

# 2013 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.

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. The nationally recognized Santa Fe Trail from Missouri to New Mexico brought thousands to the west who traveled directly through Trinidad.

Huerfano County is located north of Trinidad along the I-25 corridor. The county is 1,591 square miles. Walsenburg is the county seat and only 37 miles from Trinidad. US 160 runs east and west and, like I-25, is a major corridor for the region, connecting the southeast Colorado to southwest Durango.

County	Census 2010	July 2012	% Change
Huerfano	6,711	6,549	-2.41%
Las Animas	15,507	14,913	-3.83%
Colorado	5,029,196	5,188,683	3.17%

Per the 2010 Census, the region’s population decreased to 22,218, a -3% change from 2000. Huerfano County experienced a negative population change of 4.64%, while Las Animas County saw a modest 1.97% increase over the same period. The region’s population has continued to decline an additional -3.40% between 2010 and 2012. This population decrease is largely a result of out-migration after the closing of New Elk Mine, the prison in Walsenburg, reduction in work force due to lower natural gas production and the resulting loss of related producer support such as drilling, construction, and trucking.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

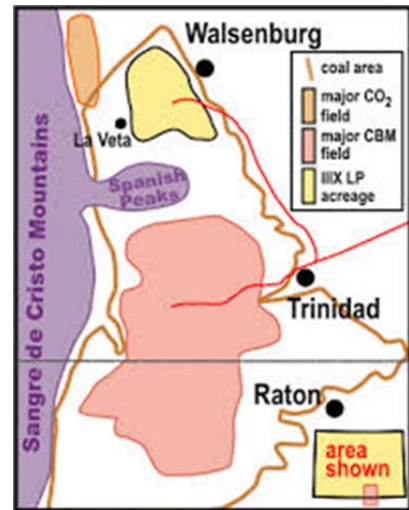
The Stronger Economies Together (SET) initiative began in 2011 and continues as Raton Basin Regional Economic Development. The name is taken from the Raton Basin, a geologic structural basin in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. It takes its name from Raton Pass (see accompanying map). The Raton Basin extends through Huerfano and Las Animas Counties (Region 14) and Colfax Counties, in New Mexico. The region shares “boom and bust”

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energy impact resulting from coal, and natural gas development. The USDA SET Initiative encouraged local economies to identify a natural region that resulted in Region 14 counties to working together across state lines with Colfax County to develop a strategic plan.

USDA Rural Development Western Rural Center, CSU Extension, Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, and El Pomar Foundation collaborated with Raton Basin SET once the region was selected for training. The purpose of SET is to strengthen the capacity of communities/counties in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint for the 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.



In June 2012, Las Animas reached an unemployment rate of 11.2% that compares to June 2013 unemployment of 11.2% reflecting no change. Huerfano County reached 11.8% unemployment in June, 2012 compared to 11.6% for June 2013. The State unemployment rate for July 2013 improved over 2012 from 8.1% to 7.1%.

### HOUSING

New privately owned residential building permits.

County	2011 Total Building Permits	2012 Total Building Permits	Year- Year change
Huerfano	30	24	-6
Las Animas	22	35	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>7</b>

### AGRICULTURE

The region has relied on coal mining and gas production from the Raton Basin. Agriculture, primarily ranching, is a strong economic engine throughout the region. Agriculture is the 4th largest sector in terms of employment, representing 920 jobs or 8.47% of all employment. The largest agriculture industries in terms of employment are 668 animal production jobs and 118 crop production jobs. Economic discussions at the Bottom Up, Stronger Economies Together,

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and Community Round Up meetings include interest in value added production for Agriculture and cattle.

### **CLEAN ENERGY**

The region values its natural assets in renewable solar and wind energy. Four wind turbines are in process of construction east of the I-25 corridor. There is current effort focused upon desired plans to develop a CNG station into the region to complete the I-25 corridor.

### **OTHER**

The City of Trinidad was successful in its effort to receive an award for emerging creative community. Community Forums are scheduled for government and elected officials, not for profit directors, business leaders, and the general public.

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. Southern Colorado Repertory Theatre achieved its goal of securing a building to stage its productions. Huerfano County's Annual Celtic Festival in late September and the Santa Fe Trail days in Las Animas continue to draw many tourists to the region.

### **NEW PROJECTS**

**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. Bids were awarded for the architectural design of the center in July 2012. Funding is in place for construction and is estimated to cost around \$800,000. Design phase is complete for the planned construction of the center.

### **GOALS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR**

1. Authorize and empower an organization to identify and achieve the economic development goals established by the Raton Basin Region.
2. Increase business development and improve business retention by 5% and encourage governments to work together to streamline and reduce regulations and encourage

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development of new industries. Support regional community development projects that enhance the creation, attraction, retention and expansion of business development.

3. Increase education level of area population by 2.5 years by 2020.
4. Have a 30 year regional energy plan in place by 2020.
5. Develop a plan to improve regional healthcare services by December 2015.
6. Expand region wide broadband availability by 20% by December 2014 and maintain state of the art connectivity and communications.