

# 2011 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

## Region 14 – Huerfano and Las Animas Counties

### Introduction

Region 14 includes the counties of Huerfano and Las Animas. Las Animas County is located at the southernmost border of Colorado and New Mexico with Huerfano County located north of Trinidad and south of Pueblo. Per the 2010 Census, the region's population is 22,218, a -3% change from 2000. Huerfano County experienced a -14.64% population change, while Las Animas County saw a modest 1.97% increase over the same period.

Las Animas County is the largest county in the state of Colorado and the fifth largest in the nation with 4,772 square miles; Trinidad is the county seat. At 6,025 feet in elevation, 300 days of sunshine and the charming brick streets the area is very welcoming to visitors and retirees. Travelers from the south along the I-25 corridor get their first glimpse of "Colorful Colorado" with the Sangre de Cristo Mountain range meaning "Blood of Christ" to the west and the Comanche Grasslands to the east. The area boasts 3 lakes that provide excellent fishing, water activities, camp sites, and RV accommodations. Informational programs include bird watching, flora and fauna identification and other educational programs to include youth involvement. The Trinidad Lake State Park amphitheater provides a venue for demonstrations of horno cooking, a form of adobe oven, bringing the Spanish cooking tradition incorporated into southwest cooking today. The area is also known for the famous Town Marshall, Bat Masterson, petroglyphs, dinosaur tracks, and artifacts from Native American communities. The nationally recognized Santa Fe Trail from Missouri to New Mexico was a well-established trail conveying thousands to the west and traveled directly through Trinidad. The Santa Fe Trail Days Festival promotes the trail or Main Street in Trinidad. The nationally award winning Cougar Canyon Golf Resort Community and the Trinidad Municipal Golf Course provides challenges to golf enthusiasts across the country. The Southern Colorado Repertory Theatre, winner of four Outer Critics Circle Awards, continues to provide entertainment to thousands from Denver to New Mexico with high quality thespians.

Huerfano County is located approximately 37 miles north of Trinidad along the I-25 corridor. The county is 1,591 square miles; Walsenburg is the county seat. Multiple lakes and streams and the aspen lined roads offer a picturesque trip along State Hwy. 12 a.k.a. "The Scenic Highway of Legends". The notable Huajatolla Peaks or Spanish Peaks, meaning "Breasts of the Earth" are visible from either Hwy. 12 or I-25 corridor between Huerfano and Las Animas Counties. The Utes, Navajos, Jicarilla Apaches and Comanche's believed this is where Mankind first emerged from the womb of the Earth into their version of the Garden of Eden.

### Jobs & the Economy

USDA Rural Development, in conjunction with the Western Rural Center, CSU Extension, Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, and El Pomar Foundation created a Stronger Economies Together Program. "The purpose of SET it to strengthen the capacity of communities/counties in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint for their multi-county region, one that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of that region." The applicants from Huerfano and Las Animas Counties in Colorado and Colfax County in New Mexico formed the Raton Basin Regional Economic Development District (REDD) were recently notified of their successful application.

In Huerfano and Las Animas the national decline in market prices for coal bed methane gas have affected local exploration and production, causing with a large number of industry employees to relocate or seek other employment. This exodus has resulted in unemployment rates in Las Animas County at 9.1% and 11.1% in Huerfano County compared to the State of Colorado at 8.5% as of July, 2011.

The New Elk Mine maintains its operations in the western portion of Las Animas County. Cline Mining Corporation, a Toronto based company, continues to make improvements to the once shuttered mine. Recent accessibility to previously unattainable coal has spurred new hiring.

The City of Trinidad is in negotiations with a minor league baseball expansion team and is hopeful the Pecos League of Professional Baseball Clubs will call Trinidad home very soon.

### Housing

New home starts are inconsistent within the region and the lack of employment opportunities has stymied potential growth trends.

### Foreclosure Filings – Region 14

County	2010 Total Filings	2011 YTD Total Filings	Year-over Year change (Jan-June)
Huerfano	20	17	-15.0
Las Animas	51	58	13.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>-1.3</b>

Source: Colorado Dept. of Local Affairs – Division of Housing

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### **Agriculture**

Ranching is still a predominate activity within the county. Although there is some agriculture in the region it is supportive of the ranching industry; crops are typically alfalfa or corn for livestock feed.

### **Other**

Heritage tourism is important in Las Animas and Huerfano Counties and their rich histories. New efforts have been made with local improvements by cleaning up the cities to attract visitors. Both counties have focused on the large talent of local artists and musicians. The Trinidadio Blues Fest in August continues to entertain many travelers from New York to California with Award-winning blues musicians as does Huerfano County's Annual Celtic Festival in late September.

### **Clean Energy**

The 2010 closing of the Huerfano County Correctional Facility (HCCF) was detrimental to the county especially the loss of employment opportunities. However, the county realizes their natural opportunities in renewable energy. The approval of a wind turbine project east of the I-25 corridor reflects the resiliency of the region.

### **Multi-modal Transit Center**

The collaborative efforts of the City of Trinidad, the South Central Council of Governments (SCCOG), Colorado Department of Transportation, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, Greyhound Bus Lines, and Amtrak resulted in the concept of a centrally located transportation hub. The center assists travelers via intercity bus, route bus, and rail to anywhere in the United States. It is anticipated the construction of the center will begin in 2012.

### **Health and Wellness**

Mount Carmel Health and Wellness has been identified as Enterprise Zone Contribution Project. The community still struggles with doctor retention and it is expected that this facility will provide access to health care for many in need.