

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 above 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 small overall population increase of 4.40% between 2000 and 2011. Fremont County saw modest single digit growth while Custer, the least populous county in the region had an increase of 20.07%. Lake was the only county with a population decrease, per the 2011 population estimates.

County	Census 2000	July 2011	% Change
Chaffee	16,242	17,966	10.61%
Custer	3,503	4,206	20.07%
Fremont	46,145	47,375	2.67%
Lake	7,812	7,396	-5.33%
Colorado	4,301,261	5,118,526	19.00%

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. The core of summer rafting and river recreation revenues and employment has been impacted by the extremely low flows from minimal winter snowpack.

The Climax Molybdenum Mine (located in the NW corner of Lake County) reopened in August 2012 and will employ 340 well-compensated workers, increase the Lake County tax base, and support development of local goods and services businesses.

The region's natural resource based summer and winter seasonal tourism and recreation industry typically generates below 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 for sale in a limited demand market. Housing start numbers are lower than pre-recession while home remodeling, upgrading and maintenance undertakings compose most construction trade activities.

AGRICULTURE

The region's agricultural economy makes up a smaller percentage of the economy compared to past decades. 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

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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 provide approximately 50 jobs. The other is the reopening of the Climax Molybdenum Mine in August 2012 with 340 new well-compensated jobs (see Jobs & The Economy section above).

GOALS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

The region’s local governments seek to improve the stability of their operating and capital budgets as revenues have declined in recent years. Businesses that are hanging on seek to increase efficiencies and revenues that will lead to improved profitability and increased jobs. Several non-profit and local government efforts are focused on developing affordable workforce housing and regional broadband services to improve the competitiveness of our 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.