

LAND USE

Introduction

County plans in Utah have two land use sections. One, located in the Resource Management Plan element, covers in detail the issues surrounding public lands. Since a majority of the county is under the jurisdiction and ownership of either a federal agency or the Navajo Nation it is essential to have that section of policy and planning separate to cover its unique situation. This section deals with the land the county does have jurisdiction over. This land totals around 404,000 acres or just under 8% of the land mass. This type of land use planning is less focused on resource management, but more development patterns and what shape development will take in the future.

Currently, the county is under significant growth pressure due to the tourism industry. *We see this pressure as positive, as it supports local tourism related industries, but also creates a concern with lucrative over-night accommodations being developed for a transient vacationing population. Typical housing stock, which would have been used for long-term rentals, are no longer available. In addition, as federal decisions that support our mineral extraction industries, the need for affordable workforce housing only continues to increase.*

Areas like Spanish Valley will most likely incorporate *as the area continues to* and experience growth. In anticipation for the growth, *an area specific* special plan has been created for the Spanish Valley - the San Juan County Spanish Valley Area Plan - which was adopted by the County Commission in April, 2018 as an amendment to the General Plan. Others areas of *unincorporated* county land outside of Blanding and Monticello will most likely see *slow to moderate* growth as well since people will want the amenities a nearby city brings and the rural lifestyle of living on unincorporated territory. A large portion of this development is either focused towards resource development, workforce housing or vacation amenities for tourists. The San Juan County Spanish Valley Area Plan and any other future area plans are components of this General Plan.

The thing that will influence the location of development the most in the county is the location of public infrastructure. Some unincorporated areas are already serviced by special service districts. If services are not expanded to remote areas, development will most likely be focused in areas that can reasonably provide *citizens with* ~~them~~ services in the future. *A future annexation plan has been created with Blanding and Monticello in anticipation of this future transition opportunity.*

Spanish Valley is experiencing significant growth pressure, so a separate master plan was developed to make sure that

growth occurred in a deliberate manner *which also incapsulates the approved State Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) Community Structure Plan*. This master plan will be referenced throughout this plan when Spanish Valley is mentioned, and that plan will be seen as an extension of this document.

The purpose of a land use element is to ensure that development does not occur in a piecemeal fashion without consideration for future impacts. This element ensures that the use of land has been sufficiently studied and conforms to the overall future vision of the county. This is done by defining and categorizing all uses into general categories.

Public Survey

~~When asked about how important it is to maintain the rural character of the county, residents gave an average response of 4.6 out of 5. Along the same lines, when asked about which topics need the most attention in the county, the first priority was farmland preservation (40.7% of responses). The third priority was land use compatibility and enforcement at 30.1%. When asked about what would be most important to them when moving, residents responded that large lots with space between neighbors would be a second priority, and nearby open space agriculture would be a third at 20.4% an 18.6% of responses respectively. When asked about infill development into existing municipalities instead of expanding outward into open lands, residents indicated a slight preference at 3.7 out of five.~~

Use the new data from the Community Survey and the Points Housing Survey

Land Use Designations

These separate land use designations will be used on the future land use map. Each designation has its own purpose and limitations. These designations are not zoning districts, but are the basis for zoning districts. Many different zoning districts can exist within a single general plan land use designation. The designations to be shown on the Future Land Use Map are as follows:

Low Density Residential - The purpose of this designation is to promote and preserve single family large lot pattern. This is normally accompanied by limited keeping of animals and some agricultural practices. Lot sizes in this designation are normally at a minimum 43,560 square feet. Anything below this lot size should be encouraged to locate closer to other municipalities in transition areas. Since uses in this designation are rural in nature and tend to be isolated, services from public utilities are limited or are not

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available. Depending on the location, sometimes flexibility can be explored if neighborhood commercial and other opportunities are kept in mind.

Agriculture - This designation is for the maintenance and protection of food production and related uses. This also includes agricultural protection areas. Incidental uses to agriculture are allowed as well, such as living quarters, sheds, storage etc.

Transition Area - The purpose of this designation is to ensure that development near existing municipalities can transition and annex into the municipality without complication. These areas closely coincide with municipality annexation policy plans. As part of a county development review in these areas, municipalities should be involved in the process, whether through actual review or by the reviewing of existing city plans and ensuring that development conforms to those plans. Some areas within these transition areas are already serviced with municipal utilities and may be able to develop at a higher density than elsewhere in the county.

Industrial - This designation is for the manufacturing, assembly, storage, and shipping of raw materials and other activities that support the economic base. Uses should be subject to approval and have no vested rights to develop in an industrial manner. Industrial uses should be regulated in a manner that adequately mitigates any negative externalities caused by the use.

Commercial - The purpose of this designation is to provide for economic development, shopping needs, and entertainment of residents. Commercial uses should be separated into different like types. (For example, types that work within a neighborhood and those that work better along a highway). Commercial uses should be clustered together to form commercial nodes and districts that can support each other. Commercial uses should not be allowed to encroach upon residential development.

Sensitive Lands - This designation is specifically for lands that cannot be developed for any use due to any natural hazard such as flood plains, erosion, tectonic, or other hazards.

Multiple Use - This designation is for land where residential and other uses will be limited. Also to protect land and open space resources; to reduce unreasonable requirements for public utility and service expenditures through uneconomic and unwise dispersal of population; to encourage use of the land, where appropriate, for forestry, grazing, agriculture,

mining, wildlife habitat, and recreation; to avoid excessive damage to watersheds, water pollution, soil erosion, danger from brush land fires, damage to grazing, livestock raising, and to wildlife values; and, to promote the health, safety, convenience, order, prosperity, and general welfare of the inhabitants of the community. **Include Recreational Support zone language**

Public Lands - This designation includes any land under the jurisdiction of an entity that is not the county or municipality. This includes, but is not limited to, entities such as the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, and The National Park Service. The county does not directly control these lands, but should be included in decisions regarding their use and access.

Tribal Lands - This designation is for land that is owned and controlled by the Navajo Nation and other groups. This land is not regulated by the county but can have a direct impact on the county as a whole.

Future Land Use Map

The main tool provided in the general plan to guide policy decisions in the future is the Future Land Use Map. It is the legal basis for zoning, and takes into account the desired state of the county in the future. It also takes into account restraints such as road access, available water/sewer services, topography, significant habitats, groundwater resources, hazards, and accessibility to emergency services. Within these constraints, the core concept for the county's development directs future growth to areas where existing or planned infrastructure and services can support growth, and to locations within or adjacent to existing communities. The end goal is to produce a sustainable, well-balanced development pattern for the future.

Anticipated Changes

Demand for workforce housing for individuals will increase, and there will most likely be a desire to locate it in San Juan County. Areas like Spanish Valley will continue to grow. The rural character of the county can be preserved through infill development and the dedication of open space.

The effort to accomplish this will be working with municipalities to annex urbanized unincorporated territory. Adequate places for industrial uses can be identified and located in places that do not conflict with public lands and recreation opportunities. This is essential to make sure that residents of the county have more employment opportunities in professional fields and not just the tourism industry. Industrial uses should locate near existing utilities or pay the way to extend needed services. Public lands and multiple use designated lands will change in some form **as development continues to**

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evolve. This is being experienced as tourism accommodation has changed adding glamping and different forms of over-night rentals or primitive camping industries come to our county. The single most important factor in growth will most likely be the availability of services. Since the county does not provide services, infill will be encouraged.

Agricultural and Industrial Protection Areas

State statute requires the county general plans to “identify and consider each agriculture protection area” (17-27a-403(2) (c)). ~~Currently, the~~ county does not have any protection areas that have been registered as of 2025, however, our citizens have requested that processes and ordinances be established to add this element into our land-use ordinance. An agriculture protection area is a section of land that has a protected, vested use of an agriculture, mining, or industrial nature for a period of 20 years. By state statute, a county must appoint an advisory board that reviews requests from private property owners that want to establish a protection area. A final decision is then made by the legislative body, and the Utah Division of Agriculture and Food is notified. The county may establish their own review process and application fees by ordinance. During the 20 year period the land and use is protected from rezoning, eminent domain, nuisance claims, and state development. There are parcels within the county that could qualify as protection areas, and a way to establish and regulate them should be ~~explored~~ enacted and encouraged.

Economic Considerations

- The effect of a land-use regulation on property values can be positive or negative. Historic land use regulation by the county has not been a hindrance to property values or local economic development opportunities.
- Without a working relationship with federal and state land management agencies, the prevalence and location of public lands in San Juan could negatively impact future land use goals of the County.

Affordable Housing

According to the 2024 Points Consulting Dwelling on the Future Housing Needs and Strategy it indicated

that Utah’s voters selected “housing affordability” as their top concern in 2024. In San Juan County, housing concerns include not only affordability but also availability. Supply is limited and the region has not experienced any notable housing “booms”. Utah Developers do not perceive an incentive to build in the county, if they can build more profitable development in other areas of the state. On paper, the county is less attractive than other Utah regions due to its lack of growth, stagnant economy, high poverty rates and lack of suitable transportation corridors. Only 40% of households can afford to buy an average-priced home in the county, and in specific areas of the county, this percentage is even lower. Short-term rentals, while encouraged in the county, they have reduced the availability of long-term residential homes in the County. For example, in Spanish Valley, 63% of homes are short-term rentals where in Blanding and La Sal, short-term housing stock is much lower at 3.3% and 5.6% respectively.

Without government assistance, the study points out that the county’s population could decline to around 12,600 by 2040. Overall, the study recommends that the county touch on issues related to zoning and housing density, eligibility to access state funds, additional resources for development, repurposing existing structures, and coordinating with the local tribes for additional housing.

Water Use and Preservation

In accordance with Utah Code 17-27a-401 the county must develop a water use and preservation element that is integrated into this general plan. This element should include the effects of permitted development on water demand and infrastructure, methods for reducing water demand and per capita consumption for future development, methods for reducing water demand and per capita consumption for existing development and opportunities to modify operations to eliminate or reduce conditions that waste water.

San Juan County is limited in water availability including that of its infrastructure and continues to work with our special service districts throughout the county as well as an emphasis of this general plan encouraging development to take place closer to those cities and towns that have available infrastructure that can be utilized as a form of conservation.

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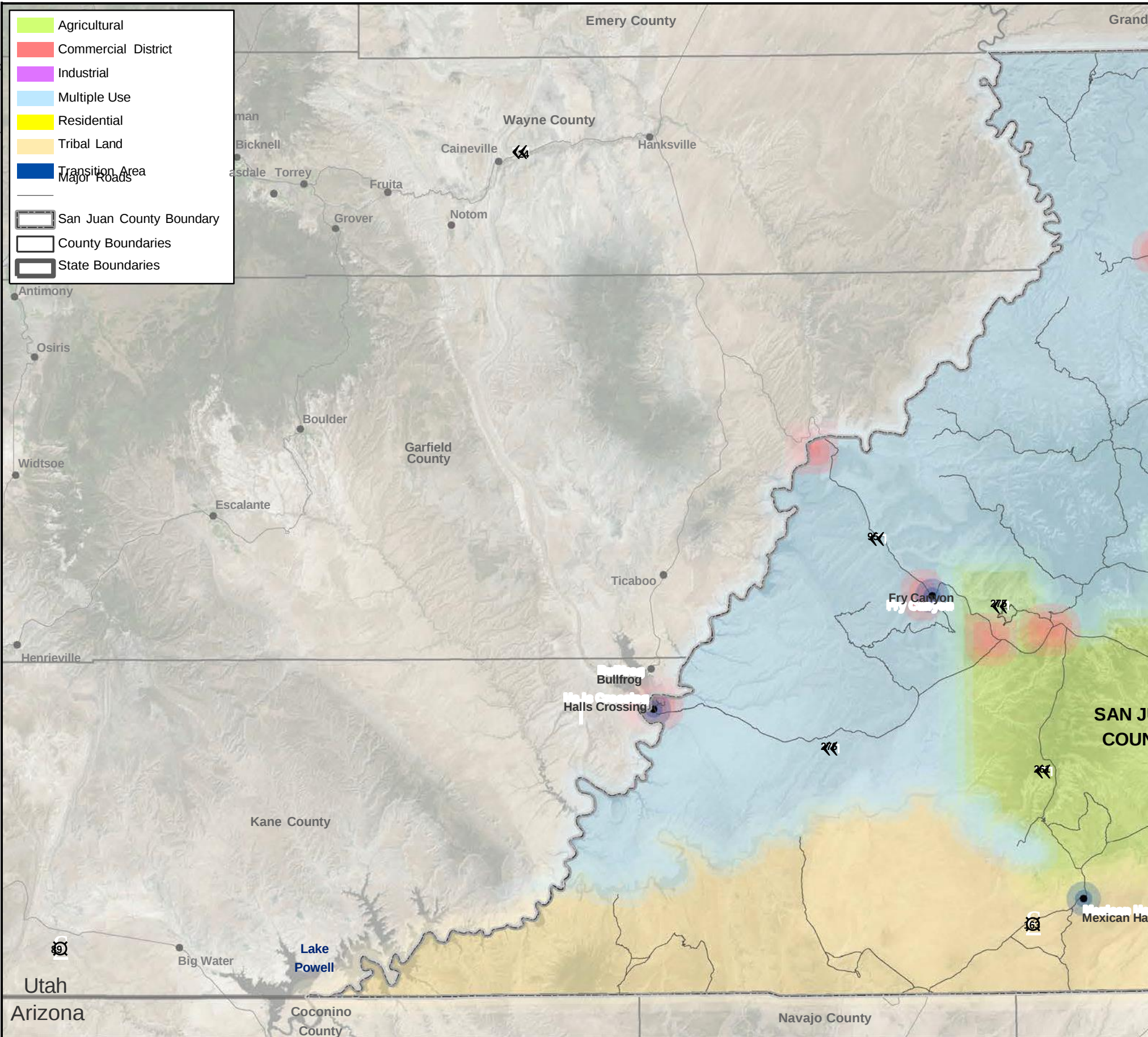
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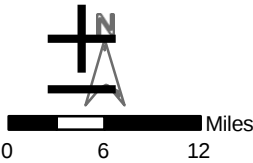
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Land Use Goals & Policies

San Juan County will seek to facilitate orderly and fiscally responsible growth by:

- Supporting the creation of agricultural and industrial protection areas by defining in county ordinances a process of how a private property owner may establish one.
- Using multiple use lands wisely and creating a trails master plan.
- Not permitting development in hazardous areas, such as floodplains and hill sides.
- Encouraging cluster developments to preserve open space and connect to public infrastructure systems.
- Exploring the option of transfers of development rights to protect multiple use lands.
- Working with landowners to obtain conservation easements.
- Requiring residential development to locate within existing communities or within areas where services are provided at a level that will meet the demand of development.
- Work with other governmental agencies to implement the resource management section of this plan.
- Ensuring that commercial developments are located near existing communities and are part of a planned use development or traditional neighborhood.
- Ensuring that commercial and industrial development locate near existing utilities or pay for the extension of services needed themselves. (Some tools to make this more achievable are impact fees and development agreements).
- Industrial uses will only be permitted in locations where incompatible uses are unlikely to encroach upon the industrial use and make it a nuisance.
- Only approve zone changes and development applications that conform to the future land use map of this plan.
- Support the creation of other area plans, like the Spanish Valley plan, when growth pressure begins to mount. (Especially if the location intends to incorporate in the future).
- Participate with entities like the Inland Port and other State and Federal resources to encourage and implement affordable housing projects within the County.





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