

Rich County Economic Development Strategy

2017



Introduction

Rich County was named after Mormon Pioneer Charles C. Rich who settled the area in 1864. Charles C. Rich was directed by Brigham Young, to colonize the areas in and around Bear Lake. Initially, Rich was sent to what is now known as Paris, Idaho from Cache Valley to establish a community. Several years later, after Paris was established, settlers moved to the southern end of the lake, near the present towns of Meadowville and Laketown. By 1870, Randolph and Woodruff had become the first settlements in the Bear River Valley. The largest community, Randolph, became the county seat in Rich County in 1872. (Campbell and Lacey 1982).



Rich County, located in the northeastern corner of Utah, is bordered by the states of Wyoming on the East and Idaho on the North. It is also bounded by the counties of Morgan and Cache in Utah, Bear Lake in Idaho, and Uinta and Lincoln in Wyoming. It has a total area of 1,086 square miles and is one of the least densely populated counties in the state of Utah at 2 persons per square mile.

The northern part of Rich County is affected by Bear Lake, which straddles the border of Utah and Idaho equidistantly. Many of the land use activities between the two counties underlying Bear Lake are coordinated by a Regional Commission composed of elected officials from both counties. Bear Lake is known as the "Caribbean of the Rockies" because of the turquoise blue hue reflected by particles in the water. Visitation to Bear Lake is primarily from residents along the Wasatch Front and Cache Valley. US Highway 89 runs through the northern part of the county along the shore of Bear Lake to the National Parks of Grand Teton and Yellowstone. Significant economic activity is generated by visitors buying gas and convenience items on their way to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks.

Bear Lake has also become popular as a second home community, and receives substantial tax revenues through various tourism taxes and residential unit taxation at full value of the home. Rich County has the second highest absentee home ownership rate in the state of Utah.

The southern part of the county still maintains a very strong agrarian lifestyle through the cultivation of crops and raising animals for food or fur. Agriculture is a significant portion of the tax and employment base that relies heavily on access to public lands. Livestock are often fed on private property on the valley floor in the winter and moved to federal grazing allotments in the summer to fatten-up on rich mountain grasses. In 2016, Rich County produced the second largest number of beef cattle (UDAF, 2016) in the state of Utah behind Box Elder. Total value of crops and livestock produced in Rich County in 2016 was \$13,100,000 (extension.usu.edu).

Economically, recreation has become a significant source of revenue in the northern part of the county. Transient room tax collected over the last ten years has increased over 300% from \$73,515 to \$285,386. Visitation to Utah State Parks at Bear Lake has increased from 184,356 to 281,717 in three years.



The area experiences significant visitation traffic each year. US Highway 89 or the “National Parks Highway” is located in Rich County and runs through the town of Garden City and along the shoreline of Bear Lake transporting people to the national parks of Yellowstone and Grand Teton. It is estimated that 500,000-700,000 visitors travel US-89 each year. Garden City, a town of 562 residents as of 2010 Census experiences population influx of over 30,000 people on weekends and holidays during the summer. The Idaho State Parks in 2016 had 136,806 day users and 17,794 overnight users. Utah State Parks visitation at the lake was 184,356 in 2013. Three years later in 2016 the visitation to the park jumped 34% to 281,717 (personal communication, Visitors bureau).

Rich County has been blessed with a variety of abundant outdoor opportunities, quality of life and proximity to urban areas.

Challenges faced in Rich County are those typically associated with highly transient recreational areas. Radical swings in population with an emphasis during the summer, high cost infrastructure, and lack of affordable housing. These issues are often perceived as barriers to economic development. We see them as opportunities to grow and progress as a community.

Of particular importance to the economy of the county are the following issues:

Relations with federal managers

Pedestrian pathway development

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Short term

Within the next year the following items will be identified for completion.

- Marina expansion
- Forward movement toward completion of the bike path around the lake
- Encourage computer savvy individual to join business community
- Additional singletrack trails on federal lands
- More public beach access
- Connecting businesses with financial and/or technical resources through the state by using the BEAR Program more effectively.
- Promotion of our "brand" and the benefits of the "off-season"
- Further develop relationships that will capitalize on skiing opportunities
- Develop housing opportunities to accommodate seasonal employees
- Attract lone eagle entrepreneurs or professionals that can access employment via telecommunication but want rural/recreational lifestyle
- Implementation of the "Three Creeks" grazing allotment rotation plan between local livestock operators and public land management agencies.
- Affordable, high-speed internet access to every residence and business in the Laketown and Garden City area.
- Improve coordination between chamber and county commission

Mid term

Medium range goals are those that require greater planning because of their complexity, cost or other factors require more time, thought and resources to bring to fruition. Among those identified are the following:

- Development of a local gun range
- Improved stability in power supply to the Garden City area.
- Educational opportunities for adults to advance educational achievement

Long Term

Long range goals are those that require significant resources, collaboration, planning, and partnership to fulfill. These make come in the form of grants, political contacts, and support by the business community to fulfill

- Support infrastructure that reduces the cost of living (communications, natural gas, roads, sewer system expansion, etc..)
- Evaluation of opportunities to cooperate with Uinta and Lincoln Counties in Wyoming on growing economic opportunities along the Bear River corridor, including reuse of the existing LEAF mining site

