



Legislation Text

File #: 24-0897, **Version:** 1

Planning and Building Department, Economic Development Division, recommending the Board receive and file a presentation from the El Dorado County Water Agency on their report titled "Outdoor Recreation in the Upper American River Watershed: An Analysis of Economic Impact and Value."

FUNDING: N/A

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

El Dorado Water Agency (EDWA) was established in 1959 to provide integrated water resources planning management throughout El Dorado County to ensure the county has reliable, accessible, and affordable water now and into the future. This long-term water supply is necessary to support growing agribusiness and community needs, protect the environment, maintain healthy watersheds and forests, and minimize flooding and wildfire risks. EDWA's role and responsibilities in countywide water resource development and management are designed to fulfill the County of El Dorado's adopted General Plan. EDWA does not own any water facilities nor provide water supply directly to any water users.

Given the geography of the county, with its rich natural lands, watershed management is a vital component to ensuring reliable and resilient water supplies. Recognizing the importance to watershed management, EDWA convened the Upper American River Watershed (UARW) Group to establish a cohesive and shared vision for sustainably managing the UARW for long-term resiliency and community prosperity. Consistent with the UAWR Group's recognition of the need to properly value this working landscape, EDWA performed an initial economic valuation of the UARW. The UARW is approximately 1.5 million acres spanning from the divide of Sierra Nevada to Folsom Reservoir. This area encompasses diverse ecosystems ranging from expansive forests to freshwater bodies to fertile agricultural lands. These ecosystems are working landscapes that produce goods, like food and clean water, and services, such as recreation and flood protection. These ecosystem goods and services provide a myriad of valuable benefits, valued at \$14.9 billion/year, to local communities as well as throughout the state, nation, and even globally.

Economic Valuation of Outdoor Recreation

As part of the abovementioned initial economic valuation, EDWA conducted a deep dive into outdoor recreation that occurred due to its widespread importance in this county. The study found that, in 2022, the UARW supported a diverse economy with visitor spending totaling \$348 million, which supported approximately 3,100 jobs and generated \$17 million in tax revenue. This spending not only boosts local businesses but also reinforces the economic resilience of the county through multiplier effects. Notably, tourists-visitors from outside the watershed-made up 53% of the visits but accounted for over 84% of the expenditures, underscoring their significant financial impact compared to their visitation numbers.

Additionally, the estimated non-market benefits, valued at \$660 million, indicate a high willingness to pay by both tourists and residents and underscore the strong value gained from recreational

experiences. These benefits highlight the UARW's dual role in driving substantial economic activity and providing invaluable recreational experiences.

This study employed advanced data analytics, combining existing observed visitation data with geospatial and mobile location data to develop detailed visitor use estimates that informed both the economic and non-market benefits analysis. Insights from this study can guide decision makers and land managers in developing policies and allocating resources within the UARW, considering the benefits of outdoor recreation.

The technical report, factsheets, and additional Upper American River Watershed Program information can be found on EDWA's website here:

<https://www.edwateragency.org/Pages/UARWatershed.aspx>

Implications of Study to County

The County has long recognized the abundance of recreation opportunities throughout El Dorado County. Having this economic analysis based on actual data confirms what we have known and positions the County to pursue funds and make informed decisions about how to invest and protect our outdoor recreation.

ALTERNATIVES

The Board could choose not receive the presentation.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION

N/A

OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The Economic Development Department shared data to assist in validation of El Dorado Water Agency's outdoor recreation economic valuation.

CAO RECOMMENDATION / COMMENTS

Receive and file as recommended.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this item.

CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT

Thriving Economy - Develop a Countywide Economic Strategic Plan focused on managed economic stability.

CONTACT

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