44, 45} The county will also receive \$365,000 from the Governor’s Office of Economic Development to develop a research facility to study uses of geothermal energy, bringing 23 high-paying jobs to the area.⁴⁶

Income

At 9.2 percent, Beaver County’s poverty rate is lower than all but two of the rural counties in Utah, although its median household income is in the bottom half.⁴⁷ The problem of relatively low incomes may be somewhat mitigated by Beaver County’s relatively low cost of living.⁴⁸

Education

In 2018, the U.S. Dept. of Education designated Belknap Elementary School as one of three “exemplary high performing” elementary schools in the state.⁴⁹

Beaver County residents can benefit from the Beaver County U program, which offers online courses from Southern Utah University, Dixie State University and a number of other institutions to earn high school diplomas as well as associate, bachelor’s and master’s degrees.⁵⁰

Health

Beaver, Carbon, and Emery Counties are among the top 5 percent of counties in the U.S. at highest risk for HIV and Hepatitis C transmission from intravenous drug use;⁵¹ these counties also have the highest overdose death rates in the state.⁵²

There are several state-approved policies that the county can implement to work to decrease health concerns. New state legislation allows for syringe exchange programs to prevent spread of disease by giving drug users can access clean syringes. Counties can also get federal funds for these programs by coordinating with the CDC.⁵³



Carbon County

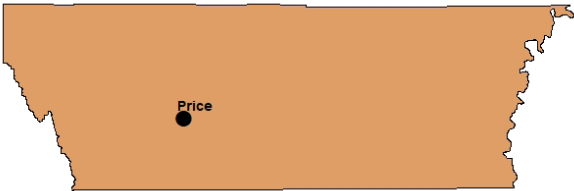


Fact: In an 1897 robbery, Butch Cassidy, Elzy Lay, and Bob Meeks stole \$8,000 in gold and silver from the Pleasant Valley Coal Company.

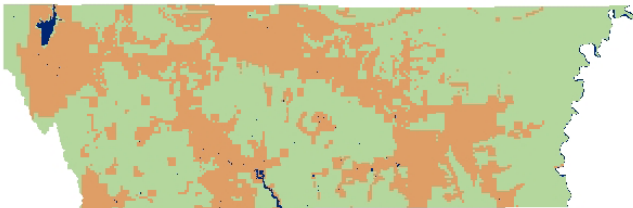
	Carbon County	Utah
Population	20,295	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$46,994	\$65,325
Unemployment	5.1%	3.2%
Poverty	15.3%	9.7%
Public Land	61%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Carbon County Resource Management Plan; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

County Seat



Land Ownership



- Private Land
- Public Land
- Tribal Land
- Water Bodies

Industry and Employment

The railroad and coal industries have historically dominated Carbon County's economic sectors, resulting in boom and bust waves of growth and decline. Now, healthcare, education services, and retail have become Carbon's top three employment sectors, although utilities, oil and gas extraction, and mining still offer the highest-paying jobs.⁵⁴

Carbon County's coal industry remains in a state of uncertainty with national demand for coal declining and international demand for coal on the rise. In 2016, massive controversy was born of Utah's proposal for \$53 million dollar investment in an marine port in Oakland, California, which would have served as an avenue for integrating Utah's coal into international markets.⁵⁵ In Nov. 2018, Oakland canceled the project due to the developer's failure to meet contract milestones.⁵⁶



Income

Carbon County's median income is nearly \$15,000 below the state average, and its poverty rate is nearly 50 percent higher than the state average.⁵⁷ Carbon also has the second highest rate of food stamp recipients of any county in the state.⁵⁸

Health

Carbon County has one of the highest rates of opioid overdose death in the state — more than three times that of the state as a whole.⁵⁹ It also has the highest opioid prescription rate in Utah — 176 prescriptions per 100 residents.⁶⁰ The county has struggled to provide adequate access to drug detox and rehabilitation services to residents. Carbon, Grand, and Emery counties have 50 percent of all opioid overdoses and suicides in the state, but receive only 2 percent of funding to address the problem.⁶¹ And despite the severity of the



problem, Carbon County does not have a detoxification center. The best alternative, according to one health administrator, is to be arrested, because Carbon County Jail's program of Naltrexone treatment and follow-up has proven effective.⁶² A new program to bring clean syringes to Carbon County has been praised by the Four Corners Behavioral Health director as "a way to kind of get your foot in the door to get people into disease prevention, to get into hepatitis C diagnosis and treatment, to help people get into substance abuse treatment."⁶³ Police are also being supplied with Naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses.⁶⁴

Education

While almost 90 percent of Carbon County adults have high school degrees, only 15.7 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is less than half the state average.⁶⁵ Utah State University Eastern's Price campus offers 60 degree programs with an emphasis on technical, vocational, and associate degree programs.⁶⁶



Technology Expansion

Carbon School District has partnered with Utah technology company BrainStorm to help integrate technology education into the district's curriculum. In January 2018, Mont Harmon Middle School in Price held a SPARK technology fair in collaboration with BrainStorm; the technology company said it is using feedback from the fair to create in-depth training opportunities based on student interest. The partnership sets a precedent for rural county school districts working with business to provide educational opportunities and pathways to career development for students in rural Utah.⁶⁷

"We've put a great deal of emphasis on creating new jobs and economic growth in rural Utah. The partnership between BrainStorm and Carbon School District is the right place to start to ensure we meet those objectives." — Utah Lt. Governor Spencer Cox.⁶⁸

Daggett County



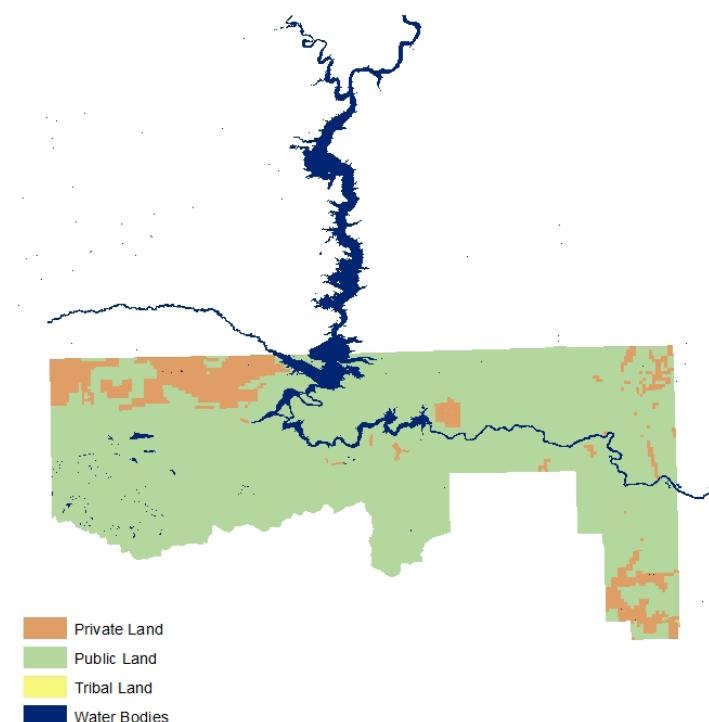
Fact: There are no stoplights in all of Daggett County.

	Daggett County	Utah
Population	1,029	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$85,000	\$65,325
Unemployment	5.0%	3.2%
Poverty	6.7%	9.7%
Public Land	89%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Daggett County General Plan; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

A narrow strip in Utah’s eastern corner, Daggett County contains two towns and the entrance to the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. Although its population is the smallest of any county in the state, Daggett County punches above its weight in tourism: It has the highest share of leisure and hospitality jobs of any Utah county.⁶⁹

Land Ownership



County Seat



Industry and Employment

For decades, the local economy centered around livestock, hay, and alfalfa. But in 1964, the completion of Flaming Gorge Dam brought new industries to the county: hydroelectric power and recreation.⁷⁰ Flaming Gorge, a large reservoir off the Green River, runs for 91 miles from Utah into Wyoming.⁷¹ The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area offers fishing, swimming, boating, rafting, hiking, biking, camping, wildlife viewing, and the stunning scenery of Utah's red rock canyons.

Heavy tourism to the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area during the summer months results in a seasonal employment pattern. For example, in 2017, unemployment rates in Daggett County



fluctuated from a low 3.3 percent in June up to 6.6 percent at the off-season peak in December.⁷² As the Daggett County 2004 Community Development/Action Plan noted, “The unpredictable weather in the spring and fall seasons make it difficult to boost the tourism industry, so other options need to be investigated. More year round jobs are needed to keep residents gainfully employed and supporting the local businesses.”⁷³

Income

At \$85,000, Daggett County's median household income is significantly higher than the state average.⁷⁴ Daggett also contains a large number of second homes: In 2014, the county had the fifth-highest share of second homes of all counties in the U.S.⁷⁵

Health

While the overall cost of living is slightly lower in Daggett County than in the state as a whole, health care is more expensive.⁷⁶ Disproportionately high insurance premiums have affected rural areas nationwide, with insufficient market competition and a small population tasked with bearing the cost burden.⁷⁷



Daggett County has one medical clinic located in Manila.⁷⁸ The nearest hospital is located in Vernal. Daggett has the smallest percentage of its population enrolled in Medicaid of any county in Utah.⁷⁹

Education

Daggett County has three schools. The high school graduation rate of 95.1 percent is higher than the state average, but the percent of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher is just 9.3 percent — less than a third of the state average.⁸⁰



Broadband

Due to Daggett County's remote location surrounded by high mountain terrain, getting residents high-speed internet access is a challenge. Daggett is one of only two counties in the state, along with San Juan, that lack fiber optic internet.⁸¹ The regions

surrounding both Manila and Dutch John do have internet access, but the connections are slow.⁸² Statewide, 95.6 percent of Utahns have access to wired broadband 25 mbps or faster.⁸³ But in Daggett County, download speeds cap off at 10 mbps.⁸⁴

County Revenue

The Daggett County Jail was shut down in February 2017 after a Department of Corrections investigation uncovered abuse of inmates.^{85, 86} The scandal led to multiple convictions within the Daggett County Sheriff's department, and all inmates were

relocated to other jail facilities. This resulted in a significant loss of county income: Daggett County had received 30 percent of its revenue, \$110,000 to \$115,000 monthly, from the Utah Department of Corrections to house roughly 80 inmates.^{87, 88} Since then, the county has

struggled financially, as local leaders and state officials continue to search for alternative revenue sources.⁸⁹ One solution may be dissolving Daggett County entirely — County Commissioner Jack Lytle says that option “gets raised regularly.”⁹⁰

Duchesne County

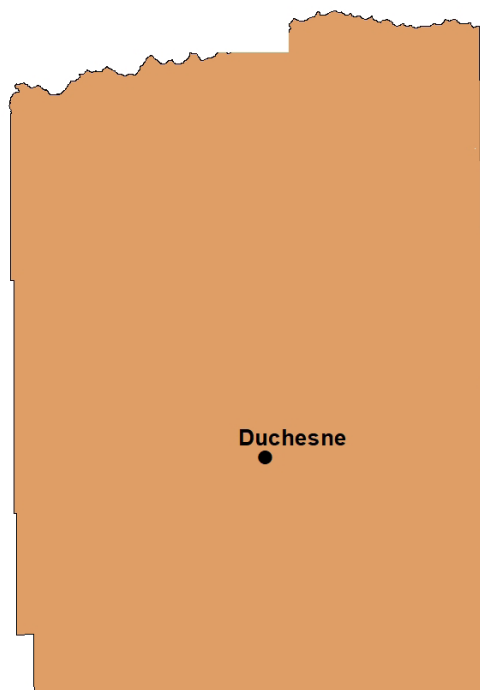


Fact: King's Peak, Utah's highest mountain, is located in Duchesne County.

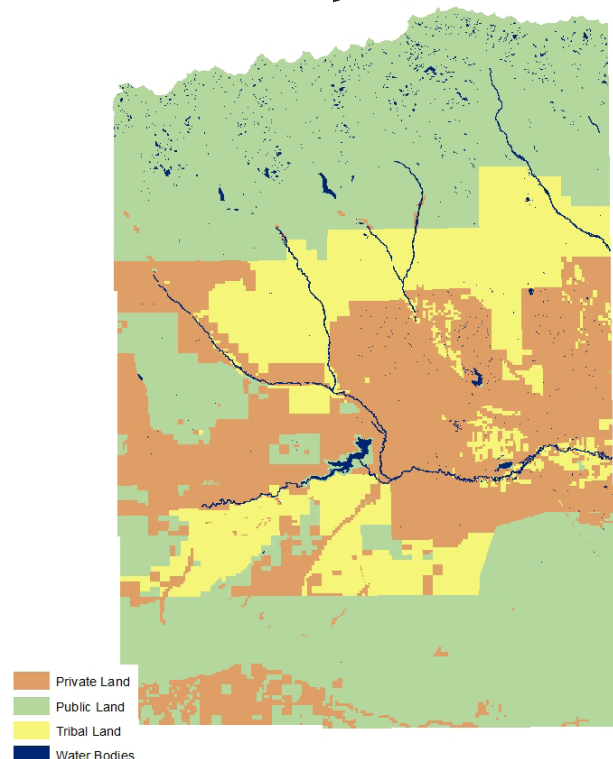
	Duchesne County	Utah
Population	20,026	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$63,000	\$65,325
Unemployment	5.8%	3.2%
Poverty	13.3%	9.7%
Public Land	73%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "Quickfacts"; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Data by County"; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, "Duchesne County Resource Assessment"; Utah State University Extension, "Land Ownership of Utah."

County Seat



Land Ownership

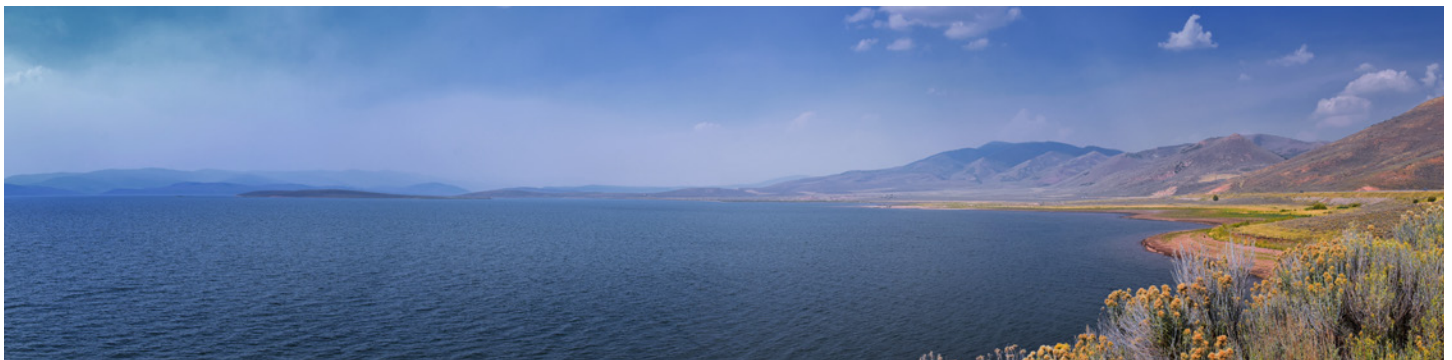


Industry and Employment

With oil and gas as the backbone of its economy, Duchesne County's fortunes have followed the boom-and-bust cycles of the energy industry.⁹¹ The year 2014 was a boom, with rapid population growth, low unemployment and expanding infrastructure.⁹² But the bust came just two years later, when a drop in global oil prices caused job and population losses and an increase in unemployment. "They are hurting everywhere in the Uinta Basin with this setback," Department of Workforce Services economist Scott Smith told the *Deseret News*. "The rest of the state is actually booming, and they are out there dying and feeling really isolated. From our point of view, things are really rough."⁹³

More recently, Duchesne's economy has been on the upswing. An increase in oil prices brought job growth to the Uintah Basin in 2017, according to the Utah Economic Council's 2018 Economic Report to the Governor, although overall, employment is still down from the 2014 peak.⁹⁴

The Duchesne County General Plan notes that "in an effort to stabilize drastic swings in the economy, the County has explored and promoted economic development and growth strategies that would diversify the County's economic base." The plan mentions manufacturing among the growth options, but cautions against tourism's low salaries and high demands on infrastructure.⁹⁵



Income

Duchesne County's poverty rate of 13.3 percent is higher than the state average. However, its median household income of \$63,000 is third-highest among Utah's rural counties.⁹⁶

Education

While the percentage of Duchesne County adults with a high-school education or higher is just a bit less than the state average, the percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher is just 14.5 percent — less than half the state average.⁹⁷

Duchesne's county leaders have expressed enthusiasm for the Utah K-16 Computing Initiative, designed to help rural students build skills for remote work.⁹⁸



“People can live here and work anywhere in the world, and we think that is one of the keys to our future. Even though we missed the boat on rail and missed the boat on road, we’re not missing the boat on connectivity.” — Irene Hansen, Duchesne County Chamber of Commerce⁹⁹

Additionally, the Uintah Basin Applied Technology Center and the Utah State University Uintah Basin Campus have an open access policy for residents in Duchesne County.¹⁰⁰

Broadband

Three-quarters of Duchesne County residents have access to internet at speeds of 25 mbps or greater.¹⁰¹ However, Duchesne County’s average download speed is about 70 percent slower than Utah’s average.¹⁰²

Health

The county is served by the Uintah Basin Medical Center, a non-profit community hospital located in Roosevelt, as well as by two medical clinics.¹⁰³



Emery County



Fact: The movie “Galaxy Quest” was filmed in Goblin Valley State Park.

	Emery County	Utah
Population	10,077	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$51,852	\$65,325
Unemployment	5.2%	3.2%
Poverty	13.2%	9.7%
Public Land	92%	78.9%

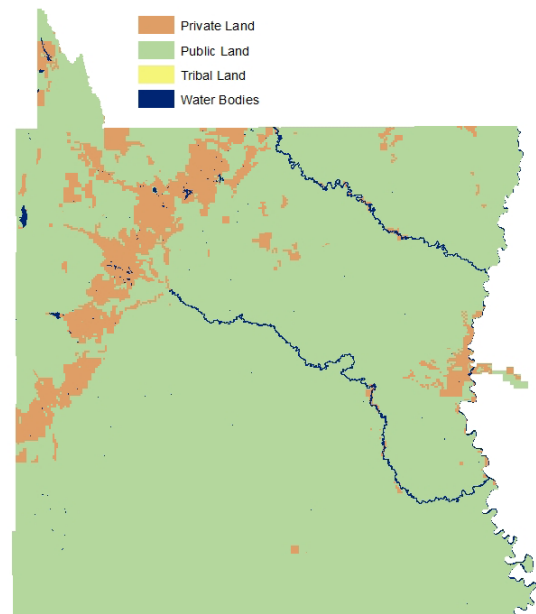
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Emery County Public Lands Department; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.” (all accessed January 10, 2019).

With its high mountains, green valleys and arid red desert, Emery County is a place of extremes. The highs and lows also extend to the county’s population, which more than doubled between 1970 and 1980 but then had the largest drop of any county in Utah between 2010 and 2016.^{104, 105}

County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

Mining and agriculture are the traditional mainstays of Emery County's economy.¹⁰⁶

In the heydays of the 1980s, almost half of Emery County's employment was in coal mining.¹⁰⁷ Now, with mining having dwindled to less than 8 percent of the employment mix, there is a greater focus on diversifying the economy.¹⁰⁸

As Emery County's economic development director told the Utah Foundation, "We are diversified, but we have to look to other industries and technologies to improve our communities."¹⁰⁹ Emery county suffered job losses of 18.3 percent between 2010 and 2016.¹¹⁰ Retail trade makes up the largest employment sector, followed by healthcare and construction.¹¹¹

The Emery County General Plan calls for continued support and investment in the energy industry "that has served as the economic backbone of the county for over a century," but also addresses opportunities for diversification, stating, "Prospects are bright ... for well-planned and well-managed recreational development."¹¹²



Nationwide, rural communities have seen a decline in coal and Emery County is no exception. As other forms of energy, such as natural gas, continue to rise Emery County has faced the closure of five of its eight coal mines in the past 10 years.¹¹³ The county has responded to these changes by advocating for recreation and lobbying for more protection of public land.

During the summer of 2018, The Emery County Public Land Management Act was introduced with the objective turning the San Rafael Swell into a massive National Conservation Area.¹¹⁴ Not all community members were keen on the potential new designation of over 500,00 acres of land; some cited concerns about the expected influx of tourists and general land use designations.¹¹⁵

With vast open space like the San Rafael Swell, a million-acre parcel of land, Emery has outdoor recreation space that might rival even Utah's iconic national parks. Goblin Valley State Park is a major attraction, and Castle Dale City's official

web page promises visitors “an epic vacation experience in the heart of the San Rafael Swell and Joe’s Valley Mountains.”¹¹⁶

Income

Emery County’s poverty rate is higher than the state average.¹¹⁷ Its median household income is lower than the state average, but the cost of living — especially housing — is lower in Emery County as well.^{118, 119}

Health

Emery County placed 25th out of the 27 Utah counties included in the most recent County Health Rankings — a drop that represents its lowest ranking in at least seven years.¹²⁰ “Minimal state and federal funding and little access to larger health care networks” have been cited as contributing factors to low health for Emery County residents.¹²¹

Emery County is also facing severe mental health and addiction issues. Emery and Carbon counties suffer from the highest rates of prescription opioid deaths in the state, at 47.3 deaths per 100,000 people.¹²²

Current efforts to address these problems have included expanded use of the anti-overdose drug Naloxone and forming a suicide-prevention group.^{123, 124}

Education

While over 93 percent of adults in Emery County are high-school graduates or higher — slightly better than the state average — only 15 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher, which is less than half the state average.¹²⁵ According to the Utah Foundation, “This is likely due in part to the dearth of jobs in the communities and the resultant brain drain after college to the Wasatch Front and large cities outside of the state.”¹²⁶



Garfield County



Fact: The county seat, Panguitch, was named for a Paiute word meaning “big fish,” in honor of the excellent fishing nearby.

	Garfield County	Utah
Population	5,078	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$51,700	\$65,325
Unemployment	7.5%	3.2%
Poverty	9.9%	9.7%
Public Land	96%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, “Garfield County Resource Assessment”; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.” (all accessed January 10, 2019).

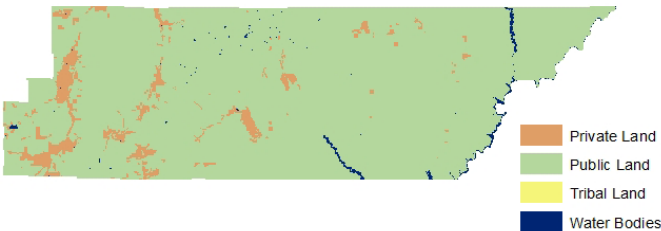
Known as “Bryce Canyon Country,” Garfield County is a tourist mecca that includes Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef national parks, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Kodachrome Basin, the San Rafael Desert and Scenic Byway 12.¹²⁷



County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

With such a wealth of scenic beauty, it's not surprising that more than half of the jobs in Garfield County are leisure and hospitality related — the second-highest share in the state, according to the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.¹²⁸ The downside is that many of these jobs are seasonal. “In January, we have unemployment that is above 16 percent,” former Garfield County Economic Development Director Justin Fischer told the Salt Lake Tribune. “The metric we're going to use to judge future opportunities is the number of full-time, year-round jobs. We have all the seasonal jobs we can handle.”¹²⁹



While Ruby's Inn employs the largest number of people, other major employers include the Garfield County school district, the federal government, Intermountain Healthcare and South Central Utah Telephone.¹³⁰

Garfield ranks in the bottom third of all Utah counties for economic diversity, a problem that county leaders are well aware of.¹³¹ “Tourism is up,” then-Escalante

Mayor Jerry Taylor told the Salt Lake Tribune in 2015. “We promote it, but we need something more. We can't have all our eggs in one basket.”¹³² Attracting large new businesses can be difficult, according to former Economic Development Director Fischer, because of a lack of freeway and rail access.¹³³

According to a Kem C. Gardner study, “The economic growth that is the hallmark of the southwest region has essentially bypassed Garfield County,” and in terms of population, “Garfield County is projected to grow more slowly than any other county in the region.”¹³⁴

Historically, the county's economy was dependent on agriculture, which still accounts for more than 10 percent of total employment.¹³⁵ Looking for a way forward, some county leaders suggest returning to traditional models rather than doubling down on seasonal tourism. “We need to bring back sawmills, and we need to bring back industry to Garfield County,” said Planning Commission Chairwoman Elaine Baldwin.¹³⁶

Health

The county is served by Garfield Memorial Hospital in Panguitch.¹³⁷ There are also several medical clinics.¹³⁸

Grand County



Fact: Named after the Grand River, the historical name for the Colorado River

	Grand County	Utah
Population	9,674	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$46,658	\$65,325
Unemployment	5.3%	3.2%
Poverty	10.8%	9.7%
Public Land	87%	78.9%

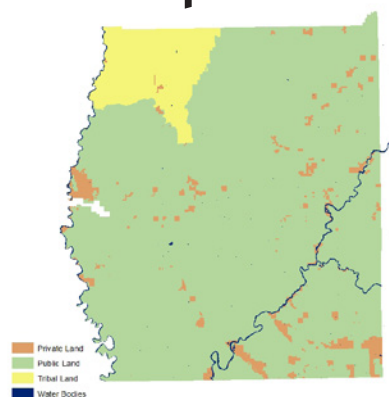
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Headwaters Economics, “Economic Value of Public Lands in Grand County, Utah”; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.” (all accessed January 10, 2019).

Grand County is one of the most iconic places in the state of Utah. It is home to part of Canyonland National Park and the famous Delicate Arch, located in Arches National Park. Moab, the largest city in the county, is a major tourist attraction offering a wide variety of outdoor recreation; its deserts, cliffs, and plateaus making up one-of-a-kind scenery.¹³⁹ While summer tourist seasons leave the area bustling, the rest of Grand County is relatively undeveloped. Outside of Moab, the county is scattered with small developments and ghost towns.

County Seat



Land Ownership





Industry and Employment

Historically, the economy of Grand County consisted of small family farms, potash and uranium mining, and raising livestock. Mining boomed in the early 1980s as the demand for uranium increased. But the increase in mining jobs was short lived, as the Uranium Reduction Company put operations in Grand County on hold in 1984 due to low uranium, and closed the mine in 1988.¹⁴⁰

Today, travel and tourism is the largest industry. When combined with businesses in the area, this sector accounts for 47 percent of private employment in the county.¹⁴¹ Outside the scope of public lands-related employment, Grand County

has also seen growth in sectors including accommodation, food services, real estate, and health care.¹⁴²

The annual unemployment rate is 5.3 percent, but fluctuates greatly throughout the year.¹⁴³ In 2017, the unemployment rate was 14.6 percent in January but dropped to 3.2 percent during tourist season in July and August.¹⁴⁴ Some economic issues in the area can be attributed to the unstable, part-time seasonal work in the tourism industry.

Income

The median income in Grand County is \$46,658, significantly lower than the statewide average of \$65,325.¹⁴⁵ As the economy in Grand County has evolved in the last decade, earnings per job have stabilized and per capita income has increased.¹⁴⁶ Economic analysis shows that the tourism, recreation, and public land sectors have helped increase success in other economic areas. In 2015, roughly two-thirds of local residents indicated public lands were “extremely important” to their business.¹⁴⁷

Health

Just over half of Grand County residents live in Moab, and the rest reside in smaller towns and unincorporated areas.¹⁴⁸ The primary medical center for many of the surrounding rural areas is Moab Regional Hospital.¹⁴⁹

Southeast Utah — particularly Grand, Carbon, and Emery Counties — has had significantly higher rates of prescription opioid deaths compared to the rest of the state.¹⁵⁰ Will Barnhardt, assistant director

of Grand County Emergency Medical Services, says the opioid crisis is not as bad in Grand County compared to other rural areas in Utah, but still remains a strong concern.¹⁵¹ In November 2018, Grand County filed a lawsuit against a number of opioid pharmaceutical manufacturers.¹⁵²

Education

With 27.8 percent of adults having a bachelor's degree or higher, Grand County outscores all the other rural counties in this category.¹⁵³ In the Utah State Board of Education's most recent "school report card," Grand County High School received a "commendable" rating in postsecondary readiness.¹⁵⁴

Environment

Even as public land has driven recreation and tourism in Grand County, concerns have grown about the negative impacts on natural resources. Each year, nearly 1.6 million people visit Arches National Park — a tremendous amount of foot traffic in a concentrated area. This has lead to soil erosion, which has become a significant issue, particularly in Moab.¹⁵⁵ Environmentalists are concerned that public desire to explore the outdoors will soon exceed the capacity of the area.



Kane County



Fact: More than 100 movies filmed in and near Kanab earned it the nickname “Little Hollywood.”

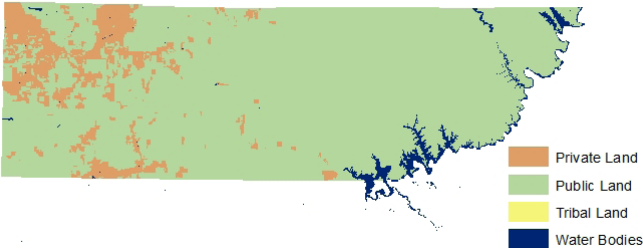
	Kane County	Utah
Population	7,567	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$50,266	\$65,325
Unemployment	3.4%	3.2%
Poverty	10.9%	9.7%
Public Land	89.7%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Bureau of Economic and Business Research, “Kane County Profile”; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

With attractions including parts of Bryce Canyon and Zion national parks, Dixie National Forest and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, it's not surprising that hospitality is the largest sector of Kane County's economy.¹⁵⁶ The county's largest single employer, Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, has become a tourist destination in its own right. Other major employers are Kane County's school district, hospital, and local government; Amangiri, a 5-star resort; and Aramark Sports, which operates marinas and other visitor services on Lake Powell.¹⁵⁷

Kane County is also home to the Center for Education Business and the Arts, an economic-development center designed to provide workforce education, business training and to attract corporate events to Kane County.¹⁵⁸

Health

The county is served by Kane County Hospital, which has partnered with Intermountain Healthcare's Connect Care Pro to offer telehealth services including virtual counseling, evaluations, and care to the rural community. "Kanab has had one of the highest suicide rates in the state ... and we don't have a crisis worker here," said the hospital's chief nursing officer. "Trying to place a patient who has not had a crisis evaluation was next to impossible. With crisis care from Intermountain Healthcare, patients receive that crisis evaluation in less than an hour, and if the crisis worker recommends inpatient treatment they assist in placing the patient. Our providers just love having this service available."¹⁵⁹

In Kane County, 58 percent of men ages 65 and older report having a serious disability — the highest percentage in the state.¹⁶⁰



Millard County

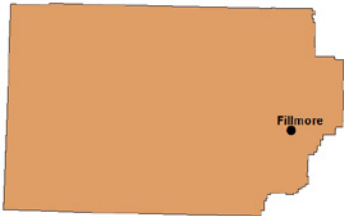


Fact: Fillmore was chosen as the first capital of Utah Territory because it was located near the geographic center, but the capital was soon moved to the population center of Salt Lake City.

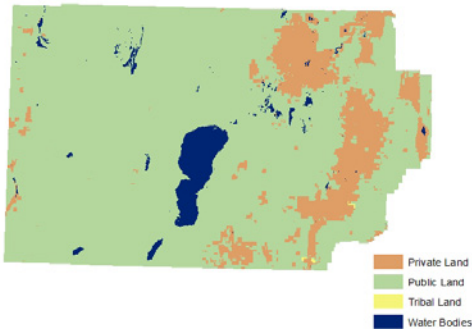
	Millard County	Utah
Population	12,863	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$59,312	\$65,325
Unemployment	3.3%	3.2%
Poverty	12.4%	9.7%
Public Land	86%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Millard County General Plan; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

Unlike many of its neighbors, Millard County doesn't depend on tourism to fuel its economy — in fact, its share of leisure and hospitality jobs is 22nd of Utah's 29 counties.¹⁶¹ The dominant industry is agriculture, with Millard leading the state in production of alfalfa and alfalfa mix hay.¹⁶² Other major industries include retail trade and healthcare.¹⁶³

Millard County has the second-least diverse economy in Utah, and is looking to expand into the energy sector.^{164, 165} Intermountain Power Service is a major employer.¹⁶⁶ With its coal-fired power plant — the state's largest — slated to switch to natural gas, plans call for development of commercial-scale gas-storage caverns.¹⁶⁷ Geothermal, solar and wind energy are also part of the mix.¹⁶⁸ In addition, the county's easy access

to Interstate 15 and Interstate 70 has led to its positioning as a transportation and distribution hub.¹⁶⁹

Health

Millard County is served by Fillmore and Delta community hospitals.¹⁷⁰

Broadband

Just 58.6 percent of Millard County residents have access to high-speed internet, according to BroadbandNow — the fourth-lowest percentage of all counties in Utah. Delta, the largest city, has less than 61 percent broadband coverage. By comparison, 95.6 percent of Utah residents as a whole have access to high-speed wired broadband.¹⁷¹



Piute County



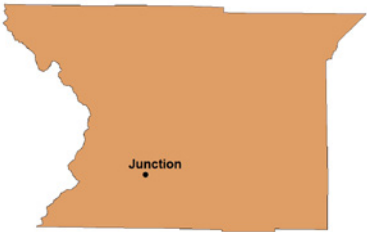
Fact: The name Piute (also Paiute) comes from a Piute Indian word meaning “traveling back and forth.”

	Piute County	Utah
Population	1,420	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$41,750	\$65,325
Unemployment	4.9%	3.2%
Poverty	16.7%	9.7%
Public Land	87%	78.9%

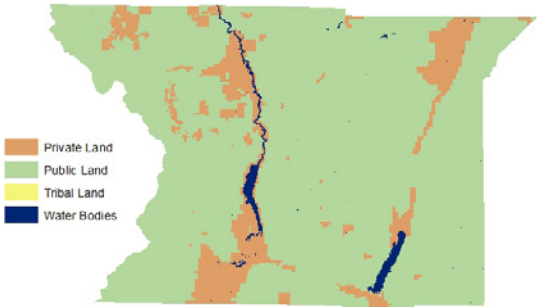
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, “Piute County, Utah Resource Assessment”; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”



County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

Piute is among the smallest of Utah's counties in both size and population. The main industries are education, accommodation and food services, retail trade and manufacturing.¹⁷²

Tourist attractions in Piute County include two state parks, a 278-mile ATV trail and Butch Cassidy's boyhood home.¹⁷³

People who live in Piute County are likely to work elsewhere: Many commute to the surrounding counties, especially Washington County.¹⁷⁴

“Everybody who lives here really has to sacrifice to be here. With the [low] availability of work, most people have to drive out of the county to Richfield or Panguitch. We love it and that's why we are here,” said Rick Blackwell, Piute County Commissioner.¹⁷⁵

Income

To stay in the place they love, residents endure low wages and a high rate of poverty. The median household income of \$41,750 is the lowest in the state.¹⁷⁶ The Rural Planning Group cites “Piute's comparatively underdeveloped economy” as the likely cause.¹⁷⁷

Poverty grew deeper after the 2008 recession, as the Salt Lake Tribune noted that “a new map of ‘concentrated poverty’ areas in America has one unfortunate,

intensely colored spot in Utah: tiny, rural Piute County.”¹⁷⁸ The county's overall poverty rate of 16.7 percent ranks second-highest in the state.¹⁷⁹

Education

Piute County's single high school includes grades 7-12, and has a total enrollment of just 150 students.¹⁸⁰ With 84.1 percent of residents having graduated from high school, the county trails behind the Utah's overall 91.8 percent.¹⁸¹ And the exodus of young, educated residents has left just 22.7 percent of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher — almost 10 percent below the state as a whole.¹⁸² This could be reining in economic progress, according to the Rural Planning Group, which noted, “Unfortunately, Piute has one of the lowest educated workforces, potentially limiting workforce development efforts.”¹⁸³



Health

The primary medical-care facility in Piute County is the Circleville Clinic.¹⁸⁴

Rich County



Fact: Rich County is home to the fabled Bear Lake Monsters, first mentioned in Native American legend and then by pioneers in the 19th century. The most recent reported sighting was in 2002.

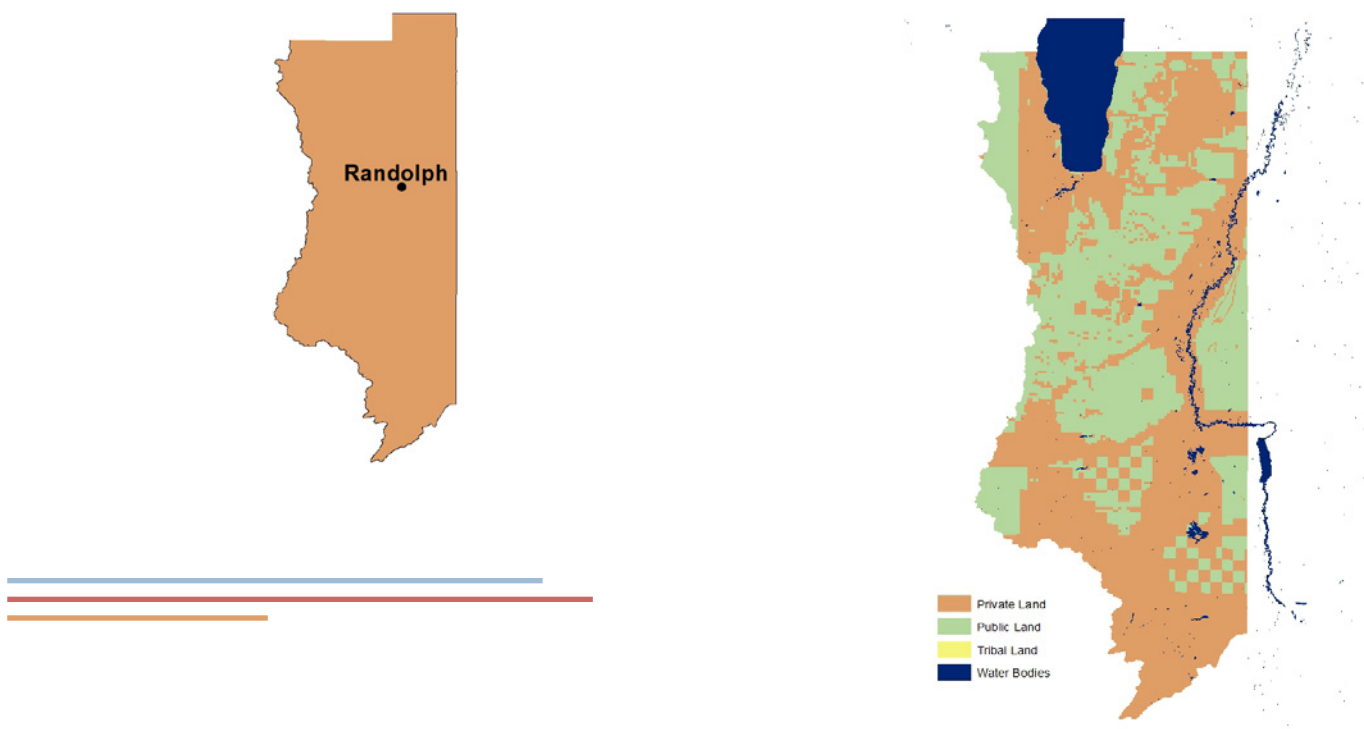
	Rich County	Utah
Population	2,391	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$52,917	\$65,325
Unemployment	3.2%	3.2%
Poverty	9.2%	9.7%
Public Land	51.7%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "Quickfacts"; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Data by County"; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, "Rich County, Utah Resource Assessment"; Utah State University Extension, "Land Ownership of Utah."

County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

Tourism plays a major role in Rich County's economy — 34 percent of the county's private-sector jobs were in leisure and hospitality in 2015, placing the county at No. 7 for tourism in the state.¹⁸⁵ The county's biggest attraction is Bear Lake, which straddles the Utah-Idaho border. Known as the Caribbean of the Rockies because of its brilliant turquoise-blue color, the lake offers a variety of recreation opportunities. Water sports such as motor boating, kayaking, canoeing, swimming and scuba diving are popular in the summer. In winter, there's snowmobiling on the Bear Lake powder. Fishing and ice fishing are also large draws that span the seasons.¹⁸⁶

Bear Lake is also famous for its raspberries, which are grown from older varieties to favor flavor over shelf life.¹⁸⁷ The annual Raspberry Days Festival draws 30,000-50,000 people each year.¹⁸⁸

Almost 300,000 people visited Bear Lake State Park in FY 2017.¹⁸⁹ Garden City, located on the shore of Bear Lake, has a population of fewer than 600 residents but “receives an average of 40,000 visitors on any given day throughout the summer months,” according to the Garden City General Plan.¹⁹⁰



Public sector work is another major job source, with Rich School District and the county offices as Rich County's two largest employers.¹⁹¹ Agriculture also remains an important industry: Rich County's Resource Management Plan notes that the county was the No. 2 producer of beef cattle in the state in 2016, and that “Rich County is characterized by citizens with roots deep in agricultural heritage ... The County values and supports the ranching industry as an important part of the county's economy, heritage and culture.”¹⁹²

Second Homes

Rich County's natural beauty has made it a popular place for vacation homes. By 2007, there were three second homes for every single primary residence in Garden City.¹⁹³ By 2014, Rich County's share of second homes was 72.7 percent — the third-highest in the nation, according to the National Association of Home Builders. “As one might expect,” the Home Builders said, “the top 10 counties with the largest share of second homes are mostly tourist destinations.”¹⁹⁴

This abundance of second homes has brought both benefits and challenges. Garden City’s General Plan notes that the second homes have increased property-tax revenues; they have created a demand for more shops, restaurants and even a community health center, stimulating the local economy; and they have supported “a highly successful real estate and construction industry.”¹⁹⁵ One downside mentioned in Garden City’s plan is that “the demand on the infrastructure has increased, while the full time population has not increased at the same rate. Therefore, the town does not have the resources to meet the demands placed on the infrastructure and services.”¹⁹⁶

Education

More than 98 percent of Rich County’s adults have a high-school diploma, but fewer than 23 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹⁹⁷

Evidence of a “brain drain” may be found in Rich County’s commuting patterns: Almost two-thirds of those who live in Rich County but work elsewhere have a bachelor’s

degree or higher, according to the Utah Department of Workforce Services.¹⁹⁸

“There is clearly a current resident population more educated than the local job market demands. It may be worth exploring the possibility that those areas may benefit from a greater focus on high-skilled job creation.” — Matt Schroeder, Utah Dept. of Workforce Services

Health

Residents’ medical needs are served by the Bear Lake Community Health Center in Garden City.¹⁹⁹

Broadband

Just 46 percent of Rich County residents have access to broadband internet, compared to over 95 percent for the state as a whole.²⁰⁰ Rich County’s 2017 Resource Management Plan called for federal land management agencies to “approach planning in a methodical and efficient way so that underserved county residents gain access to broadband, public lands are minimally disturbed, and service providers can engage in deploying services that benefit the county.”²⁰¹



San Juan County



Fact: The Four Corners Monument is located in the southeastern corner of San Juan County, connecting Utah with Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. The Monument is managed by the Navajo Nation.

	San Juan County	Utah
Population	15,356	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$42,581	\$65,325
Unemployment	7.2%	3.2%
Poverty	25.9%	9.7%
Public Land	92%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, “San Juan County, Utah Resource Assessment”; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

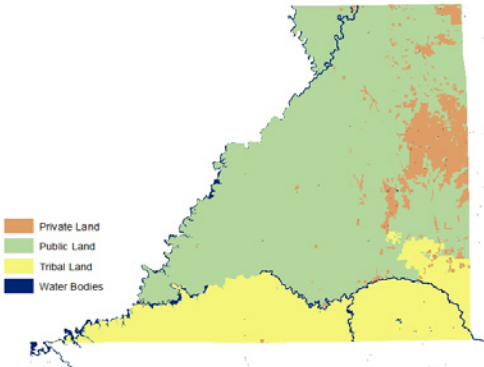
The greater part of San Juan County, 72 percent, is administered by federal and tribal agencies.²⁰² The Navajo Nation stretches across the bottom of the County, spreading from the San Juan River into Arizona and New Mexico. San Juan County is also Utah’s most racially diverse county; its racial makeup is 49.4 percent Native American, 47.4 percent White, and 5.4 percent Latinx.²⁰³



County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

The largest industries in San Juan County are health care, education, and construction, while the most lucrative industries are utilities, education, and resource extraction.²⁰⁴ The city of Blanding contains the only operating uranium processing mill in the United States.²⁰⁵

Additionally, the County seems to be on a fast track to a major tourism economy. San Juan is home to major iconic outdoor sites such as Bears Ears National Monument, Lake Powell, and Canyonlands National Park. In 2018, San Juan launched a new tourism-focused brand campaign, “Make it Monumental.”²⁰⁶

“Natalie Randall, director of San Juan County Economic Development and Visitor Services, said the revamp is the next logical step as the county capitalizes on the increased interest in the area. The county wants to promote the region as a less crowded entry point to one of the most photographed places on the planet.” — San Juan Record, Aug. 14, 2018²⁰⁷

At the same time, it introduced a Community Reinvestment Agency, a body with the authority to grant tax incentives to property owners who renovate or



construct new buildings.²⁰⁸ Two projects — a resort and a hotel - are already vying for CRA incentives.²⁰⁹ (The hotel would be developed by Phil Lyman, a former San Juan County Commissioner and freshman State Representative.)²¹⁰

Unemployment in San Juan County fluctuates throughout the year, but does not seem to follow the typical seasonal patterns of tourism-driven economies. In 2017, unemployment was at its highest in January at 10.5 percent, dropping nearly in half by October, when the rate fell down to 5.4 percent.²¹¹

Income

San Juan County has by far the highest poverty rate of any county in Utah at 25.9 percent.²¹² Within the county, economic inequality disproportionately affects Native American communities.²¹³

Over 17 percent of San Juan County residents receive food stamps, the highest of any county in Utah.²¹⁴

Former San Juan County Commissioner Rebecca Benally said unemployment and lack of economic opportunity are the main causes for poverty on the Navajo Reservation, noting that while unemployment outside the reservation hovers around 6 percent, “on the reservation side, it’s 50 percent.”²¹⁵

Health

While the County has two hospitals, one in Monticello and another in Blanding, high levels of uninsurance among residents present an additional barrier to healthcare. 17.1 percent of residents under the age of 65 don’t have health insurance, nearly double the national average.²¹⁶

There are 12 health care facilities on the Navajo reservation, although none of them are located within the Utah portion.²¹⁷ The Utah Navajo Health System, Inc. which started in 2000 as a to help provide medical and dental care for rural communities in southeastern Utah is working to increase health care accessibility.²¹⁸ The UNHS broke ground on a new Clinic in April 2018 to better equip rural Navajo communities with medical resources.²¹⁹

Education

While 83.7 percent of adults in San Juan County have graduated high school, only 17.3 percent have obtained a bachelor’s degree.²²⁰ The San Juan School District has partnered with Utah State University Eastern-Blanding Campus to improve adult education by taking a holistic approach to student needs, including on-site child care and individualized attention and support.²²¹

The San Juan School District has also received attention for its program to attract veteran teachers with high-paying salaries.²²² The District hopes that bringing in high quality teachers to the area can reduce teacher turnover, provide stability for students, and create mentorship opportunities for newer teachers.²²³

Even with the implementation of veteran teachers, Navajo students still face barriers in San Juan County schools. In the past, the District’s reliance on teachers from outside of the Navajo community has led to ineffective and culturally inappropriate school curriculum, career readiness, and discipline measures.²²⁴ There are also issues with language barriers in schools. Most school notices and resources are in English,



which makes it more difficult for essential information to be conveyed to parents who don't speak English.²²⁵

In a grant application, the District concluded that “levels of deep poverty significantly impact students’ ability to cope with school,” and also that “despite best efforts, too many children in San Juan do not feel safe at home and at times at school.”²²⁶



local tribes. However, it received strong criticism from GOP state leaders who felt too much land is publicly owned and would conflict with future energy development.

“It actually brought tears to my face. It’s so hard to even try to add up what this really means. At the end of the day, there’s only a certain place in this entire world, on earth, where we as indigenous peoples belong.” — Eric Descheenie, Navajo Nation member ²³²

“By unilaterally locking up 1.35 million acres — an area roughly the size of the entire State of Delaware — the president has misused his authority.” — Gov. Gary Herbert ²³³

Broadband

In San Juan County, only 22.7 percent of the population has access to wired broadband 25 mbps or faster.²²⁷ Blanding ranks as the city with the second-worst internet access in the state, with only 43 percent of its residents having access.²²⁸

The Seven County Infrastructure Coalition has listed broadband access in San Juan County a “priority project,” with the goal of expanding internet capacity between Blanding and Navajo Mountain.²²⁹ The Navajo Nation has expressed interest in extending coverage to other areas of the reservation as well.²³⁰

Public Lands

San Juan County gained national attention in 2016 when President Obama designated 1.35 million acres in southeast Utah as Bears Ears National Monument.²³¹ The designation was celebrated by conservationists and

The controversy continued when President Trump scaled back Bears Ears by 85 percent, along with the 1.88-million acre Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument in neighboring Kane and Garfield Counties by nearly half — the largest elimination of protected land in American history.^{234, 235, 236} While many of Utah’s political leaders and local residents supported the rescission, it was met with both local and national opposition from tribal communities and environmentalists.

Political Landscape

In 2017, a federal judge held that San Juan County’s racially gerrymandered political districts were in violation of the Voting Rights Act and ordered new maps for the county.²³⁷ Previously, the districts were

gerrymandered to give political majority to the white population over the Navajo community. The redrawn districts gave Navajos a majority of population in two of three commission districts and three of five of school board districts.²³⁸

In 2018, a federal judge held that a Navajo candidate for the San Juan County Commission, Willie Grayeyes, was improperly removed from the ballot by the San Juan County clerk.²³⁹ Grayeyes was elected in November 2018, in a historic election that tilted the makeup of the County Commission from a white Republican majority to a Navajo Democratic majority.²⁴⁰



Sanpete County



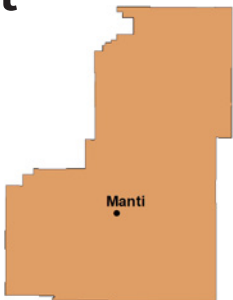
Fact: The annual Mormon Miracle Pageant brings an audience of about 100,000 visitors to Manti each June.

	Sanpete County	Utah
Population	30,035	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$50,928	\$65,325
Unemployment	3.9%	3.2%
Poverty	14.2%	9.7%
Public Land	57.61%	78.9%

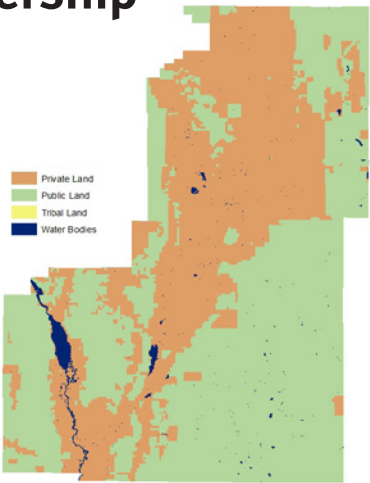
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Sanpete County General Plan; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

Located in the geographic center of Utah, Sanpete County is also demographically centrist. Its unemployment rate (3.9 percent) and median age (31.2 years) are close to the middle of the pack for Utah, and in terms of population, it seems poised to avoid the downsizing trend that has hit many rural areas.^{241, 242}

County Seat



Land Ownership



“Sanpete is one of the unique rural counties that will likely experience steady and increasing growth. In Sanpete’s cities and towns where the growth is likely to be concentrated, cultural shifts change rural culture and lifestyle to a much more suburban lifestyle.” — Rural Planning Group²⁴³

Industry and Employment

Educational services, healthcare, construction, retail trade and manufacturing are among the major industries in Sanpete County, indicating a higher level of economic diversity than most rural counties.²⁴⁴ Snow College is one of the county's largest employers, and the college "is really driving the growth" of Ephraim City, whose population has doubled since 1990, according to Ephraim's community development director.^{245, 246} Another large employer, Moroni Feed (Norbest) turkey plant, strengthens the county's agricultural roots.



Income

Sanpete's poverty level of 14.2 percent is fourth highest in the state, and — not coincidentally — the county's median household income of \$50,928 ranks in the bottom third for the state.²⁴⁷ About 800 children in Sanpete County live in intergenerational poverty, meaning they are at risk of remaining in poverty as adults, according to the county's Intergenerational Poverty Committee.²⁴⁸ To break the cycle, the committee has developed a plan focused on emphasizing the value

of education, ensuring access to quality health care (including mental health) and providing support for early childhood development.

Education

Among Sanpete County residents, 89 percent have at least a high school education, and only 19.2 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.²⁴⁹

While Snow College is an important economic driver for Sanpete County, only 39 percent of its students come from the local six-county service region, which includes Sanpete, Juab, Millard, Sevier, Piute, and Wayne counties. Of the remainder of the student body, 32 percent come from the Wasatch Front; 18 percent from other areas in Utah; 2 percent come from other states; and 9 percent come from other countries.²⁵⁰

Health

A variety of general and specialized healthcare clinics are available in Sanpete County. There is a critical-access facility, Sanpete Valley Hospital, as well as the 25-bed Gunnison Valley Hospital.²⁵¹



Sevier County

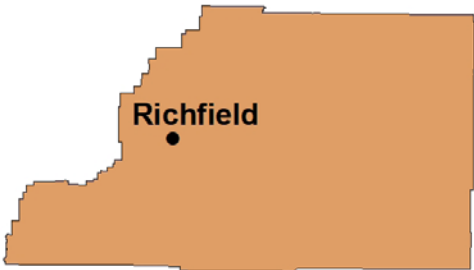


Fact: Sevier County is known for its 275-mile Paiute ATV Trail loop with over 1,000 miles of side trails, winding through dense forests, mountains, and towns.

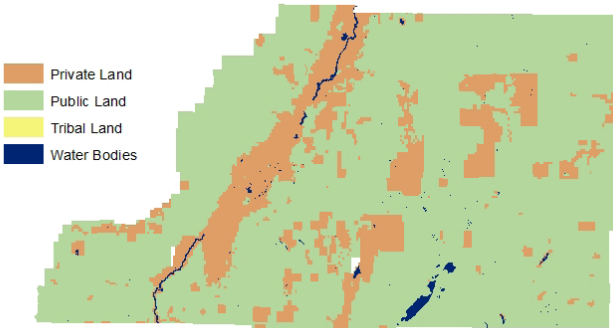
	Sevier County	Utah
Population	21,316	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$50,850	\$65,325
Unemployment	3.9%	3.2%
Poverty	12.4%	9.7%
Public Land	81%	78.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Sevier County Resource Management Plan; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

While the largest employment sectors in Sevier County are retail, healthcare and education, the highest paying jobs are found in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction.²⁵²



Sevier County is home to the highest-yielding coal mine in the state.²⁵³ The Sufco coal reserves are anticipated to last beyond 2025, but possible decreases in demand could reduce employment at the mine for people in both Sevier and neighboring Sanpete counties.²⁵⁴ Decreased demand could also reduce the need for trucking and other supplemental industries to mining in those communities.

Sevier ranks 13th in the state for tourism, with leisure and hospitality making up 13.4 percent of private sector jobs in 2016.²⁵⁵ Although Capitol Reef National Park is located partially in Sevier County, most tourists visit adjacent counties to access the park.

Income

Among children in Sevier County, 15 percent were found to be living in intergenerational poverty, and 22 percent were deemed at risk of remaining in poverty as adults.²⁵⁶

Sevier also has the third-highest rate in the state of residents who receive food stamps. Roughly 13 percent of households in Sevier County rely on food stamps. Within the county, certain regions have an even higher rate: In the Richfield area, about 16 percent of households receive food stamps.²⁵⁷

Health

Richfield is home to a number of medical clinics and the 28-bed Sevier Valley Hospital.²⁵⁸ Monroe and Salina also have several medical clinics.

Education

While 90 percent of Sevier County's adults have a high school diploma, only 16.8 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.²⁵⁹ Within the Sevier County School District, 48 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunch.²⁶⁰ Only 4 percent of students take one or more Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and for those who do, the AP test pass rate is 31 percent — much lower than the state average of 55 percent.²⁶¹ Sevier is among the counties to benefit from high-quality preschool programming through a TANF appropriation.²⁶²

In a report, the Rural Planning Group recommended Sevier County “work with USU-Extension, Richfield Campus of Snow College, and Talent Ready Utah to increase educational opportunities for non-traditional and traditional students ... to provide employees for current and potential employers.”²⁶³

Uintah County



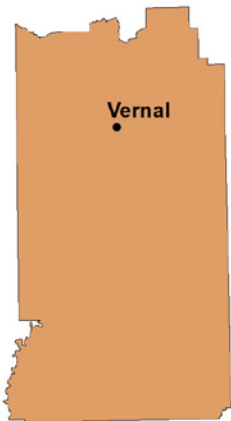
Fact: As of 2018, Uintah County contains the official best-tasting water in Utah.

	Uintah County	Utah
Population	35,150	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$67,012	\$65,325
Unemployment	6.1%	3.2%
Poverty	12.7%	9.7%
Public Land	85%	78.9%

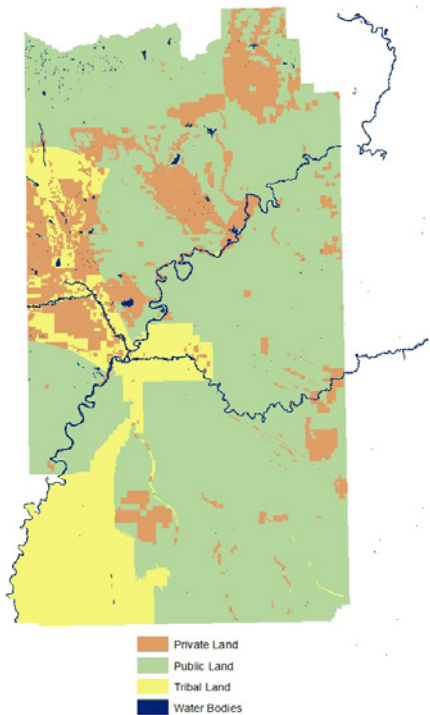
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Uintah County Land Use Plan; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

Uintah County sits in the Uinta Basin, an area known for its rich natural resources, both fossil fuels and fossils themselves. Dinosaur National Monument, located on the Utah-Colorado border, attracts paleontologists and tourists alike.²⁶⁴

County Seat



Land Ownership



Industry and Employment

Uintah County's economy is primarily based on extractive industries — mining, quarrying, and oil and gas.²⁶⁵ Uintah also has a modest tourism industry, with leisure and hospitality making up just over 12 percent of the county's private jobs.²⁶⁶

Uintah County may shift further away from coal in the coming decade. In 2015, the Bonanza Power Plant agreed to cap its use of coal at 20 million tons after 2020, in what has been described as an “early retirement plan” for the plant.²⁶⁷

From 2010 to 2016, Uintah County received about \$111 million from the Permanent Community Impact Board Fund — over one-fifth of total CIB funds awarded to counties during this time. The Board “provides loans and grants to counties, cities and towns that are impacted by mineral resource development on federal lands.”²⁶⁸

Income

At 6.1 percent, Uintah County has the fourth-highest unemployment rate in the state.²⁶⁹ Although its poverty rate

is 3 percent higher than the state average, Uintah's County's median household income is almost \$2,000 higher than that of the state.²⁷⁰ The predominance of extractive industries could partially explain the above-average median income and below-average employment rates: Although extractive industries typically offer high-paying jobs, the region experienced an oil and gas bust within the past few years.²⁷¹

Health

Air pollution is a major concern in the county, with a study by the Utah Department of Environmental Quality determining that oil- and gas-related resources were responsible for the majority of ozone-causing emissions in the Uinta Basin.²⁷²

Education

Only 14.3 percent of adults in Uintah County have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is among the lowest rates in the state for this measure.²⁷³ Utah State University has a campus in Vernal.²⁷⁴ In addition, Uintah Basin Technical College has its own Vernal campus.²⁷⁵



Wayne County



Fact: The original name proposed for Capitol Reef National Park was Wayne’s Wonderland, after the county.

	Wayne County	Utah
Population	2,719	3,101,833
Median Household Income	\$42,444	\$65,325
Unemployment	7.4%	3.2%
Poverty	13.7%	9.7%
Public Land	96.4%	78.9%

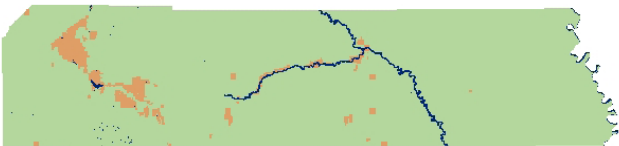
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “Quickfacts”; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Data by County”; Wayne County Public Lands Resource Management Plan; Utah State University Extension, “Land Ownership of Utah.”

Early inhabitants of Wayne County called the area “the land of the sleeping rainbow” — an apt description for a landscape that includes Capitol Reef and Canyonlands national parks as well as two national forests.²⁷⁶

County Seat



Land Ownership



- Private Land
- Public Land
- Tribal Land
- Water Bodies

Industry and Employment

Construction, tourism, and education make up the largest industries in Wayne County, with tourism on the rise. The Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute reported leisure and hospitality now account for more than 35 percent of private sector jobs.²⁷⁷



However, the 7.4 percent of Wayne County residents who make their living in agriculture (which includes ranching), can view an overemphasis on recreation as a problem.²⁷⁸ As the Wayne County Public Lands Resource Management Plan states, “All land uses except recreation have been almost entirely eliminated ... [which] has severely affected the livelihoods, families, economics, and entire lives of those who have remained and tried to raise families in the county.”²⁷⁹

Ultimately, both recreation and agriculture are important land uses, according to Western Planning Resources. The journal’s analysis identified three key sectors for development in Wayne County: (1) Internet-based industries, (2) tourism and outdoor recreation, and (3) niche agriculture.²⁸⁰

Wayne County’s unemployment rate stood at 7.4 percent in 2017 — the highest of all the counties in Utah except for neighboring Garfield.²⁸¹

Income

At \$42,444, the median household income in Wayne County is lowest of all counties except Piute.²⁸² And at 13.7 percent, Wayne County’s poverty rate is the fifth-highest of Utah’s rural counties.²⁸³ Yet Wayne County residents do not tend to rely on public assistance — only 5 percent receive help from these programs.²⁸⁴

Broadband

“We’ve got a lot of entrepreneurs. That’s kind of our base; we have a lot of individuals who can work online ... A lot of this is providing the people with the tools they need to do what they want to do.” — Adus Dorsey, Wayne County Economic Development Director ²⁸⁵



Internet-based industries seem an especially good fit for people in this remote area, where 18 percent of workers are self-employed.²⁸⁶ Broadband infrastructure and access is a critical part of that vision — according to a report by the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, broadband “increases business efficiency, opens new markets, promotes entrepreneurship and enhances economic growth.”²⁸⁷

While over 95 percent of Utah residents can access high-speed internet, Wayne County has some catching up to do. Only the city of Loa has internet speeds approaching Utah’s average, according to BroadbandNow, while the rest of the county has speeds 87 to 95 percent slower than average.²⁸⁸

Health

Wayne County is home to two Community Health Center clinics, but residents needing treatment in a critical-access hospital have some distance to travel.²⁸⁹ The nearest to the county seat is a 25-bed facility located over 60 miles away, in Gunnison.²⁹⁰

Education

Over 88 percent of Wayne County adults are high school graduates, and 26 percent hold a bachelor’s degree or higher — the third-largest percentage of all rural counties in the state.²⁹¹

Conclusion

Viewed from a distance, Utah's urban-rural divide appears to carve the state into two separate landscapes: On one side are bustling urban communities, growing and thriving; on the other side are rural areas, losing residents and opportunities. But a closer look shows a more nuanced picture of both challenges and advantages in rural Utah.

Economic Challenges

Some of rural Utah's economic challenges have been detailed in this report, which focuses on the 16 counties designated specifically as rural — rather than urban or even transitional — by the State of Utah's Rural Planning Group.²⁹²

Census Bureau statistics for these 16 counties tell part of their story:²⁹³

All 16 have a lower percentage of college graduates than the state average

- 15 have a higher unemployment rate than the state average
- 15 have a higher percentage of senior citizens than the state average
- 14 have a lower median household income than the state average
- 13 have a higher poverty rate than the state average



Rural Advantages

Another part of rural Utah's story is not so easily quantifiable, but no less real. It includes the natural beauty, outdoor lifestyle and sense of belonging that contribute to quality of life. "Residents enjoy the 'small town' atmosphere, good moral climate, and community spirit," explain the authors of Emery County's General Plan, which lists the "rural lifestyle" as one of its greatest assets.²⁹⁴ "Local residents also feel a deep appreciation for the county's unique landscape, natural setting and amenities."

There's work to be done if rural Utah is to overcome its economic problems and live up to its potential. It can be done most effectively if all Utahns — urban, suburban and rural — work together. And it should be planned and guided by those who know rural Utah best — the people who live and work there.

‘25k Jobs by 2020’

With this in mind, the governor's “25k Jobs by 2020” initiative asked the state's 25 non-urban counties to submit economic-development plans detailing their strengths, weaknesses, goals and requests for state assistance. Fifteen of the 16 counties that fit the Rural Planning Group's more stringent definition of “rural” submitted plans. The resulting data was analyzed by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, revealing some common themes.²⁹⁵

What do the rural counties see as their greatest strengths? Tourism and recreation were listed by almost two-thirds, and transportation access by almost half. Broadband access and energy/natural resources were each listed by about a third. The biggest split between rural counties and their neighbors appeared in the area of community growth and stability; it was listed as a strength by two-thirds of the transitional counties (adjacent to urban counties, or with cities of over 50,000 people), while only one of our 16 rural counties saw it that way.²⁹⁶



Among the rural counties' self-identified weaknesses, two stood out: single-industry dependency and workforce/skilled labor were mentioned by almost half.

It's not surprising, then, that about half of the rural counties said diversifying their economy was an overall goal. Other commonly cited goals included expanding existing industries and investing in infrastructure.

Rural Development Programs

When asked what their state could do for them, two-thirds of the rural counties had the same answer: expanded incentive programs.

Utah's Office of Rural Development currently has eight key programs to help boost rural business growth and employment. Its program guide notes the outsized impact that just a few extra jobs can have in a rural county, saying, "one job created in Millard County would have the same relative impact [on decreasing county unemployment] as 186 jobs created in a Wasatch Front county."²⁹⁷



Current Office of Rural Development programs are:²⁹⁸

- **Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) Program**

Provides grants to organizations and communities for economic-development projects

- **Enterprise Zone Tax Credit**

Provides tax credits for businesses that make capital investments or hire employees in state-designated, low-population “enterprise zones”

- **Enterprise Zone Nonprofit Tax Credit**

Allows nonprofit corporations to offer tax credits to donors who help fund approved projects in “enterprise zones”

- **Recycling Market Zone Tax Credit**

Provides tax credits and technical assistance to businesses that collect, process or distribute recycled materials

- **Rural Economic Development Incentive Program (REDI)**

Provides grant payments for new, high-paying jobs created after program approval

- **Rural Fast Track (RFT) Grant Program**

Provides post-project grants to rural businesses for capital investments in expansion and for creating new, high-paying jobs.

- **Targeted Business Tax Credit**

Provides tax credits to businesses for community-investment projects and the creation of high-paying jobs in “enterprise zone” areas

- **Utah Rural Jobs Program**

Provides capital loans to expand rural small businesses in specific industries

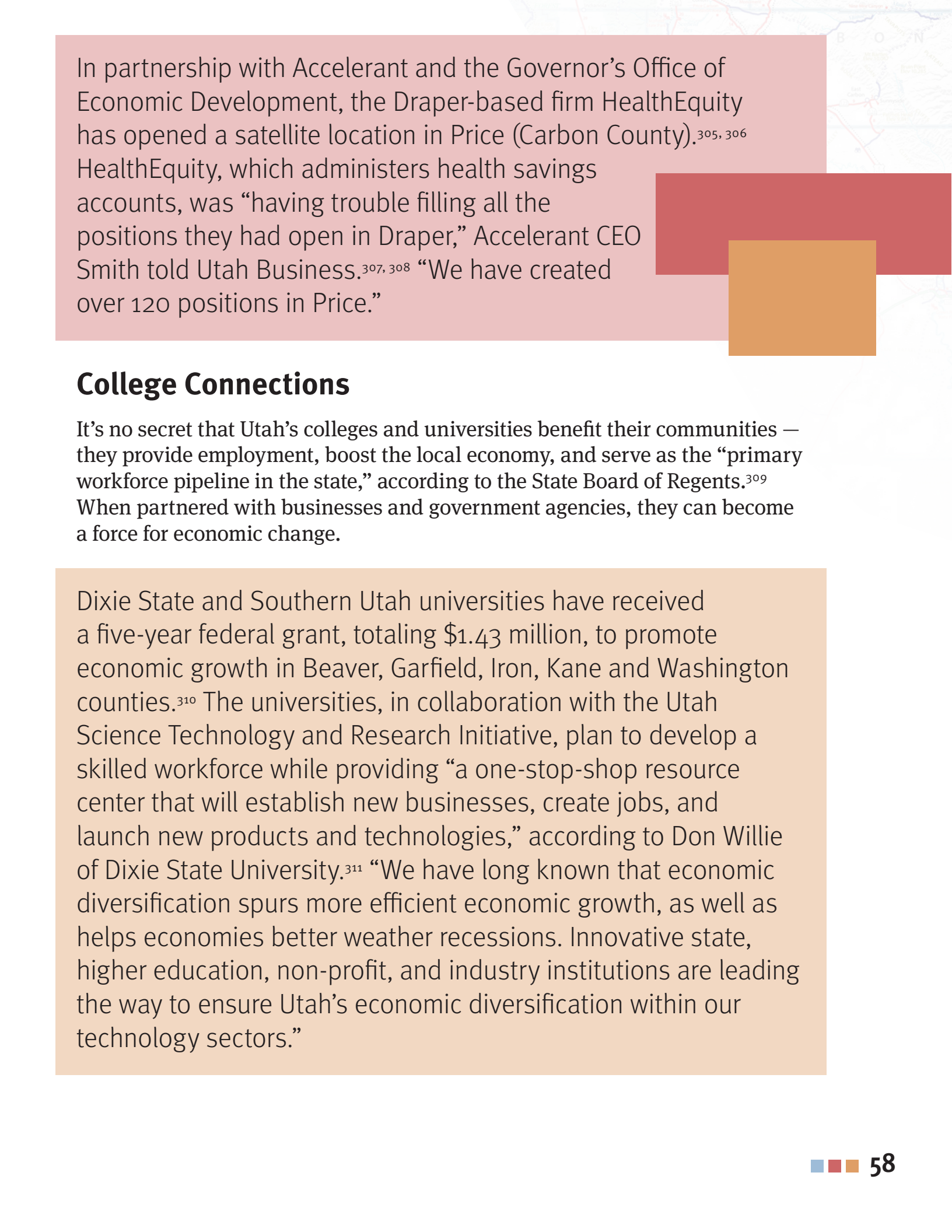
Business Development

In working to diversify their economies, rural Utah counties are taking a three-pronged approach: they want to attract new industries, expand existing industries, and train residents as a ready workforce for the jobs to come. While their economic-development plans include strategies for attaining these goals in the future, some efforts are already underway.





All three of these goals are being addressed by Accelerant Opportunity Hub in Price (Carbon County), which was created “for the purpose of providing jobs in sectors that are currently being outsourced to foreign countries such as tech, IT, contact centers, and professional services,” according to Accelerant Business Solutions Provider.^{299, 300} The facility connects the rural workforce with businesses looking for remote employees; provides skills training and a place for remote employees to work in Carbon County; and offers space and services for existing small businesses.^{301, 302} “The idea is ultrasimple: create rural jobs while filling the needs of the urban company that can’t find adequate talent on the Wasatch Front,” Accelerant CEO Joel McKay Smith told the Salt Lake Tribune.³⁰³ Accelerant has also set up a call center staffed with local employees in Richfield (Sevier County).³⁰⁴



In partnership with Accelerant and the Governor's Office of Economic Development, the Draper-based firm HealthEquity has opened a satellite location in Price (Carbon County).^{305, 306} HealthEquity, which administers health savings accounts, was “having trouble filling all the positions they had open in Draper,” Accelerant CEO Smith told Utah Business.^{307, 308} “We have created over 120 positions in Price.”

College Connections

It's no secret that Utah's colleges and universities benefit their communities — they provide employment, boost the local economy, and serve as the “primary workforce pipeline in the state,” according to the State Board of Regents.³⁰⁹ When partnered with businesses and government agencies, they can become a force for economic change.

Dixie State and Southern Utah universities have received a five-year federal grant, totaling \$1.43 million, to promote economic growth in Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane and Washington counties.³¹⁰ The universities, in collaboration with the Utah Science Technology and Research Initiative, plan to develop a skilled workforce while providing “a one-stop-shop resource center that will establish new businesses, create jobs, and launch new products and technologies,” according to Don Willie of Dixie State University.³¹¹ “We have long known that economic diversification spurs more efficient economic growth, as well as helps economies better weather recessions. Innovative state, higher education, non-profit, and industry institutions are leading the way to ensure Utah's economic diversification within our technology sectors.”

Economic diversification is also a goal of Snow College's Small Business Development Center, which operates on both the Ephraim (Sanpete County) and Richfield (Sevier County) campuses.³¹² The center helps new businesses get off the ground and existing firms find their way with free consulting services, mentoring, and practical clinics on topics such as tax planning, accounting and legal advice.³¹³

Legislative Efforts

Bills were signed into law in 2018 to create the Rural Online Initiative and the Rural Employment Expansion Program.^{314, 315} Together, the programs aim to address rural unemployment and underemployment by providing training for online remote and freelance workers, and support for the businesses that hire them.

Funded with a \$2 million appropriation administered by the Utah State University Cooperative Extension, the Rural Online Initiative is a three-year pilot program. Participants receive a certificate for completing a Master Remote Work Professional course, and then receive assistance with job placement in areas such as digital design, customer support, health care and marketing.^{316, 317, 318} “The premise was simple — educate, coach, mentor and teach rural businesses and members of the workforce so they can take advantage of online opportunities,” said Darin Bushman, a Piute County commissioner whose idea was the basis for the initiative.³¹⁹ “We also wanted to target high school students nearing graduation who were not pursuing higher education to avail them of the opportunities that exist online, which could help reduce the net migration from rural Utah counties.”

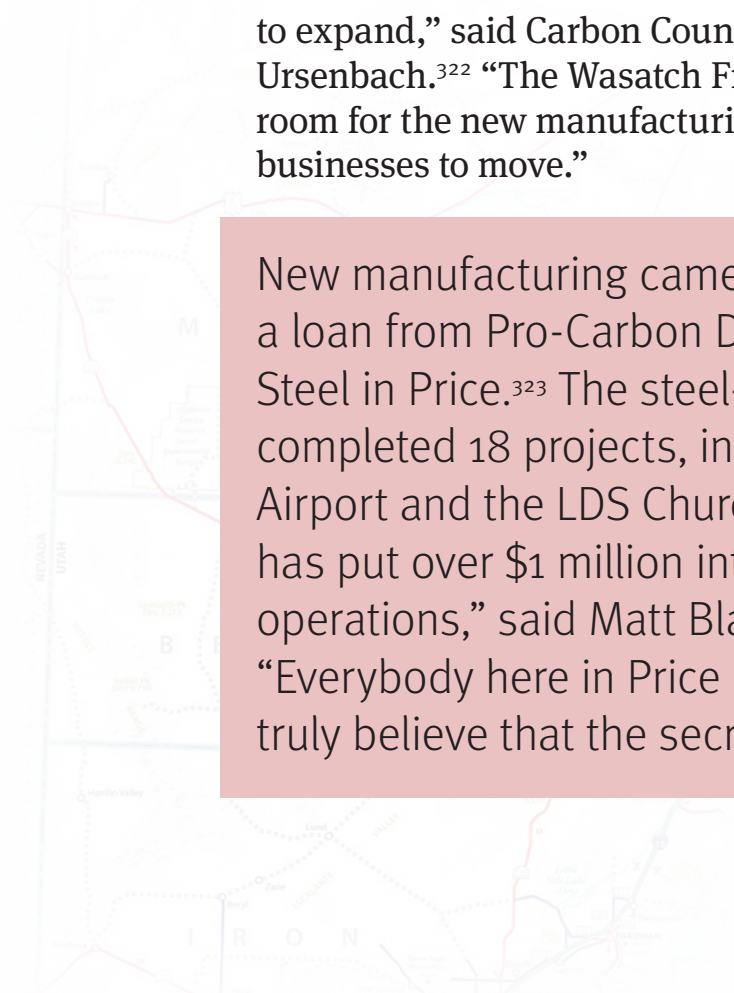
The Rural Employment Expansion Program operates within the Governor’s Office of Economic Development, offering post-employment incentives for each job a company creates in a targeted rural area.³²⁰

Lawmakers laid new groundwork for rural business development in 2016 with the Utah High Cost Infrastructure Development Tax Credit.³²¹ As the name suggests, it offers tax credits for the cost of investing in infrastructure — such as power lines, rail facilities and road improvements — in rural areas.



Signs of Progress

In working to attract new businesses, rural counties hope to create a win-win solution for themselves and the state as a whole. “Silicon Slopes is wanting to expand,” said Carbon County Economic Development Director Tami Ursenbach.³²² “The Wasatch Front is running out of room. They don’t have room for the new manufacturing to come in. So ... let’s inspire some of those businesses to move.”



New manufacturing came to Carbon County two years ago, when a loan from Pro-Carbon Development helped launch Intermark Steel in Price.³²³ The steel-fabrication company has since completed 18 projects, including contracts for the Salt Lake City Airport and the LDS Church.^{324, 325} “By my estimation, the company has put over \$1 million into the local economy since we began operations,” said Matt Blaser, president of Intermark Steel.³²⁶ “Everybody here in Price made the difference in this success ... I truly believe that the secret sauce in all this was Price.”

Population and Retention

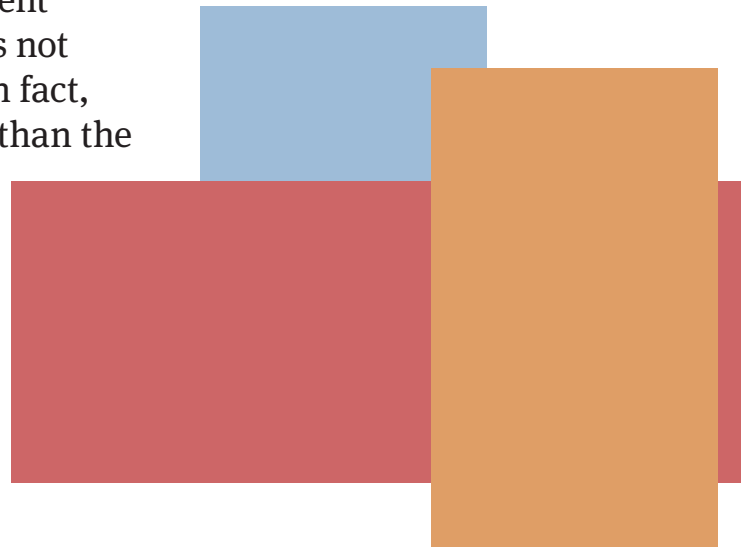
Utah is typically the “youngest” state in the nation, with a median age of 30.9 years and only 10.8% of residents aged 65 and older.^{327, 328} Not all of Utah’s counties are aging equally, however. Rural population retention becomes an issue as rural youth seek opportunity in the cities; by 2060, rural counties will be home to less than 5 percent of Utah’s population, according to projections from the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.³²⁹ Currently, every rural county except Uintah has a higher percentage of senior citizens than the state as a whole; in Piute County, senior citizens make up 28 percent of the population.³³⁰

The challenge of an aging population, according to the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, is that there are “far fewer young people and working age people to support an ever-aging generation of Baby Boomers.”³³¹

While rural areas can (and do) develop strategies for keeping up with their more urban neighbors, there is another option: Communities can accept the fact of flat or even negative economic and population growth, and then work to maximize the quality of life within that reality. Acknowledging and accepting decline is not the same as giving up, according to the State of Utah’s Rural Planning Group.³³² On the contrary, it requires “planning and preparing the best way to provide services, protect financial health, and focus on the community core ... for a better, but smaller, future.”

Income

While Utah’s overall poverty rate of 9.7 percent is well below the national average, wealth is not distributed evenly throughout the state.³³³ In fact, the nine counties with poverty rates higher than the national average share a common trait: They are all rural.³³⁴ Poverty threatens the next generation as well, according to the Utah Intergenerational Welfare Reform Commission. The Commission has identified 10 counties with the highest proportion of children at risk for remaining in poverty as adults; those counties, too, are all rural.³³⁵



Utah's Intergenerational Poverty Initiative has been working since 2012 to break the cycle of families remaining in poverty, targeting four areas: early childhood development, education, family economic stability, and health.³³⁶ The initiative brings together government, business and community groups who work collaboratively to achieve slow, steady progress. "This is a long-term effort," said Tracy Gruber, senior advisor of the initiative.³³⁷ "If we are going to reduce intergenerational poverty for kids, it will take several years to see the true fruits. The positive is we are seeing modest, incremental improvements in many areas that are going to impact childhood well-being and help support their forward progress in being contributing members of Utah's society."



Health

Utah's rural counties typically receive low scores in the annual County Health Rankings, based on criteria including lifespan, health behaviors and access to health care.³³⁸ Distance from health-care facilities is a challenge for many rural residents, as is opioid abuse, with the Centers for Disease Control reporting a higher drug-overdose death rate in rural areas.³³⁹

Bringing health-care access to rural areas is a goal of Connect Care Pro, a "virtual hospital" that allows over 500 health-care providers to help patients in remote communities via the internet.³⁴⁰ "We really want to bring bring our critical care specialties and abilities to wherever the sick patients are," Dr. David Guidry of Intermountain told the Deseret News.³⁴¹

While the opioid crisis has affected all of Utah, rural counties have been hardest hit:

- Carbon County has had the highest death rate for opioid overdose in the state.³⁴²
- Carbon, Emery and Grand counties have accounted for half of all opioid overdoses in the state.³⁴³
- Carbon, Emery and Beaver counties have ranked among “most vulnerable counties” for HIV and Hepatitis C resulting from the opioid epidemic.³⁴⁴

Amid the grim statistics, there are bright spots:

- 2017 marked Utah’s first decrease in heroin-related overdose deaths in six years, and its third straight year of decreased prescription opioid deaths, according to the Utah Department of Health.³⁴⁵
- The Utah State University Extension Service received a combined \$1.4 million in federal grants for curricula focusing on harm- and stigma-reduction strategies.³⁴⁶



Education

A comparison study of school districts in Utah from 2012 to 2017 found that rural districts held an advantage over non-rural in several areas, including: ³⁴⁷

- smaller class sizes
- slightly higher high-school graduation rate
- higher per-pupil revenue and expenditure

Rural school districts had a greater percentage of economically disadvantaged students, however, and fell short of non-rural schools in areas including: ³⁴⁸

- percentage of classes taught by a highly qualified teacher
- advanced courses available
- percentage scoring 18 or higher on ACT
- percentage enrolled in at least one advanced course

Rural schools have faced challenges in providing students with technology education, which is seen as key to building an effective workforce in their home counties. Public and private initiatives are working to address these challenges.

Utah STEM Action Center's K-16 Computing Initiative is designed to help rural school districts build computing programs. "Jobs in the tech industry can often be done remotely, which makes them a great fit for rural Utah," Derek B. Miller, president and CEO of World Trade Center Utah, told the Enterprise, adding that the initiative will "provide Utah students with computer programming skills that will increase their marketability and give them flexibility in where they live."³⁴⁹

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is investing almost \$1 million in total to improve San Juan County's interactive video classrooms and STEM equipment, and to "expand broadcast capacity for STEM programs to Duchesne, Grand, San Juan, Sanpete and Uintah Counties," according to Utah Public Radio.³⁵⁰

The challenges faced by rural Utah - including income, jobs, health and education - cannot be denied. Neither can the benefits - including recreation, resources and hospitality - that rural counties extend to their more urban neighbors. "There needs to be a greater connection between urban and rural places," said Maria Sykes, a founder of the Epicenter arts organization in Green River.³⁵¹ "The natural and agricultural resources that make people's lives successful in the city come from rural places, and yet urban residents may not care." The key question for both urban and rural residents is, as Sykes said, "What can we do, all of us working together, to make both places better for everyone?"



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