

Sonoran Desert National Monument

A summary of economic performance in surrounding counties



Photo courtesy Bob Wick, BLM

BACKGROUND

The 486,000-acre Sonoran Desert National Monument was designated in 2001 to protect lands that include expansive saguaro forests, distinctive mountain ranges such as the Maricopa, Sand Tank, and Table Top Mountains, desert washes, wide valleys, and historic and archaeological sites. Located in Maricopa and Pinal counties, Arizona, the monument is managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

PUBLIC ACCESS AND USES

The monument allows hiking, camping, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, scenic drives, biking, and access to history and archeology. In 2022, the monument attracted 52,198 visitors.¹

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Travel and tourism are important to communities in the Sonoran Desert region, representing about 15% of total private wage and salary employment, or 303,443 jobs, in 2024.² Recreation contributed more than \$14.5 billion to Arizona's economy in 2023.³

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Research shows that conserving public lands like the Sonoran Desert 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 towering saguaro forests and rugged Table Top mountains found at Sonoran Desert National Monument—also help sustain property values and attract new investment.

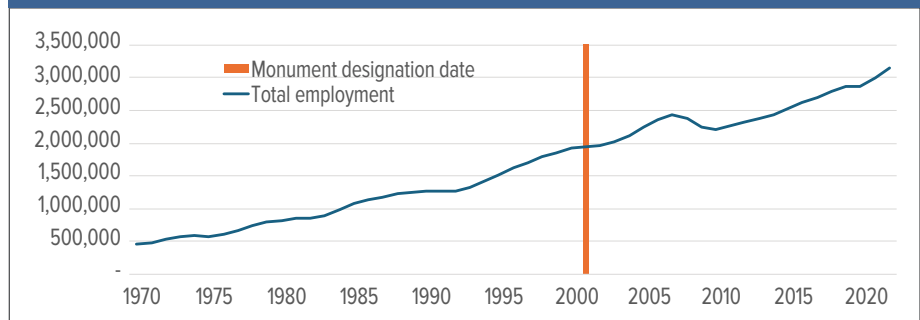
ECONOMY IS STEADY AFTER DESIGNATION

The economy of Maricopa and Pinal counties neighboring the Sonoran Desert National Monument has grown after the designation of the monument, continuing previous growth trends.

From 2001 to 2022 in the Sonoran Desert region:⁵

- Population grew by 49%.
- Jobs grew by 62%.

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 Sonoran Desert region:⁵

- Service jobs grew from 1,409,964 to 2,524,237, a 79% increase.
- Non-service jobs grew from 330,601 to 377,354, a 14% increase.

EMPLOYMENT BY MAJOR INDUSTRY

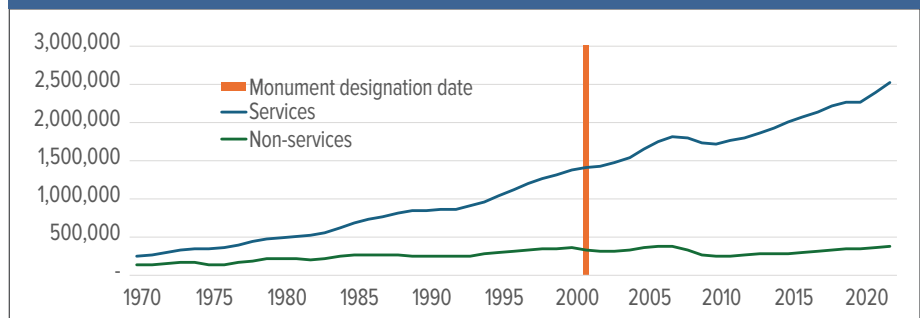




Photo courtesy BLM

The communities in Maricopa and Pinal counties neighboring the Sonoran Desert National Monument experienced strong growth since its designation in 2001. The increases in population, jobs, personal income, and per capita income 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. (2023). Sonoran Desert National Monument Annual Manager's Report, 2022. Phoenix, AZ: Bureau of Land Management, Lower Sonoran Field Office. Retrieved from https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2023-08/2022_SDNM%20Manager%27s%20Report.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/>

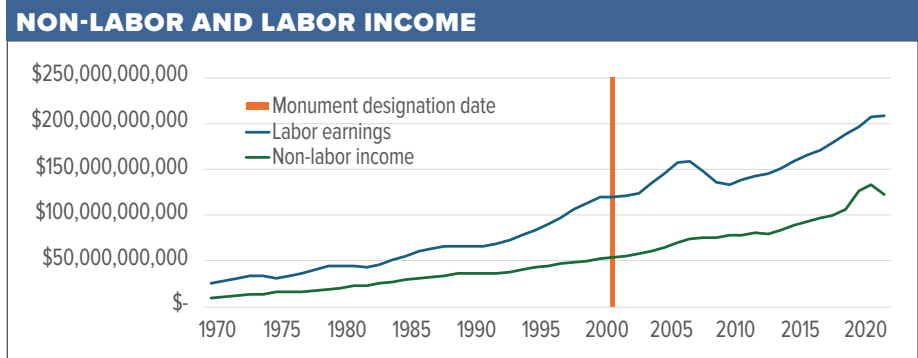
NON-LABOR INCOME GROWS FASTEST

One of the largest and fastest growing sources of new personal income in the Sonoran Desert 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 Sonoran Desert region:⁵

- Non-labor income grew from \$53.3 billion to \$123 billion, a 131% increase.
- As a result, in 2022 non-labor income made up 37% of total personal income.



TRADITIONAL JOBS HOLD STEADY

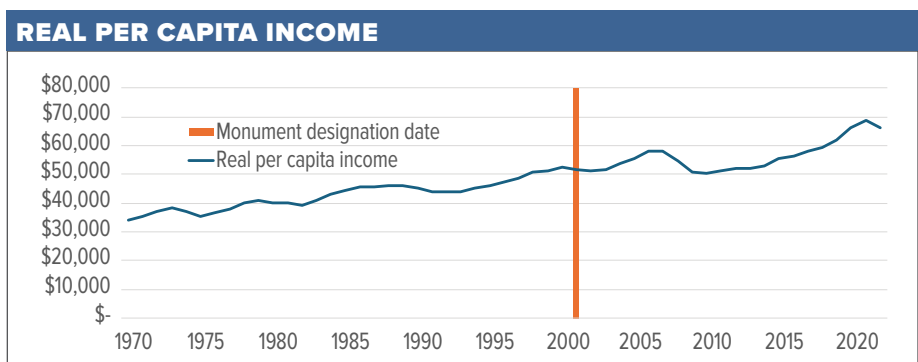
Long before the monument's creation, commodity industries (agriculture, mining, timber) were becoming a smaller share of the overall economy in the Sonoran Desert region. These industries remain part of the region's economy today.

PROSPERITY ON THE RISE

As the economy has grown since the designation of the Sonoran Desert 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 Sonoran Desert region:⁵

- Real per capita income grew from \$51,519 to \$66,293, a 29% increase.
- Real earnings per job grew from \$69,304 to \$74,797, an 8% increase.



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