



**CONSERVATION  
LANDS  
FOUNDATION**

# Reframing Community-Based Conservation

**Public lands advocacy in a  
changing cultural landscape**

**A GUIDE FOR NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS  
FRIENDS GROUPS AND ADVOCATES**

Commissioned by Conservation Lands Foundation  
Prepared by University of Colorado Boulder Masters of the Environment Candidates  
*Environmental and Natural Resources Policy*  
December 2022



**“For public lands to have a bright future, younger, more diverse generations of people from all walks of life need to engage with them, and with the political system. Good policy doesn’t just happen; it comes about because people advocate for it.”**

**—JOHN LESHY, EMERITUS PROFESSOR  
OF NATURAL RESOURCES LAW  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA HASTINGS**



# Executive Summary

The American West has experienced seismic demographic changes in the last two decades. Conservation Lands Foundations (CLF) commissioned this report to research and develop tools to assist their Friends Grassroots Network (FGN) in responding to these changes.

**The goal of the project is to investigate the ways in which western communities are changing, the impacts that these changes may have on land management priorities, and how local conservation organizations can adapt to continue to fulfill their missions.**

The project was completed in several phases. First, census data from 2010 and 2020 was collected for counties containing Friends Groups. The analysis identified several trends present throughout the studied counties. Next, a literature review was conducted to collect peer-reviewed research regarding the implications of these changes to identify ways in which land managers and conservation groups have responded to demographic change. Finally, a series of case-studies were conducted to demonstrate and share how individual Friends Groups are seeing and responding to changes in their communities.

The study identified several trends that were present across nearly all of the relevant counties. These included increasing racial diversity, population growth, increasing average age, and political polarization. The literature also identified a number of large-scale issues, such as climate change, indigenous land management, housing affordability, and labor markets in gateway communities.

We hope this report can be useful to the FGN and support efforts to increase community representation within conservation organizations at all levels, from volunteers and staff, to board members and donors. Grassroots advocacy is the most powerful tool we have in the fight and mission to protect, steward, and enjoy our public lands and the FGN plays a vital role in connecting communities to their landscapes and protecting them for generations to come.

**For access to the full report, scan here:**



**For access to the FGN Demographic Trends Spreadsheet, scan here:**











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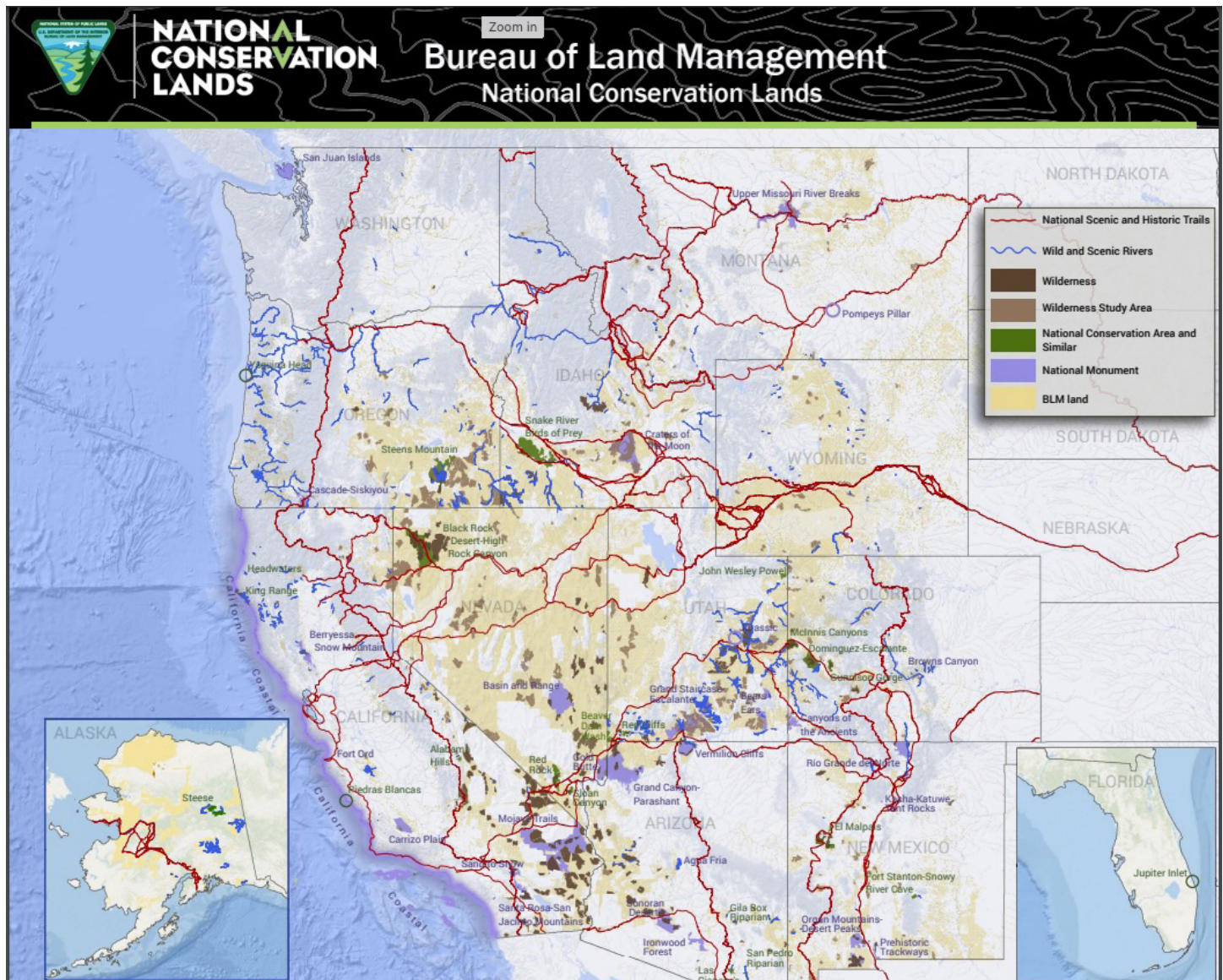
## National Conservation Lands

Grassroots advocacy plays an integral role in the protection and stewardship of our public lands. Ensuring that our most valuable and beautiful landscapes remain protected for generations to come can be a challenging endeavor in the face of cultural priorities that value economic growth and industrial development over the preservation of ecosystems, biodiversity and open spaces. Friends Groups occupy an important space in their role as a conduit for grassroots, or community, voices to be heard at all levels of the land-management decision-making process.

National Conservation Lands (NCL) are unique in the arena of public lands. A fairly new type of federal designation, NCLs represent the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) shift in priorities from extractive uses for public lands, like mining and grazing, towards more conservation driven efforts and values. Public lands make up nearly a third of the United States and The BLM manages about 40% of that area. Of the 250 million acres managed by the BLM, the 35 million acres of NCL designations represent the most ecologically abundant and culturally significant areas, or the "crown jewels" of BLM land.



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**



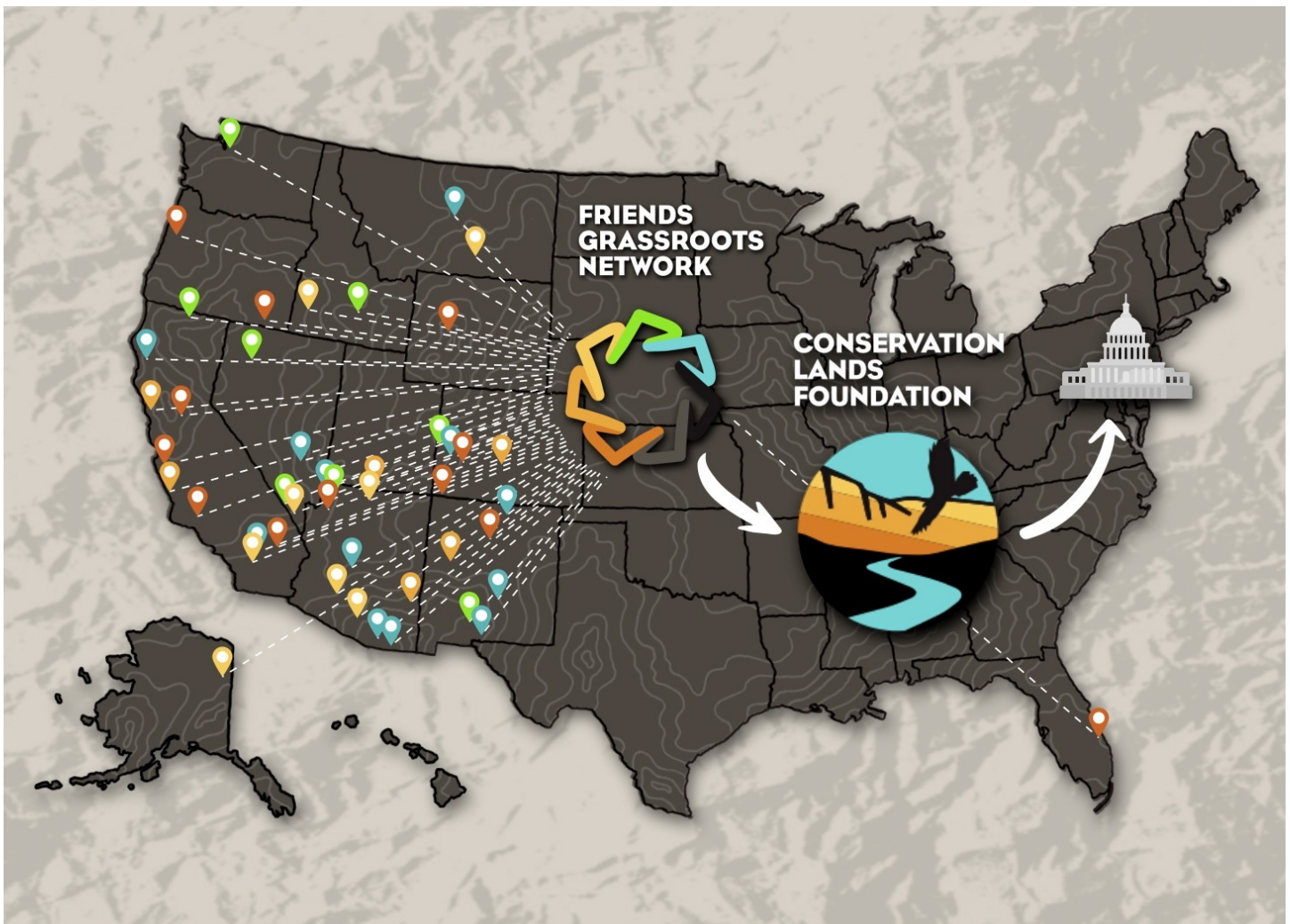


# Friends Grassroots Network

The Friends Grassroots Network (FGN) consists of 80+ public-land advocate groups. These organizations range in mission, size, and scope but are united by a passion and connection to their local National Conservation Lands.

Friends Groups are an important gateway to the landscape for the community and visitors. While NCL are managed by the BLM, the agency rarely develops roads or visitor centers leaving the role of landscape advocate and educator to be filled by grassroots organizations.

**Based in the areas adjacent to NCLs, Friends Groups have the opportunity to support and create public land advocates from the communities living closest to the protected landscape.**





# Who lives near National Conservation Lands?

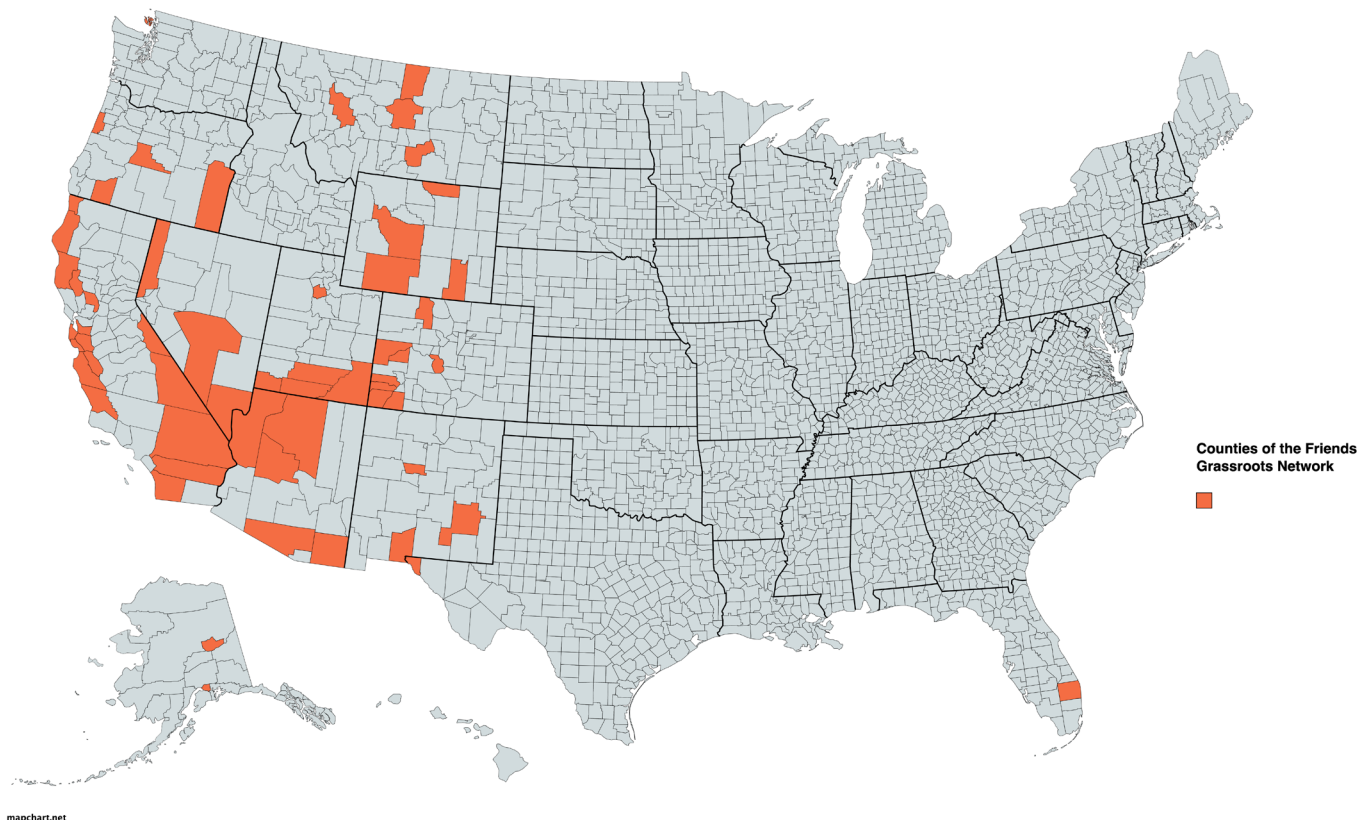
The goal of this project is to investigate how communities surrounding NCL's are changing and provide information on who is living in these areas.

To do this, we used biennial census data from 2010 and 2020 from the 58 counties that Friends Groups are located in. We looked at 15 different variables and how they have changed over the last decade. While census data is not an absolute descriptor of who is present in a community, it illustrates a macro-level view of changes occurring across the West and provides an entry point for inquiry into further discussion.

## Demographic Variables for each Friends Group county:

1. Total Population
2. Median Age
3. Population Under 19
4. Population Over 65
5. Median Household Income
6. Diversity Index
7. Hispanic Population
8. White Non-Hispanic Population
9. Black or African American
10. American Indian and Alaska Native
11. Asian
12. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
13. Some Other Race Alone
14. Two or More Races
15. Voting Tendency in Presidential Races 2000-2020

**These 58 counties represent communities where Friends Groups and National Conservation Lands are present.**





# Demographic trends in Friends Grassroots Network counties

The four trends that showed the most significant change over the last decade in the 58 counties surrounding National Conservation Lands where Friends Groups are located are:

## Increasing Racial Diversity

Overall trend of increase in diversity across all races and ethnicities. FGN counties show this is driven by increasing percentage of Hispanic population specifically, paired with decreasing proportion of White population.

## Population Growth

The FGN counties experienced an overall trend of increase in populations. Our literature review further revealed that much of this growth is due to amenity-based migration. With the rise of remote-work options, people have more agency in choosing where they live.

## Aging Population

All 58 counties showed an increase in the population over 65. This significant trend is caused by the exceptionally large Baby Boomer generation reaching retirement age in tandem with retirees migrating to the natural amenity-rich areas surrounding public lands.

## Increasing Political Polarization

Counties surrounding NCL tend to vote more conservatively but some are shifting towards voting more liberally in the data on presidential elections since 2000. Even within politically polarized areas there is opportunity to overcome political divides.

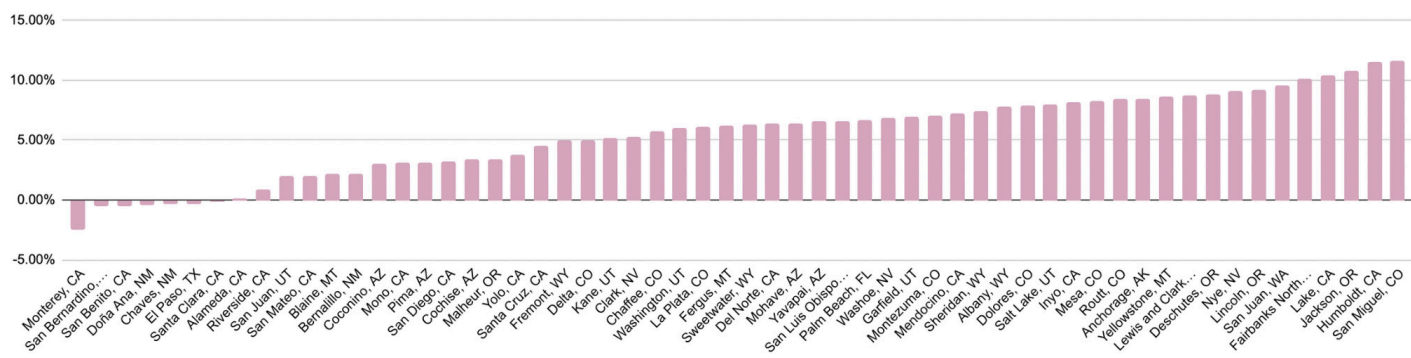


# Increasing Racial Diversity

- 51 out of 58 counties showed increased diversity index (DI) between the 2010 and 2020 Census
- The largest decrease was Monterey, CA by -2.5%
- The largest increase was San Miguel, CO by 11.6%
- The average increase across the 58 counties is 5.47%
- 37 counties showed increased DI greater than 5%

## Percent Change in Diversity Index 2010-2020

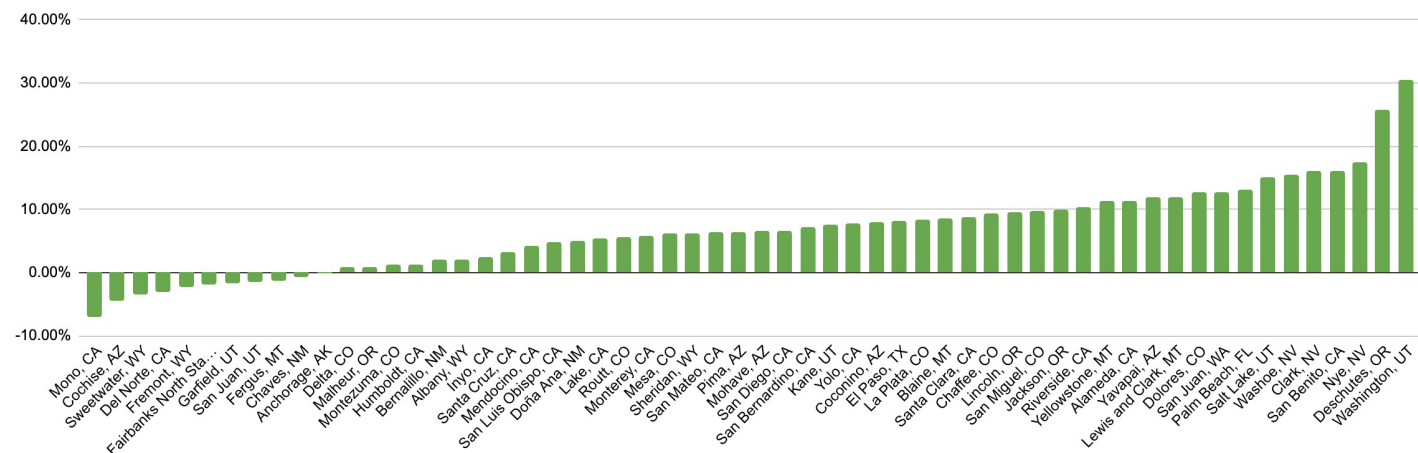
Diversity Index measures the probability that two people chosen at random will be from different racial or ethnic groups



# Population Growth

- 48 out of 58 counties experienced population growth between 2010 and 2020
- Mono, CA experienced the greatest decrease with -7.09%
- Washington, UT saw the largest increase with 30.53%
- On average, FGN counties increased by 8.9%

## Percent Population Change from 2010-2020 Census Data

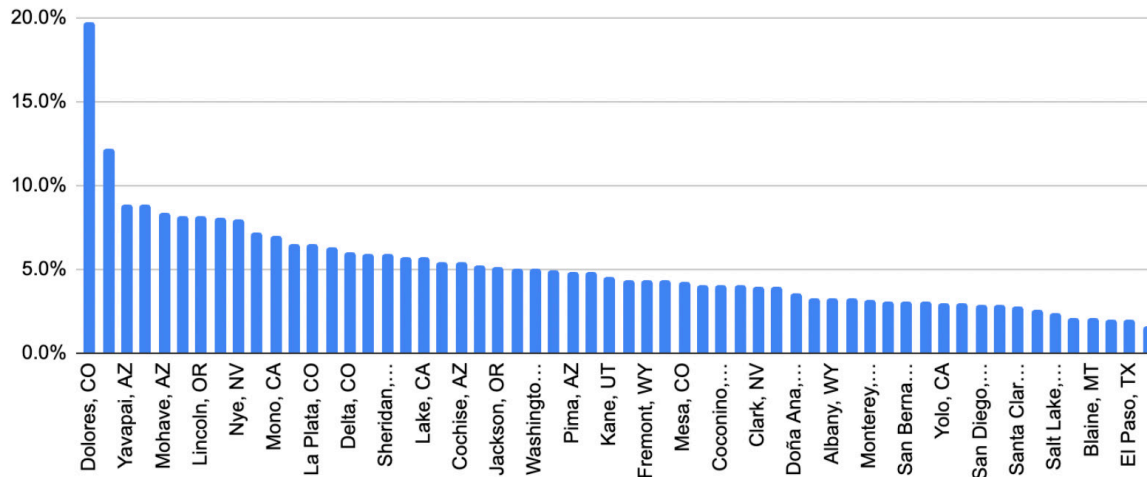




# Aging Population

- All 58 counties saw increases in percentage of population over 65
- 53 counties experienced an increase in the median age which ranged from 0.1 - 14 years
- 25 out of 58 counties experience an increase greater than 5% in the population over 65

## Percent Change in Over 65 Population from 2010-2020 Census Data

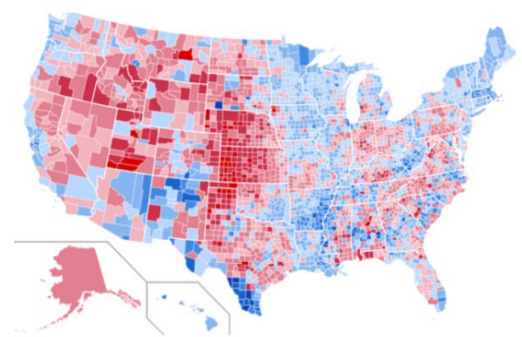


# Increasing Political Polarization

- The country, including counties where Friends Groups are located, is becoming more politically polarized.

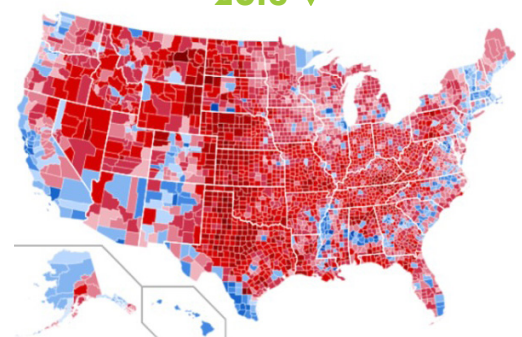
This map shows how red counties are becoming redder while blue counties continue to become bluer. Working across political party lines is essential for the future of public lands protection and advocacy.

The political discourse surrounding land use and conservation has always been contentious. The lands now protected under the National Conservation Lands system are managed by the BLM, and as a result, were originally set aside by the government for rangeland, mining, and other extractive uses. More recently, the ecological, scenic, and cultural values of these landscapes have begun to be recognized, and the vision for the future of these lands have changed. County constituency will determine the future of public lands.



1996 ▲

2016 ▼







## Changing Communities Across the West

In sum, demographics are shifting across the West. These changes present an opportunity to engage a wider network of public lands advocates. The future of successful land conservation and stewardship requires that it equitably reflects the diversity of the needs of the people in the US. Public lands rely on grassroots support and Friends Groups play an integral role in fostering and channeling community voices in public lands advocacy.

We conducted five case studies of Friends Groups who have found effective strategies in navigating these demographic trends within their communities. In our interviews we asked questions about scope and mission of the organization, how the Friends Group has experienced the demographic trends, and what efforts, strategies, initiatives, events or programs they have used in supporting broader community representation with their organization.

### Following is a snapshot of each case study that includes:

- Who is the Friends Group?
- What are the demographic trends happening in their community?
- What strategies have they found to be successful in navigating these shifts and increasing community representation in their organization?





## The Case Studies

We chose five Friends Groups as case-studies to investigate effective strategies they have used in order to engage and adapt to the demographic changes taking place in their communities.



### Conserve Southwest Utah

Washington County, Utah  
Adapting to unprecedented population growth



### Dolores River Boating Advocates

Montezuma County, CO  
Collaborating across the aisle with diverse political views to protect public lands



### Colorado Canyons Association

Mesa County, Colorado  
Navigating political polarization on the Western Slope



### Friends of the Inyo

Inyo County, California  
Investigating barriers to participation within the Hispanic community



### Friends of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks

Doña Ana County, New Mexico  
Engaging racially diverse public land advocates





# Case Study: **Conserve Southwest Utah**



**Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU)** is based in St. George, Utah and works across Southwestern Utah to advocate for the protection of public

lands and water. The organization conducts education, stewardship, and advocacy at Red Cliffs National Conservation Area. They also advocate for Smart Growth urban planning in St. George, which places sustainability at the forefront of development. Development rooted in conservation is important in CSU's region, which has seen an explosion in population of over 30% between 2010 and 2020.

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**We selected CSU and Washington County as a case study for the organizations' response to, and experience of, working in a community with rapid population growth.**

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## **Washington County, UT**

### **CENSUS DATA 2021/2020**

**Population:** 180,279

**Median Age:** 37.7

**Population under 18:** 21.3%

**Population over 65:** 19.2%

**Diversity Index:** 31.7%

### **CENSUS DATA CHANGES FROM 2010-2020**

**Population:** Increased by 30.53%

**Median Age:** Increased by 1.9 years

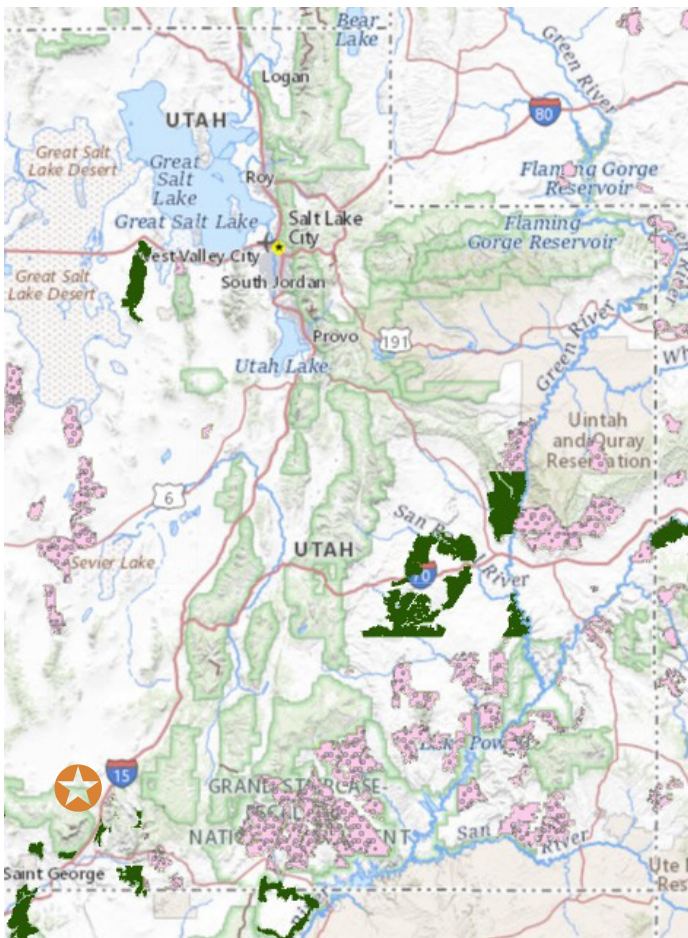
**Population under 19:** Decreased by 4.9%

**Population over 65:** Increased by 5.0%

**Diversity Index change:** Increased by 6.0%

Politically, Washington County has voted Republican in presidential elections since 2000.

Between 2010 and 2020, Washington County grew by 30.53% in population, experienced a slight increase in median age, decrease in population under 19 and increase in population over 65. This county had the smallest decrease in White Non-Hispanic population of all 58 Friends Group counties.





**"Everything is connected. One of our volunteers said, "I really believe in landscape conservation," and thats it. In a pragmatic way, you can't just look at water, you can't just look at lands, you can't look at any other without talking about urban growth policies. So we are willing to take that on and that's what makes it both a difficult and meaningful challenge."**

—ART HAINES, BOARD PRESIDENT CSU, ON SMARTGROWTH ADVOCACY

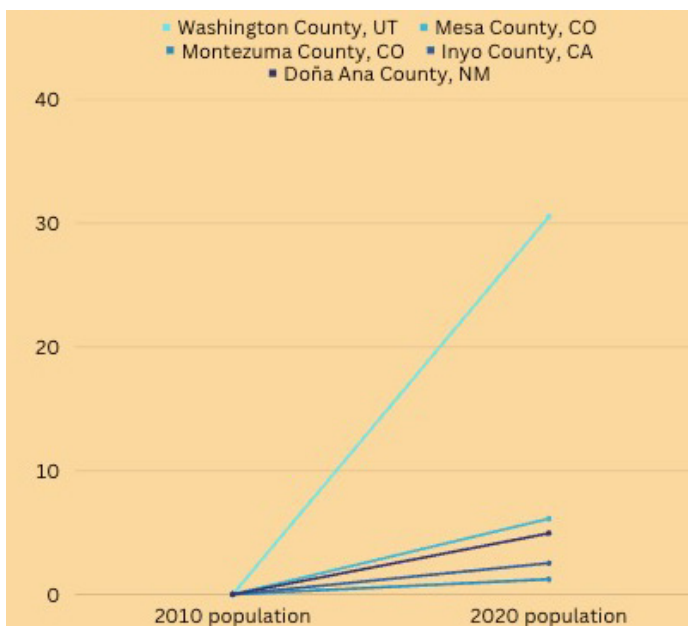
## Navigating rapid population growth in the community

Unprecedented population growth due to amenity-based migration is affecting many communities adjacent to public lands. Washington County, UT is an outstanding example. With a population growth of 30.53% between 2010 and 2020, many people are moving to this area because of the proximity to beautiful outdoor spaces and opportunities for outdoor recreation.

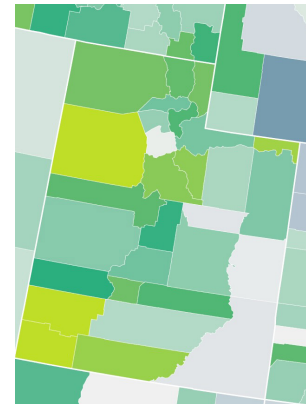
Adverse effects of rapid population growth are the sprawl that threatens public lands from urban housing and roadway development. CSU is navigating this through their continued advocacy that works to stop illegal developments on public lands, and have also introduced initiatives for Smart Growth advocacy.

With the trend of increasing population comes the opportunity for a larger public lands advocacy constituency. Increased efforts for education to reduce the impacts to landscapes is also required.

### POPULATION PERCENT CHANGE FROM 5 CASE STUDY FRIENDS GROUPS 2010-2020



### POPULATION GROWTH PERCENTAGE CHANGE FROM 2020 AND 2021 BY COUNTY



FROM 2020 TO 2021



### Strategies Used by CSU

- In response to the threats to landscapes posed by population growth and the sprawl of rapid housing development, CSU advocates for SmartGrowth strategies in St. George
- Diversifying age of Board through bringing on younger members in the community
- Fostering connections made through targeted outreach events such as Latinx Week
- Recognizing retiree migrants may have more free time to attend land stewardship events

# Case Study: Colorado Canyons Association



**Colorado Canyons Association (CCA)** is based in Grand Junction, Colorado and was formed in 2006 as Friends of McInnis Canyon, specifically to work with BLM as stewards of McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. Their purview has expanded with the conservation areas on Colorado's Western Slope and now includes Dominguez-Escalante and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Areas in western Colorado. Because CCA was not involved in advocacy for the designation of the NCAs they work on, their priorities are mainly community engagement, stewardship, and access.

**We identified CCA and Mesa County, CO as a case study for their effective strategies in navigating the trend of political polarization within the community.**



## Mesa County, CO

### CENSUS DATA 2021/2020

**Population:** 157,335

**Median Age:** 39.8

**Population under 18:** 21.3%

**Population over 65:** 19.2%

**Diversity Index:** 37.4%

### CENSUS DATA CHANGES FROM 2010-2020

**Population:** Increased by 8,940 (6.12%)

**Median Age:** Increased by 1.9 years

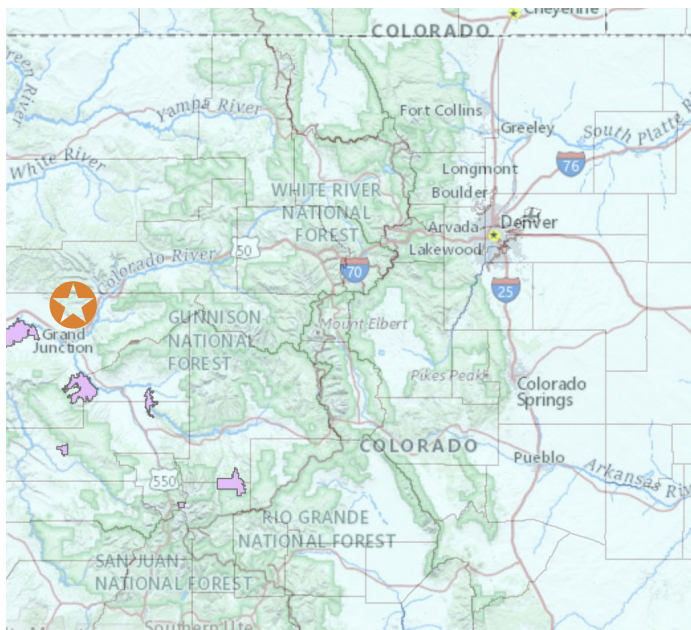
**Population under 19:** Decreased by 2.0%

**Population over 65:** Increased by 4.3%

**Diversity Index change:** Increased by 8.3%

Politically, Mesa County has voted Republican in presidential elections since 2000.

Between 2010 and 2020, Mesa County saw a slight increase in population, minor increase in median age, decrease in population under 19 and increase in population over 65. It ranked 14th in greatest increase in diversity index between the 58 counties.





## Navigating political polarization in the community

Despite political polarization within the county, CCA has found successes working across the aisle on issues surrounding public lands. CCA was created to support an existing National Conservation Area, so do not have the burden of advocating for new public lands protection.

As a result, CCA is primarily focused on engagement, stewardship, and getting people out onto their public lands. **CCA finds that focusing on stewardship and engagement helps them avoid the political fray of land conservation.** This placement in the community lends itself to building a big political tent.

To maintain this diverse stakeholder base they work to ensure that their staff and board members are trusted in the Mesa County community, and focus on stewardship projects that allow broad access for lots of different user groups and recreational activities. Still, their membership and volunteer base remains slightly left of Mesa County as a whole, as they have not yet fully engaged with more right leaning public land user groups.



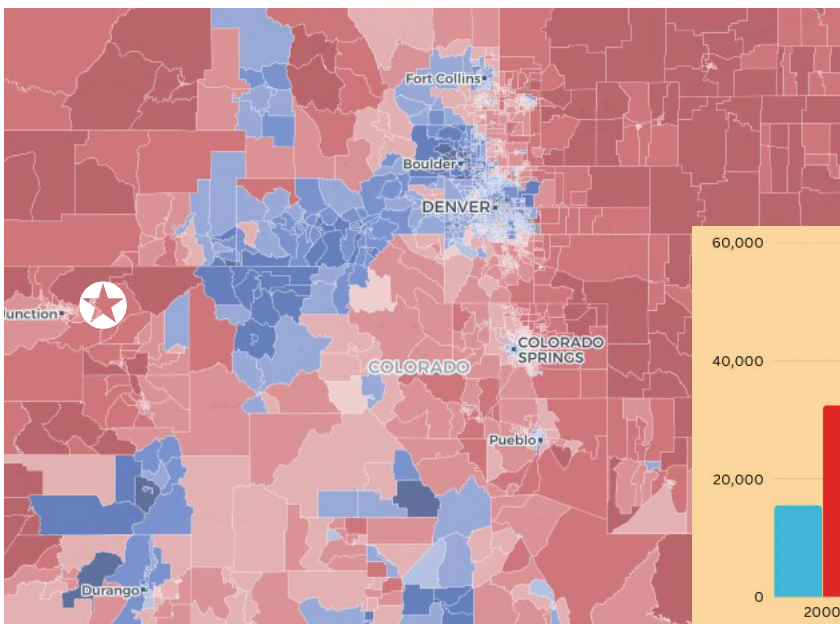
### Strategies Used by CCA

- Youth River programs that get 500-600 kids out on the river each year
- Making sure that CCA Board is representative of community politically and includes long-time residents who might be able to identify with more right-of-center politics
- A social media campaign that includes voices across political spectrum, including ranchers and long-time locals

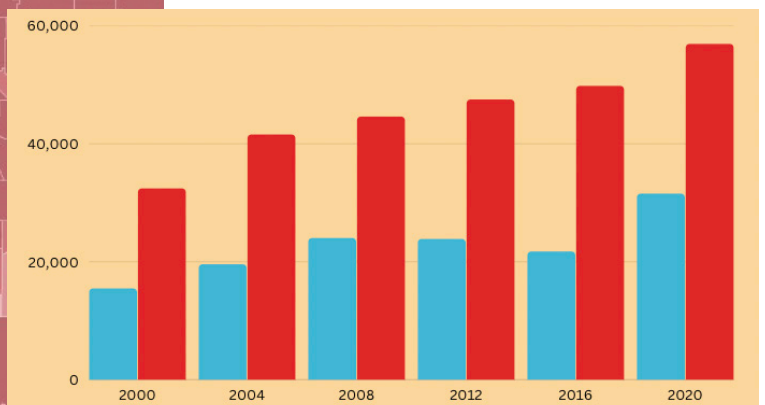
**"That's why we're here — to make these landscapes and their designation part of the fabric of the community so that, 100 years from now, we don't have to worry about someone trying to run legislation and overturn those things."**

—CHRIS HERRMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CCA

### 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS IN COLORADO



### VOTER DATA FOR MESA COUNTY 2000-2020



# Case Study: Dolores River Boating Advocates



Dolores  
River  
Boating  
Advocates

doloresriverboating.org

**Dolores River Boating Advocates (DRBA)** formed in 2011 to serve as stewards of and advocates for the Dolores River. DRBA is not directly associated with a National Conservation Lands unit, but have been major advocates

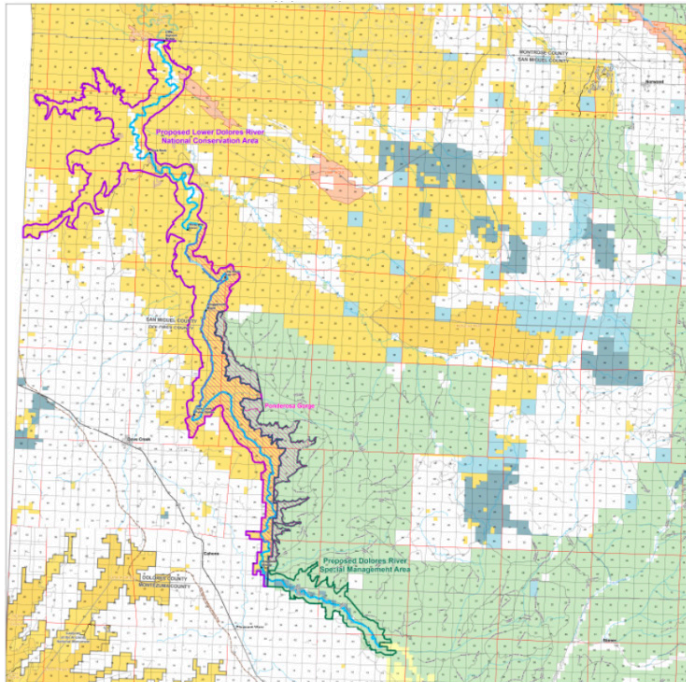
of the proposed Dolores Canyon National Conservation Area, introduced by Colorado Senator Michael Bennet in 2022. Their advocacy focuses on protecting stretches of the Dolores for recreation and ecological purposes. DRBA also provides youth programs, education, and stewardship opportunities to the community.

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**We selected DRBA as a case study due to their success in advocating for the Dolores River NCA in a very conservative area of Colorado.**

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## PROPOSED DOLORES RIVER NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA AND SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA | JULY 2022



## Montezuma County, CO

### CENSUS DATA 2021

**Population:** 26,175

**Median Age:** 45.2

**Population under 18:** 21.6%

**Population over 65:** 22.4%

**Diversity Index:** 48.2%

### CENSUS DATA CHANGES FROM 2010-2020

**Population:** Increased by 1.23%

**Median Age:** Increased by 3.2 years

**Population under 18:** Decreased by 2.7%

**Population over 65:** Increased by 6.5%

**Diversity Index change:** Increased by 7.1%

Montezuma County has voted consistently Republican in Presidential elections since 2000.

Between 2010 and 2020, Montezuma County experienced a slight increase in population and the population over 65 increased by 6.5%. The diversity index increased by 7.1% and the population under 18 decrease by 2.7% The county ranked 8th in increase of median age.



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**"You'd sit down with somebody on the complete opposite side of an issue, and we would just talk about it. We would hear each other, and we listened, and friendships came out of it with the most unlikely people... you're an environmentalist, you're a rancher. You're this, you're that, but I also care about the river corridor. On that level we could find common ground, which propelled us to put our hackles down and talk about solutions from a more productive place."**

—AMBER CLARK, DRBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ON THE DOLORES RIVER DIALOGUE

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## Land Conservation in politically conservative areas

DRBA was instrumental in the creation of the Dolores River National Conservation Area and Special Management Area Act. The idea for the National Conservation Area began when recreationists and water managers began expressing concerns about impacts to the river ecosystem downstream from McPhee Reservoir. Diversions from McPhee supply irrigated agriculture in both the Dolores and San Juan Basins. For this reason, data collection and solutions had to avoid threatening water rights.

DRBA and other stakeholders then created the Dolores River Dialogue, to facilitate roundtable discussions about solutions to the problems on the river.

These discussions included conservation advocates and irrigators from across Dolores, San Miguel, and Montezuma counties. **Through repeated interactions between conservation advocates and irrigators, the dialogue brought conflicts to the human level, built relationships with irrigators, and ultimately generated a proposal that a majority of stakeholders could support.**



## Strategies Used by DRBA

- Relationship building across the counties where the Proposed NCA is located through the Dolores River Dialogue
- Youth education and stewardships programs help drive community connection to the river
- "Take a farmer boating" and "take a boater farming" days help build connections in the community and expose people to diverse perspectives

## Stakeholders in Dolores River Dialogue

- Agriculture and water users
- Local governments
- Recreation and conservation interests
- Mineral interests
- Landowners
- Livestock operators

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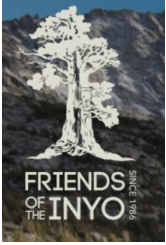
**"The purpose of [the Dolores River Dialogue discussions] are just sort of building bridges and understanding and trying to say here, look at a different perspective. When we can look at each other differently, we can have more productive conversations when it comes to really trying to work on issues that matter. If you can kind of see people in a different light, it can help build a little bit of understanding and respect."**

—AMBER CLARK, DRBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
ON THE DOLORES RIVER DIALOGUE

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# Case Study: Friends of the Inyo



Founded in 1986 as a volunteer organization, **Friends of the Inyo (FOI)** is one of the longest-standing Friends Groups within the FGN. Their work focuses on the public lands within the Eastern Sierra Nevada mountains including the Inyo National Forest, Conglomerate Mesa, Alabama Hills, and Long Valley.

FOI is involved in both stewardship and policy work, as the organization engages with a wide range of public land issues that affect Inyo and Mono counties.

**We chose FOI as a case study because of the steady increase of the Hispanic population in their area, and for the strategies that they have used to make public lands advocacy more accessible to this population.**

## INYO-MONO REGION



## Inyo County, CA

### CENSUS DATA 2021

**Population:** 18,970

**Median Age:** 45.3

**Population under 18:** 20.8%

**Population over 65:** 23.3%

**Diversity Index:** 59.4%

### CENSUS DATA CHANGES FROM 2010-2020

**Population:** Increased by 2.53%

**Median Age:** Increased by 0.3 years

**Population under 18:** Decreased by 1.2%

**Population over 65:** Increased by 4.8%

**Diversity Index change:** Increased by 8.2%

**An additional theme touched upon in this case-study is FOI's success in collaborating with the local Tribes on land management issues through fostering organic relationships, asking Tribal leaders' opinions and acknowledging and legitimizing that land stewardship may look different to different communities.**



**"I think that the Hispanic demographic will continue to grow and if they don't care about the public lands around here, if they don't care about the ecosystems and fighting for them, then bad things are going to start to happen. We are constantly pushing back against extraction proposals... forcing agencies to put conservation and healthy ecosystems above recreation development... and if there's nobody doing that, it's not going to get done. And so I think it's really important for us to engage the whole community to maintain these results that we've achieved for the land."**

— WENDY SCHNEIDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FOI

## Engaging a growing Hispanic community

FOI is intentional about increasing Spanish language resources within their communities. In 2021, FOI hired their first staff member that is a native Spanish speaker into the role of Communications and Philanthropy Director. With a native Spanish speaker on staff, FOI is able to create more Spanish-language material, the first step in increasing access to conservation advocacy for the Hispanic community in Bishop.

In partnership with CLF and GreenLatinos, FOI is currently advocating with policymakers, the Council on Environmental Quality and the Department of the Interior, for the translation of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) outreach materials into more languages than just English and Spanish.

In addition to increasing available Spanish-language resources within their own organization, FOI has an environmental column in the regions' local Spanish newspaper, El Sol de la Sierra. This covers topics in conservation and environmental safety tips, such as how to fire-proof your home.

FOI also collaborates with the Farmworker Institute of Education and Leadership Development (FiELD), an NGO that works with the Hispanic and other underserved communities, with the hope of gaining a "better understanding of how to do outreach to [the Hispanic] community."

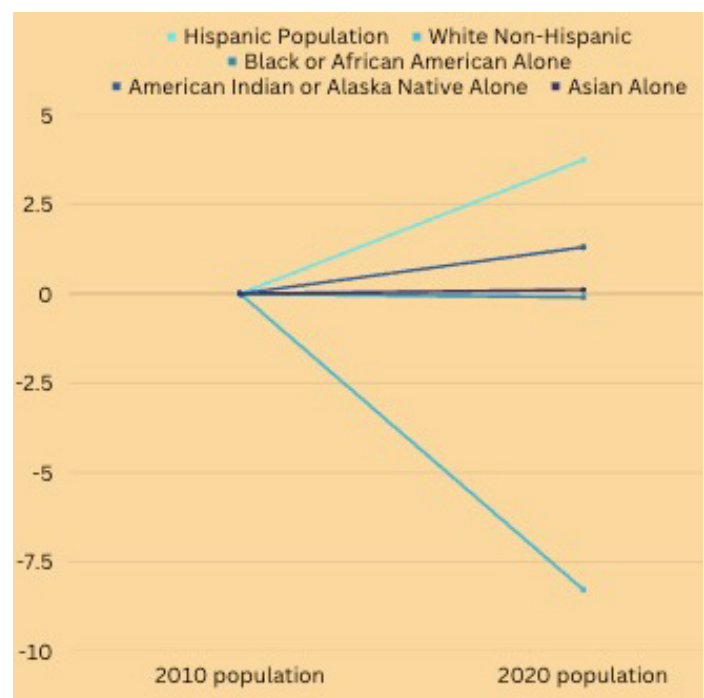
**"It's really happened very organically developing good relationships with the local tribes. I don't think that there's been any magic to it. I think we have just made an effort and reached out to them. Asked them their opinion. One of the things that we've done is we don't try to force them to be part of the coalition that is working to, you know, fill in the blank, either defend a mining threat or work for permanent projection... It is a white construct, I think, to develop these coalitions, make decision-making structures, set up committees."**

— WENDY SCHNEIDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FOI

### Strategies Used by FOI

- Building relationships with local organizations that already have relationships within the Hispanic community
- Hiring Spanish speaking staff and creating Spanish language outreach materials
- Utilizing existing Spanish language newspapers, and other Hispanic community organizations for outreach and information sharing
- Advocating for more inclusive practices with USFS, NPS and BLM Field Offices

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN INYO COUNTY, 2010-2020 (%)



# Case Study: Friends of the Organ Mountains



**FRIENDS OF THE  
ORGAN MOUNTAINS  
— DESERT PEAKS —**

**Friends of the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks (FOMDP)** is a Friends Group based in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Their work focuses on advocacy, conservation, and restoration of the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks (OMDP) National Monument. Established in 2014, OMDP was created to protect significant prehistoric, historic, geologic and biologic resources within its' 496,330 acreage span which includes four areas: the Organ Mountains, the Desert Peaks, the Potrillo Mountains and the Doña Ana Mountains. FOMDP recently celebrated their ten-year anniversary as a Friends Group.



**We identified FOMDP and Doña Ana County, NM as a case-study for the groups' skills and experience in relationship-building within the community and finding inclusive strategies of engaging the predominantly Hispanic community of Las Cruces in public lands advocacy.**

## Doña Ana County, NM

### CENSUS DATA 2021/2020

**Population:** 221,508

**Median Age:** 33.3

**Population under 18:** 24.3%

**Population over 65:** 15.7%

**Diversity Index:** 47.3%

### CENSUS DATA CHANGES FROM 2010-2020

**Population:** Increased by 10,328 people or 4.94%

**Median Age:** Increased by 1.1 year

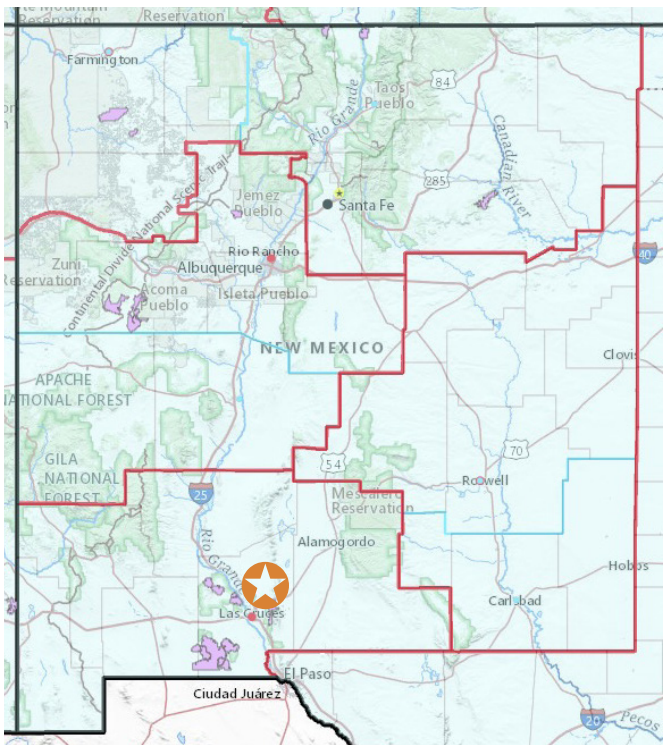
**Population under 19:** Decreased by 2.8%

**Population over 65:** Increased by 3.6%

**Diversity Index change:** Increased by 7.1%

Montezuma County has voted consistently Republican in Presidential elections since 2000.

Between 2010 and 2020, Montezuma County experienced a slight increase in population and the population over 65 increased by 6.5%. The diversity index increased by 7.1% and the population under 18 decrease by 2.7%. The county ranked 8th in increase of median age.





**"I think what we're trying to do is really engage the grassroots community in the issues of public lands, advocacy and protection. I think we focus a lot on leadership development when giving folks opportunities to advocate, build their skill sets around advocacy and engagement in our political process, and public lands policy work. And specifically our youth work too. Right? I think that's about building the next generation of public land stewards."**

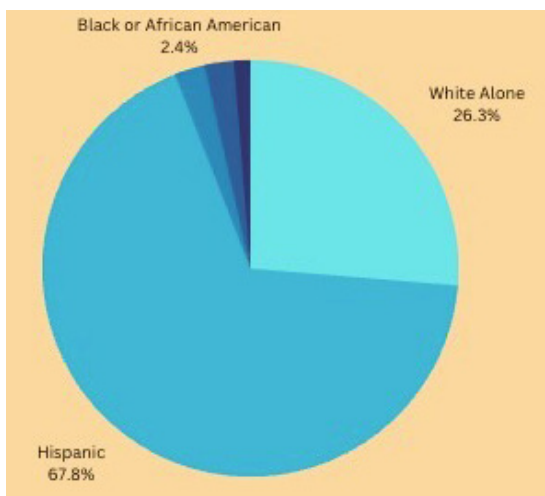
— PATRICK NOLAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOMDP

## Engaging in community outreach

FOMDP engages with the community and public lands advocacy through multiple programs: Moving Montañas kids hiking program, docent hikes, an Artist-in-Residence program, and bringing a Public Lands curriculum to the public schools.

They are notably exceptional in the youth outreach programs they provide in the community. They focus on leadership development and building skills around land advocacy, engagement in the political process and land stewardship. Programming that focusses on youth outreach can help eliminate barriers to participation for stewardship and advocacy events. It can also foster FG exposure and crossover participation within an organization. For example, kids who have participated in Moving Montañas have brought their families on docent hikes.

**DEMOGRAPHIC CENSUS DATA  
FOR DOÑA ANA COUNTY, NM, 2020**



## Strategies Used by FOMDP

- Programming tailored to different demographics within the community
- Integration of participants across different internal programming
- Developing sustainable relationships within the community
- Being intentional about who is on their board and staff
- Expanding social media presence on Instagram in being more consistent and visible

**"It's a lot of one-on-one conversations, like building real sustainable relationships with folks, I think that's really what I mean. That's key, right. Having good relationships in any community, I think matters. I think it specifically matters in Southern New Mexico."**

— PATRICK NOLAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOMDP

# Key Recommendations

Friends Groups are finding innovative ways to adapt to demographic changes across the West and to broaden community representation within their organizations across board, staff, volunteers, and donors. A broad and inclusive coalition of public land advocates is integral to the future protection and stewardship of America's National Conservation Lands.

## Increase inclusion of Hispanic population

- Increasing Spanish-language resources provides more access opportunities
- Create FG materials in both English and Spanish
- Ensure event calendars are available in Spanish
- Seek creative forms of reaching out to the Spanish-speaking community ie. Spanish radio or local Spanish newspaper
- Representation of the Hispanic community within organizational leadership matters
- Collaborating with organizations in the community that already do outreach with groups that are underrepresented in your organization can help facilitate relationships
- Foster relationships created through annual events like Latino Week
- Invest in targeted outreach programs that work to overcome barriers to participation

## Navigate population growth

- Population increase expands potential for public land advocates
- Education on minimal landscape impact is key to facilitating the engagement of new populations
- Smart Growth advocacy can help steer development in a more sustainable way

## Engage the over-65 population

- The retired population may have more free time to spend volunteering for a Friends Group in land stewardship activities than other populations
- Organizational capacity may be increased by working with this population

## Work in politically polarized communities

- Diversify messaging strategies can have a major impact on effectiveness of communication across political boundaries
- Education programming helps drive pro-environmental behavior and concern
- Building relationships with conservation minded agency personnel helps create stewardship programs
- Community representation within the organization eases engagement with diverse political groups
- Community engagement in stewardship projects drives interest and participation in the organization
- Community events and education programming helps broaden outreach and understanding





## Themes

The variety and diversity of challenges that Friends Groups face makes it difficult to develop one encompassing toolkit that lays out strategies for broadening community representation. The 81 organizations, while aimed towards a similar direction, all experience their work differently depending on what designation of landscape they are representing, the community in which they live, and the resources available to them. However, our research identified specific themes that are broadly applicable to the work of diverse coalition building within public lands advocacy. Through our case-studies, we spoke with five different

Friends Group's about their strategies for adapting to change and authentically engaging broader participation within the community, without compromising their organization's mission.

In service to the broader goal of supporting diverse community representation within ones' organization, these are three themes we heard echoed through our interviews as impactful experiences, initiatives, and insights towards fostering more inclusive participation within their organization.





# Reframing Community-Based Conservation





# Looking Forward

Creating a stronger coalition of advocates will require Friends Groups to expand their idea of what it means to be a 'conservationist.' By stepping outside of traditional conservation methods to engage a wider mix of the community, Friends Groups have an unprecedented opportunity to build a strong and diverse group of advocates that spans the boundaries of race, age, and politics. A first step an organization can take is asking who is in their community, and how those different groups connect to the landscapes.

National Conservation Lands define a new land ethic for the 21st century that incorporates the landscape as a whole including people's connection and influence. This includes human's lived history from time immemorial to the settlers expansion West, to the current shifts we see today in migration, growth and diversity. These unique areas represent an incredible opportunity to further develop and define our role as humans in these landscapes as stewards and protectors. Reframing community-based conservation begins with celebrating the work one's organization does while also acknowledging and legitimizing other forms of connecting to and stewarding of, the land.

As the population continues to grow and change, the meaning and importance of public lands will develop simultaneously. Friends Groups and conservation advocates need to recognize these changes and adapt their strategies accordingly. A diverse and vocal coalition of public lands advocates are essential to protecting America's prized public lands and ensuring a sustainable future for the West.

**"The first and perhaps most notorious myth is that the public lands have generally been a divisive force in American politics. In fact, the opposite is true; from the nation's very beginning, the public lands have tended to unite rather than divide."**

**—JOHN LESHY, OUR COMMON GROUND**







**CONSERVATION  
LANDS  
FOUNDATION**



**FRIENDS  
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For access to the full  
report, scan here:



For access to the FGN Demographic  
Trends Spreadsheet, scan here:

