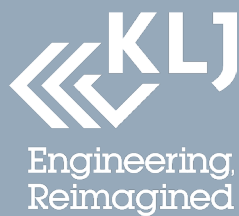




Ouray County Master Plan

DECEMBER 2024

prepared for the
Ouray County Planning Commission
Land Use Department
111 Mall Road
Ridgeway, Colorado 81432





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INTRODUCTION

As Ouray County moves forward in the 21st Century, the words found in the original Ouray County Zoning Regulations of 1971 and expanded upon in the introduction to the 1999 Master Plan are still applicable today;



The area encompassed by Ouray County is a quiet land of awesome beauty, even today nearly untouched and unspoiled ... It ranges from the magnificent San Juan Mountains on the south across the Uncompahgre Valley, and on in to the rolling foothills and mesas covering the northern parts of the county. Ouray County, then, possesses a rare combination of assets; a priceless and varied natural environment, ranging from unique wilderness to more hospitable areas, and a population which is aware of the value and delicacy of the physical setting surrounding it.

Ouray County is now becoming known to people from all areas as a winter and summer recreation area ... In the face of such potential popularity, how can the unique environment for living, including the delicate natural environment, be protected? How can the County accommodate the inevitable development pressures, without letting these pressures negate or even destroy the unique and irreplaceable qualities that attracted them in the first place?



The questions being asked then are still relevant to this day. Building on our history and incorporating results of a public survey and public comments of the people of Ouray County, this update of the Master Plan for Ouray County seeks to encompass and expand upon these original precepts.

As we go forward, we need to anticipate and prepare for new challenges to our most precious resource, our natural environment. As in the previous Master Plan, there are pressures due to increasing people, both residents and tourists, as well as development pressures on our open spaces. Changes to our natural environment present new challenges that we need to be ready to address. We need a resilient County (people and infrastructure) that can care for its residents and proactively prepare and react to the negative impacts on our natural environment.

Purpose

This Master Plan is a comprehensive, long-range guide, prepared by the Ouray County Planning Commission with significant input from members of the public garnered through public work sessions, a county-wide survey, and multiple town hall events. The purpose of a county Master Plan is to assist in making decisions that affect the physical, cultural and socioeconomic development of Ouray County. It is important to note that the Ouray County Land Use Code references the Master Plan over 25 times.

MASTER PLAN

The physical development of the County has both direct as well as indirect effects on issues including but not necessarily limited to, property rights, natural resources, community values, and property values. This Master Plan seeks a balance that respects these concerns in an effort to maintain the County resident's quality of life. Therefore, it is the intent of this Master Plan to allow proposed development that is responsible and consistent with the vision, objectives, and strategies set forth in this Plan.

It is also the purpose of this Plan is to facilitate cooperation between the municipalities, state and federal agencies, as well as regional partners, and the County on matters of mutual concern.

The Master Plan provides a realistic and achievable image of the County, both present and future, through a framework of identified objectives and strategies. The objectives provide more general statements reflecting the desires of county residents regarding the use of land and lay the groundwork for zoning considerations and the land use decision-making process. The strategies provide more specific pathways considered appropriate to attain the outcomes envisioned by the identified objectives.

Legal Authority

Under the Colorado Revised Statutes counties have the ability and responsibility to establish "master plans" to guide the physical development of the county. (See C.R.S. 30-28-106(1)).

Master Plan Process

In 2022, the Planning Commission, with the support of the County Commissioners, undertook the process to review and update the 1999 Master Plan with a specific emphasis on addressing new circumstances that had occurred over the 22 years. While the future is unforeseeable, defining a community's values and establishing *guidelines to assist in* adherence to those values, is the foundation for building a future community with both structural and sustainable integrity. ([Appendix A, page A-18.](#))





Overarching Vision

The 1999 Master Plan set forth the overarching vision for Ouray County that is retained in its entirety in this new Master Plan.

The overall goal (*now referred to as “vision”*) of the Ouray County Master Plan is to allow gradual, long-term population and economic growth in Ouray County in a manner that does not harm the County’s irreplaceable scenic beauty, wildlife, air and water resources, and other environmental qualities and that does not unduly burden the County’s residents or its governments.

To better define and implement this overall vision of this Plan, a series of objectives and strategies are set forth under **four pillars** that collectively support the high quality of life envisioned by the County’s inhabitants:

1. **Natural Environment**
2. **Land Use**
3. **Infrastructure**
4. **Economic Development**

These four pillars are being used for organizational purposes only and no weight or priority is being implied or inferred.



NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT

Ouray County residents have always been aware of the natural resources that surround them, including water, timber, minerals, clean air, wildlife, and scenery. In the past, these resources have been utilized to support mining, ranching, tourism, and the associated businesses that make up our communities. A balance between the protection of the natural environment and individual property rights must be considered. The natural characteristics of Ouray County include amazing rock formations, waterfalls, mountain streams, hot springs, beautiful and rare plants and animals, a wide variety of terrain, snowscapes, and scenic majestic vistas. The utilization of natural resources may have an impact on the environment; however, if properly planned, such utilization need not result in degradation of those attributes that continue to be of value to Ouray County residents.

The physical development of the County has direct and indirect effects on property rights, natural resources and property values. This Master Plan seeks a balance that respects these concerns in an effort to maintain the County residents' quality of life. Therefore, it is the intent to encourage only that development which is responsible and consistent with the vision, objectives, and strategies set out in this Plan.

Water

Water is an essential resource to Ouray County, necessary to maintain the natural environment, support agricultural production, and to meet both current as well as future municipal and domestic water needs. Most of the annual precipitation in Ouray County drains into the Uncompahgre River, where it flows northwesterly to the Gunnison River and then into the Colorado River. A notable portion of this annual precipitation falls as snow, and the combined runoff, rain and melting snow provide a significant source of water necessary to support the natural environment and agriculture as well as our current and future municipal and domestic water needs. Findings from the Ouray County multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan (MHMP) form the basis of this statement.

The 2016 Upper Uncompahgre Basin Water Supply Protection and Enhancement Project Report/Phase I Studies (*available at the County Water Resources website or upon request*) has formed the basis of the discussion of water by the Planning Commission. The findings from the UUB report are found in [Appendix A, page A-3](#). The UUB has the same boundary as Ouray County.

Climate

Weather and climate are as much a part of the natural environment as the mountains, plants, and wildlife of Ouray County. It is a land of extremely varied elevation, terrain, and climate. In 37 miles and 4,717 feet of elevation gain from the unincorporated township of Colona (6,365 feet) on the northern boundary of the county to Red Mountain Pass (11,080 feet) on the southern boundary, precipitation, snowfall, and temperature vary dramatically.



Ouray County, together with the City of Ouray, the Town of Ridgway, and the Log Hill Fire Protection District adopted a local multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan that seeks to include as part of its hazard identification and risk assessment process, the risk to communities in Ouray County of an observed increase of 2.0 degrees Fahrenheit in the State-wide annual average temperature over the last 50 years.

The MHMP lists 4 specific changes associated with the increase in the average temperatures State-wide: daily minimum temperatures warmed more than daily maximum temperatures during the past 30 years; snowpack as measured by April 1 snow-water equivalent has been mainly below average since 2000 in all of Colorado's river basins, but no long-term (30 year, 50 year) declining trends have been detected; timing of snowmelt and peak runoff has shifted to earlier in the spring by one to four weeks across Colorado's river basins over the past 30 years; and a trend toward more severe soil-moisture drought conditions over the past 30 years. See MHMP section 2.1.1 for more details. The MHMP concludes that these changes can impact communities in Ouray County since the County relies on winter snowpack and spring runoff for tourism, water supply and to reduce drought. The MHMP is also concerned that these findings can increase the risk of wildfires, avalanches, and drought.

Recognizing the threats of climate change, Ouray County participated with San Miguel County in a project to develop a regional Climate Action Plan (CAP) that is intended to act as a "roadmap for continued collaborative actions" that can move the counties to a "more sustainable future." The CAP posits that *"...because much of our livelihood relies on our interactions with our shared landscape, these changes [in snowfall, wildfire frequency, and temperature] endanger us all."*

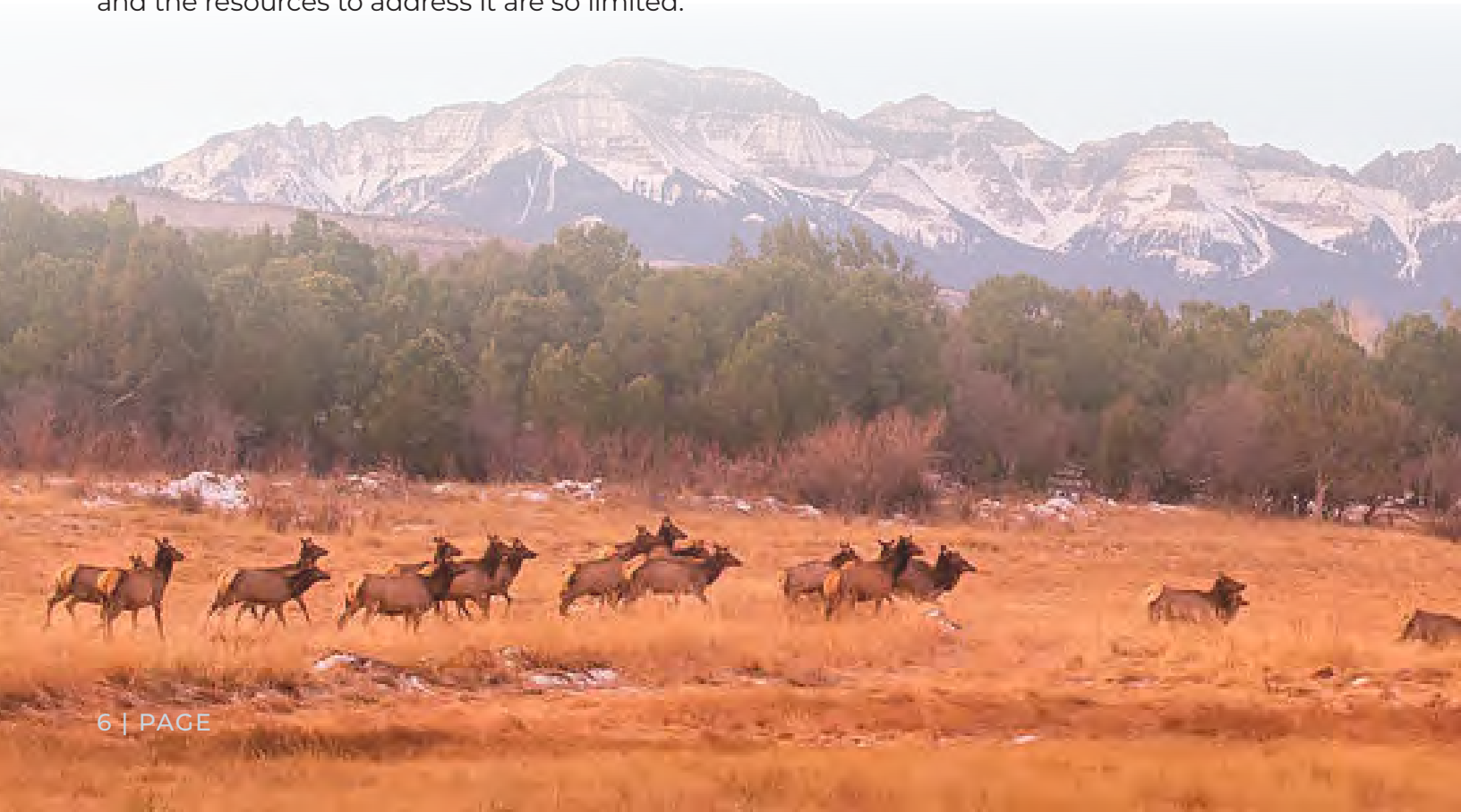
The CAP offers various actions that may be pursued or undertaken by local government policy makers, organizations, businesses and individuals to contribute toward the goals of a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and a 90% reduction by 2050. While the primary objective of the CAP is GHG emissions reduction, the Plan identifies other "co-benefits" that can be derived from successful implementation.

Wildlife and Plants

Ouray County is fortunate to have a rich and varied flora and fauna. This Master Plan recognizes the value residents place upon wildlife and plant resources for enjoyment and the economic impact that is generated by activities such as hiking, 4-wheeling, sightseeing, hunting and photography. Any degradation of wildlife and plant habitats leads to the inevitable disappearance of wildlife and plant species. This resultant loss of environmental diversity weakens the ecosystem as a whole and may displace wildlife or remove certain plant or animal species entirely.

Some of the wildlife species in Ouray County are threatened or endangered. The habitat of some wildlife species can be impacted by certain human activities such as recreation, development, and traffic. In order to reduce or mitigate these impacts, it is important to understand the habitat locations and patterns of movement. For example, during the summer, some animals live in the alpine ecosystem, but during winter they move down to lower elevations. There is a critical need to maintain open spaces and corridors to allow these wildlife movements. Other wildlife impacts may come from domestic animals, especially dogs, and from outdoor recreation activities.

Both native and non-native plants in Ouray County are a significant environmental concern. Environmental health through a return to a healthy plant community is important for producers, pollinators, recreational opportunities and wildlife enthusiasts. Ouray County is home to significant biodiverse areas which require preservation, as well as several areas which require the continued suppression and/or elimination of noxious weeds. There is a minimum of 30 identified noxious weeds confirmed to exist in Ouray County. According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, noxious weeds cost millions of dollars per year in damage to the environment and in maintenance costs. Under the Colorado Noxious Weed Act, local government is required to enforce the law on both public and private property, and managing noxious weeds is required by all citizens. However, this unfunded mandate is challenging to accomplish because the scale of the problem is so large, and the resources to address it are so limited.





Scenery

Ouray County has some of the most unique and beautiful scenery in Colorado. The collective visual richness of the terrain, plants, and animals in Ouray County is a panoramic kaleidoscope of scenic vistas throughout the County. The diversity of the landscape ranges from jagged high mountain peaks and mesas to river valleys and irrigated fields. Preservation of this visual beauty is of utmost importance to the citizens of the County. Citizens that participated in the development of this Master Plan made it clear that any future development should not hinder, impair, or destroy Ouray County's scenic beauty.

In 1986 the County adopted Visual Impact Regulations with the stated purpose of preserving the scenic beauty, rural setting and character, and the dominating influence of the natural environment of Ouray County. The expressed intent of these regulations was to minimize the visual impacts of both individual structures and development as a whole, so that the development would not compete with the existing physical environment for the viewer's attention, thereby preserving the unique physical environment that has traditionally characterized and defined the County. See the map in [Appendix A, page A-5](#) for the area protected by these regulations and Section 9 of the





Land Use Code for the scope of compliance, criteria and standards. (Note: *This language is taken directly from Section 9.1 of the Visual Impact Regulations in the Land Use Code.*)

Another aspect of the scenic beauty of Ouray County is the beauty of night skies which are to a great degree untainted by light introduced by human development. There are existing *dark sky regulations* in the Land Use Code that effectively reduce, but do not altogether eliminate, the effects of nighttime light pollution. It is noted that the Town of Ridgway has already been designated as a “dark sky community” by DarkSky International.

Another regulatory tool available to the County to address a variety of future development pressures are what are referred to as “1041 Regulations”. 1041 regulations, as detailed in the Colorado Revised Statutes, provide local governments the ability to identify, designate, and regulate areas and activities of State interest through a local permitting process. The Ouray County Planning Commission recommends investigating the possible adoption of 1041 Regulations and how they might benefit the County and support the overall vision, objectives, and strategies detailed in this Plan.

The goal of the Colorado 1041 regulations is to ensure that development projects align with local priorities and values, while minimizing adverse impacts on the environment, public health, and safety. Some local governments use 1041 powers to regulate socio-economic, land use, and environmental impacts resulting from designated areas and activities of State interest. The 1041 regulations need to be adopted prior to any initial development process.



NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Natural Resources

Objective

To protect and manage our natural resources in a manner that is both environmentally sound and protects private property rights.

Strategies

1. Continue to allow underground mining as a use-by-right in the Alpine Zone. It is recognized that this activity is highly regulated by both state and federal agencies. However, the County may consider additional regulations requiring local review for all permits to determine whether the operation is in compliance.
2. Continue to regulate, by Special Use Permit, open pit mining, milling, heap leach operations and other mineral and non-mineral, fuel and extractive operations within the County.
3. Continue to review and monitor that all commercial and industrial activities occurring in the County are in compliance with local, state, and federal regulations for air and water quality.
4. Evaluate and consider for adoption policies, incentives, and technologies that encourage energy and water conservation, and sustainable energy development.
5. Evaluate and consider for adoption "1041" regulations (C.R.S. §24-65.1-101 et seq.), commonly called "Areas and Activities of State Interest."
6. Continue to maintain strong wildfire mitigation regulations and encourage fire protection and water supply entities to work proactively to make further improvements for fire safety, including the possible creation of a unified fire protection district or entity that covers the entire County.
7. Review and update the Land Use Code Outdoor Lighting Regulations to reflect current technology and terminology.
8. Support local efforts to have Ouray County designated as a "dark sky community" by the Dark Sky International.
9. Consider water projects that have benefits across agricultural, municipal, domestic, environmental, and recreational uses.
10. Consider and evaluate options to address the impacts of a possible future reduction in water supplies across the County.

Visually Significant Areas

Objective

To protect and preserve visually significant and sensitive areas of Ouray County that provide the scenic backdrops and vistas that all residents and visitors of Ouray County enjoy.

Strategies

1. Maintain and continue to enforce strong visual impact regulations.
2. Develop and implement strategies for the protection and preservation of critical scenic vistas.
3. Evaluate and consider for adoption the programs and incentives that encourage the placement of land into conservation easements and other protective status while preserving public access to public lands.
4. Evaluate and continue to monitor existing regulations for the protection of open space in Ouray County.
5. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives for Planned Unit Developments to exceed the current minimum open space requirement as set forth in the Land Use Code.

Wildlife and Plant Habitat

Objective

To protect all native species and habitat types currently found in Ouray County and maintain the continued viability of healthy and diverse wildlife and plant habitats.

Strategies

1. With the assistance of Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), identify and protect: habitats of endangered species; species of special concern; migration corridors; breeding, spawning and birthing areas; wetland and riparian areas; important seasonal habitats; and those habitats supporting a high diversity of wildlife species, and other high quality and significant habitats.





2. Collect or obtain current maps and information resources of significant wildlife and plant habitat areas. If significant habitat loss could occur, additional wildlife impact mitigation or other local regulatory measures may be required, or a proposed development may be denied.
3. Develop and implement zoning regulations as well as incentives that protect and preserve significant wildlife and plant habitats.
4. Evaluate and consider for adoption programs and incentives that encourage the placement of land into conservation easements and other protective status, while preserving public access to public lands.
5. Continue to reduce the proliferation of noxious weeds utilizing approved methods that comply with federal and state laws and local regulations.
6. Evaluate and consider for adoption regulations that would limit the impacts that domestic animals within approved Planned Unit Developments have on area wildlife. Any future program would integrate and support the efforts of Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).
7. Review the results of the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) study when available to consider potential additional actions or strategies.
8. Develop working relationships with CPW and other governmental agencies and stakeholders to support the continued viability of native wildlife and plant life.
9. Encourage wildlife-friendly fencing across the County based upon CPW voluntary programs and standards.
10. Continue to collaborate with Federal and State agencies and non-profit organizations to clean polluted waters, restore native plant or wildlife habitats, and protect riparian area fens.



LAND USE

CONTEXT

Ouray County is made up of diverse landscape and topography. Forty-seven percent of the land in Ouray County is under the management of state or federal entities. Privately owned land varies widely in terms of the suitability for practical development. Many of these parcels are not close to existing Planned or attendant infrastructure. As a matter of public concern, expansion of urban development into rural areas is an issue because of the increased costs of County services (e.g., emergency medical services, fire protection, sheriff services and road and bridge maintenance), as well as the visual impact and overall environmental impact.

Historical Roots

The Nuche, or Ute people, inhabited the Rocky Mountains by the 1500s. Ouray County, the Gunnison Valley, the Uncompahgre Plateau, and most of the northern San Juan Mountains were home to the Tabeguache (later, Uncompahgre) Utes. Spanish explorers came through Ouray County in the late 1700s and traded with the Tabeguache Utes.

The 1858–1859 Colorado Gold Rush resulted in hundreds of prospectors seeking gold in the Colorado Rockies, and the US government started to dislodge Native Americans from the eastern Rockies. The Utes were pushed to the west and Chief Ouray signed the Conejos treaty of 1863, which gave the US Government lands east of Gunnison and the Utes the Colorado land to the west, which included the San Juan Mountains. However, that treaty and the Ute Treaty of 1868 were not respected by both sides; the Utes ranged beyond the reservation and gold and silver miners prospected on Ute lands. The Brunot Agreement in 1873 took 3.7 million acres from the Ute reservation and opened the San Juan Mountains to miners and homesteaders. Note that although the Brunot Agreement in 1873 forced the Utes out of the 3.7 million acre Brunot Area, more recently (2008, 2017), Ute Tribes have signed agreements with the State of Colorado that detail separate Tribal rights within the Brunot Area to hunting, fishing, and wildlife law enforcement. Ouray County was established on January 18, 1877, after gold had been found near what is now the City of Ouray. The city, originally called Uncompahgre, was platted and incorporated in 1876 and had 400 residents by winter. Otto Mears constructed a toll road in 1883 between Ouray and Ironton and railroads were also soon constructed. By 1890 the County's population was 6510 and gold and silver mining were going strong.

The mining industry declined in the early 20th century, but tourists began to be attracted to the area's hot springs and scenery. Mining became important again in the 1940s to support the WW2 effort and active mines continued through the late 1970's. In the 1980's, the pollution from the mines became an issue.

Agriculture

Agricultural uses within Ouray County are important physical, environmental, cultural, aesthetic, and economic assets to both urban and rural residents. In addition, preservation of these lands in large tracts is desirable to maintain the agricultural economy of the County. Development of these



agricultural properties is a matter of public concern in both the agricultural community and the residential community because of the interface between agriculture and development activities.

The open space and working landscapes associated with farming and ranching are important parts of the scenic beauty with intrinsic and incalculable values in hay meadows, bird and wildlife habitat, grazing cattle and horses, corrals and ranch buildings, and working ranch hands. For many of the County residents and visitors, these are the reasons they live in and/or visit Ouray County. The Right to Farm and Ranch Policy adopted by the County in 2001 (Ordinance No. 01-01) states that it is *not* the intent of the ordinance to require agriculture and ranch land to be “open space” by locking farm and ranch land into their existing use so that the public can continue to enjoy the scenic qualities of Ouray County. Rather, this ordinance is practical and is designed so that individual working farms or ranches desiring to continue their existing operations should receive some support from the County and the ordinance is designed to achieve that objective. The “Right to Farm Ordinance” establishes clear goals to protect the farming and ranching heritage of the County and creates a mandatory process to review and address complaints regarding agricultural activities.

According to the 2022 Agricultural Census, there are 116 active farms in the County including 8 with 1,000 or more acres in production. Today, the primary agricultural product is hay. Approximately 8,941 acres are irrigated. According to the 2016 Upper Uncompahgre Basin Water Supply Protection and Enhancement Project Report, the primary water demand in the basin is for agricultural use. This water comes primarily from the diversion structures on the main stem of the Uncompahgre River and its tributaries. Many of the agricultural operations in the County have senior water rights, which means they *generally* do not have concerns about lack of irrigation water, except for the rare occurrence of downstream calls by irrigators with even more senior water rights. (ex. Montrose & Delta (M&D) Canal).



Key agricultural issues include:

- Drought, commodity prices, production costs, and labor supply are always factors that influence the viability of agriculture.
- One of the most significant threats to the ongoing agricultural production is the potential for water rights to be sold for non-agricultural uses, and the potential for the land to be sold for non-agricultural uses. (*The State of Colorado allows water rights and mineral rights to be separated from property “surface rights.”*)
- A related issue is the anticipated transition of agricultural operations as current farming or ranching owners sell, retire, or pass away. Potential outcomes of this are the sale of water rights or land as noted in the previous issue.

Rural Character

Open space, whether agricultural land or native landscapes, is a key factor of rural character throughout the non-municipal part of the County. The often-used term “open space” includes the ideas or concepts of low density, large land tracts, preservation of low density or open space around the municipalities, and clustering of residences. Inherent in this term is the desire to have the natural landscape be the dominant character even when there are “clusters” of human development. When considering appropriate development, the cost of infrastructure and capacity to provide public services are critical components to determining project suitability.

Rural Development

Ouray County comprises approximately 542 square miles of land, or almost 347,000 acres. Approximately 9,237 acres of land in the unincorporated county are available for subdivision beyond what is allowed by state statute or what is commonly referred to as the “35-acre rule.” Ouray County land use regulations allow residential development as well as limited commercial uses



through a “Special Use Permit” process. Proposed development near the City of Ouray and Town of Ridgway is regulated through applicable zoning provisions, overlay zones (i.e., *Urban Growth Management Area or UGMA and Area of Influence or AOI*), and intergovernmental agreements.

County Approved Subdivision (PUD)

Ouray County allows the subdivision of parcels through a “PUD” process in three zoning districts (North Mesa, South Mesa, South Slope), comprising approximately 9,237 acres (2.6% of the entire county). Parcels in these zoning districts may be subdivided into what is referred to as “1-per-13” density through a Limited PUD application process, or “1-per-6” density through a Regular PUD process. Based upon current zoning and existing vested development rights, there is the potential for approximately 800 additional “units,” or lots, available in these three zoning districts.

The earliest recorded subdivisions in Ouray County preceded the development of land use and zoning regulations. The County saw its greatest growth in the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s. During that time period, a large percentage of the County’s subdivisions were approved and developed (ex. *Loghill Village, Fairway Pines, Dallas Meadows, Idlewild, Elk Meadows, etc.*). In subsequent years, the division of land for development in the unincorporated County has slowed to a few development applications per year.

35-Acre Zoning/Subdivision

Approximately 98% of the land in Ouray County is zoned “1-per-35,” meaning that no local government approval is required when subdividing land into parcels of 35 acres or greater in size (i.e., *the “35-acre rule”*). With Statutory Subdivisions, the County has limited oversight regarding size of parcels, location of parcels, driveway development, location of homes, or location of utilities. Private individuals have in the past, and continue to, acquire various size parcels for the purpose of developing new home sites. Currently, there are approximately 117,000 acres of land in Ouray County that qualify for 1-per-35 subdivision, with a potential of an additional 3,350 home sites. [Appendix A, page A-9 to page A-12](#) illustrates the development density and potential additional rural residential growth.

Non-Residential Uses

Ouray County allows a limited number of non-residential (i.e., “commercial”) uses via a Special Use Permit Process. Non-residential land uses outside the City and the Town are limited to uses allowed by right such as farming, ranching, home occupations, non-commercial camping, state run campgrounds on federal lands, and other uses that may be allowed through the Special Use Permit process or local regulations. Commercial uses allowed by Special Use Permit vary by zoning district and include activities such as: bed & breakfast, commercial equestrian, guest ranch, livery or horse rental, sand and gravel operations, and temporary uses limited to 180-days per calendar-year.

Intergovernmental Relationships and Agreements

The City of Ouray and the Town of Ridgway are municipalities with their own recently adopted Master Plans that address the land use within their municipal boundaries. A significant part of the way land use is intended to be managed in Ouray County is defined by the Intergovernmental Agreements or *IGA’s* between the Ouray County and the municipalities.

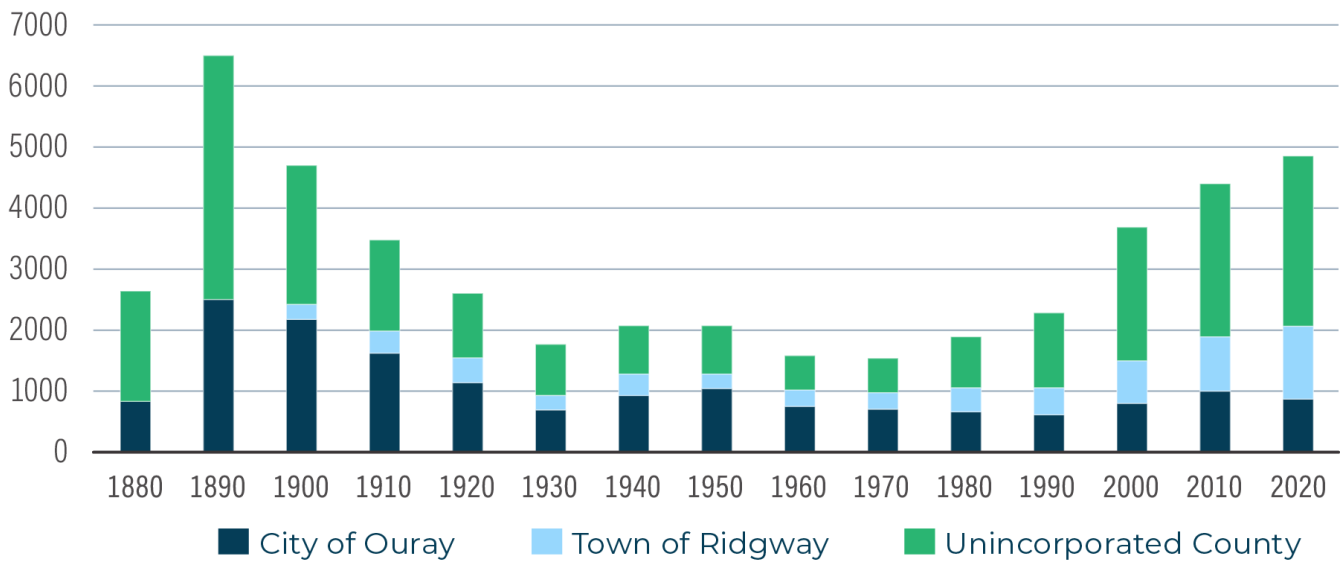
These current IGA’s support the concept of urban scale development (including that for most non-residential uses) occurring in the municipalities where utilities are readily available while the

County helps to maintain open space around the municipalities and manages development in the remainder of the County to maintain the scenic beauty and rural character that is so desired by the citizens of the County.

Population and Housing

From 1970 to the present, the County has seen modest continual growth. The 2020 Census count showed a population of 4,874. As demonstrated in [Figure 1](#), the population growth of the last few decades has been more due to population growth outside Ridgway and Ouray. For the last four decades the rural population has exceeded the population living in the municipalities.

FIGURE 1. HISTORICAL URBAN-RURAL POPULATION DISTRIBUTION



Ouray County’s population distribution is dominated by the older age groups. (See details in [Appendix A, Figure A-2 on page A-6.](#)) As of 2023, nearly 67% of the County’s population is age 40 or older, and over 49% is age 55 or older. For comparison, approximately 47% of Colorado’s population is 40 or older, and nearly 28% is 55 or older. Since the 2020 Census, Ouray County has continued to see a slow but steady increase in population. Anecdotal information suggests that the COVID pandemic motivated people to visit as well as move to Ouray County. The most recent Census estimates suggest the population of 5,176 in 2023. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) produces population projections for each county in the state. The most recent projections suggest Ouray County will continue to see modest growth, reaching 5,203 by 2030, 5,460 by 2040, and 5,802 by 2050.

The residents of Ouray County desire affordable, attainable and varied housing options for all segments of the population. Affordable and attainable housing units are becoming more scarce as population growth continues. Only by ensuring the availability of housing for a diverse and varied population will Ouray County be able to maintain a socially and economically balanced community. The public engagement responses to a question on housing for Ouray County indicated strong support for the County to be involved in addressing housing issues.



During Planning Commission work sessions, it was evident that County efforts should support housing so that people who work within the County have an opportunity to live in the County instead of having to commute from Montrose or farther afield. Ouray County Commissioners have already committed to a focus on “affordable housing” which, according to the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), “is housing which costs 30% or less of the household’s gross annual income.” The Ouray (City) Housing Needs Assessment completed in January 2024 illustrates that the major average sales price per square foot has more than doubled over the last 10 years. It concludes that “escalating home prices have put ownership increasingly out of reach for local residents.”

The same study concluded that there is a need for 270 workforce housing units countywide by 2032. The Region 10 Mind the Gap study completed in 2022 indicated that there was an approximate increase in single family home prices of 120% between 2015 and 2021, while the increase in average annual pay increased approximately 30%.

The study highlighted the issue that there is a capital gap for housing that serves families and individuals making anywhere from 60% to 140% of the area median income for Ouray County. Traditional housing finance options are available to serve the market rate housing for households making 160% of the area median income.

Hazards and Emergency Management

Ouray County completed an update of Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP) in 2019 and is currently updating this document. The County has a full-time Emergency Manager who, along with other responsibilities, actively pursues efforts to reduce the impacts of hazards identified in the plan. See [Appendix A, page A-6](#) for a summary of the overall threat assessment of hazards identified in the 2019 MHMP. The hazards of greatest concern are flooding, rockfalls and landslides, wildland fire, and severe winter weather. The Planning Commission identified drought as another hazard that is of greatest concern to them.

The concern regarding future possible drought conditions requires consideration of and planning for the potential of a major exercise of water rights by the lower basin states to the Colorado River Compact of 1922. Although, as discussed on [page 4](#), water supply for municipal and domestic uses is generally considered adequate for the foreseeable future, a major exercise of water rights by the lower basin states could impact that water availability.

Other significant impacts from the top-rated hazards include:

- Flood damage to development near creeks and areas prone to flooding from plugged creeks or culverts, as well as blocked/washed out roads.
- Blocked roads and property damage from landslides or rockfalls, primarily in the vicinity of the City of Ouray.
- Potentially major property damage and loss of life from wildland fires, as well as secondary impacts due to loss of tourism revenue after major wildland fire events. Limited evacuation routes for certain wildfire fire scenarios are an especially significant concern.
- Severe winter weather impacts include blocked roads, property damage, and loss of life from avalanches. Severe events can also lead to transportation and commerce disruptions.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Currently, Ouray County collaborates on land use-related issues with the municipalities of Ouray and Ridgway through IGAs or *Intergovernmental Agreements*. Each municipality has developed and adopted their own unique master plan or comprehensive plan to guide and manage their individual growth. Of importance to all residents are the land use decisions that may be made by



the municipalities and the County. These decisions can impact development patterns as well as the natural environment.

Throughout the planning process for this Master Plan, additional opportunities for collaboration and partnership have been discussed. Because 47% of the land in Ouray County is under the management of state or federal entities, potential collaboration includes, but is not necessarily limited to, agreements with the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Potential collaboration may also be to support attainable housing initiatives and to support ongoing assessment and protection of wildlife and plant habitats.

LAND USE OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Agriculture

Objective

To encourage the continued use of lands for agricultural productivity and support the right to farm and ranch.

Strategies

1. Ranching and farming should remain a use-by-right within specific land use zones except as restricted or modified when a change in land use is granted by the County.
2. Continue to refine, monitor, implement, and enforce the right to farm and ranch regulations that protect the agricultural community by ensuring the right to continue agricultural activities.
3. Develop and implement regulations and a process that creates incentives for a landowner to develop the land in a manner that conserves productive agricultural lands.
4. Maintain existing, or consider new or revised, intergovernmental agreements with the Town of Ridgway, the City of Ouray, and areas of future incorporation that would maintain irrigated fields and low-density development surrounding each municipality in exchange for establishing and maintaining urban growth boundaries.



5. Evaluate and consider for adoption programs and incentives that encourage the placement of land into conservation easements and other protective status while preserving public access to public lands.
6. Develop and implement a regional agricultural economic development plan in conjunction with the surrounding counties to promote agricultural activities.
7. Consider regulations that require developers to survey and designate all irrigation ditches, return flow ditches and drainage ditches located within the boundaries of any development plan and designate access to such ditches and surrounding irrigated fields.
8. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives and amendments to the Land Use Code that keep or augment existing water rights within the County.

Resource Development

Objective

Manage resources and resource development in a manner that is both environmentally sound and protects private property rights, and prioritize development of sustainable energy resources.

Strategies

1. Explore and actively pursue opportunities to support sustainable energy development at a scale that maintains the scenic beauty and rural character of Ouray County without unreasonably impacting the natural environment.
2. Support geothermal and similar sustainable energy development at a household scale, so long as it does not impact the natural environment, the scenic beauty, or the rural character of Ouray County.
3. Continue to maintain and enforce strict “High Alpine” development regulations to minimize potential conflicts between residential uses of patented mining claims and active, past, and future mining operations.
4. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives and technologies that encourage development that promotes conservation of energy, water, and clean electric generation.



Rural Character

Objective

To maintain the unique rural character of Ouray County.

Strategies

1. Develop and implement zoning and incentives to maintain low density on large tracts of land. Where appropriate, direct growth toward areas that are already developed (City, Town, Log Hill) or that otherwise clearly support the vision and objectives of this Plan.
2. Encourage build out in existing Planned unit developments.
3. Create open space or low-density development areas around the town, city and future incorporated areas by intergovernmental agreements that further the objectives of this Plan.
4. Continue to encourage clustering of residential units within all Planned Unit Developments at the earliest possible stage of the application process in those areas of Ouray County where it supports the vision and objectives of this Plan.

Housing

Objective

To assure the availability of diverse housing options to meet the needs of the County.

Strategies

1. Ensure that all documents, memos, resolutions, or regulations use the term and associated definition for "Affordable Housing" as established by the Colorado Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which currently states: *"Housing costs are affordable if they represent no more than 30-percent of a household's gross income on an annual basis."*
2. Investigate various funding options, including grants, to support and maintain affordable housing in the City, Town, and County.
3. Collaborate with the City of Ouray and the Town of Ridgway to build, preserve, and maintain affordable housing.
4. Utilize deed restrictions or other legal mechanisms to ensure workforce housing is restricted to that purpose.
5. Conduct collaborative housing needs assessments every 3–5 years to stay up to date on the county's housing needs and supply, and make any relevant changes to the Land Use Code to address the needs for workforce housing, senior housing, and co-located childcare.
6. Evaluate and consider for adoption incentives that assist in development of workforce housing within proposed Planned Unit Developments.
7. Evaluate and consider for adoption regulations concerning the long-term rental of accessory apartments and dwelling units.

Rural Development

Objective (Staff proposed changes shown in green)

To manage growth related to the development of existing 35-acre parcels in the North Mesa, South Mesa, and South Slope Zones under the zoning authority of the County and future Statutory 35-acre Subdivisions (not currently regulated the County), in order to support and encourage responsible residential development in a manner that does not negatively impact the public health and safety, the natural environment, scenic beauty, or rural character of the County.

Strategies

1. Work collaboratively with the citizens in and around the Colona area to explore the possibility for additional commercial and residential development in Colona and its immediate vicinity.
2. Evaluate and consider the potential for, and the ramifications of, additional business(es) to be allowed under Ouray County's zoning regulations.
3. Evaluate and consider the adoption of applicable State statutes regarding "cluster development," which allows the potential of 2 units per 35 acres but *requires* the "clustering" of lots/residences with the intent to preserve open space, wildlife habitat, and critical areas, thereby enhancing and maintaining the rural character of lands suitable for long-range farming and ranching operations. (See [Appendix A, page A-9](#) for examples.)
4. Evaluate and consider the potential for additional accessory dwelling unit (i.e., "duplex") to be allowed/permitted where both units include deed restrictions that directly support and enhance affordable housing.
5. Evaluate and consider new/additional regulations pertaining to excavation and blasting to protect public health and safety.
6. Review and clarify regulations with respect to development in the "High Alpine" (see Section 24 of the Land Use Code).
7. Consider possibilities to incentivize developers to protect contiguous wild lands for wildlife habitat.

Collaborative Relationships

Objective

To work with other governmental entities and non-governmental organizations to collaboratively support the vision and objectives of this Plan to achieve the shared objectives.

Strategies

1. Continue to collaborate with the Town of Ridgway and the City of Ouray in refining, monitoring, evaluating, and enforcing Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA's) regarding the management of land and resources surrounding each community, including the location of urban growth boundaries and urban influence zones.



Implement Intergovernmental Agreements with the Town of Ridgway and the City of Ouray in the following manner:

- a. The County should not rezone or allow the development of any property, other than agreed upon uses, within the urban growth boundaries.
 - b. The County should support municipal annexations when the subject properties are located within the urban growth boundaries, provided all conditions of the intergovernmental agreements are satisfied.
 - c. The County and municipalities should maintain and update, when necessary, intergovernmental agreements requiring joint review of any development proposals within established urban growth boundaries and other areas of mutual concern.
2. Encourage and foster new or revised intergovernmental agreements that uphold the intent of this Plan with any areas of concentrated residential development that undertake a process of incorporation.
 3. Encourage and foster intergovernmental agreements, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements to collaborate with non-municipal organizations to support and achieve mutually beneficial objectives.
 4. Evaluate and consider Regional Collaborative Agreements that support the vision and objectives of this Plan on tourism, housing, recreation, wildfire mitigation, climate, and other issues of mutual concern.

Emergency Management

Objective

To reduce the impact of hazards and disasters to people, environment, and property to the extent feasible and where those efforts clearly support the overall vision, objectives, and strategies of this Plan.

Strategies

1. Support implementation of the Ouray County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP), Wildfire Protection Plan, and Evacuation Plan to the maximum extent feasible.
2. Seek active participation of Planning Commission representatives in all future MHMPs.
3. Support the integration of MHMP mitigation strategies into Ouray County Planning and zoning activities and decisions as well as any future updates to the Land Use Code.
4. Evaluate and consider the potential to limit development in areas where emergency services cannot be readily provided.
5. Evaluate and consider potential ways to enhance emergency services in Ouray County, including the development of site(s) for emergency helicopter landings and transfer of patients to out-of-county locations.

INFRASTRUCTURE

CONTEXT

Human habitation in this age involves a broad array of infrastructure to support it. Transportation and land use are inherently linked in most cases. Electrical power supply supports a vast array of functions that are essential to modern life. Water is essential for agriculture, domestic, and municipal uses. Communications systems are integral to our lifestyles and quality of life.

Transportation Systems

The primary purpose of a transportation network is to move people and goods within and through the County. As the amount of development and population increases, additional demand will be placed on the transportation infrastructure. It must be recognized that the transportation network strongly influences the specific uses of land and the overall pattern of development; therefore, land use and transportation Planning must be coordinated. The quality of the transportation system also impacts access to emergency services.

The primary transportation system in Ouray County is the road network, which consists of a patchwork of County roads, Forest Service roads, and private roads. A public transit service began operating in 2024 and provides limited rides to selected points within and without the County. There is at least one private landing strip in the County, but not public air service. The road network within the County includes highly diverse access methods, from highways to public trails that may not be passable at certain times of the year. Increases in traffic volumes on the primary roadway network are due to increases in through traffic, tourism, and local development.

Many of the county roads are not maintained with any frequency. In fact, the Road and Bridge Superintendent reports that under current funding and programming, unpaved roads must wait (on average) decades for new base or surface course material. Funding constraints also are a concern for the road and bridge fleet replacement. The Road and Bridge Superintendent has indicated that as fleet replacement falls farther behind, the County is nearing a point where overall higher life cycle costs will lead to higher fleet maintenance budgets just to stay operational. Another major concern is the need for updated road standards, and a review of private access issues.





Utilities

A number of entities provide utilities in Ouray County. Utility services that are currently available in various areas of the County include electricity, telephone, sewer, cable, communication towers, and water. A variety of federal and state commissions, departments, and agencies regulate utilities in Ouray County. However, land use activities, such as the location of transmission lines, the upgrading of existing facilities, and the construction of new facilities, are subject to the County's jurisdiction and approval.

The water supply companies currently providing services in Ouray County are Dallas Creek Water Company and Tri-County Water Conservancy District. It is important to note that much of Ouray County is not served by any domestic water supplier, requiring approval from the State of Colorado for a domestic well permit (i.e., *exempt well*) or, alternatively, potable water may be hauled from an off-site source. According to both existing water companies, they have adequate water supply for both current needs as well as anticipated build-out (*as stated by Town of Ridgway – Town Manager and representatives from the Tri-County Water Conservancy District*). Additionally, several of the major rural residential developments are served by public or private water supply systems.

The two municipalities each have a lagoon sanitary sewer treatment system that, according to city and town officials, is sufficient to meet their current needs, along with pending construction for a City of Ouray wastewater treatment plant with additional capacity. The remainder of the County must use onsite septic systems or what is referred to as "on-site wastewater treatment systems" ("OWTS"). County-permitted OWTS systems are limited to a maximum of 2000 gallons-per-day. Systems over 2000 gpd fall under jurisdiction of the State and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Electrical power in the County is supplied primarily through the San Miguel Power Association (SMPA), although some site level solar power systems are in use supporting "off-grid" homes. The Board of County Commissioners has expressed strong support for sustainable and renewable energy development. It is noted that there is a need to balance the strong citizen interest in protecting the high-quality scenery within the county with potential green energy development.

Communications systems continue to be a rapidly evolving technology. Systems serving Ouray County include a legacy DSL network, a backbone fiber optic network with ISP's providing internet service to mostly developed areas of the County, wireless internet services, as well as typical 4G cellular communications. In order to ensure that future communications needs are met both for commerce and for quality of life, it will be important to develop a flexible approach to supporting and regulating future communications infrastructure.



INFRASTRUCTURE OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Transportation

Objective

To promote a transportation network with adequate and diverse funding sources that allows for the orderly flow of traffic on roads in Ouray County.

Strategies

1. Developments creating the need for road improvements are expected to bear the proportional cost of such improvements.
2. If a development creates off-site roadway impacts, the mitigation of such impacts should be required. Such improvements should be considered in addition to any required on-site improvements.
3. Development that causes significant traffic impacts to overburdened roads will be discouraged unless provisions are made for necessary improvements.
4. Coordinate planning and development review efforts with the two municipalities, future incorporated areas, and adjoining counties to ensure integration and continuity of the road system and adequacy of roads in Ouray County over time.
5. Roads within new developments should be designed to facilitate safe and logical flow of traffic on, off, and, where appropriate, through the site.
6. Support the implementation of mass transit and the effect it may have on intra-county and inter-county transportation.
7. Evaluate and consider for adoption a transportation plan for roads in the County, considering citizen input.
8. Evaluate and consider amending road standards in the Land Use Code.
9. Evaluate the feasibility of accommodating non-motorized modes of transportation, including horse, pedestrian, and bicycle, in order to provide multiple modes of mobility to all segments of the population.
10. Evaluate and consider adopting “No Through Traffic” regulations that direct inter-county traffic to state and federal highways where feasible.
11. Evaluate and consider options to increase funding for road and bridge capital investment and road maintenance funding.
12. Evaluate and monitor existing regulations for public right-of-way encroachments and related roadway issues.



Utilities

Objective

To recognize the necessity for the timely development of utility facilities and the need for careful planning to minimize the potential impacts that may be associated with utility facility siting and design. In addition, due to the economic and environmental impacts created by the increased need for energy, the County will continue to strongly encourage the use and exploration of sustainable energy sources.

Strategies

1. Evaluate and consider utilities when sited so that they are as compatible as possible with surrounding land uses and the natural environment.
2. Visual impacts should be identified, and effective mitigation measures employed.
3. Access, when required for utility service facilities, should provide minimal impacts to adjoining residents and the environment and should not be used for access to new development.
4. Utility facilities siting should consider joint tower use, multi-utility corridors, and clustering where possible and deemed appropriate.
5. In addition to environmental and land use compatibility issues, the land use review process should also consider the economic, technological, operational, maintenance, and safety implications of future utility facilities.
6. Evaluate and consider for adoption revised Land Use Code regulations that support and incentivize projects related to sustainable energy. Create an expedited and prioritized process for review and possible waiver of associated application fees and costs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT

Ouray County is a rural county with incredible scenery and recreational opportunities that drive its economy. Historically, the economy has relied upon underground mining, agriculture and tourism. In recent years, mining and agriculture have declined while the economic activities of people with income derived outside the County have increased and service and retail businesses now play a more important role in the County's economy. In addition, the purchase of goods and services, including construction materials, comes primarily from nearby Montrose County. A more sustainable and diversified economy is desirable to ensure that Ouray County will not be as susceptible to seasonal cycles of a boom-and-bust economy and that traditional interests and values do not become totally displaced.

Ouray County has many natural and scenic resources that appeal to both residents and tourists alike. The City of Ouray's history as a tourist destination began at the turn of the century. Historically, the impact of the tourist industry on the County's economy has been significant. Tourism has become a year-round industry in Ouray County. It includes outdoor adventure and exploration by multiple modes, learning about the history of this fascinating place, shopping, and enjoying the thriving arts and entertainment venues.

Recent increases in tourism have resulted in concerns that the natural environment is being adversely affected and that the residents of the County are losing some of the rural, natural environment that drew them to live or stay in Ouray County. Additionally, the opportunity to make more money from short-term than from long-term rentals has resulted in a loss of available





housing. There are increasing impacts to the County on infrastructure, maintenance, and essential services such as emergency response.

While there are campgrounds and designated camping areas within the County, dispersed camping has become more common and leads to concerns about protecting the natural environment, as well as private property. There were significant public comments concerning the need for the County to consider additional commercial camping options.

The tension between “wildlife and natural resource conservation” and “the growing demand for recreational access” prompted regional visionaries to pursue the development of a coalition with the intention of “collaboratively addressing emerging issues and safeguarding areas identified as significant for conservation, working lands, and recreation access in alignment with Colorado’s 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).” The Ouray Regional Recreational & Conservation Alliance (ORRCA) was formed out of this visionary initiative.

The term “regional” is included because the coalition’s “scope responds to regional recreation, wildlife, natural resources, and agriculture at the landscape level extending beyond a single jurisdiction’s political or administrative boundaries.” Founded in June 2021, ORRCA set out to: “provide adaptive leadership to balance competing local and national demand for quality outdoor recreation opportunities and related infrastructure with conserving and enhancing our environmental integrity to support healthy ecosystems, wildlife, water resources, and Ouray County’s incredible scenic beauty.”

Its intent is to “build bridges across our jurisdictional and land ownership boundaries to plan for wildlife and natural resource conservation along with the growing demand for recreation access” by “collaboratively addressing emerging issues and safeguard areas identified as significant for conservation, working lands, and recreation access.”

A major effort spearheaded by ORRCA during the summer of 2024 was to complete a natural heritage study. The results of this effort will provide detailed information that can inform future decisions by Ouray County and other ORRCA stakeholders. It is anticipated that additional strategies will arise out of this process and future ORRCA activities, which will be reviewed by the Ouray County Planning Commission and will lead to a more complete recreation element of this Master Plan. The Planning Commission hereby reserves the recreation and tourism uses element of the Master Plan for future revisions, pursuant to C.R.S. § 30-28-106(5) and 30-28-108.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Overall Economic Development

Objective

To promote a diverse and balanced economy.

Strategies

1. Develop and implement standards that allow home-based occupations, e.g., licensed childcare, that are appropriate for the property on which they are located.
2. Encourage high quality telecommunications infrastructure in the high-density areas of Ouray County.

3. Encourage commercial and/or industrial uses to locate within the municipal boundaries.
4. Define acceptable commercial and/or industrial uses in the unincorporated areas and develop and implement standards that allow the specific uses to be approved through the special use permit process.

Tourism

Objective

To allow a diverse and balanced tourist economy that minimizes environmental and infrastructure impacts and does not adversely impact county residents.

Strategies

1. Allow the development of the services and facilities necessary to adequately support year-round tourism in a manner that minimizes impacts on the environment, infrastructure and county residents' lifestyles.
2. Develop and implement Special Use Permit regulations that allow tourist-based businesses that are appropriately located within the unincorporated areas of the County and that minimize impacts on the environment, infrastructure, and county residents' lifestyles.
3. Encourage the location of commercial, lodging, restaurant, and other tourism-based activities in the municipalities and those planned unit developments that allow for commercial uses.
4. Allow special permitted events within the County in a manner that minimizes impacts on the environment, infrastructure, and county residents' lifestyles.
5. Encourage cooperation with the Town of Ridgway and the City of Ouray to advance a common vision for tourism in the County.
6. Recognize the multi-faceted nature of tourism opportunities in Ouray County and encourage efforts to support all facets while protecting the natural environment, scenic beauty, history and historic buildings, and rural character of the County.
7. Investigate the possibility of changing county regulations to allow more commercial campgrounds where it is reasonable and minimizes impacts on the environment, infrastructure, and county residents' lifestyles. But no commercial campgrounds should be recommended in the High Alpine Area.
8. Evaluate and consider opportunities to collaborate with the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management in managing federal public lands in Ouray County in the best interests of both residents and visitors.
9. Support efforts to protect and maintain Ouray County's historical structures.



Recreation

Objective

Collaborate with regional public and private partners to preserve ecosystem health and function across working landscapes and public lands while ensuring equitable access to sustainable recreation, thereby enhancing the County's quality of life.

Strategies

1. Support efforts to identify and fulfill the conservation values and recreation opportunities defined by ORRCA or its successor in interest based on collaborative evaluation of the County's natural landscapes, waterways, wildlife habitats, and existing recreation infrastructure.
2. Identify and balance outdoor recreation opportunities and conservation values. Prioritize a comprehensive plan for the region based on data that considers wildlife, healthy land and water, climate change, high-quality recreation experiences, agriculture, and resilient local economies.
3. Support education of the public about land stewardship, responsible recreation, and cultural history.
4. Collaborate with the City of Ouray and the Town of Ridgway to identify current recreational opportunities and needs and support a county-wide recreational plan which includes the City, Town, and any future municipalities.
5. Develop strategies to maintain and conserve snowscapes and snowpack.

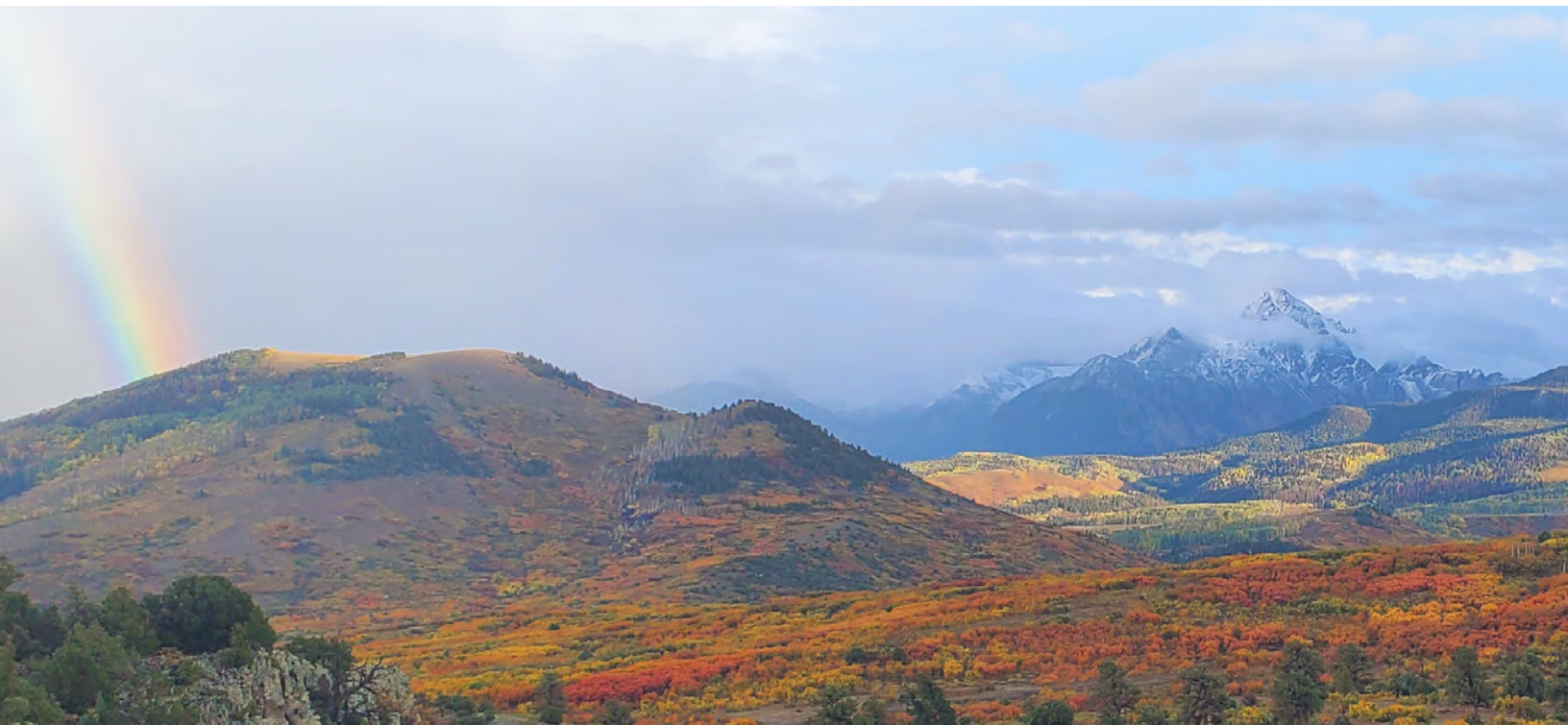
The Planning Commission hereby reserves the recreational tourism uses element of the Master Plan future revisions, as a standalone component based on additional data and recommendations from ORRCA and CNHP, pursuant to **C.R.S. §§ 30-28-106(5) and 30-28-108.**





MASTER PLAN

APPENDIX A





HISTORY

History of the Establishment of Ouray County

The current boundaries of Ouray County were created in 1883. In 1882 large deposits of silver had been discovered in the Red Mountains. The discovery and the continued high production of gold from area mines resulted in the establishment of three railroads by 1890. The third railroad to be constructed was Rio Grande Southern which ran to the north in the County and was the catalyst for the establishment of the Town of Ridgway. By 1890 the County's population had reached 6,510.

Right to Farm and Ranch Ordinance

The "Right to Farm and Ranch Ordinance", No. 01-01, sets out the following goals:

- Conserve, enhance, and encourage ranching, farming, and all manner of agricultural activities and operations within and throughout Ouray County where appropriate.
- Minimize potential conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses of land in the County.
- Educate new rural residents and long-time agricultural operators alike as to their rights, responsibilities, and obligations relating to agricultural activities and living in rural Ouray County.
- Integrate planning efforts to provide for the retention of traditional and important agricultural lands in agricultural production while also allowing for reasonable residential and other development.

The Right to Farm and Ranch Ordinance also establishes the "Agricultural Review Board". The Agricultural Review Board or "ARB" is designed to be a speedy and informal resolution to any and all nuisance conflicts that may arise between landowners and residents relating to agricultural operations or activities in Ouray County.

WATER DATA

Findings from the 2016 Upper Uncompahgre Basin Water Supply Protection and Enhancement Project Report/Phase I Studies include the following:

- Agricultural water needs account for approximately 91% of the water shortages in an average year in the UUB and municipal, domestic and industrial water shortages account for approximately 7%.
- Relevant stakeholders should focus on developing additional water supplies in the UUB to address multiple shortage types.
- To satisfy water demand during average dry years it is likely that additional water supplies need to be developed for each upstream basin because there is a large recreation and environmental water shortage during dry years.
- Overall, in dry years the UUB can see as much as 50% less water, compared to an average year.

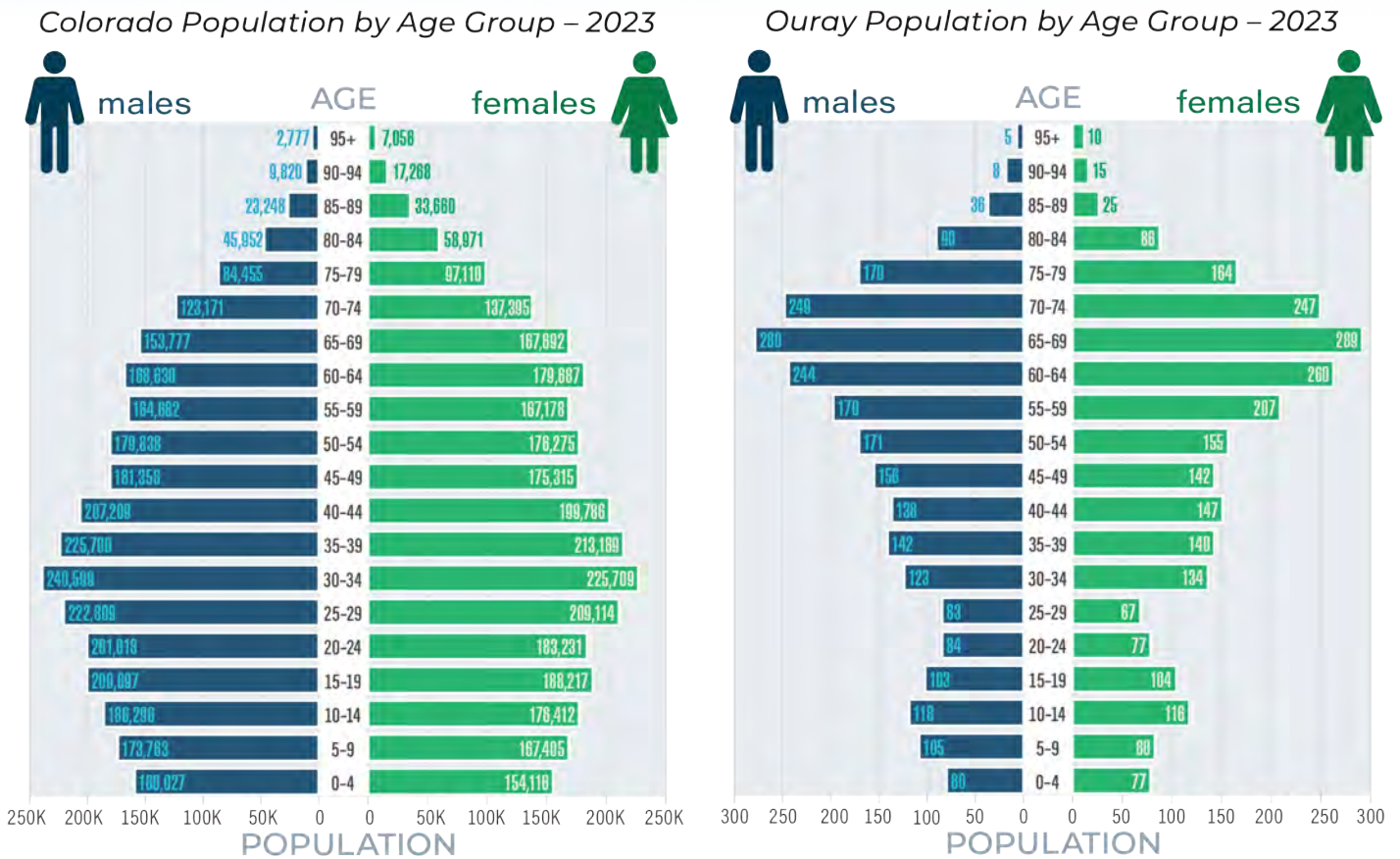
MASTER PLAN

- Dallas and Cow Creek experience a much larger water shortage compared to the main stem Uncompahgre River.
- The City of Ouray, Town of Ridgway, and TriCounty Water (TCW) all report having adequate water supplies for their planning horizons.
- Dallas Creek Water Company (DCWC) may benefit from securing an additional supply of water, as Dallas Creek has experienced water supply issues in dry years.
- Municipal water delivery may be firmed if the water service providing entities of DCWC and TCW are interconnected or merge.
- The Portland area has self-identified as being water short. Future buildout in Ouray County is uncertain and should be addressed with a refined population growth study especially in areas not currently served by a centralized water provider.
- Ridgway Reservoir may be available for water exchange, which may help alleviate shortages throughout the UUB.
- Recreational and environmental water uses should be considered a top priority for protection and enhancement to protect the scenic value in Ouray County.
- Improvements to conveyance structures and on-farm efficiencies for inter-basin ditches to protect the source basin should be considered.
- Additional water supplies along the main stem of the Uncompahgre River, as well as in its major tributaries Dallas Creek and Cow Creek should be secured.
- Projects that have benefits across agricultural, municipal, domestic, industrial, environmental and recreational water uses should be pursued.
- Additional water flow modeling refinements may offer additional insights into appropriate water management measures and benefits. It would be especially useful to better understand and utilize delayed groundwater return flows. Irrigation efficiency practices could be evaluated to identify impacts to available delayed groundwater return flows.

It is important to coordinate closely with the Colorado Water Conservation Board wherever feasible.

HOUSING

FIGURE A-2. OURAY COUNTY AND STATE OF COLORADO AGE DISTRIBUTION



HAZARDS/EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

2019 Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan High Threat Hazard Analysis

Information presented in this subsection is primarily from the 2019 Ouray County Hazard Mitigation Plan as approved and adopted by the Board of County Commissioners. The hazard mitigation plan documents the hazards which have been identified to be the most concerning to the County, its municipalities, and the Log Hill Fire District. Additionally, the plan identifies mitigation actions intended to help reduce the impacts of these hazards. Ouray County has a full-time emergency manager who actively pursues efforts to reduce the impacts of hazards in the County. Note that the hazards of greatest concern are flooding, rockfalls and landslides, wildland fire, and severe winter weather. The following paragraphs summarize key information about each of these hazards.

Flooding in Ouray County presents a considerable risk, with a 26% chance of annual occurrence and a historic damage amounting to \$3,925,983 from 1960 to 2017. The Uncompahgre River and



its tributaries, along with steep, rocky drainage channels near the City of Ouray have been the sites of several major flood events for the City and continue to pose flooding risks. Flash flooding from thunderstorms and snowmelt driven flooding occur in several creeks surrounding the City of Ouray. Debris flow, typically tied to flooding events, often results in blocked creeks and results in additional flooding.

FEMA's risk assessment tool, HAZUS (Hazards-United States), analysis in the County 2019 MHMP estimates potential economic losses of up to \$30.3 million from a flooding event at the 1% annual chance level. The City of Ouray would bear the most significant losses. Flooding in the valley can reach and impact the Town of Ridgway when thunderstorm runoff deposits shale and plugs culverts. This kind of rain event may close roads and disrupt transportation because of limited road options.

Landslides and rockfalls are a continuing threat in parts of Ouray County. Landslides are characterized by downslope movement of soil, rock, and vegetation and are typically caused by stream erosion, heavy rainfall, and human activities like construction and irrigation. Rockfalls, on the other hand, occur when detached masses of rock fall from cliffs or steep slopes due to weathering or changes in the landscape. These hazards pose threats to human life, transportation corridors, and property. The City of Ouray and nearby unincorporated area of the County has experienced over \$1 million recorded damage attributed to rockfall and nearly \$13,000 in damages due to landslides. Transportation routes, such as Highway 550 and County Road 17, are particularly vulnerable to closures due to landslide/rockfalls, posing major concerns for the County as they are primary access routes. Other potential impacts are to loss of business and damage to critical infrastructure. Anticipated climate change may increase landslide and rockfall events due to heavy precipitation, changes in the freeze/thaw cycles associated with changes in temperature and precipitation. An increased frequency of high intensity wildfires may also increase the risk of landslides and rockfall in burn scar areas during a rain event.

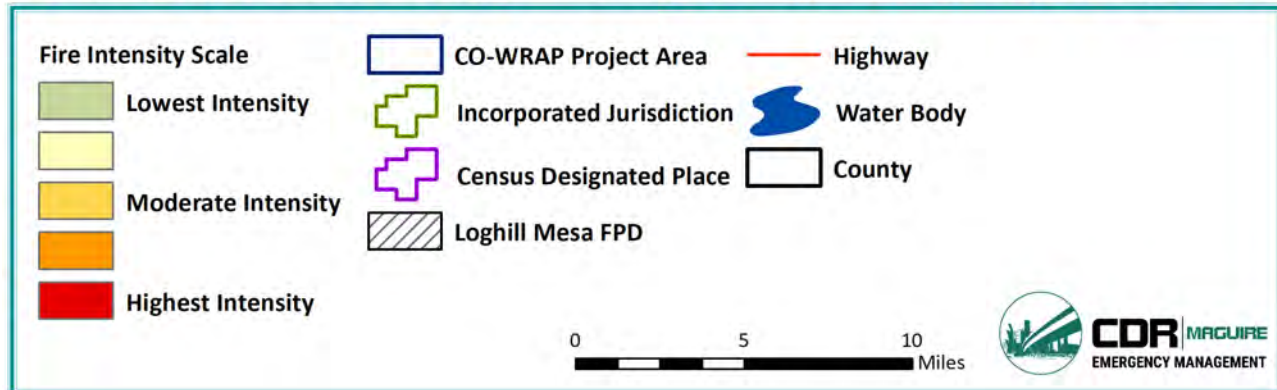
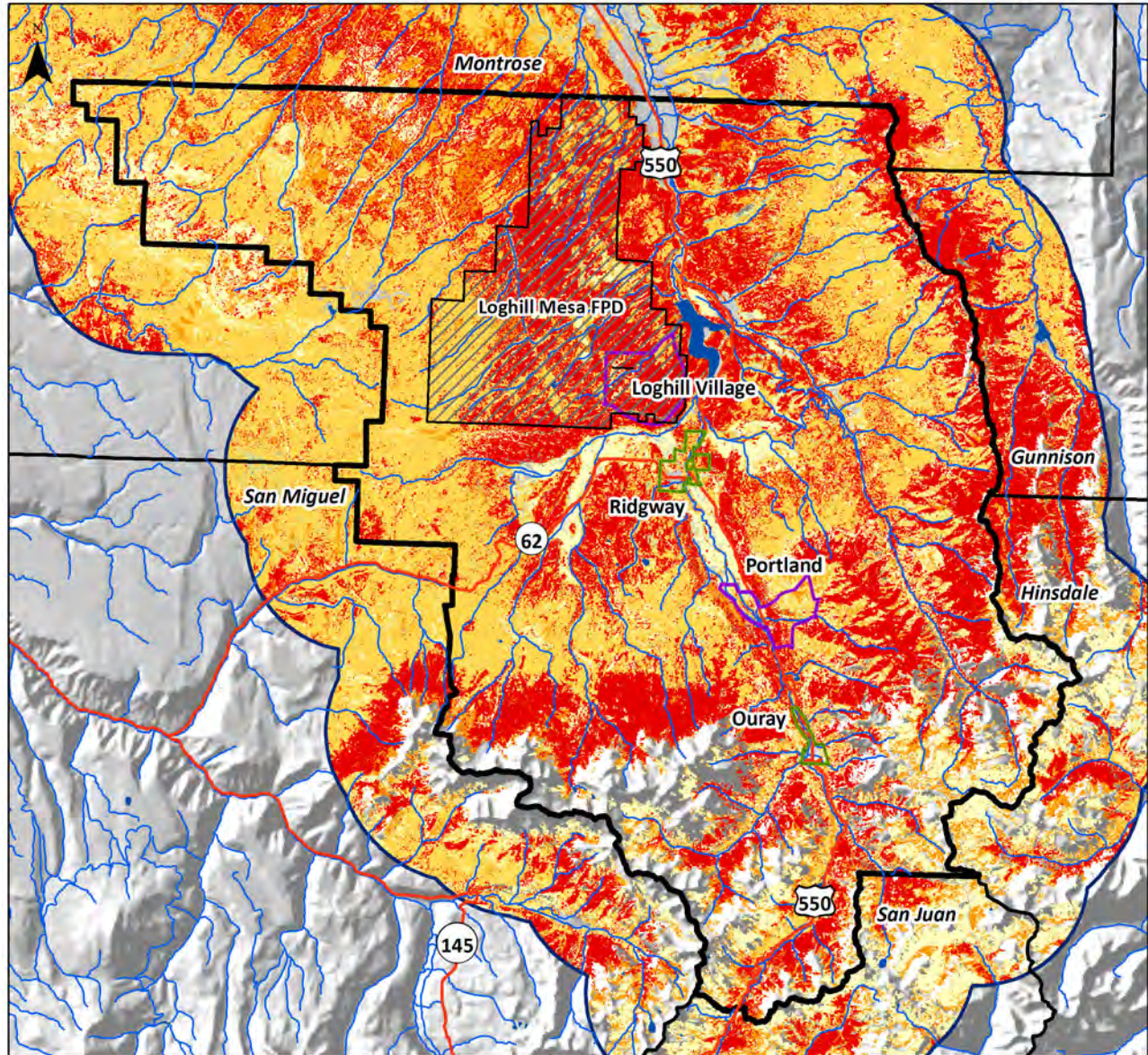
Nearly the entire County is vulnerable to wildland fires, with the highest risk area in the northern and central parts of the County, particularly around the Loghill Mesa Fire Protection District (LHFPD) and the Ridgway vicinity. With 2,618 parcels identified as moderate to high wildfire risk areas, totaling over \$1 billion in exposure value, the County's susceptibility to wildfires is significant, and potentially growing due to the effects of climate change. Identified gaps in wildfire mitigation include the need for more detailed information on damage from past wildfires and a deeper understanding of their economic impact on local businesses.

Previous wildfire data reveals a history of numerous small fires, with the potential for larger, more damaging events in the future. The County's economic reliance on tourism, coupled with limited evacuation routes and high influx of visitors, heightens concerns over public safety and economic resilience. Proactive measures addressing forest health, access to recreation, and development are crucial for safeguarding the County, its communities, and natural assets as climate change exacerbates wildfire risks.

Evacuation planning in Ouray County, particularly in wildfire-prone areas, is of critical importance due to limited access or routes, high visitor volumes, and extremely high-risk areas. Existing recommendations for effective evacuation include enhancing roadway connections, thinning vegetation, and clear signage for successful guidance. Collaboration with local fire districts is important for coordinating emergency response efforts across the county.

FIGURE A-3. WILDFIRE MAP

Ouray County Fire Intensity Scale





RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Vacant parcels in existing PUDs and subdivisions have the potential for significant additional residential growth in rural Ouray County as illustrated in the following maps.

FIGURE A-4. NORTH MESA ZONE BUILD OUT MAP

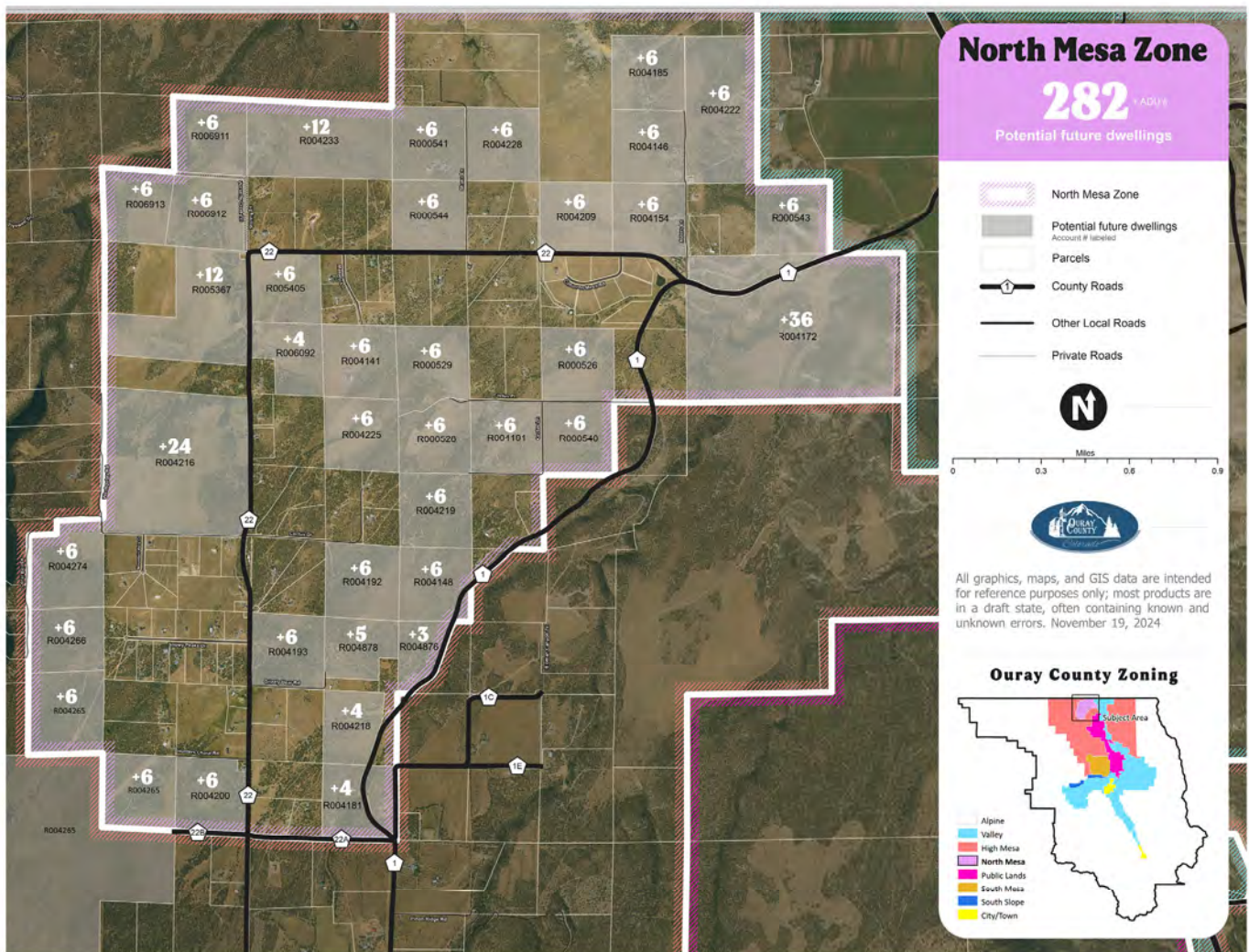


FIGURE A-5. SOUTH MESA ZONE BUILD OUT MAP

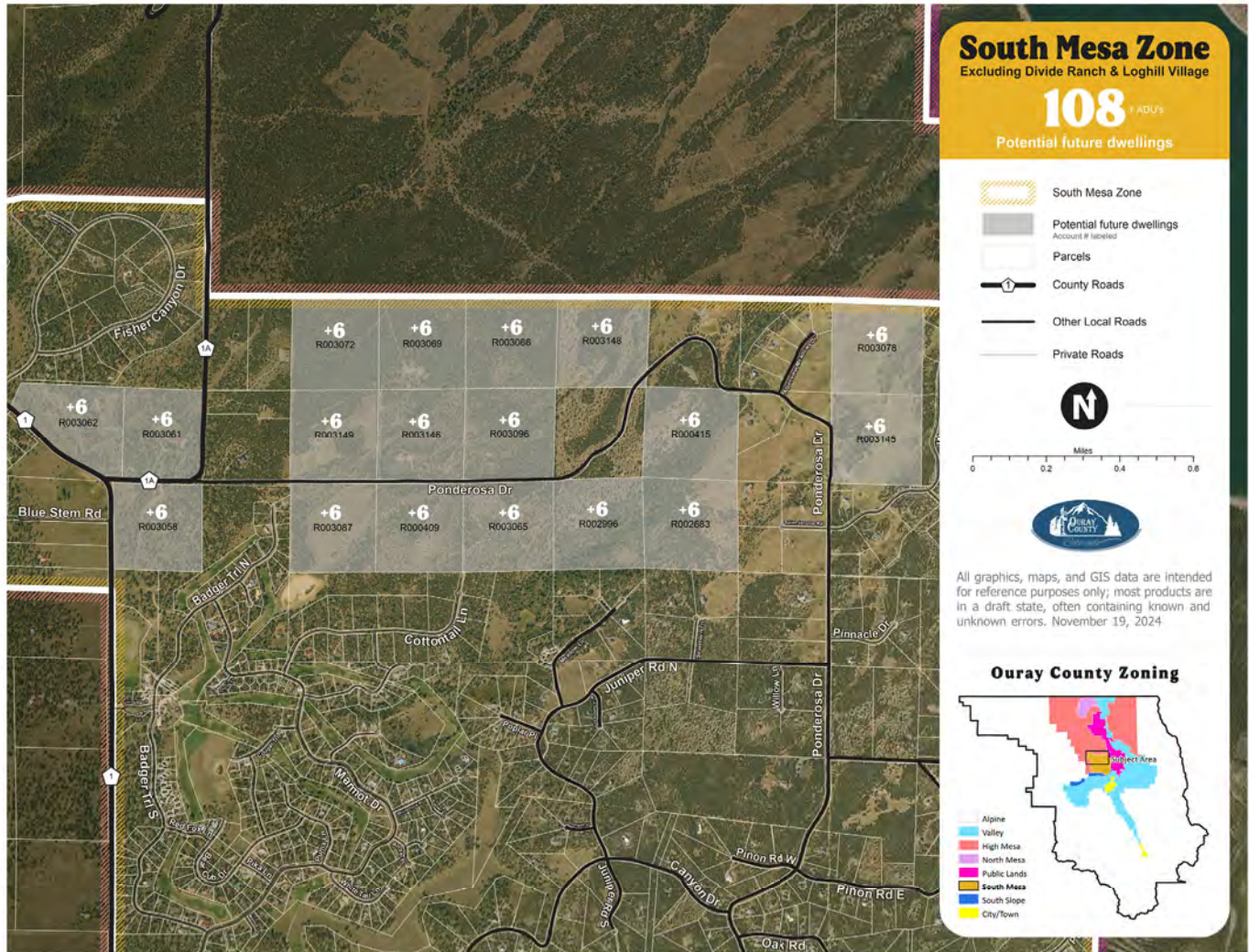
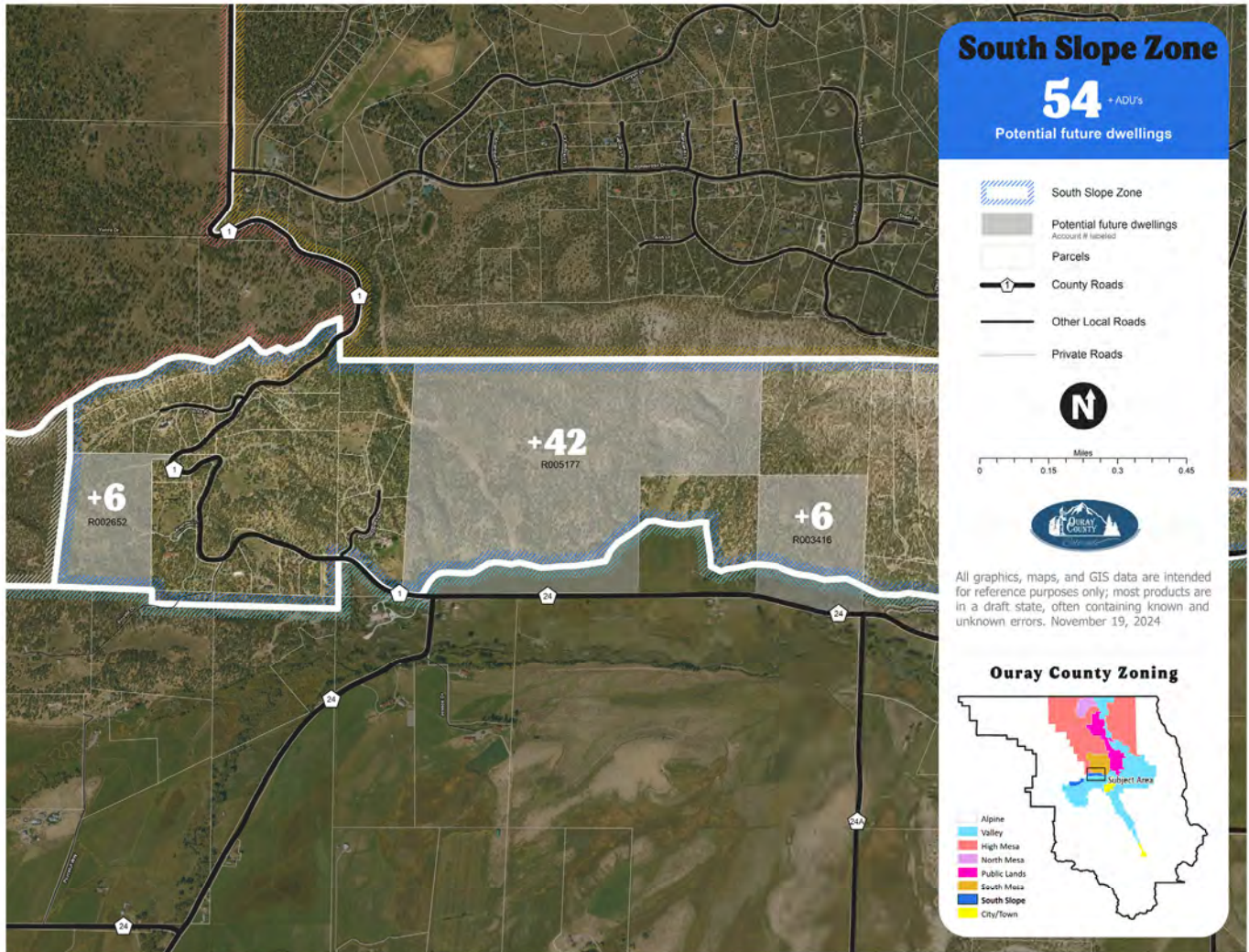




FIGURE A-6. SOUTH MESA ZONE BUILD OUT MAP



Possible 35-Acre “Cluster Development”

Example of splitting a 160-acre parcel into either 4-lots (as allowed per current state statute) or a total of 8-lots through a “cluster development” option (bonus density of 4 units) but with the required dedication of open space/conservation easement/wildlife corridor.

FIGURE A-7. SUBDIVISION OF 160-ACRES AT STATUTORY “1-PER-35” ZONING



FIGURE A-8. POSSIBLE SUBDIVISION OF 160-ACRES WITH BONUS (IE. +1) DENSITY WITH CLUSTERING





TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

Summary of Key Issues

Road characteristics: There are approximately 476 miles of public roads in Ouray County (see MAP). Additionally, there are an estimated 36 miles of private roads of various kinds, including private drives, etc. Ouray County’s Road Department has responsibility for maintenance of 300 miles of roads in the County, 90% of which are unpaved. It is essential to understand that a majority of these county owned and maintained roads are not intended to be driven at a high rate of speed. Many of the local county roads are so rough that they can only be driven safely at a speed of less than 30 miles an hour.

Traffic volumes: Figure A-9 illustrates the increase in average annual daily traffic from 2005 through 2023 on US Route 550 and State Highway 62 as reported by the Colorado Department of Transportation. At various times of the year daily traffic is significantly higher than these averages. Figure A-10 illustrates the increases in traffic from 2020 through 2024 on county roads where traffic counts have been collected.

FIGURE A-9. STATE AND US HIGHWAY AVERAGE ANNUAL DAILY TRAFFIC

Year	Station #			
	102783	105577	105584	105588
2005	3800	2300	4300	6400
2006	3800	2300	4300	6400
2007	4000	2300	4300	6700
2008	3900	2200	4300	7300
2009	3900	2200	4300	7200
2010	3200	2200	4300	7300
2011	3200	2200	4200	7000
2012	3300	2200	4200	7100
2013	3300	2200	4300	7200
2014	3400	2300	4400	7500
2015	3000	2100	4300	7800
2016	3100	2200	4000	8100
2017	3600	2100	4000	7400
2018	3600	2200	4100	7500
2019	3700	2200	4200	7700
2020	4200	2100	4800	8300
2021	4500	2300	5300	9200
2022	4400	2300	5200	9100
2023	4500	2500	5300	9200

Station Locations:

102783

2 miles west of Ridgway on State Highway 62

105577

At the southern edge of Ouray on US Route 550

105584

6 miles south of Ridgway on US Route 550

105588

½ mile north of Ridgway on US Route 550

MASTER PLAN

FIGURE A-10. TRAFFIC COUNTS (AVERAGE VEHICLES PER DAY ON SELECTED ROADS)

Location	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
CR 5 N of Ridgway Town limits	2142	2186	1837	729	626
CR 1 South end	1235	1385	1493	1305	1302
CR 23 KOA bridge	1119	1148	1031	1026	982
CR 1 North End (near pumphouse)	1046	1149	1284	1332	1404
CR 24A McCreede Bridge	907	1003	1029	960	936
CR 361 Ice Park bridge	657	660	545	583	538
CR 24 Dallas Bridge	537	563	589	483	467
CR 24 Weaver Bridge	481	672	724	662	464
CR 12 west end	480	520	523	562	693
CR 5 South Amelia St.	469	517	1662	480	452
CR 5 North of CR 5A	449	369	412	373	438
CR 361 Weehawken Bridge	414	404	303	223	201
CR 23 North end	370	431	417	351	307
Marys Rd	311	359	311	320	355
CR 24 W of CR 5	297	293	320	256	215
CR 10 West End	283	258	274	255	234
CR 7/7A	255	201	202	190	124
CR 14 Panoramic Heights	234	224	216	217	179
CR 8 Cow Creek Bridge	193	163	168	156	134
CR 8 NW end @ 550	167	112	113	112	84
CR 17 South End/Black Lake	85	105	116	90	104
CR 24 south end	49	52	72	61	61
CR 22 south of 22A	0	0	1472	3903	3954
Wisteria	0	8375	413	584	628

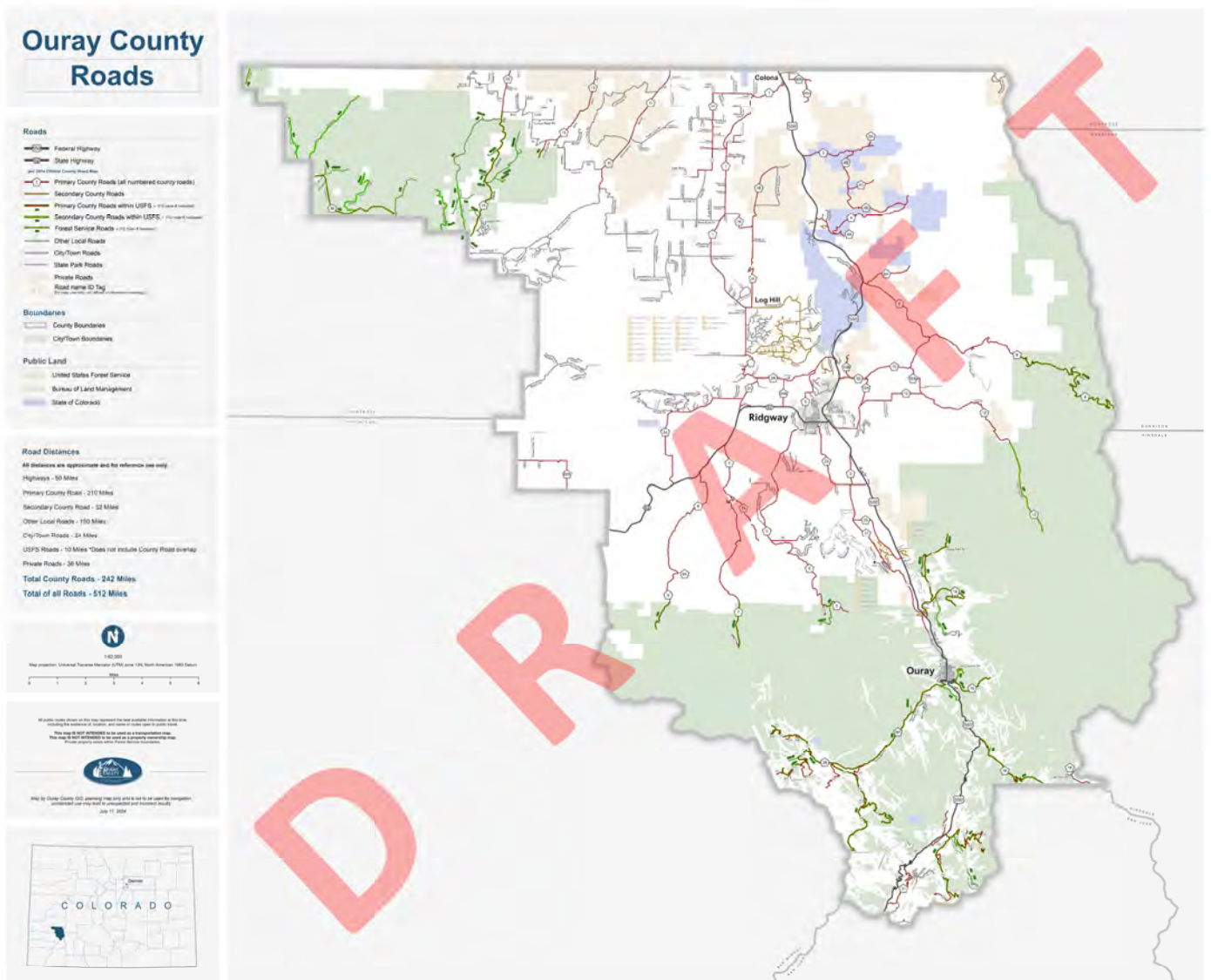
Maintenance needs: One of the fundamental concerns for county roads is their overall condition and on-going maintenance requirements. Many roads are deteriorated to the point that it is unwise to traverse them without a four-wheel drive vehicle. The Road and Bridge Superintendent estimates that non-paved county roads cannot be maintained more than once every 53 years.

Fleet replacement needs: The Road and Bridge Superintendent reports that the County is falling behind on its fleet replacement needs and states that there is a point in time where the cost of increased maintenance leads to overall higher life cycle costs for the equipment, thus leading to the need for higher fleet maintenance budgets in upcoming years.

Road Standards Needs and Private Access Issues: The Road and Bridge Superintendent has identified a need for updated road standards, which are currently found at section 15 of the County Land Use Code. This review and update may also trigger a review of private access issues, given continued development in various areas, including with the Alpine Zone and High Alpine Developments.

Other modes: Until recently there has not been a public transit system serving Ouray County, but as of March 2024, All Points Transit began providing shuttle service 5 days a week between Montrose, Ridgway, and Ouray. There are no airports or established places for landing aircraft in Ouray County, aside from at least one private landing strip. Emergency helicopter operations have designated landing sites at the Fellin Park and the 4-H Event Center.

FIGURE A-11. OURAY COUNTY ROADS

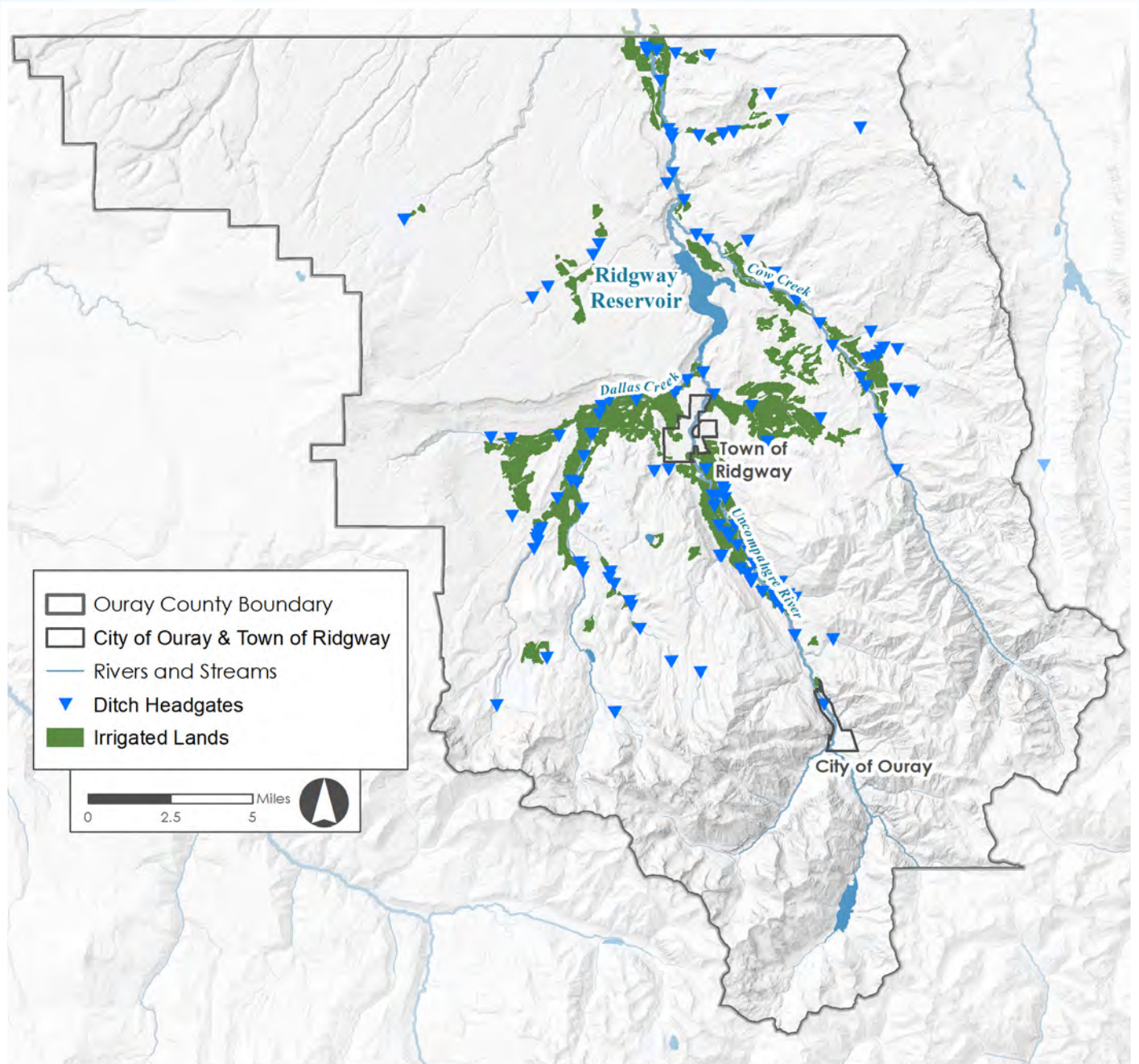


UTILITIES

Summary of Additional Details

Water needs in Ouray County generally fall into four categories: agriculture, municipal and domestic, environmental, and recreational. Water for agricultural irrigation is physically managed privately through a series of gates and open ditches. Irrigated agricultural lands are illustrated in Figure A-12. Many of the agricultural operations have senior water rights so when water is available, they generally do not have concerns for water, except for downstream calls from even more senior water rights, such as the Montrose & Delta (M&D) Canal.

FIGURE A-12. IRRIGATED LANDS MAP



In parts of the County the soils will support leach fields. In other parts of the County, such as the High-Alpine region of the County, OWTS systems may not be feasible and alternative engineered systems must be considered. Ouray County requires permitting for all OWTS septic systems. While environmental impacts are always a potential concern, in general OWTS systems in Ouray County have posed no significant environmental contamination. The state of Colorado establishes and implements the Design Criteria for OWTS systems through Regulation 43. The federal government implements the National Discharge Elimination Systems and issue permits to wastewater discharge and treatment facilities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

According to the Federal Reserve, the County's Gross Domestic Product has been on an upward trend for four of the last five years. Its peak output was in 2021 at \$265,904,000. [Figure A-13](#) illustrates the Bureau of Economic Analysis's data about employment by industry in 2020 and 2021.

FIGURE A-13. EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRIAL CATEGORY

Industrial Category	2020	2021
Farm Employment	154	150
Nonfarm employment	3717	4017
Private nonfarm employment	3311	3599
Forestry, fishing, and related activities	(D)	(D)
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	(D)	(D)
Utilities	(D)	(D)
Construction	391	393
Manufacturing	147	150
Wholesale trade	26	(D)
Retail trade	311	335
Transportation and warehousing	(D)	91
Information	24	27
Finance and insurance	178	188
Real estate and rental and leasing	427	434
Professional, scientific, and technical services	286	299
Management of companies and enterprises	62	63
Administrative and support; waste management and remediation services	173	180
Educational services	64	61
Health care and social assistance	134	137
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	185	198
Accommodation and food services	541	586
Other services (except government and government enterprises)	203	210
Government and government enterprises	406	418
Federal civilian	19	12
Military	12	13
State and local	375	393
State government	43	37
Local government	332	356

OVERVIEW OF MASTER PLAN PROCESS

February 21, 2023 Official Project Kickoff Meeting

- Developed initial meeting schedule and process details
- Identified potential data sources
- Identified entities to reach out to during process
- Discussed possible public engagement activities

March – May Meetings

- Prepare for April 25 open house
- Begin to prepare survey which would be informed by initial input received at open house
- Open house had over 70 participants and a significant amount of feedback was received
- Survey initiated early June and continued into early July - nearly 700 responses

July & August Meetings

- Early update on survey results
- Try to dovetail with ORRCA activity
- Provided complete details of survey results in advance of August meeting
- Potential additional topics discussed

September & October Meetings

- Review misc. statistics regarding trends
- Discussion of factors likely to influence future growth
- Presentations from Town of Ridgway and City of Ouray about their growth plans
- Discussion of potential areas of growth in the rural County

November & December Meetings

- Three meetings including a Joint Session with BOCC
- Discussed how ORRCA activity will fit into the overall master plan development
- Identified the importance of addressing housing - 1999 plan strategies not implemented
- Significant discussion regarding how to address the broad topic of water
- Discussed future buildout numbers and potential 35-acre unregulated development
- Received detailed update on ORRCA activities; suggestion not to duplicate effort and add placeholder
- Received verbal report on water supply from Dallas Creek Water Company and Tri-County Water
- Discussion of Plan Topics to include



January – April Meetings

- Discussion of issues and topics and text revisions
- Begin discussion of document outline

May & June Meetings

- Focus on reaching consensus on goals and strategies in order to present them for public open house

July & August Meetings

- Town Hall Meeting
- Review of Town Hall Input
- Discussion with County Administrator and County Attorney
- Result to plan for 30-day review period prior to September 24th Joint Session
- August 6th - All day work session to refine text in anticipation of review period
- KLJ (consultant) formatted text into more polished form for public review period

September Joint Planning Commission-Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) Meeting

- Packet prepared for this joint meeting contained all comments received after the draft document had been prepared in a more polished form for public review
- Planning Commission asked questions about BOCC perspectives on the draft document
- The BOCC provided comments on primary concerns and expectations pertaining to the Master Plan update
- There was a consensus at this time to conduct additional Planning Commission Work Sessions with an intended public hearing moved out to January 8, 2025

October & November Meetings

- Detailed review of draft text not already reviewed and discussed by the Planning Commission
- Final review and revisions of draft Master Plan Vision, Objectives and Strategies
- Final review and revisions of Master Plan text body and appendices

January 2025

- Conducted final hearing to formally adopt Plan on January 8., 2025

