

2010 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 9 – Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata,
Montezuma and San Juan Counties

Introduction

Region 9 encompasses a five county area including Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Juan Counties, as well as the reservations of the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribes. The region is located at the juncture of three distinct physiographic regions; the Rocky Mountains, the Colorado Plateau and the San Juan Basin. This means that there are high mountain peaks and valleys, towering mesas, deep canyons and deserts. Of the 6,584 sq. miles that comprise the region, 45% are public lands, 38% are private lands and 17% are tribal lands. The region is largely rural, with an estimated 2009 population of 92,277 in all five counties.

Jobs & the Economy

The economic downturn has affected southwest Colorado business sectors, with construction, tourism and non-profit related businesses and organizations the hardest hit. Some costs of business are unique to the western Colorado rural environment, such as the high cost of air and ground transportation due to the geographic terrain and distance between communities. La Plata County is also planning for a 30% reduction in their property tax assessment in the next year due to a decline in the oil and gas industry.

The Regional Workforce Center reports that active job seekers were up 68.7% in our region from 2007 through 2009. Job orders were down 40% in the same time period.

Unemployment rates for the region as of July 2010 were 8.8% in Archuleta, 14.2% in Dolores County, 6.1% in La Plata, 7.6% in Montezuma, and 8.5% in San Juan County.

Since 2008, Fort Lewis College and the Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado, Inc. (Region 9 EDD) have combined resources to construct and maintain a consumer price index for Southwest Colorado (SCPI). In general, a consumer price index measures the rate at which the prices of consumer goods and services are changing over time. It is a key statistic for purposes of economic and social policy-making, and has substantial and wide-ranging implications for governments, businesses and workers, households. Between the 4th quarter of 2008 and the 2nd quarter 2010, our SCPI indicates the cost of living in the region has dropped 3.6%. Grocery costs have dropped 7%, rental rates have dropped 0.38%, utility expenses have dropped 28.2%, transportation expenses have dropped 17.6%, health care costs have increased 6.3%, and miscellaneous goods & services have increased 3.9%.

Housing

Housing prices and availability vary across the region. From 2006 to 2010 three bedroom/ two bath homes dropped 44%

in the number of sales, saw a 60% increase in the number of days on the market and saw a 8% drop in the median price. Housing starts are minimal; however the current affordability index is pretty good due to the number of foreclosures coming on the market that are priced to sell (Source: MLS).

On the up side, the region has just concluded an economic drivers study as part of a Colorado Heritage Planning Grant award of \$22,000, with matching funds of \$17,500 provided by Region 9 EDD. This study was initiated in order to estimate the relative importance of second homes in the region. However, that question could not be answered without a comprehensive and consistent estimate of all drivers within each county. Public review and discussion of results is underway, using the report as a tool for strategizing for economic development. This and other reports can be found at www.scan.org/regional_data.html.

New Projects

The newly formed Southwest Council of Governments (SWCOG) also received a \$3M grant from DOLA to help build an open access telecommunications network (SCAN) supported by publicly-owned or leased infrastructure to provide secure connections between community public offices, including government, education, law enforcement, search and rescue, and medical facilities. SCAN will offer high speed transmission, greater bandwidth and the ability to deliver data transfer, telephony and internet services in an efficient and cost-effective manner. In addition, SCAN will enable private telecommunication companies, e.g. Internet Service Providers (ISPs), to lease bandwidth to deliver similar services to currently under-served residential and business customers throughout the region.

The region has also completed the Southwest Colorado Transit Feasibility Study, and received \$13K to form a Regional Coordinating Council for transit efforts. There was also interest in collaborating with neighboring transportation regions to form a Hwy 160 Coalition to work on our region's primary transportation corridor. In addition, Region 9 received a 2009 Excellence in Regional Transportation Award with Southwest Region's Freight Profile.

Goals for the Upcoming Year

In the coming year, the region will be updating its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The purpose of the CEDS is to create a plan for retaining and creating better paying jobs, fostering stable and more diversified economies, as well as maintaining and improving the quality of life in SW Colorado. Sustainable economic development is a high priority for the region. The challenge is to grow our economy in a way that balances the needs of the

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environment and society with those of economic development. Across the board, Region 9 businesses perceive their community's quality of life as its primary strength.