

Rio Blanco County Master Plan



Prepared by:

Western Slope Consulting LLC
Central Mountain Planning, LLC

Adopted:

January 13, 2011

Resolution Adopting Master Plan

RESOLUTION NO. PC 2011-01
PLANNING COMMISSION
OF THE COUNTY OF RIO BLANCO
STATE OF COLORADO

**A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF
RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO
ADOPTING THE RIO BLANCO COUNTY MASTER PLAN OF 2011**

WHEREAS, Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) 30-28-106 provides that it is the duty of a county planning commission to make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the unincorporated territory of the county; and

WHEREAS, it is the duty of the Rio Blanco County Planning Commission to make and adopt a plan for the physical development of the territory within the boundaries of Rio Blanco County, but outside of the incorporated limits of the Towns of Rangely and Meeker; and

WHEREAS, the existing Rio Blanco County 1999 Master Plan is out of date and no longer current with the existing conditions in the county; and

WHEREAS, it is in the interest of Rio Blanco County to adopt a revised master plan that sets forth a vision for the future and includes accompanying maps, charts and narratives describing the future development of the county that will guide the recommendations of the Planning Commission to the Board of County Commissioners; and

WHEREAS, the development of the 2011 Master Plan involved an extensive public input process, including identification and interviews with stakeholder groups, a county wide mail-in survey, visioning and mapping sessions, review and comment by a Technical Advisory Group, and public review meetings during 2009 and 2010; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted master plan public hearings on November 18, 2010 in Rangely, Colorado, December 9, 2010 in Meeker, Colorado and January 13, 2011 in Meeker, Colorado after notice of such public hearings was properly made in conformance with statutory requirements; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission is required by CRS 30-28-109 to certify the Master Plan to the Board of County Commissioners;

Now, Therefore, the Planning Commission of Rio Blanco County, Colorado, finds as follows:

- A. Public meetings and work sessions for development of the Master Plan of 2011 were held between May 2009 and December 2010 upon notice duly given; and
- B. The public meetings before the Planning Commission were extensive and complete, pertinent facts, matters, and issues were submitted, and any interested parties were given an opportunity to be heard; and
- C. Based upon the evidence and testimony presented at the public meetings, the Rio Blanco County Master Plan of 2011, is in the best interests of the health, safety, morals, convenience, order, prosperity and welfare of the citizens of Rio Blanco County.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO, THAT THE 1999 RIO BLANCO COUNTY MASTER PLAN, AS AMENDED, IS HEREBY REPEALED AND THE RIO BLANCO COUNTY MASTER PLAN OF 2011, A COPY OF WHICH IS ATTACHED HERETO AND INCORPORATED HEREIN BY REFERENCE, IS HEREBY APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS 13TH DAY OF JANUARY, 2011.

DULY MOVED, SECONDED, AND PASSED ON A VOTE OF 6 FOR AND 0 AGAINST, THIS 13th DAY OF JANUARY, 2011.

THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF RIO BLANCO COUNTY

By: /s/ Tim Winkler
Tim Winkler, Chairman

/s/ Clint Chappell
Clint Chappell, Commissioner

/s/ Bud Miles
Bud Miles, Commissioner

/s/ Oakley Hopkins
Oakley Hopkins, Commissioner

/s/ Dave Raley
Dave Raley, Commissioner

/s/ Holly Postmus
Holly Postmus, Commissioner

/s/ Travis Day
Travis Day, Commissioner

Legal Authority for the Master Plan

A master plan is an official document adopted by the Rio Blanco County Planning Commission in the State of Colorado. It is the duty of the county planning commission to make and adopt a "master plan" for the unincorporated territory of the county, in conformance with Section 30-28-106 (1), C.R.S.

Pursuant to Section 30-28-107, C.R.S., a county master plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the county in accordance with the present and future needs and resources. A master plan is intended to promote the health, safety, values, order, convenience, prosperity and/or general welfare of the inhabitants, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development, including such distribution of population and of the uses of land for urbanization, trade, industry, habitation, recreation, agricultural, economic, forestry, mineral extraction and other purposes.

The master plan of a county shall be an advisory document to guide land-use development decisions; however, the plan or any part thereof may be made binding by the inclusion of the county's adopted subdivision, zoning, planning, planned unit development or other similar land development regulations after satisfying notice, due process and hearing requirements for legislative or quasijudicial process as appropriate.

The county master plan shall be adopted by the county planning commission at a properly noticed public hearing and the commission is required to certify the master plan to the Board of County Commissioners.

Acknowledgments

The Rio Blanco County Master Plan project would not have been possible without the substantial time generously donated by the members of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAG), County Planning Commission, Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), the public, county staff and other participants. It is hoped that ownership and understanding of the information contained in this document is retained by the county and conveyed to future residents and decision-makers. The real measure of success of the Rio Blanco County Master Plan is regular use and application of these principles, goals and policies to land use and other decisions. The long-term challenge is to sustain ownership and understanding of the plan in future years as County Commissioners and Planning Commission members transition. The following participants are individually recognized for their participation in this planning process.

County Commissioners

Chair - Kenneth C. Parsons

Commissioner - Kai Turner

Commissioner - Joe F. Collins

Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

Regas Halandras - Town of Meeker Trustee

Kai Turner - Rio Blanco County Commissioner

Terry Goedert - Meeker Planning Commissioner

Peggy Rector - At Large Member

Ann Brady - Town of Rangely Mayor

Oakley Hopkins - Rio Blanco County Planning Commissioner

Chris Lockwood - At Large Member

Jack Rich - At Large Member

Rick Brady - Rangely Planning Commissioner

Travis Day - Rio Blanco County Planning Commissioner

Ann Franklin - At Large Member

Kim O'Connell - At Large Member

Other Recognition

Frank Cooley - For input on Rio Blanco County Oil Shale and Geology

Planning & Zoning Commission

Chair - Tim Winkler

Travis Day

Oakley Hopkins

Bud Miles

Dave Raley

Clint Chappell

Holly Postmus

County Staff

County Administration

Patrick Hooker - County Administrator

Teresa D. Anderson - County Coordinator

Planning & Development Department

Planning Director - Jeff Madison

Planner - Michelle Burke

Administrative Assistant - Jessica Abbott

Master Plan Project Consultants

Western Slope Consulting, LLC

Central Mountain Planning, LLC

RRC Associates

Schmuesser, Gordon, Meyer, Inc.

Mountain Mapping, LLC

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Plan Organization

The Rio Blanco County Plan is organized into 10 sections briefly described below.

Section 1 - Acknowledgements - Lists the organizations, boards, agencies and individuals who contributed to the writing of this plan.

Section 2 - Plan Organization (this Section) - Summarizes the various sections of the document.

Section 3 - Overview of Planning Process - Describes the planning process from start to finish.

Section 4 - Use of the Master Plan - Explains the source of the information for the document and how the Master Plan is to be used.

Section 5 - Rio Blanco County Core Values - A list of the key values of county residents identified from the County Community Survey, stakeholder interviews and public input.

Section 6 - Rio Blanco County Vision Statement - Describes Rio Blanco County's vision of ideal conditions in the year 2030. This statement sets the long-term vision of the county that is the underpinning of the planning process and that will guide county residents to their preferred future.

Section 7 - Issues - Opportunities - Issues identified during the stakeholder interview process and lists opportunities that come out of those issues as a means of responding in a proactive manner.

Section 8 - Guiding Principles, & Goals, Policies - Reviews the guiding principles with the goals and policies used to guide future growth and decisions on land-use applications. This section also lists the actions that should be taken by Rio Blanco County and others to actuate the Master Plan.

- land use
- transportation
- housing
- public services and facilities
- open lands/public lands
- historic and cultural resources
- economic sustainability
- natural resources

Section 9 - Future Land Use Map (FLUM) - Contains the descriptions of the future land use categories. This information is to be used with the Future Land Use Map.

Section 10 - Appendices - This is an assemblage of information and supporting documentation for the Master Plan.

Appendix I - Maps – A series of maps related to existing conditions.

Future Land Use Map	Physiography
Transportation	Precipitation
Minerals	Slope
Soils	Biodiversity
Soil Erosion	Wildlife - Bald Eagle
Constraints Fuel Loading	Wildlife - Elk
Constraints with Sections	Wildlife - Mule Deer

Appendix II - Rio Blanco County Existing Conditions - An overview of the existing state of affairs in Rio Blanco County up to 2010 including: land use, transportation, housing, public services and facilities, open lands/public lands, historic and cultural resources, economic sustainability and natural resources.

Appendix III - Oil Shale- A general review of oil shale and potential future ramifications if future commercial scale development occurs.

Appendix IV - Infrastructure/Capital Improvements – A discussion about existing capital improvements plans, impact fees and implementation.

Appendix V - Forecasts - Population forecasts.

Appendix VI - Plan Updates and Amendments - Describes how the Master Plan is updated or amended to keep it current.

Appendix VII - Public Input - Reviews stakeholder selection and county resident input to the planning process.

Appendix VIII - County Community Survey Results - An overview of County Community Survey information received from area residents. Detailed survey information is in the Appendix.

Appendix IX - Rio Blanco County Housing Study- The results of the recently completed housing study are included.

Overview of the Planning Process

Public involvement in the master planning process is vital to a successful plan and long-term implementation. Input from county and municipal residents formed the basis for the planning process. In order to achieve broad-based public input the following steps were completed.

- **County Community Survey** to seek broad-based county input from all residents.
- **Formation of Technical Advisory Group (TAG)** by the county Commissioners that included local residents, business interests, and members of the Planning Commission/County Commissioners. The TAG's work was focused on ensuring the Plan was comprehensive, clear, consistent and relevant.
- **Stakeholder/staff interviews** conducted to receive input from various organizations, county staff, informal groups, the towns, government agencies and others with an interest in the process.
- **Public invitation and participation** at TAG, Planning Commission and County Commissioner meetings. Public notice of Master Plan meetings which included county website postings, notice to chambers of commerce, posters, newspaper notices/display advertisements, radio announcements and word-of-mouth.
- **Visioning sessions** to investigate preferred land-use options, design concepts and future land use designations.
- **Meetings with Rangely and Meeker** to receive input directly from Trustees, planning commissioners and interested residents.
- **Plan adoption public hearings** before the county Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners to receive county resident input about the Plan prior to adoption.

The following overview highlights each step in the Master Plan.

1. Initial scoping to identify issues and concerns

The TAG, Planning Commission and public were introduced to the project, and a public outreach effort was initiated to engage residents in the planning process through dialogue and solicitation of input. Identification and investigation of county issues permitted understanding of attitudes of residents toward county government.

30+ interviews with stakeholders were completed with county employees, elected officials, landowners, businesses, interest groups, School District, special districts and federal/state agencies. The process revealed a list of issues. Interviews were augmented by the 2008-2009 RRC Associates County Community Survey. A 19% response rate consisting of 506 responses to 2,689 mailed surveys yielded statistically valid results. A list of stakeholder issues and the Survey results are included in the Appendices.

2. Existing Conditions

Existing conditions establish a baseline for determining future directions. The 1999 Master Plan and other documents offered insight about current land uses, infrastructure, socio-economics, the environment and county policies. The analysis included review of financial data, demographics, federal land information, socioeconomic reports and other documents. Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and analysis detailed existing land use conditions. Existing conditions data include area history, geography, land tenure, demographics, population trends/growth, economics, housing, transportation, environmental conditions and facilities/services.

3. County Visioning and Preferences

Two county-visioning sessions conducted in Rangely and Meeker provided important feedback on land use preferences and design guidelines. The first exercise was a visual preference survey to rank preferences on topics including residential and commercial design, streetscapes, exterior lighting and open space/parks obtained from a series of photographic images. A second exercise was a mapping exercise where participants created maps to illustrate their opinions about future land use. These maps were a starting point for creation of the Future Land Use Map.

4. GIS Maps

A series of GIS maps depict existing land use, existing zoning, transportation, minerals, soils, soil erosion, development constraints, fuel loading, physiography, precipitation, slope, biodiversity, and wildlife. The county will use these maps as part of their decision-making process. Existing zoning is used to identify which uses are allowed and where. Environmental Hazards shows areas with development limitations caused by steep slopes, floodplains, unstable soils and other development constraints factors. Wildlife Maps show areas of game concentrations and sensitive species. This information offers an initial filter about potential limitations that should be better defined through site-specific analysis that will be completed during the land use review process.

5. Guiding Principles, Goals & Policies

Information in the previous steps was a foundation for the Guiding Principles, Goals, Policies and Implementation Actions. Each guiding principle frames a particular land use issue. An associated set of goals identify objectives that Rio Blanco County wants to achieve and these are specific, measurable, realistic and may be time-targeted. The goals are further supported by policies that direct decisions necessary to achieve the goal. Lastly, implementation actions include the actions that Rio Blanco County will use to make the Master Plan Vision Statement a reality. Implementation actions include tasks to be completed by county government and some that are best accomplished by citizens' groups or the development community. This part of the Plan is where the Vision becomes reality. The information is important for land use applicants, county staff, decision-makers and the public. Land use applicants should address how their applications comply with these points. This part of the Plan is important to accomplish the long-term Vision articulated by the citizens of Rio Blanco County. The Future Land Use Map is a key part of this process because it shows where and what type of development should occur. The map identifies land-use types (commercial, residential, open space, etc.), densities, road/trail corridors in the county and in growth areas around Rangely and Meeker.

Use of the Master Plan

The Rio Blanco County Master Plan incorporates a variety of existing county data and public input. The Plan recognizes the qualities, values, vision and objectives that describe Rio Blanco County's current preferred future. The Plan in its total sets a path that supports future growth in a deliberate, planned and affirmative approach that accommodates new housing, businesses, industry, agriculture, services, jobs, open spaces, transportation and environmental protection. The Plan also provides tools to Rio Blanco County citizens, staff and decision-makers with the intent of supporting sustainable growth systems and County Core Values. It is anticipated that this Plan will be widely used by the county staff and decision-makers, but also by citizens. Regular use of this Plan will keep citizens engaged and knowledgeable of guiding principles, goals and policies. Understanding of the Master Plan will help county residents support their decision-makers as they evaluate future growth and strive to make the best choices for Rio Blanco County.

It must be recognized that outside forces beyond the control of Rio Blanco County can have a major influence on the type, rate and extent of development activity. Oil shale expansion driven by federal energy policy or issues of national security is a major question in Rio Blanco County's future. A national decision to pursue major oil shale growth on a scale rivaling that of the early 1980s will place awesome political and financial pressures on Rio Blanco County and federal agencies (BLM) for mineral development. Any scenario that could increase county population by 20,000 to 50,000 to accommodate major development activity will challenge every aspect of this Master Plan. An important mission of the Commissioners and staff will be to preserve the rural and natural qualities much loved by county residents in the face of the gargantuan changes the county would be confronted with major mineral/energy extraction activities. Many of the assumptions about future growth in the county including population, housing, infrastructure, transportation, schools, healthcare, social services, law enforcement, emergency services and others must be reassessed based upon the best available information available at that time. A detailed analysis of the impacts associated with this type of major development is outside the scope of this planning process. At the same time, it is recognized that if such a scenario occurs, the Rio Blanco County decision-makers must carefully consider the Core Values expressed by the county residents as part of this Master Plan as a basis for future decision-making.

Flexibility in the Plan supports creative solutions to the complex and integrated issues of growth. At the same time, the Plan incorporates enough specificity to support focused decision making within the overall framework of the document. This is an important point. Master plans that are too vague and too flexible do not offer adequate guidance for decision-making, resulting in widely varying and sometimes conflicting decisions. Conversely, plans that are too rigid do not support creative solutions to complex real world problems. This Plan strikes a balance between these two boundaries. The document must be used as a whole and in the context within which it was created. It is a mistake to take individual paragraphs, goals or policies out of their context in the document to support a certain end without considering both the Plan as a whole and the County Vision. The Planning Commission is charged with determining whether a given land use application substantially complies with this Plan. A finding of "*substantial compliance*" by the Planning Commission is a prerequisite of a subdivision, zoning or other land-use approval. The Rio Blanco County Master Plan is intended as an advisory document except to the extent that the provisions herein are incorporated into the Rio Blanco County Land Use Regulations (LUR) by resolution.

Rio Blanco County Core Values

Rio Blanco County Core Values

- Rural and remote character
- Quality of life
- Excellent educational facilities and personnel
- Outstanding air quality
- High-quality water
- Healthy economy and job opportunities for current and future generations
- Private Property Rights
- Protection and support of agriculture
- Access to outdoor recreation (hunting, fishing, hiking, etc.)
- Support of public infrastructure, services & healthcare
- Desire for transparent and cooperative government
- Importance of family and friends
- Safe, friendly living environment
- Economic/job opportunities
- Extraction of mineral/energy resources accomplished responsibly
- Western heritage and history



Rio Blanco County Vision Statement

Rio Blanco County in 2030:

Rio Blanco County remains rural and agricultural with two municipal development hubs: Meeker & Rangely and mineral/energy development is centered in the Piceance Basin. Private lands outside the municipal centers are rural and agricultural except for limited rural development and Piceance Basin mineral/energy activity. Responsible development of energy/mineral resources has protected excellent air and water quality. Best practices and industry collaboration minimize environmental impacts and afford conscientious extraction of resources. Flexible county and BLM land-use/permitting policies with industry cooperation address workforce demands for temporary housing and support facilities in the Piceance. On-site services and facilities reduce trips to Rangely, Meeker and elsewhere for basic medical needs, groceries, and other services. Industry provided mass transportation reduces vehicle trips by workers. County Impact Fees with industry contributions offset road and capital improvement costs.

Land-use policies protect agriculture and water resources by directing conflicting uses away from productive lands. Residential, commercial and compatible industrial activities are steered to growth areas around Meeker and Rangely where urban services/utilities are available thereby avoiding the high costs of sprawl. Industrial uses incompatible with the towns are allowed at designated locations to minimize conflicts.

There is good interaction by citizens, businesses and municipalities with the county to ensure public involvement in decisions. Public outreach through citizen surveys, committees and public meetings deliver valuable feedback on governance and services.

Regular analysis of county infrastructure and facilities for condition and need are incorporated in the Geographic Information System (GIS) database for purposes of inventory, monitoring condition, and maintenance cost to ensure quality infrastructure/facilities.

The county advocates a philosophy of working for the people with quality customer service. All county departments strive to educate the public about their function and procedures. Policies and procedures are designed to ensure fair treatment and equal access for all citizens.

Rio Blanco County, Meeker and Rangely promote their rural western heritage, healthy/safe/friendly living environment and outdoor recreation. Long-term county economic health is supported through task-forces involving citizens, municipal leaders, industry, and businesses to ensure economic diversity, education, health care and housing. County assets like agriculture, hunting, fishing, tourism and recreation add to economic diversity and are part of long-term planning to ease the transition from an energy/mineral economy as natural resources are depleted.

Issues - Opportunities

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>
<i>Preservation of rural character and quality of life</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The County Community Survey, Master Plan visioning/mapping exercise and public input supports directing most new development to Meeker, Rangely and urban growth areas. • Public input supports industrial land uses (inappropriate in/near towns) at defined rural nodes where it is compatible, is accessible and can be screened/buffered. • Land-use policies should keep rural open spaces intact and minimize adverse agricultural impacts. • Land Use policies should retain and support Rio Blanco County’s rural agricultural character. • The county should use the land use process to protect quality of life for residents. • Action should be taken to maintain and improve quality of life (QOL) by creating QOL indices and identifying trends in air/water quality, crime rate, traffic, education, service levels and other factors. • Land-use applications should be reviewed, in part, for impacts to quality of life factors upon which mitigation may be required.
<i>Water & air quality protection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand County Environmental Health Officer responsibilities on water and air quality including baseline standards. • Continue cooperative water and air quality monitoring with energy companies, state/federal agencies and other organizations to maintain high standards.
<i>Balancing resource extraction with rural qualities, agriculture and outdoor lifestyle</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource extraction is important to the current and future county economy and industry cooperation/coordination is vital. • New economic opportunities may emerge with the inevitable decline of finite natural resources. • The county should work with industry, business and the State to create an economic transition plan including job retraining and business diversification aimed at long-term stability. • Rio Blanco County should maintain financial reserves for periods of economic slowdown. • Attention should be directed to the mainstays of agriculture, outdoor recreation, tourism and the pristine environment.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>
<i>Concentrate growth in/near Rangely or Meeker & compatible development in unincorporated Rio Blanco County</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate Rangely and Meeker Comprehensive Plans in Rio Blanco County Master Plan and ensure logical and cost-effective development in urban growth areas. • Consider joint county/town planning commission for development review in municipal growth areas. • Zone land near or adjacent to towns for future growth with coordinated infrastructure and service extensions. • Use a tiered impact fee structure to incentivize development near Rangely and Meeker where service costs are lower and impact fees to offset those costs could be less. • Coordinate county and town services to cost effectively serve growth. • Quantify growth rates/costs to anticipate demands to ensure available resources, services and infrastructure. • Residential development in rural Rio Blanco County should be low density to minimize services costs. • Energy/mineral development in the Piceance Basin should occur with careful and coordinated planning with industry. • Consider remote energy/mineral development service facilities to support an on-site workforce to minimize vehicle trips to/from population centers.
<i>Compliance with Master Plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise county zoning and subdivision regulations to implement the Master Plan • Substantial compliance with the Plan should be demonstrated in application materials. • Staff should deliver written comments/recommendations to the Planning Commission and County Commissioners on application compliance with the Plan. • The Planning Commission should ensure substantial compliance with the Master Plan and make findings(s) on compliance or non-compliance, and non-compliant applications may be denied.
<i>Reservations about government</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute active public outreach. • Support citizen governmental participation. • Encourage citizen involvement with budget, policy, regulations, infrastructure (maintenance & planning) and provision of services.
<i>Healthcare access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with healthcare providers on needs, services and facilities. • Assist business community and industry with procuring needed services/facilities.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>
<i>Reduction in county level of services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rio Blanco County should continue to use and update impact fee program to offset development driven impacts. • Quantify service levels (e.g. road maintenance costs/mile, call response times, road miles per officer, staffing/population, etc.) to measure level of service. • Track service levels to give decision-makers indices to use in the decision-making process.
<i>Change perception that county is on wrong track</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commissioners and county officials should work to identify and address issues that prompted this citizen response. • A future survey could be used to explore this issue and identify possible solutions. • Rio Blanco County should expand outreach programs that engage citizens in governmental decision-making.
<i>Increased cost of living and loss of housing affordability/diversity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many cost of living forces are driven by factors outside of the region, but the county should address those under local control to minimize adverse impacts. • Offset costs of living increases by working to ensure availability of good paying jobs and economic diversity. • Reference the 2010 County Housing Study for information about housing strategies and availability. • Balance housing with short-term workforce demands and long-term county needs without over building. • Investigate, with major employers, methods on temporary housing strategies for short-term workforce peaks that can be scaled back with workforce reductions. • The county should investigate a variety of affordable housing options.
<i>Steep peaks and valleys in the economy associated with energy development create a difficult environment for housing, jobs and economic stability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate a long-term economic development plan on economic diversification and methods to offset industry peaks and valleys. • A joint effort should be undertaken with industry, chambers of commerce, banks and agriculture to develop a realistic and implementable economic sustainability plan. • The Colorado Department of Local Affairs and other state agencies should be tapped for information and funding for long-term economic development efforts.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>
<i>Ranchers want to stay in business but do not want to be locked-in to agriculture permanently</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an opportunity for greater dialogue about the needs and challenges of the agricultural community. • Generations of family agriculture has built a strong attachment to the land and at the same time, they struggle with making a living. • The county should investigate creative techniques to allow some development on agricultural properties (for example family, “Heritage”, subdivisions and/or small cluster development) to supplement ranching operations. • There is a challenge with allowing development on rural properties that create remote location service demands that are expensive and difficult to supply.
<i>County Impact Fees</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of fees that are based on the premise that new development pays its own way and does not unduly burden existing taxpayers. • Offer public information to increase understanding and the need for the impact fee program. • Seek public input on ways to make the fees more acceptable and engage the public to help refine the program to eliminate or reduce any inequities. • Develop a tiered residential impact fee structure with reduced impact fees near Meeker and Rangely where services, utilities and other infrastructure are available.

Guiding Principles, Goals & Policies

In the following section, the major elements of the Master Plan are addressed with a Guiding Principle that will frame county decisions and the Goals and Policies that will provide a context for those decisions. The Guiding Principles are based on the core values of the county residents as expressed through public input efforts including the County Community Survey, stakeholder interviews, public meetings, visioning process and TAG contributions. The following Guiding Principles, Goals and Policies are intended to provide direction to the public, applicants, Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners about the topics set forth herein. These guidelines do not have the force of regulation unless and until they are incorporated into the Rio Blanco County LUR.

Land Use

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Support development and expansion of land-use activities consistent with concepts, locations and design principles expressed by county residents incorporated in this Master Plan. Growth should occur through build-out of existing developments, new growth in designated areas and expansion of Rangely and Meeker. New growth will maintain distinct communities with defined urban boundaries and avoid sprawl. Diverse land-uses will support housing variety, availability, healthy economies, jobs and services. The choice to grow is based on:

- ★ *Deliberate decision-making guided by this Master Plan*
- ★ *Protection of rural county character*
- ★ *Quality of life*
- ★ *Long-term interests of county residents*
- ★ *County Vision Statement*
- ★ *Overall county economic health.*

Rio Blanco County's Core Values, unique character, and valued assets are considered part of these land use policies that are intended to guide future development. Development proposals should reflect the desired outcomes articulated through the county Vision in connection with Goals and Policies. These Master Plan tenets address compatible uses, service costs, transportation, hazards, wildlife, views and economic sustainability. The Planning Commission and County Commissioners will endeavor to accommodate land uses that achieve these objectives, balance private property rights of landowners and avoid placing financial burdens on county residents.



Goal - LU-1: Protect Irrigated Agricultural Lands

Policy LU-1A: Incentivize preservation and protection of agricultural lands.

Policy LU-1B: Protect ranchers and farmers from nuisance suits and other interferences by surrounding development by strengthening “right-to-farm” regulations as authorized by state law.

Policy LU-1C: Seek alternatives to subdivision on lands important to agriculture.

Policy LU-1D: The land use process should protect water rights, irrigation systems and maintenance access.

Policy LU-1E: Industrial uses and residential subdivisions should be limited on agricultural lands.

Goal - LU-2: Establish clear and predictable development standards and procedures for land-use review.

Policy LU-2A: Update LUR to ensure development complies with the revised Master Plan.

Policy LU-2B: Apply the LUR in a consistent and equitable manner.

Policy LU-2C: Review LUR to ensure that they are easy to understand and administer.

Policy LU-2D: Work to reduce paperwork, fees and processing timeframe for land use submittals.

Policy LU-2E: Ensure the land use review process encourages and incorporates public participation.

Policy LU-2F: Consider protection of private property rights when making regulatory changes recommended in this Plan.

Policy LU-2G: Investigate opportunities to allow “heritage subdivisions” that authorize a small number of lots for family members with a limitation on resale for five or more years to prevent misuse of regulations.

Policy LU-2H: In land use decisions, the County will consider property owners rights in addition to the other values identified in the Plan so that costs of development are not placed on other taxpayers.

Policy LU-2I: Consider modifications to the LUR that reduce front loaded development costs through phasing, partial letters of credit, phased impact fees and other techniques to assist smaller developers with fewer lots to finance development.

Policy LU-2J: Update infrastructure design requirements to meet current engineering standards and ensure high quality construction.

Policy LU-2K: Development requirements should be flexible enough to meet short-term needs of the energy/mineral industry with changes in workforce, but also protect environmental quality and ensure that county service

demands are adequately mitigated.

Goal - LU-3: Development must protect the existing county character by ensuring compatibility with adjacent uses.

Policy LU-3A: In rural areas, development should achieve compatibility with neighboring uses through project design with techniques like clustering, open-space buffers, low densities and conservation easements.

Policy LU-3B: Development not contiguous or in close proximity to existing services, utilities and other infrastructure should complete a fiscal impact analysis and mitigate public service impacts or negative fiscal costs.

Policy LU-3C: The county supports a mix of housing types near towns, good project design, coordinated infrastructure and efficient development patterns.

Policy LU-3D: Incorporate incentives in LUR to encourage growth that offers public benefits such as housing priced within Area Median Incomes (AMI), cost effective infrastructure extensions, reduced service demands, and/or creation of economic opportunity.

Goal - LU-4: Work with the Towns of Rangely and Meeker to establish appropriate growth areas where higher density development can occur and be served with infrastructure.

Policy LU-4A: Development requiring urban services and/or infrastructure due to density and/or land-use characteristics will be directed to areas adjacent to the towns where these urban amenities can be cost effectively furnished.

Policy LU-4B: Municipal annexation is strongly encouraged for projects with higher intensity land uses that require urban services.

Policy LU-4C: Incentives such as reduced or waived impact fees or increased density will be evaluated as mechanisms to support growth in municipal growth areas.

Policy LU-4D: The Comprehensive Plans for Meeker and Rangely are incorporated in this Master Plan to ensure coordinated compatible development in their future development areas.

Policy LU-4E: Development adjacent to or within annexation distance to Rangely or Meeker must use municipal infrastructure standards so future connections are compatible.

Goal - LU-5: Ensure that new development substantially conforms to the Rio Blanco County Master Plan Guiding Principles, Goals and Policies.

Policy LU-5A: Update the Master Plan every five years to keep it current.

Policy LU-5B: Amend the LUR to incorporate the recommendations of the Master Plan.

Policy LU-5C: Require applicants to demonstrate substantial conformance to the Plan.

Policy LU-5D: County staff should prepare written reports to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners assessing conformance to the Plan.

Policy LU-5E: Non-compliant land-use applications should be modified to substantially conform to the Master Plan or they may be rejected.

Goal - LU-6: Rio Blanco County should strive to achieve a balance of land-use categories (residential, commercial, industrial, open space/parks) to support an appropriate variety of land-use types.

Policy LU-6A: The county will work with Rangely and Meeker to achieve a good balance of land-uses including those that contribute to economic sustainability, job creation, housing, affordable housing, retail/services, recreation and wildlife/habitat.

Policy LU-6B: Residential and commercial development should be located in or near towns where services can be cost-effectively provided and should incorporate a mix of land-uses and should integrate neighborhood retail, employment, services, parks/open space/trails, and non-motorized access.

Policy LU-6C: Residential development with twenty (20) units or more should include a mix of housing types.

Policy LU-6D: The county will support the use of planned unit developments (PUDs), enhanced zoning techniques, density bonuses and other innovative techniques as methods to foster mixed-use development.

Policy LU-6E: The Future Land Use Map and the policies in the Master Plan are essential tools to guide decisions.

Policy LU-6F: The Rio Blanco County Future Land Use Map is intended to allow flexibility in the design of land-use proposals, but the Map and Master Plan Policies shall be used together to evaluate the merits of a proposal.

Policy LU-6G: Smaller separate applications shall be evaluated to ensure that they individually and collectively support the concepts on the Future Land Use Map and the recommendations in the Master Plan.

Policy LU-6H: The Future Land Use Map identifies land use classifications and a mix of uses that should be maintained to ensure a sustainable balance of land use types.

Policy LU-6I: It is an applicant's responsibility to demonstrate how a proposal achieves a balance of land uses.

Goal - LU-7: The county should make certain that large-scale oil shale and/or mineral development expands operations and ultimately phases down in a manner that protects the quality of life and environmental conditions of Rio Blanco County.

Policy LU-7A: County zoning and the permitting process in the LUR is the primary tool for managing in regulating the mineral/energy industry and shall be used to ensure that development occurs in a manner that minimizes fiscal, socio-cultural, environmental and similar impacts to the county.

Policy LU-7B: Industry is expected to work closely with the county, federal and state agencies to support orderly responsible development.

Policy LU-7C: LUR provisions for major development projects are to be used to ensure that there is adequate housing, facilities, transportation systems, infrastructure, and reclamation.

Goal - LU-8: Rio Blanco County subscribes to the 10 principles of Smart Growth to provide a framework within which informed decisions are made about improved ways to grow, create jobs, support economic development, provide housing, encourage transit options and achieve a variety of other long-term benefits.

Policy LU-8A: The following principles of Smart Growth¹ should be employed as a guide for the public, land use applicants and local decision-makers to evaluate new development with a goal of achieving most or all of the principles in a development proposal.

1. Mixed land uses.
2. Integrate compact building design.
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
4. Investigate walkable development where appropriate.
5. Promote distinctive, attractive municipalities with a strong sense of place.
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.
7. Support municipal centers and reduce sprawl by directing development toward Meeker and Rangely.
8. Consider transportation options appropriate for the region.
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective.
10. Encourage county, municipal and public collaboration in development decisions.

¹ *Getting To Smart Growth II*: ISBN: 0-87326-139-9, International City/County Management Association. (Details about each of these principles can be found at <http://smartgrowth.org> or at the Colorado Department of Local Affairs website at <http://www.dola.state.co.us/dlg/osg/index.htm>, Office of Smart Growth, 1313 Sherman St., Rm. 521, Denver, CO 80203, TEL 303.866.4552.)

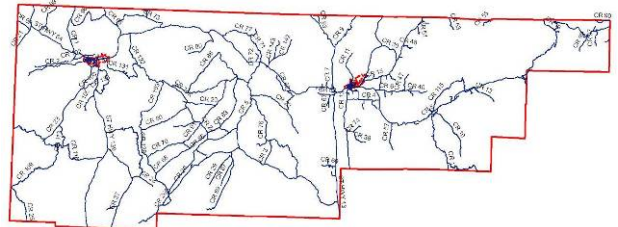
Implementation Measures

1. Initiate comprehensive revision to the Rio Blanco County LUR, application submittal criteria and other requirements so they conform to the Master Plan.
2. Streamline the land use review process to minimize the time required for processing applications.
3. Enter into intergovernmental agreements with Meeker and Rangely supporting annexation and encouraging appropriate development adjacent to the municipalities where services can be cost-effectively provided and developers install and connect compatible infrastructure.
4. Implement procedures to ensure that staff reports to the Planning Commission and County Commissioners include an analysis of development compliance with the Master Plan.
5. Investigate and implement land use tools that provide incentives for the protection and preservation of agricultural and open lands.
6. Make the Future Land Use Map, Goals and Policies and other relevant sections of the Master Plan easily available through the county's website, public displays, local publications and at county/municipal buildings.
7. Develop a Master Plan conformance threshold including a standardized compliance checklist for land use applications and include this information in staff reports to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.
8. Hold public outreach meetings with landowners, energy companies and residents to review the Future Land Use Map and other components of the Master Plan.
9. Explore options for a land use review process that integrates performance standards designed to mitigate identified constraints.

Transportation

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Rio Blanco County will provide well-designed, safe and efficient transportation networks. Maintenance and improvement of existing transportation infrastructure should be a priority to improve its long-term viability. County officials should regularly communicate with and partner with industry to ensure that travel is efficient and safe. Additionally, improvements to existing infrastructure or expansion to accommodate anticipated demands should be completed through partnerships with industry and state/federal agencies where public funds can be leveraged with private contributions and grant opportunities. Industry should continue to pay for its infrastructure impact costs through Impact Fees. Transportation infrastructure should include provision of bus/van transit and carpool lots in locations that are logically used by energy workers from Rangely, Meeker and other nearby communities.



Goal -T-1: Maintain safe and adequate roadway network.

Policy T-1A: Analyze and update impact fee requirements for development in the county.

Policy T-1B: New development shall not require new roadways that are built or funded by the county.

Policy T-1C: New development shall use existing roadways for primary access and will be required to improve roadways commensurate with development induced traffic impact.

Policy T-1D: The county will improve and maintain the roadway network based upon needs and availability of funding.

Policy T-2E: Annual budgeting for improvements to the roadway network should reflect the priorities outlined in capital improvement plans.

Policy T-2F: The county will maintain an asset inventory of the road and bridge network and evaluate that network against the county's needs.

Policy T-2G: Rio Blanco County will work with CDOT and regional partners to ensure proper maintenance, improvements and budgeting for state and regional roadway networks.

Goal - T-2: Support development and improvement of county airports.

Policy T-2A: Buffer development near airports to avoid conflicting uses and protect integrity of airport operations.

Policy T-2B: Maintain regular communication with Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Aeronautical and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regarding possible funding for improvements.

Policy T-2C: Regularly review and update capital improvements planning documents/impact fees and comply with federal and state requirements to ensure receipt of annual grant funding is maintained.

Policy T-2D: Maintain regular communication with fixed based operators and flight schools to ensure provision of best possible services at these facilities as well as accommodate expansion and improvement.

Goal - T-3: Provide adequate access for pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle traffic where suitable.

Policy T-3A: New development should be encouraged to provide access for pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle traffic where it has historically existed or where it may improve access to adjacent public lands.

Policy T-3 B: The county will actively participate in the development/amendment process for travel management plans developed by public land agencies.

Policy T-3 C: The county will support the development and improvement of regional trail networks.

Policy T-3 D: New development should conform and integrate with trails plans around the municipalities and with plans for the unincorporated areas of the county.

Implementation Measures

1. Continue to update and revise the Capital Improvement Plan to maintain its currency and verify the prioritization of capital projects.
2. Continue seeking financial partnerships with Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) and other state and federal funding sources to leverage impact fee and budgeted matching funds for road improvements identified in the Capital Improvements Plan, especially County Road 5 improvements.
3. Investigate the development of alternative routes into the Piceance Basin including Fourteen Mile Creek and County Road 122.
4. Maintain capital improvements planning efforts at the airports through cooperation with CDOT Aeronautical and the FAA.
5. As a condition of large energy development projects requiring substantial work force, energy companies should provide transportation in and out of the Piceance Basin from established carpool pick-up/drop-off points.
6. Partner with public agencies, recreation districts and stakeholder groups to develop a regional trail network and access plan.

Housing

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Rio Blanco County supports a diversified housing stock that meets the needs of its residents and includes a range of pricing and a diversified housing mix. The county recognizes there are conditions that contribute to escalating home prices. These factors include an influx of higher income households, telecommuters, a dynamic energy industry and expanding second home market. The growing affordability gap for residents can be slowed with careful planning and siting of homes close to existing infrastructure. Development incentives should be considered as an inducement for including affordable housing units. Other alternatives should be evaluated through a cooperative effort between the county, the municipalities and the development community. Flexibility to allow a variety of housing and rental opportunities, including temporary living facilities, may work to accommodate the fluctuations in the energy industry.



Goal - H-1: Provide opportunities for the housing market to meet the needs of the county residents.

Policy H-1A: Rio Blanco County will work with the Housing Authority, the municipalities and private entities to explore possibility of partnerships to meet the demands for affordable housing.

Policy H-1B: The county will evaluate various options for a long-term supply of affordable housing units. Options can include density bonuses, deed restricted units, equity caps and other methods.

Policy H-1C: Utilize Housing Needs Assessment to quantify the need for housing and make changes to the LUR that will result in the desired mix of housing types.

Policy H-1D: New development should provide a variety of housing densities, types and sizes to ensure a diversity of unit availability and serve a broad spectrum of county residents.

Policy H-1E: A housing plan for on-site employee housing shall remain

a requirement of the permitting process for energy development.

Policy H-1F: Rio Blanco County will work with Rangely and Meeker toward a goal of facilitating an adequate supply of affordable housing for jobs deemed essential to county services, including, but not limited to, public safety, teaching, public health and other government.

Policy H-1G: Facilitate development of affordable rental units by utilizing strategies such as reduced application fees and provision of land in exchange for some portion of fixed rents.

Goal - H-2: Ensure that industry can accommodate its workforce fluctuations with creative and flexible housing options that can expand and contract based upon demand.

Policy H-2A: Work with the public land agencies, private landowners and industry to accommodate workforce-housing needs in the Piceance Basin or other locations.

Policy H-2B: Enforce regulations prohibiting unapproved wildcat camps and other temporary housing sites that do not provide basic sanitation facilities and degrade public lands.

Implementation Measures

1. Coordinate with municipalities, industry, homebuilders and Housing Authority to explore solutions for temporary housing needs.
2. Investigate strategies for affordability standards and guidelines to include incentives to developers for including affordable housing.
3. Use the 2010 Housing Needs Assessment for direction on housing needs and strategies for accommodating affordable housing in Rio Blanco County.
4. Coordinate with municipalities to encourage housing opportunities that realize cost savings from proximity to urban services, central utilities, schools, transportation and jobs.
5. Develop strategies for providing affordable housing for essential personnel (e.g. health and safety, education) where jobs are located.
6. Use the Rio Blanco County Housing Study in the Master Plan Appendix for additional information and direction.

Public Services & Facilities

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Rio Blanco County will maintain a consistent level of service to its residents and will require new development to provide and maintain quality built infrastructure. Infrastructure for new growth may include on-site and off-site improvements including, but not limited to, access, water and wastewater, drainage and hazard mitigation. Many services and facilities are provided by various other taxing districts in the county. All governmental service providers should work cooperatively to consistently deliver high quality services at the lowest cost to Rio Blanco County citizens. Communication among these different agencies is vital to achieving efficient and cost effective service delivery. On-going facility maintenance will ensure longevity and supports good levels of service in the county. Industry should continue paying for its infrastructure costs through



impact fees. Deferred maintenance on infrastructure and facilities is not considered a desirable cost savings measure because it ultimately results in higher overall costs to the citizens.

Goal - PS & F-1: Rio Blanco County will strive to maintain and improve the delivery of service and quality of facilities.

Policy PS & F-1A: The county will strive to be consistent with delivery of quality services within the limitations of the budget.

Policy PS & F-1B: The county will work to avoid duplication of services and strive to consolidate services into central locations where efficiencies and cost savings can be achieved.

Policy PS & F-1C: The county will facilitate the improvement of communication infrastructure, including emergency communications.

Policy PS & F-1D: The county will update and maintain the Capital Improvements Plan to ensure that timing of improvements, costs, needs assessments and new/improved facilities remains current.

Policy PS & F-1E: The county will update and maintain the Impact Fee Study to ensure it is fair, equitably applied, current with policies and has a clear relationship to the impacts.

Policy PS & F-1F: New development must quantitatively demonstrate that county service demands generated by the project will not diminish existing service levels.

Policy PS & F-1G: Acceptance of ownership or maintenance responsibility for any roads in new development or other similar new or existing infrastructure by the county is at the sole discretion of the county Commissioners.

Policy PS & F-1H: Rio Blanco County will not accept on to its road system any roads that are not constructed to county standards.

Policy PS & F-1I: The county will cooperate with other units of government to help facilitate the best delivery of services and quality facilities for the residents of Rio Blanco County.

Implementation Measures

1. Initiate a comprehensive review of county departments to identify duplicated services that can be consolidated cost effectively and improve intra-department communication to improve overall quality of service delivery.
2. Utilize 2007 Capital Facilities Plan as a guide for annual/multi-annual project prioritization and budgetary planning.

3. The county will strive to maintain and improve its ability to offer on-line services for information, bill-pay, forms and applications and communication.
4. The county will, within budgetary constraints, employ enough staff to maintain an effective, efficient and timely delivery of services to county residents.
5. The county will strive, within budgetary limitations, to maintain and enhance its law enforcement services and including coverage to meet needs of county residents and businesses.
6. The county will strive, within budgetary limitations, to provide competitive salaries so the county can recruit and retain excellent county employees.
7. The county will work with municipalities and special districts to coordinate common goals and policies directed at improving quality service delivery and consolidated facilities.

Open Lands/Public Lands

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Open lands include both private property and public lands. They are important assets for different reasons, but they help define the character for the residents of Rio Blanco County. Open lands include rural properties with a history of agricultural use and take in irrigated pasturelands. The county will cooperate with landowners to maintain the integrity of these lands. The county will work to support continued ranching operations and will consider flexibility of uses that minimize impacts where they are appropriate. Public lands exist as the backdrop to many of the private open lands and provide access for recreation and economic opportunity. These areas have an important value that is an important part of the natural beauty of the county. Continued access to public lands helps maintain the culture and economy of Rio Blanco County. Open land gives future generations the opportunity to enjoy an important asset of their environment.



Goal - OP/PL-1: Access to public land shall be protected.

Policy OP/PL-1A: The county will work with public land agencies such as the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management on travel management plans and other resource management plans to protect access to public lands.

Policy OP/PL-1C: The county will require development to maintain access to public lands or recreation sites and may consider acceptable alternative access.

Policy OP/PL-1B: The county will work with landowners and developers to maintain and improve access to public lands that have been used historically.

Goal - OP/PL-2: Promote the preservation of open lands.

Policy OP/PL-2A: Investigate incentives including conservation easements, density increases, clustering and other techniques for preservation of meadows, river corridors and other visually significant areas in the county and work with developers to accomplish the same.

Policy OP/PL-2B: Rio Blanco County will develop incentives for the protection of large, contiguous private open lands.

Policy OP/PL-2C: Inventory the most important and visible open lands and determine a ranking in importance for possible preservation.

Implementation Measures

1. Work with municipalities, public land agencies and special districts to coordinate efforts in preserving access to public lands including public access to the White River.
2. Inventory and prioritize significant open/public lands.
3. Modify the land use review process to include a requirement for a review of potentially important access points to public lands and recreation areas.
4. The county may consider creating a funding mechanism to be used to secure access to critical public lands and/or secure easements or rights of way for trails.
5. Modify the Land Use Regulation to include incentives for preservation of important open lands that could include density bonuses, clustering, use of conservation easements, and application process modification.

Historic & Cultural Resources

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The historic and cultural amenities in the county are the legacy of generations of people making a living off the land. The range of resources spans centuries of settlement from the Native Americans to military occupation and European exploration and settlement. The opportunity to showcase these features has been enhanced through the development of two scenic byways. The protection of these areas is a priority because they tell the story of the rich history of Rio Blanco County and offer opportunity for economic development.



Goal - H & CR-1: The historic and cultural resources in Rio Blanco County will be protected and enhanced to offer recreational and educational opportunities.

Policy H & CR-1A: The county will continue to support and promote the cultural and historic resources in the county.

Policy H & CR-1B: The citizens of Rio Blanco County should have the opportunity to visit and study the historic and cultural resources.

Policy H & CR-1C: The county will, within budgetary constraints, continue to support financially the White River and Rangely Museums.

Policy H & CR-1D: The county will maintain the historic structures it owns commensurate with available resources.

Policy H & CR-1E: The county recognizes the importance of its cultural and historic resources to economic development efforts. Diversification of the economy is an important value to the residents of Rio Blanco County and therefore should be explored and supported with reference to cultural and historic amenities.

Policy H & CR-1F: Require new development to research any known archaeological sites and protect those areas before approvals are granted.

Policy H & CR-1G: Work with landowners to protect known historic and cultural sites from development.

Implementation Measures

1. Modify Land Use Regulation to ask new development to research any known archaeological sites and discuss mitigation options before approvals are granted.
2. Make available information about tax incentives and other benefits to private landowners for protecting archeological sites from damage.
3. Coordinate with chambers of commerce, museums, scenic byways boards and municipalities to develop goals that describe the enhancement of historic and cultural resources for economic development and educational purposes.
4. Continue to make preservation a priority, within budgetary constraints, to protect resources and maintain the museums and historic structures.
5. The county will actively promote and offer input on the development of a “walking tour” pamphlet that will provide a comprehensive compilation of the county’s most important historic and cultural resources.

Economic Sustainability

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The economy of Rio Blanco County has a rich history in agricultural production, in mineral/energy activities, tourism, hunting and fishing. On irregular recurring intervals, industrial resource extraction for energy and minerals has dominated this historic economic base in terms of revenues and job opportunities. While there is support in the county for industry there remains a concern about availability of employment when industrial production declines. The residents of the county want to create greater economic diversification to offset the impacts of the boom/bust cycles of extractive industries. This includes both development and support of the historic county economic base as well as economic diversification that includes new career opportunities for the residents of the county.



Goal - ES-1: The county will seek a diverse economy and will support the industries currently active in the county as well as those that may be created to support the existing industries.

Policy ES-1A: The county will work to expand commercial and industrial zones, as needed, to accommodate new and expanded enterprise activities in designated locations.

Policy ES-1B: Rio Blanco County will investigate all available financing/support mechanisms such as business enterprise zones, special districts, grant funding and other techniques to diversify the economy.

Goal - ES-2: The county will actively support the creation of new industry when it can enhance economic stability and create new jobs for residents of the county.

Policy ES-2A: The county will support opportunities for residents to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to compete for new and existing industry.

Policy ES-2B: The county will work with the State Office of Economic Development to identify opportunities for new businesses.

Policy ES-2C: The county will actively work with industry representatives to develop in-county support businesses that benefit their operations to minimize the need for out of area support.

Goal - ES-3: The Commissioners will remain active in the state legislative process with particular emphasis on ensuring severance dollars, federal mineral leasing/royalty funds and other extraction related funds are returned to the county and are not used elsewhere.

Policy ES-3A: The County Commissioners will maintain regular contact with state elected officials during the legislative session to promote ideas that facilitate business enhancement and quality of life issues and avoid unfunded or costly mandates.

Policy ES-3B: County Commissioners should invite legislators and other state elected officials for an annual in-county meeting to discuss thoughts on proposed legislation and long term goals for Rio Blanco County.

Policy ES-3B: The County Commissioners will work with legislators to enhance county economic opportunities, seek the return of severance and mineral leasing dollars and will oppose unfunded mandates.

Goal - ES-4: Rio Blanco County will work to protect the goals and objectives of the scenic byways to ensure that their qualities are maintained.

Policy ES-4A: The county will support advertisement and awareness of the scenic byways with financial assistance within budgetary constraints, support for grants and other funding sources.

Policy ES-4B: The county shall require land use applicants to mitigate negative impacts to the scenic byways such as physical buffers, setbacks, viewshed protection, noise mitigation etc...

Goal - ES-5: Explore possibilities of new or expanded existing economic opportunities to decrease negative effects of unpredictable energy market.

Policy ES-5A: Actively pursue expansion of broadband and fiber-optic capacity in the county to support existing businesses and to encourage new businesses to locate in Rio Blanco County.

Policy ES-5B: Partner with Rangely and Meeker to plan and implement regional (middle mile) and local (last mile) fiber optic infrastructure projects.

Policy ES-5C: Investigate economic diversification grant funding possibilities with state and federal agencies as well as coordination with private providers for possible public/private partnerships.

Policy ES-5D: Encourage tourism in Rio Blanco County by coordinating with the Chambers of Commerce to promote the assets of the County including archaeological sites

(Canyon Pintado), hunting/fishing, the flattops, scenic byways and other qualities that are of interest to visitors.

Policy ES-5E: Work with CNCC to target business development programs aimed at assisting existing businesses to expand and new business startups.

Policy ES-5F: Work with the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) on community assessments, business retention/expansion as well as business relocation opportunities.

Policy ES-5G: Work to identify business opportunities within Rio Blanco County to meet the needs of the energy and mineral industries and particularly those activities that are obtained outside of the county.

Goal - ES-6: Rio Blanco County will work with business interests, industry representatives and interested citizens to develop a long-term economic sustainability plan that will address a transition from the energy-based economy to be implemented as available energy resources decline or during downturns in the energy economy.

Policy ES-6A: Establish an exploratory committee including members from the chambers of commerce, business community, industry and governments to develop recommendations for business enhancement and expansion.

Policy ES-6B: The county will support the promotion of business opportunities identified by an exploratory committee through active advertisement and establishment of policy recommendations.

Goal - ES-7: Rio Blanco County will cooperate with the local schools to enhance their education opportunities.

Policy ES-7A: Rio Blanco County will help to showcase the excellent education system as an incentive to families looking to relocate/establish businesses in the county.

Policy ES-7B: Rio Blanco County will work with the Colorado Northwestern Community College to enhance and expand the provision of applicable education opportunities that can help the younger generation of county residents to stay and work in the county.

Implementation Measures

1. Actively promote and support an economic development committee to develop goals that lead to enhancement of economic development activities in the county.
2. Create a committee made up of citizens, business owners and elected officials to offer input on modifications to the Land Use Regulation that will incentivize business relocation to or expansion of business in the county.
3. Coordinate with chambers of commerce, museums, scenic byways boards and municipalities to develop goals that describe the enhancement of historic and cultural resources for economic development and educational purposes.
4. Investigate modifications to the Land Use Regulation that address appropriate updated rules for low impact cottage industry and at-home businesses.
5. Seek input from the energy companies to determine what type of support industries/businesses may be needed or desired in the county.
6. The county will actively promote and offer input on the development of a “walking tour” pamphlet, information on historic and cultural sites, or other materials that will provide a comprehensive compilation of the county’s most important historic and cultural resources.

Natural Resources

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The abundant natural resources in Rio Blanco County are important assets to its residents. New development will not be approved until negative impacts to water quality, wildlife/habitat, night skies, view sheds, floodplain and riparian areas have been adequately mitigated. Natural resource extraction primarily occurs on public lands within the county, but impacts to watersheds, scenic quality and wildlife extend into the public and private lands outside the federal jurisdiction. The county should maintain cooperative efforts with the public agencies and industry to minimize negative impacts to the scenic and environmental resources in the county.



Goal - NR-1: Rio Blanco County will seek to ensure the quality of scenic and environmental resources through sound regulation, cooperation with public agencies and education efforts with the public.

Policy NR-1A: Water quality of the White River and its tributaries should be protected and development occurring within the vicinity of these waters shall ensure full protection with buffers and setbacks.

Policy NR-1B: The scenic quality in Rio Blanco County will be maintained through careful site location and mitigation efforts for new development including but not limited to avoiding ridgeline development; development in prime agricultural areas; night lighting and screening.

Policy NR-1C: The county will maintain and improve the quality of natural resources through the implementation and enforcement of its LUR.

Policy NR-1D: The county will work with federal and state agencies to protect wildlife habitat. This may include restricting development in the most sensitive habitat and mitigating impacts in areas where there are migration corridors, areas of critical winter range or other critical habitat.

Policy NR-1E: The county will ensure that rehabilitation efforts are completed in areas where infrastructure installation occurs to avoid unsightly scars, introduction of

invasive species and unstable soils.

Policy NR-1F: The county will work with landowners and public agencies to keep prime agricultural lands in irrigation.

Policy NR-1G: The county will improve regulations governing noxious weeds and will cooperate with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, US Forest Service, BLM and other agencies to eliminate invasive species to maintain environmental quality.

Policy NR-1H: The county will work with private industry, state and federal agencies to monitor air and water quality for purposes of establishing a baseline. This baseline standard should be utilized to ensure maintenance of air and water quality.

Policy NR-1I: Development should be avoided in areas of natural hazards, such as poor soil conditions, rock fall areas and floodplains.

Implementation Measures

1. Modify the LUR to include appropriate lighting standards and communicate with Building Department to ensure compliance with regulations.
2. The county will modify the LUR to require successful revegetation and weed mitigation on disturbed soils from new development.
3. Cooperative efforts will be made by Rio Blanco County and other agencies to reduce or eliminate populations of Tamarisk Russian Olive and other invasive species along river corridors and in other parts of the county.
4. Participate in the planning efforts of the Division of Wildlife, public land agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that the desires of county residents as depicted in the Master Plan are included in resulting management plans or goals identification.
5. Continue to include the public agencies such as the Division of Wildlife in the review process for land use applications.
6. Modify the LUR to include a 300-foot development buffer on the White River and/or buffer consistent with the Source Watershed Protection Plan. Similar buffers should be included on other major tributaries and streams.

Future Land Use Map - FLUM



The Rio Blanco County Master Plan includes the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) that is to be used with the Master Plan and the following descriptions of future uses. Together the information comprises the Future Land Use Plan for Rio Blanco County. The plan and map illustrate and describe land-use patterns, types of uses, densities, location and character of future development. The Future Land Use Plan is not "zoning" per se, but may be used by Rio Blanco County to modify existing zoning or to establish new zone districts. This information is to

be used by the public, county staff and decision-makers to guide the land use review and decision-making process. The Future Land Use Plan is not intended to predetermine the details of specific applications or the exact boundaries of development areas. These details are left to the creative design work of applicants within the overall context of the Rio Blanco County Master Plan. The Future Land Use Plan establishes a framework within which development proposals must be designed, evaluated by Rio Blanco County. It is the goal of the Future Land Use Plan to:

- Ensure a variety and mix of uses that complement the existing Rio Blanco County land-use patterns.
- Ensure compatibility between uses.
- Support a balanced mix of housing types that support a broad range of pricing within the market.
- Make certain there are adequate open spaces and trails.
- Offer protection of sensitive natural areas, preservation of cultural sites and conservation of resources.
- Support development of business, industry, housing, agriculture, recreation and other land uses that provide adequate county/municipal services, employment, and that are sustainable in the long term.
- Provide for development adjacent to Rangely and Meeker with logical transitions to rural areas where open lands and agricultural uses predominate.
- Provide protection of prime agricultural lands from development encroachment.
- Concentrate development in areas where there is good access, efficiently provided services and cost-effective utility extensions.
- Promote service delivery efficiency and energy conservation in future development areas.

Successful development applications must be substantially compliant with the Rio Blanco County Master Plan to move forward in the approval process. The Planning Commission after considering staff recommendations shall determine substantial compliance with the Master Plan. Applicants will be afforded flexibility to achieve compliance with the Master Plan through design layout, zoning, infrastructure design, landscaping, non-motorized access, and the other requirements in the Master Plan. It is the applicant's responsibility to quantify and demonstrate how an application achieves substantial compliance. Staff's role, among other things, shall be to

verify compliance and forward recommendations to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.

Future Land Use Map Categories.

Agricultural/Residential/Low Density.

Types of Uses

These areas include agricultural lands, watershed resource areas, and open lands as shown on the FLUM. Generally, these locations are in rural areas and are distant from county or municipal services. Use, densities and standards in this classification should preserve the existing rural/agricultural character and to protect natural resource sites. These areas are primarily low density single-family that minimize service demands. New Single-family development may occur as low-density development such as "Heritage Subdivisions" or simple lot splits that do not cumulatively result in significant development that places disproportionate demands on county services.

Density

Maximum densities in rural/agricultural should not be less than one hundred and sixty (160) acres per residential unit. Clustering of units may be allowed by averaging lot sizes and locating building sites near maintained county roads and outside of prime agricultural lands, hazard zones or environmentally sensitive areas. Project designs must consider compatibility with adjacent uses, visual impacts and serviceability by the county. These details will be paramount to the review process. It is an applicant's responsibility to demonstrate conformance to these standards before county entitlements are granted.

Design Characteristics

Single-family structures characterize this area with low densities. Heritage Subdivision designs may average lot sizes to allow unit clustering. Large open spaces and greenbelt buffers are important design components. Minimum use of exterior downcast lighting may be incorporated but must be directed to the intended purpose and prevent glare, over-lighting and lighting trespass. Roadways must meet county standards with private maintenance. Trail systems may be considered to access open spaces and public lands. Existing access to adjoining public lands shall be maintained and new access may be considered where public access does not exist. Roadway lengths in this area should be minimized by lot design or clustering the units. Lot sizes may be as small as ten (10) acres for clustered units utilizing a common well with individual septic systems as long as the overall site density does not exceed one unit per 160 acres. Residents in rural areas must recognize the "Right to Farm" policy of Rio Blanco County and recognize that the rights of farmers and ranchers to perform activities associated with agricultural operations may create conditions for single-family residential units that residents may find objectionable. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Residential Medium Density.

Types of Uses

These areas include agricultural lands, watershed resource areas, and open lands. Large lot single-family, open lands and rural settings characterize this area. Residential low-density areas are located where previous subdivision may have occurred creating lots that are typically 35 acres or less. Development densities, land uses and infrastructure standards in this classification should preserve the existing rural/agricultural character and to protect natural resource areas. It is intended that these areas will remain low density and rural to minimize service demands. Higher residential densities are inappropriate in this area and should be directed to urban areas where municipal services and utilities can cost-effectively support density.

Density

This district should support low densities of thirty-five (35) or more acres per residential unit. Clustering of units may be allowed by averaging lot sizes and locating structures near maintained county roads and outside of hazard zones or environmentally sensitive areas. Project designs must consider compatibility with adjacent uses, lot sizes, visual impacts and serviceability by the county. These details will be paramount to the review process. It is an applicant's responsibility to demonstrate conformance to these standards before county entitlements are granted.

Design Characteristics

Large lot single-family and rural agricultural uses on individual wells and septic systems characterize these areas. Roads may be gravel or have paved surfaces and may include soft-surface rural trail systems. Lower traffic volumes in most locations allow non-motorized access on roadways. Open space is on private and public lands. Large open spaces and greenbelt buffers are important. Minimum use of exterior downcast lighting may be incorporated but must be directed to the intended purpose and prevent glare, over-lighting and lighting trespass. Roadways are constructed to county standards with private maintenance. Trail systems may be considered in this area to access open spaces and public lands. In all cases, existing access to adjoining public lands shall be maintained and may be considered where public access does not exist. Roadway lengths in this area should be minimized by lot design or clustering the units. Lot sizes may be as small as five (5) acres for clustered units utilizing a common well with individual septic systems as long as the overall site density does not exceed one unit per 35 acres. Residents in rural areas must recognize the "Right to Farm" policy of Rio Blanco County and recognize that the rights of farmers and ranchers to perform activities associated with agricultural operations may create conditions for single-family residential units that residents may find objectionable. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Residential High Density.

Types of Uses

These locations are near Meeker or Rangely where central utilities may be extended, services are more readily available and connection to municipal street systems may occur. These uses and locations are intended to serve as a transition away from Rangely and Meeker, but still have logical proximity to cost-effective services, utilities, parks, road access and other necessary functions. Future annexation of these properties to the adjacent town should be considered probable; therefore, infrastructure designs should be based upon municipal standards.

Single-family and duplex residential structures characterize this area. Residential uses comprise 75% of the area and non-residential functions do not exceed 25%. Non-residential functions could include neighborhood commercial, small offices, home businesses, day care facilities and other like uses. Live/work units and/or home businesses will be included in the 75% residential standard as long as the occupant of the residential unit is a full-time employee of the business. Live/work units and home businesses may employ persons that do not reside on the premises. The location of these uses is intended to transition away from the town centers to lower densities away from Rangely and Meeker, but still maintain cost-effective services, utilities, parks, road access and other necessary functions within close proximity to the properties. These areas are shown on the FLUM near Meeker and Rangely.

Density

Residential densities in this area may be two (2) acres per dwelling unit and clustering of units may be permitted by averaging densities across a project site. Residential high-density areas are located near municipalities where there is a potential for future annexation and municipal infill/redevelopment.

Design Characteristics

Single-family and duplex units characterize this area with lower densities than the nearby municipality. Structures may serve stand-alone residential functions or may include live/work or home occupation activities. On-street parking is allowed, but side- and rear-loaded parking is encouraged. Parking accommodations must be made for non-resident employees on lot or within close proximity to the place of employment. Parks, open spaces, greenbelts and trail/sidewalk systems are important design components. These sites should be served by municipal utilities if they are available or if those utilities are not possible, development may include on-site central water & sewer or central water with individual septic systems. Design consideration with particular emphasis on water, sewer and roads, should be made to allow for future urban redevelopment and possible annexation. Street lighting and exterior building lighting is limited, downcast, directed to the intended purpose and prevents glare, over-lighting and lighting trespass. Narrower road sections reduce traffic speeds but accommodate on-street parking. Sidewalks are separated from the roadway by a street-lawn that is used for snow storage and drainage infiltration basins. Residents in rural areas must recognize the "Right to Farm" policy of Rio Blanco County and recognize that the rights of farmers and ranchers to perform activities associated with agricultural operations may create conditions for single-family residential units that residents may find objectionable. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments,

herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Gateways.

Rio Blanco County has identified six primary gateways:

1. Northwest Rangely, State Highway 64
2. South Rangely, State Highway 139
3. West Meeker, State Highway 64
4. East Meeker, County Road 8
5. Northeast Meeker, State Highway 13
6. Southeast Meeker, State Highway 13

Each gateway serves as a welcome entry and offers visitors a first impression of Rio Blanco County and the towns of Rangely and Meeker. First impressions are those that remain and shape perceptions. The gateways present an opportunity to give visitors information about the area attractions, services, businesses.

Location

These locations are shown at various locations on the FLUM.

Design Characteristics

Each gateway should include the following attributes: attractive appearance, offer information, appealing natural landscape and reflect community pride. The gateways should include an attractive identifying monument sign, effective well-designed lighting, natural xeric landscaping, and informational signage that guide visitors to key points of interest. The gateways are important to community economic development and well-being and help to provide a sense of place to Rio Blanco County and its municipalities. The gateways should welcome and direct visitors to the unincorporated areas of the county as well as the municipalities with signage and landscaping.

Commercial.

Types of Uses

General Commercial are clustered locations where retail, wholesale, services, fuel sales, convenience commercial, visitor information, and commercial uses intended to serve Rio Blanco County as a whole. General Commercial may include accessory residential uses in a mixed-use configuration. Mixed-use designs must consider the needs of residents and provide for green spaces, parks/trails and similar amenities incorporated into the site.

Density

Densities are best determined by a site-specific application, (as applicable) compliance with the comprehensive plan of the municipality and applicable zoning. General Commercial areas should not cover large acreages, but should be clustered on a given site.

Design Characteristics

General Commercial areas should not be strip commercial and other sprawl type development. These uses should be located at identified nodes shown on the FLUM. Site planning and building design are important. Parking lots should be broken up with landscaped islands. Facilities that require substantial parking should include building parking area designs with rear and side loaded

designs that minimize large parking areas in front of the facility. Clustering of business development in commercial and or mixed-use centers is encouraged. Site design and review criteria should discourage strip development and encourage low-scale, low-impact commercial areas. Large-scale commercial business development is not considered appropriate in the unincorporated areas of the county except adjacent to or within Rangely and Meeker. Lighting should be well designed to be directed to its particular function and to minimize glare, over-lighting, lighting trespass and night sky pollution. Similarly, signage plans should be submitted that include uniform signage provisions throughout a commercial site and signage lighting should be evaluated with reference to lighting characteristics previously described. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Industrial.

Types of Uses

This designation includes contractor yards, storage facilities, light manufacturing/fabrication, lumber/material sales, wholesale sales, related offices, heavy industrial uses, pipe yards, staging areas, equipment storage, contractor yards, general storage facilities, manufacturing/fabrication, material & equipment sales, wholesale sales, related offices facilities and other similar uses located away from residential areas to minimize conflicts and incompatibility. Residential uses associated with industrial activities may be included as long as they are designed into the site, include residential amenities such as sidewalks, pedestrian access and open space/parks. Residential use should be focused on housing for business related employees.

Density

Densities are best determined by a site-specific application, (as applicable) compliance with the comprehensive plan of the municipality and applicable zoning.

Design Characteristics

Site planning and building design have less focus on aesthetics in Industrial areas, but these elements are not ignored. Parking lots may be large areas that may include security fencing and screening. Site design should include access, circulation and parking for semi-tractor-trailers and other delivery vehicles. Business activities may generate noise, odor, glare, smoke, vibration but shall comply with all county, State and Federal regulations. These sites are located away from residential and commercial areas to avoid use conflicts. Businesses that require deliveries by large semis should provide good access around and to the rear of the buildings. Lighting should be well designed to be directed to its particular function and to minimize glare, over-lighting, lighting trespass and night sky pollution. Similarly, signage plans should be submitted that include uniform signage provisions throughout a commercial site and signage lighting should be evaluated with reference to lighting characteristics previously described. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in

conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Resource Protection Area.

Types of Uses

Passive open space, primitive trails and areas where human activity may be discouraged or prohibited due to identified wildlife concerns. Residential and non-residential uses are not located in these areas. Some of these lands are owned or managed by the Colorado Division of Wildlife and are primarily reserved for habitat protection and wildlife.

Density

Not applicable because residential and non-residential uses are not permitted.

Location

Adjacent to river corridors and other environmentally sensitive locations. This designation includes floodplains, riparian/wetlands, identified sensitive wildlife habitat and may extend beyond those areas to provide buffering from residential and non-residential activities.

Design Characteristics

This area is distinguished by natural undisturbed habitat that may be traversed by primitive trails. Trail routes may offer access to isolated nodes to minimize impact to wildlife and habitat. There may be informational waysides to educate visitors about the natural qualities of the area. Building setbacks of at least 300 feet protect waterways and habitat from human encroachment. Restrictions prevent surface or groundwater contamination from herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers and other human pollutants. Vegetation management techniques are implemented to eradicate invasive species and noxious weeds. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Open Space-Recreation.

Types of Uses

Undeveloped or semi-developed lands, trails and natural passive parks are the primary uses. Appropriate areas may include developed recreation facilities such as rodeo grounds, ball fields, sports complexes, off-road vehicle areas and bicycle trails.

Density

Not applicable because residential and non-residential uses are not permitted.

Location

These lands are located in areas that historically have not been used for agricultural purposes and may include meadows, scrublands and/or forest. Open space areas may be located adjacent to highway corridors to provide buffering and to soften the appearance of the urban landscape. Open space areas are shown on the Future Land Use Map. The rock-crawler area adjacent to Rangely is an example of Open Space-Recreation.

Design Characteristics

This area is distinguished by natural undisturbed habitat that may be traversed by primitive trails or roads. Trail routes may offer access to isolated nodes to minimize impact to wildlife and habitat. There may be informational waysides to educate visitors about the natural qualities of the area. Protections are utilized to prevent surface or groundwater contamination from herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers and other human pollutants. Vegetation management techniques are implemented to eradicate invasive species and noxious weeds. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Piceance Resource Area.

Types of Uses

This location is identified for mineral resource extraction, pipelines, compressor stations, support facilities and similar uses. The Piceance Resource area is where oil shale reserves are located as well as Nahcolite, natural gas and other important minerals. Other uses in this area may include support commercial due to the remote location of these facilities from municipal centers. Major industrial activities must address on-site and off-site impacts and may include worker-housing facilities, food service, entertainment, small-scale retail and other uses that minimize impacts to the unincorporated county and existing municipalities.

Density

Densities are best determined by a site-specific application.

Location

These lands are located primarily on BLM lands along with smaller private holdings shown on the FLUM.

Design Characteristics

The potential scale of these facilities may be very large and will require detailed planning with multiple jurisdictions including, but not limited to, federal land managers, state agencies, Rio Blanco County and other governments/service providers. Major oil shale development or other mineral extraction activities that occur on a scale comparable to the oil shale boom of the early

1980s will require significant additional planning by the county in conjunction with the aforementioned agencies. Major oil shale and/or energy development could bring upwards of 20,000 workers/new residents to Rio Blanco County. The scale of development will dramatically impact the capabilities of Rio Blanco County staff, service providers and citizens. Under those circumstances, it will be vitally important for the county to ensure that the core values identified in this Master Plan are protected along with environmental quality. It will take a massive and complex cooperative effort between the county, industry, the State of Colorado, federal agencies and service providers to attempt to manage large-scale extractive industry development. The county must institute a permitting process for this type of development that requires compliance by primary and secondary employers to mitigate impacts. These efforts will require substantial financial resources for planning, mitigation and implementation efforts. Even the best of circumstances, major energy development could overwhelm Rio Blanco County's ability to permit and manage these activities. Colorado is a "Right to Farm" state pursuant to CRS 35-3.5-101, et seq. and activities and impacts associated with agricultural operations shall not be considered nuisances as long as they are operated in conformance with the law and in a non-negligent manner. Therefore, all must be prepared to encounter noises, odors, lights, mud, dust, smoke, chemicals, machinery on public roads, a livestock on public roads, storage and disposal of manure, and the application by spraying or otherwise of chemical fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides and pesticides, and one or more of which may naturally occur as part of legal and non-negligent agricultural operations. New development should protect all irrigation ditches to allow for access, maintenance and free flow of water.

Appendices

Master Plan Maps.

1. Future Land Use Map.
2. Transportation.
3. Minerals.
4. Soils.
5. Soil Erosion.
6. Constraints Fuel Loading.
7. Constraints with Sections.
8. Physiography.
9. Precipitation.
10. Slope.
11. Biodiversity.
12. Wildlife - Bald Eagle.
13. Wildlife - Elk.
14. Wildlife - Mule Deer.

The following items are available in the county Planning Office or on the Rio Blanco County Website - <http://www.co.rio-blanco.co.us/development/>

- Community Survey Results.
- Summary Stakeholder Input Results.
- Visual Preference Survey Results.
- Rio Blanco County Housing Needs Assessment – RRC Associates, Inc & Rees Consulting, Inc.

Rio Blanco County Existing Conditions

Introduction

The Existing Conditions Report is a snapshot of the county as it relates to population/demographics, land uses, transportation networks, housing, economic trends and the environment. It also takes stock of different assets and amenities such as natural and cultural features and facilities/infrastructure. The report is broad in scope like the other components of this plan. It is formed on the basis that these data will have a far-reaching affect on the county and beyond.

The examination of the county's existing conditions will establish a context for identifying issues and opportunities, which ultimately becomes the framework for realizing the county Vision of its future.

The Existing Conditions Section is a general background of information that will be used in conjunction with the other sections of the Master Plan such as the Future Land Use Map and Goals and Policy recommendations. It may also be used as a basis for establishing context in public policy decisions and future land uses. It is expected to be a resource for the public, land managers, public agencies, county staff, land use applicants, industry, community organizations and elected officials.

Balancing the desires to maintain the county's rural character, protect environmental assets, develop a safe and efficient transportation network, promote economic vitality, provide adequate

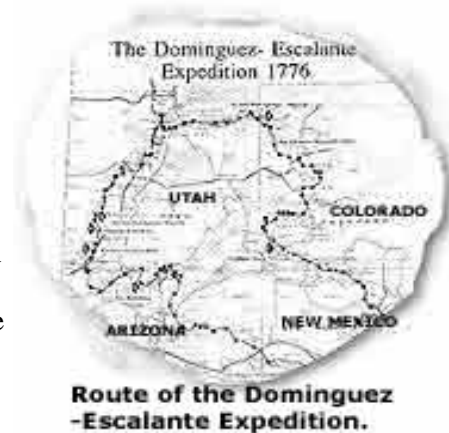
housing, effectively manage public infrastructure, and protect personal property rights are complex and very difficult tasks.

Area History

Early evidence of human occupation of the area later known as Rio Blanco County is well documented, especially in the central and western portions of the county. The Fremont culture, inhabiting the county from 200 to 1250 A.D., is clearly represented by rock art in the Canyon Pintado Historic District and other various rock art locations. There are over fifty archaeological sites in the Canyon Pintado attributed to the Fremont people. As time passed, more contemporary cultures such as the Ute Nation made this area its home beginning around 1200 A.D.

A short chronology of exploration and settlement of Rio Blanco County includes:

- In 1776, Spanish adventurers, Escalante and Dominguez, entered the county from the south and crossed into the Douglas Creek area. Ute guides took the party further north to what is now near the present day Town of Rangely. The party then turned west and headed into Utah toward Utah Lake².
- In 1844, John C. Fremont came to the area to map it for the Federal Government and traveled along the Green River to the White River. Little is known of Fremont's expedition into this area.³
- Major John Wesley Powell arrived in October 1868 to survey and camp in the area now named for him, Powell Park. He began the first documented study of the language and culture of the Ute Indians.⁴
- In January 1868, members of the Colorado Territory Government sent Indian Agent D.C. Oakes, Ute Chiefs Jack & Ouray, Kit Carson, Otto Mears and others to Washington, D.C. to execute the Treaty of 1868. In June 1869, contracts were let for two new Ute Agencies. Oakes oversaw the construction of the Ute Agency in the summer of 1869. ⁵
- Nathan Meeker, Indian Agent for the area moved the Ute tribe to Powell Park in an effort to convert the Utes into hard-working farmers. The decision angered the Ute Nation. Major Thomas Tipton Thornburgh was summoned to assist the Agency. The Utes, fearing for their safety attacked the military at Milk Creek, killing Thornburgh and all of his officers. Chipeta, wife of Chief Ouray, sent word to Ouray about the fighting and he sent men to stop them, but they arrived too late. The Ute then attacked the Indian Agency on September 29, 1879, at the Powell Park site, killing Meeker and eight of his staff, taking the women and children hostage. This event became known as the "Meeker Massacre ". Chief Ouray tried to negotiate peace with the Indian Agency, to no avail;



² "Fr. Silvestre Velez de Escalante and the Dominguez Escalante Expedition". Exploring the Southwest Desert USA. <http://www.desertusa.com/mag99/sep/papr/escalante.html>. (July 22, 2009)

³ "An Isolated Empire: A History of Northwest Colorado". National Parks Service. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/blm/cultresser/co/2/intro.htm. (August 2, 2009)

⁴ "An Isolated Empire: A History of Northwest Colorado". National Parks Service. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/blm/cultresser/co/2/intro.htm. (August 2, 2009)

⁵ Buckles, Ricki: "A History of the Upper White River Country". Meeker, Colorado.

they were relocated south of Montrose, Colorado, to the Cantonment at Colona. In 1882, the US government ordered the Utes to be relocated to Utah. The last battle between the Utes and the Militia was the Ute War of 1887.⁶

- In 1883, with the removal of the Utes, the government auctioned off the remaining buildings of the Indian Agency; this new settlement became known as Meeker. The Town of Meeker was incorporated in 1885; it was the first incorporated town in northwestern Colorado. Rio Blanco County was created in 1889 with an objective of creating a county that encompassed the White River Valley. This was accomplished through a shuffling of county lines among Routt, Grand, and Garfield Counties.
- It was known from the earliest times that there was oil near the present Town of Rangely; the Native Americans used oil seeping out of the ground for medicinal purposes. Early pioneers were known to harvest coal from sites for their home use. Later the same coalfields were used to fire steam-operated engines for use in oil exploration. Oil drilling began in 1901 near Rangely. The shallow Mancos Shale and Weber Sandstone formations yielded early production levels of oil from two oilfields- one on top of the other. By 1903, there were 13 different companies operating near Rangely, but the six wells produced only 10 barrels per day. A.C. McLaughlin came to the area in 1908 to survey the area, but it was not until 1917 that he purchased several large tracts of land.⁷
- Fourteen years later, a California company, now Chevron, purchased more land and, in 1931, began work on the first deep well, named the Raven A1. It was another two years before the Raven A1, at a depth of 6,335 feet, was online and producing 230 barrels a day. The excitement of this well was short-lived because there was no market for the oil produced. Chevron capped the well a year after it began producing and it sat idle for the next 10 years.
- In 1943 oil prices skyrocketed due to the demands of the nation in War World II, and Chevron responded by reopening the Raven A1. By 1947, Rangely was a booming oil town and decided to incorporate. Records of 1949 indicate there were 478 wells scattered across the area and the area continued to boom; by 1956 the area was producing 82,000 barrels of oil per day.⁸
- The Rangely Weber Sand Unit oilfield was unitized in 1952 with Chevron as the operator. In 2009, the oilfield began a tertiary recovery effort, which includes carbon dioxide flooding. High-pressure carbon dioxide is injected into wells to recover additional oil that the secondary water flooding process left behind. This is one of the largest carbon dioxide floods in the world and is expected to add over 20 years to the field's production.
- Elsewhere around the county, extractive industry has expanded. In the 1980s, oil companies ramped up their efforts to produce enormous quantities of petroleum from the rich shale in the area. Then, energy prices fell sharply in 1982. In May of that year, Exxon announced it was shutting down its operation, putting more than 2,000 oil-shale workers out of their jobs, the day became known as the Grand Valley's "Black Sunday."
- In 2001, the Shell Exploration and Production Company began experimenting with new technology of using super heated water to melt the oil substance trapped under the shale of the Piceance Basin. In 2006, ExxonMoble returned to the basin and Chevron and BP

⁶ "Early History Meeker Colorado". Meeker Chamber of Commerce. <http://www.meekerchamber.com/historical>. (July 18, 2009)

⁷ "History of Meeker". White River National Forest <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/rangerdistricts/meeker/extras/history.pdf>. (August 4, 2009).

⁸ "Raven A-1 Exhibits". Town of Rangely. <http://www.rangely.com/RavenA1.htm>. (July 29, 2009)

also increased their production in the area. The industry contracted after the boom in 2006, but there are still a substantial number of wells in production.⁹

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Local amateur anthropologists, the State of Colorado and the U.S. Department of the Interior have located several archaeological sites in Rio Blanco County. These sites are shown on their respective Registers of Historic Places. These sites are inventoried on the Colorado Historical Society's website and are listed below.

CANYON PINTADO HISTORIC DISTRICT

Canyon Pintado is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, located south of Rangely on Colorado Hwy 139. The Fremont Indians settled here more than 1,000 years ago, later followed by the Ute and the Shoshone Indians. Each of these native people left very distinct Petroglyphs (image that has been pecked or rubbed into the stone) and Pictographs (image painted on to the stone). Due to the arid nature of the area, the archeological sites within the District are well preserved.¹⁰

DUCK CREEK WICKIUP VILLAGE

The Duck Creek Wickiup Village is located about 36 miles west of Meeker. The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its rich archeological importance and was used by Utes well into the late 19th century during their annual fall and winter gathering of pinion nuts.



CARROT MEN PICTOGRAPH SITE

The Carrot Men Pictograph site is located about 11 miles southwest of Rangely and was added to the National Register of Historic Places for its archeologically significant Pictographs. The Fremont Indians painted carrot-shaped figures on the rock walls. Other figures of animals, birds and corn can also be seen at the site.

COLLAGE SHELTER

Collage Shelter is a continually used prehistoric site near Rangely and listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its potential to yield important information about prehistoric land use patterns and population movements between core and marginal use areas.

FREMONT LOOKOUT FORTIFICATION SITE

This site, near the Town of Rangely, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places because it is the only known example of a defensive structure in Colorado. The Fremont Indians built the stone lookout to defend their fields of corn, beans, and squash as well as their hunting areas.

HISTORIC SITES

In Rio Blanco County, there are several historic sites that are registered on either the State of Colorado or the National Register of Historic Places. Currently on one or both lists are the following (those located within municipalities are included, since they are located within Rio Blanco County).

⁹ "Rio Blanco County". Rio Blanco County Master Plan. January, 1999.

¹⁰ "Canyon Pintado". Town of Rangely. <http://www.rangely.com/CanyonPintado.htm>. (July 22, 2009)

MEEKER MASSACRE

The Meeker Massacre site (Latitude: 40.02583 Longitude: -107.99389) is located approximately 1/2 mile south of Highway 64 and approximately 2 miles west of the intersection of Highway 64 and Highway 13. The site is identified by a historical marker sign. In 1878, Nathan C. Meeker was appointed Indian Agent at the White River Indian Reserve to oversee the Ute Indians. Meeker moved to the territory with his wife and daughter. A prevailing mindset of the white settlers was to remove the Utes so the settlers could occupy the lands for mining and farming. The original agency site was moved by Mr. Meeker 11 miles downstream on the White River to what is known as "Powell Park" a site used by the Utes to pasture their ponies. Nathan Meeker aggravated the Native Americans with this act as well as other policies he tried to implement. The general discontent between the Native Americans and the Indian Agent came to a head in summer of 1879 when Meeker plowed up the Ute horse racetrack. An initial confrontation between the Utes and the Indian Agent resulted in Meeker sending a telegram to Washington seeking support from Major Thornburg's troops stationed at Fort Steele. On September 29, 1879, the conflict erupted into a battle in which Major Thornburg was killed. The Utes attacked the Indian Agency, burned the buildings and killed 11 men, including Agent Meeker. The Indians took women captive to ensure their safety as they left. The Meeker Massacre became the final justification by the US Government to remove the Utes from Colorado and forcing them into Utah.¹¹

BUFORD SCHOOL

The Buford School is listed on the State Register of Historic Places and the Rural School Buildings of Colorado. This School is located near the town of Buford on County Road 17. The 1902 school and its privy convey the rural school experience and have long been the educational center of the rural area near Buford, serving as the local school until 1952. The building then became a community center, an important gathering place for social events such as dances, meeting and other activities. Eleanor Roosevelt attended the dedication of the building when it became a community center.¹²



BATTLE OF MILK CREEK SITE/THORNBURGH

The Battle of Milk Creek site is located about 17 miles outside of Meeker on County Road 15 (Thornburgh Road). The site was added to the National Register of Historic Places and it gives us a glimpse at the Indian uprisings of the 1800s. Located in the remote Milk Creek Valley, the battle site covers approximately 1,600 acres. Portions of a historic wagon road remain visible.¹³

HAY'S RANCH BRIDGE

The Hay's Ranch Bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and it is one of Colorado's earliest state-funded vehicular bridges and one of the oldest roadway trusses in northwestern Colorado. The bridge is located near Meeker on County Road 127. The M. J. Patterson Contracting Company of Denver completed this pin-connected,

¹¹ [Rio Blanco County Historical Society, Meeker, Colorado.](#)

¹² "Colorado State Register of Historic Properties". Colorado Historical Society. <http://coloradohistory-oahp.org/programareas/register/1503/cty/rb.htm>. (August 5, 2009)

¹³ "History of Meeker". White River National Forest <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/rangerdistricts/meeker/extras/history.pdf>. (August 4, 2009).

six-panel steel Pratt pony truss in 1901. The slightly bowed top chord represents an unusual modification of the Pratt pony truss.¹⁴

HOTEL MEEKER

Susan Wright, a widow, was one of the original pioneers of the Town of Meeker. In 1883, when the government auctioned off the remaining buildings of the Army Post, she purchased one of them and opened the first Meeker Hotel. Susan died in 1893 and left the property to her brother, Sanford Ball. In 1896, Mr. Ball built the new Hotel Meeker located at 560 Main Street in Meeker. This two-story brick building reflects the characteristics of commercial structures built in small western towns during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While hunting in the area, Theodore Roosevelt stayed at the historic hotel for one night. The hotel's historic significance is the reason that it was added to the National Register of Historic Places. *National Register 5/7/1980, 5RB.98*

J. W. HUGUS COMPANY BUILDING/A. OLDLAND BUILDING

The J.W. Hugus Building located at 594 Main Street in Meeker, was designed by the prominent Denver architectural firm of Fisher and Fisher. This two-story brick building was constructed in 1911 to house the Meeker operations of J.W. Hugus & Co. The company was founded by J.W. Hugus in 1877. He operated numerous general and dry goods stores in southern Wyoming and western Colorado. In 1919, Hugus decided to liquidate his assets, selling the building to the retail firm of A. Oldland and Company. This building was added to the State Register of Historic Places in 1991.¹⁵

RIO BLANCO COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

The Rio Blanco County High School, located at 555 Garfield Street in Meeker, was built in 1924. This two-story building of rough-cut thinly coursed local sandstone was designed by noted architect Robert K. Fuller. The floor plan is similar to many secondary educational facilities built during the period, and has a gymnasium wing extending from the rear of the rectangular classroom portion. The building served as the county's only high school facility from 1924 until 1951. The building was added to the State Register of Historic Places in 1993.¹⁶

ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

St. James Episcopal Church, located at 368 Fourth Street in Meeker, was designed by a New York Architect and built by master artisans out of Denver. The cornerstone was laid in 1889. The hammer-beam ceiling is an inspiration from England and the stained-glass windows, brass fixtures and wooden interior make the church a showplace. The church opened in 1890 and remains open today. It is included in the National Register of Historic Places. The stone building was the first church in Meeker and one of the oldest Episcopal churches in Colorado. The church bell was imported from Cincinnati and is housed over the main entrance, topped by a unique bell tower faced with wood shingles.¹⁷

PYRAMID GUARD STATION

¹⁴“Colorado State Register of Historic Properties”. Colorado Historical Society. <http://coloradohistory-oahp.org/programareas/register/1503/cty/rb.htm>. (August 5, 2009)

¹⁵“History of Meeker”. White River National Forest <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/rangerdistricts/meeker/extras/history.pdf>. (August 4, 2009).

¹⁶“Colorado State Register of Historic Properties”. Colorado Historical Society. <http://coloradohistory-oahp.org/programareas/register/1503/cty/rb.htm>. (August 5, 2009)

¹⁷“High Stakes Preservation”. Historical Preservation in Colorado. <http://www.coloradohistory.org/HSP/SJChurchdesc.html>. (August 4, 2009)

The Pyramid Guard Station is located 15 miles west of the Town of Yampa; the buildings were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps between 1934 and 1936. Pyramid is an excellent example of the kind of work done by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the national forests during the Great Depression. The dwelling includes a barn, blacksmith shop and wood shed. The buildings exhibit key characteristics such as log walls, overhanging eaves with exposed rafters, small paned windows, and the use of local materials in construction. The buildings reflect a local manifestation of a regional style mandated by the USFS for rural areas. The Pyramid Guard Station is the most recent entry for Rio Blanco County in the National Register of Historic Places.¹⁸



THE WHITE RIVER MUSEUM/WHITE RIVER OFFICERS BLOCK

The White River Museum is located at 565 Park Street in Meeker; these buildings were two of the original officers' quarters built at the Indian Agency after the Meeker Massacre. This museum contains Indian artifacts and items belonging to the Indian Agencies, including the plow that started the fighting which led to the massacre. There are two other officers' buildings located on this block, one is a private home and the other is a business.¹⁹



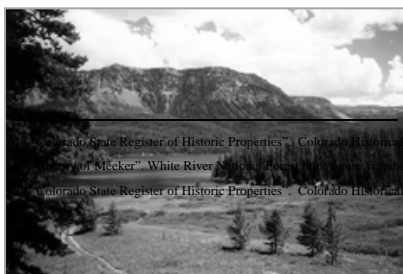
THE RANGELY OUTDOOR MUSEUM

The Rangely Outdoor Museum preserves the history of the Rangely area. Although Rangely is a relatively new town, incorporated in 1946, the area has a rich and fascinating history. The museum portrays this history in several historic buildings located on the grounds, by interpreting three distinct periods: Native American and Prehistory (*from the distant past until 1883*), Pioneer and Ranching (*from 1883 until 1946*), and Energy Development (*from 1946 to the present day*). The museum is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and protecting historic buildings. It has acquired, and moved to the museum grounds, an old jail cell, a camp house, and the Wolf Canyon School. The Wolf Canyon School was open from 1931 to 1942, was run by four teachers, and housed about 25 students.²⁰

NATURAL SITES

In 1877, the Federal Government commissioned a survey of large sections of the mountains and western territories and their resources by F.V. Hayden, and paid him \$75,000 for his survey. The Hayden Survey located, mapped and named several assets on the White River: Marvine Peak and Marvine Lake, on the Flat Tops, were named for the division chief, Archibald Marvine.

TRAPPERS LAKE & MARVINE LAKE



These two great glacial cirque lakes in glaciated valleys are located about 35 miles east of Meeker. Trappers Lake, located in Garfield County, is known as the "Cradle of the

Colorado State Register of Historic Properties - Colorado Historical Society. <http://coloradohistory-oahp.org/programareas/register/1503/cty/rb.htm>. (August 5, 2009)

City of Meeker. "White River Museum." <http://www.cityofmeeker.com/r2/whiteriver/rangerdistricts/meeker/extras/history.pdf>. (August 4, 2009).

Colorado State Register of Historic Properties - Colorado Historical Society. <http://coloradohistory-oahp.org/programareas/register/1503/cty/rb.htm>. (August 5, 2009)

Wilderness,” due to the efforts of Arthur Carhart in 1919. He recommended that there be no further construction of roads or homes around the lakes. This concept started the Wilderness movement and eventually led to the Wilderness Act in 1964. Today the lakes hold the largest population of native Colorado Cutthroat trout in the world.

BIG MARVINE PEAK

This peak is located in the Flat Tops Wilderness Area about 29 miles east of Meeker. The Peak is named for Archibald Marvine who was the division chief at the time of the Hayden Survey. Big Marvine Peak’s elevation is 11,879 feet.

ROAN PLATEAU

The Roan Plateau offers a variety of resources from its scenic beauty; rare plants, fish habitats, and natural animal habitats to its oil and natural gas wells. The Roan Plateau’s lakes and streams are home to the rare Colorado Cutthroat trout. Also, calling this Plateau home is a variety of big game, deer, elk, mountain lions and bears. The dramatic changes in elevation throughout the Plateau are prized by hikers, nature enthusiasts, campers and hunters. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management 2008 plan for the area allows natural gas and oil recovery beneath the Plateau while setting aside 21,034 acres as areas critical for the environment.

FLAT TOPS WILDERNESS AREA

This area is unique in that it does not offer fourteen thousand foot tall mountains like other wilderness areas, but tall plateaus of massive rock capped on the north and by massive lava flows that tower thousands of feet above the surface. Today, the Flat Tops Wilderness Area is Colorado’s second largest wilderness area at 235,035 acres.

WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST

The northwestern part of this forest lies in Rio Blanco County and includes the Flat Top Mountains and the upper White River drainage. The White River Forest contains 2,285,970 acres of land.

PICEANCE BASIN

Known for its abundance of natural gas reserves, the Piceance Basin (geological) is also characterized by high plateaus and deep valleys. The basin encompasses 7,110 square miles in northwestern Colorado and encompasses portions of Mesa, Pitkin, Delta, Gunnison, and Montrose Counties. The Southern Union Gas Well was the first well to be drilled in the basin in 1955. In 2007, the basin contained five of the top 50 United States gas fields. The Roan Plateau is located in the Piceance Basin.

THE WHITE RIVER

The White River runs through Rio Blanco County and is the namesake for the county. It is a tributary to the Green River and is about 160 miles long. The White River’s water is used by the ranching industry, but also is being purchased for oil and gas exploration and potential oil shale extraction. The White River offers an abundance of fishing opportunities, rafting and wildlife viewing.²¹

²¹ “Colorado’s Trappers Lake”. Anglers Guide Fishing Info-Marketing. <http://www.anglerguide.com/colorado/trapperslake.html>. (August 5, 2009)

The Land

Rio Blanco County located in the northwest portion of the state is the sixth largest county in Colorado with a land area of 3,226 square miles (2,064,791 acres). It extends from the Utah border on the west to Routt County on the east. The county is located approximately midway between Denver and Salt Lake City.

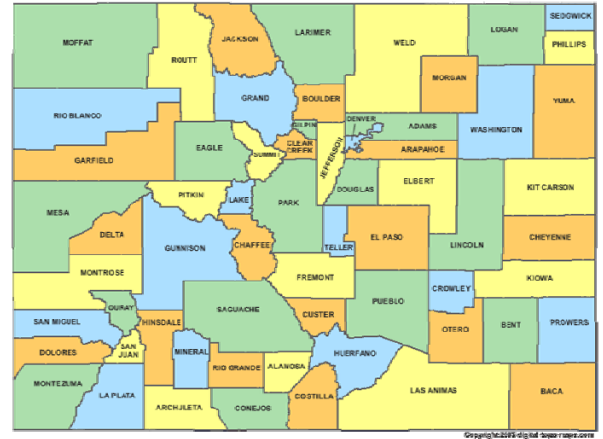
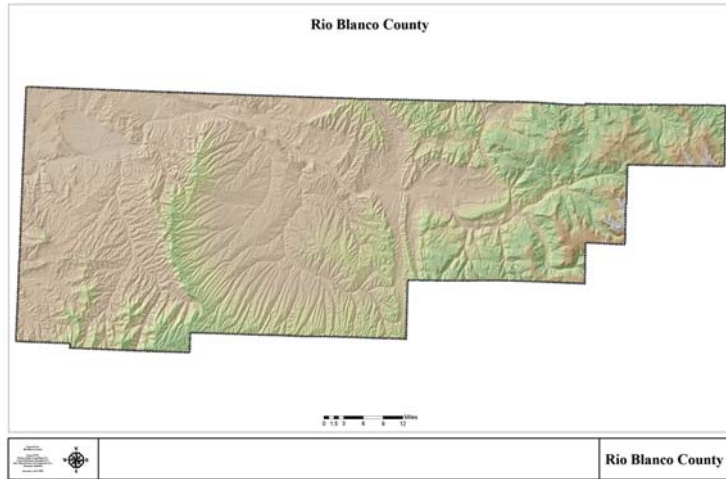


Figure 1

The highest elevations in the county lie southeast of the Town of Meeker in the Flattops. The northwest arm of Orno Peak²² in southeast Rio Blanco County is the highest point in the county at 12,027 feet above sea level. The White River exits the county into Utah at the lowest county elevation of about 5,000 feet on its way to the confluence of the Green River in Utah. Rio Blanco County is a rural county with two municipal population centers: Rangely and Meeker. Meeker is

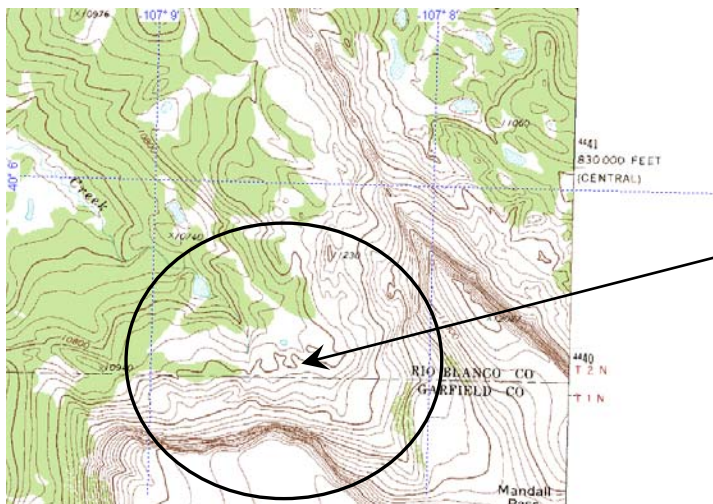


Figure 2



Basalt Cliffs in the Eastern Portion of the White River Valley

²² www.summitpost.org

the county seat. Both municipalities are located along the scenic White River, the major drainage in the county.

Topographically, the high alpine region of the county is located east of Meeker and includes the "Flattops", a large portion of which is designated wilderness under the jurisdiction of the US Forest Service. The White River drains the eastern highlands as it flows westward to the Utah border. The fertile White River Valley has supported agricultural uses since the first occupation by Native Americans and subsequent westward expansion. The wet higher elevations of the eastern Rio Blanco County transition across the Grand Hogback to dryer lower elevation uplands characterized by many arroyos eroded into the land surfaces. Cathedral Bluffs also have been channelized by erosion over the eons. Except for several large drainages, the rugged terrain of these eroded uplands makes access and travel difficult. These topographic qualities have steered settlement in the county to the more easily accessed irrigated fertile valleys.

The southern central portion of the county known as the Piceance Basin (hydrologic) is part of the Colorado Plateau. Piceance includes energy rich oil shale and natural gas reserves that are important to the economy of the county²³.

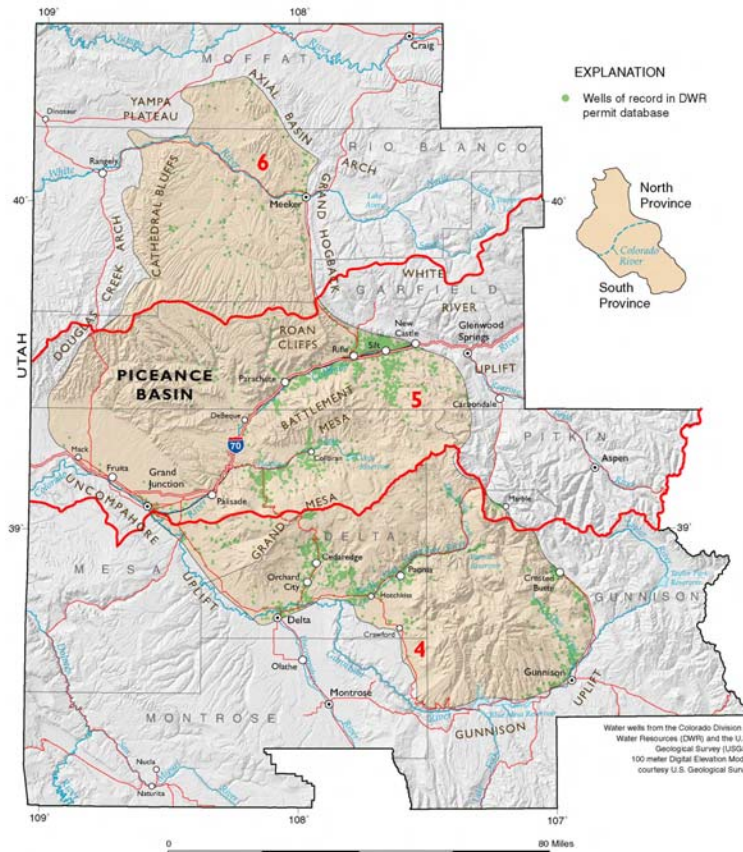


Figure 3

²³ Colorado Geological Survey, Groundwater Atlas of Colorado and US Geological Survey.

Land Tenure

Just over 76% of the land area in Rio Blanco County is publicly owned land. The largest share of the public land is under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service. A much smaller portion of these public lands are owned by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, State of Colorado, Rio Blanco County and other public agencies. The majority of privately owned lands are found in the White River and Piceance drainages and settlement has occurred there over the years. Agricultural land use occupies 19.5% of the private lands with the balance devoted to commercial, residential, industrial and vacant lands.

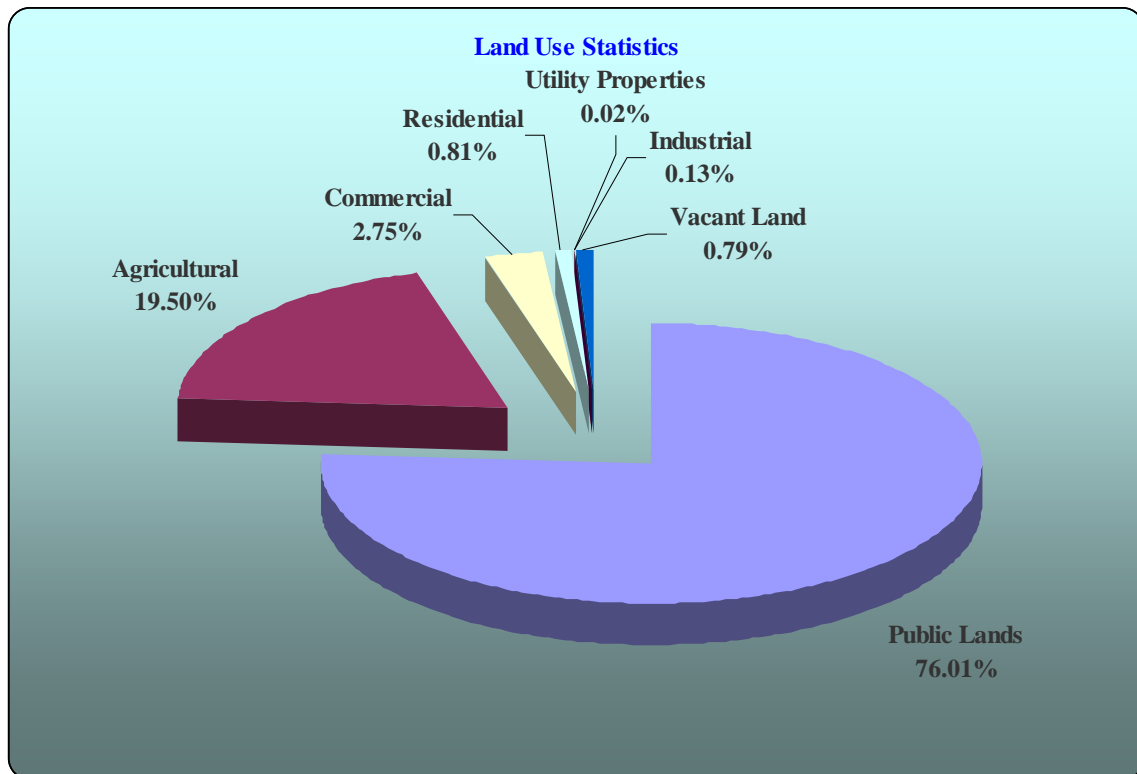


Figure 4

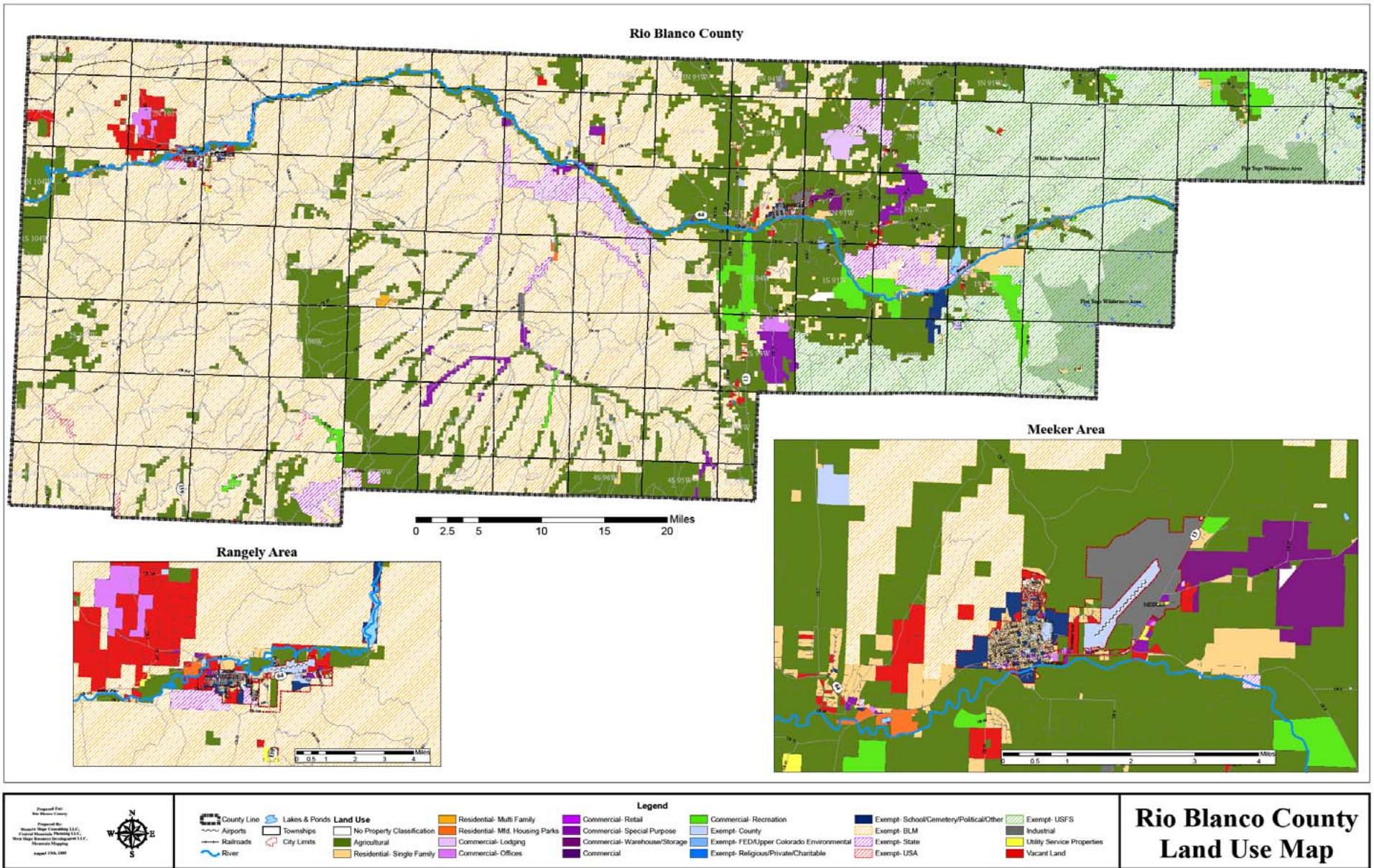


Figure 5

The People

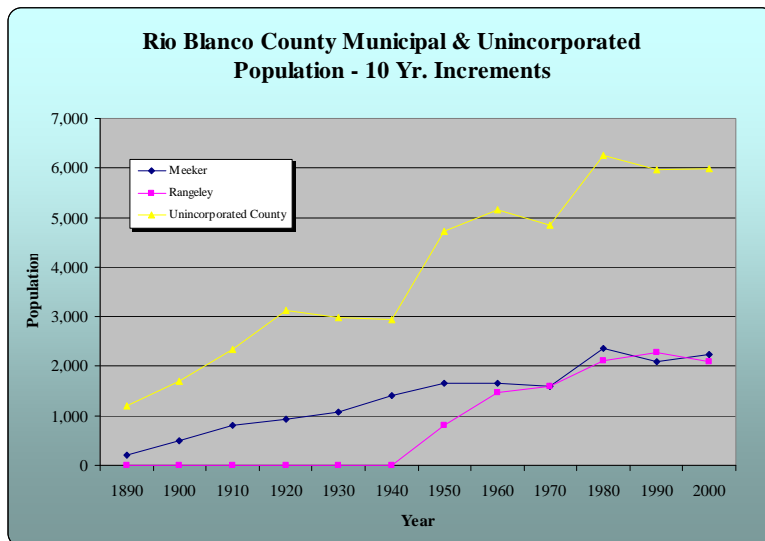
Population

Over the 119 years, Rio Blanco County has experienced a variety of growth patterns that are largely a function of its economic development history.

The timeframe between 1890 and 1920 was the early settlement phase of the county. Population grew in the Town of Meeker and in unincorporated Rio Blanco County as folks moved in and settled with agriculture being the primary source of employment. The Great Depression in 1929 resulted in a loss of population in the unincorporated portions of the county, however, Meeker continued to grow.

The development of the first deep oil well (Raven A1 Well) by Chevron in 1931 and subsequent development of the oil bearing Weber Sandstone formation along with the increased demand for oil resulting from World War II kicked off a population growth period between 1940 and 1960. This economic activity and growth led to incorporation of the Town of Rangely. The population in unincorporated Rio Blanco County grew from slightly under 3,000 to over 5,000. Between 1960 and 1970, the county experienced a declining population with a downturn in oil production and overall economic slowdown.

The most recent significant growth period occurred in the early 1980s during the oil shale boom in both Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties when the unincorporated population of the county expanded to over 6,500. That boom period ended in May 1982 when Exxon shut down their Parachute Creek operations that resulted in massive layoffs across the Western Slope and a corresponding population decline in the county.



Between 2000 and 2009, the total Rio Blanco County population grew at an annual average rate of 1.21%. The county population in 2000 was 5,986 and in 2009, it expanded to 6,640 - an increase of 654 residents²⁴. This growth includes new population in the two municipalities of Meeker and Rangely.

²⁴ Colorado State Demographers Office.

During the same time, the growth rates in Meeker and Rangely were as follows.

Meeker - Average growth rate 1.24% from 2,242 to 2,492; an increase of 250 residents.

Rangely - Average growth rate 0.69% from 2,096 to 2,227 an increase of 131 residents.

There have been recent short-term fluctuations in the Rio Blanco County population during periods of oil shale and gas exploration/development. However, these peaks are short-lived and in the case of natural gas and oil shale research and development, the peaks are associated with construction activities.

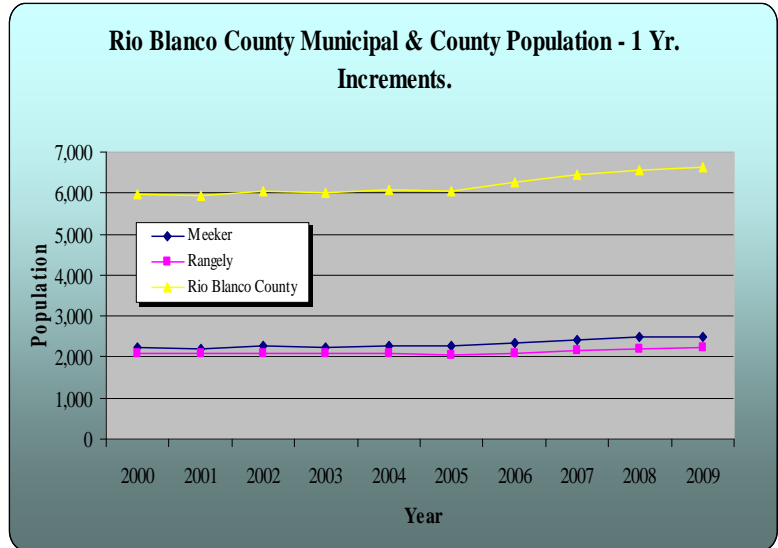


Figure 5

The natural population change in Rio Blanco County is the net difference between births and deaths in the county. As evidenced in the graph, the period between 1985 and 1998 saw a net decrease in the natural population. This trend turned around in 2001 as the population began to grow again. This natural increase is a result of increasing birth rates and declining death rates and is indicative of declining average population age.

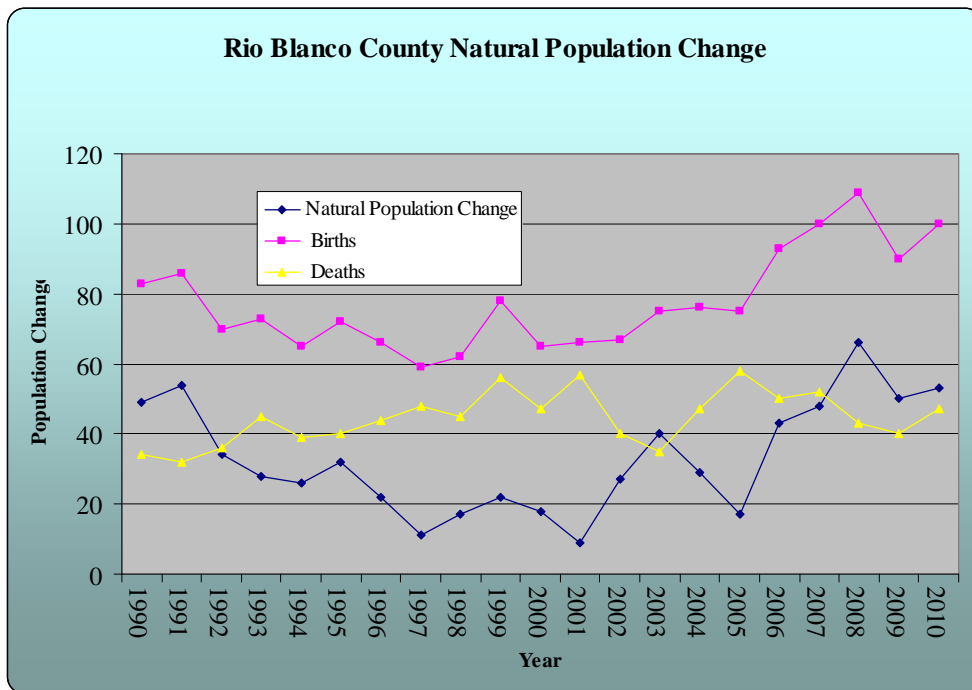
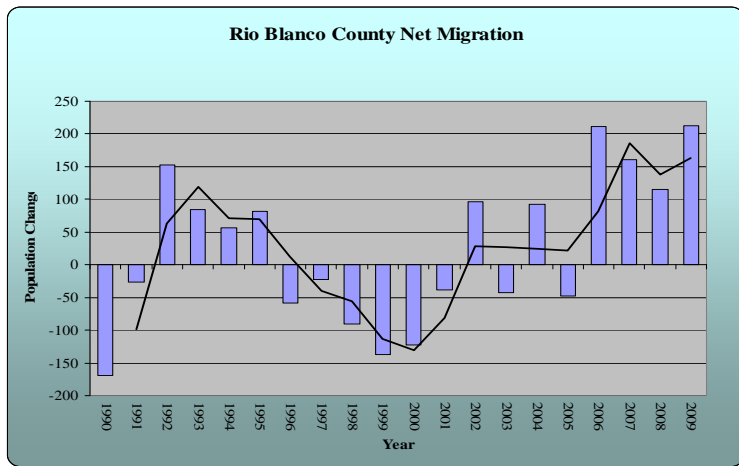


Figure 6



Rio Blanco County experiences varying rates of net migration. This is most likely due to changes in the energy industry as workers move in and move out of the county depending on energy development activities.

Figure 7

The following Colorado State Demographer population projections

by age group anticipate an increase in overall population out to the year 2035. In future years, it is expected that the largest increases will occur in the 40 to 49 year age group followed by 30 to 39-year-olds. These two age groups are in their peak income years and typically have greater disposable income. This increase may be associated with anticipated oil shale development during those years. The oil shale variable will skew numbers appreciably in one direction or the other and remains an unpredictable factor in the future of Rio Blanco County.

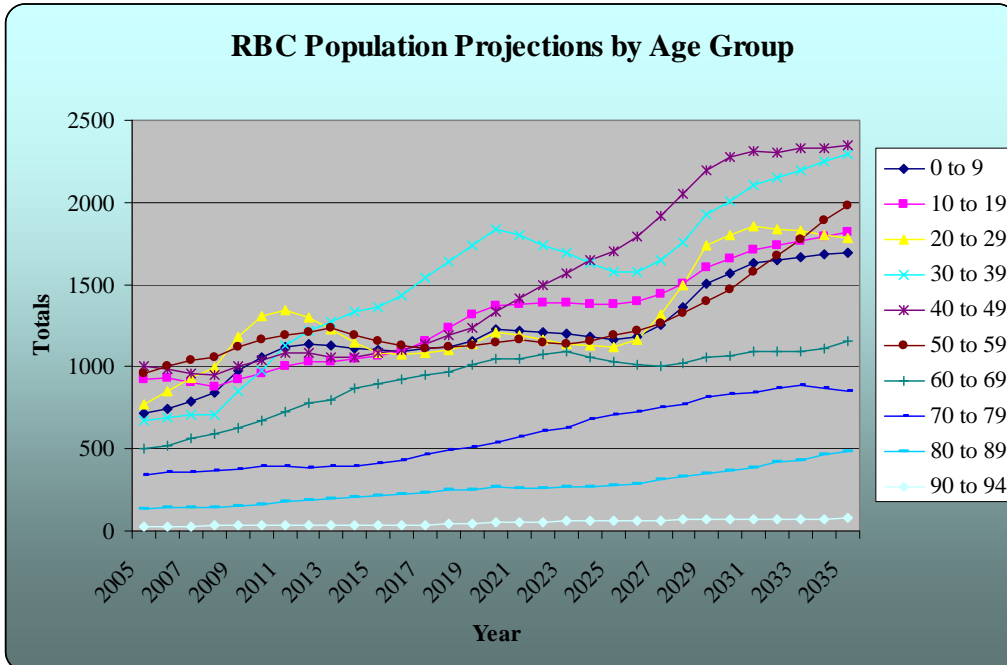


Figure 8

The change in median age in the county is more likely a result of population change from in or out migrations linked to energy development than it is from birth or death rates. In most cases, the Rio Blanco County median age is equal to or greater than that of the general Colorado population. An older population changes the demand for types of services. The county and the business community should anticipate the service needs of an older population and respond accordingly.

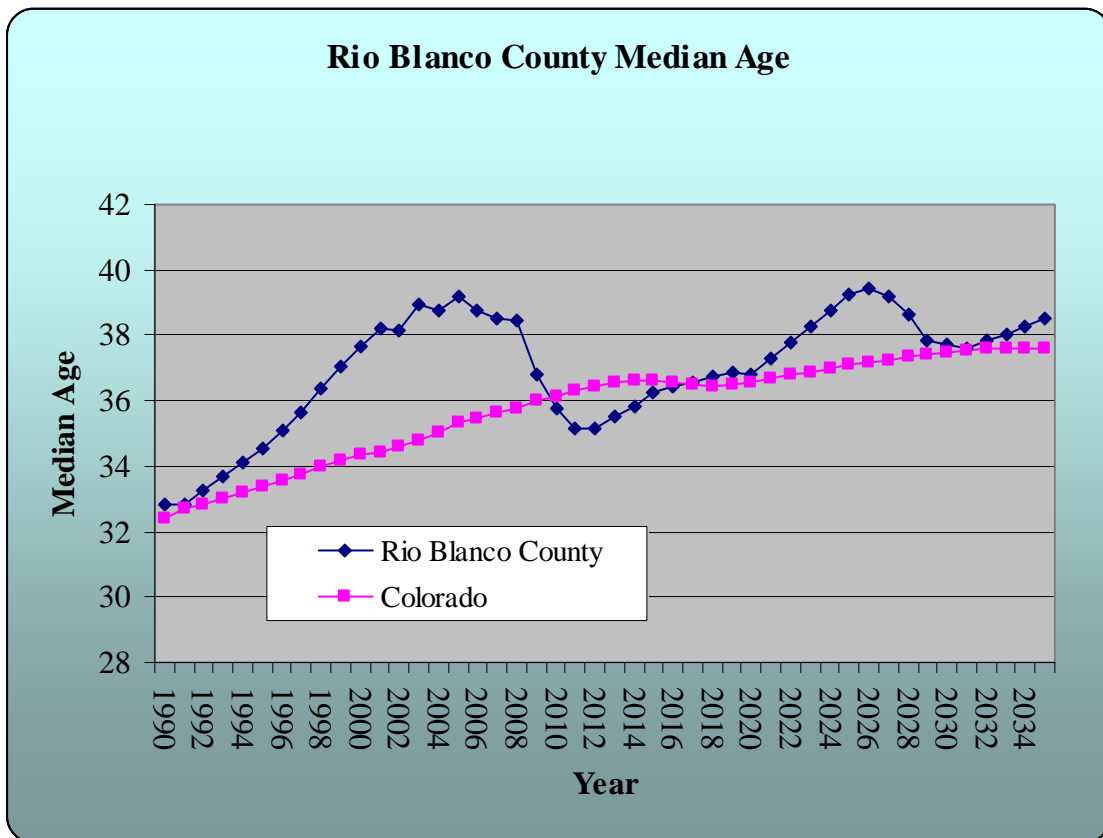


Figure 9

The Economy

The three largest employment sectors in the county are construction, government and mining. The construction sector includes work associated with energy activities (but not mining directly) as well as commercial and residential development. Mining activities currently play an important role in the county economy and likely will continue to play an increasingly significant role in the future. Not all mining activities are energy-related. Nahcolite is another abundant resource in the county that is commercially mined.

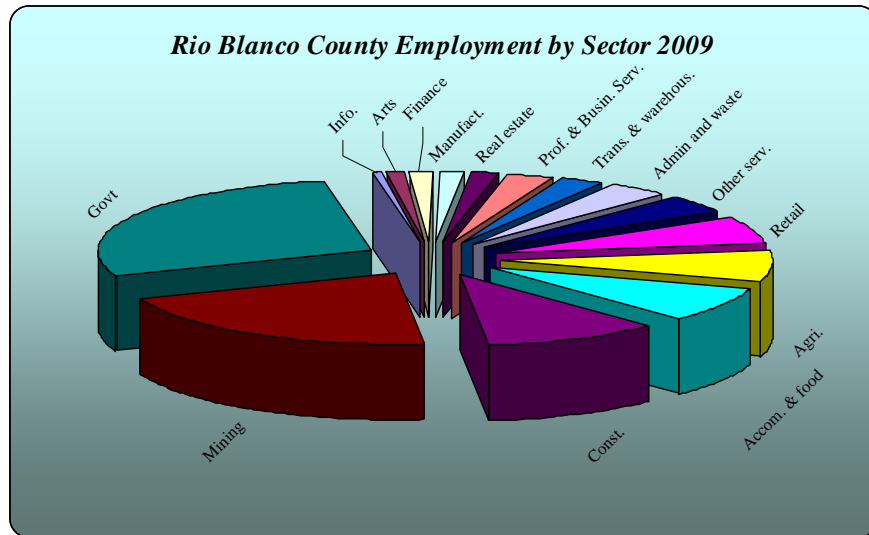


Figure 10

Agriculture, tourism and retail trade are the long-term foundations of the county economy. These activities maintain the financial baseline although they are subject to some fluctuation with changing populations and the economy.

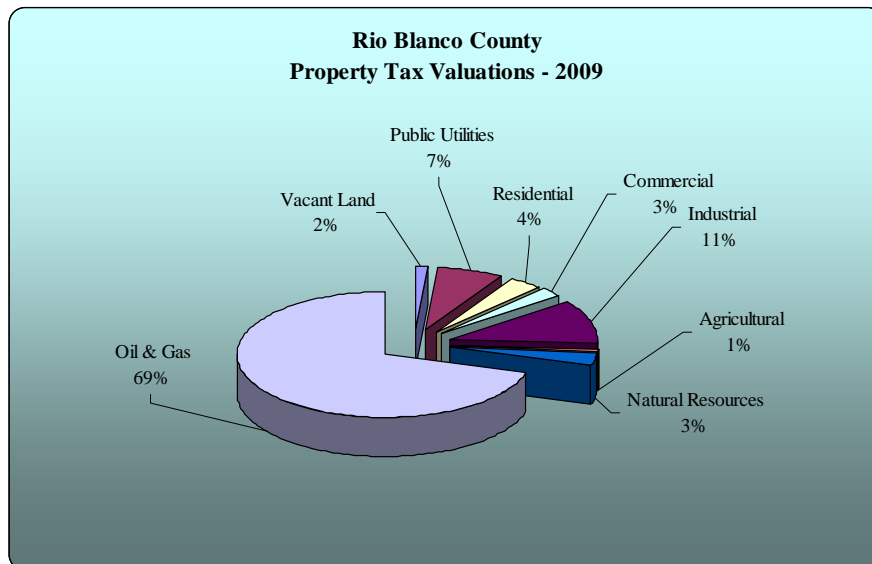


Figure 11

RBC Revenues and Expenditures per Capita

The revenues per capita show an increasing trend over time especially between 2004 and 2007. The revenues show an increase by over 100% during this time which are attributed to the strong national economy as well as localized economic performance in sectors such as energy production and tourism.

The operating and total expenditures per capita have remained somewhat stable from 2000 through 2007, but moderate increases during the same three-year period of 2004 through 2007 are shown. These increases are likely a result of increases in the cost of carrying out the basic functions of day-to-day business such as salaries, insurance and cost of supplies and materials. Other factors such as increased demand for emergency and law enforcement contribute to these increased expenditures. In addition, capital outlay for improvement projects and maintenance on existing infrastructure plays a role in increasing costs per capita.

It is important to note that revenues per capita continue to exceed expenditures per capita and are increasing at an accelerating rate. This is indicative of a healthy budget condition in the county. It is important that Rio Blanco County continue to maintain its infrastructure on an ongoing basis. Deferred maintenance on infrastructure and/or capital facilities may make the financial picture look good for a short greatest time, but eventually those costs have a major impact on the budget and the county's financial condition. It is very important for the county to monitor these budget trends to ensure that revenues continue to exceed expenditures as growth continues.

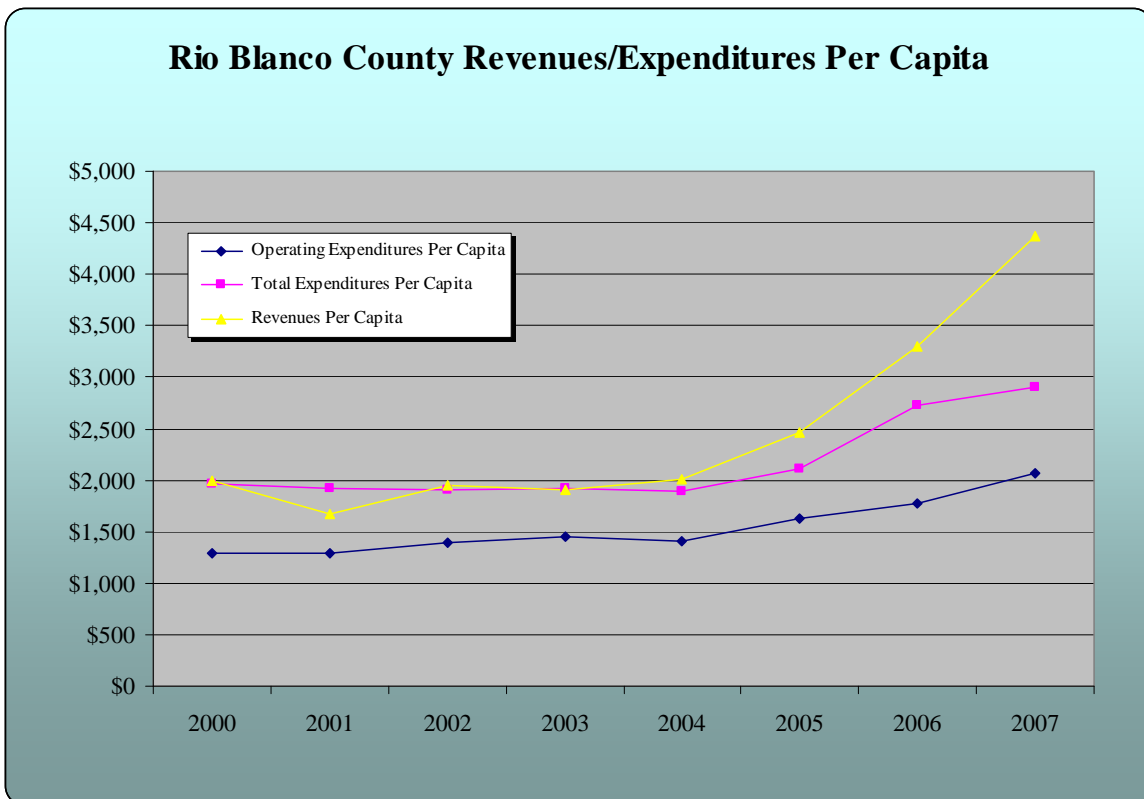


Figure 12

RBC Retail Trade Employment

The fluctuations of the retail trade industry are related to market demand. Such demand has historically been tied to the energy industry in Rio Blanco County. Retail salaries are typically lower compared to other sectors of the economy and the fluctuations seen in the following graph may be inversely tied to available higher paying jobs in the energy industry. In other words if jobs are available at higher wages, it is likely that those employees of the retail trade industry will leave their jobs seeking higher paying opportunities.

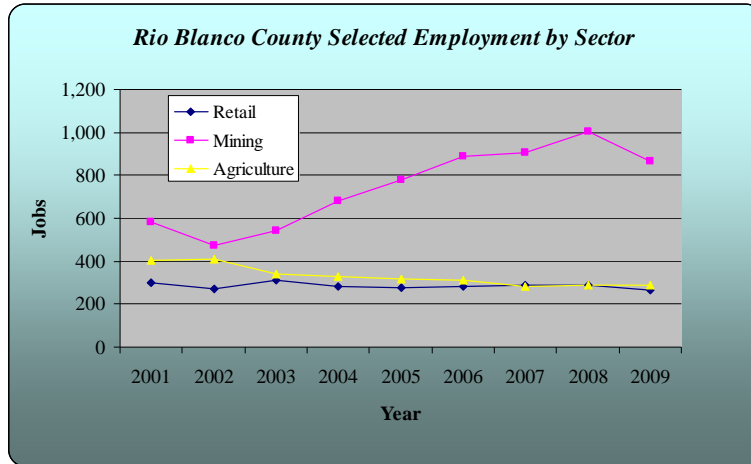


Figure 13

Jobs, Employment & Unemployed Persons

The following table shows that the economy in Rio Blanco County has remained stable during the last two decades. Comparing the Employed Persons to Estimated Total Jobs, you can follow certain events that have occurred in the county. For example, the early 1980's show a steep decline in jobs and employed persons, which are a result of the oil shale bust during that time. The number of total jobs has outpaced employed persons. This can be attributed to the number of non Rio Blanco County residents that come to work in the county because of available high paying jobs and to a lesser degree, an indication of the number school age and retired persons. Since 2008 and the economic downturn, the number of available Rio Blanco County jobs has declined and unemployment rates have been on the increase.

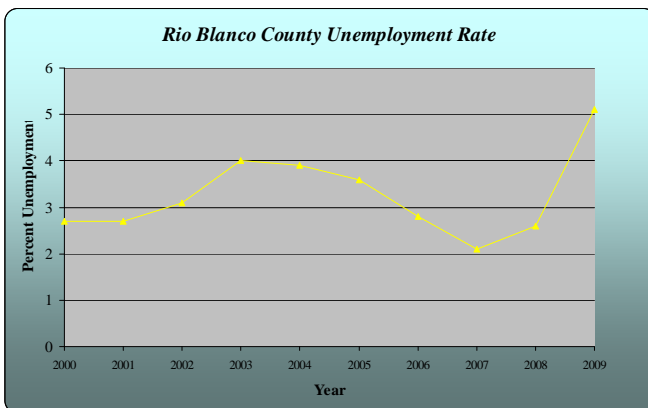


Figure 15

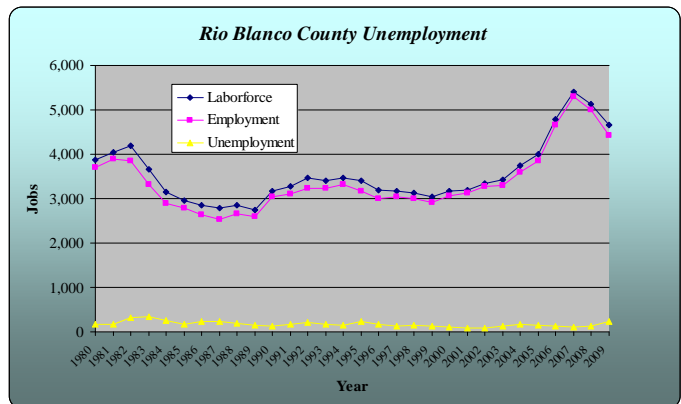


Figure 15

The Housing

Rio Blanco County Total Households vs. Housing Units

The total households and housing units have remained steady for nearly twenty years. Slight fluctuations can be noted but largely these moderate trend lines are indicative of a steady population. This trend may also be used as an indicator of the economy and demographic make up of the county. For example, the national average for a household is approximately 2.5 persons per household. If the Total Household trend line was closer to the Total Housing Units trend line that could indicate that there are fewer people per household thereby suggesting that there is a large retirement population or single occupancy that results from the energy industry workforce.

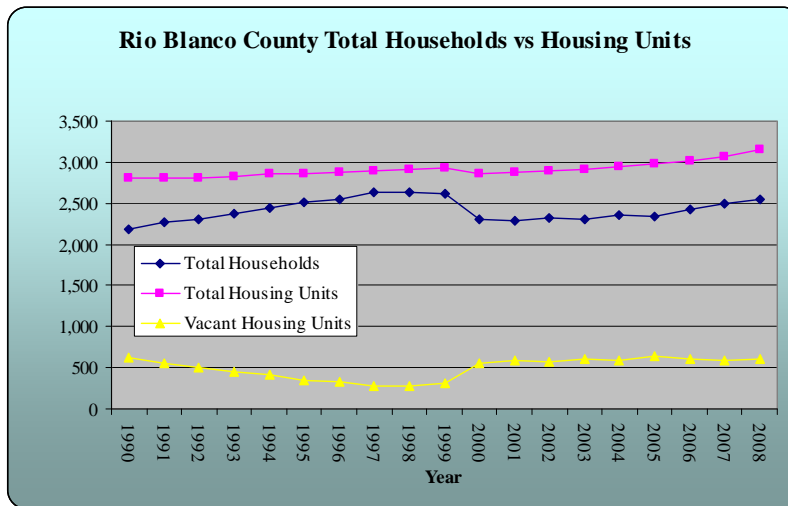


Figure 16

Rio Blanco County Building Permits

Building permits remained steady until 2000 when they increased by nearly 300% by 2007. Increases in building permits were prevalent throughout the Western Slope during that period when the housing industry was going strong.

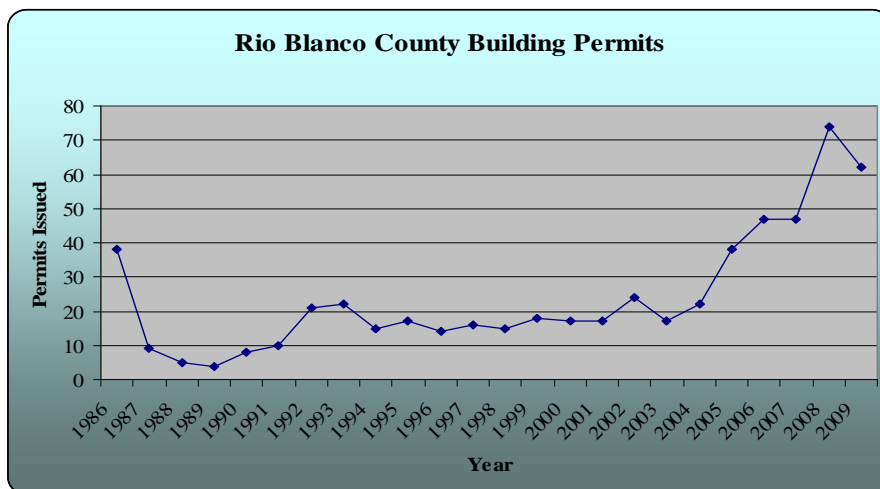


Figure 17

Total Housing Units

Housing units are consistent in number between the two incorporated towns and the county. The density however is much lower in unincorporated Rio Blanco County. The area of land in the towns is much smaller than that of the unincorporated county. Comparing these numbers to the Total Households vs. Housing Units Graph, you get a snapshot of one year that shows where those households exist. Two thirds of the housing units exist in the towns.

Persons/Household 2008

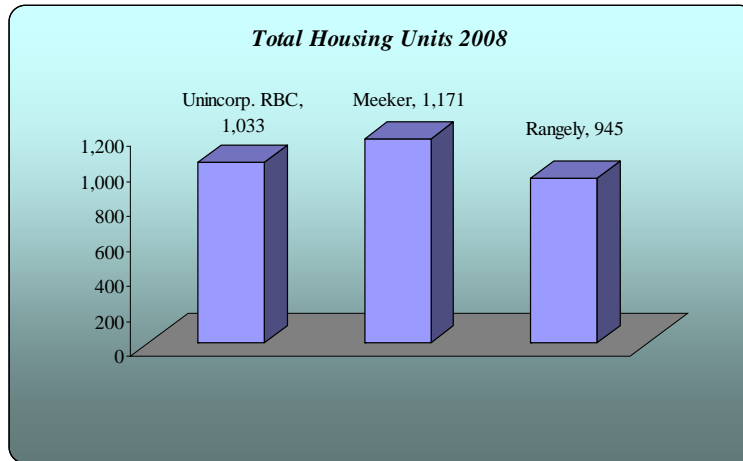


Figure 18

The persons per household are lowest in Meeker, which may be an indication of a slightly higher retirement population. The highest persons per household, in Rangely are an indication of a greater transient work force that occupies units with multiple roommates and the college with a large concentration of occupants. The national average during the 2000 US Census was the same as that of Rangely so it may be that the lower averages seen in unincorporated Rio Blanco County and Meeker are a result of fewer families being able to locate in the area, which could be for a number of different reasons.

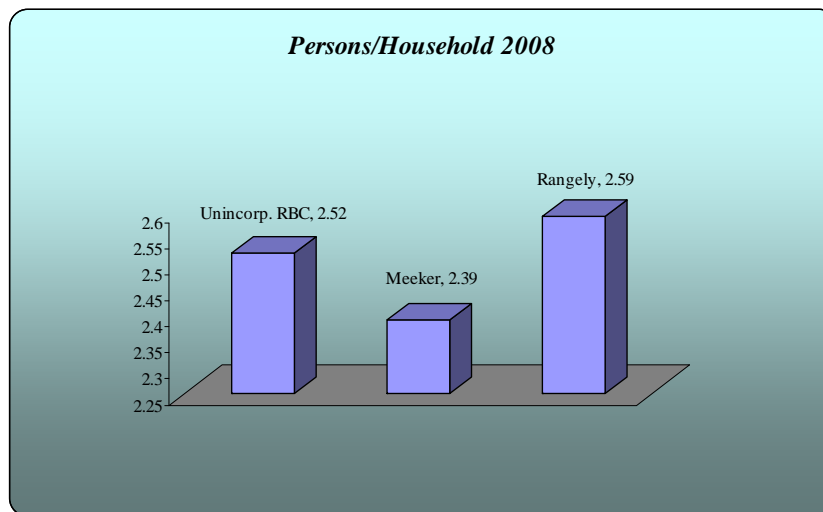


Figure 19

Transportation

The surface transportation system for Rio Blanco County consists of the network of state highways, county roads, local streets, and private, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management roads. Due to the rural nature of the county, the automobile is the predominant transportation choice for trips made within the county. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the county are generally limited to the areas within the downtown portions of Meeker and Rangely. Abundant forest service and BLM trails and roads are scattered throughout the more scenic areas. Public transportation is limited to private shuttle services for area employers as well as for seniors in the incorporated towns. A private toll road provides access to a portion of the Piceance Basin. There are two local airports and one operating railroad corridor in the county.

Roadway Network

Rio Blanco County is served by three state highways (SH) - State Highways 13, 64, and 139 provide most of the regional mobility within the county and to adjacent counties. County roads, local streets, private, Forest Service, and BLM roads generally extend out from intersections with the primary state facilities (see transportation map).

State Highway 13 is a 41.5-mile corridor extending from the Garfield County line on the south through the Town of Meeker to the Moffat County line on the north. Generally, SH 13 is classified as an "R-A" (Regional Highway) in the State of Colorado *State Highway Access Category Assignment Schedule*. An approximate 2-mile section within Meeker exists where the highway is classified as a "NR-B" (Non-Rural Arterial).

State Highway 64 extends from the intersection of US 40 in Moffat County (Dinosaur) east through Rangely and along the White River valley to SH 13 near Meeker with approximately 72 of the total 74 miles of highway occurring within Rio Blanco County. Generally, the highway is classified as an "R-A" (Regional Highway) with an approximate four mile section within the Town of Rangely that is classified as "NR-B" and "NR-A" (Non-Rural Principal Highway). The initial section of highway between Dinosaur and Rangely (SH 139) is designated part of the "Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway" (scenic byway). The final two-mile section as SH 64 approaches SH 13 is classified as an "R-B" (Rural Highway) by CDOT.

State Highway 139 extends south about 72 miles from Rangely to intersect with Interstate 70 in Loma. SH 139 is classified as an "R-A" highway within Rio Blanco County. The highway is rural in nature and forms part of the "Dinosaur Diamond Scenic and Historic Byway" from Douglas Pass on the south to the Town of Rangely. Travel across Douglas Pass can be a daunting task during periods of bad weather.

The county maintains over 920 miles of roads and approximately 29 bridges that are more than 20 feet in length. A structural sufficiency rating report completed by Lonco, Inc. in 2008 found three bridges structurally deficient (SD), three bridges functionally obsolete (FO), and the remaining bridges neither SD nor FO (with higher sufficiency ratings). Structurally deficient means there are elements of the bridge that need to be monitored and/or repaired. The fact that a bridge is "deficient" does not imply that it is likely to collapse or that it is unsafe. It means they must be monitored, inspected and maintained.

Functionally obsolete bridges are those with deck geometry (e.g., lane width), load carrying capacity, clearance, or approach roadway alignment that no longer meet the criteria for the system of which the bridge is a part.²⁵ Common reasons for functional obsolescence include narrow bridges and low clearances, often characteristics of structures built before standards became more

²⁵ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Office of Engineering, Bridge Division, National Bridge Inventory, January 2005.

stringent. Structurally deficient bridges include CR 73 over White River, CR 10 over White River, and CR 23A over White River, while functionally obsolete structures include CR 10 over S. Fork White River, CR 10 over White River, and CR 5 over Piceance Creek.

Approximately 193 miles of county road have an asphalt surface while the remaining 727 miles are primarily gravel roads. The roads are all two-lane, with a few climbing or passing lane sections existing on the state highways. One traffic signal exists in Rio Blanco County at the intersection of SH 64 and White Avenue in downtown Rangely. All other intersections are stop-controlled or have no control posted in rural locations.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Because of the rural nature of the county and relatively low traffic volumes on most of the roadways, dedicated pedestrian and bicycle facilities are rare and have not been a priority to plan and construct. Bicycles and pedestrians are required to share the roadway with the vehicular traffic. In some locations of newer development, dedicated bike and pedestrian facilities have been established, predominantly in the incorporated areas as well as east of Rangely.

Transit and Public Transportation

There is no regional transit authority established in Rio Blanco County or established public transit system within Meeker or Rangely. Several oil and gas companies provide daily bus transit for employees accessing operations in the county. Additionally, van transit services are utilized by senior care centers in Meeker and Rangely. The school systems and community college are the final component providing limited public transportation within the county.

Railroads

There is one existing rail line currently in operation in the county that runs from the Deserado coalmine northeast of Rangely to the Deseret Power Plant in Utah just over the state line. This line is an exclusive line for the power plant, with no spurs or connections to any mainline. An historic narrow-gauge rail grade exists from Bonanza, Utah, west of Rangely that traveled south over Baxter Pass to Mack, Colorado. This was used to transport mined Gilsonite from the mine to the mainline of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. There are places where track still exists, but most of this has been removed and remains a rural dirt grade and is of scenic and historic interest.

Airports

There are two airports in the county. They are owned and operated by Rio Blanco County and serve general aviation. Meeker Airport was originally established by the Town of Meeker but was turned over to Rio Blanco County in 1959. Originally constructed to 4,500 feet long, by 1991, the 6,500 foot long by 60 feet wide runway was completed. Meeker airport serves a multitude of general aviation users including recreational and student pilots, Federal agencies, medical flight operators, aerial spray operators, air taxi operators, and business use by mining, tourism, and other interests. Types of aircraft using the airport include small single-engine aircrafts, business jets, and helicopters.²⁶

The Rangely airport is located two miles east of the Town of Rangely. The airport has a single 6,400 foot long by 75-foot wide runway in fair condition. Considerably more air traffic exists at the Rangely airport, primarily because of the Colorado Northwest Community College's (CNCC) flight training programs. Annual operations at Rangely exceed 47,000 per year, while annual operations at Meeker have been in the 8,000 range for the past several years. An operation is classified as a take-off, landing, or touch-and-go procedure by an aircraft on the runway.

²⁶ Meeker Airport Master Plan

Scenic Byways

The Flattops Scenic Byway and the Dinosaur Diamond Scenic and Historic Byway are two designated highways that link to recreational, cultural, and historic resources in the county and surrounding counties. The Flattops Scenic Byway extends 81 miles from Meeker to Yampa, in Routt County. The route follows County Road 8 within Rio Blanco County. This route is maintained by the Forest Service at the end of county service (above Snell Creek) and is closed to through traffic throughout the winter. Motorized winter vehicles utilize the many miles of groomed trails. The Flattops Scenic Byway provides endless recreational access opportunities throughout the year to approximately 115,000 acres of land in the Routt and White River National Forests.

The Dinosaur Diamond Scenic and Historic Byway follows the entire length of SH 139 from Loma to SH 64 in Rangely. The Byway then follows SH 64 west to the county line near Dinosaur. This is part of a 512-mile loop stretching west into Utah through Vernal, Price, and Green River that encompasses one of the world's most concentrated dinosaur, fossil, and archeological regions.

Existing Volumes

On state highways, current traffic volumes were found on CDOT's website for the SH 13, 64, and 139 corridors. On SH 13, the 2008 24-hour volumes range from 1,800 vehicles per day (vpd) north of County Road 15 to 7,800 vpd in Meeker. On SH 64, the 2008 24-hour volumes range from 1,200 vpd near County Road 65 to 6,600 vpd in Rangely. On SH 139, the 2008 24-hour volumes range from 1,000 - 1,200 vpd between Douglas Pass and Rangely.

On county roadways, traffic data was compiled from the Road and Bridge Department and showed that County Roads 3, 5, 8, 26, and 29 have carried historical daily volumes in excess of 1,000 vpd but less than 3,000 vpd. All other county roadways carry less than 1,000 vpd. County Road 5 has historically been the busiest county roadway, providing access to the Piceance Basin, which has experienced significant growth in the past ten years. This growth, which often correlates well with traffic volumes, has leveled off and even decreased in the current climate of low natural gas prices. During the height of the recent gas boom (fall 2007), 2,738 daily vehicles were counted at Mile Post 24 (north of CR 26). Recent counts from April 2009 show 1,369 vehicles per day at this same location. Other count locations throughout the county show similar reductions in traffic volumes over the past 1 – 2 years.

Capacities of two-lane facilities typically range in the 10,000 vpd – 20,000 vpd, depending on the roadway's geometry and design. A rural highway with no shoulders or turn lanes may carry only 8,000 vpd, while an improved two-lane highway with turn lanes and generous shoulders may carry 18,000 vpd. Given the current volumes of traffic on county roads, roadway and intersection capacity does not appear to be an issue throughout the county. At intersections with State Highways where volumes are greater, the volumes on the state highway are still within reasonable limits to allow sufficient intersection and roadway operations. Several locations will be identified in the next section where turn lane and shoulder improvements will benefit the current safety issues and long-term capacity at some county road/state highway intersections.

The Environment

Rio Blanco County's unique environmental character and abundance of natural resources have helped to shape the culture, economy and lifestyle that have been the mainstay of its residents for generations. The county's history is rooted in ranching, mining and energy development and outdoor recreation. This same environmental character will continue to attract new residents and economic interests to the region. New growth will need to be managed appropriately with an

effective planning process with political support, so that future generations can enjoy the same unique character that has been afforded to their predecessors. This chapter will discuss the environmental conditions as they exist today and provide a baseline to set goals for maintaining the integrity of the environmental character into the future.

Floodplain

The county has participated in the National Flood Insurance Program since 1990. The areas within Rio Blanco County that are within the 100-year floodplain have been identified and mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Such maps, known as Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM), are the base flood maps used by the county for administering the floodplain regulations. The 100-year floodplain can be defined as the area adjacent to a stream channel that is inundated by unobstructed large flows that occur, on average, once every 100 years.²⁷

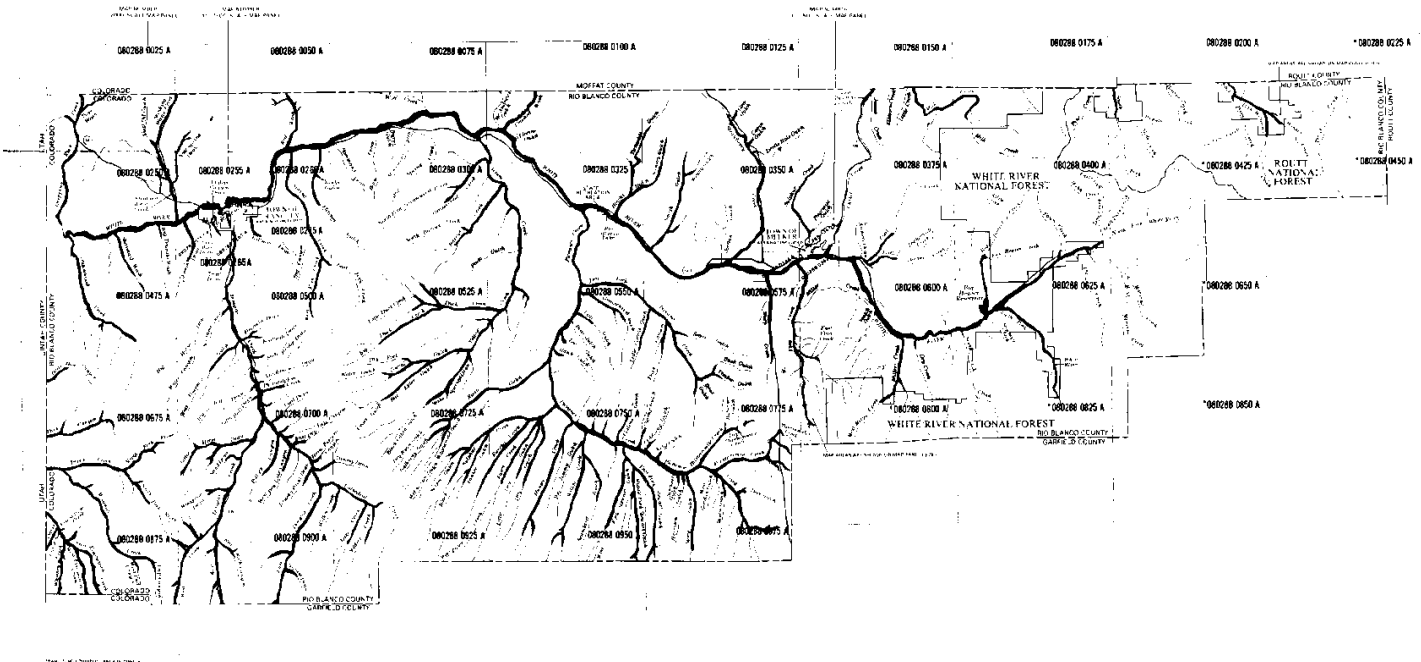


Figure 20

The FIRMs show that the areas within Rio Blanco County that are prone to a 100-year flood event are those areas adjacent to the White River as well as the tributary creeks to the White. The likely causes of flood events in Rio Blanco County have been identified as spring thaw snowmelt, monsoonal flash flooding and ice jamming during winters.

Geography

Rio Blanco County's geology is a complex mix of sedimentary and basaltic rock layers that have been uplifted and warped by tectonic forces. The geology has resulted in several unique features that physically and visually define the county. The Grand Hogback traverses the county in a north/south direction. The Hogback is a Mesa Verde outcrop lifted during the Laramide Orogeny

²⁷ Rio Blanco County Emergency Management Council, 2003, Rio Blanco County Pre-Disaster Natural Hazards Strategic Mitigation Program and Plan: Accessed May 28, 2009, at URL http://www.dola.state.co.us/dem/mitigation/rioblancopdm_plan.pdf.

and is visible from the moon. The White River uplift, east of the Grand Hogback has elevations ranging from 6,000 to 12,000 feet. The resulting eco-systems are characteristically different from those in the western part of the county. They receive more precipitation, which results in varying plant and animal life. The geologic features are also unique because glacial and stream erosion has exposed these oldest Paleozoic bedrocks in the county. Basaltic rock outcrops resulting from volcanic activity are most evident in the Flat Tops area in areas around Trappers Lake. West of the Grand Hogback in the west/central part of the county, the Piceance Basin (hydrologic) is the most significant geologic feature. It extends west to the Cathedral Bluffs. West of the Cathedral Bluffs is the Douglas Creek Arch, a north/south trending feature.

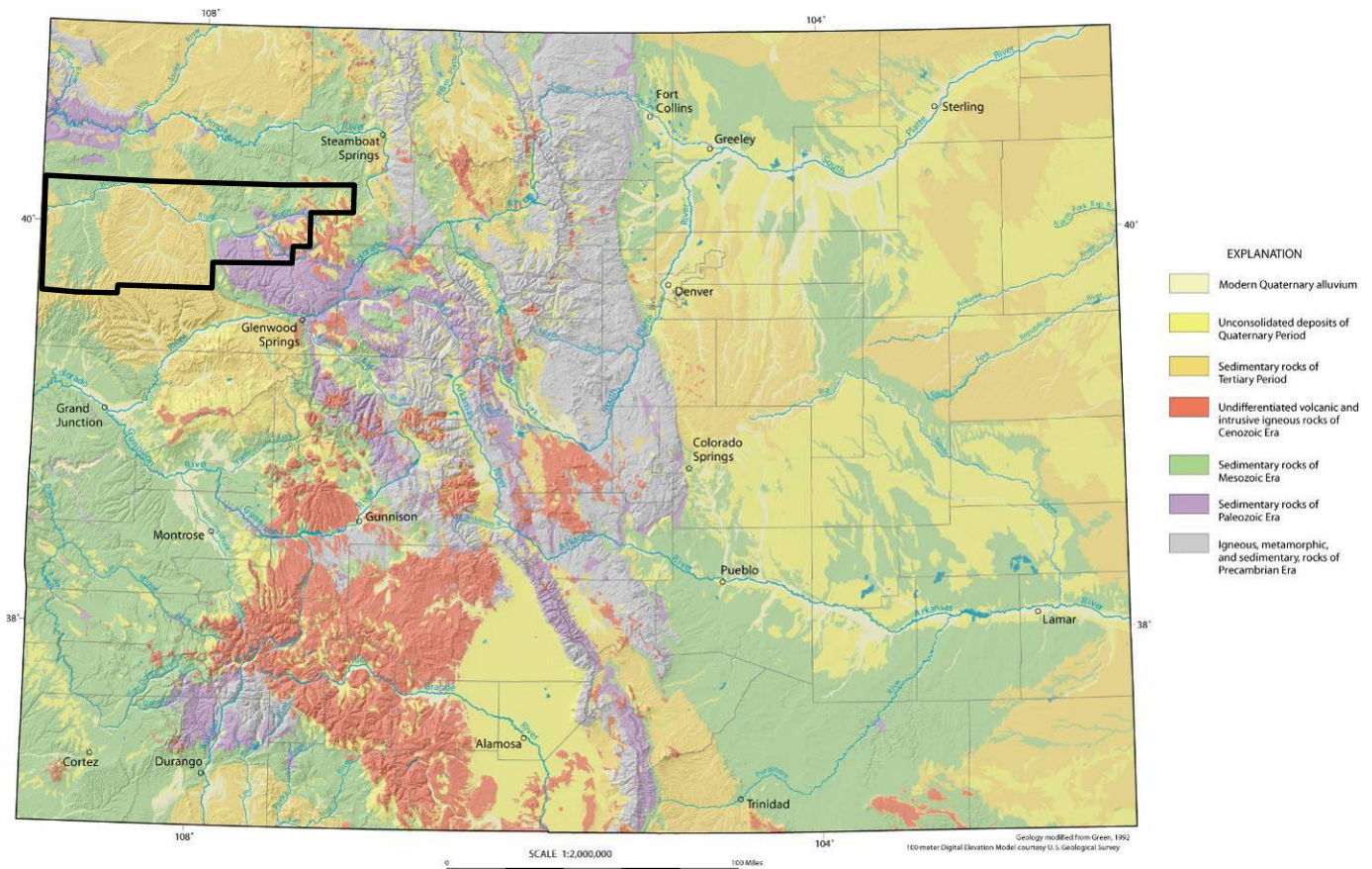
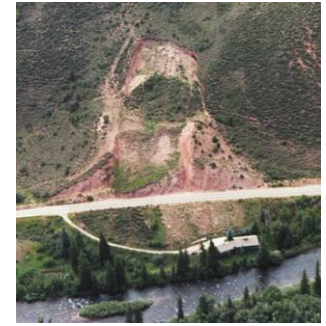


Figure 21

Geologic Hazards

The stability of soils varies throughout Rio Blanco County and in general can be characterized as unstable and highly erosive. For example, there are water-soluble soils in the floodplain near Rangely. The Rio Blanco County Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan identifies several land stability issues that exist within the county. These are debris flow/fans; erosion/deposition; landslide; rockfall; swelling soils; collapsing soils and sinkholes.



Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife habitat in Rio Blanco County varies greatly through several different ecological systems that support a variety of plant and animal species. The sensitive balance of biological diversity should be maintained in order to sustain the populations of flora and fauna that exist in the county.

The Nature Conservancy has identified three separate ecoregions within the county. These are the Southern Rocky Mountain ecoregion, which encompasses the area east of the Grand Hogback. To the west of the Grand Hogback and generally south of the White River is the Utah High Plateaus ecoregion. North of the White River is the Wyoming Basins ecoregion.²⁸

Contained within the ecoregions are several ecological systems that vary according to several factors including elevation and precipitation. The following table, taken from the *Survey of Critical Biological Resources Rio Blanco County, Colorado* represents the majority of ecological systems present within the county and includes their associated acreages and percent of total land area in the county.

Ecological System	Acres	Percent of County
Colorado Plateau Pinion-Juniper Woodland & Shrubland	683,787	33.1%
Inter-Mountain Basins Big Sagebrush Shrubland	356,638	17.3%
Rocky Mountain Aspen Forest and Woodland	224,442	10.9%
Rocky Mountain Gambel Oak-Mixed Montane Shrubland	201,403	9.8%
Rocky Mountain Subalpine Dry-Mesic Spruce-Fir Forest and Woodland	115,521	5.6%
Inter-Mountain Basins Montane Sagebrush Steppe	103,779	5.0%
Agriculture	102,629	5.0%
Rocky Mountain Lower Montane-Foothill Shrubland	73,084	3.5%
Inter-Mountain Basins Greasewood Flat	24,135	1.2%
Southern Rocky Mountain Montane-Subalpine Grassland	20,848	1.0%
Inter-Mountain Basins Mixed Salt Desert Scrub	18,415	0.9%
Rocky Mountain Montane Dry-Mesic Mixed Conifer Forest and Woodland	17,900	0.9%
Rocky Mountain Subalpine-Montane Riparian Woodland and Shrubland	14,562	0.7%
Inter-Mountain Basins Mat Saltbush Shrubland	12,629	0.6%
Rocky Mountain Subalpine Mesic Meadow	8,284	0.4%

²⁸ Colorado Natural Heritage Program, 2008, Survey of Critical Biological Resources Rio Blanco County, Colorado: Accessed June 5, 2009, at URL http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/documents/2008/cnhp_rioblanco_final.pdf.

Ecological System	Acres	Percent of County
Rocky Mountain Lodgepole Pine Forest	6,982	0.3%
Inter-Mountain Basins Shale Badland	4,471	0.2%
Rocky Mountain Lower Montane Riparian Woodland and Shrubland	4,365	0.2%
Inter-Mountain Basins Semi-Desert Grassland	1,920	0.1%

Within these ecological systems, there are obligate species that depend on the vegetation communities that exist, for their survival. There are also indicator species whose populations are indicative of the health of a particular vegetative regime. Examples include the Greater Sage-grouse, Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse, Sage Sparrow and Brewer’s Sparrow that are all obligate species to the Inter-Mountain Basins and Montane Sagebrush Shrubland and depend on the sagebrush as a source of food and cover. The health of the Rocky Mountain Subalpine Dry-Mesic Spruce-Fir Forest and Woodland can be discerned by the pine marten population, an indicator species for this ecological system. The beaver is considered the primary user and maintainer of the Rocky Mountain Subalpine-Montane Riparian Woodland and Shrubland. These are only a few of the examples demonstrating the importance of the relationship between the different ecological regions and the fauna that occupy them.²⁹

The Bureau of Land Management assesses the health of wildlife habitat within Rio Blanco County using its standard for public land health for animal communities. In general, areas that do not meet the standard for public land health have likely been affected by historical grazing practices, feeding practices and associated uses near water. Areas that have been affected by these historical practices are dominated by cheatgrass, an invasive plant species. Such plants displace the native species and usually have no natural enemies so can become prolific, changing the habitat and affecting the populations of animals that depend on the native plants for their survival. Other issues have been identified as sparse grass/forb understory due to closed canopy within the pinon and juniper habitat. This is a result of fire suppression, which has allowed the canopy to grow restricting understory growth. Other identified issues affecting habitat are drought, localized big game use, increasing elk populations, increased recreation and harassment of deer and elk on the summer and winter ranges and invasions of noxious weeds.³⁰

Other species that can be found within Rio Blanco County are moose, coyote, beaver, mountain goat, pronghorn antelope, wolverine, lynx, black bear and mountain lion. Smaller mammalian species include the Desert Cottontail, Wyoming Ground Squirrel, Kangaroo Rat, Muskrat, Shrew, Rock Squirrel, Pinion Mouse, Porcupine, Colorado Chipmunk, Yellowbellied Marmot and Snowshoe Hare. Bird species consist of jays, chickadees, thrushes, tanagers, finches, hawks, eagles, sandhill cranes, waterfowl and shore birds. Few amphibians exist within



²⁹ Colorado Natural Heritage Program, 2008, Survey of Critical Biological Resources Rio Blanco County, Colorado: Accessed June 5, 2009, at URL http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/documents/2008/cnhp_rioblanco_final.pdf.

³⁰ Bureau of Land Management White River Field Office, 2007, Oil and Gas Resource Management Plan Amendment/ Environmental Impact Statement: Accessed June 10, 2009, at URL http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/land_use_planning/rmp/white_river/documents.html

the county, with the Great Basin Spadefoot and boreal toad being the two identified examples.³¹

There are 119 lakes in Rio Blanco County that include Aldrich Lakes, Beaver Lake, Cove Lake Reservoir, Heart Lake, Rainbow Lake and Marvine Lakes to name a few. Two major waterways in the county include Piceance Creek and the White River. There are numerous other seasonal creeks in western Rio Blanco County and many perennial streams within the White River National Forest. These streams are host to many different fish species and aquatic life. Fish species include the razorback sucker, Colorado pikeminnow, Colorado River cutthroat trout, roundtail chub, brook trout, German brown trout, lake trout, Northern pike and mountain white fish. Several of these are considered game fish, including the trout species and Northern pike and white fish. The razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow are both Listed Endangered species and the Colorado River cutthroat and roundtail chub are species of State Concern.

Visual Resources

Visual resources within Rio Blanco County are cherished assets and contribute to the quality of



life for its residents and visitors. The County Community Survey that was distributed between February and March of 2009 included a question asking residents to identify local features that should be preserved from development impacts. While the question was not specific to visual resources, the answers were indicative of the fact that visual



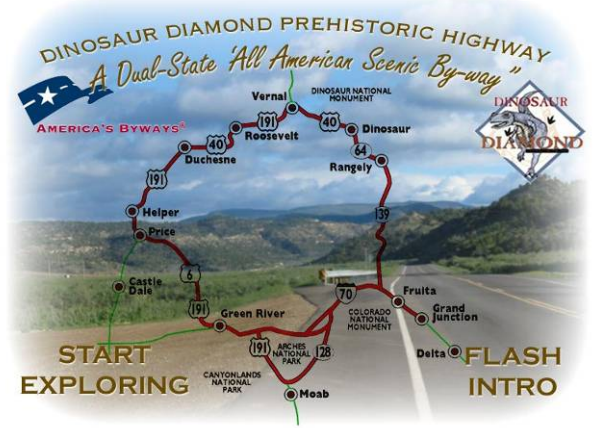
resources have an impact on the quality of life for Rio Blanco County residents. A few examples of the responses that reinforce this statement refer to scenic views on west and east sides of Meeker, bluffs north of town, ridgelines, skyline views, White River corridor, scenic byways, upper White River Valley, irrigated/open agriculture lands.

Visual resources are affected by the air quality that can become degraded as growth occurs. This includes nighttime skies that in rural settings are often of great quality. According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), the air quality in Rio Blanco County is good with pollutant concentrations below applicable Colorado and National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

The topography of Rio Blanco County, like much of western Colorado can be characterized by its hills, cliffs, mountains and expansive valleys. The lower elevations in the western part of the county near Rangely are semi arid, receiving less than 10 inches of precipitation annually. The higher elevations in the eastern part of the county near the Marvine Peaks receive as much as 50 inches of precipitation. Much of this precipitation is in the form of snow that eventually flows westward into the lower river valleys and irrigates the agricultural lands that enhance the visual resources in the county. These watershed corridors such as the White River, Douglas Creek, Cathedral Creek, Strawberry Creek and Marvine Creek have high quality visual resources because of the abundance of vegetation, rock features, wildlife viewing opportunity, water features and color variation throughout the year.

³¹ Colorado Natural Heritage Program, 2008, Survey of Critical Biological Resources Rio Blanco County, Colorado: Accessed June 5, 2009, at URL http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/documents/2008/cnhp_rioblanco_final.pdf.

Other important visual resources include the Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway and National Scenic Byway, the Flattops Trail Scenic Byway, Canyon Pintado National Historic District and Cathedral Bluffs. Wilderness areas can also be included for their high visual quality.



Facilities and Services

Rio Blanco County facilities and services are supported by revenues collected by the county such as state severance tax, federal mineral lease tax, sales tax and property tax. A way to define what one gets for their contribution of tax funds is known as level of service (LOS). Level of service is a quantitative description of the services a resident of Rio Blanco County receives. This information can relate to both services and infrastructure.

The county hired consultants in 2007 to complete studies that would quantify the current level of service provided to county residents as well as identify capital facilities needs and identify an appropriate fee for new development to help pay for those capital costs. The studies completed were a Fiscal Impact Analysis, Capital Facilities Plan, Public Facilities Mitigation Fee Support Study and Road and Bridge Impact Fee Support Study. The following tables list the services and facilities provided in Rio Blanco County. They are split into two separate tables because one represents those services and facilities provided specifically by the county and the other represents those services or facilities provided through special districts.

County Provided Services and Facilities

County Department/Services	Services Provided	Facilities
Social Services	Public Assistance Programs	Rangely & Meeker
Municipal & County Courts	Court Services	Rangely & Meeker
Public Health	Public & Environmental Health	Rangely & Meeker
County Assessor	Properties & Valuations	Meeker
County Treasurer	County Finances	Meeker
County Administration	Commissioners, County Administrator GIS Mapping & Other	Meeker & Rangely Annex
Sheriff	Law Enforcement	Rio Blanco County Court House & Rangely Sub Station
Road and Bridge	County Infrastructure	Meeker & Rangely
Building Department	Building Codes	County Building Meeker
Planning and Development	Land-Use Regulations	County Building Meeker

County Department/Services	Services Provided	Facilities
White River Roundup	Senior Meal Program	Senior Center (Rangely) & Fairfield Complex (Meeker)
County Fair	4-H events	Meeker Fairgrounds
Sheriffs Department	County Communications	Radio
Veterans Administration	Administration	Meeker Town Hall & Rangely Annex
CSU Cooperative Extension	Agriculture & 4-H/Youth	Fairgrounds & County Western Annex
Radino Senior Transportation	Transportation	Administration Building
Senior Transportation	Transportation	Eastern County Health Services District
Weed and Pest Control	Weed/Pest Management	Rio Blanco County Shop
Rio Blanco County	Recreation/Education	Meeker Fairgrounds
County Land Fill	Solid Waste Disposal	Wray Gulch Landfill
N/A	Senior Nutrition & Housing	Fairfield Complex
Radino Senior Center - Rangely		
County Extension Office	Provides facilities for recreational and educational activities	Columbine Park
Meeker Airport Authority	Runway/Fuel	Meeker Airport
Rangely Airport Authority	Runway/Fuel	Rangely Airport

Special District Provided Services and Facilities

District/Government Name	District/Government Function/Services	Service Area	Facilities
911 Board	911 Services	Eastern RBC	Sheriff's Office
Eastern RBC Health Service District	Healthcare and wellness-hospital, long term care, family health center, senior transportation and in-home care	Eastern RBC	Hospital (wallbridge wing and health center)
Eastern RBC Metro Rec & Park District	Recreation services	Eastern RBC	Meeker Recreation Center, Dorcas Jensen Memorial Park, Fay Action Park, Paint Brush Park
Emergency Telephone Service Board	911 Services	Western RBC	Rangely Police Department
Lower White River Pest Control District	Spray for pests	Western RBC	N/A
Meeker Cemetery District	Operates Cemetery	Eastern RBC	Miller Hill, Black Sulphur (closed), Strawberry, Pyramid (closed) and Highland Cemeteries

District/Government Name	District/Government Function/Services	Service Area	Facilities
Meeker Housing Authority	Low Income/Elderly Housing	Eastern RBC	The Pines 15 units apartments
Meeker Regional Library District	Public library	Eastern RBC	Library Facility
Meeker Sanitation District	Wastewater treatment	Town of Meeker	Mechanical-Activated Sludge Treatment Plant
Piceance Creek Pest Control District	Spray for pests	Western RBC	N/A
Rangely Cemetery District	Operates Cemetery	Western RBC	Rangely Cemetery
Rangely Hospital District	Healthcare and wellness services-hospital, long term care, EMS, family health, and home health	Western RBC	Eagle Crest (assisted Living), Hospital
Rangely Housing Authority	Disabled/Elderly Housing	Western RBC	White River Village
Rangely Junior College District	Education	Western RBC	State Owned Facilities
Rangely Regional Library	Public library	Western RBC	Library Facility
Rangely Rural Fire Protection District	Fire protection	Western RBC	2,800 sq. ft. building.
Rio Blanco Fire Protection District	Fire protection, EMS, Search & Rescue	Eastern RBC 2,500 mi. ²	Meeker Fire house
Western Rio Blanco Metro Rec.& Park District	Recreation Facilities	Western RBC	Recreation Center, Elks Park, Rangely Camper Park, Cedar Ridges Golf Course, RHS Baseball Field, skating rink, tennis basketball courts, Escalante Site
Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District	Manage senior water rights; administer Yellow Jacket Storage Project; contract with USGS for water quality/quantity testing on White	Central to east Rio Blanco County, small portion of Moffat and Garfield Counties	None at this time
White River Conservation District	Natural Resource Services	Eastern 2/3 RBC. 386,652 acres private land; 30,640 acres state land; 494,174 BLM land; 235,736 Forest Service land	Building & vehicles through NRCS.

Preferences for Public Funding Allocation

The Rio Blanco County Community Survey completed as part of this planning effort asked residents to identify their preferences for public funding for county services and improvements. Each respondent was asked to allocate \$100 to the categories listed below.

1. Road maintenance
2. Hospital/Healthcare
3. Law enforcement
4. Fire /Emergency Services
5. Water & Sewer
6. Landfills
7. Senior Services
8. Public Land Access
9. Rec Facility/Center
10. Parks
11. Historic Preservation
12. Public Health
13. Open space
14. Traffic
15. Social Services
16. Public Transportation
17. Community Festivals
18. Airports
19. Cultural Amenities
20. Other
21. Parking

The responses clearly indicate a preference for funding core services as the highest priority. The top four priorities of road maintenance, hospital/healthcare, law enforcement and fire/emergency services underscore the importance of these public functions in Rio Blanco County. This information provides useful guidance to decision-makers about where to allocate often-limited public funds. Not all of these service and facility functions lie with Rio Blanco County. Water and sewer utilities are provided by municipalities and/or special districts. Similarly, healthcare and hospital services are not under the jurisdiction of the county.

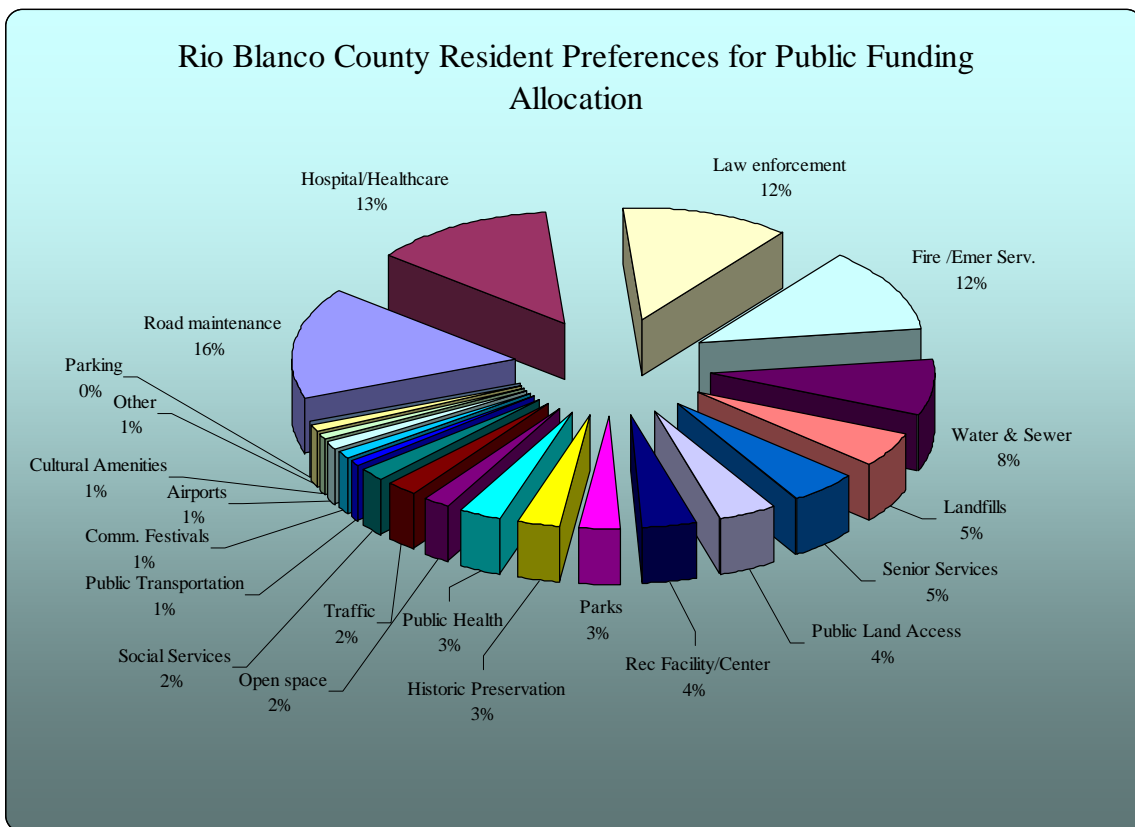


Figure 22

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement incidents show a sharp increase during the six year period from 2003 to 2008. The corresponding Incident Type Graph shows traffic contacts as the overwhelming majority of incidents during 2008. Increased traffic resulting from the energy industry may have created the impetus for increases in this type of incident.

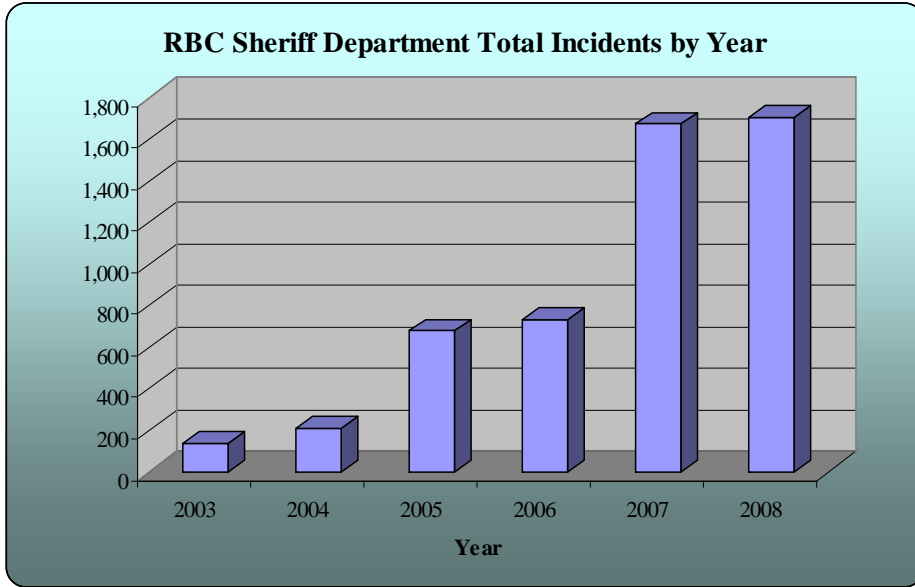


Figure 24

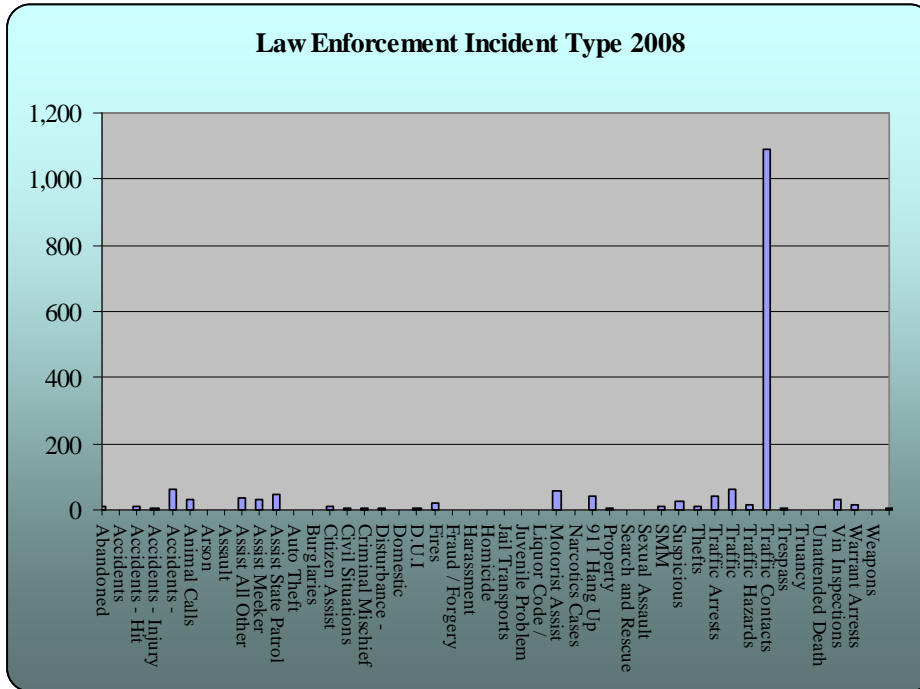
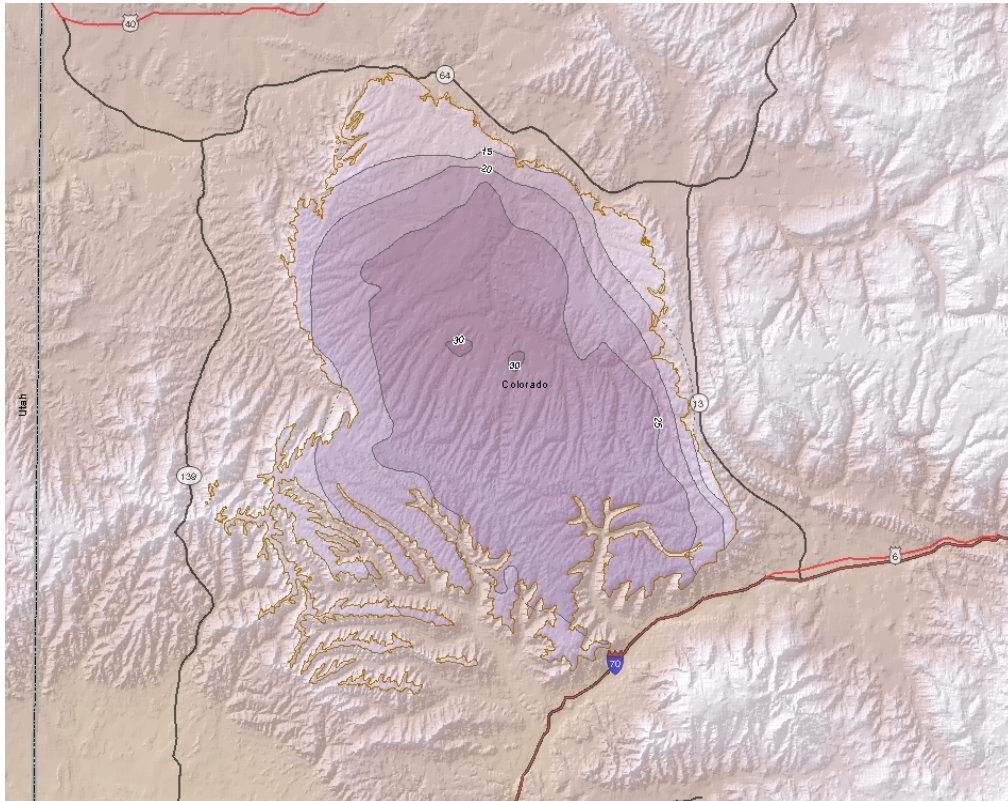


Figure 23

Oil Shale

No planning process in Rio Blanco County would be complete without a discussion about oil shale and its ramifications for future development of the region. Some of the richest oil shale deposits in the world are found in the heart of the Piceance Basin in Rio Blanco County. Recent estimates place the total oil yield in the Eocene Green River Formation in the Piceance Basin at 1.525 trillion barrels of oil.³²

The Piceance Basin, once part of ancient inland Lake Uinta, was a lush vegetated and diverse biotic environment 64 million years ago. Decomposed organic matter and sediments were deposited on the bottom of Lake Uinta starting in the Paleocene and spread east to the Piceance Basin during the Eocene.³³ These deposited materials became the carbon rich Green River Formation that contains not only the rich oil shale deposits but also deposited saline minerals such as dawsonite, nahcolite, halite as well as gas reserves.



USGS composite map of kerogen-rich zones (darker colors) and kerogen-lean zones (lighter colors) in the Piceance Creek Basin.¹

This oil-rich shale has drawn the interest of many speculators and investors since the early 1900s. Those portions of the Piceance Basin where the Green River formation lies exposed as cliffs and

³² Assessment of In-Place Oil Shale Resources of the Green River Formation, Piceance Basin, Western Colorado, USGS publication 2009-3012, March 2009

³³ Stratigraphy of the Green River Formation, Eastern Uinta Basin, Utah and Colorado—a Summary, WB Cashion, US Geological Survey, Denver, Colorado, 1995.

outcrops were the first sites of oil shale claims where direct access to the oil-rich shale was available. The 1917 report of the Secretary of the Interior about oil locked up in shales and the 1920 Minerals Leasing Act stimulated a rush of oil shale claims and operations in eastern Utah and Western Colorado that was comparable to the gold rush.³⁴

From these early years to the present, interest in oil shale has gone through periods of rapid fluctuation in development interests and subsequent declines because of political decisions and economics. The first oil shale boom went bust in the 1920s after a short run of prosperity and the subsequent discovery of more easily accessible liquid crude oil. A second resurgence in oil shale interest occurred during and after World War II with shortages of petroleum during the war and actions by President Harry Truman to open up leasing of oil shale lands.³⁵ This period of interest declined again when Congress suspended funding for the research facility at Anvil Points in western Garfield County.

Early 1980 brought the largest and most recent oil shale boom/bust cycle to Garfield, Mesa and Rio Blanco Counties. Exxon, Mobile, Union Oil (later became Unocal), Chevron, Tenneco, Occidental and other major oil companies arrived in pursuit of commercial oil shale development. The massive infusion of capital in the region brought in thousands of workers from across the nation to fill needed primary jobs. The boom also kicked off a secondary and tertiary job explosion in the construction industry focused on building houses, roads, utility facilities and other infrastructure to support oil shale development. These new workers filled restaurants, bars and demanded housing.

The substantial population increase stressed all local governments' ability to keep up with managing the growth. Exxon built a new planned community, Battlement Mesa, designed to handle up to 22,000 new residents at buildout. For political reasons, Battlement Mesa was not annexed to Parachute (known at that time as Grand Valley) even though this massive project is located just outside the municipal limits. This resulted in a large urban center being developed in the unincorporated area of rural Garfield County. Garfield County was and remains unequipped to provide urban level services to this urban center. The additional and disproportionate costs for urban services provided to Battlement Mesa are subsidized by all Garfield County residents.

Municipalities from Grand Junction to New Castle struggled to review and approve land-use applications for residential, commercial and industrial development. This development activity was taking place at unprecedented rates. Municipal infrastructure had to be upgraded to meet the new demands. Fortunately, Meeker resident Frank Cooley with the help of Colorado Senator Mike Strang worked to establish the Oil Shale Trust Fund from severance dollars to help provide upfront capital for much of the new infrastructure. These funds were distributed to impacted counties and municipalities in the region to provide much-needed capital.

Along with the newfound prosperity in the region came other impacts. There were housing shortages. Workers occupied every available motel room, mobile home and recreational vehicle space while others established makeshift camps along the rivers and in other secluded areas. The transient workforce strained social services, increased crime and overtaxed water/wastewater systems. Other side effects included increased pollution, noise and traffic congestion.³⁶ Local governments did the best they could to manage an untenable situation, but the pace of change in activity was, in large part, beyond their control and ability to cope.

³⁴ The Green River Formation in Piceance Creek and Eastern Uinta Basins, Paul L. Russell, PE, 1995.

³⁵ What Every Westerner Should Know about Oil Shale: A Guide to Shale Country, Jason L. Hanson, Patty Limerick, Center of the American West, University of Colorado at Boulder June 2009.

³⁶ What Every Westerner Should Know about Oil Shale: A Guide to Shale Country, Jason L. Hanson, Patty Limerick, Center of the American West, University of Colorado at Boulder June 2009.

As quickly as it started, the oil shale boom was over. Exxon pulled the plug on their Colony Project on May 2, 1982 on a day that became known as "Black Sunday". In 24 hours, thousands of people on the Western Slope were without jobs. The trickle down effect of the closure of the Colony Project resulted in a mass exodus of employees. Restaurants were empty. Housing projects were stopped in mid-construction. Contractors employed during the boom, many of whom were from communities over 60 miles away, were without work. Banks and businesses failed. Wastewater systems that were oversized to meet projected demands had portions of the facilities mothballed to maintain proper function. Entrepreneurs that were flush with cash filed for bankruptcy. \$85,000,000 in annual payroll disappeared from the regional economy in just a few years. Between 1983 and 1985, 24,000 people left Rio Blanco, Garfield and Mesa Counties and unemployment went from 0 % to 9.5%.³⁷

One oil company continued to operate after Black Sunday. Unocal negotiated price guarantees of \$42 per barrel from the Synthetic Fuels Corporation and continued operations for 10 years after the bust. The shale oil produced by Unocal was primarily sold to the US military as jet fuel. A few other companies continued to work on their projects. After millions of development dollars were spent and various extraction technologies had been implemented, oil prices remained volatile and oil shale remained unprofitable.

The stigma associated with Black Sunday remains on the Western Slope with regard to oil shale. There are important lessons to be learned from the most recent boom and bust cycle. First, it is difficult to effectively plan for the unknown timing of future oil shale activity. The safety net of the Oil Shale Trust Fund is gone except in Rio Blanco County where the county still holds \$18.5 million dollars and uses the interest for annual county projects. The prospect of oil shale development still looms on the horizon. There remains increasing US demand for petroleum fuels, competition from China and India and increasing interest in domestic fuel production. The provisions of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 offers political stimulus for renewed oil shale activity.

Currently, BLM has issued leases to three companies operating in the Piceance Basin to work on developing commercially viable methodologies for extracting oil from shale. Shell, Chevron and American Shale Oil are working on research and development of three different methods for oil extraction from shale. It is anticipated that the efforts of these private companies will extend over a period of 10 years or more. The current policy of the Department of the Interior is a "go slow"

Population by County, Baseline Scenario

County	Projected Population						
	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035
Garfield	50,673	67,253	78,393	95,860	109,894	119,979	136,697
Mesa	130,662	148,594	166,410	182,170	196,824	220,594	235,272
Moffat	13,426	17,705	19,798	22,014	24,257	25,483	26,356
Rio Blanco	<u>6,073</u>	<u>9,753</u>	<u>11,360</u>	<u>13,055</u>	<u>14,724</u>	<u>16,822</u>	<u>18,624</u>
Total	200,834	243,305	275,961	313,099	345,699	382,878	416,949

Note: Excludes commercial oil shale activity.

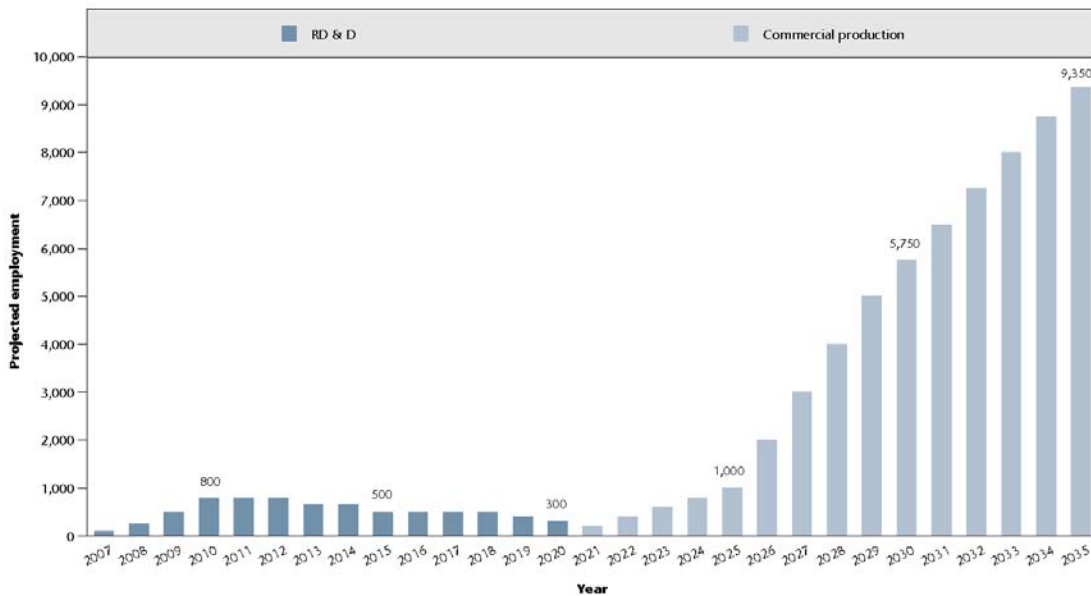
Source: Northwest Colorado Socioeconomic Projection Model, BBC Research & Consulting, 2008 and Colorado State Demography Office, 2008.

approach. However, one never knows when the political winds may change and/or the availability of foreign oil supplies and pricing may again create an environment in which there is a rapid push towards development of synthetic fuels and oil shale.

³⁷ What Every Westerner Should Know about Oil Shale: A Guide to Shale Country, Jason L. Hanson, Patty Limerick, Center of the American West, University of Colorado at Boulder June 2009.

One of the greatest challenges for planners attempting to predict the impacts of oil shale development is making accurate population projections. Population projections from the 1980s oil shale boom for 2010 still have not been realized 30 years later. A 2008 report completed for Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado by BBC Research & Consulting with assistance from the Colorado State Demography Office included the following commercial scale oil shale development projections for population and employment. Although these numbers have recently been revised downward, the projections are based on assumptions and assumptions for oil shale development can change quickly.

Exhibit III-5.
Projected Direct Oil Shale-related Employment in Northwest Colorado, 2007–2035

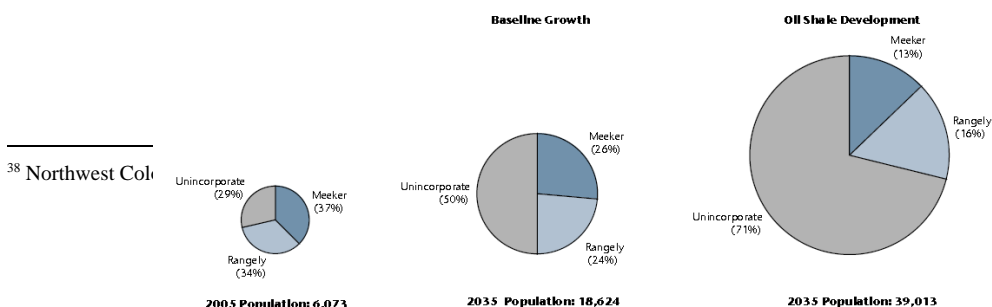


Source: BBC Research & Consulting, 2008.

The BBC report projected that Meeker and Rangely would not be in a position to absorb the new growth and that a new town may be necessary to accommodate the influx of population.³⁸ This proposition is contrary to the public input obtained during the Rio Blanco County Master Plan Process. Responses from county residents to the Master Plan Survey and community input at numerous Master Plan meetings supported growth within or adjacent to existing communities where services and infrastructure can be cost-effectively provided. Public feedback also supported flexibility in county regulations to allow development of support facilities near energy development sites to accommodate short-term fluctuations in workforce population. Rio Blanco County currently permits support facilities for natural gas development and production facilities.

The concept of a new town(s) and/or substantial development in unincorporated Rio Blanco County suggested in the AGNC report was not supported by Rio Blanco County residents during this Master Plan process.

Rio Blanco County Population Distribution, 2005 and 2035

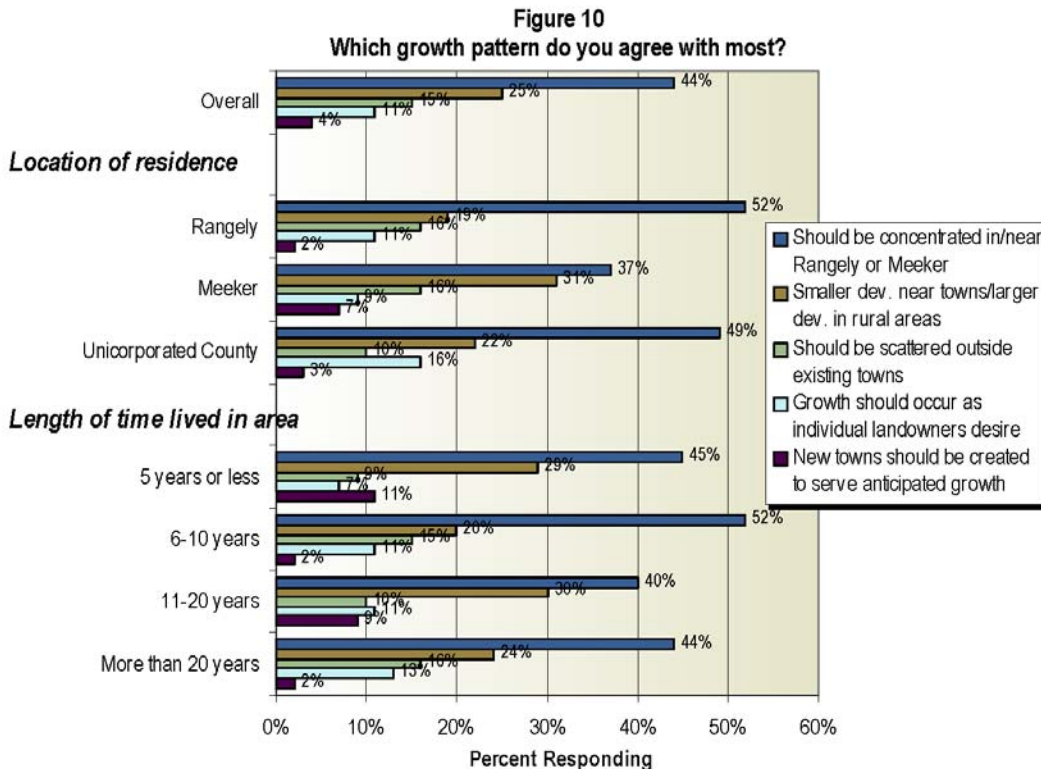


Source: BBC Research & Consulting, 2008.

Growth

Opinion of growth patterns. Different future growth patterns result in varying consequences to the county. A recent report sponsored by the Associated Governments for Northwest Colorado states that “Because the existing municipalities may not be able to absorb the anticipated growth, much of the future growth is assigned to unincorporated county areas.” The survey was conducted as part of an overall planning effort. Planning can help Rio Blanco County prepare for the anticipated growth, if and as desired by residents. The survey outlined a number of statements regarding growth patterns and asked respondents to indicate which statement they agreed with most.

- 44 percent of respondents feel growth should be concentrated in or near the incorporated towns of Rangely or Meeker. Agreement with this statement was greater among respondents who live in Rangely and the unincorporated county.
- 25 percent of respondents feel growth should be addressed by a combination of smaller lot developments near towns, and large lot developments in rural areas. Agreement with this statement was greater among respondents who live in Meeker.
- 15 percent of respondents feel growth should continue to occur in the existing pattern of development in scattered small and large lot development outside existing towns.
- 11 percent of respondents feel growth should occur as individual landowner’s desire without any overall direction.
- 4 percent of respondents feel new towns should be created to serve anticipated growth from the energy industry.



The crystal ball for predicting the future energy development in Rio Blanco County and the region remains fuzzy. It is probable that there will be continued development of natural gas supplies, associated pipelines and facilities will occur with fluctuations in drilling activities based upon gas pricing and market demands. However, the timing of future development of oil shale remains unknown. Peak world oil production may have been reached or will occur in the near future. Declining world oil supplies and increasing competition from China and India in conjunction with instability in the Middle East could bring oil shale back to the forefront in the next decade.

Rio Blanco County needs to be prepared to respond if oil shale development begins again in a substantial way. The direction from Rio Blanco County residents for this Master Plan is to incorporate growth projections based upon historic and current growth rates using high and low range scenarios that do not include rapid commercial development of oil shale. The rational basis for this approach is that predicting the timing of future oil shale development and the scale of activities is at best, difficult. The county should be prepared to respond to future commercial oil shale development by creating comprehensive regulations for large-scale energy activity that requires applicants to address the impacts of their activities on the county in an all-inclusive way. Development that occurs on a large scale should respect and support the core values of Rio Blanco County residents identified in this plan through the public input process. The planning procedures used to manage major development activities must consider on-site and off-site socioeconomic impacts, infrastructure, community development, transportation, housing and environmental impacts. The lessons learned from the last oil shale boom and the experience gained during the recent natural gas development cycle should serve as a basis to prepare Rio Blanco County for future oil shale development or any large-scale development activities. The financial safety valve provided by the Oil Shale Trust Fund is gone. Rio Blanco County should work closely with the State of Colorado and federal agencies on all future large-scale energy development permitting activities to ensure that there is a coordinated process with a scope of interest that extends beyond that of the individual permitting agencies. A coordinated planning process should be focused on broad-based solutions that do not leave the residents of Rio Blanco County in the dust.

Infrastructure/Capital Improvements

The county hired consultants in 2007 to complete studies that would quantify the current level of service provided to county residents as well as identify capital facilities needs and identify an appropriate fee for new development to help pay for those capital costs. The studies completed were a *Fiscal Impact Analysis*, *Capital Facilities Plan*, *Public Facilities Mitigation Fee Support Study* and *Road and Bridge Impact Fee Support Study*.

The *Fiscal Impact Analysis* identified as its purpose the following:

1. To estimate the current dollar cost per increment of development to maintain existing public service operations levels for General Fund Departments and Law Enforcement. This sets a benchmark for understanding the link between land use, the demand for public services and facilities, and costs to Rio Blanco County.
2. Consider the costs of future projected growth to the year 2022.

The Study focused on the General Fund portion of the county's budget, specifically the Administration and Sheriff/Law Enforcement sections. The cost of providing services was determined for each of these budget sections based on a "demand unit." The demand units are identified in the study as per residential unit, per new 1,000 square feet of non-residential floor space and per new oil and gas well. In addition, it estimated the number of staff it takes to

provide the existing level of service per 1,000 residents, per 1,000 square feet of non-residential floor area and per active well. The annual cost for each staff person per unit was also figured. Finally, the study projected the revenues and additional employees needed for maintaining the current level of service in the year 2022.

The Sheriff/Law Enforcement level of service was also identified per demand unit that are the same as those for Administration. The number of officers and support staff to maintain the existing level of service as well as additional building floor area needed to house additional staff was the focus of this section.

The *Capital Facilities Plan* is a fifteen-year forecast of the facility needs and requirements for housing public services, particularly those studied in the Fiscal Impact Analysis - Administration and Sheriff/Law Enforcement. Capital improvements can be defined to include major projects of large size, fixed in nature, having a long life, and requiring the expenditure of significant funds over and above annual operating expenses. They are further defined as items for purchase, construction or other acquisition for the betterment of the community and which add physical value to the county.³⁹ The needed capital improvements identified to maintain the existing level of service are renovations to the Courthouse facility and a new justice facility. The estimated cost of these improvements, in 2007 dollars, is \$13,495,392. The funding sources identified to pay the debt service on the buildings are property tax revenues and mitigation fee revenues. Other sources of revenue such as grant funds can also be used for debt obligations.

The *Public Facilities Mitigation Fee Support Study* was completed as a requirement of Senate Bill 15, which gave counties and municipalities authority to charge impact fees to new development to fund capital facilities. The Study outlines two fee schedules, one for Administrative Public Facilities and another for Law Enforcement/Judicial Facilities. Impact fees are charged separately for residential, non-residential and oil and gas impacts and are calculated based on the demand each of these land uses have on the county facilities and services. The conclusions of the demands for service for each of these land uses were determined to be 34% residential, 27% non-residential and 39% oil and gas industry for general fund/administrative departments and 12.1% residential, 42.4% non-residential and 45.4% oil and gas for Law Enforcement functions.⁴⁰ The resulting impact fees are as follows:

	General Fund/Administrative	Law Enforcement	Totals
Residential	\$522	\$918	\$1,450
Non-Residential (per 1000 sq. ft.)	\$445	\$973	\$1,427
Oil and Gas	\$96	\$159	\$352

The *Road and Bridge Impact Fee Support Study* was also completed in conformance with Senate Bill 15 and requires new development to contribute to the anticipated impacts to road and bridge infrastructure in Rio Blanco County. The study cited oil and gas activity and the associated new growth in residential and commercial activity as the primary need for such an impact fee. The forecasted activity for oil and gas is expected to produce 16,500 new wells within a 15-year time frame. This increase of production is associated with a sharp increase in large truck traffic in the areas where the oil and gas activity occurs. The majority of activity and therefore impact to road and bridge infrastructure is expected to occur in the western part of the county. The study cites that 99% of the impact or axle load will come from oil and gas trucks.

³⁹ RPI Consulting, 2007, Rio Blanco County General Fund Administrative, Law Enforcement/Justice Facility, & Road & Bridge Capital Facilities Plan 2007 – 2022, p. 5

⁴⁰ RPI Consulting, 2007, Rio Blanco County Public Facilities Mitigation Fee Support Study, p. 5

The specific improvements that have been identified are road structure improvements, bridge improvements and expansion of fleet and facilities. The impact fees have been estimated based on the projected oil and gas development and associated residential and commercial activity to bring in \$292,516,327 by 2022. The analysis of impact to the road and bridge infrastructure was measured in terms of axle equivalency, the number of equivalent single passes by an 18,000-pound axle. Each pass of an 18,000-pound axle equivalent was valued at \$9.07 that is the fair share contribution for new development. This has been broken down into the impact per residential unit, per 1,000 square feet of commercial space and per well. The resulting fees are as follows:

Residential	
Single Family (all detached units and duplexes)	\$600
Multi-Family	\$400

Nonresidential	Per 1000 Square Feet of Floor Area	
Shopping Center	\$6,500	
Office/Institutional	\$1,700	
General Commercial	\$1,900	
Mixed Industrial	\$1,000	
Warehousing	\$800	
Manufacturing	\$600	
Oil and Gas Well (per well)		Per Well
Gas or Oil Well		\$17,700
Well with On-site Produced Water Disposal		\$10,600
Shallow Well (per well less or = 5,500 ft. deep		\$10,300

County staff was interviewed to determine the currency of the studies and to discuss the progress of their implementation. Following the initial submission of the studies county staff worked with the consultants to verify the growth projections that ultimately reduced the anticipated number of wells and pushed the 2022 projected impacts out a few additional years.

Discussions with the county Road and Bridge Department confirm that their first priority among the list of needed capital improvements is upgrading County Road 5 (Piceance Creek Road). A County Road 5 Improvements study that was conducted by AECOM in 2008 identified deficiencies along the corridor to include poor pavement structure and shoulder widths, inadequate sight distance and passing sight distance at intersections and curves, and narrow bridges that have inadequate hydraulic capacity. Since completion of this project will require approximately \$120 M, no other capital improvement projects are planned by the Road and Bridge Department until this extensive upgrade is complete.

The immediate prioritized County Road 5 projects on the Road and Bridge Department's list include:

- Curve realignment at MP 11 – 12
- Intersection improvements at CR 3 and CR 24
- Replacement of 17 stock passes
- Road widening and passing lanes at MP 9 – 10.5 and MP 34.6 – 36
- Curve realignment and widening at MP 13.2 – 15
- Bridge replacement at MP 31.98 (#005-3198 over Piceance Creek)
- Additional preliminary engineering for other widening, realignment, and safety projects

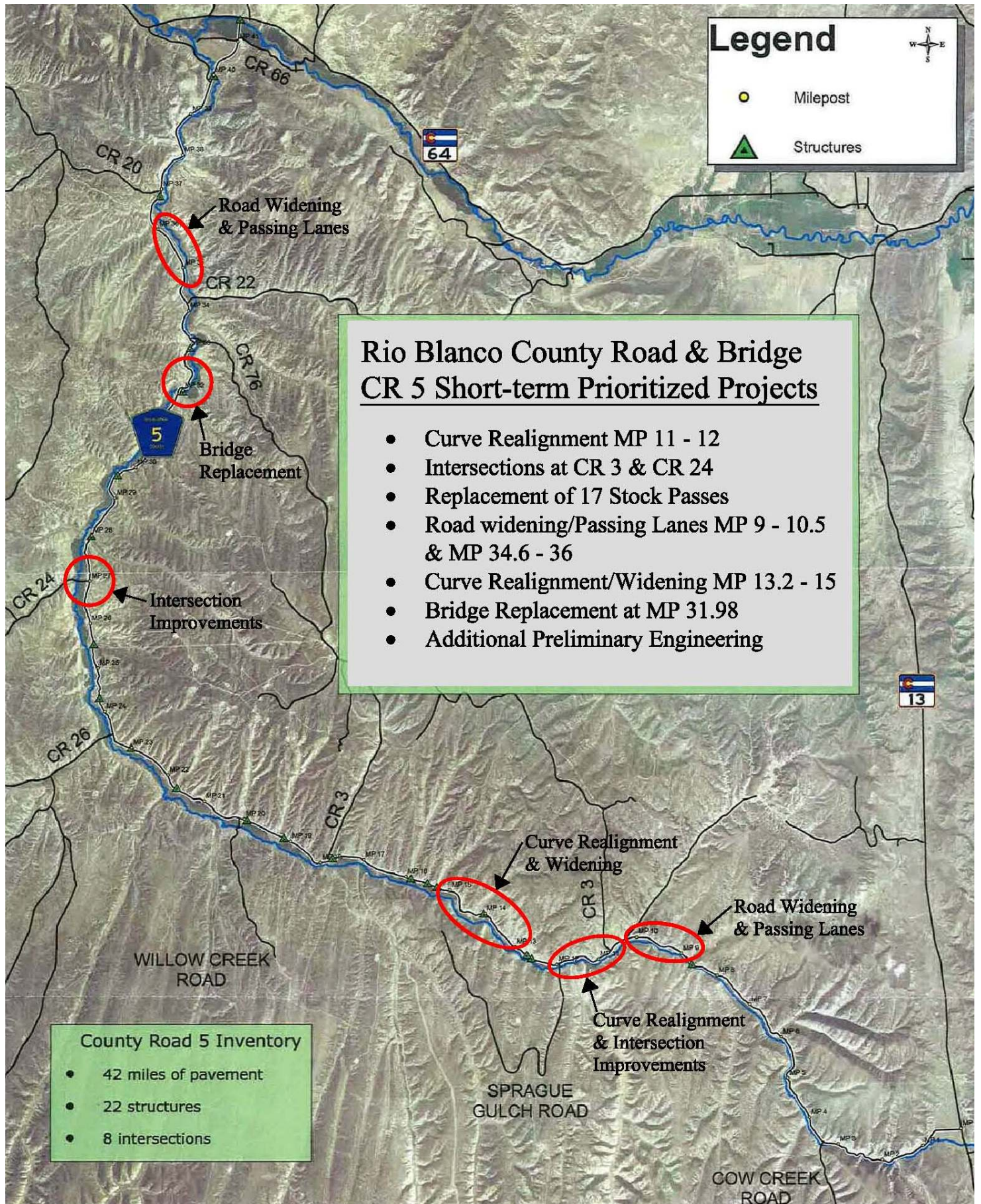
These specific projects are estimated to cost approximately \$37.5 M over the next 5 – 10 years. Impact fees have been adopted by the county Commissioners and since that time \$5,000,000 has been collected.

Recommendations

County staff will continue to update the studies annually and modify the projections based on the preceding years' impacts as well as industry projections. A comprehensive update should be completed in 2012, five years after the completion of the studies to ensure accuracy of the data as well as to make adjustments based on applicable changes in laws and rules governing development. County staff has already indicated that the projected number of wells is likely too high and therefore the pace at which the fee revenues will be collected as well as total amount of fees will be less than anticipated. This adjustment should be made in the studies as well as to the scope of capital improvement projects.

The county should begin assembling a timeline for expenditures of collected fee revenues and seek opportunities to leverage such funds with grants to maximize from the collected fee revenues.

The studies are currently used and updated by one county staff person. Other county planning staff should be familiar with and assist in the updates to the plans so staff turnover will not adversely affect the administration of the studies or the collection of impact fees.



Legend

- Milepost
- ▲ Structures

Rio Blanco County Road & Bridge CR 5 Short-term Prioritized Projects

- Curve Realignment MP 11 - 12
- Intersections at CR 3 & CR 24
- Replacement of 17 Stock Passes
- Road widening/Passing Lanes MP 9 - 10.5 & MP 34.6 - 36
- Curve Realignment/Widening MP 13.2 - 15
- Bridge Replacement at MP 31.98
- Additional Preliminary Engineering

County Road 5 Inventory

- 42 miles of pavement
- 22 structures
- 8 intersections

Forecasts

Population Forecasts

Population forecasts have been predicted at varying rates in recent years. Some forecast population increases nearly ten times the current county population in 25 to 30 years. These estimates were predicated on major increases in both natural gas and oil shale production. The county has historically grown at a rate closer to the low percentage shown on this graph. This includes the fluctuations in population seen during previous efforts of energy extraction in the county. The State Demographer has predicted that a rate close to the highest rate of 3.5% annual growth is likely. Given the historical population changes and a long history of energy production in the county, a moderate growth rate in the low to medium range is the likely trend for the county. It should be noted that the forecast below does not include projections associated with major oil shale development in the county.

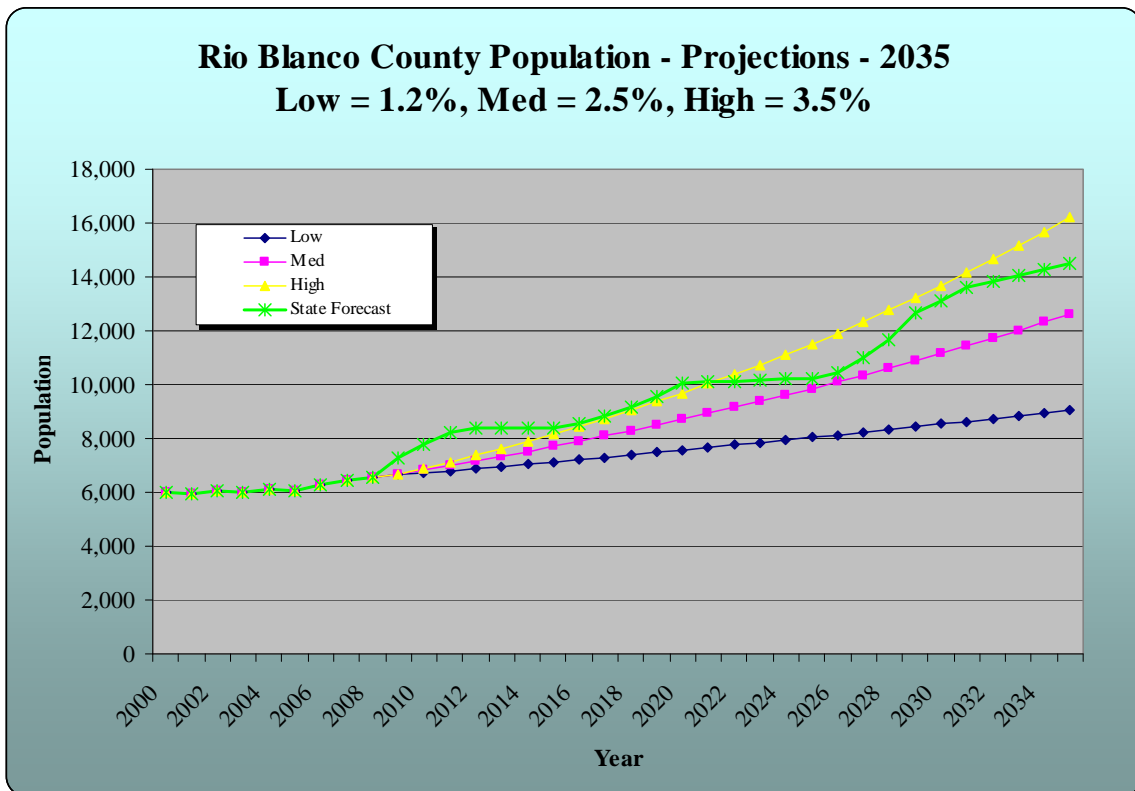
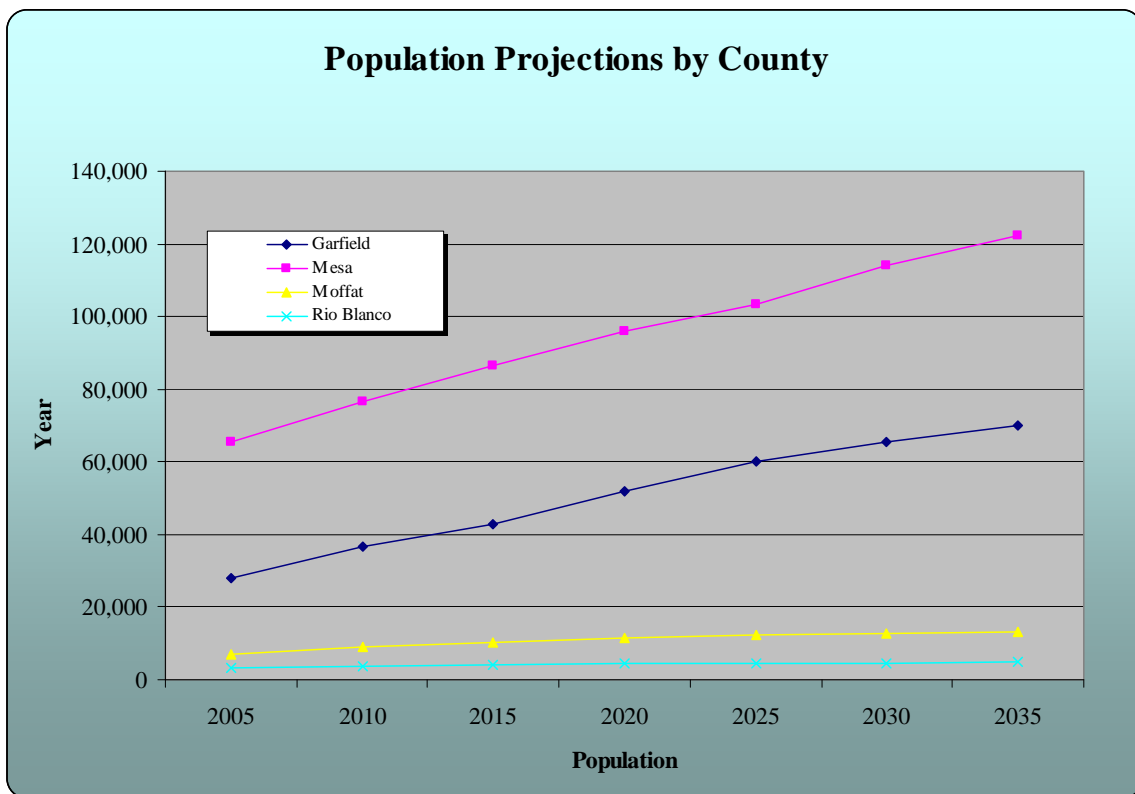


Figure 25

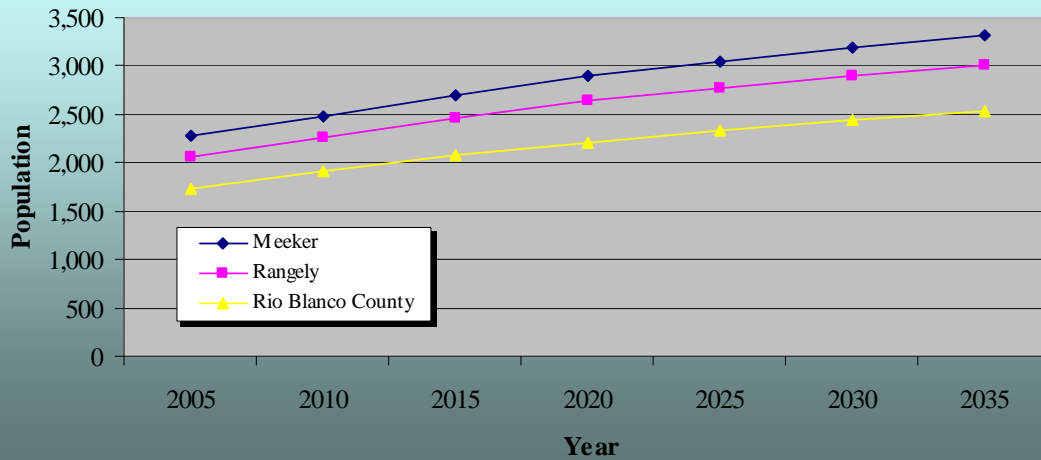
The following graphs show 2008 population growth estimates in Rio Blanco County that have been adjusted downward following their initial release in a Socioeconomic Study commissioned by the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado and completed by BBC Research & Consulting. The initial estimates showed oil shale production increasing dramatically over the next few decades resulting in drastic increases in population. The initial estimates indicated a tenfold increase in population in Rio Blanco County by 2035, but these numbers have been adjusted down to reflect an expectation of more moderate growth. This came about after further evaluation of the potential for oil shale and detailed review of historic population trends. The *Population Projections by County* graph reflects this change while the other counties still show the impacts of major energy production taking place over the next twenty-five years. Similarly, the *Municipal and County Populations* graph reflects the adjustments made to the BBC report, which show more moderate growth in each of those locations.

Source BBC Research & Consulting



The table of sub-county population estimates reflects the specific changes made in the BBC report. The estimates show that if commercial scale oil shale development occurs in the future, the county will be forced to take substantial measures to deal with such drastic change. This topic is discussed in the Oil Shale section of this Plan and it identifies the need under that growth scenario for the county to implement a permitting process that responds to large-scale energy development.

Rio Blanco County Municipal & County Population



Rio Blanco County Population by Sub-County Area, 2005 and 2035

Area	Projected Population 2035			
	2005	Baseline	Oil Shale	Difference
Rio Blanco County				
Meeker	2,273	3,315	4,938	1,623
Rangely	2,068	3,016	6,296	3,280
Unincorporated	1,732	2,535	27,780	25,245
Total County	6,073	8,866	39,014	30,148

Source BBC Research & Consulting

Plan Updates and Amendments

The Rio Blanco County Master Plan is designed to be a dynamic document that articulates the County Vision Statement, Goals and Policies of the county for future growth and development. This Plan is intended to guide decision making, as Rio Blanco County's future becomes its reality. The Master Plan needs to remain current. The basic County Core Values and Vision Statement from which this Plan is established are not expected to change significantly. However, as time moves on technical details in the document are likely to need modification and updating. Minor errors may be found in the Plan that should be corrected. The Master Plan amendment process is not directed at changing the Plan to fit the needs of a development proposal that does not comply, but rather, it allows the county and its residents to ensure that the basic tenets remain consistent with Rio Blanco County's future.

The Master Plan should be subject to review for updates every five years. The practice of periodic updates gives the county residents, Planning Commission and County Commissioners a chance to review, evaluate and consider changes to the policies and strategies defined in the document. This is also an opportunity for appointed and elected boards to renew ownership in the Plan. It is ownership in the Plan that is in accord with the County Vision that ensures long-term sustainability.

In addition to the regular Plan update process, two other methods are available for modifying the document. The simplest method is an **Insubstantial Amendment** to the Plan. Insubstantial amendments are reserved for small changes and/or corrections of errors found as the document is used. For example, population numbers may need to be updated as current information becomes available. Errors in the text or on the maps may be discovered and should be corrected. Language may be revised to better clarify the intent of a particular section. Insubstantial amendments are those that apply to a few sections of the document and do not change the intent or underlying principles of any given section. Insubstantial amendments are typically initiated by the staff, Planning Commission or County Commissioners annually or as they are needed.

Substantial Amendments are the second method for modifying the document and are reserved for major changes. Substantial Amendments are only available once a year on or near the anniversary of the Plan adoption and must be considered carefully. These amendments typically are directed to policy changes, multiple sections of the document or are a magnitude that warrants larger scale review. Substantial Plan amendments involve noticed public hearings before the Planning Commission.

Insubstantial and substantial amendments may also be initiated by county residents.

Plan amendments (substantial or insubstantial) shall be evaluated against the following criteria. The county planning staff shall submit written recommendations to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission is the final decision-making body on these changes and the Commission shall make written findings on each of the following items that shall be presented to the Board of County Commissioners no later than 45 days after a decision of the Commission.

1. The Plan section or sections subject to amendment are erroneous or have been found to be out of date.
2. The proposed amendment will not adversely affect transportation, delivery of services, or other major functions of the county.
3. An amendment does not bestow an individual benefit to a developer, property owner, or requesting party, but confers a benefit to the county as a whole.

4. A proposed change is compatible with existing uses, the Plan Vision Statement, Goals and Policies.
5. The amendment is based upon a considerable change in the land use character of an area that warrants modification.
6. The modification does not conflict with or inhibit logical cost-effective annexations by Meeker or Rangely.
7. The Plan amendment is consistent with logical provision of services, roadways and other essential county functions.
8. The amendment does not adversely affect sensitive environmental areas, air or water quality, or result in increased risks to public health, safety or welfare.
9. Strict compliance with the provisions of the section(s) to be changed conflicts with the intent of the Plan or creates conditions that were not intended in the document.
10. The amendment will not result in a reduction and delivery of county services, unmitigated traffic impacts or other conditions that create a financial hardship or other hardship for Rio Blanco County.
11. The amendment is in keeping with the overall intent of the Master Plan Vision Statement, Goals and Policies and is in the best interest of the county.

Public Input

Public Input Synopsis

The public input process conducted in both Rangely and Meeker in September of 2009 included a visual preference survey and a land use mapping exercise. The visual preference survey was developed to draw out participant's preferences for the types of development and land uses, design standards, transportation networks and recreation/open lands that are desired in the county as it continues to grow. These results will assist in developing goals and policy recommendations for development and land uses in Rio Blanco County.

The responses from the visual preference survey were tabulated and several useful details about design concepts and visioning for future development in the county can be gleaned. Some examples include preservation of agricultural resources for their provision of open lands, scenic quality, wildlife corridors, heritage resources and economic value.

Residential development was preferred in lower density with some positive feedback for clustering of housing if there were unique characteristics including architectural elements, landscaping and pedestrian access. Higher density was also preferred where it would preserve and harmonize with an agricultural landscape. Affordability was also recognized as an important element for residential development that supports the higher density preference close to services.

Streetscapes and roadway design was preferred with a rural aesthetic. There was also comment about the provision of pedestrian and bicycle access as an important part of the design. Participants preferred maintenance of the natural landscape. This meant minimizing the width of pavement when possible and eliminating excessive lighting.

Commercial development was also preferred as characteristically rural in design. This meant that signs and lighting should be managed to avoid excessive size and height. Landscaping was repeatedly expressed as an important detail in the design as well as provision of adequate parking. Some preferences on architectural details were mentioned such as covered walkways and unique design character.

Preferences for industrial development included well kept and organized grounds with screening and buffering to avoid negative visual impacts. Landscaping was also mentioned as an important detail as well as integrating uses indoors for light industrial uses. There was also a consensus of support for industrial development in the county.

Riparian areas and recreation areas such as parks and trails were preferred in their most natural state. There was a general understanding that development of such areas required some conversion to make access available and provide opportunity for recreation. Several comments were also made regarding the preservation of the environmental integrity of the natural landscape. These included maintenance of native vegetation as well as maintaining the natural meandering of waterways. Depending on the type of use and location, there was a preference of supporting a variety of recreation opportunities.

Comments on public service facilities were similar to those of the commercial and industrial. Architectural elements, landscaping, and screening of outdoor storage were mentioned as important details.

The mapping exercise was intended to encourage a group dynamic whereby participants were asked to draw their ideas of growth patterns and land uses on a large map showing the existing land use patterns present in the county. This was an opportunity to work with their neighbors in small groups and collaborate on ideas of locating future growth. Discussions included areas throughout the county and focused on residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial development. Also discussed were areas for a variety of recreation options that included preservation and enhancement of the White River corridor. Residential growth was largely directed toward the existing incorporated towns of Rangely and Meeker. Options for commercial corridors along the highways leading from the towns were also identified. Other commercial nodes were identified at either end of Highway 13 running through the Piceance Basin. Preservation of the historic agricultural land and uses was important to all the groups as was preserving the White River.

2009 Rio Blanco County Master Plan

Stakeholder Interview Questions

Summary

6/09

1. Identify the five most important issues you see facing Rio Blanco County in the next 20 years.

Housing

- Diversified, adequate, affordable housing (6)
- Establish a plan for variety of housing needs, availability and range of price.
- Value the County-supported housing inventory.
- Good data such as the housing needs inventory.
- Allow residents to rent rooms in their homes to provide housing.

Energy Development/Minerals Extraction

- Limitation on oil/gas exploration and decline in value of reserves = loss of revenue for public entities.
- Support for energy industry; can't go totally "green." Work well with them. Eastern slope needs them. Need to have a cooperative relationship with oil and gas industry. (7)
- Quit relying on energy industry to pay the lion's share of taxes. Cannot also rely on grants. Citizens need to step up and pay as well. Concerns were raised with taxing the energy industry thereby raising the cost of doing business.
- Support for energy development, but at the same time ensure that it is done properly.

Government Relations

- Lack of intergovernmental revenue sharing among jurisdictions providing services. (2)
- Improved communication and cooperation among all entities (government, business, community, energy industry). (13)
- Diversion/loss of Energy Impact funds (2).
- Make government services competitive in relation to other locations. (2)
- County spending and growth expanding too fast.
- Be approachable at all levels of government.
- Streamline government services.

- County should be proactive. (2)
- County should be accountable, build trust. (2)
- General dislike of taxes in Rio Blanco County. (2)
- A difficult regulatory process by Meeker and the County. Expressed by stakeholders that own property outside of Meeker in Rio Blanco County.

Regulation

- The layering of local, state and federal regulations on to the oil and gas industry.
- The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, federal agencies and local governments make the permitting process difficult for the energy companies. There was some recognition that some level of regulation is necessary, but a broader perspective that the energy companies were burdened by too many regulations.
- Overbearing development regulations such as impact fees. (4)
- Impact fees were sprung on the citizenry at the 11th hour when the momentum was already in place to adopt the regulations without sufficient public input. There is a general sense that the impact fees are not well-liked in the County. Staff feels that the impact fees serve a benefit to the County, but that perspective does not seem to be shared by the stakeholders at large.
- Clarity, flexibility, predictability, and consistency in regulations. Knowledgeable staff. (4)
- The escalating cost of day to day life in RBC. Mostly housing and the effect of the impact fees and building permit fees and engineered septic systems, etc.
- A sense of too much regulation or unnecessary regulation.
- A need for regulation at some level to protect values important to County residents such as air/water quality, wildlife and directing growth to appropriate areas

Economic Sustainability

- Skilled labor force (technicians, physicians, etc.), development, education and training, availability, and recruitment. No jobs for spouses. (2)
- Diversity in the economy; having jobs not just related to the energy industry. Need more industries in county, so we don't have to rely on just energy. Also consider light industry. (15)
- Tourism development such as the Taylor Draw Dam, Rock Crawlers Park. Deferred maintenance, insurance issues.
- Shopping opportunities.
- Engage the business community through the Chambers.

- Understand the difference between growth and prosperity. Sitting on a gold mine. Be patient.
- Sustainability of ranches.
- Recruit specialists to hospitals to prevent leakage to neighboring hospitals.
- More jobs so younger people can return to their communities.
- Encourage private services (retail/professional).
- Oil and gas development impacts = no lodging for tourists (2)
- County marketing to support hunting and fishing.
- County should be proactive and develop strategies in the good times for transitioning to longer-term sustainable economic activities after the extractive industries leave.

Transportation

- Good bus system needed.
- Transportation system improvements such as road from Rangely to the Roan.
- Decline in road and bridge quality. (3)
- Need inter-county or inter-state agreements on road maintenance such as CRs 5 and 7.
- County Road 5 impacts. (2)
- They need to be maintained and there is a perception that the added traffic in the county from oil and gas is having an effect on the infrastructure. (2)

Open Space/Recreation

- Protect access to public lands for multiple uses.
- Leave no trace.
- Importance of preserving open space as habitat and the importance of it for quality of life issues (recreation, visual resources).

Public Services/Facilities

- Outdated hospital/health care facilities, upgrade health care, access to mental health services, care for the elderly. (5)
- Revenues for all levels of education. Decline in population = decline in revenues, lack of critical mass to support all levels. (4)
- Relocate county shops.
- Upgrading communication system for police, fire EMS. Communications connectivity. The polycom was a great investment. Loss of local access to newspaper (Sentinel). Connectivity. (2)

- Loss of landfill in west end.
- No need for jail or hospital upgrades.
- Need to upgrade public facilities such as wastewater treatment, hospital, schools, justice center and no funds to do so. (4)
- Amenities for citizens. (2)

Natural Resources

- Protect environment.
- Diversion of water to front range, and generally its distribution. Availability and quality as well. Loss of water to industry which needs a lot of it. Need to preserve water on the land and evaluate the effects of removing the water. Loss of habitat, water quality, loss of historic ranches. (9)
- Invasive species.
- Air quality: referred to oil and gas specifically and whether or not they would be able to operate within legal limits. Also a concern that it needs to be maintained.
- Concern was expressed about wildlife impacts by energy development. Part of that concern focused around the importance of the fishing and hunting industry as important and long-term mainstay in Rio Blanco County.
- County residents are not going to injure the goose that lays the golden egg and damage wildlife that they recognize is important to the County for tourism and the outdoor industry.

Master Plan

- Completion of, and, then, adherence to, new master plan. (5)
- More notice about the comprehensive plan process is needed.
- Process needs lots of public forum.

Growth

- Growth issues in general. Don't need to lure folks here; they are already coming. Zoning, where will people live? (6)
- Planning, zoning, accepting growth, housing which fits all economic levels and infrastructure will ensure growth around existing communities. Scattered communities are the alternative. Cannot be economic diversity with such a scenario.
- Subdivision of large parcels (historic ranches) into smaller acreage.
- Rapid growth and impacts on services, infrastructure, housing availability and cost of housing.

Other

- Colonization of the County and all attendant issues (housing, infrastructure, provincialism, tribalism).
- Become more progressive.
- Citizens are too apathetic.
- Validate and use work of Community Task Force.
- Supporting historic preservation.
- Welcome new people.

2. Of those issues, tell us which ones most affect you as a stakeholder and why.

Housing

- Housing, affordable living, and the diversification of the economy to support it. (12)
- Lack of affordable housing limits ability of facilities to recruit skilled workforce.

Energy Development/Minerals Extraction

- Limitation on oil/gas and decline in revenues based on reserves.
- Support for and deregulation of energy which drives the revenues we have for things like education, infrastructure, and transportation. (3)
- No reason agriculture cannot co-exist with growing energy development as long as there is respect and cooperation between the two.
- Support for energy development, but at the same time ensuring that it is done properly.

Government Relations

- Collaboration.
- Avoid duplication of services (more efficiency).
- Frustration with government.
- Too much government control.
- Need consistency, predictability and knowledgeable staff as related to development.
- County officials should directly deal with constituents and not through outside consultant/engineers/attorneys.
- County should work together with people to problem solve. Ask the constituents but do not tell them. Be approachable at all governmental levels. (2)
- Lack of enforcement personnel.

Regulation

- The regulatory process at the local, state and federal levels drives up the cost of drilling and makes it difficult to do business in Rio Blanco County. The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, federal agencies and local governments make the permitting process difficult for the energy companies. Some level of regulation is necessary, but a broader perspective that the energy companies were burdened by too many regulations. (2)

- County standards are too tough.

Economic Sustainability

- Recruitment of skilled labor. (2)

- All issues blend together to affect economic development.
- Open for business attitude.
- Encourage private services.
- A lack of available housing for tourist industries because it is occupied by energy workers.

Transportation

No responses fell into this category.

Open Space/ Recreation

- Open space is a limited resource (bottom lands of the White River falls into several categories such as open space, habitat, water resources). Used example of Wheeler development as the type that built in an area of sensitivity.
- Water quality for fishing.
- Illegal outfitters.
- Wrongful posting of land.

Public Services/Facilities

- Hospital infrastructure.
- Revenues for education (2)
- Access to mental health services
- Don't overdevelop County facilities (jail, hospital). (2)

Natural Resources

- Balance between environment and growth. If we don't maintain the environment, people will not come.
- Public lands and multiple use.
- Natural resource exploitation and economic diversity.

- Utility corridors tear up big swaths of land and affect the habitat.
- As water rights are sold and taken off the land, there is a big impact to the watershed, habitat (fragmentation). Used example of the water rights owned by energy companies (specifically oil shale) and what would happen if they use their full allotment. Also, loss of water to metro areas (4)
- Air quality...three ways to measure it (particulate, ozone, visibility). This may have big impacts on energy development, if they can't maintain air quality and the standards are actually enforced.
- Concern over wildlife impacts by energy development. Focused around the importance of the fishing and hunting industry as important and long-term mainstay in Rio Blanco County.
- County residents are not going to injure the goose that lays the golden egg and damage wildlife that they recognize is important to the County for tourism and the outdoor industry.

Master Plan

- It will be difficult to include language in the plan that really works for agriculture.

Growth

- Good data so there is a base line to work from. This helps identify and prioritize what is needed in the County.
- Maintain a growing community.

Other

No responses fell into this category.

3. What actions would you like the County to take to address those issues?

- County will be asked for more funding support, including tax levies.
- Pressure those who restrict oil/gas development to lessen restrictions.
- Support a regional mental health network with tax support behind it.
- Use common sense in government.
- Collaboration on housing issues with true housing authority (industry, schools, county, college).
- Pay more attention to how things are designed and where they want to be in 50 years, not just 10. Balance assets. Worry less about nuance planning and more about the big picture.
- Main thing is zoning. Keep track of uses. Oil wells right in town!
- Agencies should work together to keep public access.

- More assistance for day care needs.
- Do a better job of communicating. Don't take for granted that people read the newspaper. Use lunch hours for public meetings. Most important issue of all.
- Be open.
- Study how many of the retail dollars leave the community, because the options are so limited here.
- Work with other entities in a positive atmosphere.
- Intergovernmental cooperation to fund economic development staff.
- Improve cooperation with public and private entities to identify economic development opportunities and sustainability of existing businesses.
- County needs to be the umbrella agency or fiscal agent for groups seeking a common public goal.
- Improve political influence at state and local level.
- Better communication/transparency with constituency/public agencies.
- Improved customer service.
- Be open to new ideas and be willing to change directions if needed.
- Come up with a plan that clearly articulates County values, make it accessible to the public, and update it regularly.
- More customized set of rules and regulations tailored toward RBC.
- More support for historic preservation.
- Insure environmental protection at drilling sites and man camps.
- Insure proper function and oversight for package plants permitted by the County at drill rigs and man camps.
- County should insure responsible growth patterns.
- Insure proper management of septic systems.
- County needs to use the best technology available.
- Need a central source or clearinghouse for all the available data and information.
- Improve budgeting process.
- Promote new elementary school.
- Improve aesthetics of Market Street and County in general.
- Be pro-growth but do not degrade quality of life.
- County should be more cooperative and operate with a business plan.

- Develop a good business plan.
- A good business model encouraging private enterprise will take care of economic diversity, housing and business.
- Extraction of resources should be allowed with adequate protections.
- Streamline the paper shuffle.
- City, county, school district must work together.
- Protect water rights/quality.
- County should follow its own rules and regulations & comprehensive plan.
- County should stand up to the state as an advocate for local issues.
- Streamlined permitting process.
- Structure comprehensive plan language that supports agriculture as long as it is viable.
- County should support the energy industry.
- Need better communication with the County.
- BOCC should hire a consultant to communicate/work with the energy industry (like Garfield County).
- Impact fees are a big issue.
- Deregulation.
- The County should treat the public as though they are the employer and the County commissioners/staff are the employees of the citizens.
- County should take a leadership role - be proactive.
- Build affordable housing.
- Create a vision for Rio Blanco County.
- Support growth/economic development.
- Gather data to determine needs, priorities and goals.
- County should have a clear vision about whether to support energy or not.
- County should stop being reactionary.
- County should take a leadership role -be proactive - build vision.
- Set goals for economic development.
- Establish needs, priorities and goals.
- Master plan should have several growth scenarios based upon population projections.

- County should identify concerns and respond to rulemaking agencies - Division of Wildlife.
- Advertising campaigns to support tourism.
- Use special use permit process to manage energy impact in the industry.
- Maintain a balance between the regulations and the need.

4. Do you see a role for you or your organization in the future implementation of the Rio Blanco County Master Plan? What is that role?

- Key player as a health care provider. Already at the table.
- Our role is support tourism in the county. If we are looking at increasing tourism, recreation plays a big part in that. In addition, working together to provide services avoids duplication (3)
- Role will be to assist with diversification. Help to create the critical mass of people needed to support the community. Higher ed. is a positive impact on businesses, generally. Increase FTE to help community.
- Can provide training such as the nursing or process technology programs.
- The Byway is a mechanism for diversification. Place based assets are phenomenal.
- No role yet, still need to be educated about process.
- Communication and assistance with buy-in. Continued county/town three mile plan referral reviews.
- Facilitate distribution of information and communication between businesses.
- Willingness to review draft materials.
- General support if constituent ownership is built.
- Use “community needs prioritization list” from Community Task Force to validate Mater Plan data gathering effort.
- Improved conservation of public/private lands due to increased demand for outfitting.
- General support for development and wastewater issues, including testing of small package plants and increased capacity for vault water and wastewater.
- USFS has a commitment to help maintain open space.
- Public agencies will review plans for development.
- Yes, with the implementation of the economic goals.
- Advisory role (application review).
- Identify healthcare needs and work with the County to implement goals of accomplishing those needs.

- Not exactly sure.
- Address tourism-economic development.
- Chamber/County work together on economic development plan.
- Provide financial capital to support important issues.
- Business can provide a positive attitude for the community.
- Work with Cattlemen's Association and Wool Growers Association.
- County regulatory process
- Energy industry needs to be able to give their input to the County.
- Keep dollars here.
- County should do a better job understanding the energy industry.
- Trust the industry they are not going to damage their own home.
- Meeker and Rio Blanco County need to work together on common visions/strategic goals.
- Identify corridors for residential, industrial and service growth.
- Develop a working partnership between the County and industry.
- Invite & incentivize growth.
- Support the new comprehensive plan.
- Maintain a safe shooting range.
- Maintain a strong planning commission and support the new comprehensive plan.

5. How would you describe your relationship to Rio Blanco County?

- Local Commissioner is very responsive and this year, the BOCC was very responsive.
- Inter-county issue between us and Moffat needs attention. We subsidize ambulance service for another county.
- Up until now, no relationship. Never attends meetings and is not a member of the Chamber. Like to see County support Chamber.
- Relationship with the County is good, but the basic citizenry's relationship with the County is mixed. Perception that money made in Rangely flows to Meeker. Cooperation with the Fire District is good.
- College has contracts with the County to manage Columbine Park and the airport.
- The relationship between the County and the Dinosaur Diamond Byway is non-existent. Noisier constituents dictate County policies.

- Lodging Tax Panel is an advisor to the County. Work with other boards to keep bringing people here.
- No relationship with the County, except for collaboration on public improvements (labor and materials).
- Has a good relationship with the County's Dept. of Social Services.
- Relationship improved after our staffing changes. Preference given to County seat is a recurring undercurrent. Task forces more powerful if is one and not three individual groups.
- Landfill should be one entity...not yours or ours.
- Cordial.
- Cordial at best.
- Trying.
- Supportive and cooperative.
- Need improved communication and cooperation with incorporated towns.
- Tentative at best.
- Taxpayer, citizen and along with many others, a representative of our local school district.
- Good, great people. Just need to watch out for the same mistakes other counties might make.
- Unfortunately, not good. Need experienced work force, clear rules and regulations.
- Reporting requirements such as election, annexations, service plan, certifications of the mill levy and annual report. County can appoint members to the board.
- Loves the County. He is a lifelong resident and would like to see it flourish.
- Directly dependent on County for money to run the museum.
- Cooperative in delivery of health care services and senior transportation.
- Symbiotic
- Good working relationship.
- Good relationship - County listens.
- County broadened their investment base recently.
- County uses local banks is much as possible.
- Good.
- Not sure - "us versus them" attitude. Impact fees for County Road 5. Restrictions on plowing rural county roads.

- Relationship is not good. The County serves as the enforcer and the public ends up being the recipient of enforcement - "us versus them mentality". County is too afraid to take risks they run to the shelter of their attorney, consultants.
- Good working relationship but need to work more closely on strategic planning.
- Good staff working relationships, but relationships between elected officials need to be made stronger.
- Generally good particularly with law enforcement - interactive.

6. Other points you would like to make about the Rio Blanco County master plan process.

- Find the middle road or the right road.
- County needs to listen more. On landfill, minds were made up before "we" got there.
- Can we see a proof copy of the plan? Is there a contact person for clarification of the plan or explanation of why something was done the way it was? It's great to get input, but when people don't know why decisions are made, they wonder if their voices are actually heard.
- Preach diversity, but not helping communities diversify.
- Let businesses be envoys to business prospects, not government envoys.
- Here to serve and protect; not make money.
- Stay on top of growth.
- Watch water diversion and preserve natural resources.
- Watch well impacts from resource extraction
- There needs to be cooperation. A rising tide raises all ships, but not the case here.
- Unity of effort and synergy is important.
- Master plan fails because it addresses only nuance planning. 50 years is needed. Have to put the long term horizon first. Be bold and audacious.
- Take a look at the Rangely plan
- Don't sacrifice the White to metro or downriver compacts.
- Consider workshop on the loss of fossil fuels now.
- Talk to a very diverse group of people. Majority of people work outside of Town. Takes a lot of work to get to people in the field.
- Wants opportunity to learn more about the process. Involve folks.
- Cooperation and collaboration.
- Make plan drafts available for review.

- Please be as transparent as possible. Please utilize the Chamber network to share progress on the Master Plan.
- The Master Plan must be compatible to the planning commission's rules and regulations.
- Create an avenue for improving infrastructure in the County.
- Recognize impacts from energy development including housing, transportation and natural resources.
- Need a plan for the County to deal with the boom bust cycle of energy development.
- Need to enforce regulations.
- Needs clearly defined zone districts and needs to accommodate many land uses.
- Happy the process is moving forward.
- Hard to find employees.
- Good master plan will help employees do their job.
- Energy industry says Rio Blanco County is difficult to deal with.
- County should not "outthink" themselves.
- Commissioners should pursue their own path/vision.
- The planning process is not really accomplished what it was intended to do.
- Things were fine until government got involved.
- Keep working in the citizen's best interest.
- Focus on the common good.
- More economic growth.
- Re-address impact fees.
- Keep water on the Western Slope.
- BOCC should work closely with the cities.
- There is too much of a gap between city/County regulations.
- Use the "neutral zone" as a method of disseminating information.
- Establish regular County Commissioner/Trustee meetings.
- Stop the get rich quick mindset and look at long-term benefits.
- Landowners around Meeker control how the town grows. Are they ready to accept new growth? (Many landowners around town do not want growth).
- All parties should continue to share information.

- Master plan should identify current and projected industrial growth, opportunities for economic development/job creation, identify areas designated for growth in cooperation with the municipalities.
- Consider how to keep housing stock affordable.
- Chambers of Commerce needs to provide input in the planning process - Meeker and Rangely.
- Work a little bit outside of the "rules". Maintain flexibility with special use process.
- Master plan should be reviewed annually and changed as needed. Do not make the plan too rigid.
- Maintain access to public lands.

7. Do you have any additional comments?

- Evaluate the adoption of county codes which increase costs generally. Example is Rangely recreation center. Midway through process found out there were new codes which increased the costs.
- Don't plan to leave the area.
- County is fair to citizens.
- Closed the dump, and I was opposed to it, but it was a good fiscal decision.
- Could respect west end of County more. Many revenues come from here. Give the west end a bit of credit.
- Better communication, PR and cooperation with energy companies.
- No impact fees.
- Improvements to the hospital ("better ER services").
- More emphasis on alternative energy ("need a change from the norm").
- Put suggestion boxes in various locations for comments for the Master Plan.
- Need area for developing new healthcare facility including EMS/Fire.
- Calls for service have increased.
- No mutual aid agreements.
- County are the stewards of quality of life in RBC.
- What penalties are there for the County when they are inconsistent and don't follow through with what they have represented they would?
- Incentives for businesses (to attract industry).
- Permanent employment for BOCC, not half time.
- Focus development near services.

- What is the County's stand on tourism?
- What ideas are being shared to address housing issues?
- Will the Plan address the checks & balances needed in our policy-making processes?
- County should be run as a business.
- Master plan must be written for the collective good.
- Impact fees are a source of irritation.
- County should provide staff report and resources to community planning task force and coordinate with the planning initiatives of the towns and special districts.
- County should take a leadership role on economic development.
- County needs to decide if they are open to growth or not.
- Consider realistic methods of obtaining revenues from growth that works in a rural context, but does not shut down growth.
- Current balance between roadless areas and wilderness areas seems to be correct. No more roadless/wilderness areas are needed.

Rio Blanco Community Survey

The Rio Blanco County Community Survey is available at the offices of the county planning department and is available online on the county website: <http://www.co.rioblanco.co.us/development/> .

Rio Blanco County Housing Study

The Rio Blanco County Housing Study is available at the offices of the county planning department and is available online on the county website: <http://www.co.rioblanco.co.us/development/> .