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COLORADO 14ER HIKING USE DOWN IN 2025 TO 256,000 DAYS MOUNT BLUE SKY ROAD CLOSURE OFFSETS GAINS ELSEWHERE

(Lakewood, Colo.) Hiking use on Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks fell three percent overall in 2025—down 9,000 to an estimated 256,000 hiker-use days—compared to the prior year, according to Colorado Fourteeners Initiative's 11th edition of its hiking-use report. Closure of the Mount Blue Sky Scenic Byway contributed greatly to the decline, which offset higher climbing use on several of the most popular fourteeners. The 2025 estimate is the lowest tally CFI has recorded since the nonprofit began the hiking-use-estimate program in 2015.

"Continued volatility stemming from peak closures and re-openings masks the underlying trend that the fourteeners continue to be exceptionally popular hiking destinations," said Lloyd F. Athearn, executive director of Colorado Fourteeners Initiative. "Closing access to Mount Blue Sky's most popular route cut use by an estimated 18,000 hiker days. However, hiking use was up between 1,500 and 5,000 days on some of the most popular peaks, including Mounts Bierstadt and Sherman, the Decalibron Loop, and Quandary, Grays, and Torreys peaks."

The race for most popular fourteeners last year was again a photo finish, with Mount Bierstadt narrowly edging out Quandary Peak. Use on both peaks was estimated to be in the 30,000 to 35,000 hiker-use days range. Bierstadt's trail counter recorded almost 31,000 hiker days, while Quandary's trail counter recorded an estimated 30,500 hiker days. Both counters were operational 100 percent of the monitored period. The Decalibron Loop's Mount Democrat came in third place with an estimated use at 20,000 to 25,000 hiking-use days, which was up more than 5,000 days compared to 2024. Grays and Torreys peaks and Mount Elbert remained in the third tier of use in 2025, suggesting that 15,000 to 20,000 climbers hiked those mountains.

In 2025, an estimated 59 percent of statewide hiking use (152,400 hiker days) occurred on the 12 fourteeners situated closest to the metro area, specifically those in the Front Range, Tenmile Range, Mosquito Range, and Mount Elbert, which is a geographical outlier in the Sawatch Range. The remaining 46 peaks accounted for 103,600 hiker days.

Compared to 2024, hiking use in 2025 fell in four mountain ranges: Front Range (-13,500 days, -16 percent), San Juan Mountains (-10,500 days, -30 percent), Sawatch Range (-2,000 days, -3 percent), and the Elk Mountains (-1,500 days, -17 percent). Hiking use was up in three ranges: Mosquito Range (+9,000 days, +40 percent), Sangre de Cristo Range (+5,500 days, +65 percent), and the Tenmile Range (+4,000 days, +15 percent).

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Some of the ups and downs in hiking use in recent years relate to discrete openings and closures of individual peaks. For example, access to Mount Lindsey in the southern Sangre de Cristo Range was restored last year under an electronic waiver program after being closed for five seasons due to landowner liability concerns. This led to a rebound in hiking use in 2025 as people were able to lawfully return to climb the mountain. Meanwhile, access to La Plata Peak was closed starting in mid-August due to a wildfire that started from a campfire located close to CFI's trail counter. The trail remained closed by the Forest Service through the end of the monitoring season in early October due to hazard mitigation work.

Other noticeable changes can be attributed to the way CFI has tweaked its modeling program. For example, during CFI's first nine hiking use reports the modeling program assumed that hikers were climbing Mount Blue Sky by the 17-mile round-trip route from Echo Lake. Last year CFI switched to using the 5.5-mile round-trip ascent from Summit Lake, which is more commonly done. That caused Mount Blue Sky to jump from the fourth tier (10,000 to 15,000 hiker-use days) into the second tier (20,000 to 25,000 hiker-use days). This change in assumption may have overstated climbing use in 2024, because, even when the road is open to Summit Lake, access is limited and permitted, a factor not considered by the modeling program. CFI recently obtained permission from Denver Mountain Parks to place a trail counter on Mount Blue Sky above Summit Lake, which should provide greater clarity regarding actual hiking use on this peak. To be clear, CFI does not attempt to estimate the number of people driving to the top of the road, a mere 138 feet below the summit, and then hiking to the summit.

For the 2025 hiking season, CFI began breaking out North Maroon Peak as a separate summit. Previously it had been lumped in with Maroon Peak when North Maroon was not considered a "ranked" fourteenner.

CFI maintained a network of 20 counter locations in 2025, down from 23 counters in 2024 due to the departure of a key staff member who worked on the project. Counters that had observed data for more than 90 percent of the season included Bierstadt (100 percent), Quandary (100 percent), and Pikes (100 percent). Counters that collected between 60 and 90 percent of the season included: La Plata (95 percent), Elbert (88 percent), Shavano (84 percent), Grays/Torreys (76 percent), Handies—Grizzly Gulch (76 percent), Redcloud/Sunshine (76 percent), Princeton (71 percent), Democrat and Bross (65 percent), Huron (64 percent), Sherman (63 percent), Blanca/Ellingwood (62 percent) and Lindsey (60 percent). Counters were not placed last year on Wilson, Sneffels, Challenger/Kit Carson or Handies (American Basin).

CFI's most recent estimate of hiking use suggests a statewide economic impact of \$69.4 million directly attributable to hiking fourteenners 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 15 years, so it is likely significantly understated.

CFI's hiking use projections are based on the combination of several data sources. 1) CFI collected hour-

by-hour data during the 2025 hiking season using compact infrared trail counters that were placed at 20 locations adjacent to summit hiking trails servicing 23 fourteen peaks. Hiking use is estimated for the period between May 25 and October 4. 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 fourteens were based on crowdsourced “14er checklists” submitted to the 14ers.com website by more than 26,900 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 2025.

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: Mount Elbert (3 locations), Mount 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 Mt. 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. In 2024, the Bierstadt counter was replaced for a third time—two counters were stolen over consecutive years—and counters were placed on Bross and the Winfield approach to La Plata. Due to reduced staff capacity, the following counters were not placed in 2025: Handies (American Basin), Sneffels, Wilson and Challenger/Kit Carson.

CFI uses the term “hiker-use days” to report hiking use on the fourteens. This represents one person hiking one peak on one day. Anecdotally, we know that individual enthusiasts may hike multiple fourteens 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 fourteens that year.

About Colorado Fourteens 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 41 sustainably designed, durably built summit trails on 36 14er peaks. CFI has engaged more than 25,000 days of volunteer stewardship since 2001 in the construction and maintenance of these peaks. A multi-pronged educational strategy has contacted more than 210,000 hikers in the field through paid crews and volunteer Peak Stewards, while CFI’s YouTube channel contains more than 90 educational videos that have been viewed more than 525,500 times. Learn more at 14ers.org and obtain frequent updates on Facebook and Instagram.

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.