

# Recreation heyday brings more people to public lands

More than 100,000 hikers bag 14ers every year; 230 summited Huron in 1 day

**Buena Vista —** Outdoor recreation is one of Chaffee County's hottest meal tickets but what hiking, biking, off-roading and fishing is doing to public lands remains largely unknown.

Mapping by Friends of Fourmile shows an 80% increase in campsites in the 100,000-square-mile area since 2004, including 74 new sites and 66 sites that expanded in size by two to five times.

The group notes that, if the majority of campers are toileting outside, as many as 4,000 human waste deposits could be left behind in a single weekend.

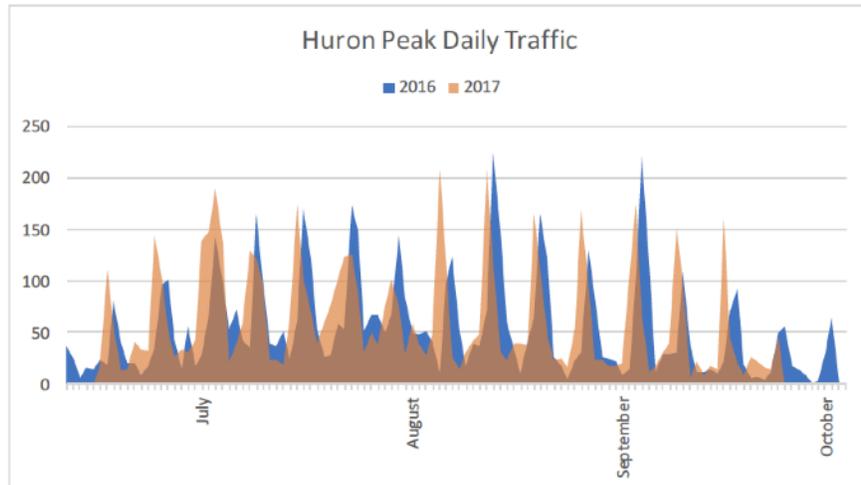
Buena Vista resident Rich Morgan, who rides in Fourmile about three times a week in the season, said he has seen the number of mountain bikers steadily increase in the last five years. This fall, he met a group that traveled from Crested Butte to ride the dry trails in nicer weather.

"It was undiscovered for so long but now the trails are being developed and people are finding out about it," Morgan said.

Formerly a third-tier fishery with water quality issues in the 1990s, the Arkansas River and its Gold Medal trout designation has also been discovered.

Angler use increased 65% from 2007 to 2012, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, which said that about 18,000 people fish the river's three most popular reaches over six months of the season.

Peak bagging by hikers is also up, according infrared counters used by the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative to estimate trail use.

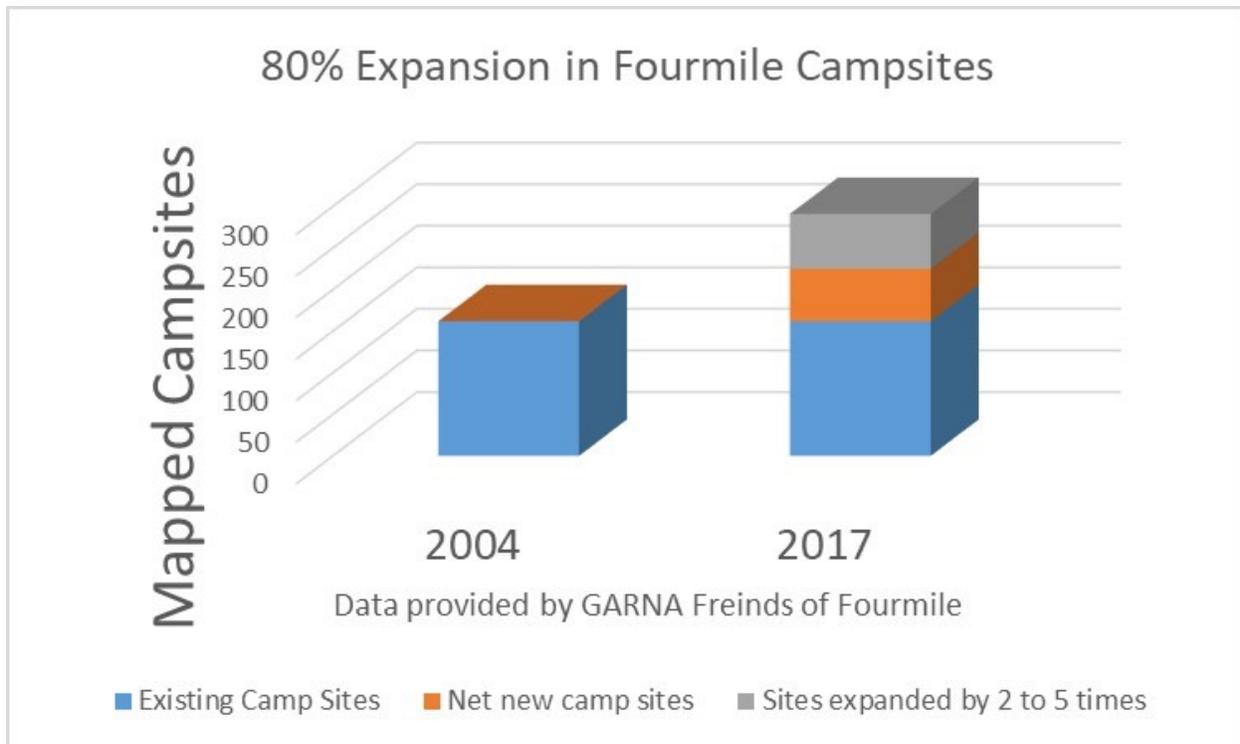


Peak bagging by hikers on Chaffee County's 14ers is more popular every year, according infrared counters used by the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative to estimate trail use.



Ben Calvert celebrated his 15th birthday on a recent Saturday zipping around Fourmile Recreation Area on an ATV. Parents Mark Calvert, far left, and Rachel Calvert were visiting Rachel's father, Buena Vista resident Dale Shoemaker, for a month from Singapore. Popular recreation areas like Fourmile, the county's 14ers, and the Arkansas River are used by more people every year.

Up to 110,000 hikers bag the county's tallest peaks every year, and on the most popular day in 2017, 230 people summited Mount Huron and 160 summited Mount Shavano — a 9% increase over the previous year.



Mapping by Friends of Fourmile shows an 80% increase in campsites in Fourmile Recreation Area since 2004, including 74 new sites and 66 sites that expanded in size by two to five times. Outdoor recreation contributes to Chaffee County’s economy but impacts to public lands remains largely unknown.

This anecdotal information suggests that Chaffee County’s public lands are more popular than ever. The outdoor recreation heyday contributes to the local economy — evidenced by a 17% increase in receipts from the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area in five years.

It is difficult to estimate tourism’s total contribution to the economy but activities associated with recreation, such as arts and entertainment, and lodging and food services, accounted for \$65.6 million in exports in 2016 — about 11% of the county’s gross regional product.

Tourism supports one out of every four jobs in the county, according to the State Demographer.

Tourism jobs are higher than the industry’s economic impact since they pay less than average — about \$21,000 per year compared to an average \$38,700.

The outdoors is a commodity in Chaffee County yet high-quality, uncrowded experiences are also prized by citizens. There is no data on the potential impacts of

increased use on forests, waters and wildlife, nor on the trails and roads themselves.

Morgan said he wants Fourmile to remain open and free but is concerned about trash, vehicles driving off designated trails, and protecting the fragile environment.

“With more people, what will happen in 10 years?” he said. “Will it get trashed or still be pretty pristine and beautiful?”

*This story was written by Kim Marquis and produced as part of Envision Chaffee County, a community effort to help maintain natural resources, affordability, rural landscapes and sense of community as the county grows and prospers.*