

## M. TOURISM

### 1. Valley Tourism Assets and Potentials

With about 80 attractions and points of interest anchored by the Great Sand Dunes National Park, three million acres of public lands, and spanned east to west – Kansas to Cortez - by US Highway 160 Kansas to Cortez, the Valley is strategically positioned for tourism. The number of tourists passing through the heavily traveled corridor and other routes entering the Valley is subject to conjecture and debate, but we believe it is in the ballpark of 1.5 million. How many of these travelers had the Valley in mind as a destination is also subject to debate, but we would guess as much as a third.

Solid counts of visitation at the national parks give some idea of the reality of the tourist numbers projected. Visitor tallies in the 275,000-300,000 range have been taken at the Sand Dunes, and a good share of the more than 500,000 visitors heading for Mesa Verde probably pass this way (see Table H-7 for other parks in Colorado).

Because attractions of various types are found throughout the Valley, tourism offers the best opportunity for all communities to work together on development and share in the benefits. Promotion of tourism on a region-wide basis is emphasized, but requires a continuous effort to keep on track due to changing economic and other conditions affecting travel, and varying levels of community resources and enthusiasm.

Many areas in the state and elsewhere would envy the diverse range of existing and potential resources and activities available to the Valley for building tourism themes. Examples include:

- national and state parks;
- heritage tourism;
- wildlife refuges and nature-based tourism and events;
- downhill and cross-country skiing;
- hiking trails, wilderness, and pack trips;
- dude ranches;
- rodeos and horsemanship;
- bicycle touring and mountain biking;
- tourist train and railroad heritage;
- scenic and historic byways;
- repertory theatre;
- geothermal springs and spas;
- museums;
- arts, crafts, and cultural events;
- golf courses;
- big game and duck hunting;
- stream and lake fishing;
- rock climbing;

- agriculture-based tourism;
- sacred-based tourism;
- a host of remote-area qualities such as dark skies and places to find solitude.

In addition to the above, contemporary concepts of tourism now include the whole range of activities associated with second-home ownership and seasonal homes, business trips and conventions, and visits to friends or relatives as a significant part of the industry along with its more traditional forms.

## **2. Importance of Tourism to the Economy (Table M-1)**

Table M-1 summarizes the tourism segment of the 2010 Economic Base Analysis, which estimates a total base income for the region at \$40,770,000 and base employment at 1,865. As noted in the chapter on economy, tourism with all its potential ranks fifth in the regional economy.

In a study released March 2014, the National Park Service estimated visitors to the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve spent \$14.3 million in nearby communities during 2012. That year, the park counted 254,674 visitors. The spending supported 188 jobs in the local area.

Mineral is the only tourism-dependent county, with 66.1 percent of its base income, and 61.8 percent of its base employment derived from tourist income streams. Following the closing of its silver mines, Mineral County transformed its economy to tourism and is regarded as one of the state's success stories. Main attractions include Wolf Creek Ski Area; dude ranches; national forest lands for fishing, camping, and hunting; snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in winter, the Creede Repertory Theatre, and a full schedule of special events.

From the standpoint of the region as a whole, Mineral's \$8,349,000 for tourism represents 20.5 percent of the region's tourism totals. Based on its concentration of lodging, shopping, restaurants, services, and proximity to the Sand Dunes, Alamosa County shows the highest amount of tourism income at \$16,853,000 (41.3 percent of the region). Rio Grande is third largest (\$7,932,000/19.5 percent) and Conejos fourth (\$3,854,000/9.5 percent). With all its history, culture, and charm, Costilla County's base income from tourism is only \$929,000/2.9.

One development that could boost the Valley's tourism base is the creation of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. Authorized by Congress in 2009, the heritage area is a nonprofit organization that promotes the valley's historic, cultural and natural sites. The group's board offers grants of up to \$25,000 for projects that restore historic buildings, provide interpretation, restore or promote scenic and recreational resources or document culturally significant components of the way of life in the Valley.

Legislation to propose a national historic park that would link a number of discreet sites in the Valley was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Mark Udall in 2013. The bill for the Sangre de Cristo National Historic Park, championed by former Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, remains pending in the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Nationally, travel and tourism industry continues to grow. According to the U.S. Travel Association,

travel and tourism grew by 6.8 percent in 2010, by 8.7 percent in 2011, and by 5.3 percent in 2012 to \$855.4 billion. That spending supported nearly 7.7 million jobs in the U.S. and accounted for 5.7 percent of non-farm employment in 2012.

In Colorado, tourism generated \$15.6 billion in 2011 and 141,000 jobs, according to the U.S. Travel Association.

### 3. Tourism Industry Components

The base analysis model recognizes four main types of tourism activities, noted as follows:

- **Second home construction and real estate** - Includes varying percentages of income and employment representing only the portion of activities dedicated to second homes or seasonal homes in most segments of construction; gravel and concrete; hardware and building materials; real estate; and sometimes sawmills.
- **Resorts, restaurants, recreation and lodging** - Includes all of lodging, and appropriate percentages of eating & drinking places; amusement; and recreational services.
- **Tourist-related transportation** - Includes appropriate percentages of air transportation and gas stations.
- **Tourist goods and services** - Includes tourist-only percentages of food stores; wholesale trade; furniture; apparel; general merchandise; drug stores; and misc retail stores.

### 4. Attractions and Events (Table M-2)

Selected tourist attractions, points of interest, museums, and historic sites for the Valley as shown on the map are widespread, and to visit them all would probably require several weeks and considerable driving time. Rough estimates on the number of visitors at some of the larger ones are as follows:

- **275,000-300,000** - Great Sand Dunes National Park; Combined lands of Rio Grande National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- **180,000-225,000** - Wolf Creek Ski Area
- **30,000-60,000** - Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad; Colorado Gators; Stations of the Cross Shrine
- **20,000-30,000** - Manassa Pioneer Days; Creede Repertory Theatre

Table M-2 shows selected events promoted by various communities with estimated total attendance of 96,950. These events also capture a fair share of tourist income, and are summarized as follows based on ballpark attendance estimates:

- 15,000-20,000 --- Ski-Hi Stampede
- 10,000-15,000 --- Summerfest on the Rio; Santiago & Santa Ana Fiesta Days
- 5,000-10,000 --- Loggers Day Festival; Early Iron Festival
- 2,500-5,000 --- Ride the Rockies; SLV Pilot's Assn Airshow; Creede 4<sup>th</sup> of July; Covered Wagon Days; Monte Vista Crane Festival; Crestone Music Festival; Spring Steam Festival
- 1,000-2,500 --- Colorado Wildfire Academy; La Jara Centennial; Fort Garland Military Encampment/Reenactment; Colorado Mining Championships

## **5. Tourism Trends (Table M-3)**

A 1.9 percent lodging tax collected on motel and hotel spending by tourists and travelers raises funds in the Valley for tourism promotion and planning, and is also a good indicator of the tourism trends. Table M-3 shows the Valley's total for 2011 at \$341,872, which represents an increase of 43.5 percent over 2006 – an average increase of 10.8 percent per year. By these numbers, Alamosa County had the best gain of 9.7 percent, followed by Costilla County (7.6 percent); Saguache (6.9 percent) and Rio Grande (2.2 percent). Mineral declined by 1.9 percent, while Conejos dropped by 0.6 percent.

While the six-year trend indicates a growth in tourism, lodging tax receipts for 2011 were down across the Valley dropping 6.7 percent from 2010 receipts. This is likely a consequence of the economic recession and a spike in gas prices in 2011. Numbers for 2012 are available at the time of this writing. We do expect to see significant adverse effects on lodging tax receipts in 2013 caused by the West Fork Fire.

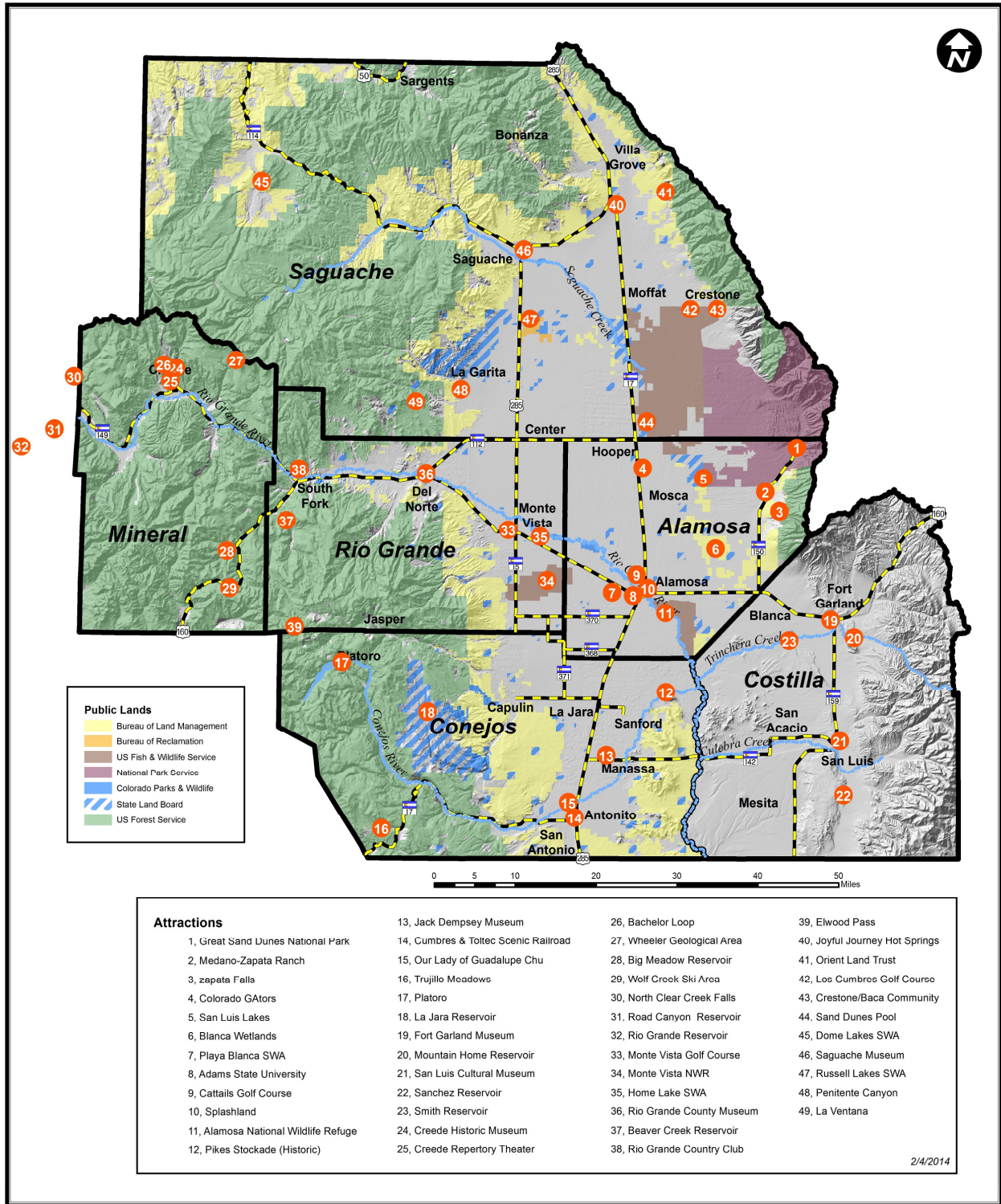
## **6. Tourism Accommodations (Table M-4)**

Estimates in Table M-4 are for total lodging accommodations in the Valley of 1,683 units at hotels and motels, bed & breakfasts, resort cabins, RV parks and tent sites. The largest concentration of lodging is in Rio Grande (651); Alamosa (593); and Mineral (239).

Typical concerns for accommodation besides lodging, campsites, and RV sites include: signage; maps and brochures; shops and downtowns; shuttles and tour buses; rest rooms; 24-hour gas service; telephones; and many more. Hospitality training for tourist and service business employees has also been discussed, and a well-informed and friendly greeting is part of the best practices treatment needed to ensure return visits.

Only one rest area exists, located on US 160 east of South Fork. It maintains an excellent appearance and could be a model for more like it in the Valley and other parts of Colorado. Several focal points for tourist information are located throughout the Valley, including the Colorado Welcome Center in Alamosa.

# Map M-1 San Luis Valley Attractions



Source: San Luis Valley GIS/GPS Authority

**Table M-1**

**Tourism - 2010 Economic Base Analysis**

	<b>Alamosa</b>	<b>Conejos</b>	<b>Costilla</b>	<b>Mineral</b>	<b>Rio Grande</b>	<b>Saguache</b>	<b>San Luis Valley</b>
<b>Total Base Income (\$1,000)</b>	\$234,156	\$63,473	\$31,861	\$12,629	\$176,178	\$67,509	\$585,805
<b>Tourism</b>	\$16,853	\$3,854	\$929	\$8,349	\$7,932	\$2,852	\$40,770
Tourism % of County Base	7.2	6.1	2.9	66.1	4.5	4.2	7.0
Rank in County	5	5	6	1	5	6	5
County Tourism % of SLV Tour	41.3	9.5	2.3	20.5	19.5	7.0	100.0
<b>Total Base Employment</b>	6,358	2,255	1,138	542	4,791	2,269	17,352
<b>Tourism</b>	816	166	42	335	371	136	1,865
Tourism % of County Base	12.8	7.4	3.7	61.8	7.7	6.0	10.7
Rank in County	4	5	4	1	4	3	4
County Tourism % of SLV Tour	43.8	8.9	2.3	18.0	19.9	7.3	100.0

**Source:** Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Division of Local Government, State Demography Office.

**Table M-2  
Selected Events**

<u>County/City/Town</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Duration -</u>	
			<u>Days</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
<b><u>Alamosa County</u></b>				
<b>Alamosa</b>	Summerfest on the Rio	June	2	10,000
	Colorado Wildfire Academy	"	7	1,200
	Ride the Rockies	"	2	3,500
	SLV Pilots Association Airshow	July	2	2,500
	Early Iron	Sept	3	6,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>23,200</b>
<b><u>Conejos County</u></b>				
<b>Antonito</b>	Spring Steam Festival	June	2-3	5,000
	Arco-Iris Arts & Crafts Fair	Sept	2	400
<b>La Jara</b>	La Jara Centennial	June	1	1,000
<b>Manassa</b>	Mormon Pioneer Days	July	2	22,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>28,400</b>
<b><u>Costilla County</u></b>				
<b>Fort Garland</b>	Ft Garland Military Encamp/Reenactment	May	2	1,200
	Ft Garland Military Encamp/Reenactment	August	2	700
<b>San Luis</b>	Santa Ana/St. James Celebration	July	2	10,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>11,900</b>
<b><u>Mineral County</u></b>				
<b>Creede</b>	Taste of Creede	May	2	600
	Wood Carvers Festival	July	7	300
	Colorado Mining Championships	"	2	1,000
	Knife & Tomahawk Throwing Championship	"	2	200
	4th of July	"	2	2,000
	Salsa Festival	Sept	3	200
<b>Total</b>				<b>4,300</b>
<b><u>Rio Grande County</u></b>				
<b>Del Norte</b>	Covered Wagon Days	August	3	2,000
<b>Monte Vista</b>	Potato/Grain Conference	February	3	350
	Crane Festival	March	3	3,500
	Ski-Hi Stampede	July	3	15,000
<b>South Fork</b>	Loggers Day Festival	July	2	6,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>26,850</b>
<b><u>Saguache County</u></b>				
<b>Saguache</b>	Home Made Tour	Sept	1	300
<b>Crestone</b>	Crestone Music Festival	August	2	2,000
<b>Total</b>				<b>2,300</b>
<b>San Luis Valley</b>				<b>96,950</b>

Source: SLV Development Resources Group, December 2007, 2013.

**Table M-3  
Lodging Tax Trends, 2006-2011**

Year	Alamosa (1.9%)		Conejos (1.9%)		Costilla (1.9%)		Mineral (1.9%)		Rio Grande (1.9%)		Saguache (1.9%)		Total	
	\$	% chg	\$	% chg	\$	% chg	\$	% chg	\$	% chg	\$	% chg	\$	% chg
2006	118,182		20,686		7,721		NR*		81,801		9,821		238,211	
2007	129,149	9.3	22,085	6.8	9,061	17.4	63,128		84,781	3.6	10,086	2.7	318,290	33.6
2008	128,274	-0.7	21,111	-4.4	6,822	-24.7	57,627	-8.7	83,597	-1.4	11,519	14.2	308,950	-2.9
2009	117,233	-8.6	23,513	11.4	9,349	37.0	60,122	4.3	83,987	0.5	11,663	1.3	305,867	-1.0
2010	175,397	49.6	20,050	-14.7	10,660	14.0	58,332	-3.0	88,879	5.8	13,217	13.3	366,535	2.3
2011	170,983	-2.5	19,260	-3.9	6,676	-37.4	53,354	-8.5	78,664	-11.5	12,935	-2.1	341,872	-6.7
2006-2011 Avg. Annual Chg.	839,218	48.4	126,705	-3.1	50,289	38.1	292,563	-7.6	501,709	8.7	69,241	34.6	1,879,725	53.9
		9.7		-0.6		7.6		-1.9		2.2		6.9		10.8

Source: Colorado Department of Revenue, 2012 Annual Report.  
<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/Revenue-Main/XRM/1213867975035>

Table M-4

San Luis Valley Lodging Capacity Estimates

Town	Hotel/Motel Rooms	Bed & Breakfast Rooms	Resort Cabins	RV Sites	Tent Sites
<b>ALAMOSA COUNTY</b>					
Alamosa	581	0	3	82	0
Mosca/Sand Dunes	12	0	0	81	80
<b>Subtotal Alamosa County</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>CONEJOS COUNTY</b>					
Antonito/Conejos Canyon	41	4	91	175	42
La Jara	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Subtotal Conejos County</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>COSTILLA COUNTY</b>					
Fort Garland	39	0	0	24	22
San Luis	22	8	0	0	0
<b>Subtotal Costilla County</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>MINERAL COUNTY</b>					
Creede	56	9	174	194	0
<b>Subtotal Mineral County</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>RIO GRANDE COUNTY</b>					
Del Norte	34	8	10	29	30
Monte Vista	147	8	0	0	0
South Fork	172	0	172	684	12
<b>Subtotal Rio Grande County</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>SAGUACHE COUNTY</b>					
Center	0	0	0	0	0
Crestone	32	20	10	0	0
Moffat	11	9	0	1	0
Saguache	9	1	7	0	0
Villa Grove	3	9	1	15	10
<b>Subtotal Saguache County</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total San Luis Valley</b>	<b>1,159</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>1,285</b>	<b>196</b>

Sources: Alamosa County Convention and Visitors Bureau, survey of accommodations in the San Luis Valley. Internet search of lodging, RV parks and campgrounds in the San Luis Valley.