

2016 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 2015 population of 96,088 in all five counties. Overall, the region saw a 4.8% increase since 2010, driven mainly by La Plata County.

Population:

County	Census 2010	July 2015	% Change
Archuleta	12,084	12,384	2.48%
Dolores	2,064	1,953	-5.38%
La Plata	51,334	54,907	6.96%
Montezuma	25,535	26,139	2.37%
San Juan	699	705	0.86%
Colorado	5,029,196	5,456,584	8.50%

Source: State Demography Office

JOBS & THE ECONOMY

Each county in the region, other than Dolores, saw a slight decrease in unemployment between August 2015 and August 2016. With the exception of Dolores and Montezuma Counties, all are below the state average.

Unemployment Rates:

County	August 2015	August 2016	% Change
Archuleta	3.3%	3.1%	-0.2%
Dolores	3.4%	4.2%	0.8%
La Plata	3.1%	2.9%	-0.2%
Montezuma	4.7%	4.5%	-0.2%
San Juan	2.9%	2.4%	-0.5%
Colorado	3.5%	3.3%	-0.2%

The Region 9 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) has been updated and is available at www.scan.org.

Strategies for economic development have been proposed for each county in the region. Many of these focus on **developing infrastructure and services** that recruit, grow and retain businesses that provide diverse, well-paying jobs for residents. In La Plata County, businesses, particularly industrial firms like construction companies and small manufacturers, are seeking affordable space to buy, lease or build. However, recent findings suggest that rather than building a new business park in the County, which

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would require substantial investments in infrastructure, it might be better to identify a location for low intensity industrial users such as storage yards to relocate and redevelop underutilized lots in Bodo Park for higher density office and light industrial businesses.

There is also a ballot initiative for a **new airport terminal** in La Plata County. The Durango/La Plata County Airport (DRO) is currently updating its Airport Master Plan, which studies the facility needs to meet projected aeronautical demand for the next 20 years and recommend a plan that prepares the airport to serve as the preferred gateway and economic catalyst for the Four Corners region. Proponents believe that a new terminal will sustain the region's economic resiliency, enable better service for passengers, airlines, and general aviation, and easily expand if the airport continues to grow.

The **expansion of broadband infrastructure** is still a high priority. The Southwest Council of Governments (SWCCOG) completed a regional telecommunications \$4 million fiber infrastructure project in 2014. Subsequently, the SWCCOG applied for and received \$75,000 in DoLA funds for the preparation of a regional telecommunications business plan and operating strategy for moving forward with their network and filling gaps. The report is expected to be complete in October 2016 and will be available at <http://www.swccog.org/projects/telecom/>.

Improving community amenities necessary to attract and retain business, focusing on healthcare, education, and housing is underway. Healthcare projects include the construction of an Integrated Care Facility in Pagosa Springs, a new wing at the Southwest Memorial Hospital in Cortez, and a Hospice residence in Durango that will serve the region. New government buildings are springing up across the region. Dolores County received a \$2 million Department of Local Affairs (DoLA) grant to build a new public service center in Dove Creek. It will house the Road & Bridge Department as well as a GIS office, and will include a meeting room to serve community events and as a disaster command center. There are also upgrades to Judicial and other governmental buildings in Archuleta, La Plata and Montezuma Counties. In addition, Cortez is building a new City Hall.

In its third year, the **Southwest Colorado Accelerator Program for Entrepreneurs (SCAPE)** is an innovative collaboration to provide access to funding, education and the intense mentoring needed to build the region's entrepreneurial infrastructure. To-date, 15 businesses have been launched, resulting in more than 45 jobs, and raising \$3.5 million dollars in capital. The program has received funding (\$150,000 total) from the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, and was recently awarded \$50,000 from the Small Business Administration. They have also received another year of \$60,000 from the USDA Rural Business Development Grants.

The Gold King Mine spill of September 2015 has been the catalyst for a number of developments in San Juan County. The **Bonita Peak Mining District Superfund** was announced on September 9th, and planning for its implementation has begun. In addition, Region 9 submitted a successful application to the EDA to fund a Recovery Coordinator in San Juan County. The Recovery Coordinator will be responsible for working with county businesses and assisting them to successfully remain open and

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navigate the community's transition from the Gold King Mine Spill disaster to a long term Superfund cleanup. San Juan County is primarily tourism based and the Coordinator will develop a resiliency plan for existing businesses, and identify opportunities for economic diversification. The Coordinator will also be a central point of contact in the communication and dissemination of accurate information to the town and county.

HOUSING

According to MLS numbers provided by the Wells Group, from August 2015 to August 2016 **home sales** were relatively flat in some counties, attributed in large part to declines in the energy industry. However, Archuleta County has seen a resurgence in home sales as the values are so attractive for second homes. There has been a 15% increase in sales, and the median price has gone from \$243,000 to \$264,000 – a 7% increase. Archuleta County has identified the provision of workforce and low income housing as a top priority and has formed a task force comprised of local businesses, governments and other organizations to identify possible solutions.

There were 22 home sales in Dolores County, up from 20 sales during this time period last year. The Dolores County median home price is the lowest in the region at \$115,000 – up from \$85,000 last year. La Plata County is down 4.5% in number of sales, though the median price went from \$345,000 to \$349,000 (1%). There are low inventories of housing stock under \$500,000 in the county. Montezuma County is down 9.7% in number of sales, again probably due to declines in the energy industry, though the median price went up from \$171,750 to \$179,000. Sales in San Juan County went up from 21 to 33 sales, a 57% increase! The Anvil Mountain housing project will soon be coming on-line and has interested buyers for single family home lots, and the County received a DoLA and Division of Housing funds to help build a 12 unit apt building next summer.