



# UINTAH BASIN THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

By Pamela Ostermiller

## FAST FACTS

### COUNTIES:

Daggett, Duchesne, Uintah

### MAJOR CITIES:

Vernal (8,403)  
Duchesne (1,553)  
Roosevelt (4,852)  
Manila (298)

### REGIONAL CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE: 25,472

### AVERAGE WAGE:

\$30,031 (Daggett)  
\$39,606 (Duchesne)  
\$42,381 (Uintah)



DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT

### MAJOR EMPLOYERS:

Duchesne County School District  
Uintah Basin Medical Center  
Halliburton Energy Services  
Colletts Recreation Services  
Cash Meat Market  
Anadarko Petroleum Corp.  
Ashley Valley Medical Center  
Jacob Fields Service N.A.  
National Forest Service

**A DRIVE THROUGH** the Uintah Basin, under the watch of King's Peak, across the maize-colored, antelope speckled plains, through the alfalfa fields and the red cliffs to the fish-filled waters of Flaming Gorge, to the lights of the oil rigs twinkling on the horizon, reveals that the lifestyle and economy of the Uintah Basin is grounded in natural resources. It's a region of roots, veins and bones, of range cattle, oil wells and dinosaurs. Duchesne, Daggett and Uintah counties each bring unique bounties and challenges and most importantly, opportunities for business.

### BREAKING THE BOOM AND BUST

Gary McClellan is a saddle maker from Maeser, a small town just outside Vernal. For 18 years he has worked for Dry Fork Saddle, a company his brother, Brad, started in 1972. The company builds about 900 saddles a year and sell them worldwide for some \$2,735 each. "We can't keep up," he says, but enjoys the work as much as the success. "I like seeing the finished product. It is satisfying to watch progress every day, to see the end result."

They are so popular Discovery Channel is doing a "How it's Made" special on the company.

McClellan can sum up life in Uintah County as well as any economic

developer or county official. "I have a three-minute commute to work, the people are friendly, I don't lock my doors at night, and you're 30 to 40 minutes away from anything you want to do, horseback riding, whitewater rafting, the Green River, fishing...I enjoy the recreation."

Mark Raymond, County Commissioner says the area is growing fast.

"Things are happening here," he says. "The traditional boom-and-bust cycle of the Uintah Basin is past history." He is talking about oil, of course, the grease of the county's economic cogs for decades. But that grease, combined with a tradition of tourism and agriculture, has opened opportunities in other industries.

Especially exciting are developments in higher education, on the Utah State University Uintah Basin Regional Campus. Recently, Utah entrepreneur Marc Bingham and his wife, Debbie, donated \$15 million to the campus to build the Entrepreneurship and Energy Research

Center. Slated to open in 2009, the building will be a state-of-the-art, high-tech educational facility to train students in engineering, water management, natural resources and environmental policy, to name a few.

In July, the Anadarko Foundation, a nonprofit organization of Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, announced a \$1.5 million joint gift to the university and the Uintah Basin Applied Technology College. The gift will fund construction of the Anadarko Petroleum Corporation Industrial Technology Building, which will offer programs critical to the natural gas and oil industry, but it will also educate locals so that they are able to live and work where they grew up. "We will have state-of-the-art facilities, equipment and programs in industrial engineering, chemistry and geology," Raymond says. "We can get our young people to fill the jobs we need."

Which leads to another so-called problem: more jobs than workers and a lack of housing for the workers already in place. "We have too many high paying jobs that we can't fill," says Michael McKee, chairman of the Uintah County Commission. "Now that is an exciting problem!" According to the Utah Department of



FLAMING GORGE



Workforce Services, unemployment is 2.6 percent. "We are very upbeat. We have a great county," says McKee. "But we have shortages."

Some solutions are in motion. In July, the county approved an 80-acre development complex in Vernal for retail, entertainment and hotels, according to the Uintah Basin Standard. At least three hotels are planned, including Hawthorne Suites, La Quinta and Hyatt's Summerfield Suites and, according to a developer quoted in the Standard, "Industry representatives from Halliburton and Anadarko have agreed to guarantee 60 percent occupancy of any hotel built on the site for the next three years."

While Uintah County is supporting an ever-diversifying economy, McKee says the oil and gas sectors remain the strongest and most likely to grow. "They are driving our economy. Of the natural gas produced in Utah, 57 percent comes out of Uintah County," at a value of \$1,160,209,692. McKee underscores the importance of the basin's natural resources. "Only 15 percent of the county is privately held, which means we have low property taxes. Seventeen percent is tribal. Our public lands are extremely important for recreation, agriculture and oil."

Big news came to the Basin in 2008, when the Bureau of Land Management released its Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the Green River Formation, the largest oil shale deposit in the world estimated at 800

billion barrels of recoverable oil. The PEIS identifies the most promising shale areas in Utah, Colorado and Wyoming that will be open to applications for commercial leasing. BLM Director Jim Caswell said in a press release, "The goal of the BLM's oil shale program is to promote economically viable and environmentally sound production of oil shale on Western lands, where we estimate deposits hold...enough to meet U.S. demand for imported oil at current levels for 110 years."

For McKee, this is an unfathomable opportunity for the people of Uintah County and beyond. "We could solve the nation's energy needs. Utah is going to play a major role."

#### DUCHESNE: DIG IN

Flanked by the Ashley National Forest and covered with a patchwork of farmland, Duchesne County is quiet and rural, but underneath the verdant hills hums an economic engine. The combination of bountiful natural resources and an energetic leadership that uses every tool in the box have kept the county on a growth pattern for years and most sectors show no sign of a slow down. All signs point to encourage growth and development.

The strongest sector continues to be the oil and gas industry. Duchesne is Utah's largest producer of crude oil at 39 percent of the State's output. "The durable nature of the industry encourages supportive new businesses which are starting up at breakneck speed," says Irene Hans-

en, Director of Duchesne County Economic Development. Services related to mining, such as welding, trucking and commercial construction, are feeding off of oil and gas, yet there is growth in other areas as well, such as tourism. Hotels are booked all summer as are the area's seven resorts, ranches and fishing destinations. In Myton, chic restaurant Hollow Moon is serving up fresh baby greens and gelato to locals and travelers alike.

While "oil and gas may be our bread and butter, agriculture is our backbone," Hansen says. Duchesne County ranks in the top five producers of cattle, hay and corn.

Hansen, part economic developer, part cheerleader, part fundraiser, is especially excited to see county residents getting their piece of the pie. "When outside companies come into the county, that's wonderful," she says. "But when a local sees an opportunity and seizes it and expands, that is even better!"

County residents are better able to capitalize when they have local leaders rooting for them. For example, Duchesne is the second largest user of the Enterprise Zone Tax Credit Program, created in 1988 for job creation and new investment in counties with less than 50,000 residents. Businesses that qualify receive helpful tax credits and in Duchesne, "it has helped a lot," says Hansen. "It has been extremely well utilized."

A new program from the Governor's Office of Economic Development has given one company in Ballard a huge boost. McMullin Heating & Cooling was recently awarded \$50,000 from the Rural Fast Track (RFT) program, which provides incentives to help companies in small towns grow and offer additional higher paying jobs. Amber McMullin, secretary for the company, says they will use the money for a new building for inventory and office space, and hire more employees. In the past, "we have had to turn business away," she says, but not anymore. McMullin is a company that has grown with the oil

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**Jim Caswell**  
DIRECTOR, BLM



UINTAH BASIN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ENERGY RESEARCH CENTER



#### NINE MILE PANEL



industry, providing AC at camp locations, over mine computers and in metal industrial buildings. But the company would not have qualified for the RFT award if it wasn't for help from local officials.

"We really appreciate Irene," says McMullin. "She is on the ball. She made me realize that the RFT is for rural businesses and will help the community."

If the community is lacking in anything, says Hansen, it is more hotels and retail and, as in Uintah County, housing. "There is opportunity here. We are losing 75 percent of our retail money to other towns. Wal-Mart serves a region, but if they are not in your community, you lose." Hansen adds that the downtown is full, creating a need for infrastructure. "When you have fast growth, you have to adapt. But we are meeting the challenge."

#### DESTINATION: DAGGETT

Tucked in Utah's eastern-most corner with endless opportunities for recreation, less than 1,000 residents and yet not one stoplight, Daggett County is the place to get away. "In the wintertime we are in our own little world," says Brian Raymond, County Commission Assistant and Director of Economic Development. Of the 1,186 residences in the area, Raymond estimates that 70 percent

are second homes, enjoyed for one week, two weeks, or months at a time by Daggett part-timers.

"Recreation is why a lot of people are here," he says, "including full-time locals." Because the majority of Daggett's land is owned by the government, most residents work for the government in some capacity—in the field, the school district or local government positions—or work in tourism and travel. This predicament, or opportunity, means that leaders must get creative and use the county's natural beauty every way they can.

While Daggett showed huge job growth in early 2008, it was due to pipeline construction and some expansion in the travel and tourism industry. The latter is the key to the region's sustainable economy.

According to the Economic Development Corporation of Utah, Daggett County is working to update the County General Plan including the

Dutch John area. The Report says that the County "is working with Aspen Rivers, LLC, a team of specialized planners, to evaluate existing plans and improve the implementation ability and create a clearer path to develop a sustainable economy." Dutch John is just one region of many that offers potential growth for tourism.

Over the years, economic developers have created festivals, events and races—anything to attract new visitors to its outdoor playground. In August the county held the fourth Tower Rock 10K Run, an event created to generate revenue which has been a big success; this year there were 71 runners and 200 attendants to the post-run pasta bash.

The First Annual Fall Festival at the Daggett County Park in Manila, featuring entertainment, a dinner, horseshoes and a benefit auction has kicked off a new tradition for the county. 



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