

2011 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. 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 a population of 91,716 in all five counties, per the 2010 Census.

County	2000	2010	% Change
Archuleta	9,898	12,084	22.09%
Dolores	1,844	2,064	11.93%
La Plata	43,941	51,334	16.82%
Montezuma	23,830	25,535	7.15%
San Juan	558	699	25.27%
Colorado	4,301,261	5,029,196	16.92%

Durango, in La Plata County, was named the top “micropolitan” area (population less than 50,000) in the United States. Policom, an independent economic research firm, studied 576 micropolitan areas and compared 23 economic factors over a 20 year period from 1990 to 2009, including wages, earnings and public assistance.

Jobs & the Economy

Although the economic downturn has affected southwest Colorado business sectors, with construction, tourism and non-profit related businesses and organizations the hardest hit, there are signs of recovery. Unemployment rates for the region are encouraging. As of July 2011 rates were 9.1% in Archuleta (down from 9.3% in July 2010), 13.0% in Dolores (down from 15.8%), 6.4% in La Plata (down from 6.9%), holding steady at 8.3% in Montezuma (down from 15.8%) and 5.9% in San Juan (down from 7.1%).

The Regional Workforce Center reports that active job seekers were down 2.48% from 2009 through 2010. However, job orders were down about 21% during this same time period.

Efforts to improve local workforce training has resulted in two new initiatives. The region’s Workforce Advisory Board implemented a Workforce Development Network for businesses to discuss their specific workforce needs and concerns. In an effort to strengthen ties between area high schools and the business community, a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) internship program was formed to reimburse businesses that hired student interns. Both programs have received Innovation Awards from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

Housing

Housing prices and availability vary across the region. In La Plata County, comparing the first half of 2011 to the first half of 2010 we find that 3BR/2BA homes showed an increase in the number of sales of 15%, a decrease in the average number of days on market of 6% and a 4% drop in the average price. Housing starts remain minimal. Foreclosures represent 9.2% of the 3BR/2BA properties currently available but only 4.2% of all residential offerings – less than many communities across the country. (Source: MLS)

New Projects

The newly formed Southwest Council of Governments (SWCCOG) received a \$3M grant from DOLA in 2010 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. Telecommunications is a high priority in the region and SCAN will offer high speed transmission, greater bandwidth and the ability to deliver services in an efficient and cost-effective manner. SCAN will also 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 in the region.

Region 9 completed the Southwest Colorado Transit Feasibility Study, and has received two years of funding to support the Regional Transit Coordinating Council.

2011 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

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

The region has also updated 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 economics, as well as maintaining and improving the quality of life in SW Colorado. The timing of the CEDS update worked well with Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper’s “Bottom Up” economic development initiative. The CEDS, as well as other regional documents, is available for review at www.scan.org.

Goals for the Upcoming Year

A new initiative is the Four Corners Film Office. The office, opened in 2010, is focused on attracting more film and television production. The production business will not only create jobs, tax revenue and marketing exposure for the region, but takes very little infrastructure and will diversify the current economic drivers of tourism, oil & gas development and construction.