

2012 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 the region is geographically significant, it's not a densely populated area. In July 2011 the estimated region population was 247,425, up by more than 24% from 2000. The region has grown steadily since 2000, with the growth of energy-related activities in the area and growth of tourism-related activities. Expected growth in the short term is slower due to current economic conditions and the impact on energy-related activities, tourism and retirees. However, Colorado Mesa University (CMU) has increased enrollment 25% over the last four years. The vitality of students in the Grand Junction community increases the number of jobs in food and retail. CMU has also driven construction projects in the community, providing jobs while expanding the campus.

County	Census 2000	July 2011	% Change
Garfield	43,791	56,237	28.42%
Mesa	116,255	147,753	27.09%
Moffat	13,184	13,434	1.90%
Rio Blanco	5,986	6,785	13.35%
Routt	19,690	23,216	17.91%
Colorado	4,301,261	5,118,526	19.00%

Source: State Demography Office

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 including St. Mary's Hospital and Grand Junction Regional Airport which are the largest hospital and airport between Denver and Salt Lake City. A number of the counties provide construction services outside their boundaries. Tourism constitutes 42.5 percent of the economic base in Routt County and is significant in Garfield (16.5 percent), Rio Blanco (13.5 percent) and Mesa (7.6 percent) counties as well. Retirees constitute 13.2 percent of Mesa County's economic base and a significant percent of the overall region. The Area Agency on Aging provides many services to the seniors in the region including Caregiver and meal centers in all counties. Each county within the region has also seen a drop in unemployment rates, with Garfield, Rio Blanco and Routt showing at least 1% change each.

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Unemployment data provided by LMI shows a decrease in unemployment rates across the region from August 2011 to August 2012 with the exception of Rio Blanco County, which had a small increase.

County	August 2011	August 2012	% Change
Garfield	7.9%	7.6%	-0.3%
Mesa	9.5%	8.8%	-0.7%
Moffat	7.9%	7.2%	-0.7%
Rio Blanco	5.0%	5.2%	0.2%
Routt	7.4%	7.0%	-0.4%
Colorado	8.1%	7.8%	-0.3%

Source: State Labor Market Information

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. Farms in Moffat County make up approximately 27% of the county land area.

CLEAN ENERGY

Clean Energy is a vibrant and important industry in this region, and many communities have been actively involved in reducing their carbon footprints. Routt County, for example, has established Vision 2030, which focuses on initiatives to attain clean renewable energy sources along with a diversified economy.

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.

GOALS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

As part of Governor Hickenlooper's "Bottom Up" Economic Development initiative, Region 11 counties have identified the following goals:

Garfield County

1. Encourage responsible energy development of our unique natural resources through innovation
2. Reduce unnecessary regulatory impediments to economic development

2012 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

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3. Encourage and support the growth of existing businesses and industries
4. Elevate regional outdoor attractions and experiences in order to support and revitalize business districts
5. Create jobs and diversify the economic order to support and revitalize business districts

Mesa County

1. Become an epicenter for energy innovation
2. Create and promote our community image
3. Support the growth of existing business

Moffat County

1. Increase the number, size and profitability of local businesses to maintain and create jobs
2. Sustain or increase current levels of production in core (primary) industries to maintain or create jobs
3. Ensure current generation broadband and cellular technology availability
4. Ensure long-term viability of energy sector jobs and businesses to maintain and create jobs
5. Ensure local control is recognized and honored by state and regional entities

Rio Blanco County

1. Streamline regulatory and permitting processes, remove overlapping regulations, improve cross jurisdictional communication, improving “customer service” in all facets of government, customizing regulations to match the “rural” setting rather than “urban” setting
2. Create a mechanism to keep more Severance Tax and Federal Mineral Lease dollars in Rio Blanco County where the majority of the impacts from resource extraction occur
3. Provide more affordable housing options and entice the workforce to remain in Rio Blanco County
4. Diversify our economic base to reduce the boom/bust cycle, encourage business growth, create new jobs, reduce the amount of sales tax leakage into neighboring communities, allow businesses more access to capital and reduce the cost of doing business in our state
5. Allow more dollars for K-12 education

Routt County

1. Expansion of educational opportunities

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2. Expansion of cellular coverage within the county
3. Expansion of broadband capabilities
4. Expand tourism by better utilization of existing resources
5. To maintain coal production to within 5% of the 5-year average 2006-2010