



# **CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL SMALL BUSINESS SURVEY**

**One-of-a-Kind Survey of Small Business Owners Along Continental  
Divide Trail Finds that Trail Users are an Economic Boon**



## Executive Summary

A one-of-a-kind survey of small business owners in four states and 16 communities near the Continental Divide Trail shows the trail, the public lands it travels through and the hikers that use it are a vital and growing part of the economic activity in those towns.

The survey of 71 small business owners, conducted by the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC) during the fall of 2017, shows that small business owners see a strong correlation between the success and promotion of the trail and their bottom lines. The survey—the first of its kind to poll small business owners in small, often remote communities along the trail that runs from Canada to Mexico—unequivocally shows that business owners feel the trail puts their communities on the map as an outdoor recreation hub and draws trail users who spend money at restaurants, hotels, gear shops, grocery stores and other places of business in their communities:

- 77% of small business owners who responded to the survey say trail users spend money at their business and have had a positive impact on their business
- 88% say that trail users spend money in their community and have a positive impact on business in general

Business owners also report having seen a number of economic benefits since their towns gained the Continental Divide Trail Community designation from the CDTC. The designation recognizes communities that have committed to promoting and protecting the trail and providing an inviting environment for trail hikers:

- 67% report seeing an increase in trail users coming through their communities
- 42% report seeing an increase in traffic from trail users in their businesses
- 39% report an overall increase in business in their community
- 61% see an increase in awareness of their community as an outdoor recreation hub

The survey provides a first-hand account of what economic reports on recreation have found—such as the 2017 Outdoor Industry Association report that shows the recreation economy drives \$887 billion in consumer spending every year and supports 7.6 million jobs.

Seeing the positive economic impact the trail has on their businesses, it's not surprising that small business owners in trail communities believe protecting their region's natural assets will enhance the financial success of small businesses and local economies.

A vast 88% of small business owners say that protecting, promoting and enhancing the Continental Divide Trail is important to the well-being of businesses, jobs and their community's economy. An overwhelming 95% say that protecting, promoting and enhancing public lands in general is important to the well-being of businesses, jobs, and their community's economy.

Survey respondents own a variety of businesses: 36% own a hotel or motel; 28% a restaurant, bar or similar business; 22% an outdoor clothing or gear store; 6% an outdoor guide service; 4% a grocery or convenience store; and 4% a RV park or campground.

The vast majority of respondents are small businesses with 98% reporting 50 or fewer employees during the peak season. Indeed, 71% have 10 or fewer employees.

## **Methodology**

This was an online survey, conducted by the Continental Divide Trail Coalition using Survey Monkey and in-person interviews, of 71 small business owners. The survey was an opt-in survey sent via email to Continental Divide Trail Coalition associates. Survey responses were also gathered via in-person interviews in communities along the Continental Divide Trail.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Continental Divide Trail Coalition would like to thank all the small business owners who took the time to complete our survey and provide valuable feedback that will inform our work in the future.



## **Key Findings**

**Business owners owned a variety of service and retail businesses.**

- |                                      |            |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| ▪ Hotel or Motel                     | <b>36%</b> |
| ▪ Restaurant bar or similar          | <b>28%</b> |
| ▪ Outdoor clothing or gear store     | <b>23%</b> |
| ▪ Outdoor guide service              | <b>6%</b>  |
| ▪ RV Park or campground              | <b>4%</b>  |
| ▪ Grocery store or convenience store | <b>4%</b>  |

**The businesses surveyed were located in four states and 16 communities near the Continental Divide Trail.**

- Breckenridge, CO
- Chama, NM
- Cuba, NM
- Dillon, CO
- Encampment, WY
- Grand Lake, CO
- Grants, NM
- Lake City, CO
- Leadville, CO
- Lincoln, NM
- Pinedale, WY
- Pagosa Springs, CO
- Salida, CO
- Salmon, ID
- Silver City, NM
- South Fork, CO

**The vast majority of businesses said protecting, promoting and enhancing the Continental Divide Trail is important to the well-being of businesses, jobs and their community's economy.**

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| ▪ Very Important                             | <b>58%</b> |
| ▪ Somewhat Important                         | <b>30%</b> |
| ▪ Neutral. Neither Important nor Unimportant | <b>10%</b> |
| ▪ Not so important                           | <b>1%</b>  |
| ▪ Not at all important                       | <b>1%</b>  |

**Business owners who were located in a community that had the Continental Divide Trail Community designation said the designation had a positive economic impact (respondents checked all that apply).**

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| ▪ An increase in trail users coming through my community   | <b>67%</b> |
| ▪ An increase in traffic from trail users at my business   | <b>42%</b> |
| ▪ An overall increase in business in my community  | <b>39%</b> |
| ▪ An overall increase in awareness of your community as an outdoor recreation hub or destination                         | <b>61%</b> |
| ▪ An overall increase in awareness of the Continental Divide Trail among business owners and residents of your community | <b>58%</b> |
| ▪ An overall increase in volunteerism in the community   | <b>12%</b> |
| ▪ I do not see any impact on my community from the designation   | <b>12%</b> |
| ▪ Don't know   | <b>6%</b>  |

**Business owners in all communities surveyed said they have seen revenue growth in their business in particular due to use of the Continental Divide Trail since 2014.**

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| ▪ Trail users spend money at my business and have had a significant positive impact on my revenue       | <b>19%</b> |
| ▪ Yes, trail users spend money at my business and have had some positive impact on my revenue           | <b>59%</b> |
| ▪ The Continental Divide Trail has had a negative impact on my revenue                                  | <b>0%</b>  |
| ▪ No, trail users do not spend money at my business and I do not see an impact on my revenue either way | <b>22%</b> |

**Business owners in all communities surveyed said they have seen growth in business in their communities due to use of the Continental Divide Trail since 2014.**

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| ▪ Trail users spend money in my community and have had a significant positive impact on business in general | <b>16%</b> |
| ▪ Trail users spend money in my community and have had some positive impact on business in general          | <b>72%</b> |
| ▪ The Continental Divide Trail has had a negative financial impact on businesses in my community            | <b>0%</b>  |
| ▪ No, trail users do not spend money in my community and I do not see an impact on business either way      | <b>12%</b> |

**The vast majority of businesses said protecting, promoting and enhancing public lands in general was important to the well-being of businesses, jobs and their community's economy?**

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| ▪ Very Important                             | <b>82%</b> |
| ▪ Somewhat Important                         | <b>13%</b> |
| ▪ Neutral. Neither Important nor Unimportant | <b>7%</b>  |
| ▪ Not so important                           | <b>0%</b>  |
| ▪ Not at all important                       | <b>0%</b>  |

**Survey respondents are truly small businesses, with the vast majority employing fewer than 50 people during the peak season. The number of employees respondents have, including themselves, are:**

- |                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| ▪ 1             | <b>6%</b>  |
| ▪ 2-5           | <b>49%</b> |
| ▪ 6-10          | <b>16%</b> |
| ▪ 11-25         | <b>17%</b> |
| ▪ 26-50         | <b>10%</b> |
| ▪ 51-100        | <b>1%</b>  |
| ▪ More than 100 | <b>0%</b>  |



## **About the Continental Divide Trail Coalition**

The Continental Divide Trail Coalition's mission is complete, promote, and protect the Continental Divide Trail by building a strong and diverse trail community, providing up-to-date information to the public, and encouraging conservation and stewardship of the trail, its corridor and surrounding landscape.

## **For More Information or to Learn About our Programs**

Continental Divide Trail Coalition  
710 Tent Street, Suite 200  
Golden, CO 80401

To participate in the Continental Divide Gateway Program contact us at  
[gateway@continentaldivide trail.org](mailto:gateway@continentaldivide trail.org)  
[www.continentaldivide trail.org](http://www.continentaldivide trail.org)