

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

A summary of economic performance in surrounding counties



**HEADWATERS
ECONOMICS**



Photo courtesy Bob Wick, BLM

BACKGROUND

The 375,000-acre Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument was designated in 2001 to protect lands that hold a spectacular array of plant life, unique geological features, endless recreation opportunities, and significant historical artifacts. The area is defined in part by the history of use by Native Americans, Lewis and Clark, and subsequent generations of trappers, traders, and homesteaders. Located in Blaine, Choteau, Fergus, and Phillips counties, Montana, the monument is managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

PUBLIC ACCESS AND USES

The monument allows hiking, paddling, boating, camping, grazing, rights-of-way, hunting, fishing, and other activities. In 2023, the monument attracted 23,355 visitors.¹

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Travel and tourism are important to communities in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region, representing about 21% of total private wage and salary employment, or 1,238 jobs, in 2024.² Recreation contributed more than \$3.5 billion to Montana's economy in 2023.³

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Research shows that conserving public lands like the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument helps to safeguard and highlight amenities that draw new visitors, businesses, and residents to surrounding communities.⁴

Western counties with protected public lands, like national monuments, have been more successful at attracting fast-growing economic sectors and as a result grow more quickly, on average, than counties without protected public lands. In addition, protected natural amenities—such as the rugged cliffs, winding river valleys, and expansive prairie landscapes found at Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument—also help sustain property values and attract new investment.

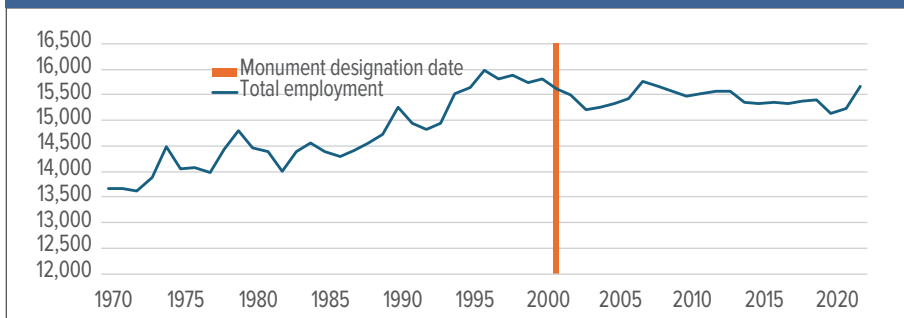
ECONOMY IS STEADY AFTER DESIGNATION

The economy of Blaine, Choteau, Fergus, and Phillips counties neighboring the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument has held steady after the designation of the monument.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region:⁵

- Population was steady, changing slightly from 28,881 to 28,737.
- Jobs were steady, changing slightly from 15,630 to 15,663.

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT



SERVICE JOBS INCREASING

Service jobs—such as doctors, hospitality workers, and teachers—reflect economic diversification for many communities. These jobs are increasingly mobile, and many entrepreneurs locate their businesses in areas with a high quality of life.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region:⁵

- Service jobs grew from 7,503 to 8,229 jobs, a 10% increase.
- Non-service jobs remained steady.

EMPLOYMENT BY MAJOR INDUSTRY

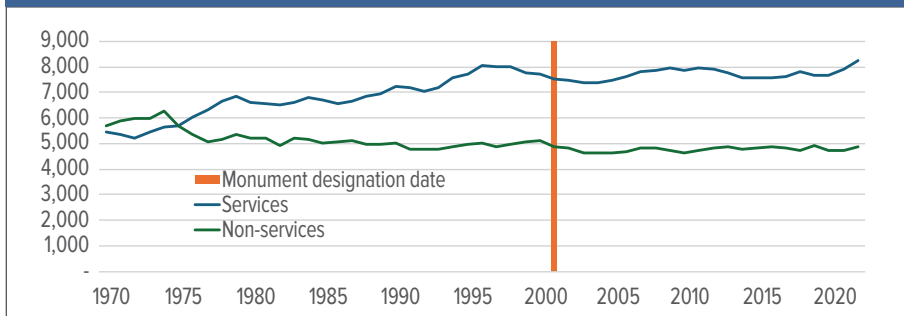




Photo courtesy Bob Wick, BLM

The communities in Blaine, Choteau, Fergus, and Phillips counties neighboring the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument experienced strong growth since its designation in 2001. The increases in personal income, per capita income, and earnings per job mirror other Western counties with national monuments or other protected lands

ABOUT

This fact sheet is part of a series created by Headwaters Economics that assesses the economic performance of local communities adjacent to national monuments. For more information, see <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/economic-performance-national-monuments>.

1. Bureau of Land Management. (2024). Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Annual Manager's Report, 2023. Lewistown, MT: Bureau of Land Management, Central Montana District Office. Retrieved from https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2024-06/UMRBNM%20Manager%20Report_FY23.pdf
2. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/cew/>
3. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2024). *Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>
4. Headwaters Economics. (2021). *National Monuments Can Boost Local Economies*. Bozeman, MT: Headwaters Economics. Retrieved from <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/national-monuments-studies/>
5. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2023). *Regional Economic Accounts*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from <https://www.bea.gov/data/economic-accounts/regional>
6. Lawson, M. (2019). *Non-Labor Income in the Rural West*. Bozeman, MT: Headwaters Economics. Retrieved from <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/papl-lawson/>

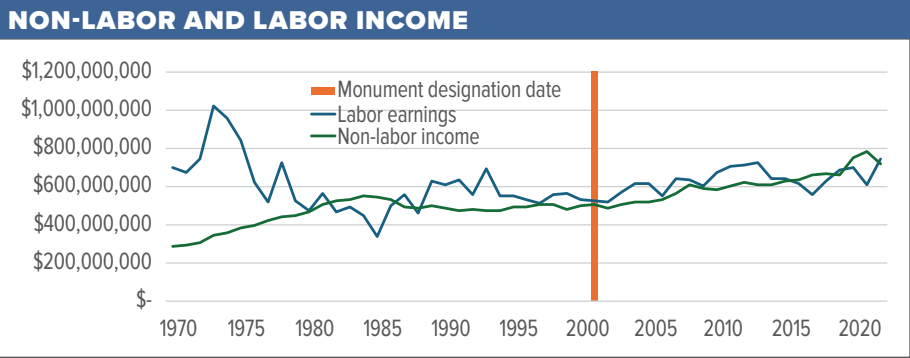
NON-LABOR INCOME GROWS FASTEST

One of the largest and fastest growing sources of new personal income in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region is non-labor income, which is made up of investment income such as dividends, interest and rent, and government transfer payments such as Social Security and Medicare.

For people with investment income and many retirees, protected public lands and recreation provide important aspects of a high quality of life. Non-labor income already represents more than a third of all personal income in the West—and will grow as the Baby Boomer generation retires.⁶

From 2001 to 2022 in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region:⁵

- Non-labor income grew from \$508 million to \$719 million, a 42% increase.
- As a result, in 2022 non-labor income made up 49% of total personal income.



TRADITIONAL JOBS HOLD STEADY

Long before the monument's creation, commodity industries (agriculture, mining, timber) were becoming a smaller share of the overall economy in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region. These industries remain part of the region's economy today.

In 2022 in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region:

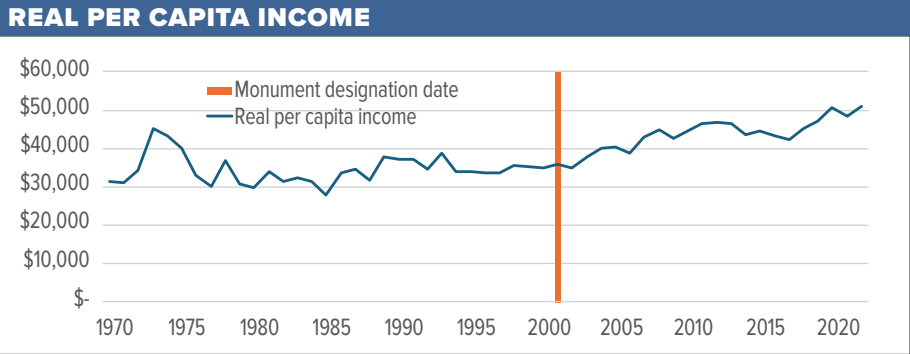
- Agriculture accounted for 18% of total employment.⁵
- Mining and timber accounted for 1.5% of total employment.²

PROSPERITY ON THE RISE

As the economy has grown since designation of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, per capita income and earnings per job have risen as well. This indicates growing prosperity in the region.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Upper Missouri River Breaks region:⁵

- Real per capita income grew from \$35,734 to \$50,929, a 43% increase.
- Real earnings per job grew from \$36,098 to \$50,847, a 41% increase.



Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group that works to improve community development and land management decisions.