

2014 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 6 – Baca, Bent, Crowley, Kiowa, Otero and Prowers Counties

INTRODUCTION

Region 6 encompasses Baca, Bent, Crowley, Kiowa, Otero and Prowers counties and is primarily an agricultural-based community with limited industrial concerns. The region is designated as an Enhanced Rural Enterprise Zone bringing additional tax incentives for existing business and any new startup business. Job and population contraction continues to be a challenge for the area and this current environment continues to impact the economic landscape. The Southeast area is still experiencing drought conditions, limiting crop production and negatively affecting the local economy and the consuming public.

The region saw an overall 4.37% decrease in population between 2010 and 2013. Bent and Crowley counties saw the biggest percent losses primarily due to declines in the prison population. Kiowa was the only county to see population growth over the last three years.

Population:

County	Census 2010	July 2013	% Change
Baca	3,788	3,669	-3.14%
Bent	6,499	5,674	-12.69%
Crowley	5,823	5,225	-10.27%
Kiowa	1,398	1,401	0.21%
Otero	18,831	18,549	-1.50%
Prowers	12,551	12,236	-2.51%
Colorado	5,029,196	5,264,890	4.69%

Source: State Demography Office

JOBS & THE ECONOMY

The area continues to face tough challenges with both jobs and population. Closures from major employers located in Bent and Prowers Counties over the past 7 - 8 years have eliminated many hundreds of jobs in the region, another significantly negative factor impacting the surrounding communities. The possibility for job creation appears distant as employers have little certainty from which to plan expansion and/or relocation of their operations to this area. This lack of confidence continues to plague businesses, neighborhoods, and families in the region. This uncertainty proves a challenging issue in all of rural Colorado.

Each county within the region saw a drop in unemployment in September 2014 over the previous year.

Unemployment Rate:

County	September 2013	September 2014	% Change
Baca	3.9%	1.7%	-2.2%
Bent	7.5%	4.1%	-3.4%
Crowley	10.0%	5.3%	-4.7%
Kiowa	3.6%	2.0%	-1.6%
Otero	7.9%	5.0%	-2.9%
Prowers	5.5%	3.2%	-2.3%
Colorado	6.3%	4.0%	-2.3%

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HOUSING

Rural Colorado is fairly insulated from major movements in the housing market. Region 6 trends closer to the bottom end of the sales spectrum. Inventories of affordable housing are becoming somewhat limited and new housing starts are showing signs of limited activity. Thus the housing market is showing some improvement, however, it's still closer to the depressed side due to the continued downturn in the job market and the overall economy. Foreclosures continue to trend above average and are attributable to the overall weak job market.

AGRICULTURE

The agriculture industry is the primary economic contributor in the region. The industry is solely dependent on weather and water, which currently is suffering through drought conditions. Water issues continue to negatively impact the viability of the industry and region. Commodity prices fluctuate and are somewhat volatile as compared to previous periods. Growing concerns regarding vital water resource as it relates to agriculture remains significant and paramount in the region. This issue continues to stress personal property rights relative to overall community welfare. Growing urban Colorado needs and Kansas compact demands continue to place unending pressure on this vital regional resource.

CLEAN ENERGY

Colorado Green Wind Power Project, located 20 miles south of the City of Lamar, was developed to help meet Colorado's demand for renewable electricity. Completed in late 2003, the project utilizes 108 General Electric (GE) 1.5 megawatt (MW) wind turbines. At the time it was built it was one of the largest assembled in America. Twin Buttes Wind Farm located in Bent County just west of the Colorado Green Wind Power Project was completed in the spring of 2007 and adds an additional 50 GE 1.5 MW turbines. The combined output of both projects totals 237 MW of renewable wind energy. Both farm projects are owned by Iberdrola, Inc. The operational jobs currently employ approximately 12-16 individuals and the royalties paid to the landowners have a positive local impact. Tax revenue generated by the project benefits communities and local governments. These installations provide Colorado a resource for complying with mandated renewable energy. The region continues efforts to expand transmission capacity to accommodate additional wind energy generation.

OTHER

Heritage Tourism has been a major focus within the region for the past several years with the community utilizing assets such as the Santa Fe Trail and all other agricultural heritage components located in the area. The Canyon & Plains of Southeast Colorado (SECORHT) tourism group was formed in 2006 with financial assistance from DOLA, CTO and Preserve America and continues to promote the many points of tourism interest within the region.

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Southeast Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction (SEBREA), a non-profit group, was formed in 2006 as a multi-faceted response to the simultaneous closures of the Neoplan bus manufacturing plant in Lamar and the Dean Foods pickle plant in La Junta. With support from DOLA, EDA CHFA and local funds regional efforts continue for business attraction and expansion in Region 6.

The Southeast Region views any and all industry in the region as a vital resource. The region is eager to entertain any opportunities for potential new projects. The most valuable resource is the population and workforce. Strong character and individual responsibility are held true as core values that will endure.

NEW PROJECTS

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless - Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community is designed to provide effective and comprehensive services to those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in an effort to end their cycle of homelessness and promote health, wellbeing and active citizenship. The Fort Lyon campus offers an unprecedented opportunity to provide a gateway to permanent housing, supportive services and vocational training in one beautiful and functional setting.

Support offered includes direct access to housing with enhanced services including education, vocation and job training opportunities, co-occurring behavior health and primary healthcare, acquisition of income, benefits and entitlements. It is projected to serve 300 clients by July 2015. The state funded facility has the potential to create 70 plus jobs in the southeast region.