

2014 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 9 – Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Juan Counties

INTRODUCTION

Region 9 encompasses the five-county area of Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Juan Counties as well as the reservations of the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Indian Tribes. The region is located in the southwest corner of the State at the juncture of three distinct physiographic regions: the Rocky Mountains, the Colorado Plateau, and the San Juan Basin. Of the 6,584 square miles that comprise the region, 45% are public lands, 38% are private lands and 17% are tribal lands.

The region is rural with an estimated 2013 population of 93,963 in all five counties. Overall, the region saw a 2.45% increase since 2010, driven mainly by La Plata county.

Population:

County	Census 2010	July 2013	% Change
Archuleta	12,084	12,168	0.70%
Dolores	2,064	2,012	-2.52%
La Plata	51,334	53,446	4.11%
Montezuma	25,535	25,650	0.45%
San Juan	699	687	-1.72%
Colorado	5,029,196	5,264,890	4.69%

Source: State Demography Office

JOBS & THE ECONOMY

Each county in the region has seen a decrease in unemployment over the past year. Other than Montezuma, all are below the state average.

Unemployment Rates:

County	September 2013	September 2014	% Change
Archuleta	6.7%	3.7%	-2.3%
Dolores	6.2%	2.9%	-3.3%
La Plata	5.0%	2.9%	-2.1%
Montezuma	6.6%	4.3%	-2.3%
San Juan	4.4%	2.0%	-2.2%
Colorado	6.3%	4.0%	-2.3%

HOUSING

Although not as high as they were in 2011 - 2012, in which a 29% increase was seen, area housing sales are stable across the region in 2013 - 2014. Montezuma County in particular has seen an 18% increase in residential sales. Residential sales at the higher end (\$800K +) were strong in 2013, and appear to be the result of 2nd home buyers returning to the “quality of life” amenities offered by the region, a buying trend that was especially strong from 1995 to 2007. Sales inventory below \$400K is currently very tight and in high demand, though new

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construction starts are up in 2014. Overall, the southwest region compares favorably to other rural areas around the state. (Statistics courtesy of The Wells Group).

NEW & ONGOING PROJECTS

In order to better utilize assets and operations already dedicated to commercial lending, Region 9 is considering an application to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to become an EB-5 Regional Center. EB-5 Regional Centers have special designation to administer EB-5 investment projects. Regional Centers are any private or public economic entity involved with the promotion of increased domestic capital, job creation, improved regional productivity, and increased economic growth. Specifically, EB-5 Regional Centers assist developers to access financing by utilizing foreign capital for public or private ventures that will create jobs. The financing is low interest with flexible terms for projects ranging in total cost from \$5M to \$50M and above. Research into the costs and benefits of the program is ongoing.

The Four Corners Film Office (4CFO), opened in 2010, is successfully attracting more film and media production to the area. Through March 2013, the 4CFO assisted on 28 projects, estimating \$235,831 of direct economic impact. In 2014, the 4CFO has assisted on 39 projects with over \$200K of measurable economic impact from productions.

GOALS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

Regional goals were aligned to the Colorado Blueprint, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper's economic development initiative. These include:

1. **Expand and maintain broadband/fiber optics infrastructure to support and anticipate the needs of future growth.** The Southwest Council of Governments (SWCCOG) completed a regional telecommunications project, with 16 area governments participating in a 3 year \$4 million dollar fiber infrastructure project. The District was the "Responsible Administrator" for the grant. The project, funded through the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) helped build an open access telecommunications network (SCAN) supported by publicly-owned or leased infrastructure to provide secure connections between community public offices including government, education, law enforcement, search and rescue, and medical facilities. The SWCCOG is very proud of what the SCAN project has achieved - namely increased broadband capacity at lower costs, and facilitated a spirit of cooperation with service providers who also have much to gain from an open access network. The region looks forward to more success stories as governments, businesses and private citizens take advantage of the network. The Final Report of the results of this project can be seen at <http://www.swccog.org/projects/telecom/>. A short video is also available at <http://youtu.be/fQds5LEscoM>

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2. **Improve community amenities necessary to attract and retain business, focusing on healthcare, education, and housing.** The region’s Community Development Action Plans (CDAPs) identify specific projects planned by each county to meet this goal. There have been 47 projects completed since the 2012 CDAPs were approved by each county’s Board of Commissioners. A total of 84 projects listed in the CDAPs are now in progress in the five counties. A status update and reprioritization of each project is currently underway and is expected to be completed by early 2015.
3. **Be business friendly and make the region an effective and efficient place to do business.** The IMPLAN economic modeling system is being used by a number of local governments and economic development organizations to estimate economic contributions and impacts from current and proposed projects. Representatives from various sectors (education, industry, workforce and economic development) in SW Colorado attended Sector Summits in 2013 and in May 2014 to identify the regional industry sectors in which they could have the most impact: Energy, Food & Ag, and Advanced Manufacturing were selected as the most promising for Region 9. Initial meetings have already occurred in the Energy sector and partnerships are forming around industry priorities.
4. **Diversify the economy and improve access to markets.** This goal is being addressed by a number of partner organizations in the region, including county and municipal economic development groups as well as the Southwest Colorado Small Business Development Center (SBDC).
5. **Encourage retention and growth of existing businesses.** Regional economic gardening efforts continue to grow through partnerships with area economic development groups and the SBDC. A new accelerator program, the *Southwest Colorado Accelerator Program for Entrepreneurs (SCAPE)* is an innovative collaboration to provide funding, education and the intense mentoring needed to build the region’s entrepreneurial infrastructure. SCAPE is one year old and to-date five businesses have graduated, resulting in eight jobs and raising \$385,000 in capital. In August 2014, Region 9 was recognized for this project by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) with an Innovation Award.