

# 2013 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 11 – Garfield, Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt Counties

## INTRODUCTION

Region 11 is located in Northwest Colorado, and is made up of the Counties of Mesa, Garfield, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt. The region is a large geographic area with a relatively sparse population. Estimated 2012 population for the region is 248,318 a 0.36% increase over 2011. While growth has slowed over recent years due to overall economic conditions, several factors resulting in a reduction in energy development activities, and a sluggish economy impacting the region's tourism and recreation industries, a modest rebound in drilling coupled with continued growth of Colorado Mesa University has helped to maintain modest population and job growth.

County	Census 2010	July 2012	% Change
Garfield	56,389	57,148	1.35%
Mesa	146,723	148,013	0.88%
Moffat	13,795	13,154	-4.65%
Rio Blanco	6,666	6,763	1.46%
Routt	23,509	23,240	-1.14%
<b>Colorado</b>	<b>5,029,196</b>	<b>5,188,683</b>	<b>3.17%</b>

## JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

The region is characterized by a diverse economy, with mineral extraction and energy development, health care, and transportation being the key industries. Agriculture is also a main economic activity in the region. Traditional base industries are supplemented by a robust tourism and recreation industry.

Energy development takes place in all of the region's counties, but is concentrated mainly in Garfield, Moffat, and Rio Blanco Counties. It consists of oil production in Rio Blanco County, natural gas drilling in Garfield, Mesa, and Moffat counties, mining mostly in Moffat and Rio Blanco, and electrical generation in Moffat and Routt. Agriculture, predominantly cattle ranching and hay production, is strongest in Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties. Tourism is the main economic driver in Routt County, and remains significant in Mesa and Garfield Counties as well. Government services are also a major employer in all counties except Rio Blanco.

Grand Junction is the largest urban area in the region, and is the largest city between Denver and Salt Lake City, UT. As such, it serves as a regional hub for transportation, commerce, manufacturing, higher education, and health care. Grand Junction Regional Airport and St. Mary's Hospital are the largest facilities of their kind between Denver and Salt Lake City. Colorado Mesa University continues to expand and grow, and bring with it increased economic opportunities for the region. Manufacturing is an increasingly important industry in Mesa County, with inroads being made into the aerospace industry.

Retirees also continue to make up a significant portion of the population, particularly in Mesa County. The Area Agency on Aging provides many services to seniors in the region.

The region's unemployment rate continues to drop slightly, with all counties seeing a modest reduction in unemployment to the lowest rate in the last two years. Routt County has the highest rate of unemployment in the region; Moffat and Garfield counties have the lowest.

## **AGRICULTURE**

Agriculture is a significant industry and economic driver in Region 11. It is also a diverse industry, varying from traditional cattle and sheep ranching and grazing in all counties, predominantly Rio Blanco, Moffat, and Garfield, to fruit orchards and vineyards in parts of Mesa County. Hay is grown in every county in the region, and a limited amount of corn production and cattle feeding are carried out in western Mesa County.

## **CLEAN ENERGY**

Region 11's commitment to clean energy development continues with various initiatives being undertaken. Garfield County began offering homeowners low interest loans for home energy efficiency improvements, through the "Garfield Clean Energy Revolving Loan" program. As well, Region 11 Counties continue with efforts towards establishing alternative energy fleets, and expanding the use of natural gas as a transportation fuel, including the development of infrastructure. Colorado Mesa University is also involved in various clean energy initiatives. Other clean energy programs include Routt County's "Vision 2030".

## **GOALS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR**

### **Garfield County**

1. Encourage Growth of Existing Business and Industry
2. Create New Jobs
3. Diversify Garfield County's Economic Base
4. Revitalize downtown and Mainstreet areas in municipalities

### **Mesa County**

1. Become an Epicenter for Energy Innovation
2. Elevate the Community Profile
3. Support the Growth of Existing Business

### **Moffat County**

1. Increase the number, size, and profitability of local businesses to maintain and create jobs.
2. Sustain or increase current levels of production in core (primary) industries to maintain or create jobs.

3. Ensure current generation broadband and cellular technology availability.
4. Ensure long-term viability of energy sector jobs and businesses to maintain and create jobs.
5. Ensure local control is recognized and honored by state and regional entities.

#### **Rio Blanco County**

1. Streamline regulatory and permitting processes, remove overlapping regulations, improve cross jurisdictional communication, improving “customer service” in all facets of government, customizing regulations to match the “rural” setting rather than “urban” setting
2. Create a mechanism to keep more Severance Tax and Federal Mineral Lease dollars in Rio Blanco County where the majority of the impacts from resource extraction occur
3. Provide more affordable housing options and entice the workforce to remain in Rio Blanco County
4. Diversify our economic base to reduce the boom/bust cycle, encourage business growth, create new jobs, reduce the amount of sales tax leakage into neighboring communities, allow businesses more access to capital and reduce the cost of doing business in our state
5. Allow more dollars for K-12 education

#### **Routt County**

1. Expansion of educational opportunities
2. Expansion of cellular coverage within the county
3. Expansion of broadband capabilities
4. Expand tourism by better utilization of existing resources
5. To maintain coal production to within 5% of the 5-year average 2006-2010