

2024



Comprehensive Plan Update



Huerfano County





Volume 1: The Plan





Huerfano County Comprehensive Plan Update 2024: Volume 1

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Acknowledgements

Project Steering Committee

Dale Lyons

Michael “Sandy” White

Dave Sheridan

Tim Tady

JoAnn Ugolini

Ron Eccher

Huerfano County Board of County Commissioners

Mayor and Board of Trustees of the Town of La Veta

Mayor and City Council of the City of Walsenburg

Staff

Heather Hillis, Town Clerk

Roger Tinklenburg, City Administrator

Carl Young, County Administrator

Brittney Ciarlo, Emergency Management Director

Robert Gilbert, Management Fellow

Consultant Team

Gabby Voeller

Julia Randall

Noelle Gignoux

Ayden Eickhoff

Austin Novak

Special Acknowledgements

Sharon Jakubowski-Wolz

Sky Tallman

Gaye Davis

Ashley Vandagriff

David Roesch

Joe Winterseik

Bob Martin



The Plan

About the Comprehensive Plan & Process

This comprehensive plan update began in Spring 2023 and was completed in 2024.

Huerfano County contracted with SE Group, a planning, permitting, and design firm, to update the comprehensive plan, which had been last updated in 2018.

The update to the comprehensive plan was overseen by a Steering Committee, formed by citizen representatives from Walsenburg, La Veta, and unincorporated Huerfano County. This body met approximately every six weeks throughout the course of the project, and while Steering Committee membership fluctuated somewhat, active membership was maintained at an average of six members. The Steering Committee was responsible for reviewing and providing feedback on all materials produced by the consultant and providing strategic guidance on the plan's scope and recommended policies. This Steering Committee also supported the Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan, as described below.

A large component of this plan was based on community engagement. In May 2023, two open houses were held in Walsenburg and La Veta to better understand existing conditions, community needs, and the county's vision. A community survey was also conducted, available both online and on paper, and received 264 responses. The project team then relied on stakeholder conversations to supplement the feedback received during the open houses and from the community survey.

The Huerfano County Planning Commission both reviewed the draft plan in advance of its completion and provided feedback on the draft goals, policies, and actions.

Coordinated Planning Projects

This County Comprehensive Plan was developed in coordination with two other county plans; a Hazard Mitigation Plan and an Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan, which was also developed in collaboration with the City of Walsenburg and the Town of La Veta. These three plans were coordinated because of the significant overlap between the three projects; for example, this Comprehensive Plan recommends certain land use strategies which are directly informed by the findings of the Hazard Mitigation Plan and the needs identified in the Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan. The overarching takeaways from these two plans are below.

Hazard Mitigation Plan

The five goals of the Huerfano County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan are the following:

- Goal 1: Reduce the loss of life and personal injuries from hazard events
- Goal 2: Reduce the impacts of hazards on property and the environment
- Goal 3: Protect critical facilities and infrastructure from the impacts of hazards
- Goal 4: Minimize economic losses
- Goal 5: Increase capacity to implement mitigation actions



The findings of this plan inform all aspects of this comprehensive plan, especially the Future Land Use Prescription of Protecting Sensitive Landscapes and Guarding Against Hazards, and policies relating to Public Services and Community Safety.

Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan (IHOP)

As a collaborative plan with the City of Walsenburg and the Town of La Veta, this plan identifies barriers to and opportunities for affordable housing in Huerfano County. This project conducted a robust analysis of existing housing and land use conditions in each jurisdiction, which led to a recommended set of affordable housing strategies and policies for each jurisdiction to adopt, as well as three opportunity sites in each jurisdiction for the development of affordable housing.

The top goals of the IHOP are:

- Goal 1: There is abundant, quality housing for workforce and community-serving professionals
- Goal 2: There is abundant, quality specialized housing (e.g., transitional housing, age-in-place options, ADA-compliant housing)
- Goal 3: There is sustainably built and sited housing (hazard and water-conscious, adaptive reuse, sustainable materials)
- Goal 4: Huerfano County residents have access to quality housing, improving economic vitality and community health

As housing is foundational to all aspects of the county, the findings of this housing plan inform the entirety of this comprehensive plan, specifically the Future Land Use Prescriptions of Supporting Thriving Villages and Encouraging Housing Opportunity, as well as this plan's Zoning and Land Use policies. Please note that there are no Housing Existing Conditions memo and associated Housing policies, goals, and actions as part of this Comprehensive plan – those pieces of analysis and recommendations are contained in the 2023 Housing Needs Assessment and the 2024 Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan that was developed alongside this Comprehensive Plan.

How to Use This Plan

This plan is divided into three volumes. Volume 1 is the core part of this Comprehensive Plan, with the specific contents outlined below. Volume 2 is the analysis of existing conditions in Huerfano County, collected in 8 topic-based memos. These existing conditions were the foundation for the development of this plan. Volume 3 is the appendix, containing public engagement materials, maps, and mapping data.

In Volume 1: The Plan, you will find the following components:

- **Vision & Community Values:** High-level direction for policymaking in the county. Use for reference in future policymaking.
- **Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and Land Use Prescriptions:** The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) provides a foundation for future zoning changes. Use the FLUM and land use prescriptions to evaluate development proposals and other changes for compliance with the comprehensive plan.



- **Goals & Policies:** These are forward-looking policies for land use and associated matters in Huerfano County. Use these goals and policies to evaluate the compliance of development proposals and other changes with the comprehensive plan (e.g., a broad, visionary policy statement --- Huerfano County should encourage and protect agricultural land uses and preserve open spaces). These goals and policies should serve as a reference in evaluations of conditional use permits, PUDs, and any major land use changes.
- **Supportive Actions:** These are recommended concrete action steps that the County should take to help fulfill the Vision, Goals, and Policies (e.g., a concrete action --- Huerfano County should undertake a study to understand water resources in key areas of the County, such as the Highway 160 corridor). The Actions should be referenced as possible projects to include in County department work plans and budget planning.

Vision

Vision Statement

A vision statement is a statement of purpose that encapsulates a community's values and desired future. This vision statement is the thesis upon which the following Comprehensive Plan is built. The following vision statement was created by community members, adapting the 2018 Huerfano County Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement:

Huerfano County maintains the high quality of life that its residents enjoy by making land use decisions that protect the County's scenic beauty, ecology, and western heritage. The County supports affordable housing and thoughtful new development/redevelopment to uplift the economic wellbeing and health of the County's citizens. As a growing hub for recreation and tourism, Huerfano County works to improve economic vitality while preserving the County's remote, rural character.

Community Input That Informed the Vision

Community input on this vision statement was collected through two open house events in May 2023 and a community survey, which was available both online and in-print and received a total of 264 responses. Residents were asked, both at the open houses and in the community survey, about the county's **greatest strengths and challenges**, as well as whether the 2018 Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement was still relevant.



Greatest Strengths:

1. Scenic Beauty
2. Recreational Amenities & Wildlife
3. Historic Character
4. Arts & Culture
5. Rural Qualities

Greatest Challenges:

1. Lack of Economic Opportunity
2. Affordable Housing
3. Crime
4. Government Accountability
5. Lack of Childcare

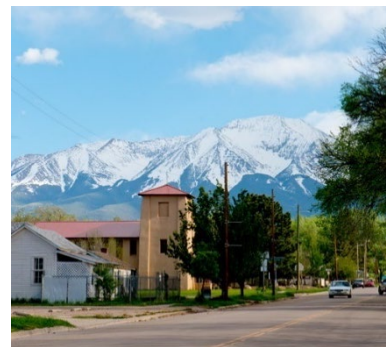
Respondents also expressed agreement with the 2018 Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement and indicated that it provided adequate direction for the county moving forward. Using this community input, several draft vision statements were created based on the 2018 statement, highlighting the county’s strengths as qualities to preserve, and the county’s challenges as topics that will be addressed and improved. These draft vision statements were then workshopped with the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee to develop this final vision statement.

About the Future Land Use Map (FLUM)

A future land use map (FLUM) is a foundational component of a Comprehensive Plan. The FLUM presents a conceptual framework and foundation for future zoning and land use decisions. While the FLUM does not need to show recommended zoning districts, it identifies different types of desired land uses that respond to community goals. A FLUM is not a new zoning map, but future updates to zoning should aim to comply with the FLUM and thus support community goals reflected in the map.

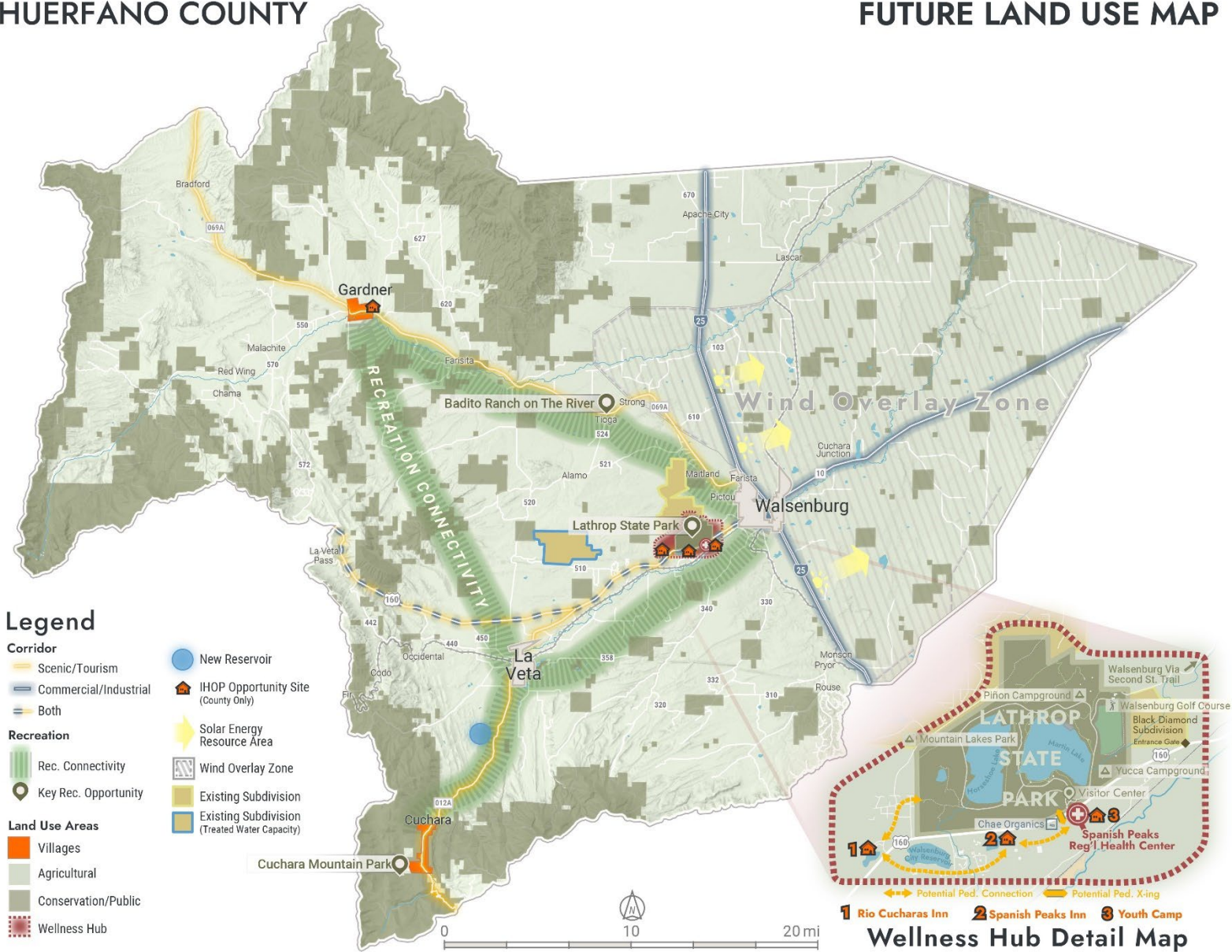
The themes of the future land use map correspond to the overall vision for Huerfano County developed for this plan, as described above. The FLUM was informed by the following plan components and pieces of analysis:

- Plan Vision Statement
- Focus Group SWOT exercises (See Volume 3: Appendices).
- Existing Land Use and Zoning Analysis (See Volume 2: Existing Conditions Analysis).
- Wildfire Analysis in the 2024 Huerfano County Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan Suitability Analysis



HUERFANO COUNTY

FUTURE LAND USE MAP



- Legend**
- Corridor**
 - Scenic/Tourism
 - Commercial/Industrial
 - Both
 - Recreation**
 - Rec. Connectivity
 - Key Rec. Opportunity
 - Land Use Areas**
 - Villages
 - Agricultural
 - Conservation/Public
 - Wellness Hub
 - Other Features**
 - New Reservoir
 - IHOP Opportunity Site (County Only)
 - Solar Energy Resource Area
 - Wind Overlay Zone
 - Existing Subdivision
 - Existing Subdivision (Treated Water Capacity)





Land Use Prescriptions

The following section describes the major themes and components of the FLUM, including the specific concepts and prescriptions for land use proposed by the map. Relevant Policies and Actions are referenced for each section. This section specifies target areas for future growth.

Support Thriving Villages in Huerfano County

- Cuchara and Gardner (the two village centers in Huerfano County) support compact, village-style development. These areas include a mix of residential, small-scale commercial, and civic spaces. Where appropriate, there are sidewalks, paths, and other infrastructure that encourage pedestrian safety and connectivity. Commercial uses in village areas help support Huerfano County's growing recreational tourism economy. Future growth in Huerfano County that does not occur within Walsenburg and La Veta should be concentrated in village areas, prioritizing infill development whenever possible. Risks associated with wildfire, flooding, debris flows, and other hazards should be thoroughly studied before executing an infill project.

Encourage Housing Opportunity

- New housing opportunities are encouraged in existing developments, close to services, and away from hazardous areas. New residential developments are encouraged to provide sidewalks, paths, and other pedestrian infrastructure as appropriate to help connect new homes to existing neighborhoods.
- Huerfano County IHOP Top Opportunity Sites are identified on the map. As described in the introduction to this plan, the IHOP identifies a set of opportunity sites for affordable housing, including several sites within Huerfano County. The sites identified here represent promising sites for affordable housing development in Huerfano County in the future. For a detailed description of how these sites were identified, please see the IHOP.

Improve Community Health & Wellbeing

- The FLUM depicts a new **Wellness Hub** that encompasses the Spanish Peaks Regional Health Center, Lathrop State Park, and the surrounding areas, including current and potential residential areas. The Wellness Hub area is home to the county's two largest employers (SPRHC and Chaé Organics), making it an important location to prioritize for future housing development and active transportation. SPRHC is currently planning future expansions to their complex. Since Highway 169 runs through this area, it will be important to ensure that pedestrians and people biking can safely navigate this area. A network of multi-use paved or dirt paths connecting key elements of the Wellness Hub would be extremely beneficial to encourage active lifestyles and connectivity in this area as it evolves and grows. In addition, there are several blighted buildings in the vicinity of the Wellness Hub – as a designated growth area in this FLUM, the County encourages adaptive reuse of abandoned/blighted buildings for residential, commercial, civic use, and/or a mix of uses.



- The FLUM highlights several key recreation sites, including Lathrop State Park, which is located adjacent to the Wellness Hub. Public access to the State Park and other green spaces is critical to maintaining and improving quality of life in Huerfano County.

Promote Water-Conscious Community Development

- The FLUM depicts a land use pattern that supports compact development, concentrating new development in existing village areas and in defined growth areas, specifically ones that already have access to infrastructure and utilities (e.g., the Wellness Hub). As such, the FLUM does not encourage sprawling development patterns that rely on exempt wells.

Preserve Agricultural Lands & Open Space

- The FLUM depicts a land use pattern that preserves existing agricultural lands and opportunities for homesteading and other similar low-density residential uses outside of established village areas. By prioritizing development into compact village areas, the FLUM reduces development pressure on more remote landscapes in the county, including agricultural lands.

Protect Sensitive Landscapes & Guard Against Hazards

- The FLUM highlights areas for open space and conservation (Public Lands/Conservation). These areas represent some of the most rugged, mountainous terrain in the County, as well as other public lands. By prioritizing development into compact village areas, the FLUM reduces development pressure on more remote landscapes in the county.
- As discussed in the 2024 Hazard Mitigation Plan, nearly the entirety of Huerfano County is within the Wildland-Urban Interface, an area with heightened risks to life and property in the event of wildfire. In addition, there are several risks to development that must be accounted for and addressed when considering building on *any parcel* in the County:

“In the context of hazard risk, new development proposed near Walsenburg must exercise heightened awareness regarding potential incidents involving hazardous materials, dam failure, and floods. Likewise, areas experiencing growth near La Veta should conduct a thorough analysis of debris flow potential, in addition to considering dam failure and floods. In the case of development near Gardner and within the Unincorporated county, wildfire emerges as a prominent and pressing concern. Irrespective of the specific location, ensuring the availability of a reliable and sustainable water supply should be prioritized for all upcoming developments. While the hazards outlined here have been identified as the highest risk, it is crucial to underscore that a comprehensive assessment of all hazards identified in this plan is essential when evaluating the suitability of a building site.”

-2024 Huerfano County Hazard Mitigation Plan Update



Encourage Economic Development & Prosperity

- The FLUM highlights a corridor for industrial development along I-25, which connects Huerfano County to the rest of the Front Range. This area is intended to accommodate larger-scale commercial development, such as warehouse uses and utilities. The FLUM also highlights Highway 10 as a Commercial/Industrial Corridor. Rail resources in the county are also critical to the county's future industrial development.
- The FLUM highlights areas with strong solar and wind energy potential where the county should allow and encourage those uses. These areas include the current Wind Energy Overlay, as well as areas east of I-25. According to San Isabel Electric Association, solar resources in Huerfano County are strongest on east of I-25, where there are no shadows from mountains that limit sun exposure.

Support Scenic Resources & Recreational Tourism

- The FLUM highlights several key areas for their value as Key Recreation Sites, including Cuchara Mountain Park, Thorne Ranch, and Lathrop State Park. These are regionally significant recreation sites, but they are not the only recreational amenities in the County.
- The FLUM supports access to these recreation areas, along with the development of complementary businesses (e.g., guiding businesses) and amenities (e.g., multi-use paths).
- The FLUM highlights Scenic/Tourism Corridors that traverse some of the most scenic terrain in the county. This includes the Highway of Legends, an officially sanctioned scenic byway. These areas are intended to maintain their scenic character and encourage some small-scale commercial development, including tourist-oriented commercial uses.
- The FLUM highlights key desired trail connections, which have also been noted in the 2011 County Trails Plan and other previous plans. These connections include a trail linking Lathrop State Park and Walsenburg, a trail linking Gardner to La Veta, a trail linking La Veta to Walsenburg, a trail linking Walsenburg to Gardner, and the Southern Mountain Loop trail concept.



The Code of the West

Huerfano County has adopted the Code of the West, a philosophy that reflects the values and spirit of pioneers who settled in the western United States in the late 19th century. According to the Huerfano County website, the Code of the West is informed by “values of integrity and self-reliance.” The Code of the West also offers a unique consideration of human relationships to land that encourages reverence for the environment and awareness of its risks.

The Code of the West clearly states the risks of living in a highly remote environment with limited services. The rural and isolated nature of this type of development makes it more challenging to provide services. The Code of the West establishes that the County is not committed to providing complete services, particularly to outlying regions.

As noted in a section pertaining to the Code of the West in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, some lots in the County are undevelopable. The section also notes that property lines may not be accurate, and that historic fences may take precedence over a legal survey. In addition, as stated in the previous Comprehensive Plan, the County only maintains some of the roads within its boundaries, limiting access in winter and other times of extreme weather conditions.



KEY COMMUNITY VALUES SUPPORTED BY THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP & POLICIES

1. Preserve Scenic Beauty & Ruggedness
2. Protect Open Space & Wildlife
3. Maintain Historic Character & Rural Feel
4. Support Quality of Life & Community Health
5. Increase Affordable Housing Opportunities
6. Encourage Renewable Energy Generation



Goals, Policies, and Actions

Zoning & Land Use

Zoning & Land Use Key Takeaways

- Huerfano County’s zoning policies currently allow for a range of residential, commercial, and agricultural uses, among other uses. A 2024 update to the County Land Use Code (LUC) expanded density limits throughout the county, with the Urbanizing Residential and Commercial districts allowing the highest density by right (6 or more units).
- The County’s Agricultural zone represents 97% of the county’s land area. The area includes the County’s most remote wilderness areas, large ranches, and some smaller subdivisions. There is a need for greater clarity to define this zone and potentially break it up into smaller districts that more accurately reflect current and desired land uses in different areas of the county that are all currently zoned Agricultural.
- The County has an opportunity to use land use codes and regulations to address its most pressing problems, including water availability, housing supply issues, lack of economic opportunity, and wildfire risk. The Areas of Focus section of this memo addresses possible changes to the land use code and potential provisions that could help the County more effectively respond to these challenges.
- Huerfano County’s current zoning and land use data contains some inaccuracies; there is a need to build and maintain accurate, consistent records of land use and zoning information in the future.
- Several recommendations from the previous Comprehensive Plan (2018) remain relevant and have been incorporated into the Areas of Focus for this plan update. Select recommendations from the recent Community Wildfire Protection Plan have also been incorporated.

Zoning & Land Use Key Facts

- About 97% of the county is zoned Agricultural, including areas that are forested or under public land management.
- Single-family homes are the predominant residential use in the county. There are few parcels with multi-unit buildings. Condominiums are present on just 41 parcels in the County – these parcels are townhomes/condos in Cuchara. These parcels are small and may not be visible on the county-wide map.
- As of 2017, land use in the County was 77% rangeland/grassland, 18% forest, 3% is cropland (96% of which is irrigated), 0.7% is barren or rock/talus slopes, 0.6% is riparian or water, and 0.6% is developed with residential or commercial uses (Natural Resources Conservation Service National Resource Inventory, 2017). This dataset has not been updated since 2017.
- There is a substantial amount of vacant land in the County that has been designated as such by the County Assessor. Almost 2/3 of the Rural Residential zoning district is classified as vacant land. These largely consist of platted lots in subdivisions that were never built out.



- Commercial land uses represent a relatively small amount of land area (8%) in the County's current Commercial zone.
- According to Colorado Senate Bill 35, the County cannot apply its subdivision regulations to parcels over 35 acres in size. These types of subdivisions are uncommon today; most of the county's large-lot subdivisions over 35 acres (subdivisions in which each parcel is over 35 acres) are at least 40 years old.
- A 2024 LUC update changed the number of dwelling units allowed on an individual lot in multiple zone districts. With the new ordinance, the county allows up to 2 units per lot by right in the Agricultural and Rural Residential districts, 3-6 units per lot by right in Urbanizing Residential, and over 6 units per lot by right in Commercial. Over 6 dwelling units are allowed by conditional use in all districts. The new ordinance places no restrictions on the unit type or architectural type of the unit (e.g., 3 units in Urbanizing Residential could be provided in a triplex or in a duplex and a detached single-family home). Prior to the 2024 LUC update, single family homes were allowed by right in all districts except for Institutional, where they were conditionally permitted.
- The 2024 LUC update redefined Qualified and Non-Qualified Manufactured Homes. A non-qualified manufactured home is any manufactured home built prior to 1993 HUD standards and is prohibited in all zoning districts. If a non-qualified manufactured home was lawfully located in the County prior to the adoption of the 2024 regulations, it is treated as a legal non-conforming use. Qualified manufactured homes are all manufactured homes built after the 1993 HUD standard updates. They are treated as a "single-family dwelling" and are permitted in any zoning district where a single-family dwelling is a permitted use.
- Since 2010, Colorado's total renewable electricity net generation has more than quadrupled and it accounted for 37% of the state's total generation in 2022. Huerfano's County's naturally occurring weather patterns, with windy and sunny conditions being common, are conducive to an ongoing transition to renewable energy sources.
- In addition, there continues to be a steady increase in electric vehicle sales in Colorado and neighboring states, including cars, trucks, and e-bikes. A growing number of communities are installing charging stations so their municipal fleets and privately owned vehicles can effectively operate.

Zoning & Land Use Goals, Policies, and Actions

ZONING & LAND USE Goal 1: Ensure that future development in Huerfano County conforms with the adopted Future Land Use Map and this Comprehensive Plan.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 1.1: The County evaluates all development in terms of its congruence with the Future Land Use Map and associated land use prescriptions to ensure that development within the county supports the long-term, community-informed vision outlined in this plan.
- ZLU Policy 1.2: The Planning Commission can make appropriate zoning changes over time that reflect the Future Land Use Map.

ZLU Goal 2: Promote a range of housing types and opportunities in Huerfano County, prioritizing attainable and workforce housing.



Policies

- ZLU Policy 2.1: The County prioritizes development within and adjacent to existing developments and discourages intensive development away from existing water and wastewater systems.
- ZLU Policy 2.2: The County encourages adaptive reuse of existing structures in the County for housing development.

Actions

- ZLU Action 2.1: Evaluate allowing higher lot coverage for the Urbanizing Residential and Commercial -Service district. The current lot coverage of 30% could preclude some residential development. Consider requiring a stormwater mitigation plan for lot coverages over a certain percentage, such as 50%.
- ZLU Action 2.2: Investigate the [HUD Community Development Block Grant Program](#), USDA Rural Development Housing & Facilities Programs, and EPA Brownfields Area-Wide Planning pilot program for adaptive reuse.
- ZLU Action 2.3: Define short-term rentals (STRs) in the county code and allow them by conditional use. Consider creating a licensing program and fees to mitigate impacts and recover costs of managing STRs in the county.
- ZLU Action 2.4: Promote a range of housing types. Continue regulating land use by units per lot or massing standards as opposed to housing types (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, townhomes).
- ZLU Action 2.5: Pursue opportunities to reduce or eliminate duplicative development standards that can make development more challenging. For example, rely on the current International Building Code for standards as applicable.
- ZLU Action 2.6: Collaborate with Walsenburg and La Veta to implement the recommendations of the 2024 Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan.
- ZLU Action 2.7: Pursue opportunities to regulate short-term rentals and identifies opportunities to increase hotel capacity in Huerfano County to reduce pressure on STRs as a primary lodging type.
- ZLU Action 2.8: Develop and promote facilities and housing that meets the needs of the county's aging population, including aging-in-place options, assisted living, and skilled nursing.

Zoning, Unit Types, & Affordable Housing The 2023 Huerfano County Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) estimates a need for 533 additional rental units in Huerfano County (including Walsenburg and La Veta). The HNA also estimates a gap in the market for affordable homes for purchase, particularly for residents earning <100% AMI. On a per-square-foot basis, traditional single-family homes are typically more expensive to construct and purchase. As such, different housing types that are more land- and cost-efficient are desirable in Huerfano County. In the past, the County's zoning has limited the development of different housing types, such as duplexes, triplexes, and small apartment buildings. A recent update to the County's zoning aims to reduce these limitations and would allow for two dwelling units per lot County-wide as a use-by-right in all districts except Industrial. The update also allows 3-6 dwelling units per parcel as a use-by-right in Urbanizing Residential and Commercial, and as a conditional use in all other districts. The update



also includes 6 or more dwelling units on a parcel as a use-by-right in the Commercial district, and as a conditional use in all other districts.

ZLU Goal 3: Right-size development and encourage efficient land use to protect and preserve agricultural lands.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 3.1: The County encourages the clustering of residential development in order to protect agricultural land. Ensure that adequate water is available for any cluster developments per C.R.S. 37-92-602(1)(b), which states, "...the only well on a cluster development lot, serving one single-family residence, where the ratio of water usage in the cluster development does not exceed one acre-foot of annual withdrawals for each thirty-five acres within the cluster development."
- ZLU Policy 3.2: The County promotes adaptive reuse of existing structures in the County for development that serves the needs of the community, such as housing, commercial development, civic uses, or a mix of uses. This can reduce development pressure for outward growth and sprawl.

Actions

- ZLU Action 3.1: Establish new zoning districts that align with this plan's Future Land Use Map and community priorities for growth management, land conservation, and local quality of life. Districts would include:
 1. Industrial (Existing Zone)
 2. Commercial (Existing Zone)
 3. Village or Mixed Use (New Zone)
 4. Residential (Combining the current Urbanizing Residential and Rural Residential zones)
 5. Homestead or Large Lot Residential (New Zone)
 6. Agriculture (Existing Zone).
- ZLU Action 3.2: Revise the county road regulations to require all new subdivision development to occur adjacent to a county-maintained roadway.
- ZLU Action 3.3: Establish a new village zoning district that would allow a wide range of uses and would promote compact development and promote community-oriented businesses and services. This type of district would enable orderly growth to occur in and around Cuchara and Gardner and potentially near Walsenburg and La Veta. This district would lessen the need for a PUD process to facilitate compact, village-style development in and around Huerfano County communities. This could replace the existing Urbanizing Residential zone or be added as a separate district.
- ZLU Action 3.4: Break up the Agricultural zone into three zones – Agriculture, Conservation/Public, and Homestead. The Conservation zone would primarily apply to FS lands/public lands and key habitat areas. This zone could provide for a variety of recreation-related uses, such as RV campgrounds. This use could be Conditional in both the Agriculture and Conservation/Public zone. Permit considerations could include factors such as elevation and habitat areas. Depending on the final boundaries of the zone, the Conservation/Public zone could be used as a tool limit development in sensitive or



especially scenic areas. The Homestead zone could apply to major subdivisions within the Agricultural zone, such as Turkey Ridge and Majors Ranch. The zone could provide for residential and agricultural uses while prohibiting certain uses that many deem incompatible with residential uses (e.g., marijuana grow operations).

- ZLU Action 3.5: Amend the County’s subdivision regulations to create different distinctions between subdivisions based on size and location. Larger subdivisions (in terms of acreage and development intensity) should automatically trigger an environmental review process. Subdivisions that overlap with hazard areas as identified in the 2024 Hazard Mitigation Plan should also trigger an environmental review process.
- ZLU Action 3.6: Consider imposing impact fees for large developments to ensure that new developments support the future infrastructure costs that they incur.
- ZLU Action 3.7: Collaborate with the City of Walsenburg and the Town of La Veta on land use decisions in the 3-mile areas. Adopt County-Municipal agreements to establish joint land use review of zoning changes within the 3-mile area.
- ZLU Policy 3.8: The County encourages education regarding the establishment of conservation easements throughout the county.

The Need for Additional Zoning Designations At present, the County Land Use code reflects very broad land use categories. There are opportunities to create additional districts that would support community priorities, such as conservation of the County’s natural landscapes/farmland and more housing availability. There are also opportunities to refine or introduce additional land use policies that encourage efficient development that is compatible with the scale of Huerfano County and reduces development pressure on agricultural lands.

ZLU Goal 4: Align the County’s land use policies and water realities; support water-conscious development and water conservation.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 4.1: The County prioritizes development within and adjacent to existing developments and discourages intensive development away from existing water and wastewater systems.
- ZLU Policy 4.2: In general, the County focuses land use regulations on accommodating and supporting uses that are already present within the county, as opposed to encouraging large new developments that are water-intensive.
- ZLU Policy 4.3: The County ensures that new development is appropriately located with adequate access to utilities and services, including water.
- ZLU Policy 4.4: The County requires that water development and use projects shall employ the most efficient use of water, including, to the extent permissible under existing law, the recycling and reuse of water, and preservation of associated resources impacted by such projects
- ZLU Policy 4.5: The County ensures that development of stormwater and sanitation systems shall be accomplished in a manner that prevents the pollution of the County’s precious water resources.



- ZLU Policy 4.6: The County collaborates with water managers on changes to the land use code that affect the County's limited water resources.

Action

- ZLU Action 4.1: Gather and maintain county-wide spatial information regarding infrastructure capacity (water capacity and rights) that informs future updates to density allowances in zoning. Through this mapping and information-gathering process, the County may designate High-Priority Water Supply Lands that contain one or more of the following:
 - Wellhead Protection Areas
 - Hydrologic Areas of Concern
 - High-Yield Aquifer Areas
 - Land that the Planning Commission has determined will likely benefit a future public or community public water system.
- ZLU Action 4.2: Add a condition to building permits that requires the applicant to demonstrate adequate water supply on the site to support the proposed use.
- ZLU Action 4.3: Require new residential development to utilize water conservation techniques in housing and landscaping, such as limitations on lawn areas, incorporation of drought-resistant plants, and xeriscape.
- ZLU Policy 4.4: The County supports education regarding water conservation methods on agricultural lands in Huerfano County.

Water in Huerfano County The county's water circumstances are very fraught and complicated. The county has been described as extraordinarily water-short. As climate change threatens the region's water resources and storage, there is an increasing need to ensure that local land use code and related policies support long-term water conservation. The county and the municipalities do not have access to comprehensive mapping of the region's water resources and rights. This leads to a potential lack of alignment between zoning districts/density allowances and the actual capacity of given areas to support developments of various sizes. Water sources in the County are fragmented; the water in Huerfano County is dispersed unevenly throughout the county and cannot be understood as a homogeneous system. The Huerfano and Cucharas Rivers are distinct, as are the alluvial deposits and soils in these rivers. Existing development in the county has capitalized on existing water sources. As such, access to water is highly location-dependent throughout the county. There is a need to address unorganized uses of water in the county, particularly through exempt wells, which are small-capacity wells (about 15 gallons per minute).

ZLU Goal 5: Use the Huerfano County Land Use Code to mitigate hazards and protect life, land, and property.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 5.1: The County uses building codes and Land Use Code requirements to protect people from hazardous conditions. For example, the County adopts codes and



regulations that incentivize fire-preventative construction, flood prevention, hazardous materials prevention, and address risks related to weather and earthquakes.

- ZLU Policy 5.2: The County uses available hazard data, particularly spatial data, to effectively plan and mitigate hazards in development decisions. Continuously reference and incorporate hazard mapping from the County Hazard Mitigation Plan into future land use planning changes and decision-making.
- ZLU Policy 5.3: The County establishes mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of implemented changes to hazard-related policies.
- ZLU Policy 5.4: The County protects the interests of Huerfano County residents by preserving and expanding county-specific regulations for land uses associated with the extraction of minerals and non-renewable resources, including but not limited to, oil and gas, coal bed methane, aggregate, uranium, and other ores. The county also protects springs and water wells, monitoring pre-development water quality and volume testing at least 3 miles from potential sites.

Actions

- ZLU Action 5.1: Define the WUI in the County land use code. The WUI is commonly defined as any developed area, or potential development, where conditions affecting the combustibility of both wildland and built fuels allow for the ignition and spread of fire through the combined fuel complex (Huerfano County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, 2017).*
- ZLU Action 5.2: Adopt elements of the [Wildland-Urban Interface Code - ICC \(iccsafe.org\)](https://www.iccsafe.org/), a code framework that sets building standards aimed at reducing fire risk and impacts. Consider exempting affordable housing developments from these standards if adequate mitigation activities have been completed in that area.
- ZLU Action 5.3: Adopt codes and regulations that support findings from the County Hazard Mitigation Plan; for example, encourage fire-preventative construction, flood prevention, hazardous materials prevention, and address risks related to weather and earthquakes.
- ZLU Action 5.4: Provide education on wildfire risks for development on lots greater than 35 acres, which are not subject to local subdivision regulations and generally lack infrastructure/services.
- ZLU Action 5.5: Use hazard mapping from the 2024 HMP to create an overlay zone (Sensitive Lands Overlay) to reflect areas of highest hazard risk; require additional conditional use review in these areas. Possible permit conditions could include mitigation steps such as fuels management and minimum defensible space requirements. In particular, the County should reference mapped burn risk areas to guard against wildfire damage.
- ZLU Action 5.6: Revise the county road regulations to require all new subdivision development to provide two points of ingress/egress from a county-maintained roadway and construct internal roadways with an all-weather surface designed to withstand weights and turning needs of all emergency vehicles.



- ZLU Action 5.7: Require all new subdivision development that results in five (5) lots or greater to be approved for access and layout by emergency services including fire, sheriff’s office, and ambulance services.
- ZLU Action 5.8: Regularly assess the impact of hazard-informed land use policies on community development, making adjustments as necessary to address emerging challenges and opportunities.
- ZLU Action 5.9: Create regulations that:
 - Require siting of resource extraction away from residential development and schools;
 - Require independent review of all technical studies on all applications at the applicant’s expense.
 - Require a permanent decommissioning bond for all non-renewable resource development and require a decommission plan financed by the proceeds of the bond.

*Recommended in the 2017 Huerfano County Community Wildfire Protection Plan

The Wildland-Urban Interface in Huerfano County According to the 2024 Huerfano County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), nearly the entirety of Huerfano County lies within the wildlife-urban interface (WUI). The county has not used hazard mapping to inform land use policy, leading to a potential misalignment between allowed density and areas of increased risks due to hazards.

ZLU Goal 6: Improve code enforcement and education in Huerfano County; provide adequate guidance to applicants and public notice for permitting processes.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 6.1: The County maintains current and accurate records of zoning and land use information.
- ZLU Policy 6.2: The County provides clear information to assist applicants through necessary permitting processes with the County.

Actions

- ZLU Action 6.1: Fix mapping of zoning districts to fix projection errors that show county zoning districts extending into La Veta and Walsenburg.
- ZLU Action 6.2: Develop a resource guide for easements to address confusion regarding creating easements and possible risks in the process.
- ZLU Action 6.3: Create a resource guide for developing tiny homes in Huerfano County that discusses the differences between tiny homes developed on chassis or foundation and relevant regulations.
- ZLU Action 6.4: Create a process guide to establishing a recreational amenity or holding a recreation-related event (e.g., guiding business, park, RV park, bike race) in Huerfano County.
- ZLU Action 6.5: Implement strategies to improve code enforcement, such as posting building permits on applicant properties.
- ZLU Action 6.6: Create a permitting process for events on County Roads.



ZLU Goal 7: Use land use regulations to preserve Huerfano County's special qualities, including its scenic views and dark skies.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 7.1: The County encourages residential development to be sited, built, and finished to protect and preserve scenic views.
- ZLU Policy 7.2: The County promotes beautification and elimination of blight on County entrances at Highway exits and on all thoroughfares throughout the County.
- ZLU Policy 7.3: The County protects its historical, natural, and archaeological resources; development must be compatible with and not destructive to these resources.
- ZLU Policy 7.4: The County supports efforts to limit the siting of nuisance uses, such as marijuana-related uses, away from residence, schools, hospitals, and other community infrastructure.

Actions

- ZLU Action 7.1: Clarify and strengthen the County's dark skies regulations to align with the Sangre de Cristo Dark Sky Lighting Management Plan.
- ZLU Action 7.2: Identify key scenic views in Huerfano County and consider creating overlay districts for those areas in which conditional use permitting would be required for developments over a certain square footage or over a certain height. Permit conditions could include mitigating steps to preserve scenic views, such as providing vegetative screening.
- ZLU Action 7.3: When conditioning any land use permission, consider inclusion of a provision for periodic county staff inspections to ensure the cleanup of debris and the maintenance of land and buildings for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety, and general welfare.

ZLU Goal 8: Expand economic opportunity through code changes.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 8.1: The County encourages daycare, childcare businesses, and home occupations within Huerfano County.
- ZLU Policy 8.2: The County embraces local recreation-oriented businesses, such as outfitters and guiding businesses.
- ZLU Policy 8.3: The County supports new industrial development adjacent to major roadways, particularly along the Commercial-Industrial Corridors identified on the Future Land Use Map.
- ZLU Policy 8.4: The County supports the strategic development of all three I-25 Walsenburg exits, particularly Exit 49.
- ZLU Policy 8.5: The County encourages land use decisions that involve partnering with RE-1 and RE-2 school districts to ensure students are ready for training or advanced education and/or develop post-secondary education facilities in the county.
- ZLU Policy 8.6: The County supports cooperative business development, along with complementary land use changes that support cooperative business development (e.g., zoning that facilitates farmers' markets, community land trusts, recognition and protection of exclusive service boundaries for electric cooperatives, right-to-farm regulations).



Actions

- ZLU Action 8.1: Expand opportunities for home occupations in Huerfano County. Allow home occupations in primary as well as accessory structures.
- ZLU Action 8.2: Make daycare, childcare and nursery schools and homes a permitted use in all districts. They are currently prohibited in Industrial and conditional in all other districts. In June 2021, the State of Colorado required home-based childcare uses to be zoned the same way as residences and to be subject to the same fire safety and building codes as residences.
- ZLU Action 8.3: Add “recreation business” to the County zoning regulations to encourage a variety of uses and businesses related to recreation, such as outfitters and guiding businesses. Allow recreation businesses in appropriate districts.

ZLU Goal 9: Encourage energy efficiency and renewable energy development in Huerfano County.

Policies

- ZLU Policy 9.1: The County encourages renovations that are aimed at achieving safe, quality, and energy efficient housing within the County.
- ZLU Policy 9.2: The County promotes the use of personal wind energy and solar energy systems, with minimal regulation, to support personal energy needs.
- ZLU Policy 9.4: The County supports wind energy development in the current wind overlay area. Ensure that siting for these developments minimizes impact to productive ranching lands and prime agricultural soils.
- ZLU Policy 9.5: The County supports upgrades to existing housing stock that incorporate energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.

Actions

- ZLU Action 9.1: The County allows the development of community and/or large-scale commercial solar arrays on the east side of I-25 by permitting them in the Agricultural zone. Ensure that siting for these arrays avoids productive ranching lands and prime agricultural soils. Encourage siting solar arrays in reclaimed mining lands.



Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) Executive Summary & Key Actions

Hazard Profiles

The Hazard Mitigation Plan evaluates 16 potential hazards and assigns a level of risk for each of them across the participating jurisdictions. The two hazards with the great number of high-risk designations are **wildfire and drought & extreme heat**. Other hazards with high-risk designations include **flooding, hazardous materials (release), mud / debris flow, dam failure, and wind**.

The Comprehensive Plan update presents the County with an important opportunity to consider how these risks can be addressed through the development and implementation of policy. Moreover, policies that proactively account for identified risks and guide future land use and development accordingly can play a critical role in reducing the potential loss of life and property.

The following key information relates to the high-risk hazards and was considered in the development of goals, objectives and policies for the Comprehensive Plan update. The recommended actions, if implemented, will help Huerfano County mitigate the identified hazards and protect the safety and well-being of its residents and property.

Wildfire

The County recognizes wildfire as the priority natural hazard for Huerfano County. Relevant takeaways from the HMP regarding wildfire include:

- Colorado and the Western US have seen significant increases in forest area burned in recent years, and the risk of wildland fires in the future are expected to increase due to a lengthening fire season and drier conditions. (HMP pg. 4.185)
- Any flammable materials are vulnerable during a wildfire, including structures and personal property. The vulnerability of general property increases with proximity to wildfire- prone areas. These structures receive an even higher level of vulnerability if the properties surrounding them are not properly mitigated for fire. Appropriate mitigation techniques include using ignition-resistant construction materials, leaving appropriate spaces between buildings and vegetation, landscaping with non-flammable materials (such as decorative rock or stone), and clearing of underbrush and trees. If a wildland fire were to cross completely into an urban zone, the damage could be extensive and there would likely be a higher potential of property and homes themselves to become fuel in extreme fire weather conditions. (HMP pg. 4.186)
- 795 structures are located on 3,128 building parcels within the moderate to high wildfire risk areas, equating to over \$135 million of improved value. When analyzing the differences in risk among jurisdictions, the unincorporated areas (i.e., areas within Huerfano County) account for 97% of the structures at risk and 98% of the total value at risk. The threat of wildfire and potential losses increase as human development and population increase. Although the population of Huerfano County is projected to remain stable over the next decade, concerns have been raised by Hazard Mitigation Plan Committee (HMPC) members regarding the influx of residents into WUI areas.” (HMP pg. 4.186)



- Continuing outreach for education and adoption of building codes that prioritize the use of ignition resistant materials and defensible space are necessary to keep up with increasing fire risk. Given that current building codes in the planning area are outdated in terms of wildfire resistance, it is imperative to update and revise them to align with modern standards... The development and maintenance of well-marked trails, strategically placed fire breaks, and accessible evacuation routes can help create a safer outdoor recreational environment.” (HMP pg. 4.189)

Wildfire Mitigation Actions

1. Update building codes to require the use of ignition-resistant construction materials.
2. Mandate the creation and maintenance of defensible space around properties in wildfire-prone areas.
3. Implement education and outreach programs to increase awareness of wildfire risks and mitigation techniques.
4. Develop and maintain well-marked trails, strategically placed fire breaks, and accessible evacuation routes.
5. Restrict development in areas identified as moderate to high wildfire risk.
6. Implement a public education campaign on wildfire risks and mitigation practices, including defensible space and emergency preparedness.

Drought and Extreme Heat

Relevant takeaways from the HMP regarding drought and extreme heat include:

- “The ability to meet today’s water demands does not, by default, translate to the ability to meet demands 20 or 30 years from now. Looking ahead, the County will need to be thoughtful and strategic about the amount and form of new development it permits and what effect that, as well as increased tourism, could have on the availability of a reliable water supply.” (HMP pg. 4.55)
- Many communities are conducting long-range water supply studies or water conservation plans to help strategize how to manage demand and sustain a long-term supply. This type of planning is strongly recommended for Huerfano County and partner jurisdictions.

Drought and Extreme Heat Mitigation Actions

1. Conduct long-range water supply studies and develop water conservation plans in Huerfano County and with partner jurisdictions.



2. Track water usage and mitigate water loss to ensure that new development does not exceed the long-term water supply capacity.
3. Promote water-efficient landscaping and irrigation practices in all applicable County permitting processes.
4. Implement policies to manage and reduce water demand, particularly during drought conditions.
5. Launch a public awareness program on water conservation techniques and the importance of reducing water usage during drought conditions.

Flooding

Relevant takeaways from the HMP regarding flooding include:

- “The type of property damage caused by flood events depends on the depth and velocity of the floodwaters. Faster moving floodwaters can wash buildings off their foundations and sweep cars downstream. Pipelines, bridges, and other infrastructure can be damaged when high waters combine with flood debris. Extensive damage can be caused by basement flooding related to soil saturation from flood events. Homes in flooded areas can also suffer damage to septic systems and drain fields. In many cases, flood damage to homes renders them uninhabitable.” (HMP pg. 4.90)
- “Countywide there are 1,274 structures at risk in the 100-year floodplain worth over \$194M, based on the parcel analysis.” (HMP pg. 4.92)
- “The impacts of floodwater on critical facilities such as police and fire stations, health facilities, and water or wastewater treatment facilities among others can greatly increase the overall effect of a flood event on a community (e.g., if critical potable facilities are impacted). The GIS analysis performed indicates several critical facilities were found to be vulnerable. Of potential concern are the school and EMS facilities noted. The HMPC noted water distribution lines as additional infrastructure at risk to flooding.” (HMP pg. 4.93)
- “Based on a 100-year flood scenario, it is estimated that 185 buildings will be at least moderately damaged, with 1 building estimated to have a complete loss. The estimate total economic loss for this flooding scenario is \$272M.” (HMP pg. 4.94)
- The map showing economic losses due to the 100-year flood indicate that La Veta and Walsenburg would experience the highest total losses, as well as the southern portion of the county along Highway 12.
- “Mitigating the root causes of localized stormwater through on-site detention or choosing not to develop in areas that often are subject to localized flooding will reduce future risks of losses due to stormwater/localized flooding. Floodplain management practices implemented through local floodplain management ordinances should mitigate the flood risk to new development in floodplains” (HMP pg. 4.97)

Flooding Mitigation Actions

1. Enforce local floodplain management ordinances (Section 4.00 Flood Hazard Reduction) to mitigate flood risk for new developments.



2. Prohibit development in the 100-year floodplain and other high-risk flood areas.
3. Require developments over a certain size to include on-site stormwater detention to manage localized flooding.
4. Develop and implement plans to protect critical facilities such as police and fire stations, health facilities, and water treatment plants from flood risks.
5. Conduct regular maintenance and upgrades of existing flood control infrastructure.
6. Establish a flood awareness and preparedness program, providing residents with information on flood risks, evacuation routes, and emergency supplies.

Hazardous Materials Release

Relevant takeaways from the HMP regarding hazardous materials releases include:

- “Should a hazardous materials spill occur near the built environment, impacts could include reduced or limited access for a short period of time, or building and ground contamination, or large fires associated with fuels and other flammable material that could spread to structures.” (HMP p. 4.107)
- “The HMPC highlighted that the predominant trend in the planning area involves new growth occurring primarily in non-urban areas. Consequently, the associated risk linked to population density near train lines (on which hazardous materials are conveyed) remains unchanged.” (HMP pg. 4.109)

Hazardous Materials Release Mitigation Actions

1. Develop and implement emergency response plans for hazardous materials spills. Prepare for and develop mitigating actions for disruptions to transportation and impacts to public health in the event of a spill.
2. Subject new development near train lines and other transportation routes that convey hazardous materials to additional conditional use review that considers vulnerabilities to hazardous materials.
3. Conduct regular inspections and maintenance of facilities that handle hazardous materials.
4. Develop and distribute educational materials on the risks of hazardous materials spills and appropriate response actions for residents and businesses.

Mudflow / Debris Flow

Relevant takeaways from the HMP regarding mudflow/debris flow include:

- “Most flows occur on areas with steep slopes and generally occurs more frequently in the more mountainous areas of the County. Wildfires greatly increase the threat of mud or



debris flows, so areas downslope of recent burn scars are more likely to experience mud flow events.” (HMP pg. 4.119)

- “Residents living near steep slopes or downslope of wildfire burn scars are also exposed to mud and debris flow hazards. Structural damage can range from minor to total destruction. There are 249 structures within the identified mud and debris flow susceptibility areas associated with the Spring Creek Fire, all located in the Unincorporated County. The total market valuation of exposed structures is \$42,695,385.” (HMP pg. 4.128)
- “While growth in the planning area is anticipated to be minimal, the emergence of new developments, particularly in areas with steep slopes or recent burn scars, poses an increased potential for exposure to debris flow. The rise in recreational tourism can further amplify this exposure. These developments and activities can alter the dynamics of the landscape, rendering them more susceptible to the associated risks of debris flow.” (HMP pg. 4.131)
- “Locations with the highest probability of debris flow as a result of the Spring Creek Fire include areas above Hwy 12, County Road 421, County Road 572, and the community of Paradise Acres.” (HMP pg. 4.132)

Mudflow/Debris Flow Mitigation Actions

1. Restrict development in areas with steep slopes and areas downslope of wildfire burn scars.
2. Implement erosion control measures in areas prone to mudflow and debris flow.
3. Develop and maintain early warning systems for areas at risk of mudflow and debris flow.
4. Require structural assessments and retrofitting for buildings in high-risk areas.
5. Create an outreach program to educate residents about the dangers of mudflows and debris flows, especially those living near steep slopes or burn scars.

Dam Failure

Relevant takeaways from the HMP regarding dam failure include:

- “Flood related policies in the comprehensive plan will help to reduce the risk associated with dam failure hazard for all future development in the planning area.” (HMP pg. 4.37)
- “The Martin Lake and the Horseshoe Lake Dams could have the greatest potential impact ... The largest populations potentially at risk are in the city of Walsenburg, downstream from the Horseshoe Lake, Martin Lake, and Walsenburg Lake dams, and the town of La Veta, downstream from the Wahatoya Lake Dam” (HMP pg. 4.38).

Dam Failure Mitigation Actions

1. Work with municipalities to continuously monitor risk levels for dam failure within the county.



2. Conduct regular inspections and maintenance of dams to ensure their integrity.
3. Develop and maintain emergency evacuation plans for areas downstream of high-risk dams.
4. Conduct community workshops and drills to raise awareness about dam failure risks and familiarize residents with emergency evacuation procedures.

Extreme Wind

Relevant takeaways from the HMP regarding extreme wind include:

- “A severe thunderstorm with high winds, or a tornado path in an older residential area with older homes, large trees, and overhead utility lines will have a significantly greater impact with the same storm in a new development with lower building density, modern constructed buildings, small or newly planted trees, and underground power lines. Mobile homes are particularly vulnerable to impacts of high wind events compared to other housing types due to the methods of construction. Mobile homes represent 11%, 19%, and 6% of housing units in unincorporated county, La Veta, and Walsenburg, respectively.” (HMP pg. 4.196)
- “All critical facilities are likely exposed to risks associated with severe winds. Power lines, communications networks, and other above-ground infrastructure are vulnerable to the effects of windstorms both directly and indirectly.” (HMP pg. 4.196)
- “New development should be able to withstand or at least resist wind damage if properly constructed.” (HMP pg. 4.197)

Extreme Wind Mitigation Actions

1. Require new developments to be constructed to withstand/resist wind damage.
2. Encourage the underground installation of power lines and other utilities to reduce windstorm impacts.
3. Develop and implement tree management ordinances and programs to reduce the risk of wind damage from falling trees.
4. Strengthen building codes to improve the wind resistance of mobile homes and older structures. Example treatments to improve resistance to wind include anchor and tie-down systems, structural reinforcements, bracing, improved foundations, enhanced roof and wall construction, window and door reinforcements, and using wind-rated construction standards (e.g., HUD Wind Zone standards).
5. Implement a public information campaign on windstorm preparedness, including tips on securing property and creating emergency plans.

Innovative Housing Opportunities in Huerfano County



The 2024 Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan was developed to support the generation of affordable housing in Huerfano County, the City of Walsenburg, and the Town of La Veta. This plan was written in lieu of a housing chapter of the Huerfano County Comprehensive Plan. **The tactics and actions outlined in this plan are intended to function as operative housing policies in this Comprehensive Plan.**

Community Goals

Through community and stakeholder engagement, four primary community goals were identified:

1. There is abundant, quality housing for workforce and community-serving professionals.
2. There is abundant, quality specialized housing (transitional housing, senior housing, etc.)
3. There is sustainably built and sited housing (hazard and water-conscious, adaptive reuse, sustainable materials).
4. Huerfano County residents have access to housing, improving economic vitality and community health.

Tactics and Actions to Increase Affordable Housing

Six tactics to increase affordable housing were identified as policy objectives with associated actions to ensure effective adoption. Many of these tactics align with or support DOLA's 15 Qualifying Strategies to promote affordable housing, as part of Proposition 123.

1. **Build capacity to plan, construct, and manage affordable housing and support the process.** This will take the form of a dedicated organization to oversee housing programs and initiatives, such as a housing authority or housing coalition. This organization will be the catalyst and champion of many of the following tactics and actions.
2. **Identify and provide a designated funding source for affordable housing.** The source of funding may have implications on land use dynamics and regulations, such as taxes on short-term rentals, or fees on commercial developments over a certain size.
3. **Establish a clear, efficient, and effective development process that facilitates and incentivizes the development of a variety of housing types.** This tactic incorporates many of the DOLA Qualifying Strategies and has implications on land use regulations. Select recommended actions include the use of publicly owned real property for affordable housing, adopting a density bonus program for affordable housing, creating a land banking program, and reducing minimum parking requirements.
4. **Facilitate local ownership and occupancy of units, support a year-round community of workers, families, and retirees.** Recommended actions to achieve this tactic include using a deed restriction model for housing, developing short-term rental regulations, and financial support for local homeowners and workforce.
5. **Preserve and maintain Naturally Occurring Affordable housing (NOAH).** Preservation of naturally affordable housing requires regular rehabilitation and maintenance, energy efficiency improvements, and occasional demolition of unsafe housing. Establishing a land bank for blighted or underutilized properties ensures affordable land for housing development.



6. **Site housing away from hazards and close to community amenities.** Use the [Suitability Analysis tool](#) developed for the Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan to ensure that development patterns are smart and safe.

Suitability Analysis

The IHOP developed a housing suitability analysis tool to analyze where new housing development, including affordable housing, is most appropriate and suitable in Huerfano County, La Veta and Walsenburg. This analysis serves as a tool for policymakers, planners, and housing developers to make informed decisions about land use regulation and resource investment for housing development projects. This tool considers a variety of variables that affect the suitability of a site for housing, including natural hazards, proximity to roadways and other infrastructure, and proximity to businesses and community amenities. The tool is intended to assist in site selection for affordable housing, promoting housing opportunities that are strategically located, accessible to a diverse range of residents within a region, and harmonious with natural resources to the degree possible.

This tool should be evaluated and updated over time to ensure accuracy.

Opportunity Site Profiles

Using the Suitability Analysis and extensive stakeholder engagement, twelve opportunity sites were identified as potential sites for affordable housing throughout Huerfano County, Walsenburg, and La Veta. These profiles are intended to inform affordable housing developers, documenting the beginning of the due diligence process and providing a draft concept for housing development. Four sites were identified in Huerfano County:

- Rio Cucharas Inn
- Gardner PUD Site
- Black Knight Inn
- Former Youth Camp

These sites are identified on the Huerfano County Future Land Use Map, and all but the Gardner PUD site are located within the “Wellness Hub” Future Land Use Designation.



Economic Development

Economic Development Key Takeaways

- Huerfano County faces many challenges related to economic development, including population stagnation, high poverty rates, and an aging population
- The County has suffered from an overall lack of economic opportunity, from larger employers to small businesses. In the future, there will be distinct opportunities for economic development in certain industries (e.g., manufacturing, tourism). There is also a growing need for support services for the community's older residents which may spur economic development in care-taking services.
- Child poverty is an acute issue in Huerfano County; 17.6% of county residents are in poverty. Only 244 residents of the County are under 5 years old, but 56% of county residents in poverty are under 5 years old. There is a clear need for economic development strategies that aim to reduce poverty and increase earning power for struggling residents.
- Cooperative business models offer one method of empowering individuals who may have previously struggled to participate in the workforce.
- The cost of living has increased significantly in the last few years due to state and national trends in inflation. The cost of housing and transportation is particularly acute for Huerfano County residents as they must travel far distances to access certain goods and services. Attracting key services and retail businesses to locate within the County would have a meaningful impact on travel time and costs to residents.
- This memo identifies several opportunities to support economic development and community prosperity in Huerfano County. These opportunities are described in more detail at the end of the memo:
 - Encourage business formation, including cooperative businesses
 - Address workforce limitations
 - Support elderly residents
 - Adopt an anti-poverty strategy and address substance abuse
 - Emphasize resident wellbeing as a component of economic health
 - Leverage key transportation networks as part of the county's economic development strategy
 - Promote sustainability and environmental sensitivity in economic development decisions
 - Enhance downtown vibrancy and promote tourism, particularly recreational tourism
 - Cultivate a culture of hope and commitment within communities and residents of Huerfano County

Economic Development Key Facts

- Huerfano County's population has roughly stagnated in recent decades. The County's population has been on an overall declining trend over the past 20 years. Without new investments in industries or other changes that would substantially impact population, the



County’s population is expected to decline in coming decades. (Source: DOLA, State Demographer)

- The County’s population of residents ages 85 and up is expected to increase by over 50%. Residents ages 85 and up currently make up 2% of the county’s overall population. At the same time, the County’s population of residents ages 55-64 and 65-74 are expected to decrease by 22% and 36%, respectively. The population of children ages 0-17 is expected to slightly decrease by 8.3%. (Source: DOLA, State Demographer)
- 14.24% of families in Huerfano County are living below the poverty line, compared to 6% in Colorado. La Veta’s poverty rate is on a downward trend, while Walsenburg’s is on an upward trend. (ACS, 2021)
- 22.3% of Huerfano County residents have a disability, compared to 11.2% of residents of Colorado. 75% of individuals with a disability or disabilities are senior citizens, and half of all residents over 75 years old have a disability. About a quarter of residents between 65 and 74 have a disability. The most common type of disability is related to the ability to walk and move (Ambulatory – Having Serious Difficulty Walking or Climbing Stairs).
- 2021 median income data for households in Huerfano County is as follows:

1 person	2 person	3 person	4 person
\$24,773	\$61,462	\$46,719	\$77,366

- In 2021, 64.2% of income earned in Huerfano County was from non-labor sources, such as federal assistance, social services assistance, and investment income. In comparison, 37.6% of income in Colorado was from non-labor sources in 2021. Given the high rates of poverty in the County, this statistic indicates high use of and need for income assistance. 54% of income earners in Huerfano County collect Social Security, compared to 25% statewide. Source: Headwaters Economic Profiles, 2021.
- For about 13% of county residents, housing and transportation costs make up over 87% of their income. At an average of 35% of median household income, transportation costs are particularly steep in Huerfano County. For households earning about \$30,000 dollars a year (about 80% of the median household income for the county), typical housing and transportation costs make up 82% of income.
- Huerfano County’s employment by industry is largely similar to statewide metrics, with a few notable exceptions:
 - 13.6% of jobs in Huerfano County are in “Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services” (compared to 9.7% statewide)
 - 7.9% of jobs in Huerfano County are in “Ag, forestry, fishing & hunting, mining” (compared to 2.1% statewide)
 - 11.9% of jobs in Huerfano County are in public administration, compared to 4.7% statewide
 - 9% of jobs in Huerfano County are in professional services, compared to 14% statewide
- Almost 50% of Huerfano County workers commute over 50 miles to work each day. The proportion of “super commuters” has grown in recent years – in 2005 the share of super-commuters was only 30% and it was between 40 and 45% in 2010 and 2015 respectively.



- The closure of the Huerfano County Correctional Center in 2010 eliminated 188 jobs. The county has struggled to bring in major employers for several reasons including a lack of housing opportunities for workers. The county currently has very limited formal childcare options.

Economic Development Goals, Policies, and Actions

ED Goal 1: Encourage the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the attraction of new businesses that will benefit the county. Address the barriers to business formation in Huerfano County (e.g., affordable housing, transportation, worker education and skills development) and target needed business types.

Policies

- ED Policy 1.1: The County encourages and enables the formation of cooperative business models in Huerfano County.
- ED Policy 1.2: The County collaborates with current and potential large employers to facilitate employee housing opportunities, which are often essential to business formation.
- ED Policy 1.3: The County prioritizes support for existing businesses and encourages the development of local entrepreneurs.

Actions

- ED Action 1.1: Provide guidance on creating cooperative business models or provide technical assistance for starting a cooperative business.
- ED Action 1.2: Identify a list of high-priority businesses and professionals for the County. For example, this list could include in-demand professionals such as plumbers, electricians, and lawyers. Offer reduced fees or other appropriate incentives for an individual seeking a business license for a high-priority business.
- ED Action 1.3: Partner with the nearest USDA SBDC (Small Business Development Center) to train future business owners, get access to loans, and to provide other forms of assistance.

ED Goal 2: Encourage the development of an adequate workforce to support existing and potential businesses.

Policies

- ED Policy 2.1: The County supports the development of a variety of housing opportunities that cater to potential residents of different income levels; the County considers housing opportunities as a critical dimension of economic development
- ED Policy 2.2: The County supports efforts to build and market Huerfano County as a remote working/flexible working destination, which may attract a broad and diverse workforce
- ED Policy 2.3: The County supports the development of trade schools, such as a truck driving school in Huerfano County that would make strategic use of the County's proximity to I-25.

Actions



- ED Action 2.1: Partner with Trinidad State College, CSU Pueblo and other educational institutions to ensure students and workers in Huerfano County learn the skills needed to participate in the local workforce.
- ED Action 2.2: Partner with local school districts to align educational opportunities with top-needed jobs in the county
- ED Action 2.3: Educate employers on opportunities to improve the efficiency and quality of hiring processes.

The Importance of a Strong Workforce Huerfano County lacks skilled tradespeople, workers, and other professionals, from electricians to doctors and those working in the social services and caretaking industry. This workforce limitation has far-reaching implications for Huerfano County's economy and quality of life – for example, housing in Huerfano County may be more likely to fall into disrepair without available contractors and other important services.

ED Goal 3: Support the health and economic wellbeing of the County's growing population of senior citizens.

Policies

- ED Policy 3.1: The County supports improved access to medical care and safe, suitable housing for older residents.
- ED Policy 3.2: The County supports multi-generational housing opportunities, such as the ability to have additional dwelling units on a lot by right – this can allow multiple generations to live in close proximity.
- ED Policy 3.3: The County prioritizes the training, recruitment, and retention of professionals who support older populations -- this includes trained nursing staff, caregivers, and other supportive jobs to assist the County's older population.
- ED Policy 3.4: The County supports efforts to improve quality of life through services and recreational amenities that would improve Huerfano County as a great place to retire.

Actions

- ED Action 3.1: Identify and pursue opportunities to create "aging-in-place" housing opportunities. "Age-in-place" options are typically small units that allow older residents to remain at home living independently or semi-independently for longer periods of time. This can be achieved through new construction or through upgrades to existing housing stock.
- ED Action 3.2: Facilitate opportunities for retired and semi-retired residents to work and/or volunteer their time in Huerfano County.

ED Goal 4: In County efforts to encourage economic development, prioritize the wellbeing of residents alongside growth-related goals (e.g., increasing overall jobs, attracting new industries and talent).

Policies

- ED Policy 4.1: Huerfano County supports the development of housing, recreation opportunities, access to nutritious food, and other key elements that improve community



health outcomes. Improvements to community wellbeing and quality of life will also help attract and retain a talented workforce, including remote workers.

- ED Policy 4.2: The County prioritizes efforts to create and maintain affordable housing opportunities in Huerfano County, particularly workforce housing opportunities.
- ED Policy 4.3: The County supports development patterns that support walkability and other drivers of public health.
- ED Policy 4.4: The County facilitates the development of new recreational opportunities and/or access to existing opportunities. Encourage recurring recreational and artistic events which enhance life in Huerfano County and create business growth in other economic sectors.

Actions

- ED Action 4.1: In future updates to the County’s land use code, encourage clustered patterns of development that provide more opportunities and flexibility for mixed-use, village-style districts. These walkable patterns of development support active lifestyles for County residents.

ED Goal 5: Ensure that the county has appropriately located, well designed commercial/industrial development.

Policies

- ED Policy 5.1: Huerfano County capitalizes on the I-25 transportation corridor as a key investment area for commercial/industrial development.
- ED Policy 5.2: The County supports the development of warehouse and transportation businesses that rely on the movement of goods north-south along I-25 and east-west along Highways 10 and 160.
- ED Policy 5.3: The County supports opportunities for rail freight and passenger service, as well as potential rail connections between Alamosa and Walsenburg.

Actions

- ED Action 5.1: Develop a strategic approach to signage along I-25; advertise Huerfano County communities and opportunities for food, gas, entertainment using billboards or other appropriate signage.

Huerfano’s Strategic Location Huerfano County is strategically located at the confluence of several major roadways and railways. This creates an important opportunity for the county to function as a hub for shipping, manufacturing, and other businesses that rely on proximity to major transportation networks.

ED Goal 6: Encourage sustainability, renewable technologies, and environmental sensitivity in all aspects of Huerfano County’s economic development strategy.

Policies



- ED Policy 6.1: The County prioritizes community solar along Highway 10 and other major roadways with high sun exposure and close proximity to consumption and/or interconnection points. Areas along Highway 10 are strategic locations for community solar due to their proximity to interconnection points.
- ED Policy 6.2: The County supports battery storage projects in collaboration with SIEA to facilitate renewable energy availability at peak demand times

Actions

- ED Action 6.1: Provide public education on the value of solar tax credits and the process to switch to solar energy sources.

Huerfano’s Renewable Energy Potential Huerfano County has good solar resources, particularly in the eastern portions of the county that lie out of the shadows of mountains. San Isabel Electric Assn (SIEA) reports that the county is well-positioned to develop small-scale solar operations, such as rooftop solar and small community solar farms. The County also has exceptional wind resources.

ED Goal 7: Promote resource efficiency, particularly with regard to water.

Policies

- ED Policy 7.1: The County supports rainwater conservation practices on public and private properties throughout Huerfano County.

Actions

- ED Action 7.1: Share and distribute best practices regarding personal and commercial water usage in the County; provide incentives for water-conscious business practices

ED Goal 8: Support the vibrancy and beautification of Huerfano County’s downtowns and work to reduce economic leakage.

Policies

- ED Policy 8.1: The County supports efforts to identify gaps in the local market for goods and works to reduce leakage issues in the local economy. Leakage in local economies refers to the outflow of money from a local economy to other regions or countries, which diminishes the economic impact of local spending. This occurs when local businesses and residents spend their money on goods and services that are produced outside the local area, leading to a reduction in the circulation of money within the local economy.

Actions

- ED Action 8.1: Consider implementing a revolving loan program for downtown businesses. Revolving loan funds are a common tool used to assist with small business development and building upgrades, particularly in downtown and/or historic areas. Many communities have chosen to use ARPA funding to create a revolving loan fund.
- ED Action 8.2: Identify opportunities to support Huerfano County communities in the winter months (e.g., winter-specific festivals and events, support for winter sports activities and associated amenities at Cuchara)
- ED Action 8.3: Provide education for local business owners to help them support and capitalize on Huerfano’s main economic opportunities. This education could take the form



of a guide for local businesses to tap into Huerfano County's key industries and market opportunities.

- ED Action 8.4: Discourage parking requirements within Huerfano County's downtown areas to support economic vibrancy; onerous parking regulations can make downtowns and business districts less walkable and inviting to residents and visitors.

ED Goal 9: Promote Huerfano County as a destination for recreational and heritage tourism and capture economic benefits from tourism and visitation.

Policies

- ED Policy 9.1: The County promotes its unique setting and tourism draws, such as the scenic Highway of Legends, golf courses, parks, skiing, fishing, hiking, biking, horseback riding, and arts and cultural events.
- ED Policy 9.2: The County supports enhancements to navigability through improved wayfinding and signage.
- ED Policy 9.3: The County encourages short-term and long-term visits to Huerfano County communities with the strategic addition of electric vehicle charging stations, particularly in Cuchara and Gardner. This would provide an opportunity for visitors to support local businesses while they are charging their vehicle.

Actions

- ED Action 9.1: Implement a revolving loan program for downtown businesses. Revolving loan funds are a common tool used to assist with small business development and building upgrades, particularly in downtown and/or historic areas.
- ED Action 9.2: Collaborate with community organizations to grow the county's tourism marketing strategy (e.g., wayfinding, web presence) under the label of "Spanish Peaks Country."
- ED Action 9.3: Consider creating a tourism improvement district encompassing all or portions of Huerfano County. This type of district is used to fund marketing and promotion of tourism in a given area. The district typically generates funding by generating lodging taxes or other similar fees.
- ED Action 9.4: Continue ongoing efforts to produce gravel biking promotional materials and information.
- ED Action 9.5: Continue to work with stakeholders on ways to market and brand the county and the region as a unique recreational destination.
- ED Action 9.6: Collaborate with relevant land managers to complete physical improvements to roads and trails that improve access to recreational amenities.

ED Goal 10: Embrace innovative business ideas and create an atmosphere of hope in Huerfano County.

Policies

- ED Policy 10.1: The County fosters a business-friendly environment through incentive programs, direct outreach to local business owners, and business education programs.
- ED Policy 10.2: The County supports work-from-home and home business opportunities to encourage a wide variety of work opportunities in Huerfano County.



- ED Policy 10.3: The County supports exploration of untapped economic opportunities related to Huerfano County's unique set of natural resources. For example, consider opportunities for brick manufacturing from the County's abundant clay soils.

Actions

- ED Action 10.1: Highlight success stories of local businesses and events through County channels (website, social media, emails, etc.)
- ED Action 10.2: Identify ways that the county's abundant natural resources can be sustainably harvested and managed to improve its economy through private investment and job creation. Opportunities to consider include, but are not limited to, mid-scale production of beef jerky and the creation of commercially operated carbon sinks / carbon sequestration areas where dead or live wood is buried to reduce the release of carbon typically caused by tree decomposition.

ED Goal 11: Create and support opportunities for cooperative business models to establish in Huerfano County.

Actions

- ED Action 11.1: Encourage interested local businesses to seek out technical assistance organizations (e.g., the Rocky Mountain Employee Ownership Center). These organizations can help retiring business owners with succession planning and conversion of their businesses into employee-owned enterprises.
- ED Action 11.2: Consider establishing preference clauses for cooperatives or employee-owned companies in local public procurement and contracting processes.
- ED Action 11.4: Consider offering economic development incentives to cooperative businesses.

The Potential of Cooperative Business Models *The following text is an excerpt from a report on Employee Ownership in Huerfano County developed by the Rocky Mountain Employee Ownership Center.* Employee ownership (EO) is a concrete economic development strategy to address rural business stagnation and to prevent job loss or loss of community wealth due to business closures or sale of a business to an outside interest who may be less invested in a community. In particular, employee ownership has grown rapidly across the United States since the economic crisis of 2008. Between 2011 and 2019, there were 195 new worker cooperatives formed in rural communities, while 750 cooperatives were formed in urban areas.^[1] Between 2019 and 2023, worker cooperatives grew another 35% in the US. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has documented an increasing number of rural jurisdictions that are pursuing cooperative support as an economic development strategy, and recently announced plans to invest “more than \$1.2 billion in assistance to rural cooperatives to increase economic opportunity and advance equity in rural America.”^[2]

Rural counties are susceptible to business closure and job loss when owners retire.



- Currently, total of 6 out of 10 business owners are approaching retirement within 10 years, and over 76% of Colorado small businesses are owned by baby boomers.[3] This is a particular problem in rural counties, with aging populations.
- Only 20% of businesses get sold upon an owner’s retirement; the remainder are shut down, which turns into job loss for employees.
- Only 15% of business owners have a succession plan; the rest have no plan for their business and no idea who to sell it too—a particular problem in rural areas.[4]
- In a 2016 Department of Commerce survey, 8,266 Colorado business owners aged 65 and over said they would be interested in selling to their own employees – but many do not know how or where to turn for help.
- Considering that Huerfano County has a higher percentage (55.3%) of elderly individuals, compared to 39.5% in Otero, and 45.6% in Las Animas, including cooperative creation and cooperative conversion assistance to businesses in Huerfano County will help Huerfano become a leading rural county to include employee ownership as the key economic development strategy.

Additional actions that can help support cooperative businesses include funding expenses to start-up or assess feasibility of a project (e.g., Property tax reductions for housing cooperatives, suspending sales tax remittances to offset the legal and accounting fees required to accomplish a conversion to employee ownership, offering local funding for cooperative start-ups, establish Revolving Loan Funds using USDA or other grants, building connections with existing social impact/coop support loan funds (e.g., The Working World loan fund) to help local coop projects engage with national funding networks, identifying a percentage of local small business development funds to go to cooperatives, and funding feasibility studies for new cooperative projects.¹

¹ Further reading on cooperative business models includes:

[1] <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/where-are-new-co-ops-emerging-the-changing-map-of-co-op-development/>

[2] <https://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/success-stories/worker-cooperative-model-empowering-workers-creating-community>; <https://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/news-release/usda-invests-more-12-billion-rural-cooperatives-increase-economic-opportunity-and-advance-equity>

[3] <https://oedit.colorado.gov/press-release/the-employee-ownership-office-and-exit-planning-institute-share-findings-on-business>

[4] <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/retiring-boomer-business-owners-turn-to-worker-co-ops-to-preserve-legacy/>



Transportation

Transportation Key Takeaways

- Driving is currently the main mode of transport in the county, but public engagement conducted as part of this project shows that there is interest in having access to more transit and options for walking and bicycling. This sentiment aligns with policies in local and regional plans that identify the need for investment more multimodal facilities.
- Huerfano County has limited infrastructure and programs to accommodate and encourage walking, biking, and the use of transit. However, it has the foundation for a comprehensive multimodal network, and opportunities to enhance connectivity and transportation options for all ages, abilities, and income levels in the years ahead.
- There are ample opportunities for recreational bicycling and hiking in the county, but access to facilities can be limited and connections between them in some locations are limited or not available.
- Access to transportation for commuting purposes (within the county and to neighboring counties) is a major need. A variety of high-quality transportation options helps enhance economic opportunities for residents.
- CDOT's Statewide Transit Plan establishes the framework for an integrated statewide transit system. This plan provides a summary of data and survey responses related to transportation gaps and needs. The state is broken up into different Transportation Planning Regions (TPR), and Huerfano County is located within the South-Central TPR. When survey respondents were asked whether they depended on others for transportation, the highest level of dependency was identified in the south-central region. Responses also showed the highest likelihood of using fixed route-public transportation or on-demand services instead of driving if these options were offered. In addition, older adults are expected to comprise over 25% of the population in the region by 2045. Taken together, these data points convey that expanded transit service is likely to play an important part in the county's future transportation system.

Transportation Key Facts

- The majority (63%) of the County's Vehicle-Miles-Traveled (VMT) occurs on I-25.
- Looking ahead, CDOT projects that VMT in the South-Central TPR will increase by 30% from 2015 to 2045.
- The county has a larger percentage of residents who commute by driving a vehicle alone (72%) when compared to the state (63%).
- Public transit mode share is much lower rate in the county (0.3%) when compared to the state (1.3%).

While still relatively low, the county has a larger percentage of residents who walk to work (4%) when compared to the state (2.3%).

- Since the year 2010, VMT per capita has grown 10% in the county, which is more than double the rate of increase when compared to the state's growth of 4%. One likely cause of this variance is that some employees who reside in the county drive to and from jobs in Trinidad, Pueblo, and Colorado Springs.



- The greatest number of vehicle crashes occurred on State Highway 160, followed by State Highway 69.
- State Highway 12 is the core of the Highway of Legends Scenic Byway and has been designated by CDOT as a High Demand Bicycle Corridor, which is used to plan and prioritize bicycle investment and maintenance
- CDOT operates a commuter bus, Bustang (Outrider Line), and has a stop in Walsenburg. This route has northbound line (from Trinidad to Pueblo) and a southbound line (Pueblo to Trinidad) that each run an AM and PM schedule. The interval between northbound arrivals and southbound departures in Walsenburg is slightly less than 8 hours. The interval between southbound arrivals and northbound departures in Walsenburg is about 4 hours. This schedule does not fit the schedule of workers along the route who commute to Walsenburg and need to work an 8-hour schedule.
- The South Central Council of Governments (COG) provides door-to-door, demand-responsive, and subscription transportation services to senior citizens, people with disabilities, and the general public. Service demand is primarily concentrated in Walsenburg, the most populous city in the county. Pre-covid, ridership in Huerfano County made up about 1/3 of total ridership.
- CDOT projects that VMT in the South-Central TPR will increase by 30% from 2015 to 2045.
- Public input indicated that the three most needed transportation improvements are road maintenance, local transit, and regional transit connecting to Pueblo & Trinidad.

Transportation Goals, Policies, and Actions

T Goal 1: Increase access to public transit that connects residents and visitors to key destinations.

Policies

- T Policy 1.1: The County supports and invests in services that will improve residents' and visitor access to transit connecting key origins and destinations both within and outside the county.

Actions

- T Action 1.1: Conduct a study to determine where on-demand or fixed route shuttle service should be provided to better connect county residents to jobs, education, and services; especially for those residing in more remote areas. As part of this study, assess whether demand is sufficient to pilot (test) a fixed route or on-demand shuttle between Walsenburg and La Veta and whether such a route / service could include Gardner and Cuchara.
- T Action 1.2: Conduct a countywide education campaign to grow residents' awareness about and promote ridership on existing mobility service administered by the SCCOG and CDOT's Bustang Outrider Line. Coordinate with CDOT to evaluate Bustang's current service schedules (for the Trinidad to Pueblo Line) in the county and determine whether schedule adjustments would better serve employees working within the county and in employment hubs outside the county including Pueblo and Trinidad.



- T Action 1.3: Develop a countywide carpooling initiative in collaboration with the Colorado Workforce Center to mitigate dust and facilitate ride-sharing among residents, particularly for commutes to job centers such as Pueblo. Encourage employers to offer incentives to employees who participate in the carpool program.
- T Action 1.4: County land development and public works staff should stay apprised of ongoing Front Range Rail Planning efforts and work with County Commissioners to determine if they want to formally advocate for a future stop in Walsenburg.

T Goal 2: Support rail as a transportation mode within the County and address safety concerns at rail crossings.

Policies

- T Policy 2.1: The County supports efforts to address safety issues at rail crossings in the County.

Actions

- T Action 2.1: The County should continue communications with rail companies to understand intended, future changes to routing or operations (i.e., frequency of movements).

T Goal 3: Increase mobility options for seniors and disadvantaged populations.

Actions

- T Action 3.1: Support efforts to better connect and establish ride share opportunities among residents that don't own a private vehicle; support efforts to prevent impaired driving.
- T Action 3.2: Identify and publicize which recreation opportunities require 4WD to access; explore appropriateness of ATVs on some county roads and thoroughly evaluate pros and cons of expanding ATV use.

Transportation Access & Equity In more remote parts of the county, many seniors and lower income residents and residents living in poverty don't have access to a private vehicle and therefore have limited means of reaching critical services (i.e healthcare), employment, education, and other community destinations.

T Goal 4: Promote pedestrian and bicyclist safety and connectivity of pedestrian facilities (e.g., sidewalks, paths, trails).

Policies

- T Policy 4.1: The County supports development and project designs that incorporate pedestrian and bicycle facilities whenever possible and feasible.
- T Policy 4.2: The County supports actions to ensure that growth areas (e.g., village areas and the Wellness Hub area) have adequate pedestrian facilities.
- T Policy 4.3: The County collaborates with Walsenburg and La Veta on pedestrian facilities and connectivity projects as appropriate.

Actions

- T Action 4.1: Complete designs for off-street multi-use trails in Cuchara and Gardner.



- T Action 4.2: Identify a prioritized and phased list of projects necessary to improve safety, access, and connectivity for pedestrians in Huerfano County.
- T Action 4.3: Research grant opportunities to find ways to fund the development of a Non-Motorized Transportation Master Plan to identify existing and proposed non-motorized transportation routes throughout the County and the construction of additional bicycle, pedestrian and related alternate transportation routes in the County.
- T Action 4.4: Install bike racks and repair stations throughout Huerfano County. (See Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation and Main Street Development Community Action Plan for more detail on this recommendation)

T Goal 5: Promote proactive facility planning and maintenance of County roadways and transportation facilities.

Actions

- T Action 5.1: Develop a plan that prioritizes and phases maintenance and construction projects; ensure that all County dedicated and maintained roads meet uniform minimal standards of design and construction.
- T Action 5.2: Develop a database that County Road and Bridge staff can use to assign a pavement condition rating to county roads. The database can be used to prioritize/phase projects and be updated over time.
- T Action 5.3: Develop a prioritized list of locations where water intrusion and erosion is causing greater risk for roadway bed or bridge failure.
- T Action 5.4: Coordinate roadway projects with major utility projects when possible so that areas and periods of disruption can be minimized.
- T Action 5.5: Coordinate with CDOT and continue to encourage pavement resurfacing / overlay on State Highway 12 between the intersection of SH 160 and La Veta.
- T Action 5.6: Encourage the education of existing and potential residents in regard to County maintained roads.
- T Action 5.7: Advocate for four-foot paved shoulders along all State Highways through the County.
- T Action 5.8: Support the implementation of the South Central Transportation Planning Region's 2035 *Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)*.
- T Action 5.9: Support the County's Spanish Peaks Airfield and encourage continuation of La Veta's Cuchara Valley Airport and other private airfields.

T Goal 6: Identify cost-saving measures and/or new sources of revenue to help cover the costs of maintaining roads within subdivisions.

Actions

- T Action 6.1: Consider an increase in developer fees or property taxes, or a transportation impact fee for owners within subdivisions to cover the disproportionate cost burden to the county.

- T Action 6.2: Consider revisions to the county’s subdivision policy or regulations to assign a greater level of maintenance responsibility to developers and / or property owners.
- T Action 6.3: Encourage the use of local improvement districts to support transportation planning and development in Huerfano County.





Recreation & Trails

Recreation & Trails Key Takeaways

- The County does not directly manage the vast majority of recreational assets within its bounds
- Many of the existing recreational roads and trails are located in the remote northwest and southwest portions of the County, far from the majority of the residents in the County.
- Huerfano County has lower than average recreation access scores when compared to state and national rankings. Increasing recreation access scores requires placing recreation facilities such as parks or trail systems near population centers and identifying other access gaps such as transportation needs and accessibility considerations for existing recreation amenities. .
- Public engagement results have indicated that residents are interested in more access to recreational facilities and trails, as well as more programming for young residents
- There is a need for recreational facilities and programming to support older residents of Huerfano County, who could benefit from increased access to activities and amenities that could improve their health
- Many relevant planning documents and initiatives speak to the importance of creating a cohesive and well-connected recreation destination and point to signage as a way to support this goal. Signage and wayfinding (trail maps, trail markings, trailhead kiosks, etc.) can help increase community awareness and guide visitors between destinations
- A successful well-connected and cohesive county-wide trail system must include coordination with Huerfano’s municipalities and other communities such as Cuchara and Gardner

Recreation & Trails Key Facts

- The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages the majority (93%) of recreational trails and roads found in the county.
- About 75% of land in Huerfano County is owned privately, a higher percentage of private land ownership compared to Colorado as a whole (57%). The other 25% of land consists of federal lands (Forest Service and BLM), state land (State Trust Lands, State Parks) and county and municipally owned land.
- Lathrop State Park, located southwest of Walsenburg, is a popular destination for locals and visitors, estimating approximately 153,000 visitors in 2021.^[1] According to a survey conducted by CPW, about 50% of visitors are from within 15 miles, and 23% of visitors are from over 60 miles away.^[2]^[1] Colorado State Parks Annual Visitation Report, 2021 ^[2] [CPW Lathrop State Park Public Comment Form Results](#)
- In Huerfano County, 44% of people live close to a park or recreation facility, much lower than across Colorado (90%) and the United States (84%).^[1] ^[1] [County Health Rankings – Huerfano County](#)
- The City of Walsenburg Comprehensive Plan notes a priority to extend a regional trail along the Cucharas River from Lathrop State Park to Walsenburg.
- The Town of La Veta Trails Plan articulates a vision to create “an interconnected community-based system of parks, open spaces and trails for people of all ages and



abilities and to connect to the regional trail system.” The plan mentions a Cucharas Riverfront and River Walk Trail that would be a relatively flat grade and accessible. It also prioritizes trail connections between Wahatoya Lake and the Diagre Reservoir.

- With the dramatic population growth that Colorado has experienced in the last 30 years, many of the state’s natural resources have experienced intense pressure due to an increase in outdoor recreation. While this is less of an issue to date in Huerfano County compared to Summit County and Clear Creek Counties, for example, the potential exists. Litter, degradation of wildlife habitat, and vehicle congestion on access roads and at trail heads are just some of the common issues that popular areas are experiencing. The county will need to remain vigilant so that increased recreation and visitation doesn’t result in the same unintended consequences.
- 94% of Visioning Survey respondents indicated that “Scenic Beauty” is one of Huerfano County’s greatest strengths

60% of Visioning Survey respondents indicated that “Recreational amenities and wildlife” are one of county’s greatest strengths. Some write in comments highlighted the county’s “remote and peaceful” qualities, “remote nature,” and rural environment as strengths.

41% of Visioning Survey respondents indicated that improvements to trails were one of the most-needed transportation improvements in the county. 32% indicated that improvements to bicycle facilities (bike lanes, bike racks, bike routes) were most needed.

Recreation & Trails Goals, Policies, & Actions

RT Goal 1: Identify and address barriers to recreation access for multi-generational residents of Huerfano County

Policies

- RT Policy 1.1: The County follows guidance from AARP’s [rural livability initiative, which provides resources and trainings related to age-friendly development](#)
- RT Policy 1.2: The County prioritizes the development and maintenance of recreational amenities that serve older and/or disabled residents, such as ADA-compliant trails, paved trails, pickleball, and gardening opportunities

Actions

- RT Action 1.1: Build awareness of available public indoor gathering spaces (community centers, recreation facilities, etc.) to identify opportunities for indoor recreation. Seek out individuals in the community who can commit to programming and hosting indoor recreation activities in these community spaces. Indoor recreation activities can include a variety of activities and community entertainment suitable for different age groups, including bingo, dance nights, cooking classes, crafting groups, and movie nights.
- RT Action 1.2: Support activity programs for older adults, particularly programs that encourage exercise and spending time outdoors; facilitate projects to create activities and spaces for these community members.



Recreation As Preventative Medicine Huerfano County is home to many older residents, and the proportion of the county's older residents is expected to grow. Exercising and spending time outside are excellent preventive health measures, but residents currently lack access to these resources compared to other Colorado communities. County residents also lack access to public indoor community and recreational facilities. The community has an interest in more access to recreation facilities, programs, and activities, particularly youth-oriented programming. Key recreational amenities within the County, such as the water park, have fallen into disrepair and no longer serve the community. With a current ranking of 48th in health outcomes in Colorado, Huerfano County should make increased efforts to support healthy and active lifestyles among residents.

RT Goal 2: Improve the accessibility and connectivity of recreation and trail amenities in Huerfano County.

Policies

- RT Policy 2.1: The County supports active transportation and multi-modal connections to Key Recreation Sites, such as Lathrop State Park and Cuchara Mountain Park
- RT Policy 2.2: The County supports bike paths and other multimodal connections between municipalities

Actions

- RT Action 2.1: Continue implementation of County Trails Master Plan, coordinate with municipal planning efforts to ensure alignment
- RT Action 2.2: Work with the COG to provide transportation access to remote trails on "trail days" throughout the warm-weather months for those without personal vehicles and as a social event
- RT Action 2.3: Consider pursuing planning and improvements through the US DOT Safe Routes to Schools program and Federal Land Access Program (FLAP).

RT Goal 3: Promote opportunities for exercise, wellness, and recreational programming throughout Huerfano County.

Policies

- RT Policy 3.1: The County prioritizes upgrades or new development of recreational facilities close to schools, job centers, and neighborhoods
- RT Policy 3.2: The County uses shared use agreements to facilitate access to recreation for residents throughout the county.

Actions

- RT Action 3.1: Encourage community fitness programs for all ages. Continue current County programming for youth sports and encourage participation in 4-H programs.
- RT Action 3.2: Explore shared use agreements that support access to recreation and fitness amenities. For example, facilitate contracts that support community access to existing public, private, or nonprofit facilities before or after business hours; also called joint use, open use, or community use agreements
- RT Policy 3.3: Support the use of community centers throughout the County and other space for structured indoor and outdoor recreational programming



RT Goal 4: Support resident and visitor access to trails and recreation areas; provide adequate information about recreational opportunities in Huerfano County.

Policies

- RT Policy 4.1: The County encourages the development of winter tourism activities and amenities to help support visitor-facing businesses year-round.

Actions

- RT Action 4.1: Create an interactive map to show the spatial distribution of existing recreation facilities relative to communities, businesses, and parking
- RT Action 4.2: In all county-produced recreation information, highlight relevant rules and regulations for particular trails and recreation areas, particularly those that need additional permits such as CPW lands
- RT Action 4.3: Partner with land managers within the county, including Colorado Parks & Wildlife and the San Isabel National Forest, to distribute accurate recreation information online and in-print
- RT Action 4.4: Consider adding wayfinding signage (trail signage, navigation signage, trailhead kiosks) in key locations. This can increase awareness of recreation opportunities without building new facilities. Pursue relevant grants from DOLA, GOCO, and OEDIT to upgrade trail kiosks and wayfinding signage
- RT Action 4.5: Collaborate with recreation stakeholders to consolidate information and create a “one stop-shop” for recreation information in the County.
- RT Action 4.6: Continue to work with the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), and Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office (OREC) on ways to market and brand the county and the region as a unique recreational destination.
- RT Action 4.7: Prioritize the rebuilding of sections of Indian Creek and Middle Creek Roads that have been washed out by rain events to re-establish access to the National Forest.
- RT Action 4.8: Pursue relevant grants to upgrade trailhead kiosks and wayfinding signage. (See Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation and Main Street Development Community Action Plan for more detail on this recommendation)
- RT Action 4.9: Promote responsible recreation principles specific to Huerfano County to educate residents and visitors about how to recreate responsibly. (See Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation and Main Street Development Community Action Plan for more detail on this recommendation)

RT Goal 5: Improve the quality of trails and trail experiences in Huerfano County.

Policies

- RT Policy 5.1: The County supports efforts to improve signage to and connectivity between trails and trail systems both locally and inter-regionally so more people without access or limited access to private vehicles can use them for commuting, and other trips.

Actions

- RT Action 5.1: Update the county’s 2011 Trails Master Plan to assess the condition of current trail infrastructure, identify critical gaps, and develop a prioritized – phased list of improvements to make in the next 10 years. Priority should be given to trails connecting



key origins and destinations such as residential areas, employment nodes, schools, and retail areas.

- RT Action 5.2: Pursue relevant grants from GOCO, CDOT, and/or CPW to plan and design a multi-use path from Walsenburg to La Veta, and a multi-use path between Walsenburg and Lathrop State Park.
- RT Action 5.3: As e-bikes gain in popularity and usage increases on trails in the county, invest in e-bike education to ensure safety between all users and to clearly communicate where e-bike use is permitted and not permitted.
- RT Action 5.4: Post maps of trails and access points at visitor centers and kiosks throughout the County.
- RT Action 5.5: Work with CoTrex/All Trails (<https://trails.colorado.gov/>) to ensure that their online maps fully capture existing trails within Huerfano County.
- RT Action 5.6: Work with CDOT to continue pursuit of funds for recommended improvements in the Southern Mountain Loop Planning & Environmental Linkage Study that would improve non-motorized transportation options between Walsenburg, La Veta, and Cuchara.

RT Goal 6: Preserve Huerfano County's scenic and remote recreational opportunities.

Policies

- RT Policy 6.1: In the development of new recreation destinations and facilities, the County considers the location, the capacity of the county to manage new facilities, the desired recreation experience, and the desired audience (locals vs. visitors)

RT Goal 7: Provide excellent recreational amenities and opportunities for Huerfano County residents that are effectively managed by the County or another provider. Capitalize on opportunities to generate revenue based on recreational tourism, athletics, music venues, and convention centers.

Policies

- RT Policy 7.1: The County supports the development of commercially taxable lodging opportunities such as hotels, motels and RV parks.
- RT Policy 7.2: The County supports the development of venues and uses related to recreational tourism, athletics, music venues, and convention centers that meet all County land use requirements and support community vibrancy.
- RT Policy 7.3: The County supports the viability of its regional park system for residents and visitors

Actions

- RT Action 7.1: Encourage efforts to host a marathon using a roughly 26-mile loop from La Veta (La Veta – County Road 358 – County Road 363 – County Road 360 – La Veta)
- RT Action 7.2: Support gravel bike riding events in Huerfano County.
- RT Action 7.3: Explore opportunities for a shooting sports center, a facility for shooting skeets/clays, and archery.
- RT Action 7.4: Promote bird watching opportunities by expanding information available online, and creating itineraries or guidebooks (See Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation



and Main Street Development Community Action Plan for more detail on this recommendation to expand online information)

- RT Action 7.5: Support horseback riding as a recreational activity in the County; explore opportunities for endurance rides (50-100 miles) including on private ranches
- RT Action 7.6: Continue implementing the recommendations of the Cuchara Mountain Park Master Plan
- RT Action 7.7: Promote public golf courses
- RT Action 7.8: Consider allowing ATVs, UTVs, and OHVs on certain County roads by registration; publicize relevant rules and regulations related to motorized recreational travel. Thoroughly weigh the pros and cons of expanding ATV use on County roadways.
- RT Action 7.9: Collaborate with relevant land managers to complete physical improvements to roads and trails that improve access to recreational amenities
- RT Action 7.10: Initiate conversations with utility companies and public land management agencies to discuss repurposing previously disturbed areas for the development of outdoor recreation assets (See Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation and Main Street Development Community Action Plan for more detail on this recommendation)

REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES The county is not currently maximizing revenue and community benefits from tourism. Other communities in Colorado and elsewhere have implemented measures to ensure that tourism revenue is put back into the community in the form of housing and infrastructure funds. If tourism revenue becomes significant in Huerfano County in the coming years, the county may consider this type of funding response to support other aspects of the community.



Public Services & Community Safety

For a complete summary of public services in Huerfano County, including water/wastewater facilities, please see “Summary of Current Services & Providers” in Public Services & Safety Memo in Volume 2: Existing Conditions.

Public Services & Community Safety Key Takeaways:

- The county has experienced very limited population growth and land use change since it last updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2018. As such, demand for public and community safety services has essentially remained level, however challenges and needs remain as explained in this memo.
- The County Sheriff’s Department faces continued challenges with its ability to recruit and retain personnel for open positions. This is an issue in the sense that Huerfano County has the third highest rate of violent crimes per capita (among Colorado counties). Recently, several community stakeholders engaged for this plan update voiced concerns about drug-related crimes throughout the county, but particularly in Walsenburg, where there is greater population density.
- As discussed later in this memo, the county’s fire response and prevention districts are generally well equipped in terms of personnel, volunteers, and equipment. However, the level of wildfire risk is high throughout the county given the relatively arid climate, and expanses of dense forests, and dry grassland. Furthermore, due to variable levels of precipitation, and increasing (average) temperatures during the warmer months, ensuring the adequacy of response staff and equipment is critical to community safety now and in the future.
- Given the county’s limited population growth in recent years and relatively limited amount of new development, its demand for water has remained relatively flat. However, the ability to meet today’s demands does not, by default, translate to the ability to meet demands 20 or 30 years from now. Looking ahead, the county will need to be thoughtful and strategic about the amount and form of new development it permits and what effect that, as well as increased tourism, could have on the availability of a reliable water supply.

Public Services & Community Safety Key Facts:

- When asked “What are Huerfano County’s greatest strengths today?”, only 6% of Visioning Survey respondents selected community facilities and services
- Huerfano County is served by three fire protection districts – the Huerfano County Fire Protection District, the La Veta Fire Protection District, and the Upper Huerfano Fire Protection District. The Huerfano County Fire Protection District does not employ any full-time, paid staff. Four officers receive a small, monthly stipend and are supported by 17 volunteers. The District’s contact indicated they would ideally like to have 8 additional volunteers on call for a total of 25.
- The County Sheriff’s Department serves all of Huerfano County, including Walsenburg. As of 2016, Walsenburg does not maintain its own Police Department.



- The rate of violent crime in Huerfano County is 25, while the US average is 22.7. Additionally, Huerfano County has a higher-than-average property crime rate. Property crime in the county stands at 35.7, which is greater than the US average of 35.4.
- Since the mid-20th century, there have been notable reductions in the County's headwater supply.
- In 2016, the Cucharas Basin Storage Collaborative Stakeholders (which includes the Cucharas Sanitation & Water District, the Town of La Veta, and the City of Walsenburg) conducted an analysis to provide an overview of demands, supply, infrastructure, and operations in the Cucharas River basin. The analysis found that the basin, which encompasses approximately half of Huerfano County and its most populous areas, is short approximately 16-500 acre-feet per year on average. This about 1.5x as much as drought years.
- The Huerfano Water Conservancy District (HCWCD) notes on their webpage that "there is a dramatic shortage of water storage facilities (reservoirs) in the Cucharas basin, making dry year supplies tenuous and subject to the whims of annual and seasonal changes. Since WWII, the capacity of Cucharas basin storage facilities has dropped by more than 70%."
- It is estimated that there are over 4,000 small wells throughout the county serving residential and other uses.

Public Services & Community Safety Goals, Policies, & Actions

PSCS Goal 1: Support the safety and security of all residents of and visitors to Huerfano County.

Policies

- PSCS Policy 1.1: The County supports efforts to improve public safety through community partnerships, utilization of data, and use of best practices from peer agencies in other jurisdictions.
- PSCS Policy 1.2: The County supports coordination with the state and SPRHC on the development of a drug treatment center within the county.
- PSCS Policy 1.3: The County supports coordination with the state and SPRHC on the development of a diabetes treatment center within the county.
- PSCS Policy 1.4: County Human/Social Services Department staff should encourage the development of mental health care in Huerfano County.

Actions

- PSCS Action 1.1: County planning staff and the Sheriff's office should plan and hold a one-day forum with community members and community-based organizations to encourage community policing and neighborhood watch efforts.
- PSCS Action 1.2: County staff and partners should continue pursuing opportunities for increased employment, community-building (volunteer) activities, and destinations that provide programming (i.e. recreation / community centers) as means of reducing drug use and crime.



- PSCS Action 1.3: County Human/Social Services Department staff should continue collaboration with the Spanish Peaks Medical Center to obtain data on the causes of depression and drug use and help identify solutions to empower people (county residents) to reduce hopelessness and depression.

PSCS Goal 2: Support community service providers in efforts to mitigate wildfire risk in Huerfano County.

Policies

- PSCS Policy 2.1: The County supports efforts to ensure regular communication and collaboration between fire districts operating within the county to optimize their preemptive actions, response effectiveness during an incident, and capacity to support recovery after an incident.

Actions

- PSCS Action 2.1: Maintain a county-wide wildfire protection plan.
- PSCS Action 2.2: Ensure that mutual aid agreements between districts in the county are all in good standing as well as any districts or agencies in neighboring counties.
- PSCS Action 2.3: As financial resources allow, invest in the latest wildland fire detection technologies to better enable immediate response. Options to research include Insight Robotics <https://www.insightrobotics.com/en/services/wildfire-detection-system/> and Fire Scout <https://firescout.ai/>
- PSCS Action 2.4: Collaborate with partner agencies (i.e., US Forest Service) to continue biofuel removal programs to reduce the amount of excess fuel loads within forested areas.

High Susceptibility to Wildfire Huerfano County is highly susceptible to wildfire risk due to the aridity of the climate, the amount of mature forest and open grasslands, rising average temperatures, and variability in annual levels of precipitation.

Accounting for Limited Water Supply Based on its current water sources, the aridity of its climate, and rising average temperatures, Huerfano County needs to be thoughtful about the amount, type, and location of future land development and population growth in order to sustain a long-term water supply.

PSCS Goal 3: Support community service providers in efforts to monitor and maintain the County's water resources.

Policies

- PSCS Policy 3.1: The County supports efforts necessary to understand the evolving quantity and quality of its long-term water supply and whether the County could adequately serve certain new land development, population growth, and agricultural uses.
- PSCS Policy 3.2: The County considers the role of the over 4,000 private wells in managing water resources on a county scale, particularly exempt wells that are not augmented.
- PSCS Policy 3.3: Using its authority and powers under Colorado House Bill 1041, the County opposes exporting water beyond the County's boundaries.
- PSCS Policy 3.4: The County supports efforts to maintain and acquire new water rights.



- PSCS Policy 3.5: The County supports Walsenburg’s efforts to augment water resources to facilitate affordable and attainable housing development in Northlands.
- PSCS Policy 3.6: Applicants seeking County approvals for development shall show they possess sufficient water for the development they propose at the time of the application process.

Actions

- PSCS Action 3.1: Building on the 2016 supply-demand analysis completed by the Cucharas Basin Storage Collaborative, the county should commission a 30-year water supply study (starting in 2025) to determine if there is a gap between projected supply and projected demand and, if so, quantify the gap in acre feet.
- PSCS Action 3.2: As part of the recommended supply study, the County should closely coordinate with the Huerfano Water Conservancy District on their ongoing capacity / storage projects to determine the degree to which those would augment supply volumes.
- PSCS Action 3.3: If determined to be necessary as a result of the water supply study and leveraging the expertise of and plans completed by several other Colorado communities, the county should commission a Water Conservation Plan / Water Efficiency Plan.
- PSCS Action 3.5: Evaluate the communal water systems in the County to determine if they have capacity to expand and if not, consider appropriate growth restrictions.
- PSCS Action 3.6: Educate residents countywide on their right to collect up 110 gallons of storage capacity for rainwater per household (on-site) for irrigating outdoor lawns, plants or gardens.
- PSCS Action 3.7: The County opposes the State Engineer’s recent administrative limitations on the futile call doctrine so as to allow diversion of water within the County when it would not otherwise reach users on the Arkansas mainstem.



Natural Resources

Defining Natural Resources Natural resources in Huerfano County encompass the land, water, wildlife, scenic vistas, and geological formations that are vital to the area’s environment, economy, and residents’ quality of life. These resources include diverse species of plants and animals, recreational landscapes, and unique geological structures like the Spanish Peaks dikes. Residents view these natural assets as essential not only for their recreational value but also for their role in tourism, economic potential, and environmental health. As the county faces risks from drought, wildfire, and climate change, sustainable management of natural resources is central to maintaining ecological balance and preserving Huerfano’s character.

Natural Resources Key Takeaways

- Based on strong input, it is clear most Huerfano residents see the county’s natural surroundings and resources as very important to their way and quality of life.
- Natural resources are a key part of what make Huerfano County a unique place. In the April 2022 community survey, 66 percent of 515 respondents chose the Natural Environment when asked ‘What are your favorite aspects about living in Huerfano County?’
- In the survey conducted in the spring of 2023 for the Comprehensive Plan Update, respondents were asked, ‘What are Huerfano County’s Greatest Strengths Today?’ Ninety-four percent (187 respondents) selected Scenic Beauty and 60.3 percent (120 respondents) selected Recreational Amenities and Wildlife.
- The abundant opportunities to explore and enjoy the county’s natural resources through recreation have the potential to play a pivotal role in growing visitation and tourism.
- While many residents feel there is an immediate need to increase job opportunities, affordable housing options, and revenue generating uses, they do not want to see changes that will degrade their access to and enjoyment of natural resources in the county. Changes must keep environmental sustainability central to decision making.

Natural Resources Key Facts

- As noted in the county’s 2018 Comprehensive Plan, the Colorado Division of Wildlife’s Natural Diversity Information System listed 259 bird, 86 mammal, 29 reptile, and 11 amphibian species in Huerfano County.
- Over 500 dikes surround the Spanish Peaks. A dike or dyke is a sheet of rock that is formed in a [fracture](#) of a pre-existing rock body. Some of these dramatic formations of rock protrude vertically along and can easily be seen from the Highway of Legends (SH 12). These protrusions were formed by molten rock several thousand feet underground, below and among many layers of sedimentary rock. Over time, the ground rose and the softer rock eroded away, exposing these igneous intrusions. One set of dikes emanates radially from the West Spanish Peak, another set emanates radially from Silver Mountain, nine miles northwest of La Veta. These very unique formations make a notable contribution to scenic vistas and the visitor experience in the county.



- As explained in the Hazard Mitigation Plan being developed as part of this cooperative planning project, a growing number of communities in Colorado and throughout the western U.S. are experiencing the effects of prolonged drought. A growing shortage of water over time is likely to have a significant adverse effect on the county's natural resources. With changing environmental conditions, the county should plan for warmer average temperatures and reduced levels of precipitation in the years ahead. Both factors increase the importance of water conservation and reuse/recycling in the county across all sectors; residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural.
- Due to reductions in annual levels of precipitation and rising average temperatures, the county's landscape is warmer and drier for more of the year. As a result, more of Huerfano County is susceptible to wildfire events, regardless of whether they start within the county or carry over (jump) from an adjacent county. Moreover, while wildfires are typically associated with forested areas, changing conditions are such that more of the county, including grasslands, ag lands, and even more developed areas (i.e. Walsenburg) are susceptible to the effects of a wildfire incident. As evidenced by the 2022 Marshall Fire in Boulder County, Colorado, a grass fire coupled with high winds can have catastrophic effects in a developed setting.
- The management of natural resources in the county plays an important role in reducing the likelihood and ability to respond to and reduce the severity of a wildfire. Namely, the reduction of biofuel and the coordination of pre-emptive planning efforts among fire districts can significantly reduce risk.

Natural Resources Goals, Policies, and Actions

NR Goal 1: Manage future growth in a sustainable manner so that the county's economic gains are made in balance with environmental stewardship and create equitable access to opportunities for all residents.

Policies

- NR Policy 1.1: The County focuses growth and investment in areas of the county that have already been developed (or immediately adjacent to them) to minimize adverse effects on environmentally significant resources, such as water supply, sensitive habitat, unique geologic formations, and scenic vistas.
- NR Policy 1.2: The County ensures that, as new development is proposed, the appropriate levels of development review are conducted so that potentially significant impacts to environmentally sensitive resources can be minimized or altogether avoided.

Actions

- NR Action 1.1: Continue to collaborate with state and federal resource management agencies on the mapping and delineation of environmentally sensitive areas (i.e., wetlands and threatened species habitat) so that these resources can be appropriately protected as land development occurs.
- NR Action 1.2: Consider creating a viewshed protection overlay zone that would limit the height of new development between the Highway 12 / Highway 160 intersection up to



Cuchara and prevent junk and blight in these areas. This would minimize negative impacts on scenic vistas, especially views of the Spanish Peaks.

NR Goal 2: Facilitate the growth of the renewable energy sector to reduce the County's reliance on fossil fuels.

Policies

- NR Policy 2.1: The County focuses investment in renewable energy in areas where the placement and operation of new infrastructure (i.e. turbines or panel systems) would have less impact on valued and sensitive natural resources including water supply, wildlife habitat, mature forests, and scenic vistas.

Actions

- NR Action 2.1: Update zoning provisions in priority renewable energy areas to allow for the installation and operation of necessary infrastructure. Siting is preferred in areas with few infrastructure hurdles, such as areas close to points of interconnection.
- NR Action 2.2: Pursue existing grants available through the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) for the placement of solar panels on publicly owned (county and city) buildings in Walsenburg, La Veta, and the unincorporated county.
- NR Action 2.3: Pursue existing grants available through the Colorado Energy Office (CEO) to upgrade HVAC systems in public buildings to include more energy efficient equipment.
- NR Action 2.4: Pursue grants through the Colorado Energy Office to add electric vehicle charging stations at key locations in Walsenburg, La Veta, and Cuchara to better accommodate electric vehicles owned and operated in Huerfano County. Develop siting criteria to guide where the county should invest in and place EV charging infrastructure (i.e., on or within 200 feet of downtowns/Main Streets).
- NR Action 2.5: Work with fire protection personnel and districts to prepare for increasing popularity of electric vehicles.

NR Goal 3: Conserve natural resources and landscapes that support quality of life and recreational tourism.

Actions

- NR Action 3.1: Huerfano County staff and the Huerfano County Economic Development Inc. should coordinate with DOLA and the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) to obtain the most current best practices on how rural Colorado communities are effectively branding and marketing themselves as recreational hubs to increase tourism.
- NR Action 3.2: Coordinate with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, US Forest Services and Colorado Forest Service to stay informed about use / visitation levels and assess whether recreational tourism is having unintended, adverse effects on the county's natural resources.
- NR Action 3.3: Consider adoption of tourism tax to financially support the county's efforts to grow recreation-based tourism. Revenue from tax could be used to hire, for example, a County Tourism Director to lead and coordinate these efforts, including the pursuit of grants from DOLA, CTO, and GOCO.
- NR Action 3.4: Promote the stewardship of natural resources throughout the County in future marketing and branding materials related to tourism.

- NR Action 3.5: Promote responsible recreation principles specific to Huerfano County to educate residents and visitors about how to recreate responsibly. (See Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation and Main Street Development Community Action Plan for more detail on this recommendation)





Community Health & Arts

Community Health & Arts Key Takeaways

- In national health rankings, the County has earned low scores in some categories of physical health, mental health, and access to services
- For a county with ample space and natural assets, Huerfano County should look to improve outdoor access and physical activity through strategically located trail areas and pathway corridors, indoor recreation facilities, and local park spaces
- Access to certain clinical services is limited or non-existent, reducing preventative treatment access, increasing reliance on personal transportation to access care, and reducing physician choice

Community Health & Arts Key Facts

- [County Health Rankings^{\[1\]}](#) identifies Huerfano County as one of the least healthy counties in Colorado in both health outcomes (life expectancy and quality of life) and health factors (availability of resources to increase life expectancy and quality of life).
- 21% of Huerfano County adults report no leisure-time physical activity, compared to 17% in Colorado
- 44% of Huerfano County residents have adequate access to locations for physical activity, compared to 90% in Colorado
- 51% of Huerfano County adults ages 25-44 have attained some post-secondary education, compared to 73% in Colorado
- 32% of residents under 18 are in poverty, compared to 12% in Colorado
- 33% of children are in single-parent households, compared to 22% statewide
- The County has a rate of diabetes that is 2% above the state average
- Responses to the Visioning Survey indicated that there are more arts and cultural opportunities in La Veta compared to other areas of the county. 63% of La Veta respondents indicated that Arts and Culture is a strength for Huerfano County, compared to only 21% of Walsenburg respondents. Very few respondents indicated that schools and families and festivals were strengths.
- 37% of Visioning Survey respondents indicated that a lack of childcare was a top challenge for the county.

Community Health & Arts Goals, Policies, and Actions

CHA Goal 1: Capitalize on opportunities to make recreation and exercise facilities more accessible to Huerfano County residents; cultivate a culture that celebrates staying active in all stages of life.

Policies



- CHA Policy 1.1: The County works to ensure that all recreation facilities meet the needs of current and future residents. For example, aim to provide age-friendly and accessible trails in new trail developments or upgrades to existing trails.

Actions

- CHA Action 1.1: Identify outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities that are proximate to existing and future residential development.
- CHA Action 1.2: Identify trail corridors that expand access to existing recreation facilities and public lands.
- CHA Action 1.3: Support and celebrate active lifestyles (bike or walk to work days, community events, block parties, etc.)
- CHA Action 1.4: Identify opportunities for a gear library or other initiatives that promote free or low-cost access to recreational and athletic equipment. (See Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation and Main Street Development Community Action Plan for more detail on this recommendation)
- CHA Action 1.5: Post maps of area trails outside of community centers.

CHA Goal 2: Address the root causes and aggravating factors of both poverty and substance abuse in Huerfano County.

Policies

- CHA Policy 2.1: The County encourages development that includes affordable housing, education, daycare, and other essential needs that can help alleviate poverty.
- CHA Policy 2.2: Huerfano County prioritizes the wellbeing of all residents, particularly children and families, and reduces barriers to participation in the workforce that are uniquely faced by parents.
- CHA Policy 2.3: Huerfano County supports daycare and childcare opportunities in the County, particularly options that serve shift workers, who make up a substantial portion of the workforce.

Actions

- CHA Action 2.1: Provide information to low income families about childcare subsidy programs.
- CHA Action 2.2: Continue to provide support and technical assistance for residents seeking employment, receiving benefits, and accessing social services.
- CHA Action 2.3: Develop a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy for the County that involves a variety of departments (Land Use, Economic Development, Human Services) and coordinates their complementary efforts. This strategy could include potential support actions intended to alleviate poverty (e.g., cash assistance, zoning changes, career training programs).
- CHA Action 2.4: Partner with SCCOG and other transportation partners on bus services (e.g., Bustang Outrider) that meet the needs of employees in the County. Ensure that available bus services align with regional commuting patterns (e.g., drop-off and pick-up times in >8 hour intervals for those living or working in Pueblo or Trinidad).
- CHA Action 2.5: Pursue programs to mitigate substance abuse in the county, and support existing programs that help prevent substance abuse (e.g., 4H programs). Through county



messaging and outreach efforts, foster a culture of positivity and compassion towards individuals in recovery from substance abuse issues.

High Poverty in Huerfano County In Huerfano County, 32% of people under the age of 18 live in poverty, compared to 12% in Colorado and 17% nationally. Living in poverty can make it much more challenging to access and participate in activities that improve health and wellbeing, such as exercise, healthy eating, spending time in nature, and socializing. People in poverty may lack the financial power to improve their health, and they may also lack the time necessary to participate in health-boosting activities. Reducing poverty in Huerfano County will also help promote access to healthy activities.

CHA Goal 3: Residents of Huerfano County have improved access to healthy food based on distance, availability, and cost.

Policies

- CHA Policy 3.1: The County supports and promotes healthy eating and access to healthy foods throughout Huerfano County.

Actions

- CHA Action 3.1: Investigate opportunities to establish and support existing and new community gardens or a network of gardens.
- CHA Action 3.2: Establish a community kitchen space where local or regional produce can be processed; consider repurposing empty storefronts for this purpose
- CHA Action 3.3: Offer and distribute educational programming around preparing nutritious food for people experiencing food insecurity
- CHA Action 3.4: Support the Gardner Care & Share and other similar entities that aggregate and distribute fresh food products.
- CHA Action 3.5: Support pop-up opportunities for residents to access fresh food, such as farmers' markets and/or a mobile produce vendor for fresh fruits and vegetables to appear at community events throughout Huerfano County; ensure that this vendor accepts SNAP benefits

CHA Goal 4: Expand access to medical care throughout Huerfano County.

Policies

CHA Policy 4.1: The County supports land use changes that allow more medical providers to open offices throughout the county.

CHA Policy 4.2: The County supports housing opportunities for medical staff, including traveling practitioners.

Actions

- CHA Policy 4.1: The County supports improved transportation and access to medical providers in Huerfano County.



CHA Goal 5: Support arts and community-building programming, education, and opportunities for all age groups in all areas of the County.

Policies

- CHA Policy 5.1: The County supports the adaptive reuse of buildings throughout the county as artist studios and other artistic uses

Actions

- CHA Action 5.1: Support programming at the Huerfano County recreational facilities and libraries that promotes access to the arts and community-building activities for different age groups

Supporting Arts and Community-Building County-Wide Huerfano County is already home to many creative and cultural amenities. Public engagement during this planning effort has indicated that La Veta enjoys the most access to the arts, and other areas have disproportionately low access. There is a need to expand access to arts opportunities throughout Huerfano County.



Governance

Governance Key Takeaways

- At the time of writing, the County is experiencing challenges maintaining staff in several departments due to budget constraints. This severely limits the capacity of the County to execute on important services and the Policies, Goals, and Actions recommended by this plan.
- The 2018 Comprehensive Plan lacks a specific section on Governance. Municipalities, La Veta and Walsenburg, have active 3-Mile plans for potential annexation areas.
- Visioning survey results indicate public trust issues with the County government. The City of Walsenburg has also experienced ongoing political turmoil.
- Participants in a Quality-of-Life focus group identified substantial challenges in managing recreational facilities.
- There is an opportunity to create engagement events, newsletters, and accessible public meetings.
- There is a need to address the challenge of multiple boards by identifying overlaps, encouraging joint meetings, and recruiting members.
- There is an opportunity to facilitate collaboration for effective management of recreational resources, relying on volunteer support as necessary.

Governance Key Facts

- Huerfano County's core governing principles include fairness, innovation, candor, craftsmanship, and camaraderie. The County has adopted the Code of the West to promote self-reliance and environmental awareness.
- 43% of respondents indicated that government accountability was a top challenge for the county.
- At the time of writing, there are a total of 13 Boards and Commissions in Huerfano County.

Governance Goals, Policies, and Actions

G Goal 1: Provide opportunities for county residents to stay politically engaged and directly speak with Commissioners.

Policies

- G Policy 1.1: The County is committed to building trust, openly engaging with the community, serving the public, and working in a cooperative manner.
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Actions

- G Action 1.1: Consider creating "Coffee with Your Commissioner" events that provide an opportunity for County residents to engage with commissioners on important topics. Encourage commissioners to attend events and meetings of coequal bodies around the County.



- G Action 1.2: Improve publication of public meetings and events; consider creating a newsletter and/or e-newsletter that would provide routine updates about specific County projects and priorities.
- G Action 1.3: Create a webpage specifically aimed at new residents of Huerfano County that provides direction to relevant information and ways to stay informed about County affairs and how to get involved.
- G Action 1.4: Create opportunities for residents of Huerfano County to build their computer skills.
- G Action 1.5: Support efforts to make public meetings more accessible the general public. Use surveys and other interactive tools to help encourage different forms of participation in local government.
- G Action 1.6: Consider holding an annual Open House (or set of open houses) that encourages county residents to provide their input and feedback to County Commissioners and leaders outside of a traditional BOCC meeting.

G Goal 2: Ensure that the County has an appropriate number of boards, commissions, and governing groups to support County operations and goals; ensure that those boards have adequate participation levels and representation from the community.

Actions

- G Action 2.1: Identify areas of overlap between boards and commissions.
- G Action 2.2: Encourage joint meetings between different boards and commissions when possible and appropriate.
- G Action 2.3: Advertise opportunities to join existing boards and commissions. Explore opportunities to pay people serving on boards for their time to ensure that serving on a local board is possible for residents with limited financial resources.

G Goal 3: Provide, manage, and maintain an array of inviting recreational opportunities accessible to the Huerfano County community to support quality of life and a tourism economy.

Policies

- G Policy 3.1: The County works to develop coalitions of relevant groups to ensure that the County's current and future recreational resources will receive adequate stewardship and management.
- G Policy 3.2: The County supports the provision, management, and maintenance of recreational opportunities for County residents of all ages and abilities.

Actions

- G Action 3.1: Convene an annual "Recreation in Huerfano" meeting that brings together managing entities of the County's recreation facilities and programs. This meeting could highlight management needs and future collaboration opportunities between relevant boards.
- G Action 3.2: Explore opportunities to marshal volunteer management support for recreational assets in the County. This could take the form of "park clean-up days" or monthly meet-ups to conduct basic maintenance and beautification projects.

- G Action 3.3: Implement the recommendations of the 2023 Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation and Main Street Development Community Action Plan.

Manage & Steward Recreational Resources The County has experienced challenges with managing and maintaining recreational resources, such as the swimming pool and mountain park. As the County looks to increase its portfolio of recreational resources, further organizational support is needed to ensure adequate management for existing and future recreation opportunities.





Implementation & Special Considerations

1. Top Priority Actions

To address the most pressing needs Huerfano County, as identified in the Cooperative Planning Projects, the following high-priority actions should be implemented first:

A. Launch the Housing Coalition

As described in the IHOP, this group will focus on implementing the Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan (IHOP) recommendations, targeting infill and compact development near essential services while avoiding hazard-prone areas. Priority Opportunity Sites in the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), particularly those with proximity to existing infrastructure and employment hubs, will be designated for affordable and workforce housing. These sites will incorporate IHOP's design strategies, such as mixed-use zoning and diverse housing types, to maximize affordable and sustainable housing.

B. Support Village-Style Development

To preserve Huerfano County's rural character while promoting growth, future development will concentrate in designated village centers like Cuchara and Gardner and growth areas such as the Wellness Hub. These developments will emphasize pedestrian-friendly design and resilience against natural hazards, addressing the Hazard Mitigation Plan's recommendations for wildfire and flood-resistant building practices in areas like Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) zones. By focusing on village centers, the plan promotes compact growth and preserves surrounding open spaces.

C. Develop and Implement Standards for Water-Conscious Development:

In line with the FLUM's compact land-use approach, growth will be directed to village centers and infrastructure-served areas, reducing the strain on remote landscapes and agricultural lands. Partnerships with local water districts are an important step to help establish standards for water-conscious development, ensuring sustainability in areas prone to drought and supporting water availability as per Hazard Mitigation Plan recommendations. The County should prioritize water conservation measures such as drought-tolerant landscaping and low-water-use building technologies.

2. Encourage Coordinated Implementation Across Plans (Hazard Mitigation Plan and Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan)

To efficiently manage resources and align actions, the Comprehensive Plan should be implemented in coordination with the Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Innovative Housing Opportunities Plan (IHOP):

Continue Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration:



Cross-jurisdictional collaboration between the County, Walsenburg, and La Veta will encourage a unified approach, addressing intersections in housing, economic development, and resilience. The Cooperative Planning Projects/IHOP Steering Committee should continue to meet periodically to monitor and guide the implementation of these plans.

Pursue Zoning Updates in line with FLUM prescriptions:

Future zoning updates should align with FLUM guidelines as specified in this plan, especially in high-value agricultural and conservation areas. This will include revisiting Agricultural zoning (covering 97% of the county) to refine boundaries and clarify allowable uses that support conservation and sustainable agricultural practices. Zoning adjustments should also address the recommendations of the IHOP, supporting varied residential densities and promoting a range of housing types to accommodate diverse populations and housing needs.

3. Promote Water-Conscious Development

Given Huerfano County's water limitations, sustainable water management is a top priority and is essential to long-term resilience. The following actions will help balance water resource availability with new development:

Implement FLUM Prescriptions to Conserve Water:

The County should seek to implement the recommended land use pattern as outlined in the FLUM as part of a broader water-conservation strategy. By directing growth toward areas with existing water infrastructure, the FLUM supports efficient water use, limiting the need for new wells and water systems in isolated areas. This approach will prioritize infill development within areas like the Wellness Hub and village centers, reducing pressure on groundwater resources and supporting sustainable growth.

Establish Water-Saving Standards in New Development:

Water conservation standards should be integrated within the permitting process for new developments. New subdivisions will be required to demonstrate sustainable water sources and may incorporate innovative solutions, such as low-impact landscaping and greywater systems, as recommended by the Hazard Mitigation Plan. In flood-prone areas, water conservation should also include stormwater management to mitigate flood risks.

4. Uphold the Code of the West

The Code of the West serves as a guide emphasizing self-reliance, respect for the land, and realistic expectations for development in Huerfano County. Upholding these principles will ensure



that new developments and residents understand the challenges and responsibilities of rural living:

Integrate the Code of the West into Development Standards:

New development proposals in remote or rural areas must acknowledge the challenges outlined by the Code of the West, such as limited access to services, emergency preparedness, and infrastructure limitations. This encourages developments that respect the land’s natural constraints, particularly in hazard-prone zones, aligning with Hazard Mitigation Plan recommendations for hazard-resistant infrastructure and self-sufficient community planning.

Promote Resilient and Responsible Development:

The Code of the West should serve as a guiding principle for sustainable practices, especially for developments in remote areas with limited water access or increased natural hazard risks. New property owners and developers will receive educational materials on the Code, emphasizing sustainable living practices and preparedness for hazards.