



STEAMBOAT SPRINGS
More Colorado

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO

Destination Stewardship Action Plan



Overview



The City of Steamboat Springs is an established mountain resort community that has evolved from its deep roots in agriculture and ranching into a vibrant, multi-dimensional city. The community is a desired year-round destination that offers a wealth of seasonal outdoor recreation opportunities.

The SteamboatSprings Chamber (SSC) is the destination organization responsible for developing and managing tourism on behalf of the City of Steamboat Springs. The following action plan is designed to be a three-year plan that drives our annual scope of work with the City and influences everything that we do as a destination organization.

The Destination Stewardship action plan provides a clear way forward. It has been developed to create a shared understanding of the importance of finding harmony between resident quality of life and the quality of experience for visitors. It represents a multi-faceted approach to tourism, taking into consideration the economic, cultural, and environmental benefits and impacts to create a holistic tourism ecosystem.

What is Destination Stewardship?

A collaborative, community-centered approach to tourism designed to enhance the quality of life for residents and the quality of experience for visitors, while protecting and supporting our environment, communities, and cultural heritage.



Why Create an Action Plan?

Over the past several years, Steamboat Springs has experienced changes in population, visitation patterns, and community character. The pandemic years of 2020-2022 saw inflation and historic price increases and the “Mountain Migration”. In addition, we saw a surge in residents and visitors alike drawn to our outdoor spaces. Some residents expressed concern over a degraded quality of life, frustration over congestion on Lincoln Avenue, and with tourism in general. In response, the Steamboat Springs City Council reduced the Destination Organization budget of the SSC by 40% to respond to resident complaints and tasked the SSC with focusing on managing visitor behavior and destination stewardship.

Tourism is a critical component of our community. Over 5,000 jobs in Routt County are tied to tourism. Our residents benefit from tax savings and amenities that were created from visitor spending and nearly half of our yearly sales tax collections are paid by visitors. For our community to truly thrive though, tourism must be a force for good and the benefits must outweigh the impacts. This action plan was created to help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism while continuing to support the tourism economy.

Destination Stewardship Action Plan



Vision:

A vibrant Steamboat Springs where locals thrive and tourism is a force for good.

The Steamboat Springs Chamber, key stakeholders, and many residents and business members have aligned around these strategic goals to support the holistic Destination Stewardship vision:

- Leverage tourism to support a thriving Steamboat Springs economy
- Encourage responsible and respectful use
- Protect and enhance Steamboat Springs' cultural identity



Success:

Destination stewardship is a success when:

1. We preserve our natural, cultural, and economic assets
2. Our residents benefit from and support the tourism industry

Destination Stewardship Planning

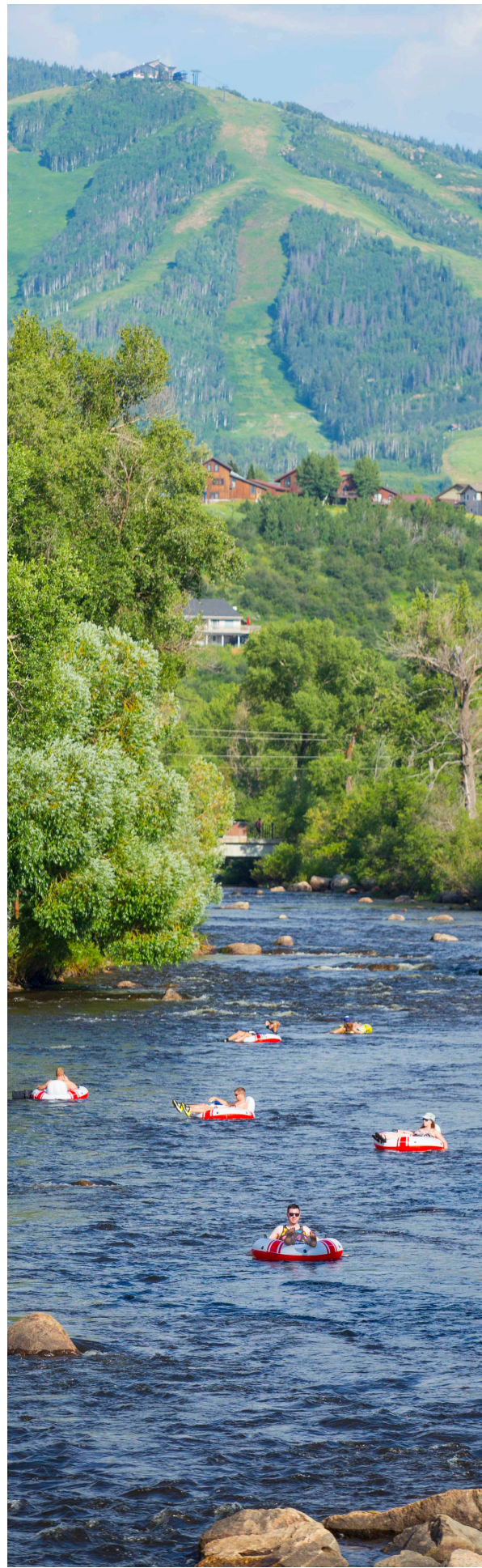
Over the past two years, SSC has conducted multiple points of input from residents on its Destination Organization priorities. In 2023, a core team was convened to provide input throughout the design and delivery of the Destination Stewardship program.

In addition to steering team meetings, SSC conducted several community meetings, discussions with Steamboat Springs City Council, the Steamboat Springs Chamber Board and members, conducted a resident sentiment survey and business stakeholder survey, and provided various resident touchpoints through social media, emails, and the local newspaper. Our efforts were guided by Clarity of Place and the Colorado Tourism Office.

Key Findings:

Throughout the entire process, residents and stakeholders were asked to establish a future vision for destination stewardship in Steamboat Springs. Key findings included:

- Enhancing non-single vehicle transportation
- Maintaining main street vitality
- Improving trail and river user behavior
- Preserving and protecting wildlife and natural resources
- Supporting and sustaining tourism workforce
- Improving community understanding of and support for tourism



Plan Framework

The Action Plan is divided into three sections by strategic goal.

1. Leverage tourism to support a thriving Steamboat Springs economy

To bolster local understanding of tourism's significant economic and social contributions, this strategy aims to expand efforts to highlight tourism's role in supporting local businesses, creating jobs, generating taxes, and facilitating community development.

2. Encourage responsible and respectful use

By promoting responsible outdoor recreation, we play a pivotal role in safeguarding our natural and cultural treasures for present and future generations.

3. Protect and enhance Steamboat Springs' cultural identity

It is critical to Destination Stewardship to preserve the authentic heritage of the area including the unique art, history, and community character that makes Steamboat unique.

Lead-Partner-Advocate Framework

The SSC developed short- and long-term action items to advance the agreed priorities. A Lead-Partner-Advocate framework will guide action-planning discussions and define roles for SSC and its stakeholders.

According to this framework, the roles of SSC are defined as:

- Lead: SSC will be responsible and accountable for the initiative
- Partner: SSC will support the pursuit of the stakeholders' goals
- Advocate: SSC will work with, for, and through others to achieve a desired outcome



Priority & Action Breakdown

Leverage Tourism to Support a Thriving Steamboat Springs Economy

At its best, tourism is an economic driver for a community, enhancing residents' quality of life and bolstering local pride. To bolster local understanding of tourism's significant economic and social contributions, this strategy aims to expand efforts to highlight tourism's role in supporting local businesses, creating jobs, generating taxes, and facilitating community development. By utilizing the data on annual impacts available from various research and data tools to leverage existing campaigns and develop new initiatives, this approach seeks to improve resident perceptions of tourism and garner increased community support for tourism ventures. The expected outcome is a well-informed public that recognizes tourism as a vital economic driver and community asset.

ACTION	SSC ROLE
Create and distribute a Routt County version of the value of tourism video that includes local figures, and distribute this strategically within the local community	Lead
Develop and deploy campaign to drive more value from visitors that are already in-market during high-value time periods	Lead
Develop a tourism stakeholder and resident communications strategy that includes key audiences, priority communication channels, and targeted value propositions for their engagement	Lead
Explore new research to better understand the state of local tourism, such as visitor behavior and demographics, local economic impact, destination stewardship success metrics, or a needs analysis on infrastructure to meet resident and visitor demands	Lead
Distribute regular communications (e.g. newsletters, press releases) about the state of tourism in Routt County that highlights timely research and active investments by SSC to support local tourism	Lead
Promote marketing messages during the shoulder and off-peak season to focus on time periods of opportunity	Lead
Highlight Green Business Network Certified businesses through marketing efforts	Partner
Advocate for more robust public transportation options that service tourism workforce in Routt County	Advocate
Advocate for new tourism workforce support programs, such as health insurance collaboratives for employers and employees, workforce housing availability and affordability, or workforce sharing programs between seasons and during high-seasons	Advocate

Priority & Action Breakdown

Encourage Responsible and Respectful Use

Steamboat Springs and the Yampa Valley are home to thousands of acres of public lands, breathtaking scenery, and boundless opportunities for outdoor recreation. Activities such as skiing, hiking, camping, fishing, rafting, snowmobiling, and horseback riding draw visitors seeking adventure. Promoting responsible recreation practices on these lands and rivers is crucial for visitor safety and preserving the region's natural beauty. Encouraging respectful use through inter-community messaging and management campaigns is essential. By promoting responsible outdoor travel practices, we play a pivotal role in safeguarding these natural and cultural treasures for present and future generations.

ACTION	SSC ROLE
Actively distribute responsible and respectful use messaging during strategic times of year, and encourage businesses to bolster the campaign digitally (i.e. social posts) and physically (i.e. QR codes)	Lead
Continue to expand upon SSC's Know Before You Go messaging and Do Steamboat Springs Right campaign	Lead
Compile and distribute information about car-free transportation to and within Steamboat Springs, and consider seasonal itineraries that educate visitors about ways they can travel without a car	Lead
Partner with CPW and local land managers to distribute accurate, timely messaging on respectful wildlife encounters	Partner
Explore opportunities to enhance local signage (e.g. bilingual, interpretive, wayfinding) in partnership with local land managers, Friends of Wilderness, CDOT, and Friends of the Yampa	Partner
Partner with local land managers to develop new visitor management plans for high-use public land units, and consider new investments in trailhead webcams, trail counters, or transportation options	Partner
Partner with Routt Recreation and Conservation Roundtable CPW regional partnership to contribute insights and resources and promote and communicate initiatives	Partner
Advocate for new programs that enable visitors to reduce waste (i.e. reusable bags at hotels) and engage in car-free transportation (i.e. bikes for guests to use on bike paths)	Advocate

Priority & Action Breakdown

Protect and Enhance Steamboat Springs' Cultural Identity

Throughout the engagement process, participants often mentioned the special qualities that make Steamboat Springs unique in the vast Colorado mountain town landscape. The intersection of outdoor recreation and western heritage creates a distinctive space for Steamboat Springs to thrive as a singular place to call home. Residents expressed a keen interest in preserving the authentic heritage of the area including the unique art, history, and community character, and that those elements wouldn't get lost in the changing times.

ACTION	SSC ROLE
Re-establish in-market and target-market campaigns focused on arts, culture and heritage during key times of year	Lead
Continue Do Steamboat Springs Right campaign with cultural themes dictated by resident sentiment and community survey input	Lead
Conduct Resident Sentiment Survey every two years to identify areas of growth and improvement	Lead
Research the local taxes that visitors pay into, and compile insights that communicate how tourism contributes to projects that enhance local quality of life, and consider a public digital dashboard	Lead
Cultivate local pride through resident and culture storytelling campaign	Lead
Promote and advance front-line trainings like Service Excellence	Lead
Partner with event promoters and community organizations to elevate messaging of cultural events	Partner
Evaluate community desire to pursue Mountain Ideal status or similar sustainable destination certification	Advocate

Appendix

Background Research and Methodology

SSC provided insights from recent discussions with community stakeholders related to a collective interest in transitioning away from approaching destination management through a reactive lens towards approaching destination stewardship through a proactive lens. Key interests included:

- Define destination stewardship and communicate it with residents and visitors
- Establish metrics for SSC to publicly report on destination stewardship
- Engage in coalition building with local organizations on shared goals
- Explore new collaborative programs that inspire behavior change

Desk research was also conducted to understand industry trends for advancing destination stewardship. Key trends included:

- Proactively protecting the destination brand in the media
- Shifting marketing budgets to address seasonality
- Investing in timely research to increase understanding of visitor behaviors
- Convening local working groups to address broad community issues

Visitor Profile Study

Visitor profile data was compiled for Steamboat Springs based on a geographical boundary and Points of interest that were provided by SSC. Key findings include:

- Visitation consistently peaks each July
- Visitor volume is fairly similar across the months of August, December, January, February, and March
- The months of June and September form the summer shoulder season
- Visitation drops significantly during the months of October, November, and April

Appendix

Resident Sentiment Survey

A resident sentiment survey was distributed to Steamboat Springs residents in early 2023, with 988 responses received. The purpose of the survey was to gain a stronger understanding of how residents perceive various aspects of the tourism industry in Steamboat Springs, such as impacts to the local economy, environment, and quality of life. Key findings include:

- Less than 20% of residents state that they work in the tourism industry
- A majority of respondents agree summer and winter have too many visitors
- A majority of respondents agree fall and spring have the right amount of visitors
- A majority of respondents agree that tourism is good for Steamboat Springs and that tourism is important for the local economy
- A majority of respondents are aware of SSC's tourism marketing efforts but fewer residents are aware of the SSC's destination management efforts
- A majority of respondents agree that tourism development is happening too quickly and largely does not improve their personal quality of life



Appendix

Tourism Stakeholder Survey

A tourism stakeholder survey was distributed in early 2023 to businesses and organizations directly contributing to the tourism industry in Steamboat Springs. The purpose of the survey was to receive input on economic outlook, priority concerns, and opportunity areas. The SSC survey received 100 responses. Key findings include:

- A majority of respondents identified housing costs, staff hiring and retention, increased costs of supplies, and resident sentiment and attitude towards tourism as the key concerns for 2023
- A majority of respondents identified building local awareness of the value of tourism and advancing local tourism workforce as the key priorities
- A majority of respondents agree fall and spring have too few visitors
- A majority of respondents agree winter has the right amount of visitors
- Respondents were split on their assessment of summer visitor volume, with 40% of respondents feeling that the volume was about the right amount
- Respondents agree that disposal of trash along trails and trailhead parking congestion are critical issues facing public lands
- Respondents agree that parking congestion is the top issue impacting the community



Workshop Overview

As a follow-up to our initial 2022 workshop, SSC held a community visioning and action planning workshop on November 16, 2023, to convene business leaders and stakeholders at the Bud Werner Memorial Library. The workshop was designed to review the destination assessment and align on priority actions for advancing destination stewardship in Steamboat Springs. Workshop participants represented a wide range of tourism stakeholders, including public officials and representatives from industry sectors, including outdoor recreation, arts and culture, attractions, lodging, retail, restaurants, non-profits, and event producers.

Key agenda items included:

- Group discussion to establish a vision for destination stewardship in Steamboat Springs
- Overview of the Steamboat Springs destination assessment
- Action planning to align on priority actions to advance destination stewardship

Key Findings

Workshop participants engaged in small group discussions to establish a future vision for destination stewardship in Steamboat Springs that focused on main street vitality, tourism workforce, transportation, user behavior, and community support for tourism.

Overlapping themes from these discussions focused on providing support for small and medium-sized businesses, reducing congestion and transportation emissions, building a culture of shared stewardship of public lands, enhancing waste management practices, and bolstering collaboration between local organizations to work together on shared community goals.



Glossary of Terms

Created by the Colorado Tourism Office's Destination Stewardship Coalition, 2024

Accessibility

The degree to which destinations, facilities, and services are easily approachable, usable, and enjoyable for individuals with disabilities.

Biodiversity

The diverse range of species and landscapes that contribute to the natural appeal and ecological resilience of the area.

Carrying Capacity

The maximum number of visitors an area can sustainably accommodate without causing significant negative impacts on the environment, cultural heritage, overall visitor experience, and resident quality of life.

Cultural Heritage

The collective legacy of a community or society, including tangible and intangible aspects such as historical sites, artifacts, traditions, language, and customs passed down from previous generations that contribute to the identity, understanding, and appreciation of a particular culture.

Cultural Resources

Tangible and intangible elements within a destination that hold cultural, historical, or artistic value, serving as attractions for visitors and contributing to the overall cultural experience, including landmarks, artifacts, traditions, languages, and other elements that showcase the heritage and identity of a community.

Destination Development

Strategic planning and technical assistance designed to empower Colorado tourism industry partners to develop, manage, and promote visitor experiences that align with their competitive advantage as a destination and help protect their unique sense of place.

Destination Management

The coordinated management of all the elements that make up a tourism destination to enhance its overall appeal, success, and long-term sustainability.

Destination Marketing

Strategic planning and implementation of promotional activities to enhance the visibility, appeal, and overall attractiveness of a specific location or tourist destination to target audiences, attract visitors and drive tourism-related economic benefits.

Glossary of Terms

Destination Management/ Marketing Organization (DMO)

An organizational entity that serves to initiate, coordinate, and manage activities within a destination including implementing tourism policies, strategic planning, product development, promotion, marketing, and convention bureau activities. Also referred to as a convention and visitors bureau (CVB) or destination organization (DO).

Destination Stewardship

A collaborative, community-centered approach to tourism designed to enhance the quality of life for residents and the quality of experience for visitors, while protecting and supporting our environment, communities, and cultural heritage.

Over-Tourism

The issue that results when a popular tourist destination experiences an excessive and unsustainable influx of visitors, leading to negative impacts on the environment, local communities, and the overall quality of the tourist experience.

Regenerative Tourism

A paradigm shift that sees humans and nature as part of an interconnected living system, where tourism acts in service of the destination and the well-being of communities and the environment is emphasized above profit and growth.

Responsible Tourism

Conscientious travel practices that prioritize the well-being of local communities, minimize environmental impact, and promote cultural understanding.

Responsible Recreation

Engaging in leisure and outdoor activities in a conscientious manner, respecting natural environments, wildlife, and local communities, and promoting ethical behavior to minimize negative impacts while fostering a positive and respectful experience for all participants.

Stakeholders

An individual, group, organization, or entity that holds a vested interest or plays a role in the tourism industry.

Sustainable Tourism

Tourism activities conducted in a manner that seeks to minimize negative environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts, while promoting conservation, community engagement, and long-term well-being, ensuring that tourism can be enjoyed by present and future generations.