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AN ESTIMATED 279,000 PEOPLE HIKED COLORADO'S 14ERS IN 2022 USE DROPPED 8 PERCENT STATEWIDE, 37% AT QUANDARY PEAK

(Golden, Colo.) The number of people climbing a 14,000-foot peak in Colorado last year fell by 8 percent to 279,000 hiker use days, according to the most recent hiking use report released today by the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative (CFI). Last year saw the second-fewest number of 14er hikers over the eight years CFI has produced estimates (2015 = 260,000). Continued access and parking restrictions at the highest-use peaks near the Front Range contributed to a 33 percent drop in 14er hiking over two years. Quandary Peak saw the largest one-year decline (37%) followed by Grays and Torreys Peaks (14%). The statewide economic impact of hiking Colorado 14ers in 2022 was \$75.7 million based on past 14er hiking use expenditure studies.

“The number of people hiking 14ers fell consistently across the state and to levels we have not seen in more than seven years,” said Lloyd F. Athearn, executive director of CFI. “Use continued to fall most dramatically on the peaks closest to Denver due to parking and access restrictions. The only area to see increased hiking traffic was the Mosquito Range, where the re-opening of the Decalibron Loop returned hiking use to more traditional levels.”

Mount Bierstadt regained the status as the most-climbed Colorado 14er in 2022 after four years as #2 with an estimated 30,000-35,000 hiker days (best guess = 32,000). CFI's trail counter on the peak was removed and presumed stolen, so the estimate is based on past use levels and the fact that the mountain had no new parking or access restrictions. Hiking use on Quandary Peak ranked second in the state at an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 hiker days (best guess = 22,000). Best-guess Quandary hiker days declined 13,000 from the 2021 season (-37%) and a whopping 27,000 hiker days (-55%) compared to the 2020 pandemic season. Last year was the first full season in which Quandary hikers had to either pay for a reserved trailhead parking spot, ride a paid town shuttle bus or find alternate means of reaching the trailhead. Mount Elbert and the Decalibron Loop tied for third place in a range of 20,000 to 25,000 hiking use days (best guess for both routes = 21,000 days). Hiking use on Elbert remained in the same category, though the best-guess estimate dropped by 1,000, while use on the Decalibron Loop (Mounts Democrat, Cameron Lincoln and the Bross bypass) surged by more than 200 percent. The loop was open to hiking

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in 2022 after being closed during the first half of the 2021 season due to private land liability concerns. Grays and Torreys Peaks rounded out the top five with an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 hiking use days (best guess = 19,000), a one-year decline of 14 percent. Hikers unable to find a parking spot in the trailhead lot were forced to park near I-70 and hike the 3.5-mile-long road, contributing to lower use levels for the second season in a row. Grays/Torreys hiking use has fallen an estimated 39 percent over two years.

Access to Mount Lindsey in the southern Sangre de Cristo Range was closed to public use the entire season due to landowner liability concerns.

CFI maintained a network of 20 counter locations in 2022. Counters that had observed data for more than 90 percent of the season included Quandary (100%), Pikes (99%--Devil's Playground, 98%--Barr Trail), La Plata (99%), Elbert (three routes--99%), Grays/Torreys (96%), Huron (94%) and Redcloud/Sunshine (90%). Counters that collected between 60 and 90 percent of the season included: Princeton (84%), Challenger/Kit Carson (82%), Handies (79%--American Basin), Sherman (76%), Democrat (76%), Blanca/Ellingwood (74%), Sneffels (69%), Castle (61%) and Lindsey (61%). Counters on Bierstadt and the Grizzly Gulch route on Handies went missing, the Shavano counter was damaged, and the Wilson Peak counter was marooned.

Colorado was the fourth-fastest-growing state between 2010 and 2019, growing its population by 14.5 percent. The Denver metro area has grown nearly 15 percent during the same period. In-migration was highest for those aged 24-32, the prime age for fit, outdoor-oriented people to be exploring Colorado's high peaks.

CFI's estimate of hiking use suggests a statewide economic impact of almost \$75.7 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.¹ This expenditure estimate has not been updated in more than a decade, so it is likely understated.

CFI's hiking use projections are based on the combination of several data sources. 1) CFI collected hour-by-hour data during the 2022 hiking season using compact infrared trail counters that were placed at 23 locations adjacent to summit hiking trails servicing 21 14er peaks. Hiking use is estimated for the period between May 24 and October 10. 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 22,790 individual hikers. Estimates for peaks without trail counters were determined 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 2022.

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. In 2017 the Antero counter was moved to the Winfield approach to La Plata Peak. In 2018 two new counters were deployed on Pikes Peak (Barr Trail and Devil's Playground), while the La Plata (Winfield) counter was moved to the West Ridge of Quandary and the Princeton counter was moved to Mount Lindsey. In 2020 the West Ridge of Quandary counter was moved to a better location on Mount Princeton, while a new counter was deployed to Mount Bierstadt. Hiking use is being monitored at 23 locations during the 2023 summer/fall hiking season after replacement of the Bierstadt and Handies/Grizzly Gulch counters.

CFI uses the term "hiker use 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 "hiker use 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 39 sustainably designed, durably built summit trails on 35 14er peaks. CFI has engaged more than 20,500 days of volunteer stewardship since 2001 in the construction and maintenance of these peaks. A multi-pronged educational strategy has contacted more than 190,000 hikers in the field through paid crews and volunteer Peak Stewards, while CFI's YouTube channel contains more than 80 educational videos that have been viewed more than 386,000 times. Learn more at www.14ers.org and obtain frequent updates on Facebook and Instagram.

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ⁱ 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.