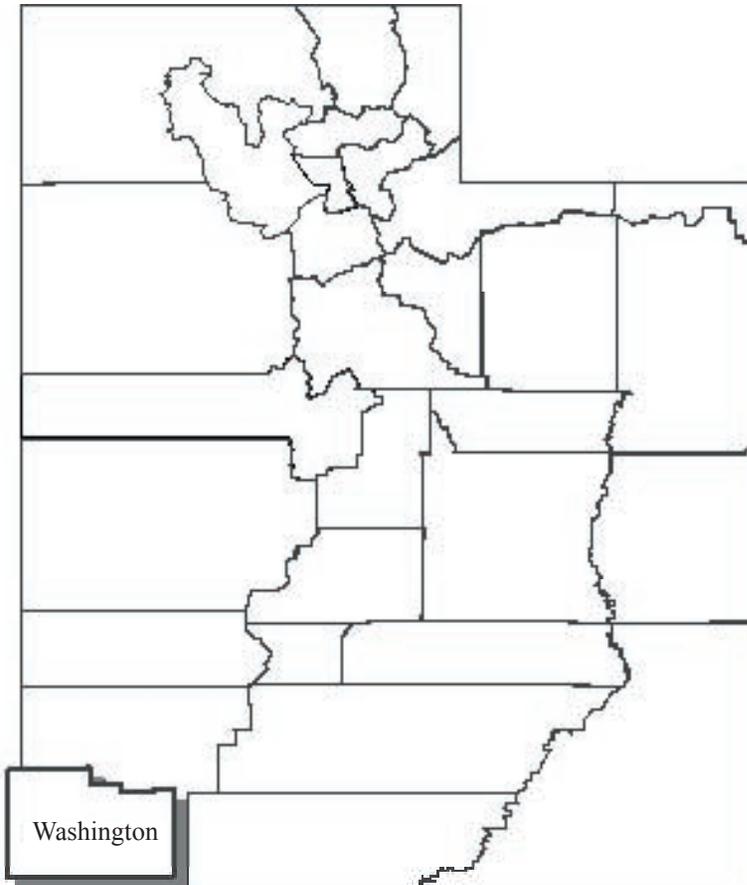


# Washington County

*Prepared for the:*  
**Dixie, Fishlake & Manti-La Sal National Forests  
Forest Plan Revision  
Social and Economic Assessment**

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## WASHINGTON COUNTY OVERVIEW



### **County Land Ownership**

- 40.5% — Bureau of Land Mgt.
- 22.1% — US Forest Service
- 17.7% — Private
- 8.5% — Natl. Park/Monument
- 5.4% — State Trust Lands
- 1.8% — Tribal
- 0.5% — State Parks
- 0.1% — Other
- 3.4% — Wilderness
- 5.7% — Wilderness Study Area  
(within BLM total)

source: SITLA, 2003

### **County Planned Uses**

- 3.7% — Agriculture
- 2.8% — US Forest Service
- 0.5% — National Park
- 20.4% — Open Space
- 0.7% — Residential
- 64.4% — No Zoning
- 5.5% — Municipal

source: Washington County

*This overview contains observations drawn from the maps, economic and demographic trend data, and a review of county plans contained in this profile. In addition, it contains comments and explanations of county leaders and residents, gathered at workshops conducted to review this assessment.*

### **Landscape**

Washington County is at the intersection of three distinct landscapes—the Great Basin, the Colorado Plateau, and the Mohave Desert. While the geography and plant and wildlife of these three differ, they have one thing in common—aridity. This region, known as “Utah’s Dixie,” was originally settled as an agricultural region for its favorable warm climate. The success of settlements was completely reliant on the availability of water. Three major rivers, the Virgin, Santa Clara, and Ash Creek fed from precipitation and snowmelt at higher elevations, are the lifeblood of this region. Numerous reservoirs have been built along these to supply water year-round. Water remains a critical resource and the county can not expand without developing commensurate water supplies. While many people are relocating to the area for the wealth of public lands and recreation offerings, the limited quantity of private land is a constraint to growth.

### **Population**

Washington County has been the fastest growing county in the state for the past decade, and is projected to continue to be so. This is in part due to the growth of Las Vegas as well as retirement and in-migration for lifestyle reasons. County population increased 551% between 1970 and 2000 and the county was the fourth-fastest growing county in the United States from 1990 to 1994. According to the county, the growth rate averaged 6.5% over the last decade. State projections predict an average 3% growth for the next thirty years, but county leaders expect the rate to be higher—closer to the growth experienced in recent years. The county has also experienced strong growth in its Hispanic population, and believes that there are a large number of uncounted immigrants in their population totals. All age groups are growing as St. George becomes more than a retirement community. The County also expects that their projected educational attainment figures will improve over time as the Southern Utah University grows and the number of lifestyle migrants, with higher education levels, grows.

## WASHINGTON COUNTY OVERVIEW

**Current Issues**

*affordable housing  
groundwater quality  
transportation  
airport expansion  
out-of-state visitors  
endangered species  
PILT payment values*

***Economy***

Washington County is the most urban county in Southern Utah, and most closely resembles the economies of northern Utah. While it started as an agricultural region, tourism and winter residences began to change the character of the region beginning in the 1960s. Visitation to National Parks further spurred growth as Zion National Park became an international destination and a part of the National Parks “Grand Circle.” As St. George grew into an urban area, trade, transportation, and utilities became the largest sectors of the Washington County economy. The services sector has had the most significant increases since 1980 and the growth in student population at Dixie College is viewed as a significant contributor to the tourism related workforce. The low wages of the tourism industry are a concern because they are too low to support a family and attract long-term residents. Because the county’s economy is already diverse, the balance of industry sectors is expected to remain relatively stable, but services are expected to continue growing and county leaders believe that their manufacturing sector will increase as well as they work to expand this base. A continued decline in agriculture is expected, and may be hastened by the demand for water which is converting many irrigation shares to culinary water. Grazing may still continue without this constraint, but the county also notes that the importance of maintaining AUMs for livestock operators. County residents are still interested in preserving agriculture as a small but viable industry, and view the preservation and protection of different types of open spaces as an economic development strategy that also enhances tourism.

***Planning***

Locals rely heavily on adjacent public lands, and multiple-uses and sustainability of public lands are an important issue. Nearly half of Washington County’s General Plan concentrates on public lands issues. In addition to the National Parks, recreation on BLM and US Forest Service lands are a major draw for new residents and visitors alike. The county is actively working to better organize public lands holdings through consolidation and trades and is striving toward an ongoing, working relationship with those Federal and State land agencies. There is a substantial amount of private land that are near, adjacent to, or within the forest lands and managing the urban-forest interface is becoming a critical issue.

The current water supply will prove to be a limit to growth unless new water sources, such as Lake Powell or converting agriculture water to municipal and industrial use, are developed. The Water Conservation

## WASHINGTON COUNTY OVERVIEW

District supports the opportunity for improved management and development to increase water quality and quantity and would like to implement conservation pricing. Transportation infrastructure is also in need of improvement, with a new airport being planned and pressing needs for new roads to continue residential and business growth. Planning documents reviewed, which were available at the time of this assessment, include:

*Washington County General Plan, 1994*

*Washington County, Coordination Plan for Washington County's Urbanizing Region, 1997*

*Washington County Economic Development, Strategic Plan*

*Five County AOG, Washington County Fact Sheet, 1999*

*Washington County Water Conservancy District, Water Conservation Plan, 1998*

*Utah State Historical Society, Beehive History: Utah Counties. 1988*