

**Fishers Peak State Park: Evaluating a New Natural Amenity in Southern Colorado**

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The recently christened Fishers Peak State Park offers great potential to give a much-needed boost to the economy of Las Animas County, specifically the town of Trinidad. With help from the City of Trinidad and Great Outdoors Colorado, the 19,200-acre property was initially purchased by The Nature Conservancy and Trust For Public Lands (TPL) from private owners on February 28, 2019. In September 2019, Jared Polis signed an executive order to officially pave the way for Colorado Parks and Wildlife to purchase the property from Trust for Public Lands and The Nature Conservancy on April 2, 2020. On July 16, 2020, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission formally approved naming the property, Fishers Peak State Park.

State Parks tend to draw tourism as well as improve the subjective quality of life in the areas around them. Tourism benefits the state itself, in the form of entry fees, hunting and fishing licenses, and other direct costs to use the parks, as well as the local area in the form of spending on goods and services, and increasing the popularity and visibility of the local area. The following report outlines the current situation regarding Fishers Peak State Park, its potential economic impacts and effects on the region, and how those impacts can be maximized and sustained.

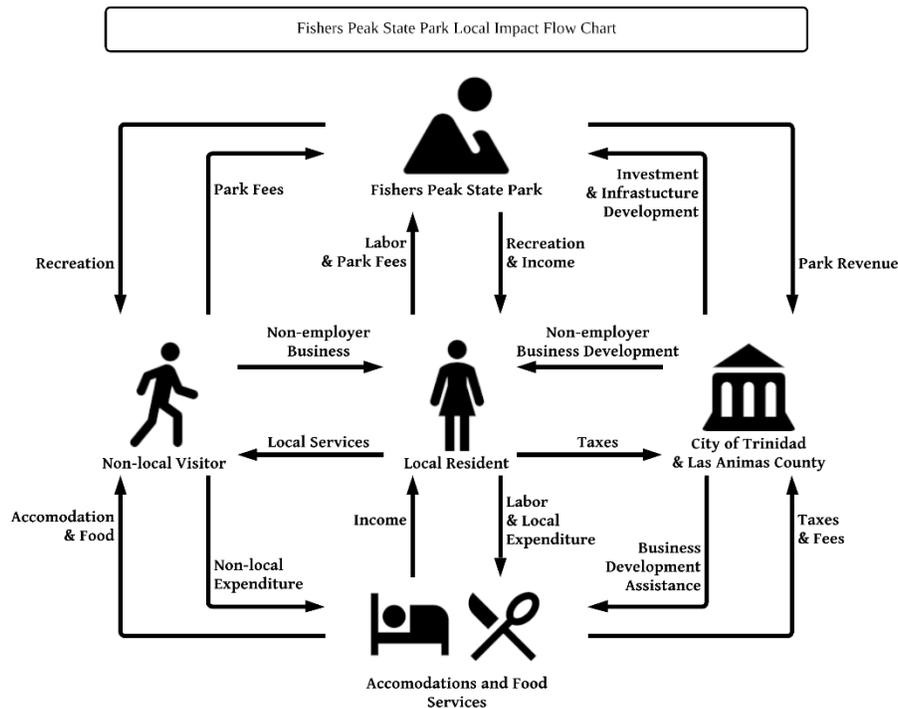


Figure 1

Fishers Peak will generate direct effects on the region through employing park staff and attracting non-local visitors who make purchases in the local economy. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of the local flow of effect generated by the addition of Fishers Peak State Park. Researchers estimate non-local visitor spending on state park recreation trips to range between \$15 to over \$100 per person per trip spent in the local

area, with an average between \$20-40<sup>1</sup>. A few factors also consistently correlated with higher spending, the most universal being visitors camping or staying in other park accommodation if the visitors were non-local, and if the park was a popular and commonly-visited destination. We can use these estimates of visitor spending to estimate the impact Fishers Peak could have in terms of tourism spending and what kind of visitation the park could expect to generate.

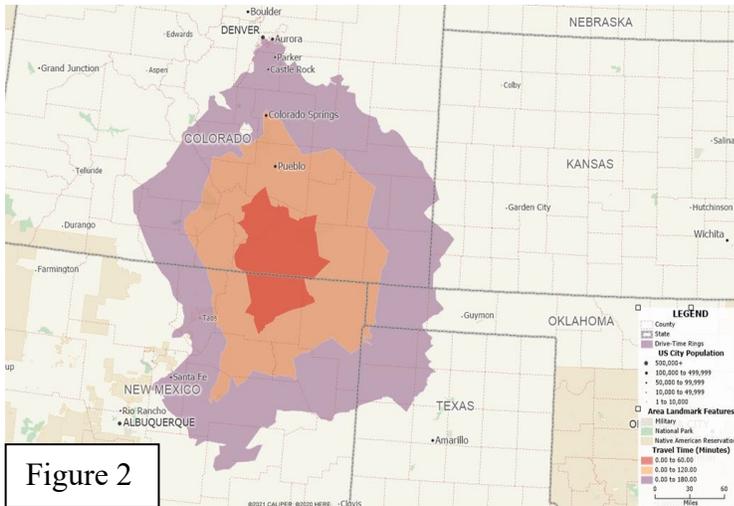


Figure 2

When estimating visitation, it is important to consider who will be visiting Fishers Peak as a primary destination or as a secondary destination on a multi-destination trip, and the distance both groups will be traveling. As a primary destination Fishers Peak it is estimated that 80% of its visitors will live within two to three hours by car (140 miles)<sup>2</sup>. It is also an ideal location as a secondary destination as the park is along major highway, I-25, and busy roadways in all directions. Figure 2 describes the visitors who live within the one- (red), two- (orange), and three- (purple) hour radii. Based on this map the

primary visitors in the two-hour driving radius base includes 730,000 people, with 600,00 residents from Pueblo and Colorado Springs. The extended radius of three hours adds major populaces in South Denver and Santa Fe, NM.

Activities are the next factor to consider when estimating visitation. The park features hiking, nature walking, picnicking, and hunting. There are also extensive plans to add mountain biking amenities. At 19,200 acres, the park is the second largest state park in Colorado, though only 250 acres are currently accessible to the public. Presently there are three trails, funded by [SB 20-003](#) which allocated \$1 million to capital construction related to infrastructure development projects. Despite the current low level of amenities there should be significant infrastructure coming to park soon. [SB 21-112](#) and [HB 21-1326](#) allocated a further \$20 million and \$14 million to state parks including Fishers Peak for capital construction related to infrastructure development projects. Should Fishers Peak receive 1/12th of funding in [SB 21-112](#) and a conservative \$500,000 from [HB 21-1326](#), the park will have \$2 million in total funding for development.

Assuming the park is fully open to the public, estimates based on US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) data, the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) conservatively places visitation from a few thousand to 150,000 visitors per year. Statistical estimates, based on research from REDI@CSU's own Stephan Weiler and Andrew Seidl, find Fishers Peak will likely have between 162,289 and 173,931 visitors per year.

<sup>1</sup> Briceno et al., 2015; Jeong & Crompton, 2014; Magnini, 2018; Magnini & Uysal, 2015; Morris et al., 2006; Prey et al., 2013

<sup>2</sup> Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2003, p.170.



Based on estimates using Weiler & Seidl’s lower estimate of 162,289, we can look forward to the local impact on local businesses and total visitor expenditure. The state demographer estimates that non-local visitor spending will have a multiplier of 1.41, meaning that every dollar of direct spending will add 41 cents to the overall impact of expenditure through local incomes and re-spending. State park literature places average expenditure per visitor at \$30, while TPL finds an average expenditure per visitor of \$85. The expenditure impact is tabulated in Figure 3 below. The most important expenditure estimate to look at is the total expenditure impact from non-local visitors. The numbers underlined and bolded represent the value added to the local area from the addition of the state park.

Figure 3

<b>ESTIMATED FISHERS PEAK ANNUAL VISITOR EXPENDITURE BY VISITOR TYPE</b>					
Average Annual Expenditure Per Visitor Estimate	Visitor Type	# of Visitors	Direct Expenditure (\$ millions)	Indirect Expenditure (\$ millions)	Total Expenditure Impact (\$ millions)
\$30 per year per visitor	Non-local	129,831	3.89	1.60	<b><u>5.49</u></b>
	Local	32,458	0.97		0.97
	<b>Total</b>	<b>162,289</b>	<b>4.87</b>	<b>1.60</b>	<b>6.47</b>
\$85 per year per visitor (Trust for Public Lands)	Non-local	129,831	11.04	4.52	<b><u>15.56</u></b>
	Local	32,458	2.76		2.76
	<b>Total</b>	<b>162,289</b>	<b>13.79</b>	<b>4.52</b>	<b>18.32</b>

This amount of tourism and expenditure will be a great catalyst for small businesses in the Trinidad/Las Animas County area. Looking at both non-employer and employer businesses, Las Animas County already has above state-average concentration in Accommodation and Food Services, and these businesses respective sales and wages have been growing faster than the state average as well. These features indicate that the area is well-poised to welcome more visitors. Retail trade and other services (except Public Administration) also maintain above state-average levels, which are important in tourism and spending. Tourism and tourism expenditure generated by Fisher's Peak could not only improve incomes in the local area, but also spur the expansion and transition of small single-person businesses into employer businesses, and even draw migration to the Trinidad/Las Animas County area with the park as an added amenity.

The Trinidad/Las Animas County area can greatly benefit from the addition of Fishers Peak State Park. Already backed by partial or full state funding from three different bills, continued development of infrastructure to push the park from utilizing just 250 acres to its full 19,200 acres has the potential to draw over 170,000 annual visitors and add over \$18 million in economic impact. The economic impact from the new state park has the potential to spur major business development by allowing non-employer businesses to form, as well as have existing non-employer businesses transition to employer businesses which can increase local incomes and incentivize migration.