



August 18, 2017

Contact: Lloyd F. Athearn, Executive Director

Office: (303) 278-7650

Mobile: (720) 556-6166

Email: [lloyd@14ers.org](mailto:lloyd@14ers.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **COLORADO'S 14ERS EXPERIENCED 311,000 HIKING USE DAYS IN 2016 ESTIMATES PROJECT \$84.3+ MILLION IN STATEWIDE ECONOMIC IMPACT**

(Golden, Colo.) Colorado's popular 14,000-foot peaks experienced an estimated 311,000 person days of hiking use in 2016 based on a study released today by the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative (CFI). This represents an increase of more than 50,000 person days compared to 2015's estimate of 260,000 hiker use days. The increase is likely due to more accurate projections rather than a dramatic, one-year surge in climbers on Colorado's highest peaks.

"By doubling the number of trail counters placed on the peaks last year, we were able to get a more accurate picture of the number of hikers out on Colorado's 14ers," said Lloyd F. Athearn, executive director of CFI. "It turns out our estimates were a bit conservative in projecting 2015 hiking use. Some monitored peaks actually saw year-on-year increases—in particular Mount Elbert, the state's highpoint. But for most 14ers the apparent increase in hiking use was just more accurate estimates."

The greatest amount of hiking use occurred on the 14er peaks closest to the Front Range metropolitan areas. These peaks also tend to be among the easiest climbing routes in the state. Mount Elbert, the state's highpoint, again was the most-climbed 14er, with an estimated 29,000 hiking use days. This was up from an estimated 25,000 hiking use days in 2015, a 16 percent year-on-year increase. Several other high-use 14ers showed increased levels of hiking use as a result of obtaining monitoring data, including Mount Sherman and Pikes Peak. Hiking use was relatively unchanged on Grays and Torreys Peaks, Mount Democrat and Quandary Peak, all of which have been monitored in prior years.

"Last year we were able to get counters out on several remote and more challenging peaks, including Wilson Peak and Mount Sneffels," Athearn added. "These counts showed higher levels of climbing use in 2016 than we estimated in 2015. Though the increase in use from fewer than 1,000 hiker days to around 1,500 hiker days for some of these peaks is not huge, it caused projections for all of the least-climbed peaks to increase."

— more —

Actual hiker counts and projected use levels last year remained within 2015's projected range for 23 routes, while 21 routes showed increased hiking use and 3 routes showed lower hiking use. Most of the routes showing increases were among the least-climbed in the state, with projected hiking use well below 5,000 use days annually.

This level of recreational use suggests a statewide economic impact of more than \$84.3 million directly attributable to hiking 14ers based on economic expenditure studies performed by Colorado State University economists John Loomis and Catherine Keske. Their 2009 study found that climbers of Quandary Peak near Breckenridge spent an average of \$271.17 per day for gasoline, food, lodging, equipment and other retail purchases.<sup>i</sup>

"14er hiking use is a significant and stable source of economic development for Colorado and many of its trailhead communities across the state," said Athearn. "Building out and maintaining the network of sustainably designed, durably constructed summit hiking trails is CFI's top priority. If we can provide a robust network of 14er hiking trails that protects the fragile alpine tundra ecosystems through which these trails pass we can protect these signature Colorado peaks while helping foster this source of hiker-generated revenue for years to come."

CFI's hiking use projections are based on the combination of two data sources. 1) CFI collected hour-by-hour data during the 2016 hiking season using compact infrared trail counters that were placed at 20 locations adjacent to summit hiking trails servicing 23 14er peaks. Hiking use is estimated for the period between May 24 and October 14. Missing data were modeled using a linear model incorporating week number, day of the week, holiday and use levels on other similar peaks, which has shown to be statistically accurate. 2) Hiking use projections for all other 14ers were based on crowdsourced "14er checklists" submitted to the 14ers.com website by more than 14,000 individual hikers. Estimates for peaks without trail counters were calculated using a trend line calculated by the relative frequency of reported hiking use on all peaks using data points as anchors for peaks that had trail counters in 2016.

Mount Elbert experienced an estimated 29,000 hiking use days during the 2016 season, making it the most-climbed 14er in Colorado for the second year in a row. Trail counters were placed on the mountain's three primary ascent routes. Hiking use was estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 person days for Mount Bierstadt, Grays Peak and Torreys Peak. Hiking use was estimated between 15,000 and 20,000 person days on Mount Democrat (and nearby Mounts Lincoln and Bross, which are usually climbed in a loop route), Mount Sherman, Pikes Peak and Quandary Peak.

– more –

The Sawatch Range experienced an estimated 115,000 hiking use days, the highest in the state. This stems from having more 14er peaks—15—than any other mountain range, as well as including Mount Elbert, the most-climbed 14er. In contrast, the Elk Mountains near Aspen experienced the lowest 14er hiking use—9,000 days—due to the technical nature of most of its peaks.

CFI began deploying compact infrared trail counters as part of a pilot program in 2014 at five locations: Grays/Torreys, Castle, Quandary, Redcloud/Sunshine and Handies Peaks (American Basin). The program was expanded in 2015 to five additional locations: Mounts Elbert (3 locations), Democrat and Handies Peak (Grizzly Gulch). Additional funding in 2016 allowed CFI to add 10 new monitoring locations: Mounts Sneffels, Sherman, Princeton, Antero and Shavano, La Plata, Huron and Wilson Peaks, Challenger Point/Kit Carson Peak and Blanca Peak/Ellingwood Point.

Hiking use is being monitored at 20 locations during the 2017 peak summer hiking season, with estimated counts to be released in 2018.

CFI uses the term “person days” to report hiking use on the 14ers. This represents one person hiking one peak on one day. Anecdotally we know that individual enthusiasts may hike multiple 14ers over the course of a given year, including climbing the same peak multiple times. Using “person days” reports the number of days of hiking use that occurred, but does not represent the number of individual people who hiked 14ers that year.

**About Colorado Fourteeners Initiative.** CFI was founded in 1994 to preserve and protect the natural integrity of Colorado’s 14,000-foot peaks through active stewardship and public education. To date CFI has constructed 31 sustainably designed, durably built summit trails on 28 14er peaks. CFI has engaged almost 13,500 days of volunteer stewardship since 2001 in the construction and maintenance of these peaks. A multi-pronged educational strategy has contacted more than 112,000 hikers in the field through paid crews and volunteer Peak Stewards, while CFI’s YouTube channel contains more than 40 educational videos that have been viewed more than 43,500 times. Learn more at [www.14ers.org](http://www.14ers.org) and obtain frequent updates on Facebook.

---

<sup>i</sup> Loomis, John and Catherine Keske, “Did the Great Recession Reduce Visitor Spending and Willingness to Pay for Nature-Based Recreation? Evidence from 2006 and 2009,” *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Vol. 30, No. 2, April 2012, pp. 238-246.