

2010 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 12 – Eagle, Grand, Jackson,
Pitkin and Summit Counties

Introduction

Region 12 includes the counties of Eagle, Grand, Jackson, Pitkin and Summit Counties, and is considered the “Rural Resort Region” because of our rural nature and focus on tourism. Jackson is more focused than the other counties on agri-business. The region continues to be a high-growth area, with regional population increasing 25 % from 2000 to 2009. This growth results mostly from the region’s natural beauty and numerous recreational opportunities and amenities which attract a large number of baby boomers to the area. The most significant population trend in Region 12 is the tremendous growth in the 65+ age group which is projected to grow by almost 300% over the next 20 years.

Jobs & the Economy

The region has been hard hit by the national recession in major sectors of the economy including the construction industry (particularly second homes) and tourism. Land development, real estate sales, and construction related work have almost disappeared from the local economy as the credit bubble burst and builders as well as consumers found it impossible to obtain financing. To illustrate: building permits for the region in 2009 experienced an 80% decrease compared to 2001. This has hurt our local economy greatly as it results in the loss of a great deal of construction jobs. This has also resulted in underemployment as workers in the construction industry have settled for other lower paying jobs just to make ends meet.

Most businesses in the region have reduced their workforce and some businesses are closing their doors for good. A large number of governments in the region have reduced their personnel costs through layoffs, attrition and/or furloughs. As a result of this recession, sales tax collections, the bread and butter of most of the towns and counties in the region, are down by up to 25% in some areas. Building permit and use tax revenues are down over 80% in some areas.

Housing

In spite of the recession, and even with sales volume and value decreasing, housing prices in the region remain relatively high. For example, the average sales price for a single-family home in Summit County for 2009 was \$905,030.

Agriculture

Jackson County still reports agribusiness as its main industry, accounting for 35% of the county’s jobs.

Clean Energy

Many of the local jurisdictions in Region 12 are taking measures to “go green” with new initiatives. Multiple

counties and towns are taking steps to green up their buildings by installing solar panels and exploring alternative energy sources. Many are creating innovative programs to encourage their citizens and businesses to participate in activities that will reduce waste, reduce air pollution, and are overall better for our environment.

The Town of Avon was recently awarded \$1.5 Million as part of the New Energy Program for Heat Recovery Project. In conjunction with the Eagle River Water and Sanitation District, Avon is constructing a facility to utilize the heat from the effluent of their sanitation facility to heat 4 pools at the town’s rec center, reducing utility costs and the town’s carbon footprint. A second phase is scheduled to utilize the same heat source for snow-melting of sidewalks in the downtown area.

Further, NWCCOG’s weatherization program has more than doubled in the last year due to ARRA funds. As of June 30th, 2010 the weatherization program has successfully completed its first year of stimulus-funded production with the weatherization of 454 homes. The weatherization program budget has more than doubled since 2008, and has created a dozen much-needed jobs, filled by displaced workers from the construction industry in the area.

What’s New and Interesting in the Region

With all the “doom and gloom” above, here are some positive things happening in Region 12:

Eagle County

- The county is exploring a public/private partnership with the developer of a Continuing Care Retirement Community to be located in the Town of Eagle. The County recently held a panel interview session made up of citizens as well as staff to interview potential developers. This is in response to the growing number of seniors in Eagle County.
- The Eagle County Board of Commissioners will consider approval of a new developer for Stratton Flats, a workforce housing project located in Gypsum. The new developer will bring an additional \$3.5 million in capital to the development. This project will have approximately 300 units, of which one third will be dedicated and restricted to local workers. This new development hopes to put many locals back to work, as well as will provide much-needed workforce housing to 300 families upon its completion.

Grand County

- Grand County received a \$63,000 grant to remove approximately 3,200 hazardous trees along the County Road right-of-way. The money came from the Colorado

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Forest Restoration Pilot Program established by the General Assembly through House Bill 1199. Grand County Natural Resources applied for an additional \$20,000 through the BLM Community Assistance Grant for this project.

Jackson County

- Rocky Mountain Pellet Company Inc. continues to utilize beetle-killed wood for its production of pellets and has recently announced that it has weathered the recent downturn in the economy very well. The company has 24 new customers since the first of the year. They have kept their large customers, who have added more locations, plus added an additional private bagging contract that purchases 1,000 tons per month. Although they had a layoff late last year, they have kept an average of 25 employees working full-time. August 23 through August 27 was their best shipping week since 2008, in which they shipped well over 1,300 tons.

Pitkin County

- The Aspen/Pitkin County Airport and Stay Aspen/Snowmass joined together to thank United Airlines for adding two non-stop United Express flights to Aspen/Pitkin County Airport (from Chicago and San Francisco) this winter season to help offset the loss of seats from Frontier and Delta. Frontier and Delta recently confirmed plans to discontinue service to Aspen. Aspen/Pitkin County Airport is located only 3 miles from Aspen and 7 miles from Snowmass Village, the closest airport to any ski resort in North America.
- Renewable Energy – Holy Cross Energy, which serves a large portion of the Roaring Fork Valley, is trying to significantly boost the amount of renewables in its power mix by enlisting help from entrepreneurs. They issued a request for proposals recently for up to 10 megawatts of generation from renewable sources. Proposals must be submitted by Jan. 31, 2011. The power sources must be located within the Holy Cross service area, which includes the Roaring Fork and Eagle valleys and the I70 corridor west of Glenwood Springs. Realistically, any proposals will likely be for solar farms, biomass plants and hydro-electric projects. Holy Cross has won acclaim for its “green” programs and is regarded as a leader among small utilities. Between 9 and 10 percent of its current power mix comes from renewable sources. In a separate project, Holy Cross teamed with the Town of Basalt to finance a 40-kilowatt micro-hydro plant in the hills above the town. Construction will take place this summer and fall and supply power for 25 homes.

Summit County

- Colorado Mountain College is one step closer to realizing a hefty goal – to offer four-year baccalaureate degrees to its mountain-town students. Governor Bill Ritter signed the CMC baccalaureate bill on 5/27/2010 which will OK the initiative at the state level. CMC must now earn accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission and the blessing of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. CMC hopes to offer preliminary upper-level classes as early as fall 2010, and a limited number of four-year degree programs could potentially be in place by the following fall, including the fields of business and teaching. This is a huge positive step in terms of economic development.
- Swan Mountain Recpath - The Sapphire phase of the Swan Mountain Recpath was officially opened to the public on June 29th. This new 1.0-mile paved recreational pathway segment is the second phase of a multi-phase effort to complete the Recpath loop around Dillon Reservoir, through the construction of a safe grade-separated pathway to connect the areas of Keystone/Snake River Basin and Breckenridge/Upper Blue River Basin. There were numerous funding partners in both the public and private sectors that helped make the Sapphire Section a reality. In addition, a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the start of construction for the Summit Cove Section of the Swan Mountain Recpath occurred immediately following the dedication and is currently under construction.
- A Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse proposed in the Town of Silverthorne recently received approval on its final site plan from the Silverthorne Planning Commission for a 110,000 square foot store with a 25,000 square foot garden center. The project now moves to the Town Council for consideration.

Goals for the Upcoming Year

NWCCOG is pursuing Economic Development District status for Region 12. NWCCOG received a planning grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and to apply for EDD status. We hope to have the CEDS completed and all of our designation materials in to the EDA by February 1st, 2011. Once granted EDD status, we will have the tools necessary to assist our communities with projects that fulfill the EDA's goals of building resilient regions through fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, talent and workforce development, exploring new technologies, and strategies to be competitive in a global economy.

Another new program development – NWCCOG hopes to explore new and innovative programs in the areas of clean energy and seniors in 2011.