

2011 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 13 – Chaffee, Custer,
Fremont and Lake Counties

Introduction

The Upper Arkansas region is located from the headwaters of the basin near Tennessee and Fremont passes in Lake County down to the eastern Fremont County line just about Pueblo Reservoir. Beginning at the top of the basin the counties and their cities and towns are: Lake (Leadville), Chaffee (Buena Vista, Poncha Springs, Salida), Custer (Silver Cliff, Westcliffe), and Fremont (Canon City, Florence, Brookside, Coal Creek, Penrose). The region experienced a population increase between 2000 and 2010, although the increases were relatively small. Chaffee, Fremont and Lake Counties all saw single digit percent growth, while Custer, the least populous county in the region, had an increase of 21.47%.

County	2000	2010	% Change
Chaffee	16,242	17,809	9.65%
Custer	3,503	4,255	21.47%
Fremont	46,145	46,824	1.47%
Lake	7,812	7,310	6.43%
Colorado	4,301,261	5,029,196	16.92%

Source: State Demography Office

Jobs & the Economy

During the nationwide recession jobs in tourism and recreation, health care and services have remained steady with marginal growth, while jobs in construction and retail have declined during the recession. Summer tourism bookings and revenue are up with upscale discretionary retail spending down. Lake and Chaffee leaders and job seekers are anticipating the reopening of the Climax Molybdenum mine in 2012 as mining facilities are nearing completion and work markets are favorable.

The region's natural resource based summer and winter seasonal tourism and recreation industry typically generate below state average per capita income levels for its part-time seasonal and lower hourly wage job workforce and households.

Housing

Workforce housing availability is limited while an increased percentage of high priced homes are priced for sale in a limited demand market. Housing start numbers are lower than pre-recession while home remodeling, upgrading and maintenance activities compose most construction trade activities.

Agriculture

The region's agricultural economy makes up a smaller percentage of the economy compared to a couple of decades ago. Irrigated hay, alfalfa and pasture lands continue to produce for local and out-of-region markets. Livestock production is composed primarily of beef, and continues as it

has historically in the valley. Locally-grown produce for sale to local consumers and greenhouse vegetable production techniques are currently being evaluated.

Clean energy

Improved awareness of clean energy opportunities continues to be the focus of local business and government leaders in our region. Clean energy assessments indicate good potential for solar and marginal potential for wind energy generation. Several new clean energy design and installation businesses have emerged in the valley. Geothermal resources are being evaluated for local base-load electric power for local electric associations.

New projects

Two natural resource based businesses are ready to emerge. One is a manufacturer of "green" LEED rated insulation providing concrete building block named AERCRETE in Fremont County. AERCRETE is planning a manufacturing facility on an old wood product manufacturing site that has rail access and adjoins a naturally occurring deposit of "clean sand" and will employ about fifty. The other is the Climax Mine in northern Lake County as it projects employment of 300 to 350 with a re-opening date in 2012. Molybdenum is an essential strengthening agent in manufactured steel.

Goals for the coming year

The region's local governments seek to improve the stability of their operating and capital budgets as revenues have declined in recent times. Businesses that are hanging on seek to increase efficiencies and revenues that lead to improved profitability and jobs. Several non-profit and local government efforts are focused on developing affordable workforce housing, and regional broad band services to improve competitiveness of the local business community.

Chaffee County leaders are looking to create living wage jobs through the expansion and creation of new businesses, as well as more affordable housing. In Custer County, Downtown Colorado, Inc is working with community leaders to create a viable and sustainable business district along main street and adjacent two blocks through Silver Cliff and Westcliffe. Fremont County wants to increase jobs and diversify their economy by addressing local regulatory concerns and creating a more "business friendly" community, and Lake County is focusing on creating new jobs through retention and expansion of existing businesses, as well as improving the reputation of their schools.