

A full-page background image of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, three goats with thick, light-colored woolly coats are standing on a rocky ledge. The middle goat is smaller, flanked by two larger adults. The background features steep, rugged mountains with patches of green and brown vegetation, and some snow-capped peaks in the distance under a clear blue sky.

# 5. Data & Trends

PEOPLE & COMMUNITY SERVICES  
DATA & DISCUSSION

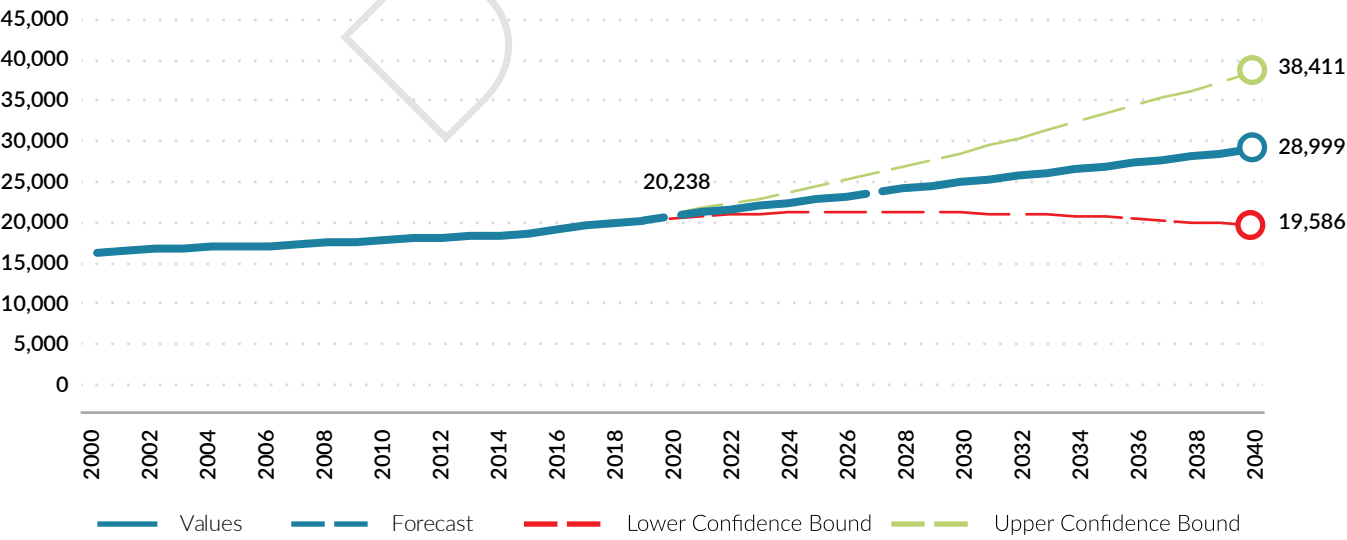
WHY THIS THEME IS  
IMPORTANT

With changing demographics and an increasing population, Chaffee County is experiencing shifting priorities and growing pains when providing community services to its residents and their changing needs. From education to senior services, the current and future residents of the County rely on these services to meet essential needs.

KEY DATA POINTS

Population & Projections

- Chaffee County has experienced unprecedented growth over the last 20 years, with the fastest growth rates occurring in recent years. According to the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), **from 2015 to 2018 Chaffee County added approximately 1,438 people, an average growth rate of 7.7%, up 3.3% from that of 2010 to 2015 (4.5%).**
- Utilizing U.S. Census data from 2000 through today, an exponential smoothing forecast estimates that **Chaffee County's population will increase by 33% by 2035**, reaching 26,949 people based on historic growth trends.



Population Growth: Population and projection, 2000 to 2040 (Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Cushing Terrell)

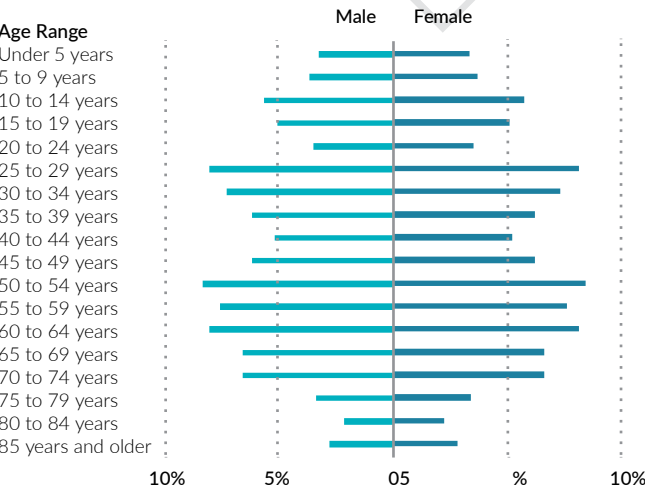
- Pending unforeseen circumstances, Chaffee County will add between 6,000 and 13,000 new residents between 2020 and 2035 who will need adequate housing, services, goods, and recreational activities to maintain the livability that attracts people to this community.

Demographics

- Chaffee County's population is aging**, with a median age of 49.1, which is much older than the state's median age of 36.6.
- An estimated 64% of the population is between the ages of 30 and 75, and half is over the age of 50. The County's population pyramid indicates current and future demand for housing and services for an aging population, such as assisted living facilities and expanded health care.
- Personal incomes in Chaffee County are below average for the state**, but are increasing at a faster rate. According to the

Age and Gender: Population Pyramid

Source: US Census ACS 2017



Median Income Comparison, 2010 - 2018

Area	Median Income 2010	Median Income 2018	% Change
Chaffee	\$42,941	\$54,580	27%
Colorado	\$56,456	\$68,811	22%
United States	\$51,914	\$60,293	16%

Source: US Census ACS 2018

US Census 5-year estimates, the median income of Chaffee County residents increased from \$42,941 in 2010 to \$54,580 in 2018. This 27% rate of increase is higher than the state of Colorado's 22% increase in the median income in that time. According to HUD and CHFA, the Area Median income for 2020 is \$50,000 for a single person.

- An increase in second homes and occasional use homes point to a more seasonal population.** In 2018, the US Census estimated that 19% of housing units in the County were for seasonal or occasional use only, around 2,069 homes. At an average of 2.2 persons per unit in 2018, that represented an estimated seasonal population of around 4,552 persons.

Schools

- The County is serviced by two public school districts, one in Buena Vista and the other in Salida. Each has an elementary, middle/junior, and high school.
- The Montessori School and the Darren Patterson Christian School also operate in the County.

Higher Education

- Residents within the Salida School District voted in 2019 to join the Colorado Mountain College (CMC) Tax District and pay the attendant mill levy on real property. These funds will be used to support much-needed courses and programs through the College.
- CMC is already gearing up its programming in the southern half of the County, with significant emphasis on technical training programs and careers.

Medical Care

- The Heart of the Rockies Medical Center in Salida is the only hospital in the County, and there are many services not available at this facility that require trips to the Front Range.
- Services that were identified as lacking or needed include: urgent care, pediatric dentists, transitional care, substance abuse programs, continuum of care and hospice.

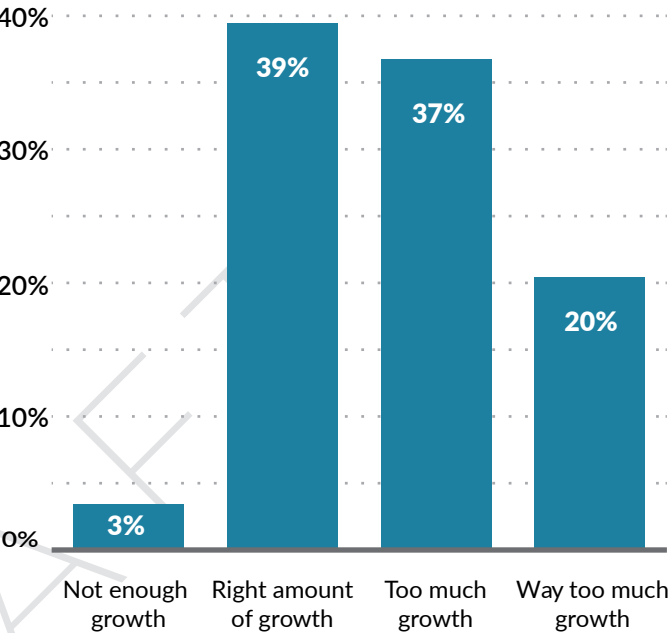
Behavioral Health

- Solvista Health provides mental and behavioral health services for Fremont, Chaffee, Lake and Custer Counties out of Salida. In 2019, they received a grant to build a treatment center adjacent to the Heart of the Rockies Medical Center.

Emergency Response Services

- Capacity for first responders like police, fire and EMS, although potentially adequate for the current population, might b challenged as they serve a growing population. Goal 1.7 “Ensure emergency services are adequately funded and staffed to maintain high quality

What are your feelings on the pace and amount of growth in the County? Survey #1 Results



service in the County as the populations increases” is intended to find ways to proportionally increase facilities, personnel, and resources for emergency service branches at the same pace of proposed growth. Additional studies and capital planning should be completed to build an understanding of servicing needs.

COMMUNITY INPUT

- Almost half (45%) of residents who took the first online community survey have lived in Chaffee County for over 10 years, while 38% have lived here for less than 5 years.
- When asked what they valued most about Chaffee County, 25% of all answers mentioned the people and the sense of community. Many mentioned the friendly people of Chaffee, and the tight-knit nature of the Arkansas Valley community.

- About 39% of survey responders thought that Chaffee was experiencing the right amount of growth, 37% thought that there was too much growth, and 20% responded that there was way too much growth. One responder stated “Growth is going to happen and we have to have a plan and be more progressive...if we do not do that, the growth will still happen, but we will not have control over it. Growth is not a bad thing!”

COMP PLAN IMPLICATIONS

With changing demographics comes the need to create the facilities, supply the housing types and construct mobility features for all ages and abilities, including healthy recreation options. This means projects should be oriented to accessibility with gathering spaces that have features and facilities for all ages, such as playgrounds, shady resting areas and safe, visible gathering spaces where the community can interact.

Additional focus is therefore placed in existing town centers, where a critical mass of housing, jobs and job creation opportunities and gathering spaces would encourage the vitality and vibrancy desired by the Chaffee community.

Much study and discussion has been held on the social capital within Chaffee and how it relates to growth and development. The value in tapping into Chaffee’s social networks was communicated in the Envision Chaffee process which stated several grassroots-level ambitions including (paraphrased from “Envision Chaffee County”):

- Chaffee County has a severe shortage of licensed child care locations. Providers decreased from 27 to 12 in recent years, and 65% of 2018 Child Care Availability Survey respondents indicate they may leave due to child care shortages.
- Concern about finding common ground and building community capacity to discuss difficult issues, and develop and achieve solutions.
- Support vulnerable residents: Currently resources are limited for supporting domestic violence programs or resources at the county-level. Goal 1.8 “Support vulnerable residents with appropriate services” is intended to consider expanding those programs to offer support for such services.

Fiscal responsibility is paramount to this comprehensive planning effort, particularly as a global pandemic continues to impact the day-to-day financial well-being of Chaffee County. To the extent that it is feasible, development and growth must only occur if it does not cause undue burden on the County’s finances or its ability to provide a high level of public services. As such the plan has a focus within this theme relating directly to the subject of fiscal responsibility with Goal 1.9: Maintain a Fiscal effective County government, and a list of strategies consistent with the community’s desire to maintain financial health while promoting the right amount and character of growth.



# COUNTY CHARACTER DATA & DISCUSSION

## WHY THIS THEME IS IMPORTANT

County character is visualized in the historic architecture of the core business districts of town and city centers, the historic ranches lining the Collegiate Peaks Byway, the ruins of old mines, and the many pedestrian and bike trails connecting people to recreation opportunities.

Character comes out in the feeling of being in Chaffee County and walking down the streets of Salida, Buena Vista, and Poncha Springs. It comes out of driving down Collegiate Peaks Byway, or one of the winding mountain passes. It's the sounds of the Arkansas River and the glee of people rafting its rapids.

Character can be measured by the demographic, social, or economic characteristics of the County's people. It can also be measured visually by surveying the natural and built environment. Both means of measurement are important to understand in discussing goals and policies that could bring about or maintain desired character in the future. The following discusses this theme in terms of how character has shifted and the implications of such change.

Maintaining public management of public lands at all levels is a mission of Chaffee County's leadership. This Comp Plan builds upon that legacy.

## GROWTH AND ITS EFFECTS ON CHARACTER

Recent growth (residential subdivision, land development or infill redevelopment) has been a catalyst for change in community character. The threats in Chaffee County are found among many other mountain and resort communities, including the loss of agricultural landscapes and open spaces in place of suburban sprawl. This exacerbates a jobs and housing imbalance as residences continue to be built on the easiest-to-develop land further out in the unincorporated county instead of near employment centers.

## KEY DATA POINTS

### Parks and Public Land

- **Chaffee County is 83% public land** owned by Federal, State and Local organizations.
- Resolution 2017-10 "Recognizing the Value of Federal Public Lands" which was adopted in 2017 to state the County's continuing support for public management, maintenance and control of federal lands. The resolution states the public value inherent in these lands and intends to maintain that public use for future generations. Chaffee County does not maintain a formal park or recreation system or facilities such as campgrounds. **Citizens have access to large tracts of state and federal lands for recreational purposes and hundreds of miles of developed trails and over 900 private and public campsites in the County.**

- The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages 70% of the 83% of public land in Chaffee. The Forest Service has **over 300 miles of trails** within the Chaffee County Forests.
- The Bureau of Land Management manages 8% of public trails in Chaffee County.
- The State of Colorado owns over 20,000 acres in Chaffee County, managed by the Colorado State Forest Service, State Land Board, Department of Corrections and the Colorado Division of Wildlife.
- The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) is managed through a unique partnership of Colorado State Parks, the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Division of Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service. The AHRA manages recreation along a 152-mile extent of the Arkansas River.

### Historic & Cultural Resources

- Chaffee County has a tremendous bank of natural and cultural resources such as abundant wildlife, scenic natural areas like the Chalk Cliffs, historic towns and sites, natural hot springs and pools, and blue-ribbon trout rivers and streams.
- The County has a wealth of sites of historic and archaeological interest. These range from mines to historic cemeteries and ghost towns such as Turret. Of particular note is the **town of St. Elmo, a National Historic District.** Currently, there are no land development or zoning regulations that protect these historic and archaeological resources in the County.
- Salida's Creative District and art scene have offered residents increased opportunities to interact with art after being selected as one of only two inaugural "Certified Creative Districts" in Colorado in 2012.

- Many widely varies cultural and community events have put Chaffee County on the map as a unique destination to enjoy the creative arts, the Arkansas River, music and history.

### Agriculture

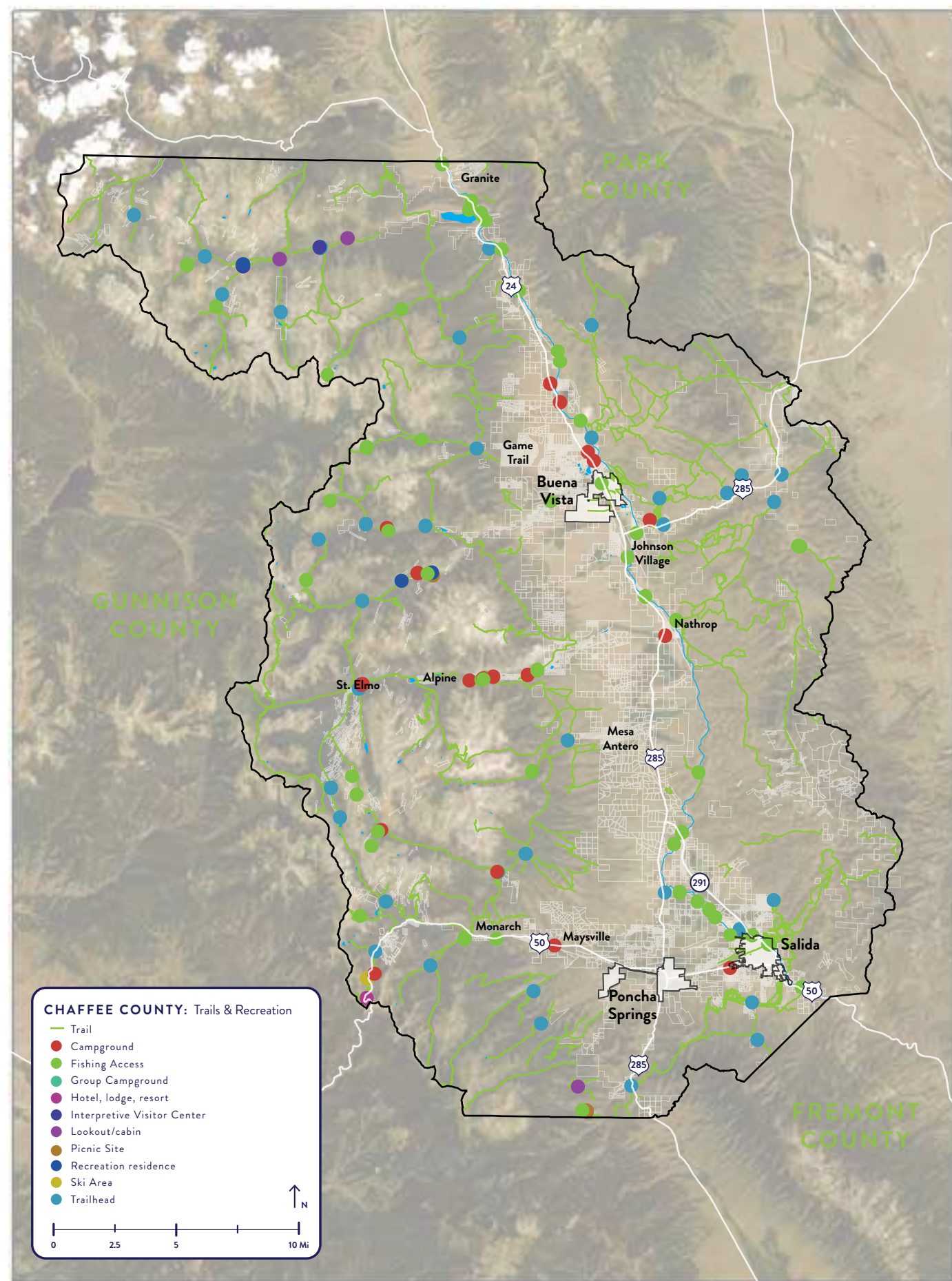
- In recent years, **farms and ranches in Chaffee County have been increasing in number while decreasing in size.** According to USDA Census of Agriculture estimates, from 2012 to 2017 the number of ranches and farms in the County increased by 30%, while the acreage of farm and ranchland decreased by 15%.
- Most sales from farming and ranching in Chaffee County come from livestock, poultry and products (67%) while 33% come from crop farming."
- **There are approximately 16,464 acres of irrigated land** in Chaffee County, which is 25% of land in farms and ranches.
- 90% of farms in Chaffee County are family farms.

### Chaffee County Agriculture

County Farms	2017	% Change since 2012
Number of farms	289	+30%
Land in farms (acres)	66,297	-15%
Average farm size (acres)	229	-34%
Land in farms by use		2017
Cropland	26%	
Pastureland	62%	
Woodland	7%	
Other	5%	

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2017





## Recreation

- **Recreation use is growing by 15% per year.** We currently have about 4.3 Million visitors per year. At the current growth rate this will double to more than 8 Million in 6-7 years. Impact is increasing in parallel. Of 1,005 dispersed campsites monitored in 2019, 37% have trash and/or human waste and roughly 40% are within 100 feet of water. In the Fourmile area, dispersed campsite numbers are increasing by 23% per year - or doubling every 4-5 years and doubling impacts. This was also identified as a top 5 community concern in the Envision survey and is the second greatest threat to forest health (just after severe wildfire). The challenge is retaining quality experiences and economic benefits while also maintaining health of forests, waters, wildlife and working lands - all of which are currently being impacted by recreation growth.
- There are **over 800 miles of trails** within Chaffee County for hiking, biking and horseback riding. Some trails are open for ATV/OHV and dirt bike recreation, like the 10,000-acre Fourmile Travel Management Recreation Area.
- The **102 miles of whitewater on the Arkansas River** that runs through the County are open to fishing, white water rafting and kayaking. Boaters can find everything from Class IV and Class V rapids, to milder Class II and Class III sections.
- Monarch Mountain offers over 800 skiable acres, 670 of which can be accessed by ski lifts. There are 66 total trails, and the Mountain gets an average annual snowfall of 350 inches.

## COMMUNITY INPUT

- When asked what the greatest risk to Chaffee County's current quality of life was, 26% survey responders mentioned uncontrolled growth and over-development, and another 26% believed that the lack of affordable workforce housing posed the biggest threat.
- Responders appeared to value the County's open space and were cautious of growth encroaching on natural lands and changing the character of the County.
- Survey responders took pride in the character of the County - when asked what makes Chaffee County a great place to live, 23% answered the rural, small-town feel of their community. Many mentioned the laid-back or "slow" lifestyle as something to be preserved.
- While 97% of the 1,500 citizens who participated in the Envision survey indicated that "working lands are important to my quality of life," there has been a 15% decrease in agricultural lands in the last 5 years or -3% a year. At that rate, agricultural lands will be halved in about 16 years, vastly impacting County character and also the ecosystem (see Theme 5).

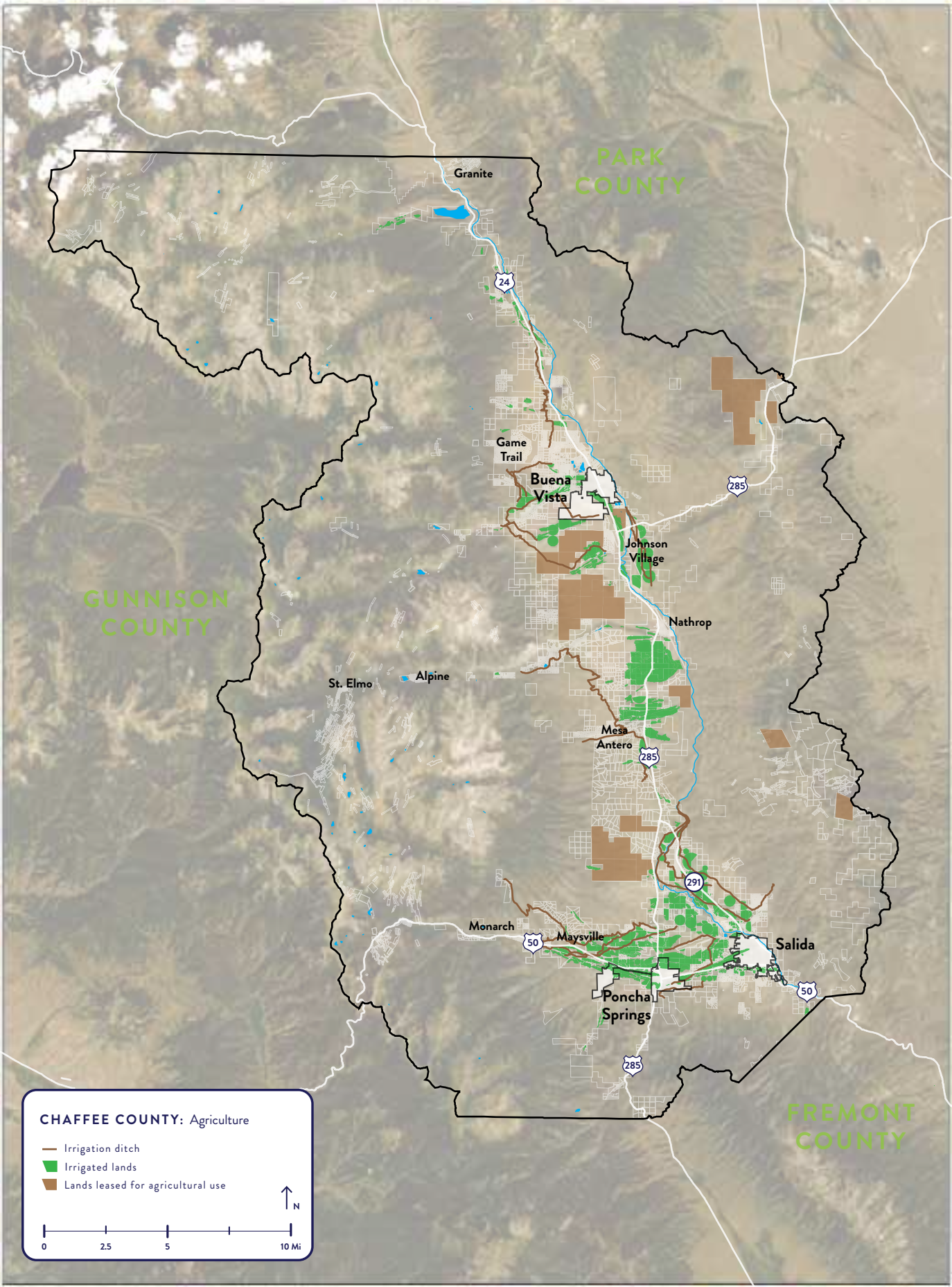


COMP PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Agriculture, recreation, western heritage and open space contribute to Chaffee County’s character and allow its people their chosen lifestyles. The Comp Plan recognizes this and proclaims the need for flexibility in the face of change. Character is after all defined by the County’s people and when the people change, the plan must be adaptable.

The conversion of ranches, farms or other working agricultural landscapes for suburban single family style development has been the impetus for change in land use philosophy across Chaffee County for decades. Similar issues were evident in the 2000 Comprehensive Plan and more recently the issue was discussed in the Citizens’ Land Use Roundtable. Demand continues to drive the need to provide housing for newcomers. Ranchers and landowners are able to take advantage of the market by conveying pieces of vacant or agricultural land to developers for residential subdivision. Meanwhile, smaller pieces of farmland have been conveyed through subdivisions exempt from full land use review through exemptions in state law.

This pattern has left unincorporated Chaffee County with little land available for subdivision when public lands and previously platted subdivisions are removed from consideration (See Theme 7: Growth & Land Use for additional discussion on developable land). As that is, future land use policy in Part III of this plan provides guidance to keep agricultural lands in the rural county while respecting the rights of ranchers, farmers and landowners to manage their lands in their best interest for future generations.



# AFFORDABLE & INCLUSIVE HOUSING

## DATA & DISCUSSION

### WHY THIS THEME IS IMPORTANT

Understanding the interrelationship between housing costs, jobs, local economics and sustainable growth, Affordable and Inclusive Housing plans for a future where housing is accessible for all segments of the population. This theme centers on the lifestyle that includes all people of all ages, social groups and income levels.

Along with the State of Colorado and the country itself, Chaffee County and the region face challenges to providing sustainable housing for its workforce. A regional housing shortage, lack of diversity of housing, and low-wage jobs have priced certain income levels out of the County, and have continued to push existing residents elsewhere.

Understanding the regional nature of housing, the community partnered in completing the Chaffee County Housing Needs Assessment in 2016 which assessed trends, evaluated supply and demand conditions and identified gaps where resources should be focused.

In general the study found that most new jobs added to the County in the past 20 years have been low-wage, tourism-based work, coupled with the rapidly increasing cost of housing and land, resulting in the widening of the gap between wages, incomes and housing. With the

high cost of constructing housing preventing adequate numbers of new homes on the market and non-local ownership and short term rentals constraining the supply of housing to new workers, the gap will continue to widen.

### KEY DATA POINTS

#### Pace of Housing Growth

- **The number of housing units in the County has increased**, with growth of 2,739 units County-wide from 2000 to 2018, according to DOLA. However, the County only grew by 1,975 households over that time. Since one household is equivalent to one occupied housing unit, this faster growth of housing units compared to households indicates an **increase in second home ownership**.
- According to US Census 5-year estimates, 26.8% of housing units in Chaffee County are vacant, which is much higher than the state vacancy rate of 10%. The Census also estimates that in 2018 **2,069 units (19% of total housing units) were used as second homes**, classified as “for seasonal, recreational or occasional use”, compared to Colorado’s 5% second homes.
- **A large portion of the housing stock in Chaffee is in the unincorporated county, according to DOLA.** Of the approximate 11,188 housing units, 29% are in Salida, 14% are in Buena Vista, 4% are in Poncha Springs, and 53% are in the unincorporated area. Development in the unincorporated area is generally low density, dispersed, and without municipal utilities.

- **The Chaffee County Housing Needs Assessment concluded that the region’s households in most need of housing are those below 120% AMI.** It identified a 1,262-unit shortfall for households at 60% AMI and below, an 834-unit shortfall for those at 60-120% AMI, and a 330-unit shortfall for the “missing middle” households between 120 and 160% AMI in 2016.

#### Housing Type

- Based on 2018 US Census estimates, single-family detached housing units made up 81% of the county-wide housing stock, followed by mobile homes at 9.8%.
- Excluding the municipalities, in the unincorporated areas of the County, the **majority (85%) of housing units are single family detached**, up 9% since 2010.
- The number of mobile home units in unincorporated Chaffee decreased from 20% of all units to just 11% from 2010 to 2017.

- The housing stock has become less diverse over the last 15 years in the County, with only 5% of units being multifamily. According to the Housing Needs Assessment, there has been very little apartment construction due to a lack of available sites with the right zoning and rents that did not cover the cost of construction.

#### Housing Cost and Affordability

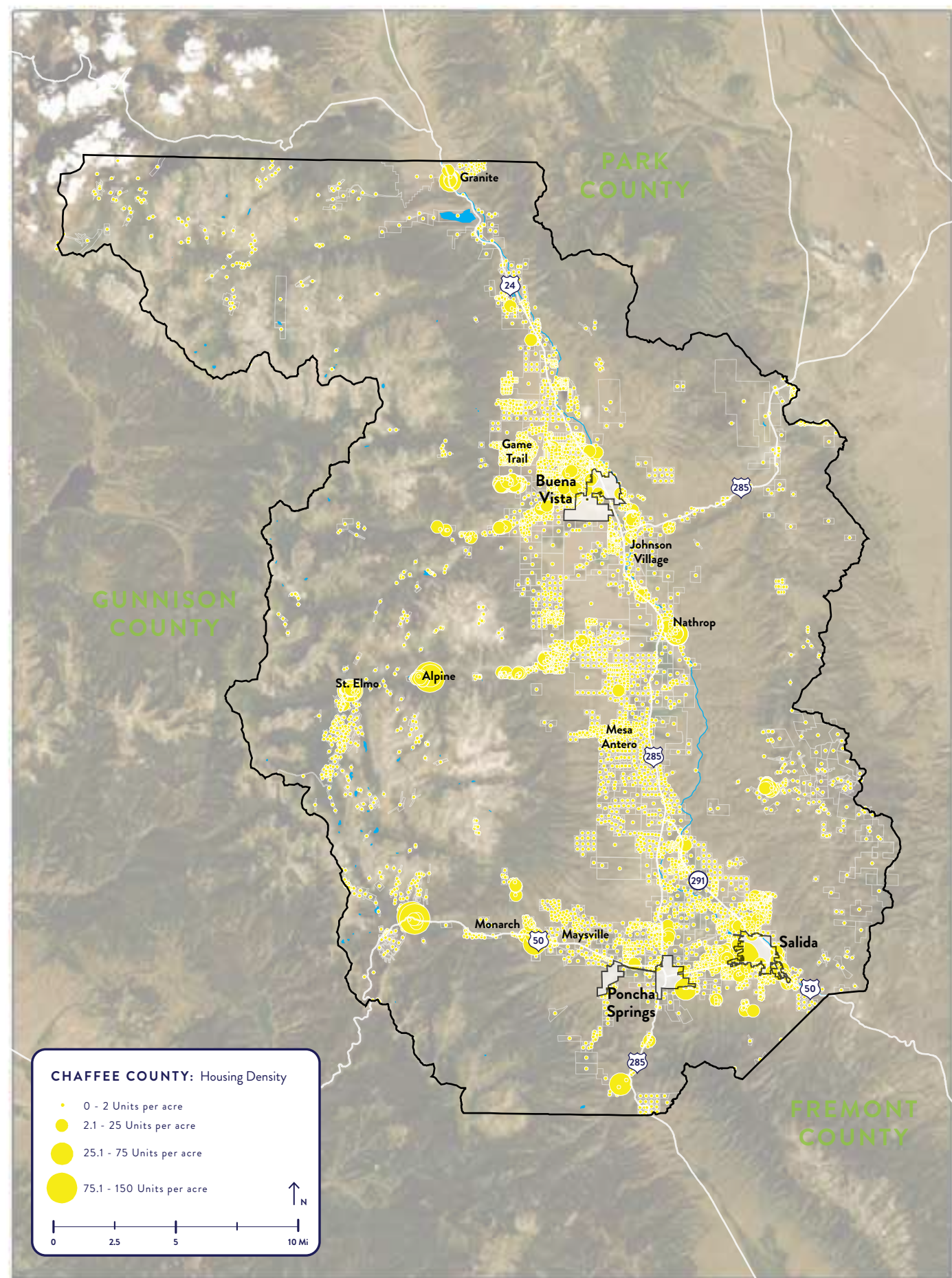
- The dramatic increase in County housing costs largely occurred within the last two to three years. According to the Realtors of Central Colorado, the **median sales price for a single family home in Chaffee County was \$426,978 in December 2019, up 11% from 2018 and up 21% from 2016.**
- Similarly, the median sales price for a townhouse or condo was \$325,200 in December 2019, up 12% from 2018 and up 27% from 2016.
- According to US Census 5-year estimates, 23% of the total housing units in Chaffee County are rentals.

#### Housing Inventory by Type

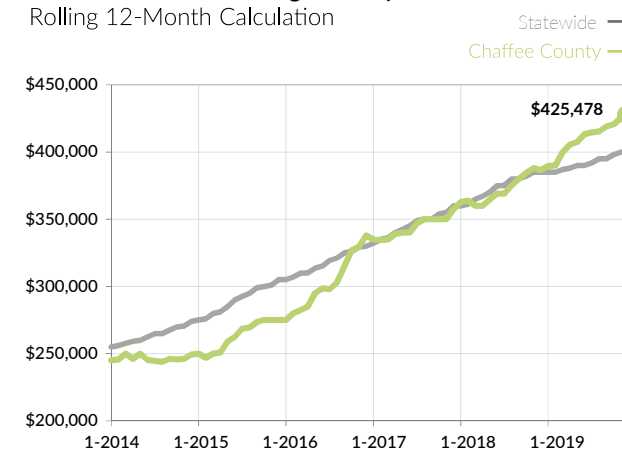
Area	Single Family	Duplex	Multi Family	Mobile Home	Townhome/ ADU	Total
Unincorporated county	4,860	29	58	648	95	5,700
Salida	2,139	232	368	233	94	3,066
Poncha Springs	236	8	53	28	19	344
Buena Vista	1,250	31	113	9	27	1,430
Johnson Village	41	0	0	119	33	193
Maysville	90	0	0	0	0	90
Total	8,575	300	592	918	235	10,630
% of Total	80.7%	2.8%	5.7%	8.6%	2.2%	100%

Source: US Census ACS 2017

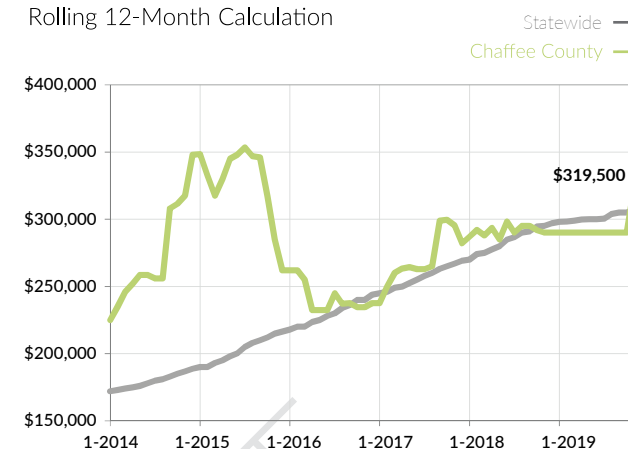




Median Sales Price – Single Family  
Rolling 12-Month Calculation



Median Sales Price – Townhouse-Condo  
Rolling 12-Month Calculation



Current as of January 6, 2020. All data from the multiple listing services in the state of Colorado. Report © 2019 ShowingTime.

Chaffee Median Home Sales Price	2016	2018	2019
Single-Family	\$338,000	\$386,500	\$425,478
Townhouse or Condo	\$237,650	\$290,000	\$319,500

Source: Colorado Association of Realtors. Reflects prices County-wide, while home prices vary by municipality.

- According to the 2016 Chaffee County Housing Needs Assessment, **rents have been rising** and were between \$1,200 and \$1,600 per month. Most rental properties are single family homes, and when properties become available they are usually rented within one month. An average rent of \$1,200 per month is not affordable to a household earning less than 100% AMI. Anecdotally, current local ads show rents between \$1,600 and \$2,000.

#### Homelessness

- Although accurate numbers of persons experiencing homelessness are difficult to find for Chaffee County, the school officials report an unexpectedly high number of students who claim to not have “housing security”.
- Chaffee has a Homeless Coalition formed in 2019 that focuses on finding solutions and resources for homeless community members. Limited wintertime facilities are available in the south end of the County.

- Homelessness has had significant impacts on the management of public lands, as the rapidly increasing housing prices in the County have forced community members to live in tents and vehicles full-time without proper facilities.

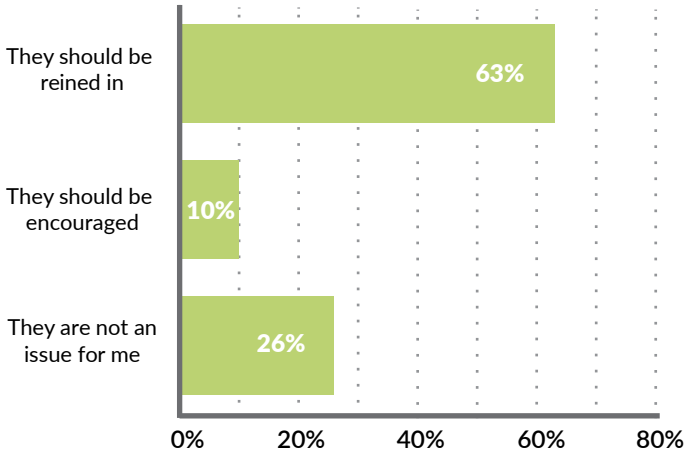
#### COMMUNITY INPUT

- When asked what the greatest risk to Chaffee’s quality of life was, 26% of responders to the first community survey referred to lack of affordable housing.
- Similarly, 22% of responders mentioned that affordable and/or workforce housing was the number one thing that Chaffee County should focus on in a new comprehensive plan.
- Ninety percent of community survey responders lived in a single-family detached house, while only 3% lived in a townhouse, 2% lived in a duplex or apartment, and 2% lived in a mobile home.

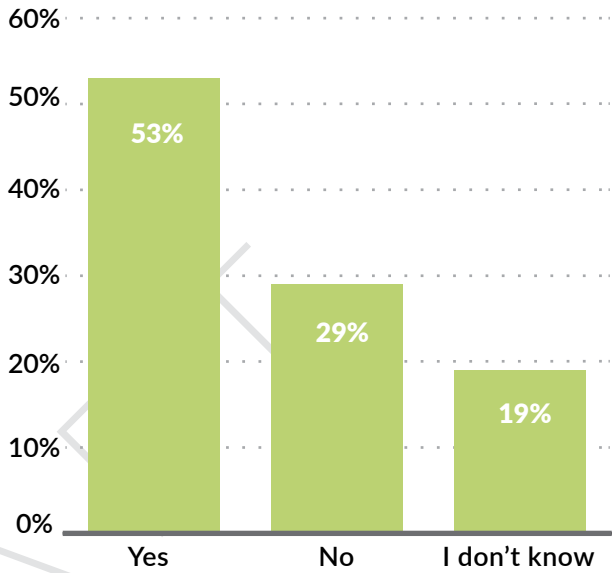


- The majority (89%) owned their home, and of those who rented over half (53%) stated that the greatest barrier to owning was that it was too expensive in their community, while 24% said that there were not enough dwelling types that they needed.
- The majority (63%) of responders thought that short term housing rentals (STRs) should be reined in in Chaffee County, while only 10% thought they should be encouraged, and 26% said that they were not an issue for them personally.
- In Survey #2, 25% of responders said they would support a flat-rate annual licensing fee for STRs that contributes to an affordable housing fund, while 22% said they would support a fee at the percentage of the listing price paid by the vacationer. Only 5% of Survey #2 responders said that they did not support any additional fees for STRs.
- Responders were split on what type of housing they would like to see more of in Chaffee County. Forty percent answered free-standing small homes and small-lot

**What do you think about Short Term Rentals (STRs) in the County?** *Survey #1 Results*



**Would you support a local dedicated tax for affordable housing?** *Survey #2 Results*



freestanding houses, while other popular answers included duplex-fourplex (18%) and vertical mixed-use building (12%).

- In response to the open-ended question “What type of affordable community housing should the County produce?”, over one quarter of responders described medium to high density apartments in and around existing towns and activity nodes.
- Just over half (53%) of Survey #2 responders were supportive of creating a local dedicated tax for affordable housing, while 29% said they would not support a tax and 19% said they did not know.
- When asked what type of tax they would support, 35% of responders said a hotel/ lodging tax, 22% said an excise tax or development impact fee, 15% said a real estate tax or dedicated property tax, and 13% said they did not support a tax for affordable housing.
- When asked if they would support an inclusionary housing ordinance requiring

10-20% affordable housing for every new subdivision developed in the County, 69% responded yes and 31% said that they would not support an ordinance

**COMP PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

Ultimately the question the community must answer is “How can we continue to supply a strong mix of housing types and prices so that we can alleviate the issues caused by and the economic impacts brought on by losing segments of the population who are unable to participate in the community--either economically or culturally--due to housing costs?” Long commutes, displacement, and empty homes change the community’s character and vibrancy.

The dominant housing type is the single family detached unit, and that is unlikely to change. But as people of all types continue to choose Chaffee County as their next home as they depart large cities, the single family home-type will be challenged to absorb the mounting growth pressure. Demand in the rental market is for attached units and apartments, as well as units for seasonal and other workers. Opportunities to increase supply at modest densities will be beneficial in relieving this pressure.

Planning to provide opportunities for a mix of housing--particularly affordable units--for all incomes across the county began with the Housing Needs Assessment and is continued in the Comp Plan by expanding opportunities for housing in the right locations near existing communities and through strategic action steps.

Such locations should be designated in the Sub Area Future Land Use Maps.

From what was heard in the community input, conservation subdivision design appears to be increasingly an alternative to sprawl in applicable locations on transportation corridors or within a municipal planning area where infrastructure may be accommodated. County regulations should incentivize or provide guidance for developers to pursue these designs instead of traditional large-lot rural subdivisions.

As such, the County has made this part of their vision through the goals, strategies, projects and future land use maps. All of the above strive to promote compact, dense housing and mixed use development in the most appropriate areas near or within existing communities.

# CONNECTIVITY, MOBILITY & ACCESS

## DATA & DISCUSSION

### WHY THIS THEME IS IMPORTANT

In this document, transportation incorporates Connectivity, Mobility & Access within Chaffee County to create a connected system network for all types of transportation movement through the Arkansas Valley and beyond.

This theme is important as it addresses existing transportation patterns and provides proactive alternatives and practices to accommodate future growth pressures and economic trends. Issues that will affect transportation in the future include population growth, County land development, infrastructure needs and the funding and maintenance of existing and planned transportation networks. This comprehensive plan set the objectives to provide and promote multimodal alternatives to travel, improve connectivity within and between towns, adopt and support safety strategies, support public transportation and telecommunication investments.

Of particular concern is potential growth between the County's employment centers of Buena Vista and Salida. Highways with increasing vehicle traffic and bicycle and pedestrian safety create complicated issues throughout the County.

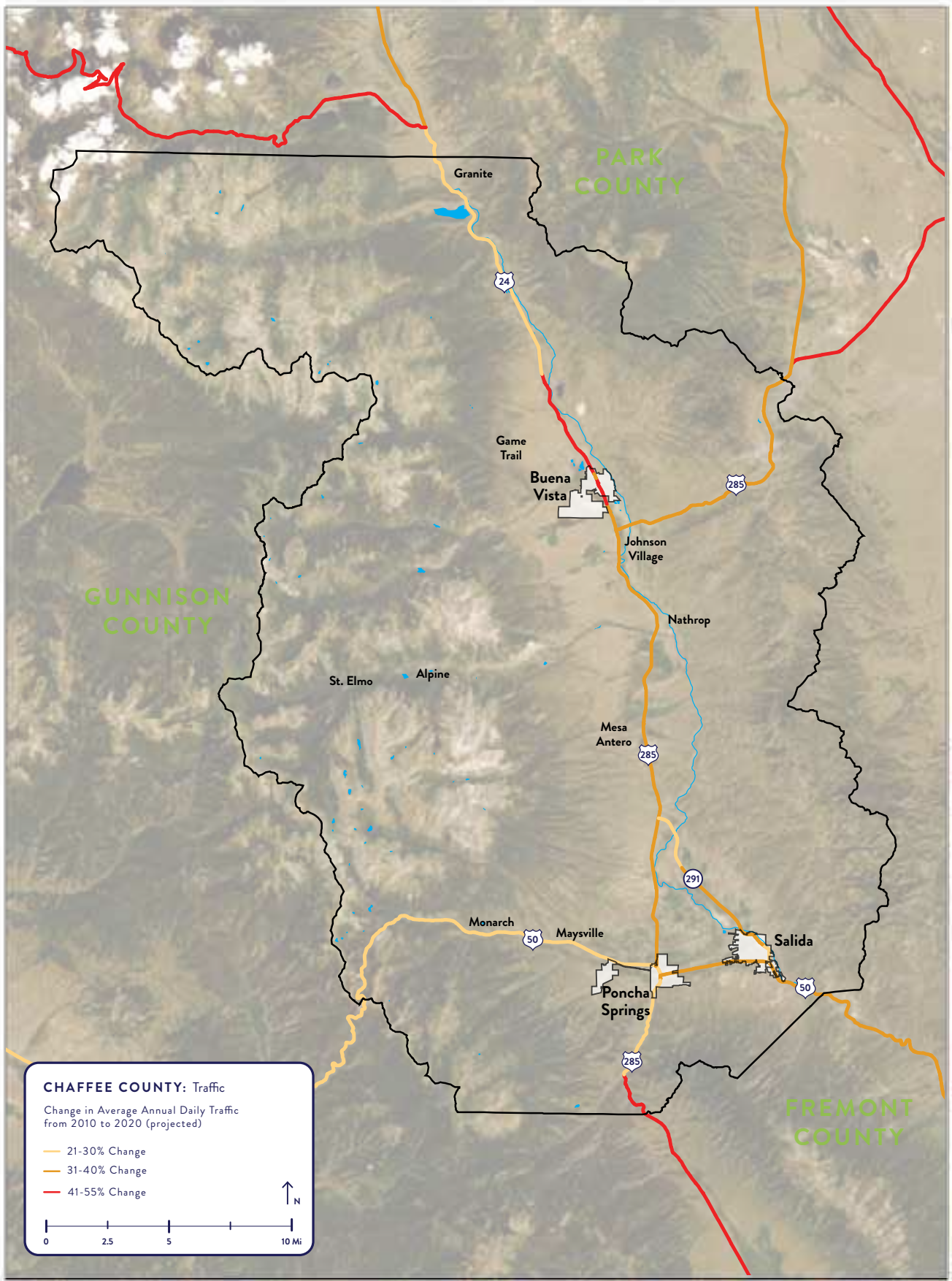
### KEY DATA POINTS

#### County Roads

- The Road & Bridge department has a staff of 18 employees and a budget of \$3 Million per year. The budget is funded by HUTF, PILT and a small portion of property tax.
- The County manages 334 miles of roads. 156 miles are paved, the majority of which are in poor condition. The budget for asphalt will allow for 2 miles of 2 inch overlay and 10 miles of chip and seal per year. There are also 59 bridges managed by the County.
- 178 miles of road are gravel. The challenge with gravel roads is keeping the road users happy with the road condition and dust. Demand is increasing for dust control.
- School bus routes utilize approximately 110 miles of county roads.
- Maintenance of these roads involves geohazards such as landslides, rock falls and flooding, tunnels, pipelines (gas, water, other fuels, etc.), signs, incidents such as roadkill and damage from weather and crashes, and telecommunications infrastructure (phone, internet, cable TV, etc.).

#### Highway Traffic

- Three major highways serve Chaffee County; U.S. Highway 50 is the primary east/west link and Highways 285 and 24 are the primary north/south links. Traffic backups occur on these highways during the summer months when high concentrations of tourists move throughout the County.





- **Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) has increased significantly on portions of both US 285 and US 24** from 2010 to 2020. The section of US 24 that goes through Buena Vista saw an AADT increase of 46% in ten years.
- Other areas that have seen traffic increases include US 285 at Poncha Pass, US 285 through Johnson Village, and the intersection of Highway 50 and 291.

Commuting Patterns

- **The majority of Chaffee County residents work and live in Buena Vista and Salida.** This indicates that the majority of residents in Chaffee County live where they work.
- According to US Census estimates, almost half (47%) of the workforce in Chaffee both live and work in the County, while 25% work in the County but live outside and 28% live in Chaffee County but commute outside for work.
- An estimated 70% of workers in Chaffee County drove alone to work in 2018, according to US Census estimates. Only 7% carpooled, and 11% walked or biked.

Place of Work vs. Place of Residence

Area	Where talent works	Where talent lives
Salida	58%	57%
Buena Vista	32%	30%
Poncha Springs	3%	3%
Nathrop	4%	10%
Monarch	2%	

Source: Chaffee County Economy Overview, 2018

Telecommunications

- Chaffee County has emergency and commercial telecommunication systems including broadband fiber-optic cable, cell and radio towers, telephone lines and satellites, providing internet/cellular and television access to subscribers.
- **Telecommuting has become more prevalent in recent years (12% of workers worked from home in 2018)**, thus putting higher demands on the systems. Tourism, which is a major sector of the county's economy, also strains the existing telecommunications.
- Broadband access is essential to economic development, purchase and delivery of goods for businesses, and residents.

Chaffee Shuttle Operations

Chaffee Shuttle Riders	Percent of riders
60+ disabled	27%
60+ (non-disabled)	30%
Under 60 disabled	14%
General public	30%
Chaffee Shuttle Trips	Percent of trips
Shopping	27%
Medical appointments	25%
Social/recreational activities	13%
Nutrition, employment or education	11%

Source: Chaffee Shuttle, 2019

Alternative Transportation

- **The Chaffee Shuttle is a transit organization** operated under the non-profit agency of Neighbor to Neighbor Volunteers. It is a shared ride and public transit service, providing transportation to Chaffee County residents for medical appointments, work, shopping, and social activities. The Shuttle has been expanding to provide connecting services for San Luis Valley residents to and from Chaffee County for the same types of trips. Of significance, it is the only public transit agency within CDOT's Transportation Planning Region #5, which includes Chaffee, Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande and Saguache Counties.
- **The Chaffee Shuttle operates with a small office staff and drivers, all of whom are paid through the grants, donations and some fees charged for fixed routes.**
- Bustang, a fee-operating service offered by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), runs a daily bus line from Denver to Gunnison that goes through Buena Vista and Salida. It also runs a bus from Salida to Buena Vista, Salida to Fairplay and Salida to Denver.
- Other transportation options include private taxi and non-profit ride services.

Trails

- Chaffee County has a network of motorized and non-motorized trails used for hiking, walking, mountain biking, and ATV/OHVs. Over the past 30 years, non-motorized systems have developed in each of the three municipalities with connections along county roads leading to the multi-use trails in the public lands surrounding the valley.

- Planning efforts for future trail connections and extensions continue as trail popularity has grown substantially. Continued trail improvements with-in and between communities, counties and the country are encouraged through public support. A Trails Master Plan was completed by the county in 2008 and will be updated as part of the Chaffee County Multimodal Transportation Plan (CCMTP)

Aviation

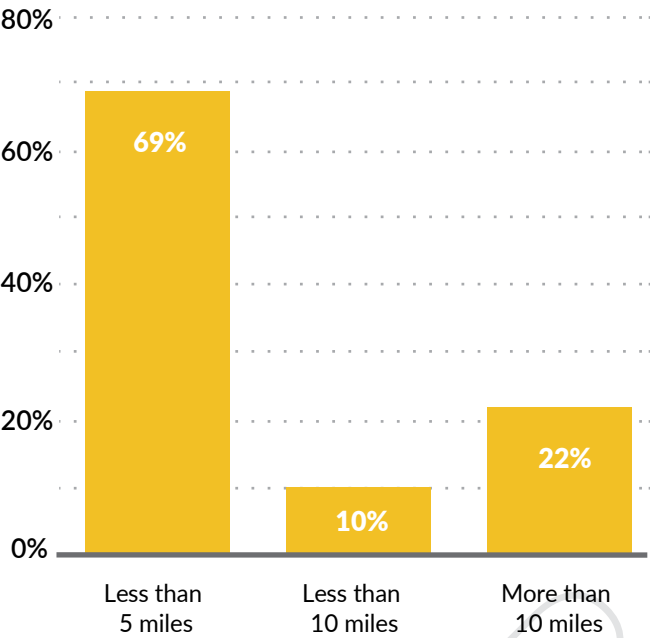
- Chaffee County is served by two general aviation airports. Harriet Alexander Field is located two miles west of Salida and is owned jointly by the City of Salida and Chaffee County and is operated by the County. It serves a variety of private, commercial and government users, including area hospitals.
- Central Colorado Regional Airport is located one mile south of Buena Vista. It is owned by the Town of Buena Vista and is operated by Arkansas Valley Aviation. It serves a mix of private, commercial and government users, including firefighting, search and rescue, and emergency medical operations. (Note: Airport Master Plans for both airports are adopted by this comprehensive plan).

Rail, Trucking and Freight

- The former Denver and Rio Grande Western provides an intact railroad corridor from the southeast corner of the County to the northern border. It has been in Active Reserve status with the Surface Transportation Board (STB) since 1998. Although there have been a number of efforts to utilize the corridor over the years, the STB is holding the corridor for the possible resumption of rail traffic.

How far do you travel to get to work?

Survey #1 Results



- The intact D&RG railroad corridor is a unique and valuable asset that should be kept intact, whatever its final use may be. It is not currently being actively maintained. The corridor could potentially be used for rail and or rail/trail travel.
- Trucks continue to be the main source of freight movement through the County. This not only includes large semi-trucks delivering products to stores, but also includes the “small freight” trucks that are now part of the County’s daily economy. These include parcel delivery by such organizations as UPS and FedEx making direct deliveries to residential and commercial doorsteps from on-line retail establishments.

COMMUNITY INPUT

- Based on the first online survey, Chaffee residents voiced concern over the lack of multimodal options and infrastructure in the County. They were concerned with State Highway congestion, parking issues and that Highway 285 is the only way to get through the County.
- Safety concerns were also often brought up when discussing pedestrian and bicycle interactions on the Highways across the County.
- Although persons who telecommute from home or commute to Chaffee County to work were not surveyed, these are important elements of Chaffee County’s economy.
- Responders took great pride in the existing trail network and its importance for active lifestyles. Thirty-three percent of all responses to the question “What spaces in and around Chaffee County are most important to you?” mentioned trails.
- Due to the Chaffee Shuttle’s limited capacity (and the lack of awareness among citizens that this service is available), the need for a County-wide circulator shuttle was brought up frequently through the engagement process. At the Together Chaffee Drop-in Events in an investment activity, 7% of residents voted to invest in a County-wide circulator shuttle.

COMP PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Community input indicates the existing trail network is critical to the County’s identity, yet progress is needed to ensure recreational and commuter travel is safe and convenient for Chaffee’s residents over the next decade.

Implications for this comprehensive plan include the need for maintaining and improving the County transportation system by analyzing existing conditions and implementing policies, procedures, funding and infrastructure to accommodate the future functionality of the County.

This plan encourages the use of existing studies and promotes intergovernmental, agency and community planning in the decision making process concerning the County transportation corridors; roads, trails, waterways, railroads, easements, rights-of-way, air space and telecommunications. The completion of the Chaffee County Multimodal Transportation Plan is essential to meeting these needs.

Land use and connectivity or mobility intersect particularly when exploring ideas to promote density over sprawl. Transit-oriented development has long been discussed as a strategy, such as building density near Bustang stops or along high-volume non-vehicle transport routes.



# RESILIENT & SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

## DATA & DISCUSSION

### WHY THIS THEME IS IMPORTANT

Fostering a Resilient & Sustainable Environment means being a regional and national leader in policy-making and resource allocation that emphasizes sustainable development. It means approaching County planning ecologically, understanding that Chaffee’s way of life and some of its highest valued ecological assets require active protection and monitoring.

This comprehensive plan is meant to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our community and preserve our community character for future generations. To do this in a community that is 83% public land, we must have a comprehensive plan organized around stewardship of our ecological resources. This plan extends that ethic to the private lands in Chaffee County, where most of the community lives and works.

### KEY DATA POINTS

With continuing efforts from the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association and Chaffee Green, community-based organizations, and the general public, Chaffee County has endeavored to become a leader in the field of sustainable and resilient Western living. There are numerous projects, programs, and efforts driven by grassroots and governmental agencies aimed at pushing the Resilient and Sustainable Environment agenda.

Sustainability-oriented agencies, nonprofits, or other groups have emerged in Chaffee County in the past 20 years. The following organizations had direct input into this comprehensive plan:

- GARNA
- Chaffee Green
- Central Colorado Conservancy

#### Chaffee Common Ground and Citizen Advisory Committee

- An outcome of the Envision Chaffee County action plan, Common Ground is community-led initiative to **maintain the quality of life and resources** that attract so many people to the region.
- Enabled through a ballot-initiated grant process that leverages a portion of local sales tax, Common Ground makes possible programs and projects that **protect “the county’s most spectacular scenic views, the health of forest ecosystems, watersheds and water quality, and wildlife and their habitats.** The Common Ground Fund helps preserve our community’s unique character and enhances the assets that support our local economy” (from Common Ground’s [website](#)).
- Common Ground is overseen by a Citizen Advisory Committee that provides recommendations to the County Commissioners on efforts or projects.
- Common Ground’s guiding principles are congruent with this Comp Plan’s motivations (as discussed on page 196) with forest health, sustainable agriculture and mitigating impacts from recreational uses as high priority subjects.

- Along with the Recreation in Balance Program from Envision Chaffee, this Comp Plan supports the efforts put forth in the mission of these efforts, as well as the urgency in competing critical tasks to further their effectiveness. Further information on these tasks can be found in the CCG 2019 Annual Report ([link](#)).

#### Forest Health

- In the Envision Chaffee effort, forest health was identified as one of the top two concerns of our community.
- Decades of fire suppression has led to a mostly climax forest that lacks diversity and is susceptible to disease. **The spruce beetle is transforming the spruce zone from a forest with 3-4 standing dead trees per acre to 120 standing dead trees per acre.**
- There is also spruce budworm, beetle, and a disease wiping out stands of aspen trees. This has set the stage for catastrophic wildfire.

#### Wildfire Risk

- According to the Chaffee County Wildfire Protection Plan, wildfires can be classified by how they are managed on a scale of Type 5 (very small fires) to Type 1 (large, complex fires and natural disasters). Ten years ago, the Upper Arkansas River Headwaters Region in Chaffee and Lake Counties had only experienced one Type 3 wildfire ever. In the decade since, **there have been two more Type 3’s (Treasure and Lodgepole), the first Type 2 (Hayden Pass), and the first two Type 1’s (Weston Pass and Decker).**
- While lightening statistically causes the most forest fires, rapid growth in recreation use exacerbates the threat. Fire management will be a critical concern when dealing with future fires.

- The Collegiate Peaks Wilderness covers a significant portion of the western side of the County, and much of the municipal water supply derives from that region. The fire management practices, coupled with the difficulty of the terrain make fighting fire in this region extremely difficult and dangerous.
- The CWPP calls for a proactive approach to prioritizing forest treatment, not to eliminate fire, but to try to eliminate *catastrophic* fire.

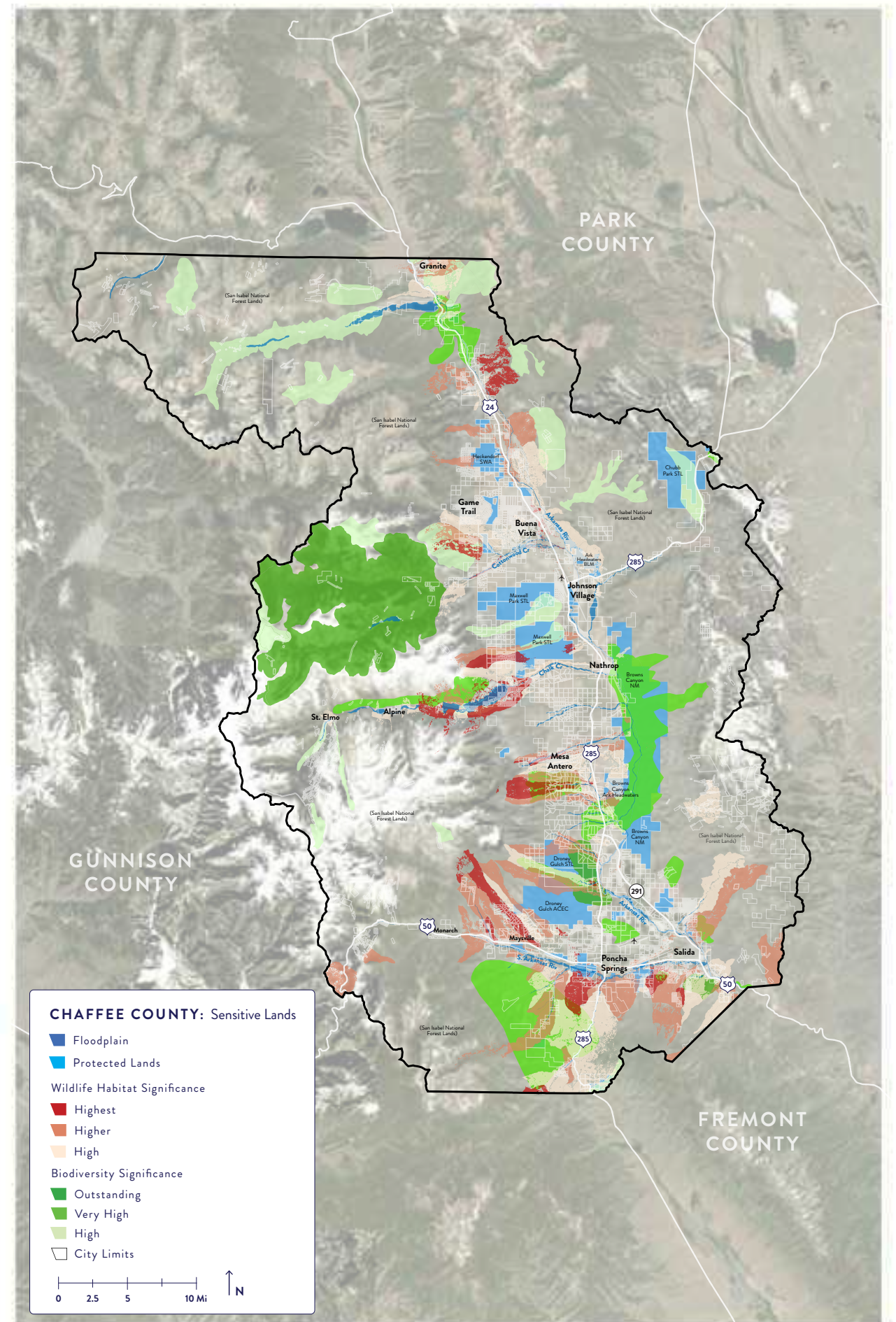
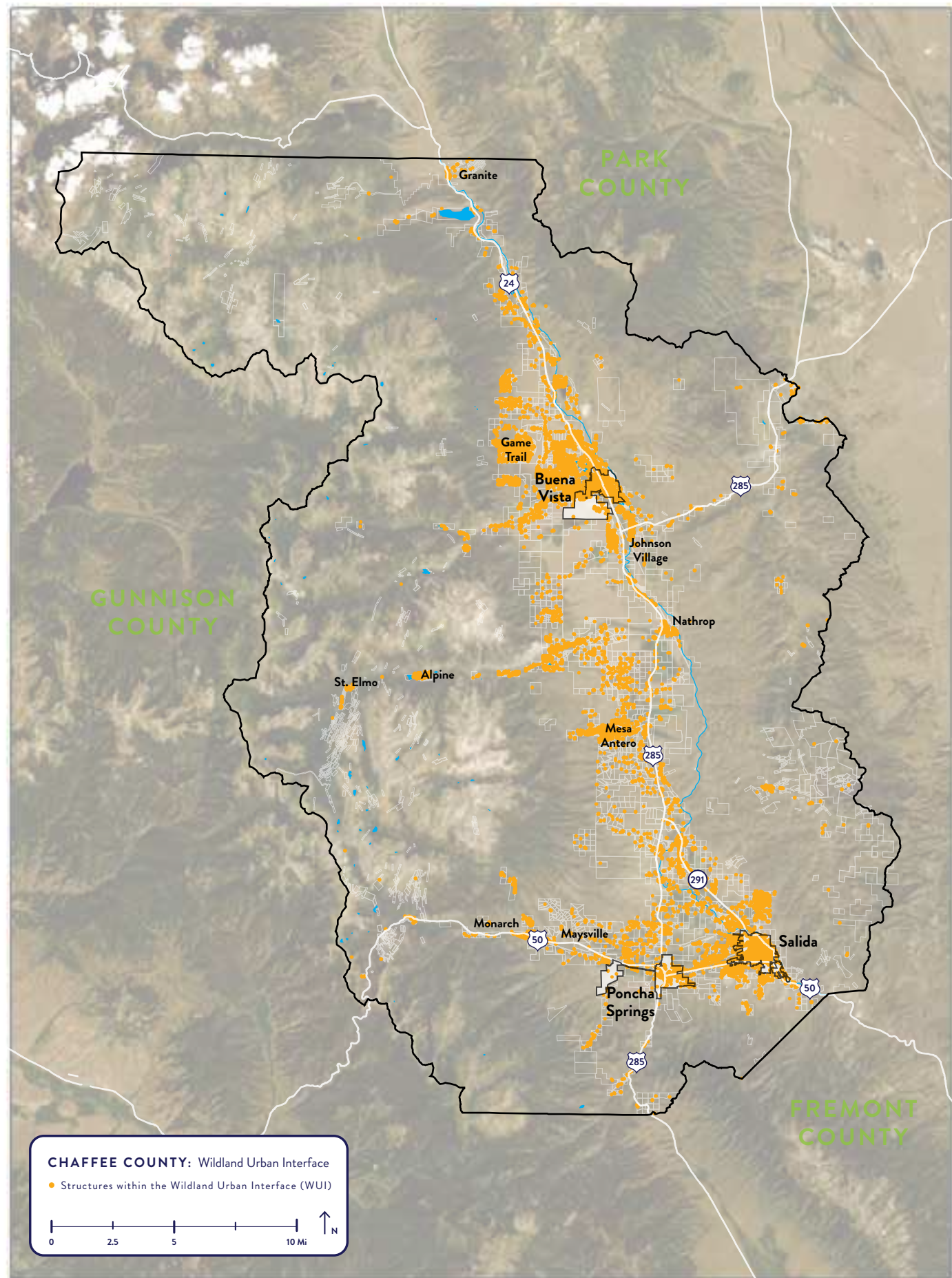
#### Preserved/Protected Lands

- With over 502,500 acres of public land, making up 83% of the County, it’s undeniable that Chaffee’s economic success and future growth is dependent upon preserving its natural assets. The same land that provides spaces for outdoor recreation and drives the tourism industry is also crucial habitat for fish and wildlife, as well as the foliage that sustains the county’s grazing agricultural population.
- All of Chaffee’s public land is managed by agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, whose responsibilities include managing snowpack repositories, runoff, and surface reservoirs. The proper management of all these elements directly affect the quality and quantity of water supply which the people of Chaffee County rely on.

#### Water Resources

- Water is a limited resource, and in Chaffee County it is an issue of concern voiced often by the public and County leadership.
- **The Upper Arkansas River Basin has an average of 12 inches of precipitation** or less, and rivers and streams rise with spring runoff from snowmelt and flows reduce significantly during the hot summer months, making it essential to manage water prudently throughout the year.







- The Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District is responsible for managing water resources through storage, augmentation, legal and engineering activities.
- In Colorado, water in every natural river and stream is owned through water rights, and every drop of water in the Arkansas River Basin is appropriated and thereby owned by individual entities, private and public.
- In Chaffee County, water flows through irrigation ditches which are owned and maintained by ranchers across the County.
- Protection of riparian corridors is critical to the survival of wildlife species in the County.

### Watershed Health

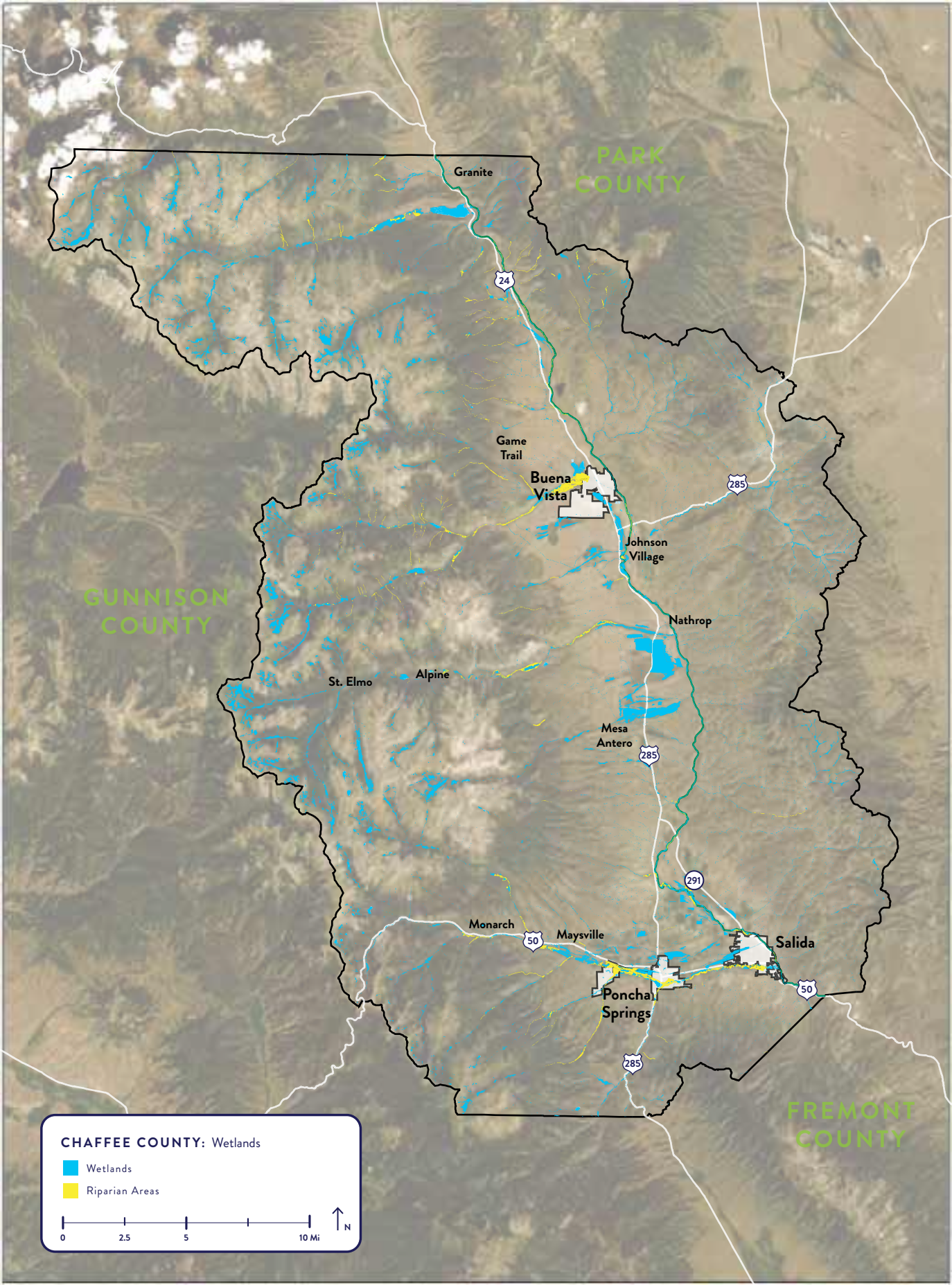
- A number of cooperating federal and state agencies have worked to clean the Arkansas River from decades of mining and other contaminants that had negative health impacts to the river and its native trout population.
- One major indicator of the success of these cleanup efforts is the **return of a healthy trout population**. The Arkansas is rated Gold Metal Fishing, which means a body of water must consistently support a minimum trout standing stock of 60 pounds per acre, and the Arkansas has an average of 170 pounds per acre.
- A major concern for the Arkansas River is pollution by sedimentation from erosion. A 2010 watershed assessment determined that historical human uses of the water have put pressure on the river as its flows have been channelized, bends straightened, its bank eroded and its wetland habitat degraded.
- Declining forest health and tree mortality impacts the ability of the watershed to hold snow until summer, and weakens the groundwater recharge function as well.



Members of Chaffee Green make reusable bags from recycled feed bags

### Wildlife & Habitat Loss

- Elk are currently managed at the low end of target range. Mule deer population declined 33% in the past decade, and deer collar data indicates that deer wintering in Chaffee County populate 8 counties in other months - so our winter habitat impacts regional populations. Chaffee is a center of T&E Boreal Toads which are rapidly declining.
- Studies in other places (Eagle County) have demonstrated up to 50% decline in Elk populations in 10 years directly related to rural lands development and impacts from increasing recreation - exactly what is happening in Chaffee now.
- CPW also indicates that the crossings of major highways with migration corridors are a key threat at traffic increases with increasing population and visitation.





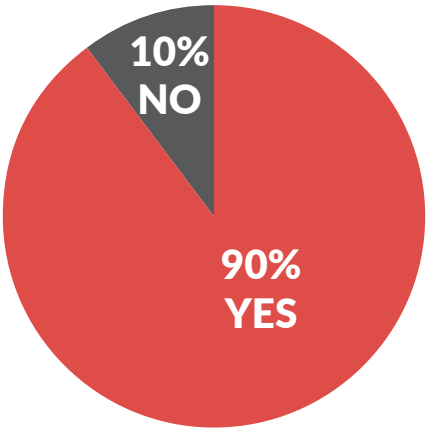
Energy Use

- Clean Energy Chaffee (CEC) is a citizen group dedicated to the advancement of clean energy and energy conservation in the County. The group produced a Clean Energy Plan, in which they recommend strategies for Chaffee County to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. This plan should be used as a guiding document regarding energy use in the County.
- Private energy providers and the State of Colorado are making great efforts to expand renewable energy use statewide. The Colorado Energy Plan updated in 2018 aims to achieve 55% renewable energy on the grid by 2026, and reduce carbon emissions by about 60 percent from 2005 levels through a \$2.5 billion investment.
- From geospatial surveys in Chaffee County, the aerial extent of the geothermal reservoir in the Mt. Princeton area has been estimated by the Colorado Division of Water Resources as containing between 3.81 Qs and 68.6 Qs of energy. A “Q” is equal to one quadrillion (10 to the 15th power) British Thermal Units (BTUs). If early estimates prove accurate, this is a major renewable energy source. One Q is equivalent to 160 million barrels of oil.
- Congress has recently established tax incentives for businesses locating in Opportunity Zones, two of which lie south of Buena Vista. This is in addition to State Tax Incentives available throughout most of Chaffee County. In late 2019, Congress re-instituted and increased both the Investment Tax Credit and the Production Tax Credits, which incentivize most types of renewable energy investments.

COMMUNITY INPUT

- Those who provided community input voiced concern that development and growth is encroaching on open space and sensitive environments.
- Of particular concern was wildlife habitat and corridors, watershed health, water quality and quantity, wildfire risk, air quality, waste disposal and landfill capacity, and overall ecosystem health.
- One responder to the first online community survey stated “The current County Land Use Code, with 2-acre minimum lot size for single family residential is the primary driving force in creating sprawl, compromising water quality, wildlife habitat, and impacting the landscape to the maximum degree.”
- Another said “The greatest risk to Chaffee County’s quality of life is the loss of our wilderness areas and wildlife due to growth, wildfire, and not putting an emphasis on sustainability.”
- In Survey #2, when asked if they would support the creation and adoption of a County-wide Sustainability Plan, 90% of responders said yes. Without a sustainability department or manager, many residents expressed their concern that Chaffee County is lagging behind other Colorado communities in planning for sustainability.
- In the effort to update the County’s Wildfire Protection Plan, a survey was conducted to better understand perceptions about forest fire, fire resilience, treatment activities and preparedness for a major wildfire event. The results of the survey indicated that nearly half of citizens were not prepared for wildfire, 40% had no established evacuation plan and 62% had no arrangements related to children at home alone during an emergency.

Would you support the creation and adoption of a County-wide sustainability plan? Survey #2 Results



- Survey responses also indicated that private landowners have little sense of urgency to act to remove vegetation or to change the characteristics of their home to protect their residences from wildfire.
- Regarding new private land development, the survey data appeared to indicate strong support for wildfire-related provisions in building codes.
- Community members recognize that renewable energy competes with other sectors for inputs, particularly land. Poor siting can adversely affect local residents and disrupt tourism, which is a large source of income and employment in Chaffee County.
- Local social acceptance by stating clear benefits to our local community will be critical to introduce renewable energy projects.
- In addition, several key participants in Envision Chaffee and key personnel behind the Recreation in Balance effort were interviewed and provided input to this Comp Plan’s goals, strategies and action steps as found in this theme.

COMP PLAN IMPLICATIONS

The key intersection between sustainable planning, climate change and County growth is fire resiliency planning. The heightened awareness caused by the Decker Fire of 2019 may have had a galvanizing effect regarding community awareness of high fire hazard areas and the real dangers of threats to existing homes in such areas.

This residual consciousness is intended to be used to not only prevent future hazards by eliminating future growth in hazardous areas, but also by putting an eye towards prevention efforts, projects and resources not only for fire, but for combating climate change as a whole by promoting smart and efficient growth through the Comprehensive Plan.

Alternative energy should not be considered as a standalone sector within Chaffee County’s economy. Potential backward and forward linkages with local industries such as forestry or tourism should be developed through an integrated approach to renewable energy deployment. Collective action should be stimulated through intermediate institutions active in our community and policy makers should aim at involving a larger number of stakeholders in policy interventions to stimulate sustainable development and improve local support.



JOBS & ECONOMY  
DATA & DISCUSSION

WHY THIS THEME IS  
IMPORTANT

Conventionally known as a recreational mecca and tourist destination, Chaffee County aims to reinvent itself as a more diverse and productive place of business so as to attract workers from elsewhere and balance the inflow and outflow of people commuting throughout the valley in their own vehicles.

Housing and employment characteristics are affected by the land use patterns in a region, and this plan strives to balance opportunities for new jobs with housing to mitigate impacts such as increased traffic.

Attracting new and diverse industries would broaden Chaffee County’s economy while providing an opportunity for the County’s workers with differing education and backgrounds to obtain employment.

Support for existing businesses across the region is also critical, with the growing trends in remote employees working from home. Supporting the technology and infrastructure required for such businesses is a key component of plan implementation.

KEY DATA POINTS

Jobs & Employment

- According to US Census LEHD estimates, there were 7,350 jobs in Chaffee County in 2018. **Jobs are projected to increase to an estimated 9,500 jobs by 2030.**
- An emerging trend in Chaffee County in recent years is the **expanding population of remote workers - in 2018 11.8% of residents worked from home**, which is higher than Colorado’s 7.7% remote workers.
- Envision Chaffee found: “telecommuting represents a rapid change in the fabric of our County, with 37% of people living in Chaffee County now working in other locations, an increase from 3% in 2000. Continued broadband development will enable continued telecommuting economy growth.”

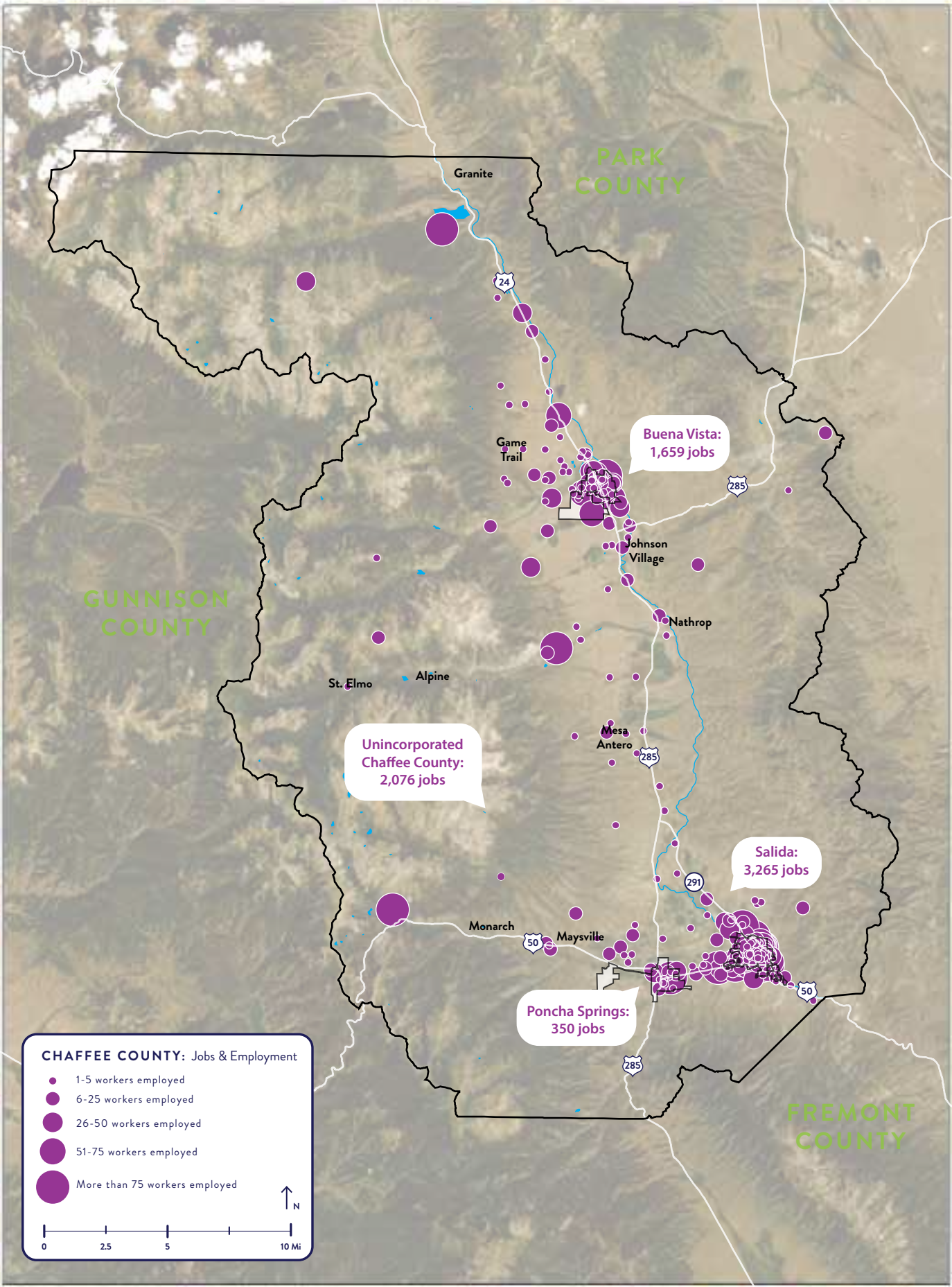
Labor Force

- According to US Census estimates, in 2017 Chaffee County’s **labor force participation was 52.9%, which is lower than the state participation of 68.2%.**

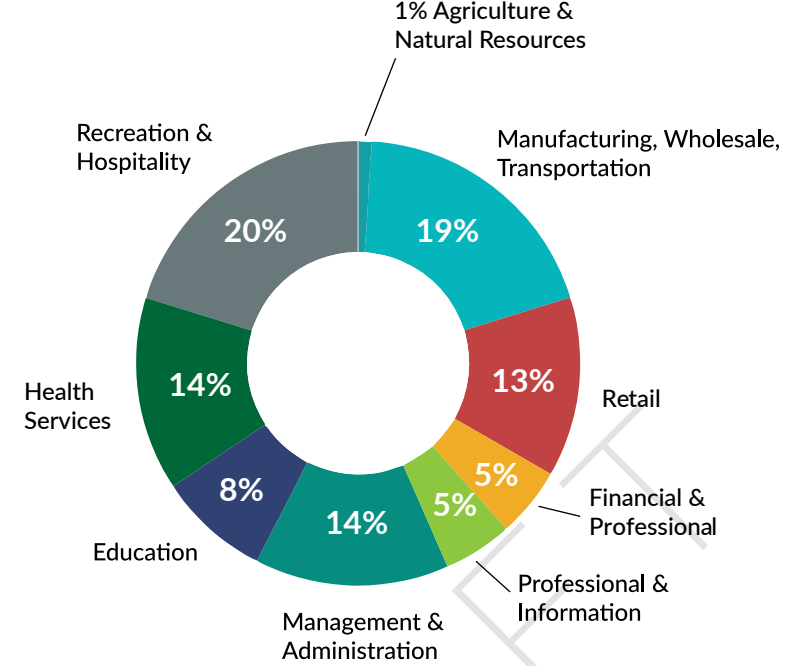
Employment in Chaffee County

Area	% of total jobs
Salida	44%
Buena Vista	21%
Poncha Springs	5%
Unincorporated county	28%

Source: US Census LEHD estimates, 2018



2017 Job Sectors, US Census 5-year Estimates



- In 2018, the ratio of jobs to labor force in Chaffee was 0.86:1, which indicates a **shortage of jobs in the County**. This has increased from 2015, when the jobs to labor force ratio was 0.77:1 and the 2010 ratio was 0.68:1, indicating that jobs have grown faster than the labor force in the past 10 years.

Job Sectors

- Chaffee County’s economy benefits from its world-renowned recreational opportunities and the tourists that they attract, and the County’s labor force and employment picture reflects a tourist economy.
- According to Census estimates from 2017, the top three job sectors in the County were accommodation and food services (16.9%), health care and social assistance (13.5%), and retail trade (12.3%). **That’s 29% of the population that works in the tourism industry**, postulating that almost one third of Chaffee County workers may have to work multiple jobs at relatively low wages. Other prominent job sectors are public administration (9.7%) and construction (9.2%).

- The dominance of food service and retail employers in the County indicates a lack of large-scale employers. According to the 2018 Chaffee County Economy Overview, 42.6% of businesses employ between 1 and 4 workers, 27.9% employ 5-9 workers, 17.5% employ 10-19 workers, and less than 3% employ over 50 workers.
- **Government remains the largest employer with almost 2,000 jobs.** There is some growth in administration and professional jobs, along with wholesale trade that reflects some diversification.
- The growth of craft brewing, wine, and distillery businesses, along with marijuana companies, highlights the diversification and growth of this industry, wholesale trade.
- Health care and construction are the fastest growing and among the highest paying jobs in the County. The Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center is the largest employer followed by the Buena Vista Correctional Facility.

- Monarch Mountain Ski area, which anchors the economy during the winter season, and Mt. Princeton Hot Springs, are among the largest employers.
- Building on an already established music scene, new hotels and music venues have catalyzed the expansion of this industry along with the creation of seasonal jobs. Such visitor-oriented job creating venues and events provide for additional seasonal employment, however impacts to public services or facilities should not place undue strain on the County’s ability to provide a safe and fiscally responsible environment.

COMMUNITY INPUT

- Residents who responded to the first online survey appeared to be concerned with the lack of economic diversity Chaffee County. When asked what the top issues facing Chaffee planning were, lack of job diversity and low wages was the third most common answer.
- Survey responders were split on the types of businesses they thought are most needed in the County. The most common answers were better paying businesses (23%), small/local businesses (19%), high-tech businesses (13%), and more restaurants (10%).
- In response to the open-ended question “What can Chaffee County do to make businesses more successful?”, survey responders offered a variety of ideas. Some thought that small and local businesses should be given financial assistance in the form of tax breaks and incentives, others mentioned workforce housing to support employees.

- Other common answers included providing high-speed internet to businesses and offering more post-high school educational opportunities like vocational training programs.

COMP PLAN IMPLICATIONS

The public vision for Chaffee’s future economic identity pushes towards innovative and sustainability-oriented businesses, while looking for opportunities to foster the next-generation worker and workspace. A somewhat large amount of presumed remote workers or sole proprietorships as seen in the data provided by Envision Chaffee may indicate latent demand for live/work uses or buildings where entrepreneurs can start up their dream business.

Similarly, promoting new office formats such as shared office concepts offers young or cash-burdened future businesspeople lower overhead costs, flexible leasing, equipment and technology, and a quality environment conducive to creativity and innovation.



GROWTH & LAND USE  
DATA & DISCUSSION

WHY THIS THEME IS  
IMPORTANT

Growth and Land Use directly addresses the regulatory framework in place which has guided growth across the Upper Arkansas Valley. Growing smart in a community with limited resources and tax base to provide public services creates the potential for challenges if the pace of growth exceeds its ability to provide services and infrastructure. Understanding the capacity of public systems and associated facilities is an important function of the Comprehensive Plan. A growth plan must provide for a pattern of development that has mechanisms to harness growth - or in some cases leverage it - to ensure adequate levels of civic services are maintained.

With three incorporated municipalities with their own Three-Mile Planning Areas housing almost half of the County’s homes, and the other half scattered throughout various unincorporated nodes, there is considerable overlap in long range land use strategies. Communicating this intended vision becomes critical to building consensus on what happens on the ground throughout the County.

KEY DATA POINTS

Amount of Developable Land

The comprehensive planning process addresses growth and capacity, and the amount of land physically available for development—in this

case referring generally to land that would be subdivided for single family housing—has helped make determinations on how, where and what kind of growth can be managed in the long-term. A planning-level inventory was used to calculate the amount of land that could potentially be developed. The parameters for an available property were:

- Privately-owned
- Vacant or partially-vacant: residential property occupied by an allowed land use which is large enough to be further subdivided or developed
- Not previously platted in a subdivision
- Not in a environmentally sensitive or unbuildable area (e.g. conservation easement, floodplain/wetlands, habitat, steep slopes).

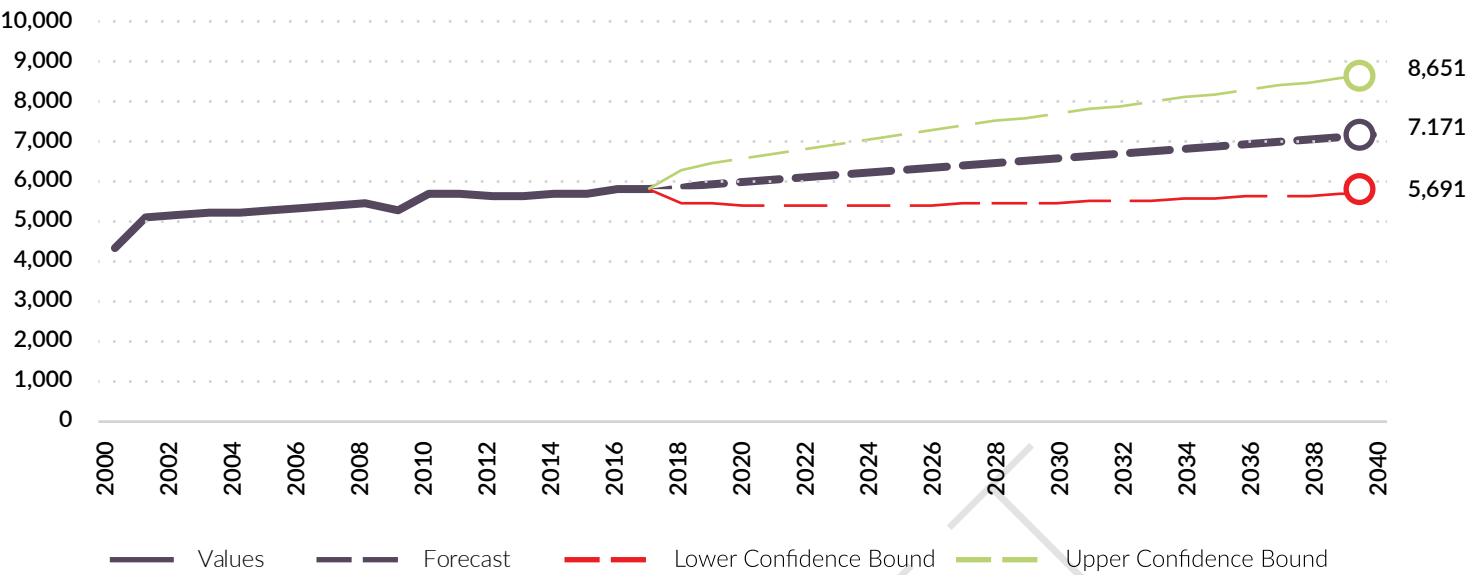
Based on these parameters there are approximately **38,648 acres** that are physically able to be developed. About 12,740 of that total are partially-used residential properties over 40 acres that still that could still be potentially subdivided further.

Housing Distribution in Chaffee County

Area	% of Housing units
Salida	30%
Buena Vista	14%
Poncha Springs	4%
Unincorporated county	over 50%

Source: Chaffee Housing Needs Assessment, 2016

Housing Unit Growth: Pace of housing growth and projection, 2000 to 2040 (US Census, Cushing Terrell)



Pace of Housing Growth

- Utilizing U.S. Census data from 2000 through today, an exponential smoothing forecast estimates that **Chaffee County’s housing stock will increase by 19% by 2035, reaching 6,874 housing units** based on historic trends. This forecast also predicts an upper confidence bound of 8,184 units, which indicates that plans for where future growth should occur should accommodate this number of new housing units.
- According to the 2016 Housing Needs Assessment, of the **approximately 10,400 housing units in Chaffee County, 30% are in Salida, 14% in Buena Vista, 4% in Poncha Springs, and over 50% in the unincorporated county**. The Assessment also found that 75% of new housing in Chaffee County was built in the unincorporated area over the past 15 years (2000-2015).

Water

- Water is supplied in the Salida, Buena Vista and Poncha Springs Sub-Areas by municipal water systems. **Outside of the municipalities, a number of community water systems exist within county limits.**

- There are three non-transient, non-community water systems that serve at least 25 of the same people at least six months per year (Mount Princeton Hot Springs, Monarch Mountain Lodge and Salida KOA Campground).
- Additionally, there are 45 transient, non-community water systems are defined as water systems that serve at least 25 people more than 60 days per year.

Sanitation

- Buena Vista, Johnson Village, Salida and Poncha Springs are served by municipal sanitation districts.
- There are 8 minor wastewater dischargers permitted through the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) under Regulation 22 – Site Location and Design Approval Regulations for Domestic Wastewater Treatment Works in Chaffee County.
- **Outside of the municipalities of Chaffee County, most homes use on-site wastewater treatment systems (OWTSs),** also known as septic systems and leach fields.



- According to CDPHE, Chaffee County has experienced a 15% annual increase in OWTS permits filed.

Electricity

- Chaffee County is served by two electric providers: Sangre de Cristo Electric and Xcel Energy.

Broadband & Cell Phone Coverage

- High-speed, redundant broadband is not available in many areas of Chaffee County. Colorado Central Telecom and Spectrum provide internet service to customers throughout the County, although community members have cited redundancy as a significant issue.
- Cell phone coverage has also been reported as unreliable, as outages and poor coverage are common (particularly in the north end of the County). These weaknesses inhibit diversification of the economy and creation of higher paying jobs.

Fire and Emergency Services

- Chaffee County Fire Protection District's (CCFPD) predominately volunteer force is responsible for the efficient mitigation of emergencies and delivering service to the community within the 1,000 sq mile Fire District.
- CCFPD has 35 pieces of mobile equipment/apparatus allocated between **6 fire stations (located in Buena Vista, Nathrop, Poncha Springs and Maysville)** that are professionally staffed by **40+ volunteer firefighters and 4 paid firefighters.**
- The Salida Fire Department consists of professional fire personnel on duty 24/7 to serve the Salida municipal area with mutual and automatic aid agreements to assist throughout Chaffee County.

Law Enforcement

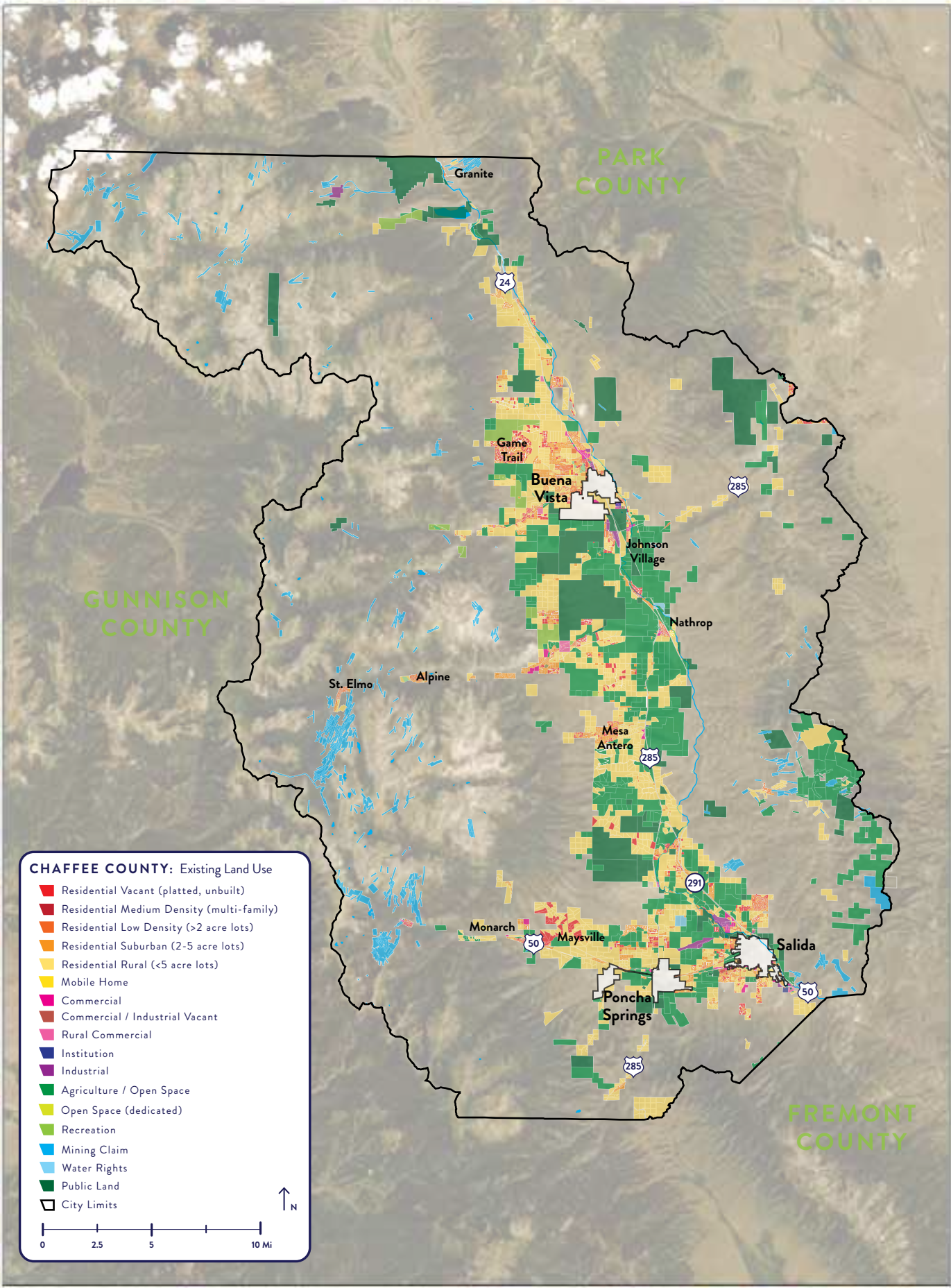
- Law enforcement is provided by the Chaffee County Sheriff Department. The department has 23 sworn officers, and in 2019 they received 6,535 calls. The department **struggles with employee retention due to lack of funding to pay officers competitive salaries.**
- There are two municipal police forces in Salida and Buena Vista, with mutual aid agreements with surrounding agencies.

Road and Bridge

- Chaffee County Road and Bridge is responsible for maintaining approximately 300 miles of roads in Chaffee County. There are 44 bridge structures of various types in Chaffee County.
- The primary responsibility of the Road and Bridge Department is the routine maintenance of county roads. This includes plowing snow, grading dirt roads, maintaining barrow ditches, cattleguards and drainage along county roads, weed and brush control, and patching asphalt.
- **County road maintenance is currently unable to keep up with the impacts of growth,** and public expectations of road conditions continues to rise.

Waste Services

- The Chaffee County Landfill is located off Highway 285, approximately 11 miles from Salida and 14 miles from Buena Vista. Many County residents contract with private haulers to pick up and dispose of household trash.
- The landfill property and landfill enterprise are critical elements of County infrastructure, and while the projected lifespan of the landfill is many decades, replacing it will be a massive challenge. Efforts to best manage this resource should be continued.





Existing Land Use

Land Use	% of total acres
Public land	83%
Agriculture	7%
Residential	9%
Recreation/mining claims	2%

Source: Cushing Terrell, 2019

- Chaffee County's intergovernmental agencies operate four recycling centers in the County, and according to the UAACOG Waste Optimization Regional Study, the **diversion rate for Chaffee County increased from 4.8% in 2005 to 16% in 2016**. However, the amount of waste generated per household was 8.45 pounds per day, compared to the national average of 4.41 pounds per day. Desire for a more robust recycling program was expressed by the community and County leadership.

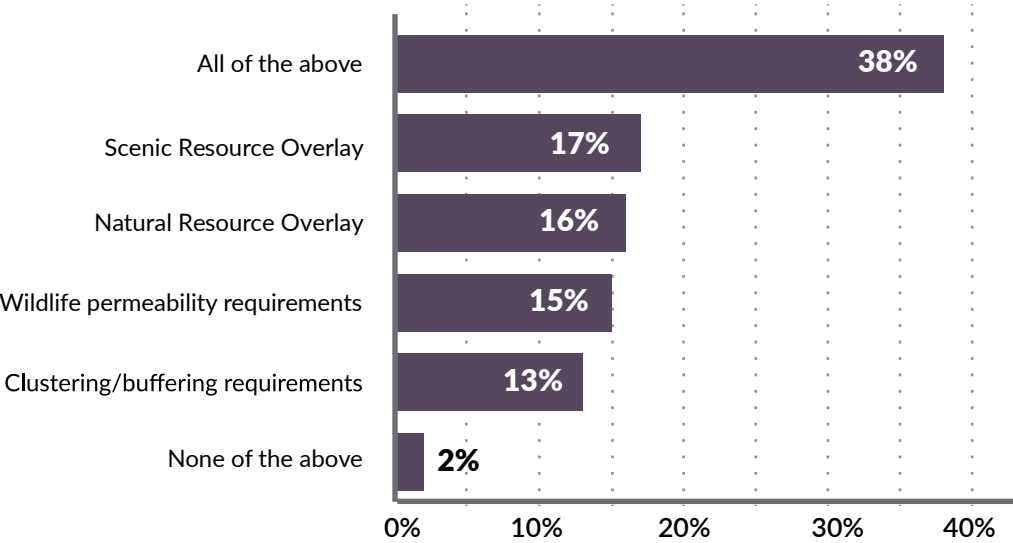
Existing Land Use

- The majority (83%) of Chaffee County is **public land**, most of which is open space. An estimated 7% of the land is agriculture/open space, over 45,000 acres. The remaining 10% of land is mostly (7%) rural residential (on lots larger than 5 acres). Approximately 3,100 acres in unincorporated Chaffee County are Residential Vacant - which are platted but unbuilt lots.

COMMUNITY INPUT

- Community members that participated in the first online survey expressed concern over the nature of growth and development in Chaffee. When asked what the greatest risk to Chaffee County's quality of life is, 25% of responders mentioned uncontrolled, sprawling growth in rural areas.
- One survey responder answered "The greatest risk to Chaffee County's current quality of life is over-development of rural areas: rural sprawl. Development must be regulated

Which of the following natural resource protections would you support in Chaffee County? Survey #2 Results



to accommodate the large and growing population,” and another stated “Sprawl development that stretch our infrastructure, place homes in greater fire danger and consume more water.”

- Across all engagement channels, the 4th most common comment was concern over the capacity of existing infrastructure (water, sewer, roads) to sustain growth. The 5th most mentioned topic was the idea of density over sprawl - residents would rather see dense growth in existing residential and commercial centers to preserve open space in the rural parts of the County.
- In Survey #2, when asked which tools used to direct growth to municipalities they would support, 38% of responders wanted to use every tool listed (all of the above), 17% wanted a Scenic Resources Overlay, 16% wanted a Tiered Natural Resources Overlay, 15% wanted wildlife/human conflict design requirements and 13% wanted clustering and buffering incentives and requirements.
- Responders to Survey #2 were closely split on their feelings toward the 2-acre minimum lot sizes in the Rural Zone; 34% said they should stay the same, 30% said they should be increased to 5 acre minimums, 28% said they should be increased to 10 acre minimums, and 8% said they should be decreased.

COST OF GROWTH

Authors and researchers have generally posited that sprawling residential development may create a financial burden on local governments as the tax revenue generated from new subdivision rarely covers the cost of its ongoing servicing and maintenance. While it is difficult to know the true cost of providing services to future growth, it is true that the cost of providing public infrastructure and services for

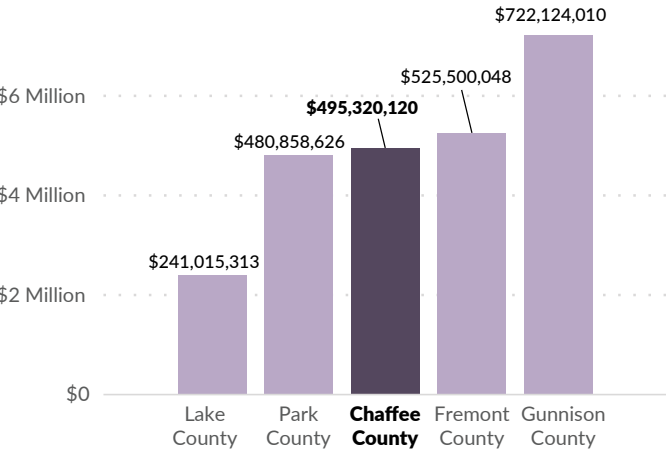
“new sprawling development is higher than to service that same population in a smart growth or infill development” (W. Coyne, The Fiscal Cost of Sprawl, 2003). In Colorado where local government finance is driven by TABOR limits or restrictions established in the 1990s, this issue is even more pressing as Chaffee County’s values and revenues are likely to see dramatic variations, as typically consistent revenue streams from seasonal tourism will be affected by variations in visitation in 2020.

Continuation of low-density residential growth has potential to place additional strain on the of these services or activities (for example emergency services, schools, recreational facilities, or capital infrastructure projects) required to maintain Chaffee County’s quality of life and additional discussion is warranted to understand the affects of growth on the County’s budget and revenues.

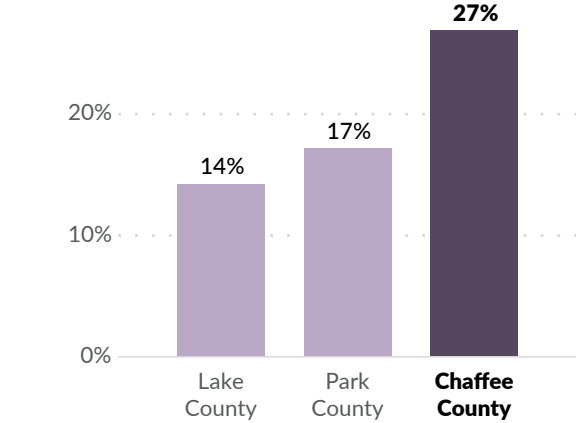
Property Tax and Growth

- Chaffee County’s taxable value and revenues have increased from 2016 to 2019 across all land categories.

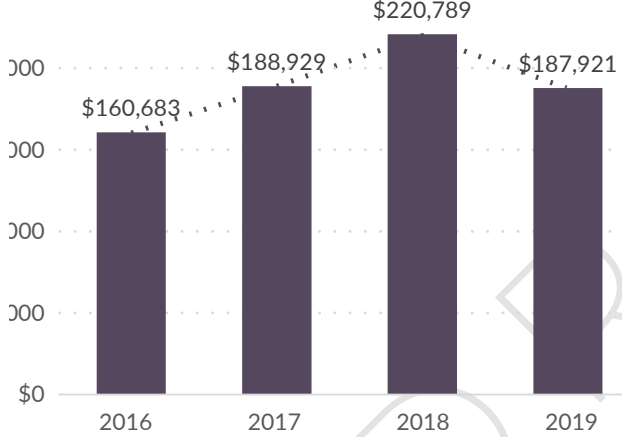
Taxable Value in 2019



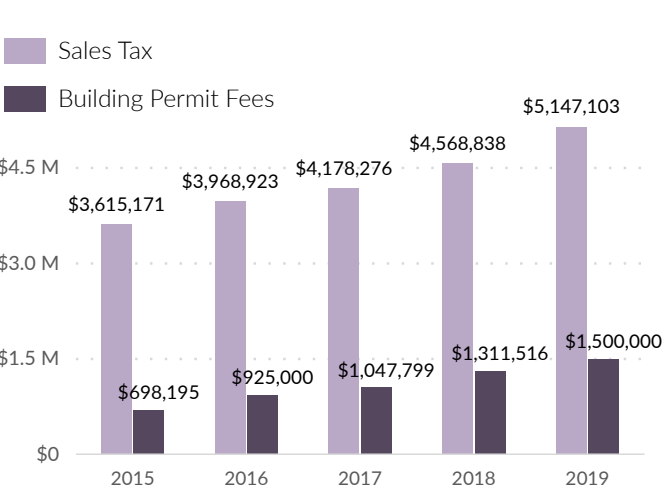
**Increase in Taxable Value  
(County-wide, 2016-2019)**



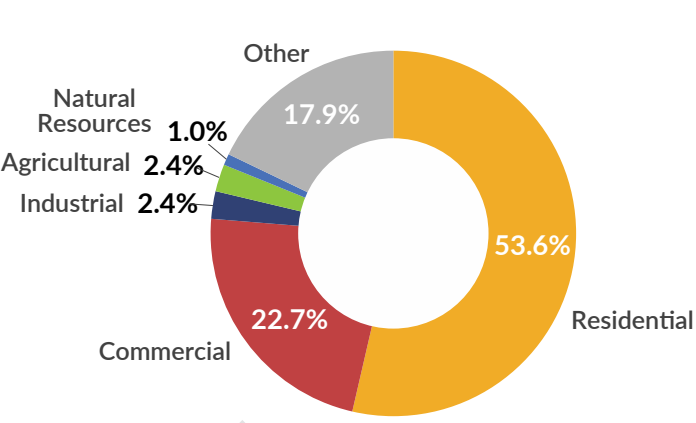
**Property Tax Revenue (County-wide, 2016-2019)**



**Sales Tax and Building Permit Revenues (2015-2019)**



**Taxable Value Distribution, Chaffee County (County-wide, 2019)**



- Chaffee County's recent increase in county-wide taxable value (27%) from 2016 to 2019 was much larger than nearby Park County (14%) and Lake County (17%).
- Increases in assessed values of residential property contributed to much of the overall increase, and residential property made up the majority of all taxable value in 2019 (53.6%).

**Budget**

- Other significant revenue sources include sales taxes and building permit fees. Both have been steadily increasing until 2020 and the outlook is unclear.
- Ballot Issue 1A passed in 2018 increasing sales taxes to support conservation efforts. 1A has allowed for the transfers of some funding to other departments where support is needed such as Road and Bridge. Despite these transfers Road and Bridge is still unable to financially accomplish their major projects.

**COMP PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

The county budget for the last five years has largely been balanced with the help of increases in property taxes, sales taxes and building permit fees, but any change in these sources would threaten the ability to cover expenses which in 2020 were estimated at \$36,823,855. Even prior to the events of 2020 creating uncertainty in

these sources, the County grappled to provide adequate FTE employment at standard pay levels and was unable to complete essential projects such as chip seal/asphalt services on the county's roads. Anecdotal evidence suggests Chaffee County's real estate market is as busy as it has ever been and it is likely the inflow of people moving into to Chaffee County from coastal areas or large cities to pursue their lifestyle choices will continue.

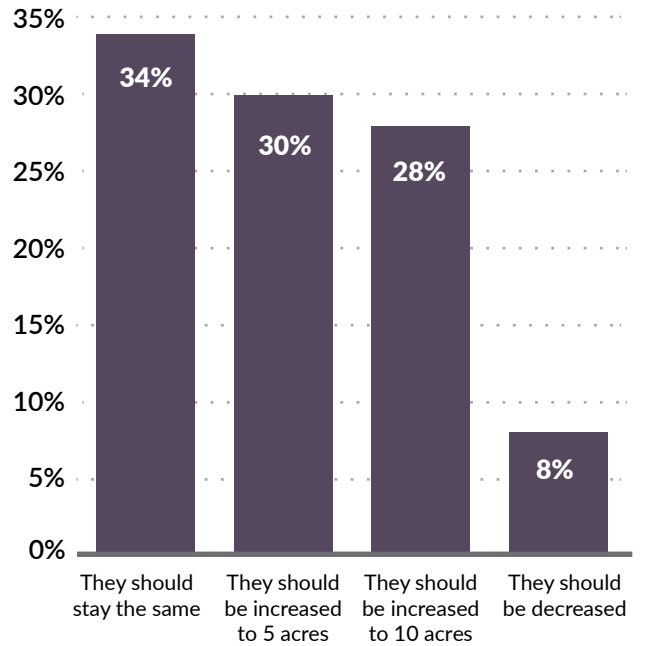
If new residential growth continues at present rates and if property values continue to increase, Chaffee County will struggle to generate revenue to provide adequate levels of service or infrastructure without new and creative sources. TABOR limitations will further challenge the County's service providers. Shifting policy initiatives such as a proposed repeal of the Gallagher Amendment further complicate long-term financial predictions. As such, additional advisory information is needed to ensure fiscal responsibility when approving new development.

To accommodate new growth, the County should continue to establish policies that equip decision makers with the best possible information. This includes relying on smart growth principles in this plan that support infill development and pushing or incentivizing conservation subdivision design. Areas where this Comp Plan proposes recommendations that will affect Growth & Land Use include:

- With TABOR hampering the ability to raise property taxes, the County should explore additional funding sources for providing infrastructure and services.

- Amend or modify Future Land Use Maps regularly to ensure the growth rate of new residential subdivisions will not outpace the County's ability to fund services.
- Look at creative uses of existing revenue sources such as Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT).
- Create Future Land Use Maps that envision infill development near municipalities that will save the County on services/infrastructure.
- Action steps for implementing land use code revisions.
- A plan for additional funding for the Road and Bridge department for maintenance of county roads.
- Evaluate all land use applications in terms of cost/benefit to the County.

**How do you feel about the 2-acre minimum lot sizes in the Rural Zone District? Survey #2 Results**





# Buena Vista Sub Area

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Population

- The Buena Vista Sub Area has an **estimated population of 6,333 - with 3,613 people living in unincorporated Chaffee County and 2,720 in the Town of Buena Vista.**
- According State Demographer’s numbers, the population of the Town of Buena Vista is expected to surpass 3,000 people in 2020.

### Jobs

- **The Buena Vista Sub Area had an estimated 1,999 jobs in 2017**, with 1,659 of those being in the Town of Buena Vista, and about 24 of the total in Johnson Village. The unincorporated area around the Town (including Johnson Village) had 316 jobs in 2017.
- According to geographic data from the US Census, many of these jobs in the County are found in rural subdivisions, indicating many people work out of their homes.

### Land Use and Development Patterns

- Growth has been affected by public lands and conservation areas established in decades past. As a result, the overall amount of available land for future growth is limited when one considers sensitive areas (e.g. wildlife habitat, fire hazard areas).
- Existing subdivisions already occupy much of the Sub Area’s land, and will remain in place as low-density residential land uses. These older subdivisions exhibit a very suburban pattern of development that consumes land less efficiently than what was desired in the public vision, which in 2020 is to promote development near community centers and corridors.

- These subdivisions have many unbuilt parcels, indicating they will continue to add housing units without the approval of any new subdivisions. Among the area’s subdivisions, approximately **310 lots are vacant** and available in subdivisions like Game Trail. Although many of these lots are “holding” parcels purchased by an adjoining landowner to maintain as vacant lots, such parcels could potentially supply additional housing without consuming more open land.
- The Buena Vista Three-Mile Plan designates 10 Areas of Desired Growth (ADG) where future growth is desired, but that are outside of the Municipal Services Area (MSA) where the Town can currently provide water.
- The Three-Mile Plan provides future growth policies for new development, annexation and provision of infrastructure in these areas. The Future Land Use Map is congruent with these recommendations in its vision for future growth, and anticipates development in the Residential Mixed future land use district to be annexed into the Town, and developed to the Town of Buena Vista standards for access and infrastructure.
- Based on approved land use and building permit records for the last 10 years, much of the residential development in and around the community has been in existing platted subdivisions, in new subdivisions or within the Town limits. **Approximately 210 permits were issued in the unincorporated county of the Buena Vista Sub Area from 2009 to 2019, of which 94% were residential** (see Buena Vista Sub Area: Patterns of Development map on the following pages). Estimates for permits inside the Town are 169 total residential permits between 2018 and 2019 (source: Town of Buena Vista).

Physical Character

- In the Buena Vista Sub Area, the average parcel size is just over five acres. **In the Town of Buena Vista, the average parcel size is 1.5 acres, while in the unincorporated area surrounding it, the average parcel size is 9.8 acres.** Excluding some larger commercial parcels, the average in-town residential lot size in downtown Buena Vista is 2,500 square feet (0.057 acres), which is significantly smaller than the County’s average lot size (16.8 acres).

Recreation

- The Buena Vista Sub Area has an estimated **7.8 miles of trails managed by the Town of Buena Vista** and four fishing access points. There are four campgrounds located in the Sub Area.

EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY FOR GROWTH

Water

- The Buena Vista water system currently contains one source, which provides up to 1.5 million gallons per day (MGD) of potable water. **It is anticipated that a portion of the existing service lines will need to be modified to meet the demands of new, higher-density users.**
- Additionally, watering landscapes and lawns in the summer creates a huge demand on the water supply. Reducing this type of high-maintenance outdoor space through redevelopment and zoning modifications may aid the health of the overall water supply.

- The only area of concern for natural growth is to the north of the existing water district. Due to elevations increasing in this direction, water pressure within the system will fall below operational standards without the addition of a booster pump.

Sanitation

- The Buena Vista Sanitation District (BVSD) provides sanitary sewer services to those properties within the District limits and to the unincorporated community of Johnson Village through the Intergovernmental Agreement with Chaffee County.
- The District limits include all of the properties within the Town of Buena Vista, as well as the Buena Vista Correctional Complex and a number of individual parcels, which were accepted into the BVSD, but did not annex into the Town.
- The BVSD also accepts septage collected from area septic systems, at a rate not to exceed 5,000 gallons per day (gpd). The infrastructure of this system consists of approximately 25 miles of public sewer pipe, ranging from 8 inches to 21 inches in diameter.
- According to 2019 collection data, the plant is currently operating near **35% in the winter and 75% in the summer.** This facility is rated to treat up to 1.5 million gallons per day (MGD). This permit will expire in October 2020, and the renewal may be subject to new terms and conditions, which are expected to be issued before the end of 2024.

Mid-Valley/Nathrop Sub Area

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Population

- The Mid-Valley Sub Area had an **estimated population of 3,309 in 2017.** Population is geographically centered toward the main County Road corridors and in Nathrop.

Jobs

- **The Mid-Valley Sub Area had an estimated 221 jobs in 2017.** The largest employer in this area is Mount Princeton Hot Springs, with employment fluctuating seasonally.

Land Use and Development Patterns

- The Mid-Valley/Nathrop Sub Area represents the open space and rural character that the public desires to maintain in land use and activity.
- In the past 10 years, growth has occurred around very large ranches, many of which have been owned by families for multiple generations. As a result, the overall amount of available land for future growth is limited considering privately-held ranches and sensitive areas (e.g. wildlife habitat, fire hazard areas). However, this land is not necessarily protected in perpetuity by conservation easements, agricultural covenants, or similar controls.
- Some older rural subdivisions have many unbuilt parcels, indicating they will continue to add housing units without the approval of any new subdivisions. Among the area’s subdivisions, approximately **261 lots are vacant** and could potentially have a house built on them in subdivisions like Mesa Antero. Many of these lots may be held by neighboring parcel owners for later in order to maintain adjacent open space.

Physical Character

- **The average parcel size in the Mid-Valley Sub Area is 11.4 acres,** the largest average size among the four Sub Areas.

Recreation

- The Mid-Valley Sub Area has an estimated **3.6 miles of trails** and one campground. There are three fishing access areas on the Arkansas and Chalk Creek.

EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY FOR GROWTH

Water

- The Mid-Valley Sub Area is served by community water systems, as **there is no municipal water available.**
- Nathrop has a transient, non-community water system which serves Chateau Chaparral and parts of the Nathrop Townsite. Chateau Chaparral has a minor wastewater treatment facility, which is rated for 12,100 gallons per day (gpd). The Chateau Chaparral WWTF is a small sequencing batch reactor which was upgraded a few years ago and is meeting permit discharge limits. The WWTF was designed to provide service to the Chateau Chaparral development and is operating near the 12,000 gpd capacity.
- Mount Princeton Hot Springs is served by a non-transient, non-community water system. The Mount Princeton Hot Springs minor wastewater treatment facility is rated for 0.0936 MGD, and is currently in compliance.



Sanitation

- The Mid-Valley Sub Area is not part of a sanitation district and is primarily **served by on-site wastewater treatment systems** (OWTSs), also known as septic systems and leach fields.

Future Infrastructure Planning

Specifically in Nathrop, growth is paced by the availability of public utilities. The current pace of development generally meets the community’s needs in 2020, as Nathrop is considered rural in character with limited rationale for residential growth due to it’s distance from amenities and services. However, lower land values and land availability has spurred recent construction of new low-income housing, and infrastructure could be improved to further supply affordable housing in Nathrop. Major infrastructure improvements would be required to build additional housing at a very high cost. Connecting to the BVSD wastewater treatment plant, for example, would require a four-mile sanitary line extension with several lift stations.

Another high-cost option is to establish a special district to eventually provide an internal network of infrastructure and improve existing wastewater treatment systems to move away from on-site septic and individual wells, which may pose public health risks in the future.

Updated long-range planning for the County Landfill site near Centerville is warranted, as the site’s current use as a landfill may be evaluated for enhanced facility upgrades or another use entirely.

Salida Sub Area

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Population

- The Salida Sub Area has an **estimated population of 7,284 – with 1,719 people living in unincorporated Chaffee County and 5,565 living in the City of Salida.**

Jobs

- **The Salida Sub Area has an estimated 4,020 jobs.** The City of Salida is home to 3,511 jobs and Smelertown 27 jobs, while the unincorporated area surrounding the City has 482 jobs.

Land Use and Development Patterns

- Development surrounding the City of Salida is affected by the County’s two main waterways—the Arkansas and South Arkansas Rivers. Floodplain, wildlife corridors and steep slopes to the south and east of the City have pushed much of the residential subdivision in unincorporated areas to the bench above Salida near the airport and along the Highway 50 and 285 corridors.
- Some subdivisions have unbuilt parcels, indicating they will continue to add housing units without the approval of any new subdivisions. Among the area’s unincorporated subdivisions, approximately **102 lots are vacant** and available.
- **Approximately 98 permits were issued in the unincorporated county of the Salida Sub Area from 2009 to 2019** (see Salida Sub Area: Patterns of Development map on the following pages).
- Open space immediately to the west of Salida has remained undeveloped, either through conservation easements or because wetlands or other physical constraints made subdivisions more costly to service than lands with municipal services.

- Community trails traverse this area and public input regarded this as highly valued for preservation of open space.

Physical Character

- **The estimated average parcel size in the Salida Sub Area is 2.5 acres**, while in the City of Salida it’s 0.73 acres. In the unincorporated area surrounding the City, the average parcel size is 8.4 acres.

Recreation

- The Salida Sub Area has an estimated **14.3 miles of trails** and two campgrounds. There are two fishing access areas on the Arkansas River.

EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY FOR GROWTH

Water

- The City of Salida provides potable water service to all of its residents, as well as several in the surrounding unincorporated areas. In total, there are approximately 2,500 taps in operation.
- There are three sources in the Salida system: two infiltration galleries and a surface intake from the South Arkansas River. The current combined production capacity is 5.3 million gallons per day (MGD).
- **Current usage is at approximately 50% of production capacity in the summer** (highest usage), with an average demand of roughly 1.5 MGD throughout the course of the year.

Sanitation

- The Salida Sewer System provides service within the City of Salida and the Town of Poncha Springs municipal boundaries. The intergovernmental agreement between the Town and the City states that the transmission line along Highway 50 must be maintained and upgraded so that it does not become a limiting factor to the growth or development of the Town of Poncha Springs.
- The wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) also accepts the waste that is pumped from private septic systems, known as septage, from a number of collection companies that operate in Chaffee and surrounding counties.
- In total, the plant treats an average 0.61 million gallons per day (MGD). Approximately 10% of this is collected from the Town of Poncha Springs, another 30% is from commercial properties in Salida, and the remainder is residential (via public sewer or septage).
- The infrastructure of this system consists of approximately 45 miles of public sewer pipe, ranging from 8 inches to 30 inches in diameter. This facility is rated to treat up to 2.7 million gallons per day (MGD). Given the 2014-2018 collection data, **the plant typically operates around 25% capacity and has reached approximately 50% capacity during the summer**, when outdoor watering and tourist populations are at their highest.

Poncha Springs Sub Area

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Population

- The Poncha Springs Sub Area has an **estimated population of 2,282 - with 1,487 people living in unincorporated Chaffee and 795 living in the Town of Poncha Springs.**

Jobs

- The Poncha Springs Sub Area has an **estimated 463 jobs**, 364 of those in the Town of Poncha Springs and 99 in the unincorporated county.

Land Use and Development Patterns

- Historically, development patterns in this Sub Area have been affected by conservation areas and public lands. Public lands include the San Isabel National Forest, federal BLM lands, Colorado State Land Board lands, Chaffee County lands (fairgrounds) and Town of Poncha Springs-owned lands, mostly south of the Town.
- The South Arkansas River is a scenic riparian corridor running through the sub area, which is rich in wildlife diversity and provides habitat for native species. As such, the river corridor has several conservation easements that will preserve the land for agricultural uses or open space.
- Other large land holdings such as portions of the Hutchinson Ranch near Poncha Springs have conservation easements which push growth elsewhere. Over all, there are about **984 acres of land under conservation easements in this Sub Area.**

- The Town of Poncha Springs has annexed lands in recent years to accommodate municipal growth and extension of services. As such, much of the recent development activity and building permit activity has occurred within the Town's boundaries.
  - About **310 building permits have been issued in the last 10 years** in the sub area for residential or commercial construction. About 61% of those (190 permits) were within or immediately adjacent to the Poncha Springs municipal boundary, many of those within new subdivisions such as Little River Ranch and Quarry Station.
  - Rural subdivisions have seen additional development activity, particularly in the last five years in subdivisions such as Cameron Meadows Estates, Eagle Moon Ranch and Weldon Creek Subdivision. Average parcel size for these developments was approximately 6.5 acres.
- Physical Character**
- **The average parcel size in the Poncha Springs Sub Area is 8.1 acres;** in the Town of Poncha Springs it's 3.2 acres and in the unincorporated area surrounding the Town, the average is 14.3 acres.

Recreation

- The S. Arkansas River corridor is a long-term target for conservation and many easements already exist or are planned by town. Likewise river trails and fishing accesses exist or are planned along the river. The FLUM identifies areas where proposed trails will further connect the town to public lands and National Forest access. A regional trail system that will connect Maysville to Poncha Springs and Salida is in the planning stages and has support from various community organizations. Poncha Pass is a popular hill climb for road cyclists. Additionally, there are two campgrounds in Maysville.



EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY FOR GROWTH

Water

- The Town of Poncha Springs provides potable water to its nearly 1,000 customers. Any property interested in connecting to public water must be annexed into the Town if it is not already located within those boundaries.
- The Town currently has 6 wells. The total current production capacity is 0.63 million gallons per day (MGD).
- Once treated, the potable water is stored in one of three tanks across Town. The total storage capacity is 0.66 million gallons (MG), which is adequate to meet required fire flows. The overall distribution system is currently contained within a single pressure zone. It is anticipated that any further expansion to the system would require booster pumps and/or pressure-reducing valves (PRVs), which would create a multi-zoned system.

Sanitation

- The Salida Sewer System serves all properties contained within the City of Salida and the Town of Poncha Springs municipal boundaries. The intergovernmental agreement between the Town and the City states that the transmission line along Highway 50 must be maintained and upgraded so that it does not become a limiting factor to the growth or development of the Town of Poncha Springs.
- The wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) also accepts the waste that is pumped from private septic systems, known as septage, from a number of collection companies that operate in Chaffee and surrounding counties.

- In total, the plant treats an average 0.61 million gallons per day (MGD). Approximately 10% of this is collected from the Town of Poncha Springs, another 30% is from commercial properties in Salida, and the remainder is residential (via public sewer or septage).
- This facility is rated to treat up to 2.7 million gallons per day (MGD). Given the 2014-2018 collection data, the plant **typically operates around 25% capacity and will stretch to 50% capacity during the summer**, when outdoor watering and tourist populations are at their highest.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

GEOGRAPHY

Chaffee County is one of the most strikingly beautiful areas in the United States Surrounded by high mountain peaks, it is graced with alpine rivers and streams, broad expanses of ranch land and meadows, and landscapes that vary from rolling pinon and juniper forests to rugged wilderness. Located in the Upper Arkansas Valley on the eastern slope of the continental divide, land in Chaffee County ranges from about 6,900 feet to over 14,000 feet in elevation.

There are more 14,000-foot peaks here than in any county in the united states. The Collegiate Peaks are the most striking and prominent physical feature in the County, providing a breathtaking backdrop for the County and some of the most important views from venues such as Trout Creek Pass. Running north to south Oxford, Harvard, Columbia, Yale and Princeton grace the western viewshed of the Collegiate Peaks Byway. These dramatic peaks are the core of the Sawatch, the highest continuous mountain range in North America.

The Arkansas River is the other primary physical feature of the County, running roughly through its midsection from Granite to Salida. US Highways 285, 24 and 50, the three major transportation corridors in the County, parallel the Arkansas River as it runs north to south and then west to east in the County. The views from

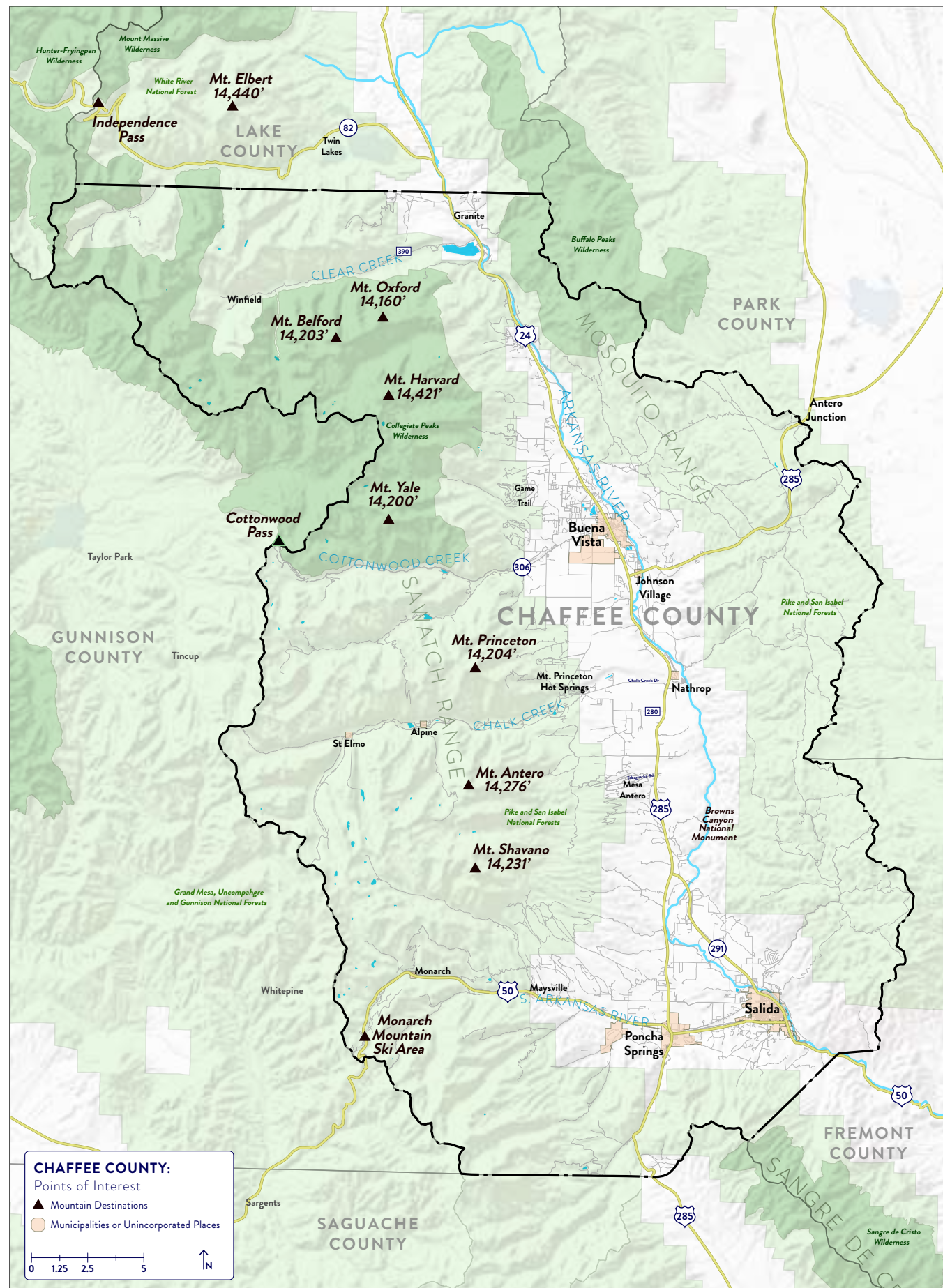
these three highways towards the surrounding mountains and across the Arkansas River do much to establish the rural, scenic character of the County.

Over a billion years ago a long sequence of immense uplifts interspersed by sea sedimentation, volcanic action, and water and wind erosion began in the region. In more recent geologic time, huge glaciers chiseled the Upper Arkansas Valley’s monumental Collegiate Peaks. The dramatic white of Mt. Princeton’s Chalk Cliffs comes from the kaolinite in granitic material from hot springs leaching up from fault lines.

Most of the County has slopes of over 10% and over one third has slopes in excess of 25%. The Valley soils are typically thin, rocky, and somewhat alkaline. However, soils in a broad band running along the west side of the Arkansas River are generally suitable for development and agricultural uses.

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

Ecosystems change with elevation, from prairie grasses and cottonwoods along valley watercourses to alpine tundra. Pinon-juniper hills with yucca and cacti rise up to mountain slopes blanketed successively by ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, aspen, Colorado blue spruce, white fir, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, bristlecone pine and limber pine. Wildflowers grace the spring and early summer landscape. In the fall, aspen color blazes from yellow-gold to flame orange.



Many people come to Chaffee County for the alpine scenery, extensive public lands, exceptional whitewater and the Collegiate Peaks. As such the County celebrates prevalent natural and ecological resources found in the Arkansas Valley by promoting their conservation for existing and future generations to enjoy.

Ecological assets of high value include:

- Arkansas River and its riparian area
- Wildlife habitat, including several species of North American megafauna like elk, deer, black bear and moose
- Lakes and reservoirs (Trout Creek)
- Browns Canyon National Monument
- Collegiate Peaks Wilderness Area
- Buffalo Peaks Wilderness Area
- Cottonwood Hot Springs
- Mt. Princeton Hot Springs

## WILDLIFE

The Arkansas River and tributaries harbor prize native wild brown trout. Alpine lakes, streams and reservoirs are stocked with rainbow and cutthroat trout reared in Chalk Creek and Mt. Shavano state fish hatcheries. Elk, moose, mule deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, bears and beaver thrive in the area. Large elk herds gather in the fall and winter on the grasslands lining the County roads near Buena Vista, Mt. Antero and Mt. Princeton. Bald eagles, peregrine falcons, wild turkeys, mountain bluebirds and hummingbirds are also found in Chaffee County. Yellow-bellied marmots, pikas and white-tailed ptarmigan live in the alpine tundra.



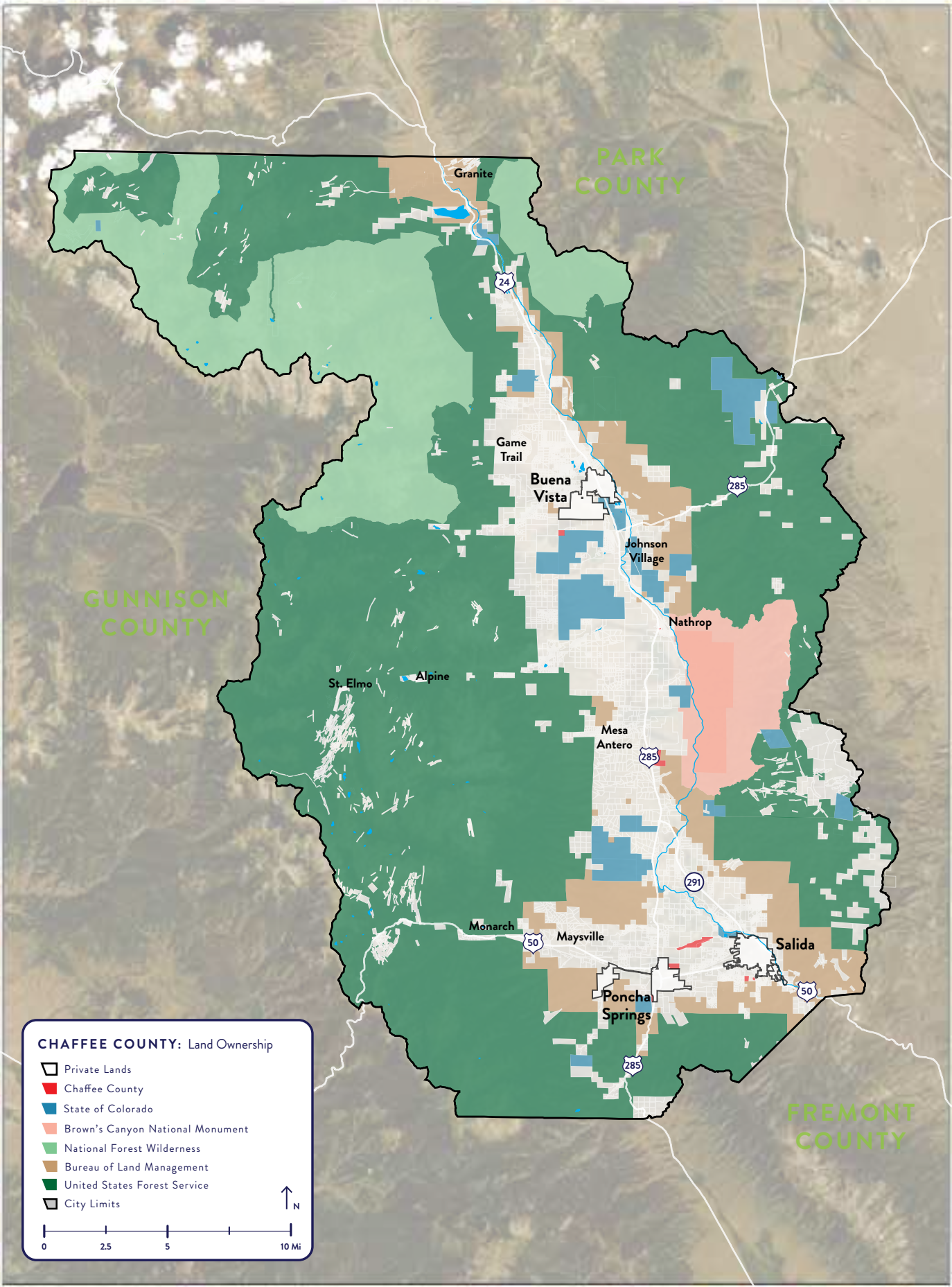
AMENITIES AND ACTIVITY  
NODES

Residents and visitors are drawn to Chaffee because of its wealth of amenities associated with outdoor activities. Hiking one of the fifteen 14,000 peaks, road and mountain cycling on off-street paths and trails, whitewater rafting, fly fishing, rock climbing, and Nordic and alpine skiing are all popular activities located in Chaffee County.

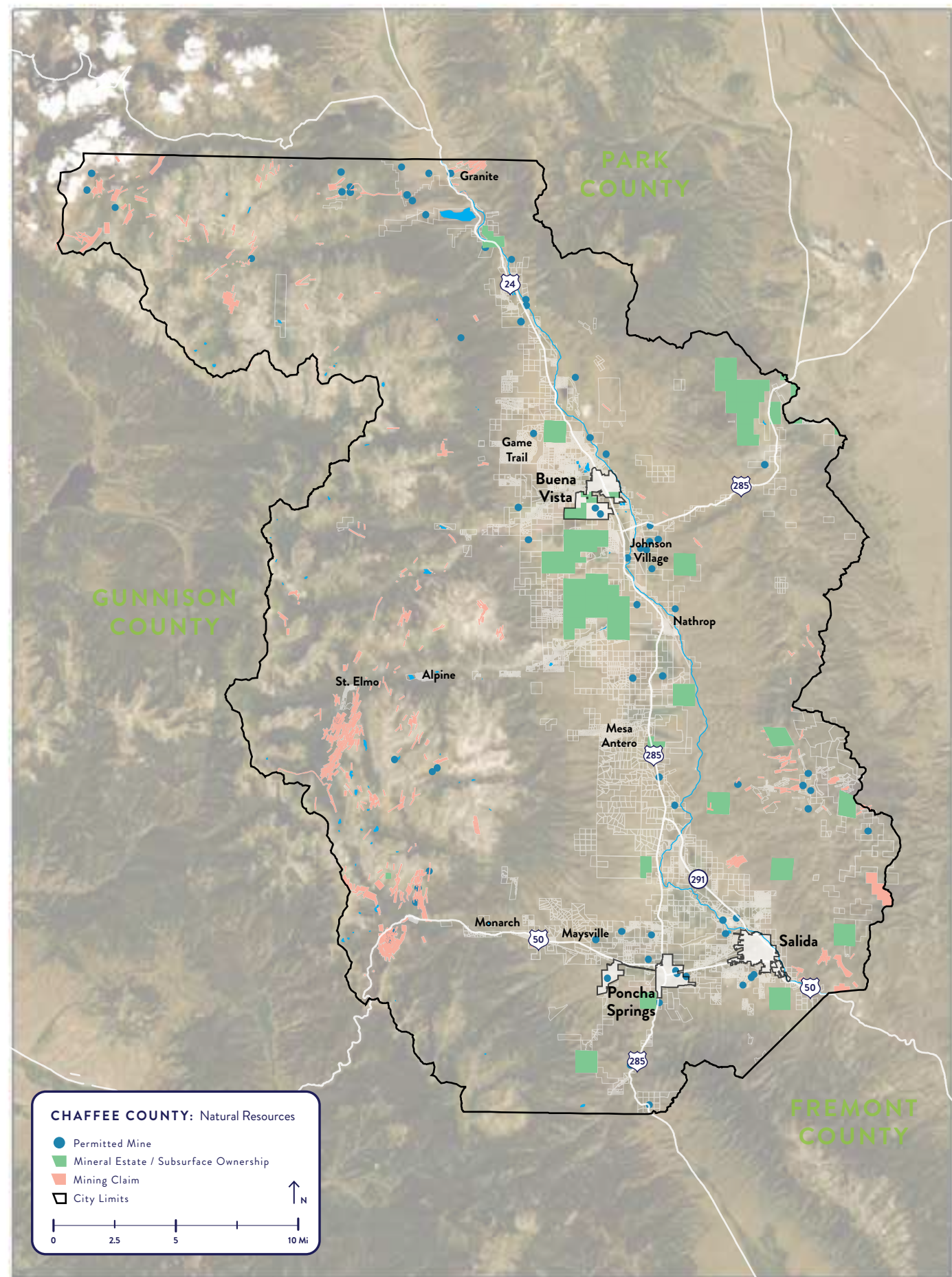
Retail, shopping and entertainment destinations in Salida and Buena Vista also bring people to the County. The two hot springs (Cottonwood and Mt. Princeton) attract people from all over the state. All of these destinations bring in families and individuals from across the nation and beyond who stay at local hotels, shop in local stores and eat at cafes all of which make tourism an important share of Chaffee’s current and future economy.



Elk herd  
Photo by Scott Peterson







## PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

### RIVER AND FLOODPLAIN

The Arkansas River and its tributaries can pose hazards to structures and property in the County when these channels flow at their peak due to warm temperatures and snowmelt. The River has flows that range from 275 cubic feet per second (CFS) in the winter to over 4,000 CFS during spring runoff. Peak flows typically occur in June or early July, presenting challenging conditions not only for those who choose to recreate on the rivers, but also to property adjacent to the rivers in or near the flood hazard areas as provided by flood insurance studies from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

This comprehensive plan intends to continually guide development away from flood hazard areas, or where necessary, to mitigate impacts by following federal, state and local regulations regarding development in flood hazard areas.

### FIRE AND WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE (WUI)

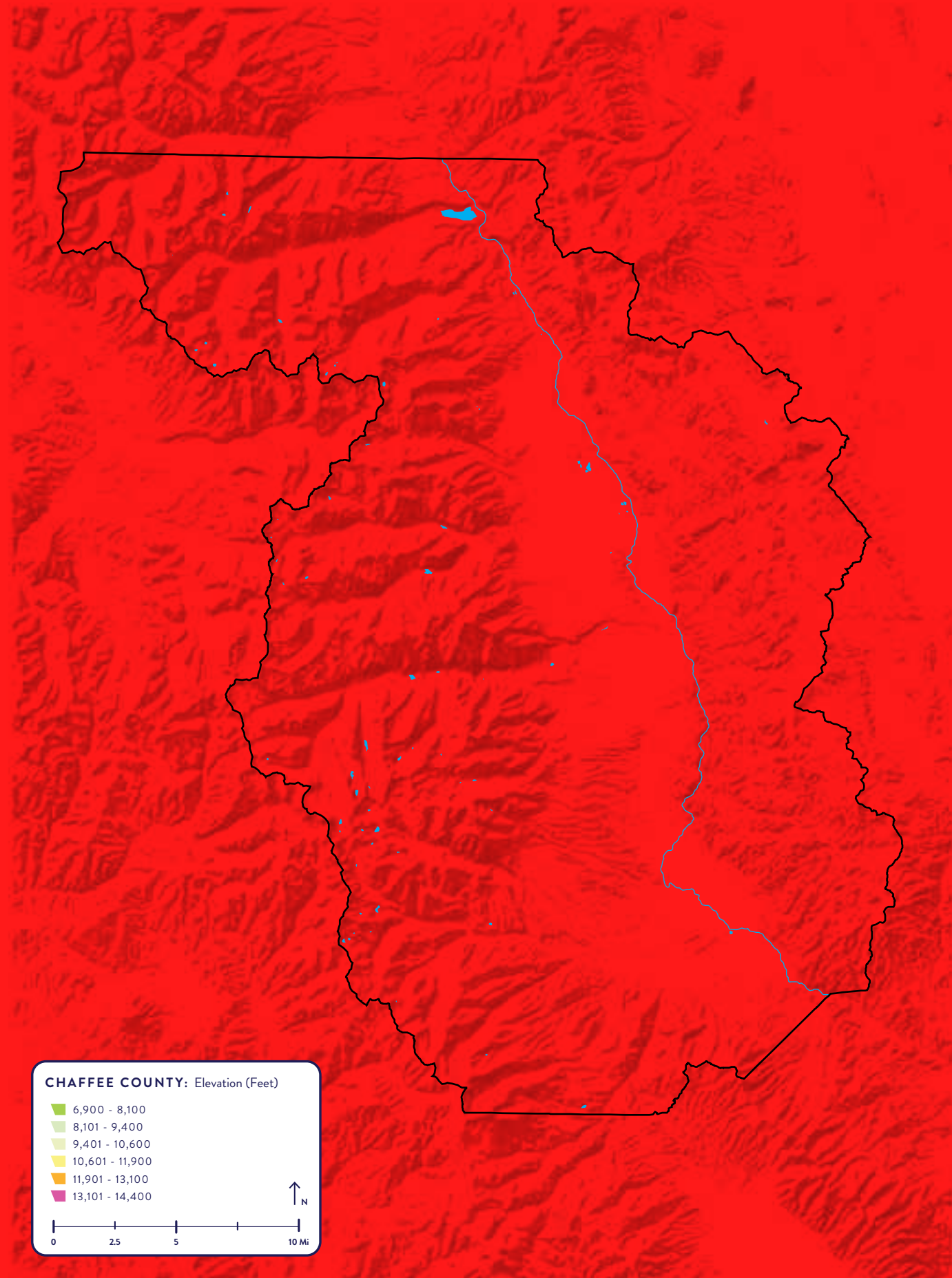
The Wildland Urban Interface is defined as the fringe area where urban or residential areas meet with undeveloped land or vegetation. Historically in the Western US, considerable housing development has occurred in the WUI, as it is often the most desirable and valuable land with scenic vistas, dense forests and privacy. The idea of the WUI was formally introduced in a 1987

Forest Service Research document but was not properly recognized as a major component for federal land use and fire management until the 2000 National Fire Plan.

Over 80% of Chaffee's landscape is federal land, with the vast majority forested, posing high risk of wildfire. Nearly half of the County's population resides outside of municipalities, many in the WUI.

A 2019 survey found that 80% of residents believe that a major wildfire is very or extremely likely within the next five years in Chaffee County, and that 58% of residents are concerned about a fire near their residence. Land management agencies are challenged to keep pace with the need to effectively manage our forests. Recognizing the urgency of the issue, Chaffee County partners with them, as well as local fire districts, homeowners and the community to improve wildfire resilience, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Chaffee Common Ground funds projects through these partnerships to improve forest health and reduce wildfire danger to make the community safer and help protect our forests for future generations.



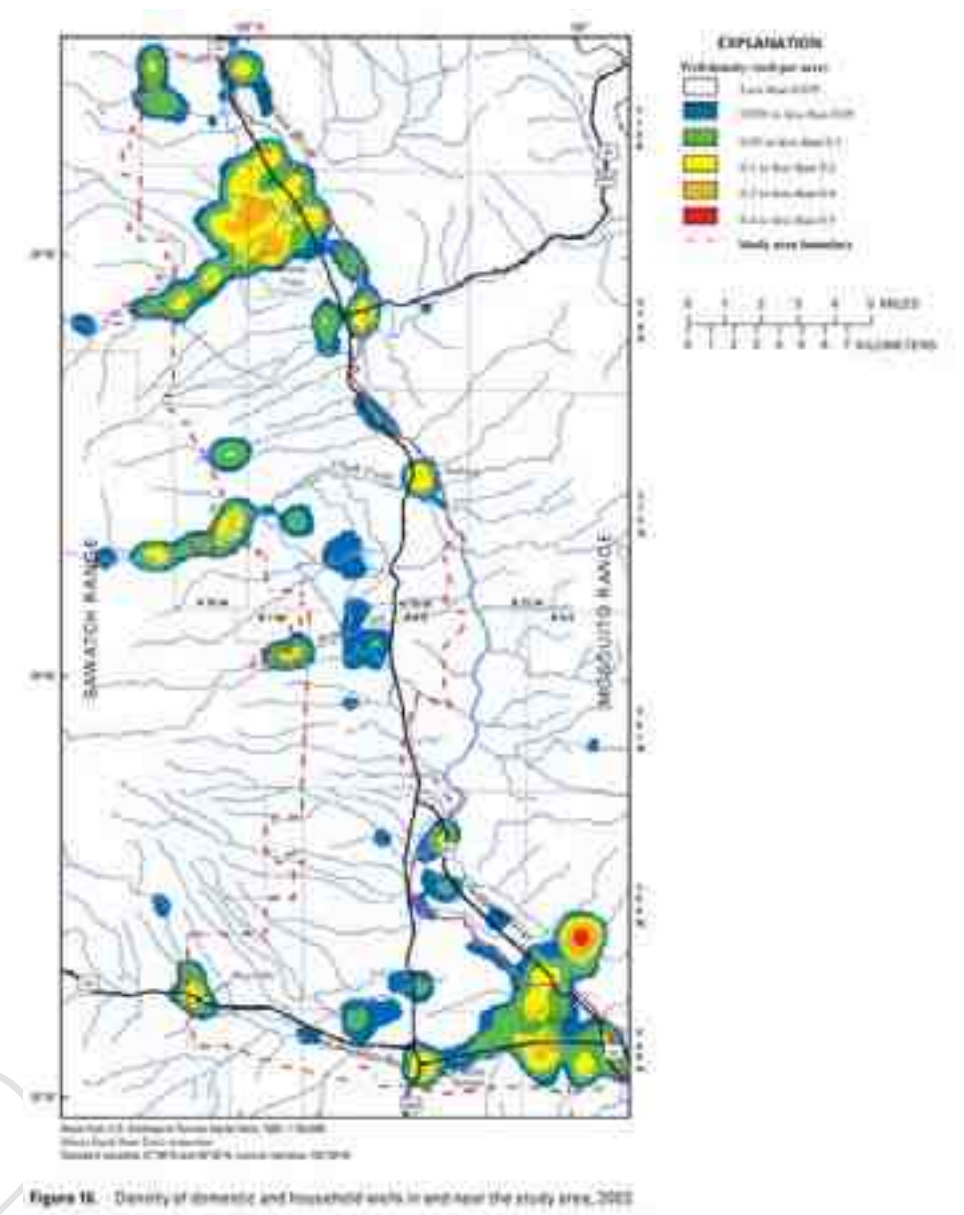


## GROUNDWATER

The majority of the groundwater within Chaffee County is managed by the Colorado Division of Water Resources and the Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District (UAWCD), as it has been deemed tributary to the Upper Arkansas River. The UAWCD was founded in 1979 to protect and secure water in the Upper Arkansas Valley. The UAWCD now spearheads basin-wide projects which secure and augment groundwater and to increase the water supply available to the valley. Part of the District's endeavor is to oversee and augment water rights throughout Chaffee County, as all of the wells within Chaffee County have been deemed tributary to the Arkansas River. The United States Geological Survey completed a study in 2003 to evaluate characteristics of groundwater in Chaffee County including aquifer characteristics, aquifer depletion, aquifer storage, and nitrate/nitrite contamination.

The heatmap at right shows areas with high well density, and based on the hydrogeology, the density may be more than the aquifer can support with groundwater withdrawals.

Figure 20 from the USGS report shows areas of increased nitrate + nitrite contamination. The EPA regulates nitrate and nitrite with



a maximum contaminant level of 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L), as these contaminants are classified as an acute health risk and can cause methoglobinemia ("Blue Baby" syndrome. Areas with higher nitrate + nitrite concentrations may be correlated to areas of high densities of failing septic systems or septic systems installed in unsuitable soils.

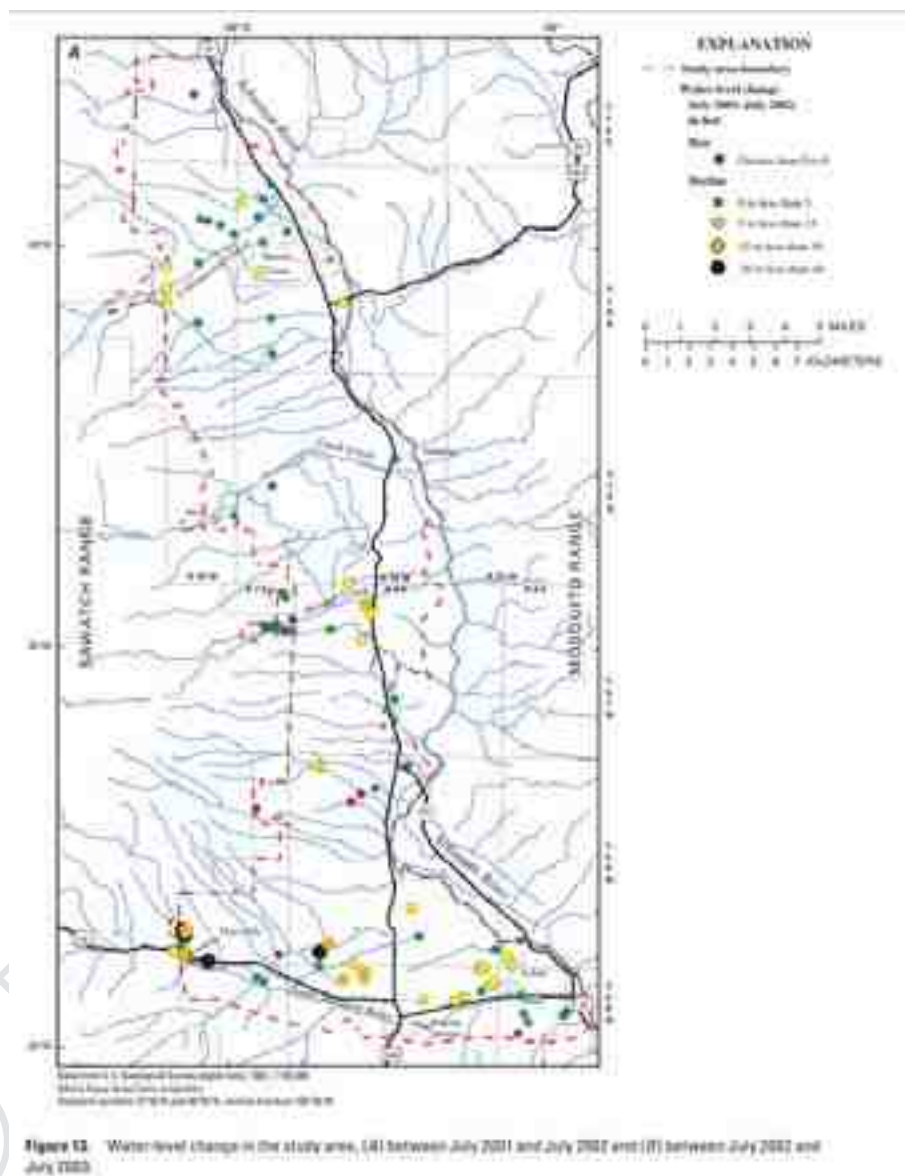
## Comp Plan Implications

The availability and quality of groundwater are major concerns. The Arkansas River Basin is overappropriated and we have a compact with Kansas. There is no such thing as a “free” river as there is always a call in place. Many uses of water, such as wells or ponds, result in out-of-priority depletions to the system - water is lost or consumed out of priority and this can cause injury to surface water rights, either here or downstream. The state engineer has determined that there is a nexus between surface and ground water, so well pumping creates an impact to surface water availability. Augmentation replaces the depleted water so that surface water rights are not injured. The availability of an augmentation plan, both the water and the legal/engineering, is a critical component to growth in areas outside of the municipal service areas. Even within the municipalities, municipal wells need augmentation too.

These state reports suggest that the time may have come to consider — at the planning level — incorporating measures to further protect existing and potentially outdated OWTS in the rural county. Implementing Transfer of Title ordinance as per Regulation 43 (See Lake 2018 County On-Site Wastewater Treatment Regulations

Source:

Watts, K. R. (2005). Scientific Investigations Report 2005-5179: Hydrogeology and Quality of Ground Water in the Upper Arkansas River Basin from Buena Vista to Salida, Colorado, 2000-2003. Retrieved January 6, 2020, from <https://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2005/5179/pdf/SIR2005-5179.pdf>.



for policy precedent). The early stages of such a policy should be for information-gathering purposes only so as to build a regional database of systems.

At the appropriate time, the County may decide to incorporate remediation measures that would require a landowner to upgrade the system to specifications required of new on-site treatment systems.