

2017 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 a growing industrial sector. The region is designated as an Enhanced Rural Enterprise Zone, bringing additional tax incentives for both existing and new businesses. Job and population contraction continues to be a challenge for the area and this current environment continues to impact the economic landscape. In 2016-2017, Region 6 received above average amounts of snow and rainfall, which has helped to bring the area out of the drought. Farmers in the region reported an improvement in the crop season, with crop production hitting all-time highs for summer 2017. Lack of water is always a concern in Southeast Colorado as drought has a negative effect on the local economy and the consuming public.

On average, the region lost 1.1% of its population each year between 2010 and 2016, whereas the state has grown by 1.6%. Bent County shrank the most; 2.4% of the county's residents left each year. Otero (0.5%) and Kiowa (0.6%) counties shrank the least on average.

Population:

County	Census 2010	July 2016	Annual Change
Baca	3,788	3,557	-1.0%
Bent	6,499	5,626	-2.4%
Crowley	5,823	5,214	-1.8%
Kiowa	1,398	1,347	-0.6%
Otero	18,831	18,290	-0.5%
Prowers	12,551	11,841	-1.0%
Region 6	48,890	45,875	-1.1%
Colorado	5,029,196	5,538,180	1.6%

Source: State Demography Office

JOBS & THE ECONOMY

The effort to promote the region has been ongoing as communities in the region have been focusing their marketing efforts to stress the attractiveness of wide-open, non-congested living conditions. The effort to attract new business, retain, and promote existing businesses, as well as attract and support businesses in the area, has led to a renewed effort by all to market Southeast Colorado as a place to work, live, and play. Economic Development agencies continue their efforts to promote the region by marketing and providing information to site selectors.

There is a concerted effort to find ways to attract millennials. Great strides have been made in the broadband effort with fiber being offered to major employers/organizations (hospitals, governmental agencies, schools, etc.). The Regional Broadband Strategic Plan that was just completed in August 2017 provides gigabyte fiber to most towns across the region and can be accessed for a fee that is determined by location. For those areas outside of Town limits, efforts to provide the last mile are still very important and will continue to be addressed.

Following State trends, the region saw reduced unemployment in August 2017 over the previous year. The greatest improvement to the unemployment rate occurred in Otero (1.1%) and Prowers (1.1%)

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counties, which both experienced slightly greater reductions in unemployment than the state. Reductions in the unemployment rate in Bent (-0.9%), Crowley (-0.6%), Baca (-0.5%), and Kiowa (-0.4%), and counties suggest potential growth in the future.

Unemployment Rates:

County	August 2016	August 2017	% Change
Baca	1.7%	1.2%	-0.5%
Bent	3.0%	2.1%	-0.9%
Crowley	3.4%	2.8%	-0.6%
Kiowa	1.8%	1.4%	-0.4%
Otero	4.5%	3.4%	-1.1%
Prowers	3.2%	2.1%	-1.1%
Colorado	3.2%	2.2%	-1.0%

Source: Labor Market Information

HOUSING

Housing continues to be one of the biggest challenges faced by Region 6. New housing stock is particularly challenging. Inventories of affordable housing are somewhat limited and new housing starts are showing signs of limited activity.

AGRICULTURE

The primary economic contributor in Region 6 is the agriculture industry, which is solely dependent on weather and water. Water issues impact the viability of the industry and region, but 2016-2017 showed an exceptional improvement. Commodity prices improved due to the change in the amount of rainfall in 2016 and 2017. It has been a banner year for farmers as crop harvests were very good. Concerns regarding vital water resources as they relate to agriculture will always remain significant and paramount in the region. The water issue will always be a concern for personal property rights relative to overall community welfare. Growing urban Colorado needs and Kansas compact demands will continue to place pressure on this vital regional resource.

CLEAN ENERGY

The Vilas Solar Project in Baca County is a 5MW Solar Project that is under construction and scheduled to be finished by the end of 2017. The project is owned by Renewable Energy Systems. The power generated from this project will help to stabilize rates in the region as well as create additional capacity for growth and expansion of industry in the area.

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NEW PROJECTS

Gateway Safety Flare Company is one of two flare manufacturers of its kind in the United States. It located to Lamar, Colorado in early June and has thus far created 6 jobs and anticipates doubling its workforce by end of 2018. Gateway ships domestically as well as internationally. The owner is aggressive in increasing its market, which has resulted in quick growth.

The Sage Brush Meadows project is anticipated in Prowers County. An 80 bed nursing facility to be located in Lamar, it could provide 30-40 jobs upon completion of the project, which will address the healthcare needs of elderly people as well as a growing housing need in Southeast Colorado. However, the project was denied eligibility for a USDA grant at the beginning of 2017, though private funding is sought.

Other

Heritage Tourism continues to be a major focus utilizing assets such as the Santa Fe Trail and 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.

In addition, Southeast Colorado Enterprise Development, Inc. (SECED) and the Southeast Council of Governments (SECOG) are making efforts to provide an avenue for the attraction and injection of dollars to support the six-county region. Acting as the Enterprise Zone Administrator, it offers an avenue for accessing business and tax incentive programs through the Enhanced Rural Enterprise Zone. Southeast Colorado Enterprise Zone also offers loan programs to support business development as well as community development through the esthetic improvement of single-family owner-occupied homes.