

Bent County



2017 CEDS

Prepared by Southern Colorado Economic Development District

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SUMMARY BACKGROUND

Bent County is located in the Southeastern corner of Colorado along the Arkansas River. The county is 1,541 square miles with a population density of 4.4 per square mile. The average elevation is 3,900 feet.

The southern portion of the county contains bluffs, mesas and canyons that open to the rolling plains of the Arkansas River Valley and the northern portion is a series of rolling plains sloping south to the Arkansas River. The Arkansas River provides water for irrigation, recreation and wildlife. The Santa Fe Trail traverses the north side of the Arkansas River and lies parallel to Highway 50. Bent's Old Fort served as a major trading post on the Santa Fe Trail. Bent County houses two correctional facilities. Agriculture is the main economic driver in the county, encompassing approximately 91% of the County.

County Commissioners:

Lynn Gill
Bill Long
Thomas Wallace

Legislative Districts:

Congressional District: 4
Senate District 2
House District 64

County Seat: Las Animas

Population

The population for Bent County in 2015 was 5,841.

Population by Age

Under 5 years	243	5 to 9 years	261	10 to 14 years	307
15 to 19 years	198	20 to 24 years	160	25 to 34 years	1,312
35 to 44 years	876	45 to 54 years	950	55 to 59 years	430
60 to 64 years	353	65 to 74 years	510	75 to 84 years	246
85 years and older	154				

Population by Community

Las Animas	2,210
Unincorporated area	3,631

www.dola.state.co.us

Poverty

In 2014, Kids Count reported that 66.5% of school age children qualified for free/reduced lunch and 34.4% 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 for Bent County is 2.34 compared to an average family size of 2.64 in the State. The homeownership vacancy rate is 3.8% and the rental vacancy rate is 5.55.

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 Bent County was \$679 for a two bedroom home. In order to afford rent at this amount, a household in Bent County must earn \$27,160 annually. At the minimum wage of \$8.31 per hour, one minimum wage earner would have to work 63 hours per week.

www.nlihc.org

Education

Two districts provide K-12 education in Bent County. Higher education is available at Lamar Community College and Otero Junior College and Colorado State University Pueblo (four year University) in Pueblo.

The 2014 Census American Community Survey estimates that 78.4% of the total population 25 years of age and older has attained a high school diploma or higher; 7.5% have attained a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

www.factfinder.census.gov

Agriculture

In 2012, Bent County had 725,764 acres of agricultural land. There are 277 farms, with an average of 2,620 acres. The market value of products sold was \$70,794,000 of which \$12,706,000 (18%) were crop sales and \$58,087,000 (82%) were livestock sales. The average per farm was \$255,573. Government payments in 2012 was \$2,945,000 with an average of \$18,067 per farm.

www.agcensus.usda.gov

Travel Impact

Dean Runyon and Associates report that \$2.7 million was spent by visitors to Bent County in 2015. Not only does travel affect the revenues to a community, but jobs must be created to maintain services to visitors. Approximately 36 full and part time jobs were attributed to travel and tourism in Bent County in 2015 with \$0.6 million dollars in earnings, \$70,000 in local tax revenue and \$80,500 in state tax revenue.

www.deanrunyon.com

Local Economy

The current unemployment rate for Bent County is 2.6% in October 2016. The median family income is \$42,764.

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 Bent County stakeholders the following was identified:

Strengths

- County funds for development
- 300+ days of sunshine
- Open space
- Wind resource
- Available water
- Strong leadership
- Ongoing legislative support for Fort Lyon
- Friendly community
- Historical facilities/History
- Strong education system
- Golf course
- Access to College
- Senior Center
- Quality of life
- Fair grounds
- Community Center
- Recreation/Recreation League
- Major Employers (CCA, Mountain Prairie)

Strengths Continued

- Quality nursing home
- Quality assisted living
- Quality daycare
- Partnership with State and CCH (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless) regarding Fort Lyon

Weaknesses

- Aging housing and infrastructure
- County dependent on property taxes
- Lack of diverse businesses
- Low wages
- Lack of jobs
- High rate of teen pregnancies
- Access to capital for businesses
- Lack of qualified labor force
- Outmigration of youth
- Lack of tourism dollars
- State regulations/red tape
- Lack of medical professionals
- Increase in drug related crime
- High cost of utilities
- Lack of service professionals; electricians, plumbers, repairmen

Opportunities

- Proposed longitudinal study of Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community
- Additional tenants at Fort Lyon
- Increased promotion of tourism (John Martin, Blue Lake, Historical birding)
- Improve Highway 50/four lanes
- Explore/increase renewable energy options (solar power, wind energy transmission)
- Value added agriculture
- Increase retail sales
- Explore additional options for Fort Lyon facility
- Expand Mountain Prairie (hog farm)
- Streamline State regulation process
- Recruit medical professionals
- Grow our own professional/service professionals

Threats

- Lack of veterinarians
- Lack of shopping at home
- Water transfers (not just out of basin)
- Job loss to Mexico and China

Bent County has identified a number of strategic priorities. These include:

- Repair and upgrade electrical transmission in the City of Las Animas
- Childcare
- Housing
- Diversification of local economy

Goal: Repair and upgrade electrical transmission in the City of Las Animas

The primary source of purchase was built in 1960 and is in desperate need of repair and upgrade. They have experienced several outages, one that last 10 ½ hours and another that lasted 8 hours. The line feeds electricity to all of the businesses in town as well as the Bent County Correctional facility. Funding is needed to repair and upgrade the line.

Goal: Childcare

Funding is needed for the Las Animas Early Learning Center (childcare). The Center closed down a couple of years ago and was a significant economical impact driver for the families being able to work and have daycare in town. The Center did reopen last year but funding is needed in order to continue the program.

Goal: Develop Housing

The lack of housing as well as aging housing with asbestos issues is a priority for Bent County. The lack of housing stymies economic growth and diversity when businesses can't recruit employees because there is no place for them and their families to live.

Goal: Diversification of local economy

Diverse economies are sustainable economies. With a diverse economy as one industry declines it does not negatively affect the entire economy. By diversifying the economy, Bent County is less susceptible to fluctuations and economic cycles.

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.

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