

Baca County



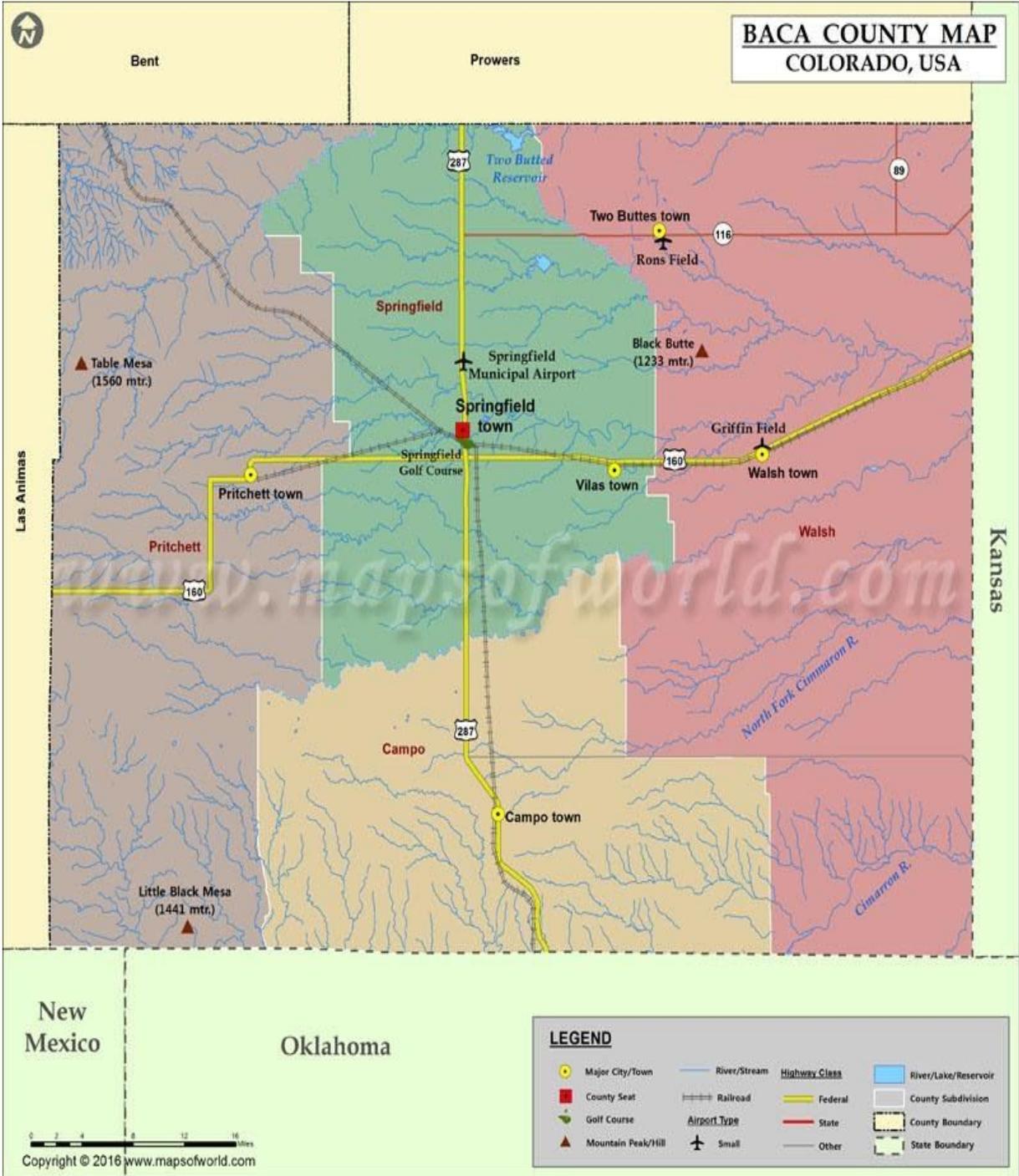
2017 CEDS

Prepared by Southern Colorado Economic Development District
1104 N. Main Street
Pueblo, Colorado 81003

719-545-8680

Table of Contents

Map of Baca County	3
Background	4
SWOT	6
County Development Strategy	7
Projects	8
Resiliency	11



SUMMARY BACKGROUND

Baca County is located in the Southeastern corner of Colorado, bordered by New Mexico and Kansas. The county is 2,558 square miles with a population density of 1.5 per square mile. The average elevation is 4,295 feet.

Established in 1889, the area boasts a unique combination of plains, canyons and buttes to create a picturesque open landscape. Baca County is crossed by the Cimarron branch of the Santa Fe Trail, which served as an important route for commerce and cultural exchange in the development of the West in the mid-1800s. Agriculture is the main driver for the county’s economy.

County Commissioners:

Glen R. “Spike” Ausmus
Peter Dawson
Dean Ormiston

Legislative Districts:

Congressional District 4
Senate District 2
House District 64

County Seat:

Springfield

Population

The population of Baca County for July 2015 was 3,615.

Population by Age

Under 5 years	213	5 to 9 years	203	10 to 14 years	244
15 to 19 years	241	20 to 24 years	133	25 to 29 years	199
30 to 34 years	162	35 to 39 years	179	40 to 44 years	199
45 to 49 years	258	50 to 54 years	293	55 to 59 years	296
60 to 64 years	259	65 to 69 years	226	70 to 74 years	186
75 to 79 years	171	80 to 84 years	142	85 years and over	186

Population by Community

Campo	103
Pritchett	132
Springfield	1,383
Two Buttes	41
Vilas	108
Walsh	518
Unincorporated	1,311

Data retrieved from State Demography Office – DOLA

www.data.state.co.us

Poverty

In 2014, Kids Count reported 62.2% of school age children qualified for free/reduced lunch and 29.6% of children under 18 years of age were living in poverty compared to 14.9% in the State.

www.kidscount.org

Housing

The average household size is 2.19 compared to the state average family size of 2.64. The homeownership vacancy rate is 1.4% and the rental vacancy rate is 12.6%

According to the National Low Income Coalition, affordable rent represents the generally accepted standard of not spending more than 30% of gross income on gross housing costs. The fair market rent in 2015 for Baca County is \$658 for a two bedroom home. In order to afford rent at this amount, a household in Baca County must earn \$26,320 annually. At the minimum wage of \$8.31 hour, one minimum wage earner would have to work 61 hours per week.

www.nlih.org

Education

Five towns provide K-12 education in Baca County. Higher education is available at Lamar Community College, Otero Junior College and the University of Southern Colorado Pueblo (four-year University).

The 2014 Census American Community Survey estimates that 85.5% of the total population 25 years of age and older has attained a high school diploma or higher; 16.1% have attained a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

www.factfinder.census.gov

Agriculture

In 2012, Baca County had 1,503,419 acres of agricultural land. There are 737 farms, with an average of 2.040 acres. The market value of products sold was \$125,299,000 of which \$78,922,000 (63%) were crop sales and \$46,376,000 (37%) were livestock sales. The average per farm was \$170,012. Government payments were \$15,510,000 with an average per farm of \$23,935.

www.agcensus.usda.gov

Travel Impact

Dean Runyon and Associates report that 3.1 million dollars were spent by visitors to Baca County in 2015. Not only does travel affect the revenues to a community, but jobs must be created to maintain services to visitors. Approximately 40 full and part time jobs were attributed to travel and tourism in Baca County in 2015 with \$658,1000 in earnings, \$43,400 in local tax revenue and \$111,500 in state tax revenue.

www.deanrunyon.com

Local Economy

The current unemployment rate for Baca County in September 2016 was 1.8% compared to 3% for the state and 5% nationally. The average earnings for Baca County for 2015 was \$38,625

www.factfinder.census.gov

STRATEGIC PLANNING

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis

The starting point for a credible economic development strategic plan is a SWOT analysis. By working with Baca County stakeholders, the following was identified:

Strength

- Strong work ethic
- Low cost of living
- Available land/industrial park
- Outdoor activities
- Retirement community
- Quality of life
- Gigabit Fiber Available
- Strong education system
- Airport
- Location on Hwy 287 in the Ports to Plains Corridor

Weaknesses

- Rapidly declining population
- Growing aging population
- Dependency on agriculture as the main source of revenue
- Aging housing
- Lack of jobs
- Non-Competitive wages
- Lack of available water
- Lack of specialty businesses

- Lack of workforce
- Transmission lines

Opportunities

- Explore value added agriculture
- Create wind farms
- Explore renewable energy options
- Skilled trade professions expanded
- Encourage specialty businesses
- Technology businesses requiring gigabit fiber

-6-

- Increase transmission lines
- Create a youth center
- Location Neutral jobs
- Develop Industrial Park

Threats

- Out of basin water transfers
- Continued drought conditions
- Aging and declining population
- State and legislative regulations
 - Lack of cooperation and collaboration
 - Lack of Infrastructure

County Development Strategy

In order to provide opportunities for the youth, officials in Baca County recognize the need to diversify the economic base of the area. This continues to be a priority. In general, these plans have been realistic, and have centered around the resources available and how to expand the return realized from the resources. The primary resources are 1) Highway 287/385 the Ports to Plains Corridor that extends from Mexico up into Canada; 2) Recreational Opportunities; 3) A major agricultural base, and; 4) Energy Resources.

Highway 287/385 is a major point of entry for the State of Colorado. As of 2014, the most recent traffic counts available, this highway through Springfield and Baca County carried an average of 37,000 vehicles per day, of which approximately 40%

were trucks. Clearly this level of traffic supports a truck stop and in 2012 a truck stop was opened on the south end of Springfield. In 2013 a restaurant was added to the truck stop which added a total of 23 jobs to the property. This was the single largest addition to employment for Baca County in over 20 years. With that number of vehicles coming through on a daily basis it also supports a chain type hotel. Work by a group of citizens has been ongoing for the last year to bring that type of product to the community which is different than the other products currently available within the town of Springfield.

In late 2014 the Alco store chain went out of business nationwide leaving Springfield with a newer 15,000 square foot building empty. Economic Development worked with 12 different companies in 2015 until a deal was reached between the property owner and Big R creating 10 fulltime jobs. In 2015 Baca County Economic Development secured a \$140,000 grant for infrastructure that was used for lighting and street improvements around Big R in an effort to encourage further development of the area.

-7-

Recreational opportunities include hunting, fishing, boating and birding. Baca County has significant traffic during hunting seasons with upwards of 10,000 hunters per year. Hunting season is a cash infusion into the local economy, particularly for lodging and restaurants. The Comanche National Grasslands makes up the southwest corner of the county with a large number of visitors coming into the canyons for sightseeing, birding and hiking.

Agriculture is the most important segment of Baca County's economy. This sector provides a large percentage of the employment and is a key element in the County. Local farmers have used various government support and conservation programs extensively. The most typical crops are wheat, sorghum, corn, hemp, alfalfa and sunflowers. As with any agricultural area, the primary problem is that first step in the production chain, actually growing and harvesting crops. This is essentially the raw material step. There is currently little processing or packaging that involves high value added to the basic crop. Any such development with processing would be highly encouraged.

In 2016 a hemp farm and processing facility continues construction in Baca County. Currently, 3.1 million dollars has gone into the office, science lab, equipment, greenhouses, infrastructure and housing which has created roughly 15 jobs. The hemp crop will be used in pelletizing or fiber manufacturing, which is a huge step to added value in the crop. The portions of the crop not used on site will be exported to other businesses for processing.

Given the heavy agricultural base a Dairy would be a huge asset to the community. There has been some work around this off and on for several years.

Energy resources exist in the County in the form of many low grade natural gas wells and a couple high producing oil wells. The low prices of natural gas make it uneconomic to do the processing necessary to bring the pipeline industry in. The oil well production has and is still being explored.

The area is ideal for solar and wind farms however; the lack of transmission lines is the primary obstacle. Light manufacturing or a distribution warehouse would be ideal fits for the community given the ease of access to travel corridors. Additional upgrades were completed at the Springfield airport making it possible for larger planes to land such as a Beechcraft King Air. A hanger with a pilot's lounge was added as well as a fuel station.

Projects

Project 1: Infrastructure for agricultural processing industries

There is a need to promote agriculture related businesses and the County is actively researching viable projects such as a dairy.

-8-

Project 2: Explore alternative crops for value added agriculture

In an effort to diversify the agricultural community, there is increasing interest in value added crops. As the County pursues agricultural processing industries, it will be beneficial for the County to also explore opportunities for alternative crops. Baca County now has a Hemp farm. Currently plans are being developed to add manufacturing of the crop on site in 2016 and beyond.

Project 3: Infrastructure to the Industrial Park for manufacturing

Baca County has approximately ninety-seven available acres that is split between two sites that is currently available for growth and expansion. Recruitment of any type of manufacturer will require infrastructure in and around the industrial park and other property Baca County has listed for development. Such infrastructure may include roads, water and sewer systems and utility access. Funding for such a project would be vital to the community as they recruit primary industries. Plans are currently underway to look at bringing water to the industrial park for the EDC building currently on the property.

Project 4: Business Retention and Expansion of Businesses Countywide

There are vacant storefronts in the downtown areas. Recruitment of specialty shops and encouraging entrepreneurs to the downtown areas will improve the quality of life in Baca County.

Project 5: Housing

Improve aging housing and create affordable rental housing to allow for future growth in the community and improve the overall appearance. The Towns and County will continue to monitor housing needs.

Project 6: Develop rental housing

Baca County's rental housing availability is extremely limited. Funding opportunities will be explored to create affordable rental housing in the community.

Project 7: Improve aging housing

Baca County will encourage homeowners to renovate run down homes. The creation of a "Fresh Start" program to assist owners with renovations might encourage them to upgrade the aging housing stock.

Project 8: County Fairgrounds Improvements

Continued improvements to the fairgrounds will create opportunities for additional events for residents and increase tourism opportunities. There is a need for a rodeo arena and announcer's booth reconstruction, electrical grid improvements, RV park development and new camp sites.

-9-

Project 9: Energy and Natural Resource Development

Research and analyze existing renewable energy resources and expand on those resources. New opportunities will create jobs and a better quality of life for residents.

Project 10: Energy Impact Study

A full review and inventory of the available oil and gas in Baca County would create an opportunity for the county to expand and diversify the economy. Such a project would allow the county to tap into a resource it has available, but never fully utilized.

Project 11: Explore alternative fuels

The idea of fuels from plants at the community level is a "grass roots" approach to exploiting a potential area for development. In concept, this would give farmers a market for "distressed" grains which would be otherwise essentially worthless in the market. Such plants could be economically feasible in a stronger fuel market.

Project 12: Expand transmission lines

Inadequate transmission capacity has prevented development of additional wind and solar energy opportunities. The cost for new transmission lines is beyond the ability of county governments and the private sector. Increasing transmission capacity is a top priority of the county as renewable energy options need explored.

Project 13: Protect available water

Out of basin water transfers continue to threaten rural farming communities. Protecting the available water resources will help to secure the future growth of Baca County.

Project 14: Expand/Increase Recreational Opportunities

In order to diversify the economy, leaders understand the positive impact outside dollars coming into a community will have on the local economy. Development and marketing of heritage tourism and natural attractions will play an important role in the county's economy.

Project 15: Golf Course Development

Limited opportunities exist for golfers in Southeastern Colorado. The further development of a nine-hole golf course would provide recreation for residents, tourists and surrounding communities. Improvements and getting water to the existing nine-hole golf course will require some grant funding. Golfing is very popular in the region and this would be a great attraction asset.

Project 16: Marketing of Natural Attractions

Much of Baca County is designated as the Comanche National Grasslands and in close proximity to canyon lands.

-10-

Both attractions provide a glimpse into history and a great opportunity for hikers. Regulations to protect these assets have stopped development in the area. However, marketing of these attractions will draw tourists to the area. Funding for marketing the attractions will be explored. Education of locals and businesses will increase marketing efforts.

Project 17: Promote and expand on bird watching and hunting opportunities

There has been an increased interest by bird watchers to Baca County. Promotion of the activity, guided tours and a welcoming committee would increase awareness and draw tourists. Baca County attracts over 10,000 hunters per year.

Project 18: Create a regional strategy to promote heritage tourism and recreation

Efforts are underway to create a regional strategy to promote heritage tourism in Southeastern Colorado. Kiosks will be going in at Campo, Gobblers Knob to highlight Two Buttes and kiosks will be going in at Springfield for the 4 panels highlighting Springfield and Baca County.

Project 19: Water Planning and Water Quality

A planning grant is needed to study water resources in order to continue to promote water conservation and development of water. The Town of Springfield would like to do a study of water resources in 2016 to look at everything within the Town's boundaries as well as 10 miles out to account for future development.

Project 20: Southeast Heritage Education Center and Museum

Grants will be sought to bring this Education Center to life in Springfield.

Project 21: Downtown Revitalization, marketing and signage

Work is needed in the downtown areas. Storefronts and facades need work and updating. Buildings need addresses and signage. Spaces need remodeled for businesses instead of being used for storage.

Project 22: Economic Development and Community Development

Growing and diversifying the economy is important and will require marketing and technical assistance. Additionally, infrastructure will need addressed throughout the community. Landfill and water issues will be addressed through collaboration, grants and resources.

Resiliency

In the event of a disaster, the Southern Colorado Economic Development District (SCEDD) plays a support role to other partners in planning and recovery efforts following a disaster.

Baca County Emergency Contact Information:

Baca County Emergency Operations Center
29400 US Highway 287
Springfield, CO 81073
719-523-6796
bacaeoc@yahoo.com