

# 2010 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 11 – Garfield, Mesa, Moffat,  
Rio Blanco and Routt Counties

## Introduction

Region 11 is located in Northwest Colorado, and is comprised of Garfield, Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt Counties. Although our region is geographically significant, it's not a densely populated area. In 2009 the population was estimated at around 250,293, a 3% increase from 2008 and a strong annual average increase of 2.8 percent since 2000. The region has grown steadily since 2000, with the growth of energy-related activities in the area and growth of tourism-related activities, and second homes in Routt and other counties. Garfield (3.0 percent annual growth rate), Mesa (2.6 percent), and Routt (2.2 percent) counties have grown at particularly high rates since 2000. Expected growth between 2010 and 2015 is slower due to the current recession and its impact on energy related activities, tourism and retirees.

## Jobs & the Economy

The economic base of the region is very diverse. Traditional base sectors include strong agribusiness in Moffat and Rio Blanco counties, major mining activities and Federal and state government presence in all counties except Routt, and a significant manufacturing sector in Mesa. Mesa County also provides business and professional services to the wider region while a number of the counties provide construction services outside their boundaries. Tourism constitutes 49.2 percent of the base in Routt County and is significant in Garfield (20.1 percent), Rio Blanco (15.3 percent) and Mesa (9.4 percent) counties as well. Retirees constitute 16.4 percent of Mesa County's economic base and 13.3 percent of the overall region.

The region had 138,886 jobs in 2009. The largest portions of these were in retail trade, construction, health services and social assistance, local government, and accommodations and food services. Employment grew an average of 1.9 percent annually from 2001 to 2009 but dropped 7.4 percent (-11,150 jobs) from 2008 to 2009. Construction decreased by 4,196 jobs (-21.5 percent), followed by 1,922 jobs lost in mining and utilities (-18.3 percent) and 1,500 retail jobs lost (-8.7 percent). Local government added 419 jobs (3.2 percent), as did federal and state government (168 jobs, 2.9 percent) and health services and social assistance (133 jobs, 1.0 percent).

## Housing

Construction of new housing units dropped significantly in the region from around 3,200 to 2,200 units between 2008 and 2009 reflecting the current economic and housing conditions. Foreclosure filings are up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2010 from the previous year in Region 11. Garfield and Rio Blanco counties show a slight decrease in filings, but based on actual numbers, these decreases are not significant.

## 2010 Foreclosures- 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Filings

County	2 <sup>nd</sup> Q 2009	2 <sup>nd</sup> Q 2010	% Change
Garfield	154	148	-3.9
Mesa	264	370	+40.2
Moffat	15	30	+100
Rio Blanco	20	7	-65
Routt	41	75	+82.9

Source: Colorado Division of Housing

The region's 13.32 percent vacancy rate includes a significant number of seasonal recreational houses – in Routt, especially. Vacancy rates within the region range from a 2009 low of 3.7% in Garfield County to 38.8% in Routt County

## Agriculture

Agriculture is a significant industry in this region and varies from sheep, cattle and hay in Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties to orchards and vineyards in Mesa and Garfield Counties. Agriculture makes up 12-13% of the base industry jobs in Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties and is a smaller share (around 5%) in Routt, Garfield and Mesa Counties. Land in farms in Moffat County make up approximately 27% of the county land area.

## Clean Energy

Clean Energy is a vibrant and important industry in our region, and many of our communities have been actively involved in reducing their carbon footprints. The town of Silt installed three new solar arrays on town buildings which were switched on September 1<sup>st</sup>. The systems have a total of 39 solar panels and are expected to save the town about \$3,500 a year on electricity. The town of Parachute built solar "flowers" at the town's I-70 rest area, a visually pleasing alternative to traditional panels. Within 2 hours of being switched on, the solar flowers were pushing excess energy back onto the regional power grid, proving their success.

Region 11 residents are being encouraged to participate in the state's residential energy audit rebate program. This program, which aims to save energy, also creates more work for contractors, thus stimulating the economy. Multiple rebates are available to homeowners across the state, and can be viewed at [www.rechargecolorado.com](http://www.rechargecolorado.com).

## New Projects

The town of Rifle was chosen as a pilot community for the Colorado Sustainable Main Streets Initiative. This initiative brings a "collaborative, integrated process to leverage technical and existing financial resources to help communities enhance the sustainability of their downtowns." With the

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Colorado Department of Local Affairs acting as the primary point of contact, Rifle has been able to work with multiple state agencies and nonprofits to acquire funding and expertise to achieve specific goals identified under the program. Our stated goals are 1.) To increase private investment in our downtown by supporting existing businesses, and reducing the number of vacant storefronts in our downtown, and 2.) To achieve more infill and mixed land uses while improving the pedestrian friendliness of Main street. As part of our agreement with the State as pilot community, we have pledged to show significant progress on our goals by the end of 2010. By the end of the year, the town of Rifle has committed to accomplishing the following:

- Redevelop the vacant Valley Lumber site into a Health and Wellness Center with transit-oriented mixed uses, including senior/affordable, energy efficient housing.
- Renovate the historic Ute Theater and incorporate community education, events and an entertainment venue.

So far we have built key partnerships with DOLA, Downtown Colorado Inc., the Office of Economic Development and International Trade, CDOT, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, the Sonoran Institute, UCD, Clean Energy Economy for the Region, CDPHE, Roaring Fork Transit Authority, and the Colorado Center for Community Development, each of which is helping us to fulfill our pledge.

## Goals for the Upcoming Year

The Yampa Valley Partners, a regional nonprofit serving Routt and Moffat counties, recently received a grant from the Governor's Energy Office (GEO) to "*promote GEO programs, financing options and facilitate a region wide energy plan with key community members in the tri-county area.*" Under the name Northwest Colorado Energy Steering Committee, this group will create a regional energy plan with input and participation from cities and towns, workforce development, business interests, economic development, utilities and higher education. This ongoing project is expected to have a significant effect on the region in terms of both energy and cost savings.