

Daggett County Recreation Audit and Recommendations



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Goals of this Report:

At the direction of Daggett County, Utah, [Public Land Solutions](#) (PLS) produced this report: “Daggett County Recreation Audit and Recommendations” to serve as a business plan for optimizing the recreation revenue potential of Daggett County.

This report examines the existing and potential recreation assets of Daggett County, Utah through:

- An audit of current recreation assets and revenue flows
- Consideration of potential new and/or enhanced recreation assets
- An analysis of the threats and challenges for creating those assets, and an examination of current and potential gateway service businesses

The report offers suggestions for enhancing the recreation economy of the region to both maximize revenue from visitors and attract “quality-of-life” recruits. These recommendations primary focus on the development of new and enhancement of existing mountain biking opportunities between Flaming Gorge and the Uinta Mountains. A key tool recommended for improving and expanding recreation assets in Daggett Cpounty are the development public/private partnerships that include:

- Outdoor professionals from non-government organizations
- Outdoor industry/corporate donors
- Land management agencies
- City and county governments

Successful examples of similar partnerships are cited to provide a template for implementation of the conclusions presented.

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I. Introduction: Understanding Recreation Assets

Communities who invest in recreation assets see strong lasting returns primarily because they meet or exceed the expectations of their visitors. Like successful businesses, recreation investments embrace their strengths (i.e., “market advantages”) and clearly explain the unique qualitative attributes of their product, or in this case, place. Recreation assets can generally be viewed in one of two categories, frontcountry or backcountry.

- **Frontcountry Recreation Assets:** These places are characterized by proximity to the grid, in the form of pavement, cell coverage, and support services. Visitors to frontcountry assets expect infrastructure such as well-marked trails or full service marinas. They expect and generally enjoy seeing and meeting other visitors.
- **Backcountry Recreation Assets:** These places require a higher level of skill and self-reliance. Visitors to backcountry destinations are often seeking solitude and the opportunity to test their knowledge and skills. Physical fitness is also key.

In both cases, outdoor recreation provides people with the opportunity to get away from it all: the noise and distractions of modern life. It is the chance to relax and reconnect with nature. Outdoor recreation is an excuse to focus on the most basic elements of life such as putting one foot in front of the other on the trail, feeling the wind in your face, or the chance of catching the big one.

In Daggett County both frontcountry and backcountry recreation opportunities abound and the key to optimizing the economic benefits associated with these opportunities depends on two key elements.

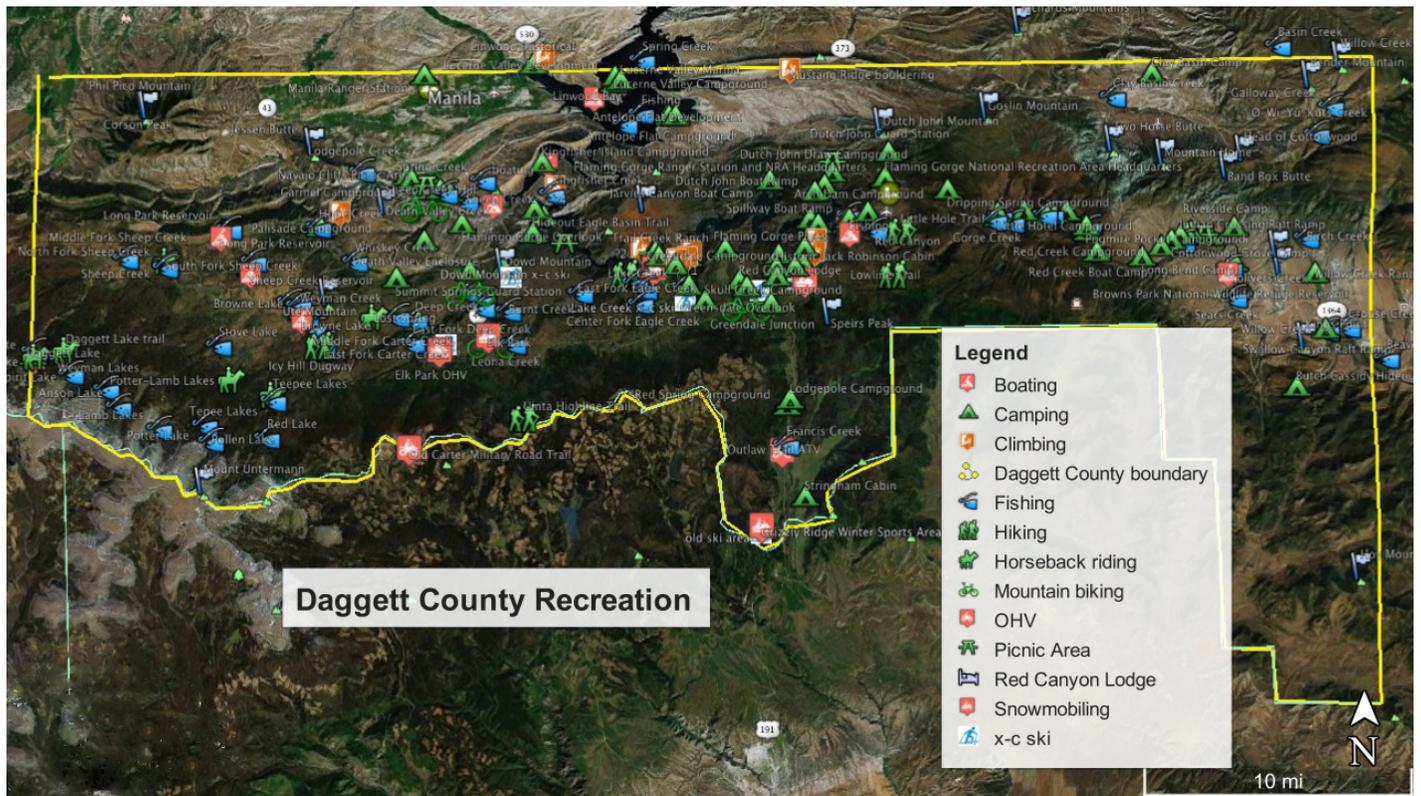
- **Authenticity:** Enthusiasts in any activity cannot be fooled. When the experience lives up to the hype there is no stopping the power of word of mouth endorsements. And conversely, trying to be something you are not simply will not work. It is critical to focus on the strengths and natural attributes of an area, and not try to make it something it isn't.
- **Partnerships:** Successful implementation of recreation assets in today's economy depends on partnerships. Local government, land managers, user groups and non governmental organizations of all types have teamed up to raise funds, work through regulations, and market newly created recreation assets of all types. And many of these projects have become powerful revenue generators in their regions.

The Outdoor Alliance recently completed a report on partnerships around the country. The full report can be found at this [link](#). While there is much to be learned from this report the examples most applicable to Daggett County are: Redding, CA; Raystown Lake, PA; and Indian Creek, UT. Other projects that could provide a model for Flaming Gorge include Curt Gowdy State Park in WY.

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II. Daggett County: Existing Recreation Assets and the Character of Resulting Revenue Flows

This section identifies the “market share” that various recreational activities have in Daggett County, Utah. Daggett County has a very diverse landscape and boasts a variety of physical attributes that support many different types of recreational activities, from fishing and boating, to hiking and biking.



Lake fishing, snowmobiling, fly-fishing, rafting, camping and hiking are all popular activities in Daggett County, but fishing by far represents the largest “market share”

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Flaming Gorge and Daggett County's dramatic topography lends itself to a variety of recreational opportunities

Daggett County's most valuable recreation asset is the Flaming Gorge Reservoir, but the Uinta Mountain and the interesting topography between Flaming Gorge and the mountains offers outstanding opportunities for a variety of activities.

Current Recreation in Daggett County

The estimated percentages of each recreational activity noted below are based on web surveys, forum posts, guidebooks, interviews, and visitation data where available. Estimates are provided for discussion purposes only and to provide relative perspective between activities.

Fishing (approx. 63%): This is the predominant attraction in the area. Many of these visitors come year after year and consider Flaming Gorge their personal vacation site. For most, fishing is an opportunity to get away from it all and spend time in a natural setting, enjoying the scenery, and being outside. A large percentage of these visitors bring their own boats to Flaming Gorge.

In general, the further a person travels away from their home, the more money they are likely to spend. And along with this travel industry maxim goes the idea that the more you bring from home the less you are likely to buy while traveling. Most boating and fishing enthusiasts who visit Daggett County tend to travel with a quite a bit of baggage and equipment, and a high percentage bring an RV (already stocked with groceries), a boat, and possibly an ATV. While they may travel 300 miles or more to come to Flaming Gorge, fishing enthusiasts often bring just about everything they need with them.

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Most of the fishing at Flaming Gorge would be considered a front country experience that requires a boat and involves interaction with other visitors. This is in contrast to exclusive backcountry fishing lodges popular with high wealthy visitors. While this high net-worth market segment may be of interest to Daggett County, it is relatively small and requires a high level of services and amenities, neither of which are Daggett County strengths. For this reason we do not see this market segment as a current growth area for the county.

Instead, the more that can be learned about the needs and concerns of the mainstream middle market fishing enthusiasts currently visiting the area, the better their expectations can be met. Finding a means to entice this existing customer to spend more by finding ways to better meet their needs will yield more for Daggett County than attempting to compete with exclusive backcountry lodge fishing market.

Whitewater Rafting (approx 9%): Many visitors enjoy floating the 7 miles stretch along the Green River from below the dam to Little Hole, both with outfitters and on their own. The area is very busy with fishing enthusiasts in boats and along the shore.

OHV/ATVs (approx. 7%): The Outlaw Trail is a key recreation asset for the region, but few visitors come only for this 40-mile trail as it provides only one full day of off-roading. In addition, the Outlaw Trail does not seem to accommodate more casual riders who need easier and shorter options. Other important ATV routes are found along the road to Spirit Lake and a new ATV trail in this area is being established. While further investment in ATV trail mileage could attract more specific ATV visitors, two concerns would have to be addressed: mileage and spending habits. The 900-mile Paiute Trail in Central Utah has been widely applauded as one of the top ATV trail systems in the country, and to effectively compete with this trail, a great many miles would have to be built or designated in Daggett County. While this is possible, the steeper nature of the terrain closest to the Daggett County towns could make this type of new development very challenging. In addition, this group of visitors is extremely similar to visitors traveling with RVs and boats in that they often travel with everything they need for the trip, and are thus less likely to significantly increase revenues in the region.

Jeeping (approx. 5%): While there are jeep routes in Daggett County, are not a major attraction and are unlikely to compete with jeeping routes and events in southern Utah or central Colorado. Many people bring jeeps to get too and from dispersed campsites to the water, but very few seem to come to the area specifically for jeeping.

Motorcycling (approx. 4%): In general dirt bike enthusiasts are attracted to areas with long miles of singletrack trails or rough double tracks through relatively accessible terrain such as Sun Valley, ID or White Salmon, WA. The geologic features of the Uintah quartzite seem to have discouraged any extensive dirt bike trail usage.

Scenic Driving (approx. 2%): Retirees and RV enthusiasts visit the area on their way to other destinations such as Jackson, Yellowstone, Arches and beyond.

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Road Bicycling (approx. 2%): Road biking continues to grow in popularity and Daggett County includes many scenic miles of highway, but narrow shoulders and challenging site lines make it less than optimal for road riding. And any type of major road riding event will include road closures that could interfere with other visitation. In previous years, Federal Transportation Enhancement Funds for dedicated bike paths were available, but these funds have ebbed dramatically in recent years. When, and if this pendulum swings back, it would be advisable to consider the Enhancement Program, by working directly with UDOT.

Snowmobiling (approx. 2%): Snowmobiling routes exist from the western side of the county into the National Recreation Area, but at present—like OHVs—these visitors tend to bring most of what they will need for their trip.

Hiking (approx. 1%): While there are a great many hiking opportunities in the area, Daggett County is not known for hiking and there is very little evidence that the area is specifically attracting folks who are primarily hikers or backpackers. However many visitors do incidental hikes and walks as part of their visit.

Mountain Biking (approx. 1%): This activity is also currently incidental and few if any folks travel to the region specifically to mountain bike, but many roads and trails have been visited by mountain bikers on occasion. Currently there are two main trails: the Red Canyon Trail is the only purpose built trail in the area, and the other popular trail is along the Green River below Flaming Gorge Dam. This latter trail is open from September to March, as it is busy with fisherman in the season. There is discussion of rerouting and improving it.

Horseback Riding (approx. 1%): Horseback riding is similar to hiking in that few if any visitors come specifically for this purpose, but instead may take a trail ride as part of their visit to the area (at this time, there are no horses at Spirit Lake).

Cross-Country Skiing (approx. 1%): Trails are groomed between the Resort and the Lodge along Red Canyon on the north rim. The area has immense potential for cross-country skiing, but few people visit specifically for this activity at this time.

Sea Kayaking/SUP: (approx. 1%) These paddle sports continue to grow, especially “stand up paddle boarding” (SUPing). While these activities do not integrate well in congested motorboat areas, the many “no wake” canyons in the reservoir could provide great opportunities for these activities.

Climbing (approx. 1%): Quality rock climbing and “bouldering” opportunities existing around Daggett County, particularly at Sheep Creek, Mustang Ridge, and near Cedar Springs Overlook. However, these areas see very little traffic. Many more new climbing routes could be developed at Sheep Creek and above the lake on the cliffs in Red Canyon.

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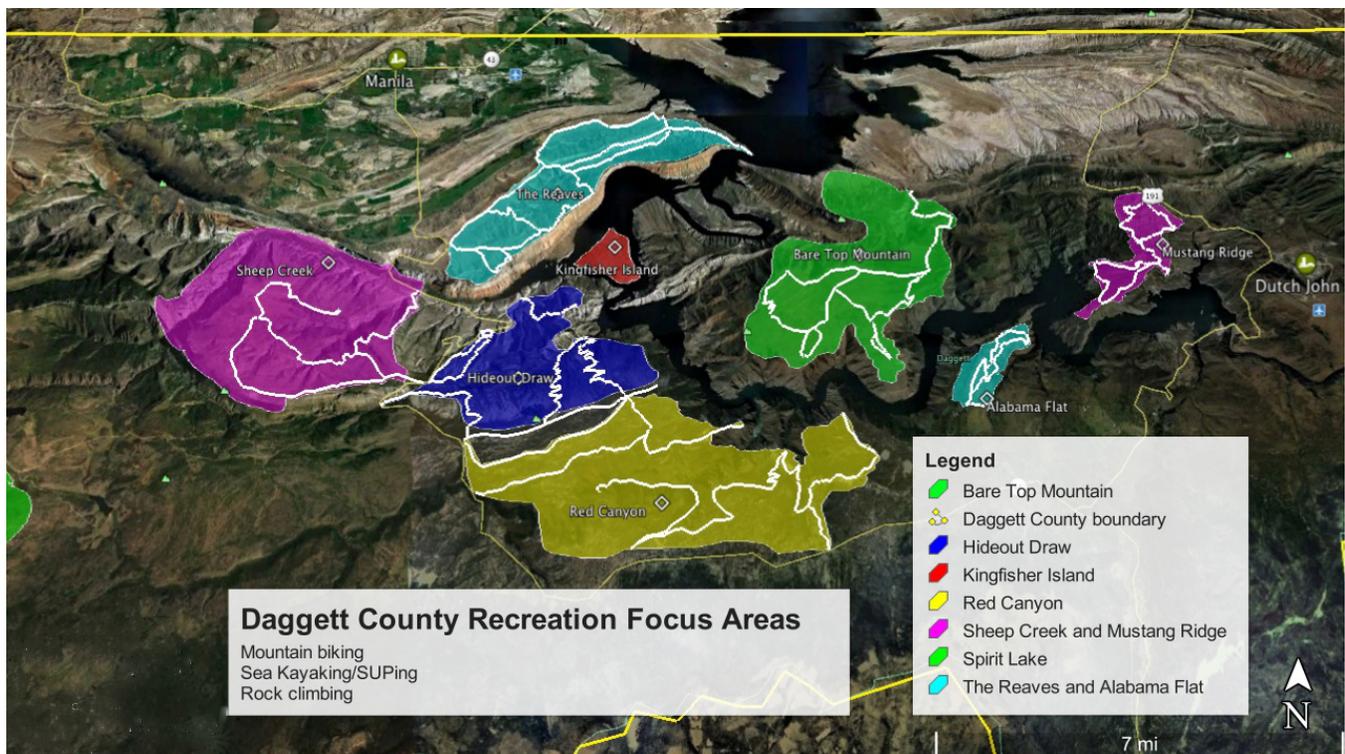
Events: The area is home to many successful fishing events. Opportunities abound for events for the non-fishing visitor if additional recreation assets are established.

III. Potential New and/or Enhanced Recreation Assets

The most obvious area for expanding recreational opportunities and creating new revenue in Daggett County—given its topography, location and services—is the establishment of new mountain bike trails, which costs a fraction of other recreational developments and has proven successful elsewhere. These new developments could come in a variety of types:

1. New stacked-loop singletrack trails
2. Improved and expanded internal connectivity of existing trails and roads
3. Improve existing mountain bike single track trails
4. Connector trails between new and/or existing singletrack and road areas
5. New and/or improved day-use trailheads

In addition to Mountain biking, Daggett County could also explore new recreational activities in a cost-effective way by developing and promoting a few key paddle sports and rock climbing opportunities. These expanded recreational opportunities are explored in detail below and represented on the following map.



Potential new recreation focus areas in Daggett County for mountain biking, sea kayaking/SUPing, and rock climbing

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Mountain Bike Trails

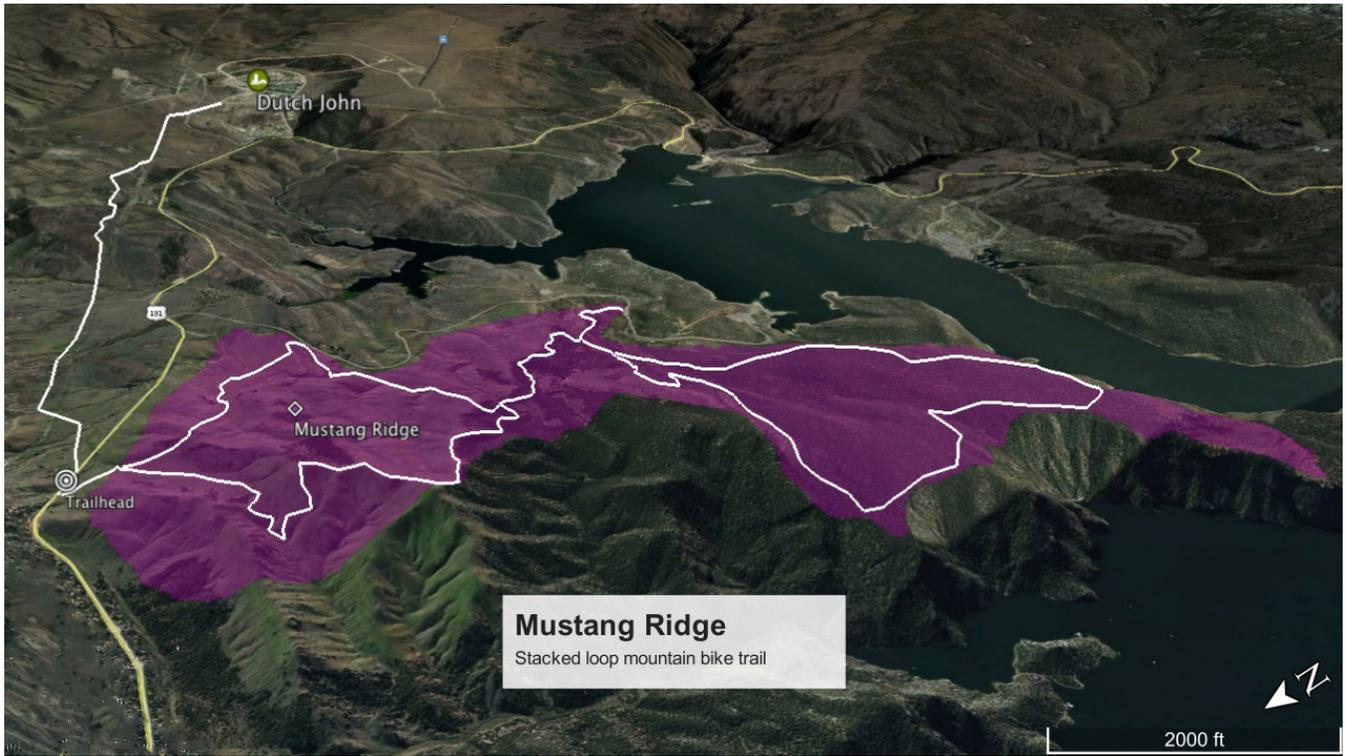
The Ashley National Forest Service has expressed preliminary support for all of the trail areas mentioned below and would look favorably upon trail building in all of these areas. While new trail developments will require NEPA clearance, a variety of approvals are already standing and categorical exclusions are possible.

Bare Top Mountain: This primitive area has been closed to motorized travel for over 20 years. It supports a healthy population of both big horn sheep and elk and is a popular hunting area. Existing roads are “ride-able,” but not ideal for introductory riders. The primitive road leads to a high plateau on Bare Top Flat which is rolling sage brush, with no shade. The view from the top affords a 360 degree unobstructed view of the Uinta Mountains and Flaming Gorge. A trailhead for a large stacked loop system could be located at or near the current Antelope Flat Campground and Boat Ramp. While the lower slopes are bare, the mid ranges slopes are pinyon/juniper and in general this area is sunny and windy. The area has been considered for Wilderness, but there is plenty of room for discussion of other designations, should a trail system here be developed. Here is a depiction of what a stacked loop system at Bare Top Mountain might look like:

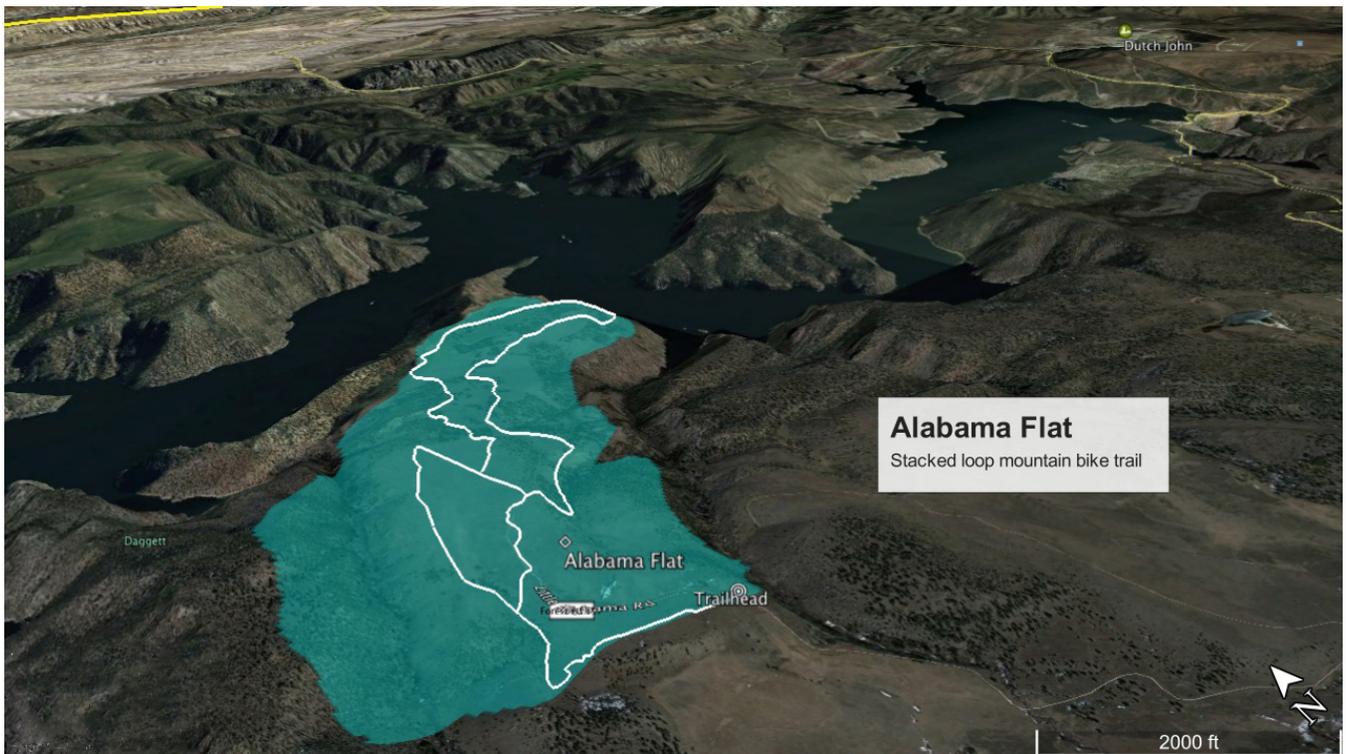


Mustang Ridge: This area is home to a busy campground and boat ramp, but the landscape between the water, the highway and Jarvies Canyon could be utilized for a smallish stacked loop that would be easily accessible by trail from Dutch John. The terrain is open and rolling with ample opportunity for flow type trails. This is what a stacked loop trail at Mustang Ridge might look like:

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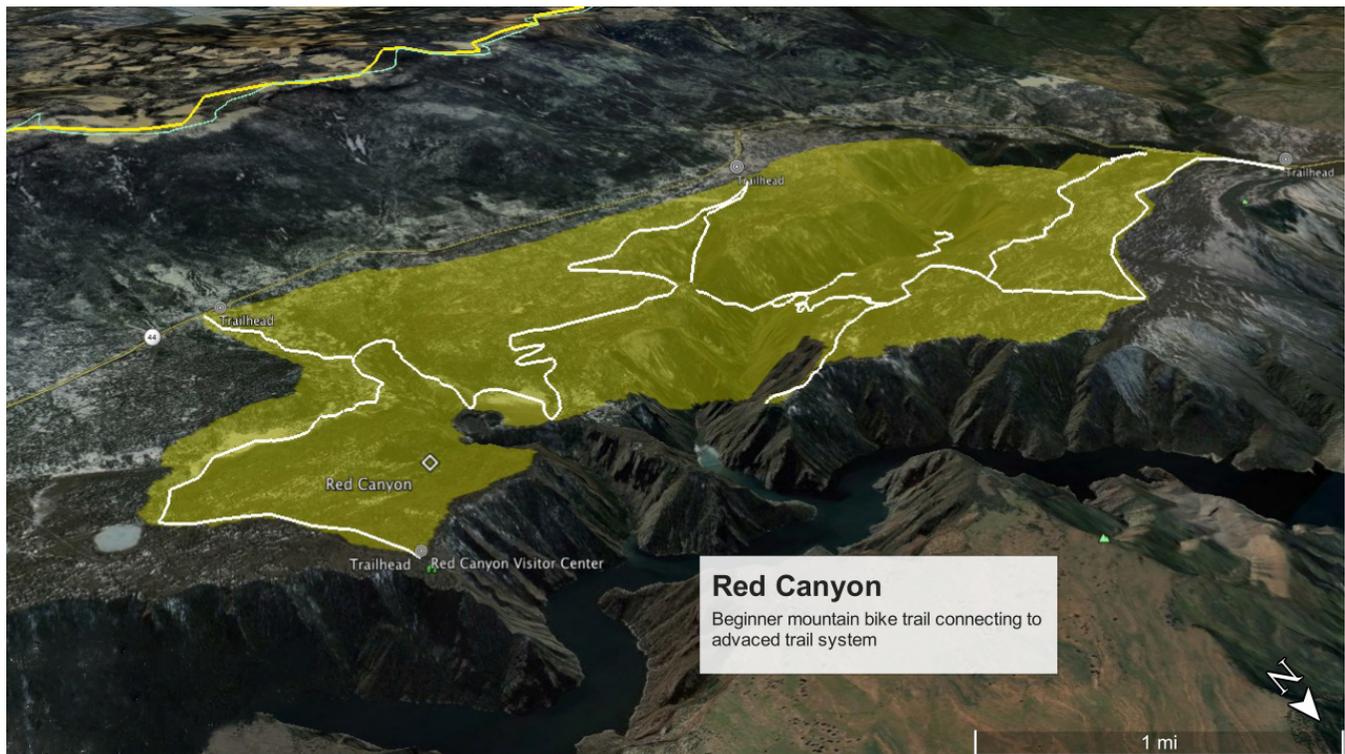


Alabama Flat: High above Flaming Gorge Reservoir, this gentle terrain could provide yet another venue for a wonderful beginner to intermediate trail network. Here's is a illustration of a possible trail system at Alabama Flat:



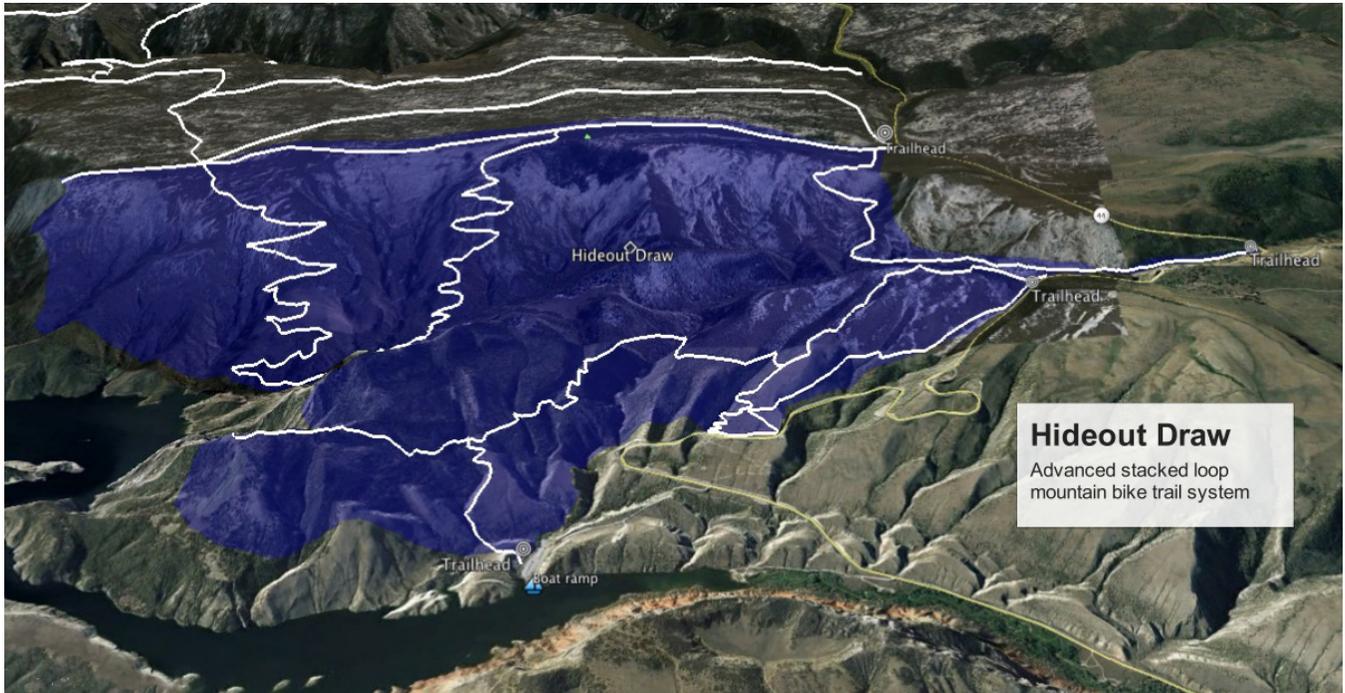
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Red Canyon/Dowd Mountain: From the Red Canyon Lodge, a large healthy Ponderosa Forest dominates the rim above Flaming Gorge, with wide areas of surprisingly flat topography leading to the dramatic Hideout Draw and Dowd Mountain to the west. Multiple group campsites near the Red Canyon Visitor Center already connect to the Red Canyon Trail along a fun singletrack trail. The new opportunity here is to build trails on the flatter terrain near the Red Canyon Visitor Center in a beginner loop, which connects to the more advanced terrain to the west. A new purpose-built trail, using the existing trailheads and rest areas, could look like this:

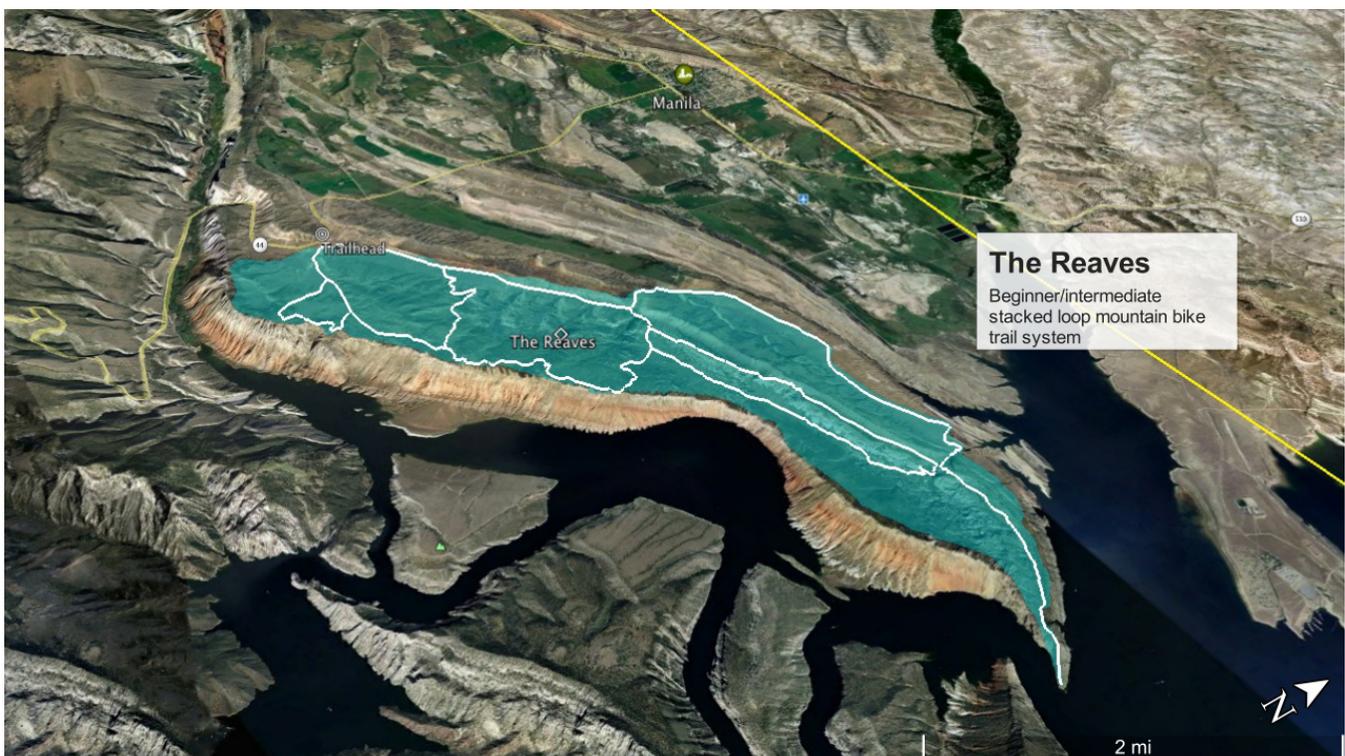


Hideout Draw: This boat ramp and campground at the western edge of the reservoir is currently only appropriate RV camping in the area and includes no real tent sites, but does include a large bathroom at the boat ramp, as well as one at the campground. This site could be an important trailhead for a large stacked loop through fantastic and variable terrain between the boat ramp and the Dowd Mountain Road. The area includes a complex array of terraced canyons that could provide an incredible mountain bike experience. A stacked loop from here could include a section along the water's edge and includes the added bonus of a swim in the lake after the ride. The boat dock simply needs a ladder to accommodate swimmers or perhaps the addition of a separate swim dock. This area's proximity to Manilla is also of great interest. A trail system originating from the boat dock could look like this:

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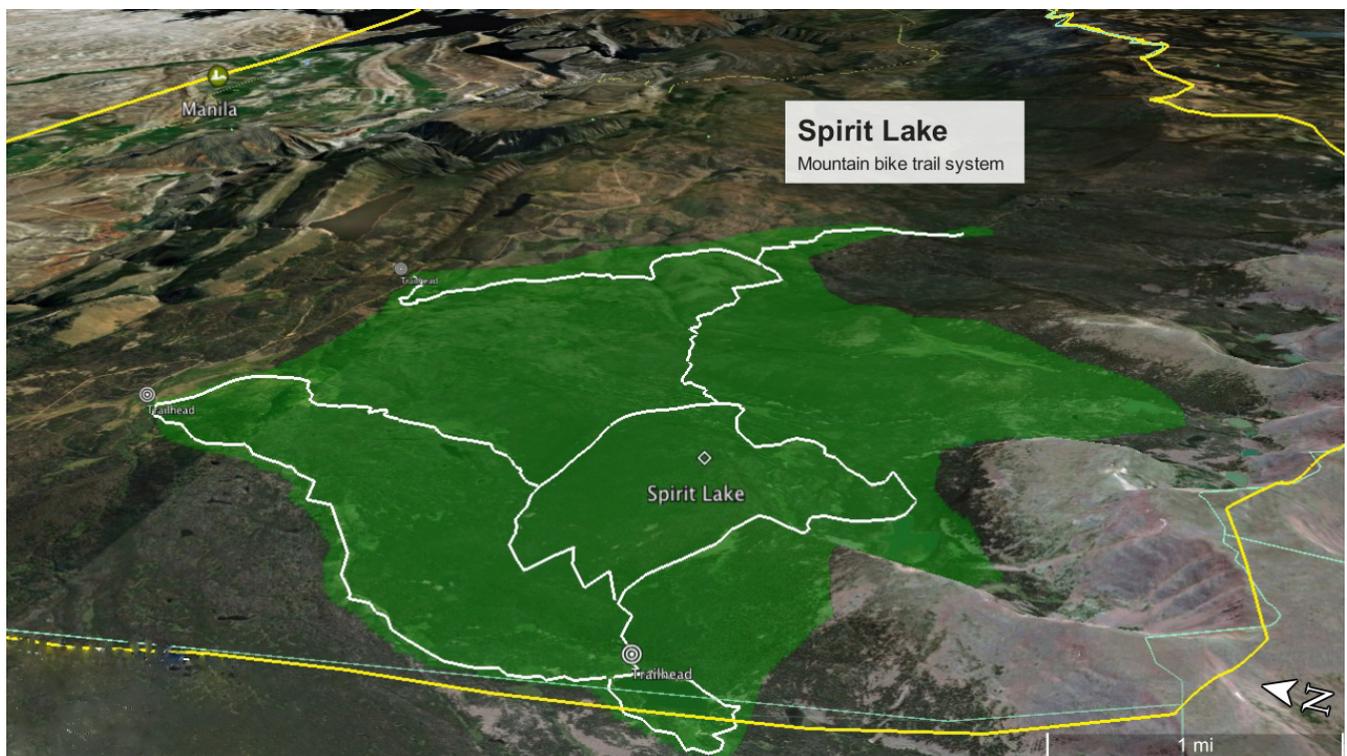


The Reaves: More high quality mountain biking opportunities are possible at the Reaves. From the Willow or Mann Campgrounds a narrow loop could head northeast under The Reaves formation through Finch Draw the Flaming Gorge.



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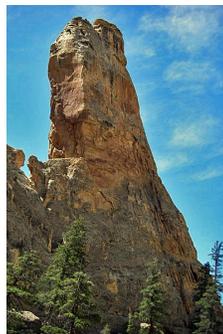
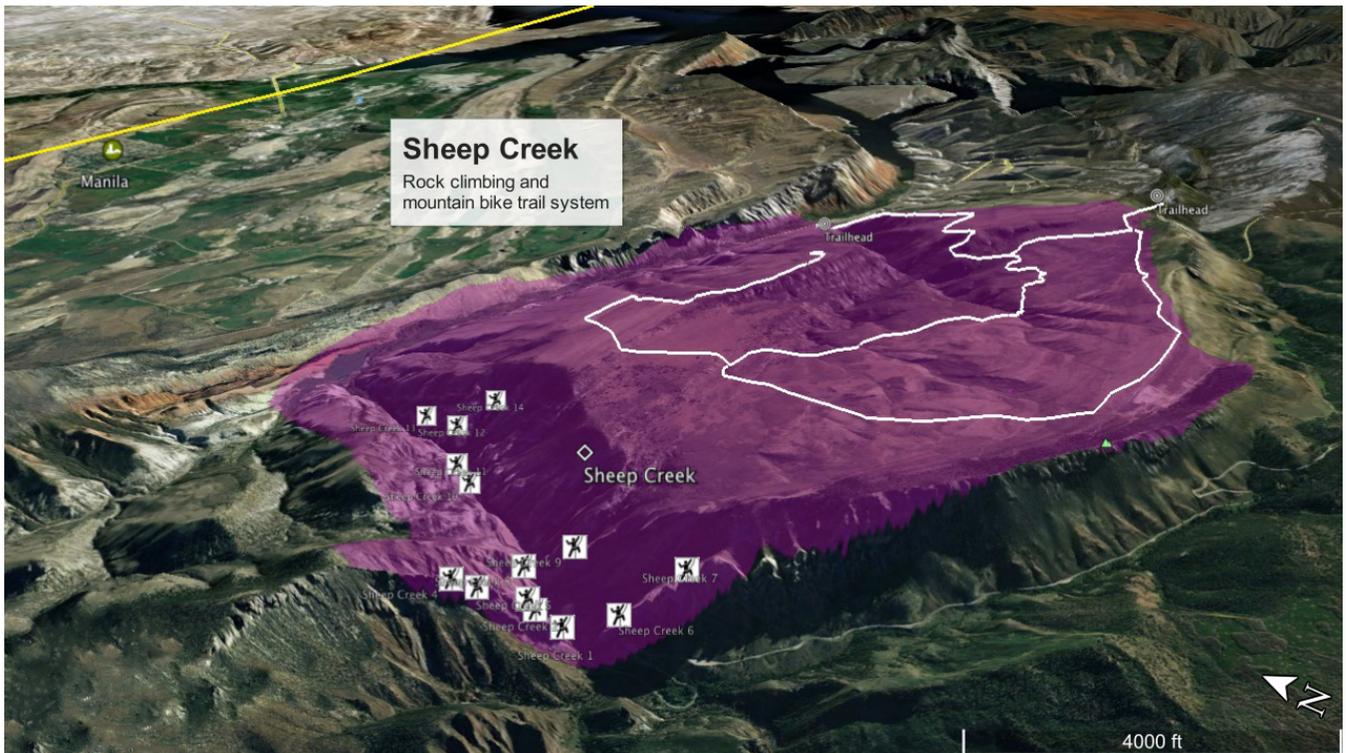
Spirit Lake: Forest Road 221 to FR001 to Spirit Lake leads through a series of alpine meadows and terminates in the lower circ of a high Uinta peak. While the area is fully alpine, the terrain is gentle and would provide beginner to intermediate trails. While existing trails travel to various points of interest they are not built to mountain bike specs and generally travel point to point. The area provides a unique opportunity to create a stacked loop system for all abilities in an alpine setting. The gentle sloping meadows travel through stands of Aspen and Lodgepole with dramatic high peaks in the background and the lake includes an existing campground on one side and a historic lodge and cabins on the other. Existing trailheads could be used east of the lake to allow visitors to ride to the lake, and a trailhead at the lake would provide trail loops from the lodge and campground. This trail system at Spirit Lake could look like this:



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Climbing

Sheep Creek: The northern section of the Sheep Creek-Spirit Lake Scenic Byway through Sheep Creek Canyon boasts walls of highly featured vertical sandstone. A combination of sport and traditional routes abound, with several routes of high quality for rock climbing, including beginner and intermediate climbs. In addition there are a variety of multi-pitch routes that would be of interest to experts. There are four campgrounds adjacent to the canyon and a private ranch that recently changed hands. We believe the area could attract more climbers, especially those with families because of the extremely easy access. With further route development and marketing, this area could truly provide a destination climbing area that would regularly attract climbers from Salt Lake City and beyond. The Sheep Creek area could also host a stacked loop mountain bike trail that would provide spectacular views into Sheep Canyon and Flaming Gorge.



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Paddle Sports

Kingfisher Island: Although canoeing, sea kayaking and other forms of boating have been around a long time, paddle sports have gained a new discipline in “stand up paddle boarding” or “SUPing.” Sales of these surfboard-like paddleboards are skyrocketing, and experiencing Flaming Gorge by stand up paddle board would be an incredible adventure. Sea kayaking, canoeing and other paddle sports could also be promoted in a non-motorized paddle sports focus area. To avoid conflicts with motorized boating enthusiasts there is a need for a separate non-motorized zone and possible camping area. Kingfisher Island could be an ideal location to locate this focus area. A water taxi from Sheep Creek Bay boat ramp or Lucerne Valley could bring visitors to Kingfisher Island, and from there boaters could explore the backside of the island and nearby Horseshoe Canyon when it regains its no wake status at higher water levels.



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IV. Challenges to Creating New Recreation Assets and Existing Gateway Services

The primary challenges to pursuing the recommendations in this report are funding and obtaining authorizations and NEPA clearance from the US Forest Service. While Daggett County will need to raise funds for these new trails and other recreation assets, the amounts involved are in the 10s of thousands dollars, not hundreds of thousands (and no act of Congress will be required). Public Land Solutions also can assist Daggett County on developing grant applications to the organizations we're affiliated with as well as other funding sources. Budgets for comparable projects can be provided upon request.

Upon preliminary discussions, the Forest Service is enthusiastic and supportive of developing the recreations assets listed above. Normal NEPA concerns, including archaeology and special status species, will need to be addressed. But at this time, we see no significant threats of any type to moving forward with the above suggestions.

There are a variety of stores, lodging and restaurant opportunities in the area providing very basic services. While we would anticipate growth for these businesses and others should the assets above be developed, current services are more than adequate to meet the expected needs of initial growth in visitation. The trail systems and other assets proposed in this report would be built in phases which would allow for the gateway services to be expanded as visitation increased.

We believe Daggett County has immense potential to expand its recreation visitation and associated revenues from tourism dollars by implementing the recommendations outlined in this report. These suggestions take advantage of the natural beauty and terrain of the area and appeal to groups who would compliment existing visitors, strengthening their numbers significantly.

Recent similar suggestions were implemented in Curt Gowdy State Park in Wyoming and here are the results reported by Todd Thibodeau, Planning and Grants Manager, Wyoming State Parks:

“When we started the trail project in 2006, there were about 55,000 visitors to the park. In 2011 there were 117,000 visitors to the park. The trails are the only major change to the park during this period. In the park staff's opinion more people are visiting the park for the trails than for the reservoirs. Revenue generation at the park has double from 2006 -2011 and the projected economic impact on the surrounding region has doubled from an estimated \$3,000,000 in 2009 to \$6,000,000 in 2012. Both sport shops in Cheyenne have changed their business model and expanded to account for the impact from trail use at Curt Gowdy State Park. Also, almost every residence that has sold near the park has cited the property's proximity to the trails at Gowdy.”

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Daggett County has nearly ten times the terrain and acreage found in Gowdy. Flaming Gorge National Recreation area is uniquely positioned to gain an entirely new population of recreation enthusiasts, whose presence will inspire businesses of all types who will in turn provided needed revenue for the county.

V. Public Land Solutions

This report was prepared by Public Land Solutions:

Ashley Korenblat
Managing Director
Ashley@publiclandsolutions.org
801-910-3205

Jason Keith
Managing Director
Jason@publiclandsolutions.org
435-709-8674

243 Aspen Avenue, Moab, Utah 84532 – www.publiclandsolutions.org

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