Forest Service Portfolio

Overview
Utah contains six National Forests. Four of those forests are currently updating their forest plans. Forest plans are revised every 10 to 15 years for the Forest Service to incorporate changes in the natural environment, new scientific understandings, social trends, and new laws and policies.

In an effort to provide a fresh approach to forest resource planning, the Planning Section, in cooperation with the Demographic and Economic Analysis Section of the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB), has been exploring new methods of encouraging collaboration between National Forest managers and the local communities that are impacted by forest decisions. GOPB is currently developing Social and Economic Assessments for the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal National Forests.

Forest Planning
Forest plans are revised every 10 to 15 years so the Forest Service can incorporate changes in the natural environment, new scientific understandings, social trends, and new laws and policies. This requirement was established by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, which created the need to prepare and periodically revise land management plans. The National Forest Management Act of 1976, required that each National Forest and Grassland complete and periodically update a management plan.

The Forest Service faces a very difficult situation in revising their forest plans. It must attempt to find a balance between the various interests of its diverse constituent base (the American public), comply with the many federal laws that guide its actions, and assure that the land and resources are capable of accommodating these expectations.

A New Approach to the Process
One of the first tasks of the forest plan revision process is to inventory and assess relevant information on current conditions. This helps the Forest Service understand local management challenges. An appraisal of social and economic conditions is one of these required assessments. It is also one of the most challenging and significant assessments because many of the most difficult and contentious issues and demands facing the Forest Service today involve the relationships between the social and economic interests of people and public lands.

The social and economic assessments illustrate how people and forests are connected and influenced by one another. Economic, social, and environmental sustainability are interdependent goals for forest management, yet the Forest Service has traditionally focused primarily on environmental factors. As human uses and impacts have grown, it has become evident that forest management goals cannot be achieved without understanding economic and social factors as well.

A primary goal of these assessments is to promote a greater understanding, in both forest management officials and the general public, of how Forest Service decisions and actions affect local communities and others who use the forest. Conversely, it also attempts to illustrate how people and their activities affect forest lands. A second goal of this assessment is to involve people more closely in forest planning and to encourage collaborative planning that can ultimately help resolve many of these shared challenges.

From the outset, this study strived to go beyond the traditional economic and demographic "snapshot" of a place at one moment in time. While such information was collected in this process, as it is useful as a means for establishing an understanding of a shared background, this assessment went a step further by also establishing a new approach to understanding the various ways in which people are connected to the forests.

This project also broke new ground in the process of creating the assessment. It utilized a collaborative approach to include numerous stakeholders in development. Local communities participated in regional and county workshops to review and develop the materials. Their eager participation points to one of the most important conclusions of this assessment-that people want to be involved in planning the future of the forests and are committed to working collaboratively towards their goals. Thus, the process and interaction established in this assessment were important tools to establish its recommendations.

As the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal National Forests designed their forest plan revision process, they recognized that decisions made by the federal government also affect state and local governments as well as American Indian tribes. In order to better understand and manage these complex relationships, an assessment team was assembled with partners from GOPB, the Utah Division of Indian Affairs, and the Natural Resource and Environmental Policy Program in the College of Natural Resources at Utah State University. The Forest Service also established cooperative agreements with the local communities through either their counties or Associations of Government.

Within this broader context, traditional planning rarely stayed current. A more adaptive planning approach with strong stakeholder participation is needed to remain current and effective. Greater responsibility and stewardship for making decisions and acting upon them is also an important part of ensuring that shared goals are met.

Forests in Utah
Utah contains six National Forests. Four of those forests are currently updating their forest plans (Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal). The study area for this project encompasses 19 counties in Utah, two counties in Colorado, one in Wyoming and nine American Indian tribes. The study area covers well over two-thirds of the state of Utah-almost 54,000 square miles, including over 7,000 square miles of National Forest System lands.

More than half of the population of the study area now resides in or near urbanized areas such as Cedar City and St. George. In fact, 85% of Utah's total population lives in urban areas that are expanding and changing rapidly. The population is also becoming more ethnically diverse. Like much of the nation, Utah is transitioning away from a traditional resource-based economy, such as mining and agriculture, toward an information- and service-based economy. Many communities in this region have felt not only the economic impact of these changes, but have also felt an erosion of traditional lifestyles and cultures that accompanied this transition.

Many of the newest and fastest-growing uses of the forest are recreation-based, and have begun to compete with more traditional uses

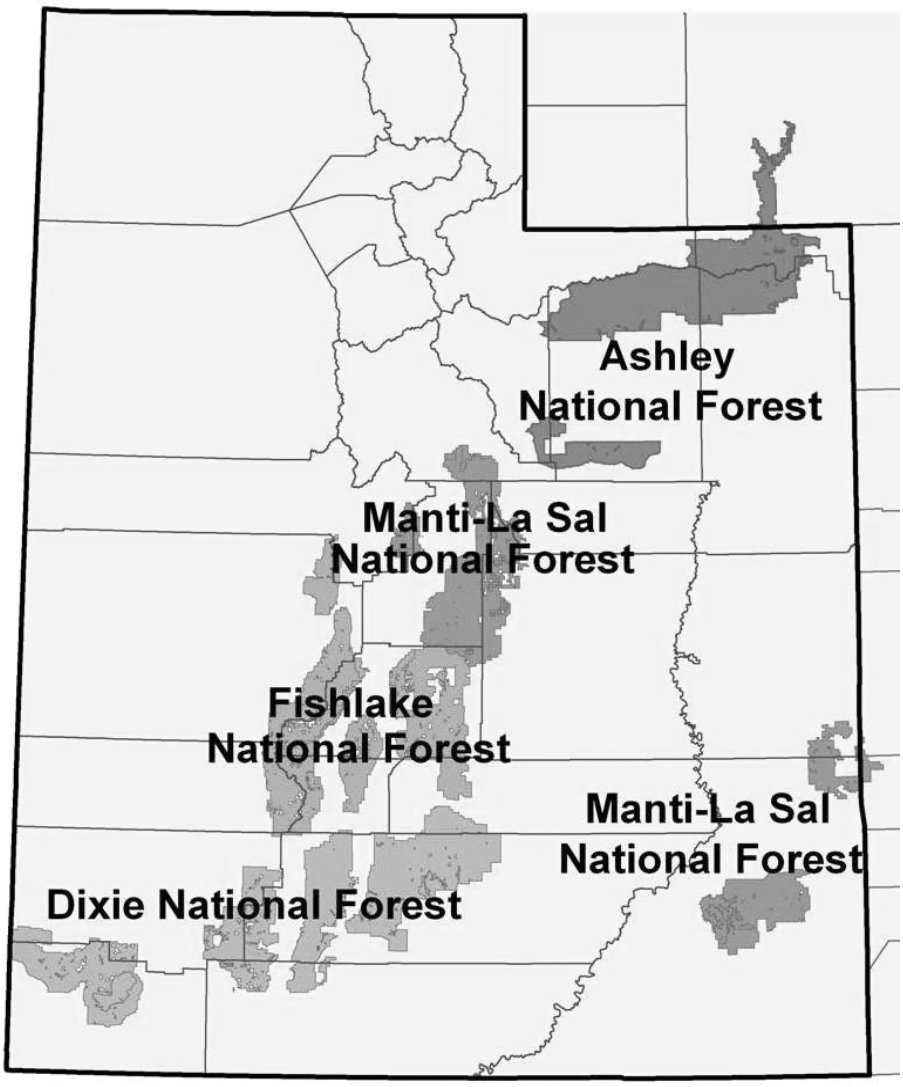
for the same resources. Recreation and tourism are becoming economic drivers in this region as they attract new residents and businesses. Many new users and residents have expectations about resource management that are different from the traditional views. These newer groups sometimes feel as though they are often not well represented in current government leadership and in the data and statistics used to help guide planning and allocate funding.

Many rural residents who have lived and functioned in the traditional economic setting for generations are facing new economic realities and trends. Rural communities often express an uneasy sense that their culture and traditional way of life is at risk, and they focus a great deal of their energy on safeguarding and defending these important social values and traditional economic activities.

Conclusion

This review of the social and cultural context displays the broad trends that are rapidly changing the demands placed on Forest Service lands. It also reveals the many different perspectives of people wishing to further their interests on forest lands. The assessment package developed by GOPB provided reference information, tools, and ideas that can be used throughout the forest planning process. It is also hoped to be useful for implementing the forest plans-including developing future alternatives, and formulating appropriate decisions, actions, and projects. While the framework and materials were developed specifically for four forests, they were designed to be used in other projects as well.

Figure 68
GOPB/USFS Socio-Economic Assessment



Source: Governor's Office of Planning and Budget

Figure 69
USFS Socio-Economic Study Area

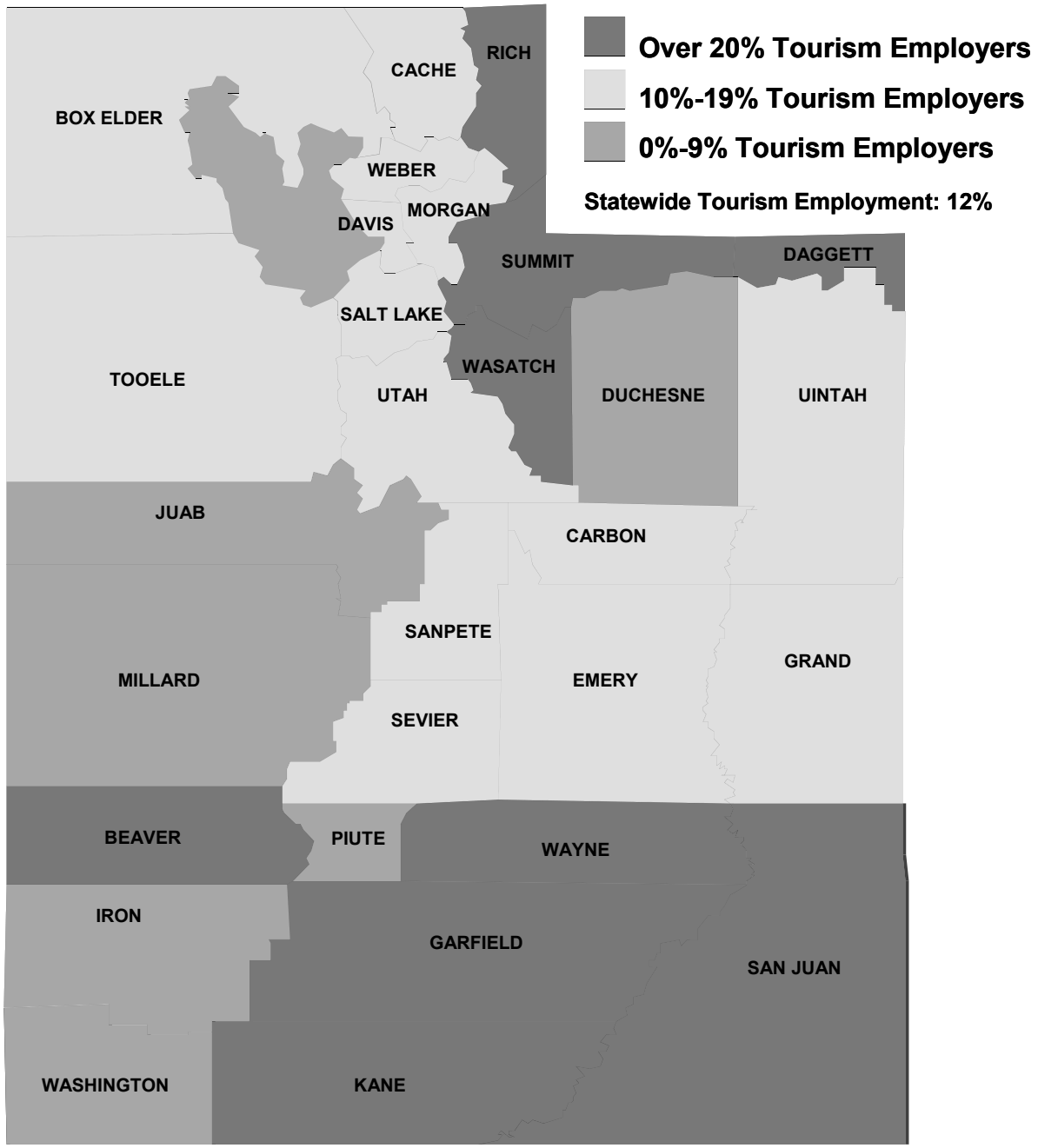
22 Counties: 18 counties in Utah, two counties in Colorado (Mesa and Montrose) and one county in Wyoming (Sweetwater).

8 Indian Tribes: Northwestern Band of Shoshone, Goshute Indian Tribe, Paiute Indian Tribe, Hopi Tribe (AZ), Navajo Nation (UT & AZ), Northern Ute Tribe, Ut e Mountain Tribe (CO), White Mesa Band of Utes

Approximately 500,000 people, or 20% of Utah 's population.

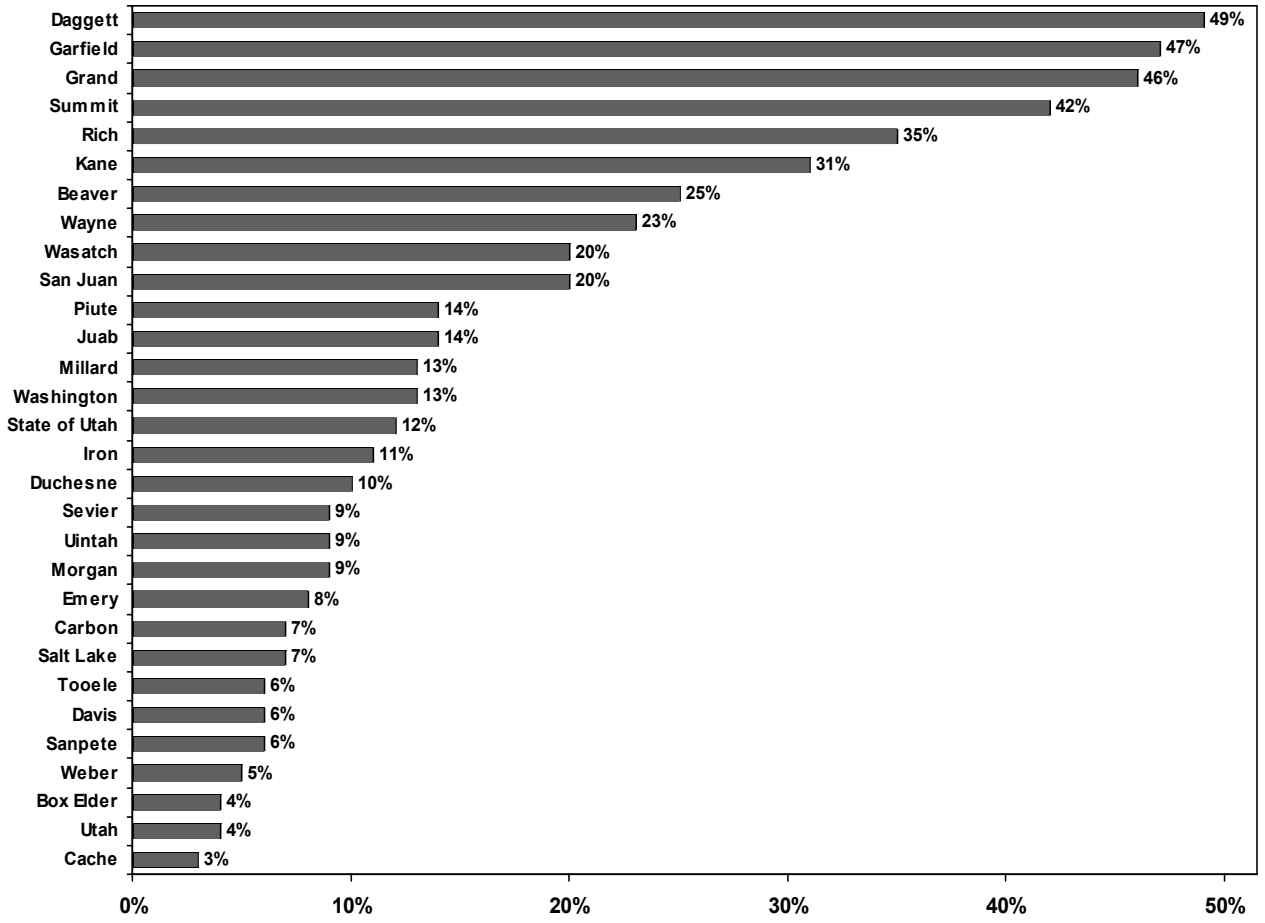
Source: Governor's Office of Planning and Budget

Figure 70
Tourism Employment Map



Source: Utah Department of Workforce Service, Adapted by Utah Di vision of Travel Development, 2002

Figure 71
Tourism Employment by County (Percentage of Total County Employment)



Source: Department of Workforce Services, Adapted by Utah Divisi on of Travel Development, 2002