Rio Blanco County, Colorado
Comprehensive Plan 2025

Adopted June 26, 2025



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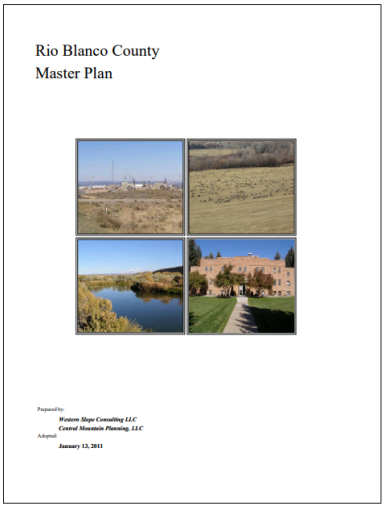
1.0 Introduction



The Rio Blanco County 2025-2035 Comprehensive Plan ("the Plan") utilizes the 2011 Rio Blanco County Comprehensive Plan as a foundation while providing an updated analysis of existing conditions, goals, and policies. The Plan makes projections about the future based on past and present trends in American Community Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Data presented herein should be occasionally reassessed and updated during the Plan's effective lifespan based on future available data to ensure continued accuracy.

While the Plan outlines specific goals and objectives that support Rio Blanco County's Core Values, it should be noted that alternative strategies presented herein for accomplishing these goals and objectives are intentionally diverse to ensure that the desired ends can be achieved in the long-term no matter the variation in short-term political climate or associated obstacles.

The document must be used as a whole and each part must be utilized only within the context for which it was created. Extracting individual paragraphs, goals, or policies out of their contexts to support certain ends without considering both the Plan as a whole and Rio Blanco County's Core Values is discouraged and does not align with the overall goals and objectives of Rio Blanco County.

Overall, the purpose of the Plan is to serve as a reference document to enable Rio Blanco County citizens, staff, and decision-makers to easily access a variety of pertinent information from a broad array of sources in one digital location and to remind decision-makers of Rio Blanco County's Core Values as the future unfolds.

1.1 Resolution Adopting Comprehensive Plan

RESOLUTION NO. PC 2025-01
PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE COUNTY OF RIO BLANCO
STATE OF COLORADO

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF
RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO
ADOPTING THE RIO BLANCO COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF 2025

WHEREAS, Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) 30-28-106 & 31-23-206 provide that it is the duty of a county planning commission to make and adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the physical development of the unincorporated territory of the county; and

WHEREAS, it is the duty of the Rio Blanco County Planning Commission to make and adopt a plan for the physical development of the territory within the boundaries of Rio Blanco County, but outside of the incorporated limits of the Towns of Rangely and Meeker; and

WHEREAS, the existing Rio Blanco County 2011 Comprehensive Plan is out of date and no longer current with the existing conditions in the county; and

WHEREAS, it is in the interest of Rio Blanco County to adopt a revised Comprehensive Plan that sets forth a vision for the future and includes accompanying maps, charts and narratives describing the future development of the county that will guide the recommendations of the Planning Commission to the Board of County Commissioners; and

WHEREAS, the development of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan involved review and comment by a Technical Advisory Group, and public review meetings; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted Comprehensive Plan public hearings on May 15, 2025 in Meeker, Colorado and June 19, 2025 in Rangely, Colorado after notice of such public hearings was properly made in conformance with statutory requirements; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission is required by CRS 30-28-109 to certify the Comprehensive Plan to the Board of County Commissioners;

Now, Therefore, the Planning Commission of Rio Blanco County, Colorado, finds as that based upon the evidence and testimony presented in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan presented in Rangely and Meeker at the dates mentioned above, the Rio Blanco County Comprehensive Plan of 2025 has been created to align with the best interests of the health, safety, morals, convenience, order, prosperity and welfare of the citizens of Rio Blanco County.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO, THAT THE 2011 RIO BLANCO COUNTY MASTER PLAN, AS AMENDED, IS HEREBY REPEALED AND THE RIO BLANCO COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF 2025, A COPY OF WHICH IS ATTACHED HERETO AND INCORPORATED HEREIN BY REFERENCE, IS HEREBY APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS 26TH DAY OF JUNE, 2025. DULY MOVED, SECONDED, AND PASSED ON A VOTE OF 7 FOR AND 0 AGAINST, THIS 26TH DAY OF JUNE, 2025.

THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF RIO BLANCO COUNTY (2025)

By:	Signature
CHAIRMAN **TRAVIS DAY**	
VICE-CHAIRMAN **CLINT CHAPPELL**	
SECRETARY **LEE OVERTON**	
MEMBER **ADAIR NORMAN**	
MEMBER **EMMA BAKER**	
MEMBER **DIANA SIZEMORE**	
MEMBER **JAY SULLIVAN**	

Chariman:

8-20-2025
Date:

1.2 Legal Authority for the Comprehensive Plan

C.R.S Section 30-28-106

It is the duty of a county planning commission to make and adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the physical development of the unincorporated territory of the county. When a county planning commission decides to adopt a Comprehensive Plan, the commission shall conduct public hearings, after notice of such public hearings has been published in a newspaper of general circulation in the county in a manner sufficient to notify the public of the time, place, and nature of the public hearing, prior to final adoption of a Comprehensive Plan in order to encourage public participation in and awareness of the development of such plan and shall accept and consider oral and written public comments throughout the process of developing the plan.[1]

C.R.S Section 30-28-107

In the preparation of a county or regional Comprehensive Plan, a county or regional planning commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and probable future growth of the territory within its jurisdiction. The county or regional Comprehensive Plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the county or region which, in accordance with present and future needs and resources, will best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, or general welfare of the inhabitants, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development, including such distribution of population and of the uses of land for urbanization, trade, industry, habitation, recreation, agriculture, forestry, and other purposes as will tend to create conditions favorable to health, safety, energy conservation, transportation, prosperity, civic activities, and recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities; will tend to reduce the wastes of physical, financial, or human resources which result from either excessive congestion or excessive scattering of population; and will tend toward an efficient and economic utilization, conservation, and production of the supply of food and water and of drainage, sanitary, and other facilities and resources.[2]

C.R.S Section 30-28-108

A county or regional planning commission may adopt the county or regional Comprehensive Plan as a whole by a single resolution or, as the work of making the whole Comprehensive Plan progresses, may adopt parts thereof, any such part to correspond generally with one or more of the functional subdivisions of the subject matter which may be included in the plan. The commission may amend, extend, or add to the plan or carry any part of it into greater detail from time to time. The adoption of the plan or any part, amendment, extension, or addition shall be by resolution carried by the affirmative votes of not less than a majority of the entire membership of the commission. The resolution shall refer expressly to the maps and descriptive matter intended by the commission to form the whole or part of the plan. The action taken shall be recorded on the map and descriptive matter by the identifying signature of the secretary of the commission.[3]

This Comprehensive Plan is an official document adopted by the Rio Blanco County Planning Commission in the State of Colorado.

1.3 Acknowledgements

Rio Blanco County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Leif Joy and the Technical Advisory Group as well as recent efforts made by staff and consultants from Rangely and Meeker involved in the creation of the 2024 Rangely Comprehensive Plan and the 2021 Meeker Comprehensive Plan. The policies and community engagement efforts presented in these recent plans helped to inform the creation of this Plan to avoid duplication of effort and overcome existing survey fatigue.

County Staff
J. Leif Joy PLS, GISP
Community Development Director
Rio Blanco County

Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
Town of Rangely, Town of Meeker, and the Board of County Commissioners of Rio Blanco County, Colorado

Planning & Zoning Commission
Travis Day, Meeker
Adair Norman, Rangely
Emma Baker, Rangely
Lee Overton, Meeker
Clint Chappell, Meeker
Diana Sizemore, Rangely
Jay Sullivan, Meeker

County Commissioners
Doug Overton, District 1
Jennifer O'Hearon (Chair) District 2
Callie Scritchfield, District 3

Comprehensive Plan Lab LLC
Robin H. Pavase, AICP

1.4 History[7]

Early evidence of the human occupation of the area now known as Rio Blanco County is well documented. The Fremont People's occupation of Rio Blanco County from 200 to 1250 A.D. is clearly represented by over fifty archaeological sites and rock art locations in the Canyon Pintado Historic District. As time passed, more contemporary cultures such as the Ute Nation made this area their home beginning around 1200 A.D.



Source: Rio Blanco County

A succinct chronology of the exploration and non-indigenous settlement of Rio Blanco County is as follows:

- In 1776, an expedition was organized to find a northern route to the newly established missions in Monterrey, California led by Spanish Friars Atanasio Domínguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, who entered the county from the south and crossed into the Douglas Creek area. Ute guides took the party further north to what is now the present day Town of Rangely. The party then turned west and headed into Utah toward Utah Lake.[4]



Source: Rangely Outdoor Museum

- In 1844, John C. Fremont came to the area to map it for the Federal Government and traveled along the Green River to the White River.[5]



Source: National Park Service

- Major John Wesley Powell arrived in October 1868 to survey and camp in the area now named for him, Powell Park. He began a study of the language and culture of the Ute Indians.[5]

- In January 1868, members of the Colorado Territory Government sent Native American Agent D.C. Oakes, Ute Chiefs Jack & Ouray, Kit Carson, Otto Mears and others to Washington, D.C. to execute the Treaty of 1868. In June 1869, contracts were established for a new Ute Agency. Oakes oversaw its construction in the summer of 1869.[6]



Source: RBC Historical Society

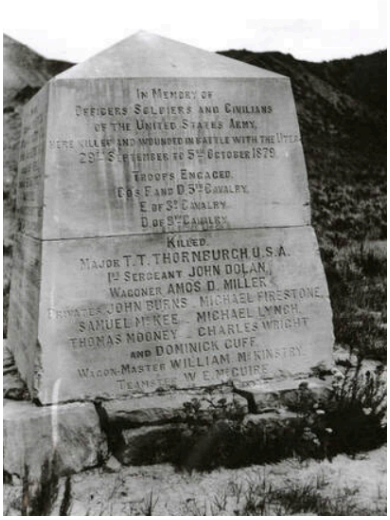
- Nathan Meeker, a Native American Agent for the area moved the Ute tribe to Powell Park in an effort to convert the Utes into farmers. The decision angered the Ute Nation. Major Thomas Tipton Thornburgh was summoned to assist the Agency. The Utes, fearing for

their safety, attacked the military at Milk Creek, killing Thornburgh and all of his officers. Chipeta, wife of Chief Ouray, sent word to Ouray about the fighting and he sent men to stop them, but they arrived too late. The Ute then attacked the Indian Agency on September 29, 1879, at the Powell Park site, killing Meeker and eight of his staff, taking the women and children hostage. This event became known as the "Meeker Massacre." Chief Ouray tried to negotiate peace with the Indian Agency, but to no avail. They were relocated south of Montrose, Colorado, to the Cantonment at Colona. In 1882, the US government ordered the Utes to be relocated to Utah. The last battle between the Utes and the Militia was the Ute War of 1887.[8]



Source: Rangely Outdoor Museum

- In 1883, after the forcible removal of the Ute People, the remaining buildings of the Indian Agency were auctioned off and this new settlement became known as Meeker.



Source: RBC Historical Society

- The Town of Meeker was incorporated in 1885; it was the first incorporated town in northwestern Colorado. Rio Blanco County was created in 1889 with an objective of creating a county that encompassed the White River Valley.[11] This was accomplished through a shuffling of county lines among Routt, Grand, and Garfield Counties.



Source: RBC Historical Society

- It was known from the earliest times that the County had a plethora of natural resources, and in 1901, oil drilling began near Rangely. The shallow Mancos Shale and Weber Sandstone formations yielded early production levels of oil from two oilfields- one on top of the other. By 1903, there were 13 different companies operating near Rangely, but the six wells produced only 10 barrels per day. A.C. McLaughlin came to the area in 1908 to survey the area, but it was not until 1917 that he purchased several large tracts of land.[9]



Source: RBC Historical Society

- Fourteen years later, a California company, now Chevron, purchased more land and in 1931, began work on the first deep well, named the Raven A1. It was another two years before the Raven A1, at a depth of 6,335 feet, was online and producing 230 barrels a day. The excitement of this well was short-lived because there was no market for the oil produced.

- Chevron capped the well a year after it began producing and it sat idle for the next 10 years.



Source: Town of Rangely

- In 1943 oil prices skyrocketed due to the demands of the nation in World War II, and Chevron responded by reopening the Raven A1.

- By 1947, Rangely was a booming oil town and decided to incorporate.

- Records of 1949 indicate there were 478 wells scattered across the area and the area continued to boom; by 1956 the area was producing 82,000 barrels of oil per day.[10]



Source: Town of Rangely

- The Rangely Weber Sand Unit oilfield was unitized in 1952 with Chevron as the operator.

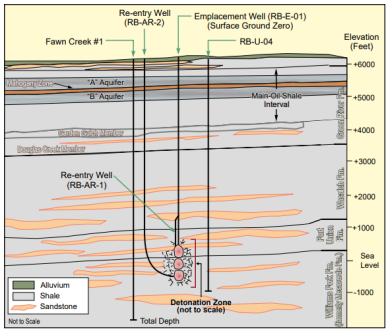
- Production peaked in 1956 at 82,000 barrels a day and has been steadily declining since.[15]

- In 1957, a steering committee was created to develop a higher education facility in Northwestern Colorado to serve Jackson, Grand, Routt, Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties. Rangely was chosen because “Rio Blanco County had an assessed valuation equal to that of the other four counties combined and surveys had shown that Rangely residents were likely to pass a bond issue.” Further, in 1959, Rangely residents voted to pass the bond issue for $2.8 million and in September 1962, classes started in Rangely for 83 students.[12]



Source: Denver Public Library

- On May 17, 1963, Project Rio Blanco[59] took place at 39°47′34.8″N, 108°22′4.8″W. This project was an underground radioactive detonation that was intended to increase the efficiency of natural gas production in the area. The project ultimately failed: “It was determined that the simultaneous detonations failed to create a single elongated interconnected chimney based on tracers included with each device. Additionally, production testing on the reentry wells did not indicate significant increases in productivity from the formation.” [58] The site is still monitored by the U.S. Department of Natural Resources regularly.[60]



Source: US Department of Energy

- In the 1980s, oil companies ramped up their efforts to produce enormous quantities of petroleum from the rich shale in the area as the extractive industry expanded throughout the country.

- Energy prices fell sharply in 1982. In May of that year, Exxon announced it was shutting down The Colony Project,[57] putting more than 2,000 oil-shale workers out of their jobs. The day became known as the Grand Valley's "Black Sunday." [61]

- In 2001, the Shell Exploration and Production Company began experimenting with new technology of using superheated water to melt the oil substance trapped under the shale of the Piceance Basin.

- Exxon Mobil returned to the basin and Chevron and BP also increased production in the area in 2006.[13]

- In 2009, the oilfield began a tertiary recovery effort, which includes carbon dioxide flooding. High-pressure carbon dioxide is injected into wells to recover additional oil that the secondary water flooding process left behind. This is one of the largest carbon dioxide floods in the world and is expected to add over 20 years to the field's production.

- In 2017, Titan Energy LLC sold its stake in the Rangely Field for $105 million. "The deal included Titan's interest in the field, its 22% interest in Raven Ridge pipeline, a CO2 transportation line, as well as surrounding properties in Rio Blanco and Moffat counties. The assets yielded about 2,500 barrels of oil equivalent per day of net production." [14]

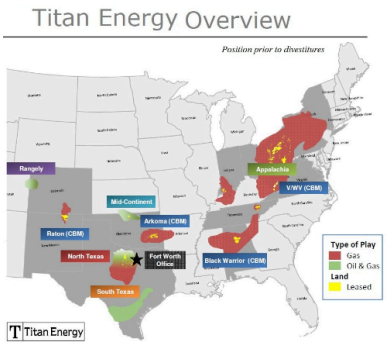
- Chevron sold its stake in Weber Sand Unit and associated facilities to Scout Energy Partners in 2021.



Source: US Department of Energy



Source: Rio Blanco County, 2011 Master Plan



Source: Hart Energy



Source: Herald Times

2.0 Existing Conditions

2.1 Location

Rio Blanco County ("RBC") is located in northwestern Colorado roughly half-way between Denver, Colorado and Salt Lake City, Utah. RBC is bordered by Moffat County, Colorado to the north, Routt County, Colorado to the northeast, Garfield County, Colorado to the south and Uintah County, Utah to the west. Contained within Rio Blanco County are 2,062,851.55 acres (3,223.22 square miles). The distance across RBC from east to west at its largest cross section is 161.51 miles, and the County's perimeter is 293.31 miles.[16]

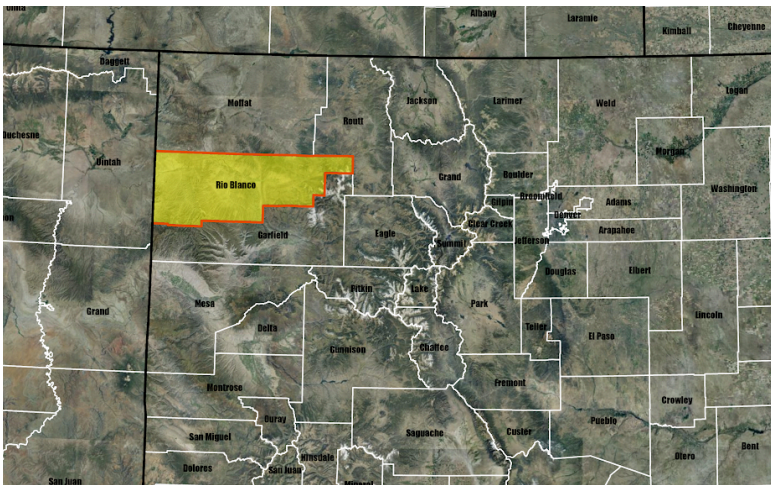


Figure 2.1a: Map of County Boundaries
Data Source: US Census Bureau, Tigerline Data, 2023

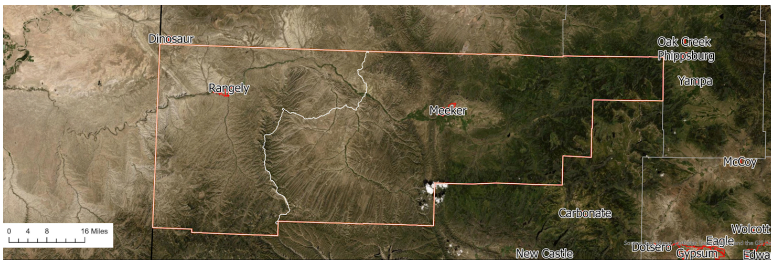


Figure 2.1b: Map of Places and CCDs
Data Source: US Census Bureau, Tigerline Data, 2023

Despite its vast size, Rio Blanco County contains only two towns, Meeker, which is 3.59 square miles, and Rangely, which is 4.38 square miles. The majority of RBC's land area is unincorporated. There are two county subdivisions within RBC, the Rangely CCD in the west and the Meeker CCD in the east. See the white line delineating the separation between CCDs in Figure 2.1b for reference.

2.2 Topography and Natural Resources

The highest elevation in Rio Blanco County is 12,027 feet above sea level in the northwest arm of Orno Peak, which is southeast of the Town of Meeker in the Flat Tops region. The lowest

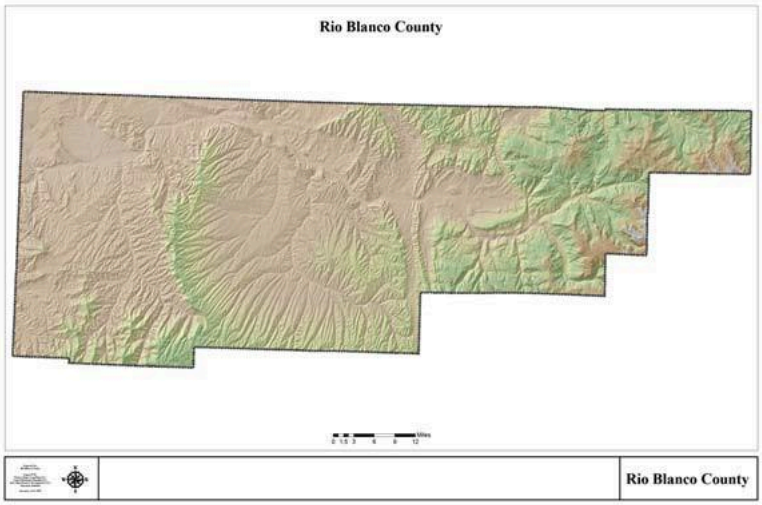


Figure 2.2a: Map of Rio Blanco County Topography
Data Source: US Geological Survey, accessed 2009, by others

elevation in Rio Blanco County is about 5,000 feet, where the White River exits the county into Utah on its way to the confluence of the Green River.[17] See Figure 2.2a for details.

The southern central portion of the county, known as the Piceance Basin (hydrologic), is part of the Colorado Plateau. The high alpine region of the county is located east of Meeker and includes the "Flattops," a large portion of which is designated wilderness under the jurisdiction of the US Forest Service.

The White River drains the eastern highlands as it flows westward to the Utah border. The fertile White River Valley has supported agricultural uses since the first occupation by Native Americans and subsequent westward expansion. The wet higher elevations of the eastern Rio Blanco County transition across the Grand Hogback to dryer lower elevation uplands characterized by many arroyos eroded into the land surfaces. Cathedral Bluffs also have been channelized by erosion over time. Except for several large drainages, the rugged terrain of these eroded uplands makes access and travel difficult. These topographic qualities have steered settlement in the county to the more easily accessed irrigated fertile valleys.

Rio Blanco County is known internationally for its profound supply of natural resources, especially oil, which has historically been the primary economic driver of the region. The Rangely Oil Field is a well-known compilation of extraction sites located near the Town of Rangely in the western portion of RBC. See Figure 2.2b for a location map of Rangely Field.[69] Subsequently, Figure 2.2c is a map of the Production Status of all Oil and Gas Sites throughout Rio Blanco County.[70]

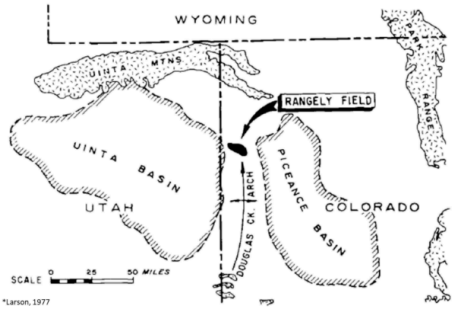


Figure 2.2b: Map of Rangely Oil Field
Data Source: Larson 1977

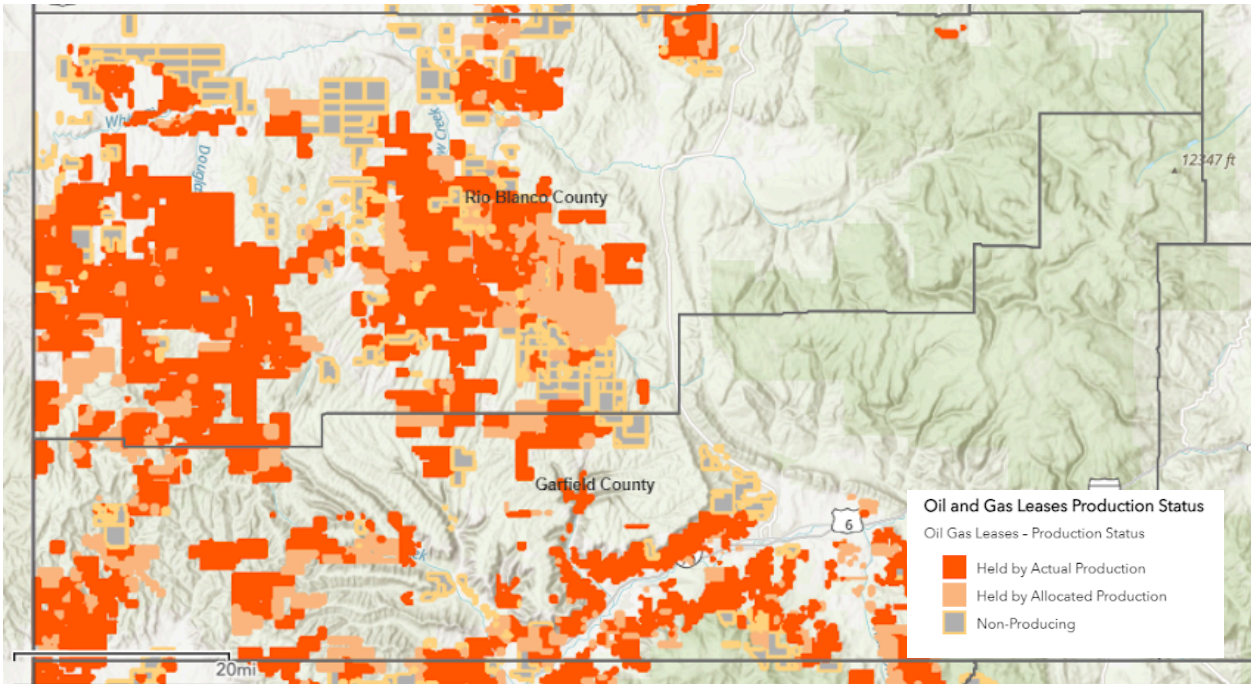


Figure 2.2c: Map of Production Status of Oil and Gas Sites throughout Rio Blanco County
Data Source: Colorado BLM, https://www.blm.gov/maps/frequently-requested/colorado/gis-datasets

Coal is also a naturally-occurring resource that has contributed substantially to the region's economy. Figure 2.2d is a map of Authorized Coal Leases within RBC.[71]

From 2001 to 2023, an average of 1,929,478 tons of coal were produced annually in Deserado Mine and shipped via railroad line to Deseret Power's Bonanza Power Plant, south of Vernal, Utah.[74] While "Unit 1 [of the powerplant] was planned for retirement in 2030, the unit could continue to run after 2030 if the plant installed catalytic control technology before the end of 2030. In April 2024, Deseret Power filed an application with Utah's Public Service Commission to install selective catalytic reduction (SCR) technology on Unit 1. If the project is approved by state regulators and the EPA, and installed before 2030, the coal plant could potentially continue to operate until 2041 or 2042. The Utah Department of Commerce's Division of Public Utilities had reportedly recommended approving Deseret's application."[75]

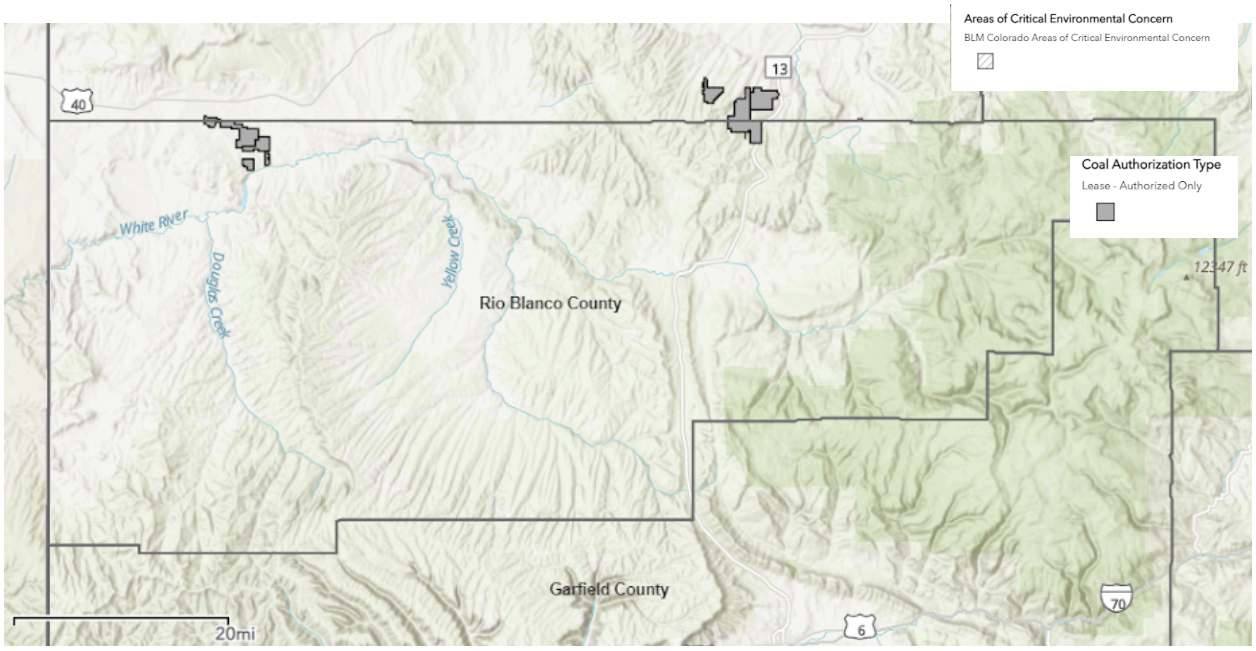
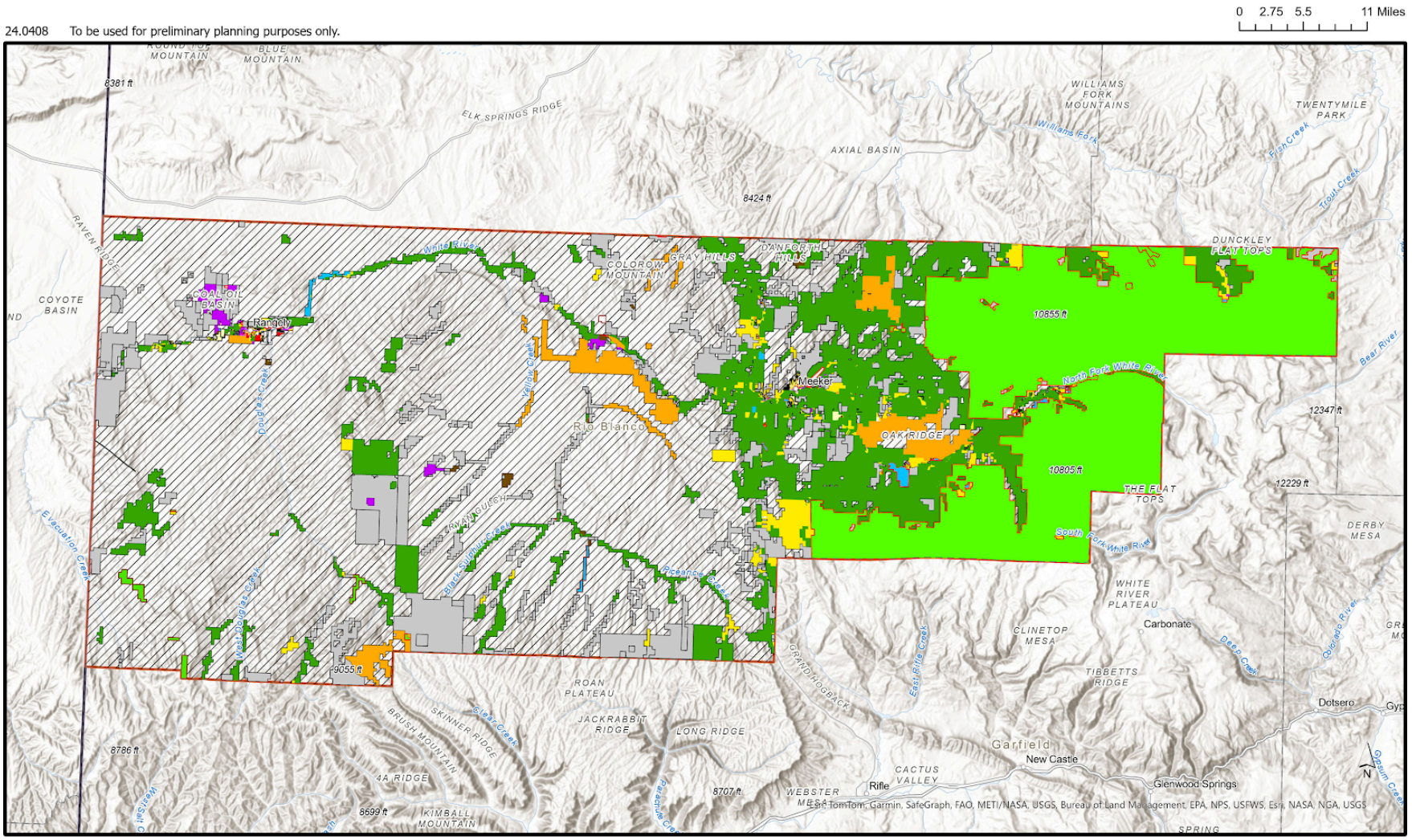


Figure 2.2d: Map of Authorized Coal Leases
Data Source: Colorado BLM
https://blm-egis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=59bfb9b9406d4a409e2f510bda9e409f

2.3 Land Tenure

The majority of land in Rio Blanco County is public land. The largest shares of land are under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (1,153,200 acres) and the US Forest Service (352,423 acres). A portion of these public lands are also owned by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the State of Colorado, Rio Blanco County, or other public agencies. The majority of privately owned lands are found in the White River and Piceance drainages, within and surrounding Meeker and Rangely. Agricultural land use occupies 55% of the private lands with the balance devoted to commercial, residential, industrial and vacant lands. Many "vacant" parcels are owned by entities that focus on natural resource extraction and related industries. See Figure 2.3 for a map of tax account types.



Data Source(s): U.S. Census Bureau Tigerlines; USGS Contour Lines

Comprehensive Plan Lab

2.4 Population Size

Since its establishment, Rio Blanco County has experienced a variety of growth patterns that are largely a function of the county's economic drivers.

200 AD to 1250: Early evidence of human occupation of the area later known as Rio Blanco County is well documented, especially the central and western portions. The Fremont People occupied Rio Blanco County from about 200 to 1250 A.D., as is clearly represented by existing archaeological sites and rock art locations throughout the Canyon Pintado Historic District.

1250 to 1880: As time passed, more contemporary cultures such as the Ute Nation made this area their home. Indigenous peoples occupied the area until the Meeker Massacre and subsequent battles, which resulted in the indigenous peoples being forcibly removed from this land and pushed into what is now Utah to make way for American settlers.

1890 to 1920: During this period, the population grew in the Town of Meeker and in unincorporated Rio Blanco County as non-indigenous households moved into the area and developed an agricultural economy.

1920 to 1930: The Great Depression resulted in a loss of population in the unincorporated portions of the county, however, Meeker continued to grow.

1930 to 1960: The development of the first deep oil well (Raven A1 Well) by Chevron in 1931 and subsequent development of the oil bearing Weber Sandstone formation along with the increased demand for oil resulting from World War II kicked off a population growth period between 1940 and 1960. This economic activity and growth led to the incorporation of the Town of Rangely. During this time, the population in unincorporated Rio Blanco County grew from around 3,000 to over 5,000.

1960 to 1970: During this period, Rio Blanco County experienced a declining population with a downturn in oil production and overall economic slowdown.

1980 to 1990: The most recent significant growth period occurred in the early 1980s during the oil shale boom in both Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties when the unincorporated population of the county expanded to over 6,500. That boom period ended in May 1982 when Exxon shut down their Parachute Creek operations that resulted in massive layoffs across the Western Slope and a corresponding population decline in the county.

1990 to 2000: From 1990 to 2000, the overall population in the county stagnated, increasing by only 14 people in ten years.[31]

2000 to 2010: The county population increased by 11.4% from 5,986 to 6,666 residents during this time. This growth included increases in population within Meeker, Rangely, and unincorporated areas.[32]

2010 to 2020: By 2020, Rio Blanco County's population had decreased by 2%. [33]

Average Population Change: From 1950 to 2020, there was an average increase of 26 residents per year in Rio Blanco County. During that time period, the population of Rangely increased by an average of 21 residents per year, the population of Meeker increased by an average of 18 residents per year, and the population living in unincorporated areas within Rio Blanco County decreased by about 13 residents per year. See Figures 2.4a and 2.4b for details.

Population				
Year	**RBC**	**Rangely**	**Meeker**	**Uninc.**
1950	4,719	807	1,117	2,795
1960	5,150	1,464	1,655	2,031
1970	4,842	1,591	1,597	1,654
1980	6,266	2,113	2,356	1,797
1990	5,972	2,278	2,098	1,596
2000	5,986	2,101	2,183	1,702
2010	6,666	2,365	2,475	1,826
2020	6,529	2,299	2,374	1,856
2022	6,511	2,382	2,500	1,629

Figure 2.4a: Table, Population Change
Data Sources: Census 1950-2020, ACS DP05 2022

According to the most recent ACS data, population change in Rio Blanco County was relatively stagnant from 2020 to 2022, decreasing by only 2%.[34] During that time, the number of residents located in Rangely and Meeker increased, indicating a net loss in only unincorporated areas.

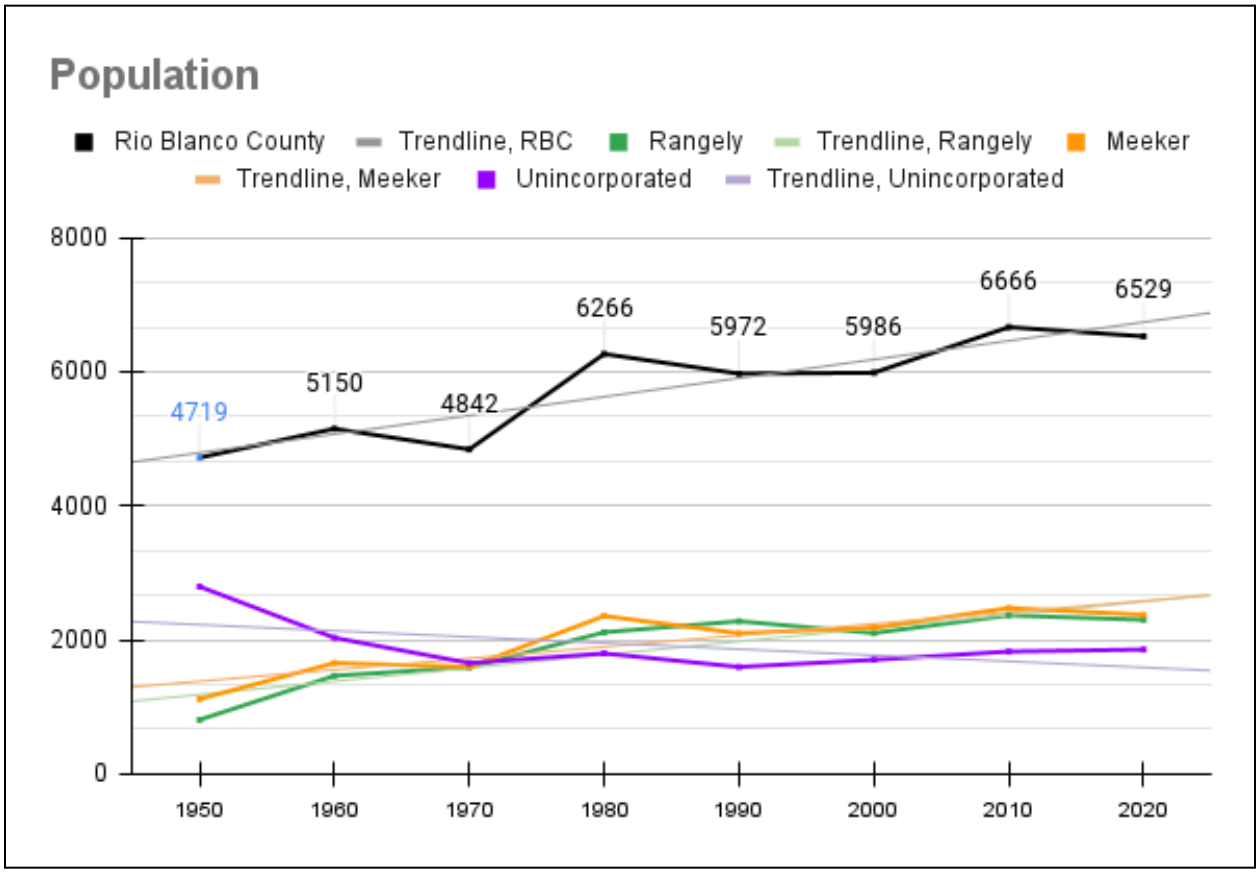


Figure 2.4b: Chart, Population Change
Data Sources: Decennial Census 1950-2020, ACS Table DP05 2022

2.5 Population Age and the OADR

According to the latest available data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the median age in Rio Blanco County is 39.2,[35] which is 2.4 years older than in 2012.[36] Comparatively, the median age in Colorado increased by only 1.2 years since 2012, indicating that the population of Rio Blanco County is aging twice as fast as the state as a whole.

Median Age		
	Colorado	RBC
2012	36.1	36.8
2013	36.1	38.0
2014	36.2	36.8
2015	36.3	36.4
2016	36.4	35.7
2017	36.5	35.9
2018	36.6	35.9
2019	36.7	36.9
2020	36.9	37.6
2021	37.1	37.5
2022	37.3	39.2

Figure 2.5a: Table, Median Age
Data Sources: ACS Table DP05, 2012-2022

By calculating the ratio between working-age individuals (age 20-64) and likely retired individuals (age 65 and over), the Old-Age Dependency Ratio (OADR) provides insight into the long-term stability of a region's labor force. The OADR of Rio Blanco County was 0.20 in 2010[48] and 0.33 in 2020.[47] A continued increase at this rate would result in an OADR of 0.46 in 2030 in Rio Blanco County. Comparatively, Colorado's OADR was 0.17 in 2010[46] and 0.23 in 2020.[45] If the rate of change remained constant, Colorado would have an OADR of 0.29 in 2030. While there is no defined threshold associated with an absolute and critical loss of labor supply since the demand for labor and the actual retirement age in each region are unique, as a large percentage of working-age individuals age out of the workforce, an increased OADR will require existing industries to shift in scale or type to adjust for the long-term change in labor supply. This loss of working-age individuals can be offset in the short term by attracting working-age individuals living outside of Rio Blanco County to the region to fill specific jobs.

Age Data, 2020	Rio Blanco County		Meeker		Rangely	
Cohort	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Total population	6,529	100.00%	2,374	100.00%	2,299	100.00%
Under 5 years	364	5.60%	139	5.90%	145	6.30%
5 to 9 years	434	6.60%	167	7.00%	161	7.00%
10 to 14 years	581	8.90%	221	9.30%	197	8.60%
15 to 19 years	509	7.80%	166	7.00%	240	10.40%
20 to 24 years	342	5.20%	97	4.10%	179	7.80%
25 to 29 years	311	4.80%	139	5.90%	126	5.50%
30 to 34 years	410	6.30%	160	6.70%	150	6.50%
35 to 39 years	478	7.30%	182	7.70%	164	7.10%
40 to 44 years	355	5.40%	125	5.30%	143	6.20%
45 to 49 years	310	4.70%	112	4.70%	105	4.60%
50 to 54 years	336	5.10%	112	4.70%	96	4.20%
55 to 59 years	447	6.80%	159	6.70%	135	5.90%
60 to 64 years	491	7.50%	133	5.60%	168	7.30%
65 to 69 years	415	6.40%	171	7.20%	100	4.30%
70 to 74 years	303	4.60%	126	5.30%	68	3.00%
75 to 79 years	212	3.20%	66	2.80%	52	2.30%
80 to 84 years	125	1.90%	54	2.30%	37	1.60%
85 years and over	106	1.60%	45	1.90%	33	1.40%

Figure 2.5b: Chart, Age Cohorts, 2020
Data Sources: Decennial Census 2020

However, in a remote area like Rio Blanco County, finding laborers who are willing to relocate permanently could be challenging. In the long term, the problem of a shrinking labor force can be solved by increasing family-friendly policies, resources, and housing options that enable households with children to choose to live in the region, thereby enabling children to grow up in these communities and eventually learn the required skills compatible with existing industries as they enter the labor force at maturity.

Additionally, as the population ages, a broader range of services are required to maintain the population's overall health and ability to live independently.

2.6 Population Health

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention releases statistics on health outcomes for each county in the United States regularly. According to the most recently available health outcome data,[37] individuals living in Rio Blanco County had about the same incidence of cancer, chronic kidney disease, coronary heart disease, and stroke as elsewhere in the United States. However, Rio Blanco County residents displayed a higher incidence of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, current asthma, and depression and a lower incidence of diagnosed diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity. According to this data, the most problematic health outcome in Rio Blanco County is depression and the most beneficial health outcome is a lower incidence of obesity.

Health Outcomes in Adults (Population 18+)	Location	Incidence %	Difference
Cancer (excluding skin cancer)	United States	6.0	-0.3
	Rio Blanco	6.3	
Chronic kidney disease	United States	2.7	-0.1
	Rio Blanco	2.8	
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	United States	5.7	-0.9
	Rio Blanco	6.6	
Coronary heart disease	United States	5.2	-0.1
	Rio Blanco	5.3	
Current asthma	United States	9.7	-1.2
	Rio Blanco	10.9	
Depression	United States	19.8	-3.8
	Rio Blanco	23.6	
Diagnosed diabetes	United States	9.9	1.8
	Rio Blanco	8.1	
High blood pressure	United States	29.6	3.4
	Rio Blanco	26.2	
High cholesterol	United States	31.0	2.6
	Rio Blanco	28.4	
Obesity	United States	33.0	5.8
	Rio Blanco	27.2	
Stroke	United States	2.8	0.0
	Rio Blanco	2.8	

Figure 2.6a: Chart, Health Outcomes
Data Sources: CDC, Places: Local Data for Better Health, 2021

2.7 Health Insurance Coverage

Access to healthcare options is critical for any population to remain healthy in the long-term. Health insurance limits the maximum out-of-pocket amount that a given subscriber can be subject to per year, though high insurance premiums and provider costs can also prohibit individuals from accessing the care they need. However, medical costs and the geographic availability of medical providers within this region are elements that are outside the scope of this report. In 2020, 90.7% of the non-institutionalized civilian population[40] of Rio Blanco County had health insurance coverage.[41]

2.8 Fertility and Premature Death Rate

According to the latest ACS data, 143 women between the ages of 15 and 50 gave birth in Rio Blanco County in 2022.[43] Comparatively, in 2012, 124 women of the same age group were reported to have given birth within the same timeframe.[44] From 2012 to 2022, the number of annual reported births increased by 15%.

The Premature Death Rate (PDR) is the number of people under age 75 that die per every 100,000 people per year. In 2010, the PDR was 317 and in 2020, the PDR was 406, demonstrating a 28% increase over 10 years. For context, the PDR for Colorado in 2020 was 298,[39] indicating that premature deaths occurred at double the rate in Rio Blanco County as in Colorado in 2020. From 1999 to 2020, the PDR for Rio Blanco County fluctuated between a relative max of 512 (in 2004) and a relative min of 310 (in 2009).[38]

2.9 Population Composition

The Rio Blanco County population consists of 53% males and 47% females. Of the total county population, 16.5% have a disability. In 2022, 48.2% of residents were born in Colorado, 46.6% were born in a different US state, 1.4% were born in Puerto Rico, U.S. Island areas, or born abroad to American parents, and 3.8% were born in a different country. Of all households in Rio Blanco County, 92.8% reported to speak only English at home and 7.2% reported to speak a language other than English at home. However, only 2.5% of those households that reportedly do not speak English at home indicated that they speak English “less than very well.” [43 / 44] The population is 82.3% White, 11.1% Hispanic or Latino, 0.3% Black or African American, 1.1% Native American, 0.1% Asian, and 5.1% “two or more races.”[42]

2.10 Educational Attainment and Employment Industries

The population in Rio Blanco County has lower attainment levels for graduate degrees and bachelor’s degrees than Colorado as a whole. See Figure 2.10a for a complete comparison. However, most jobs in Rio Blanco County have historically not required a degree for entry level employment since said jobs have been primarily manual-labor driven, requiring extensive and specialized on-the-job training not learned adequately through collegiate classroom-based instruction. More specifically, in 2012, the largest employment sector in Rio Blanco County was “agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining.” Jobs were historically focused around Rio Blanco County’s array of mineral extraction sites and natural resource areas. See Figure 2.10b for details.

Educational Attainment, 2022	RBC	Colorado
Less than 9th grade	2.0%	3.1%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	5.8%	4.3%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	34.8%	20.4%
Some college, no degree	24.3%	20.0%
Associate's degree	9.3%	8.4%
Bachelor's degree	16.4%	27.2%
Graduate or professional degree	7.4%	16.5%

Figure 2.10a: Table, Educational Attainment Comparison
Data Sources: ACS DP02, 2022

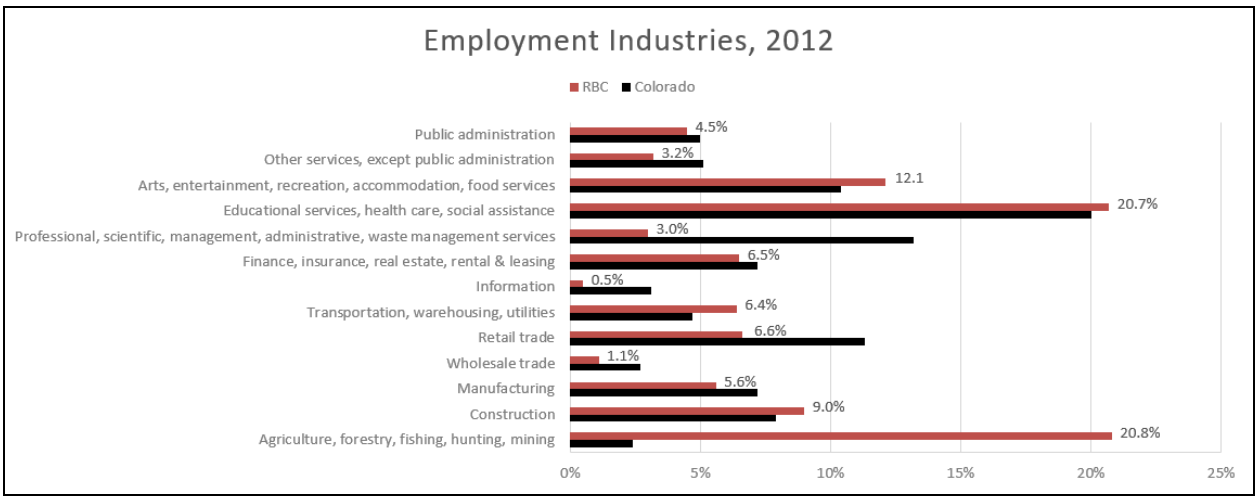


Figure 2.10b: Chart, Employment Industries, RBC, 2012
Data Source: ACS, DP03, 2012

However, that is no longer the case. In 2022, the above-mentioned industry now employs only 12% of Rio Blanco County's workers. The "educational services, health care, and social assistance" industry is now the largest employment sector in Rio Blanco County and "agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining" is the second, followed closely by "retail trade" and "public administration." See Figure 2.10c for additional information.

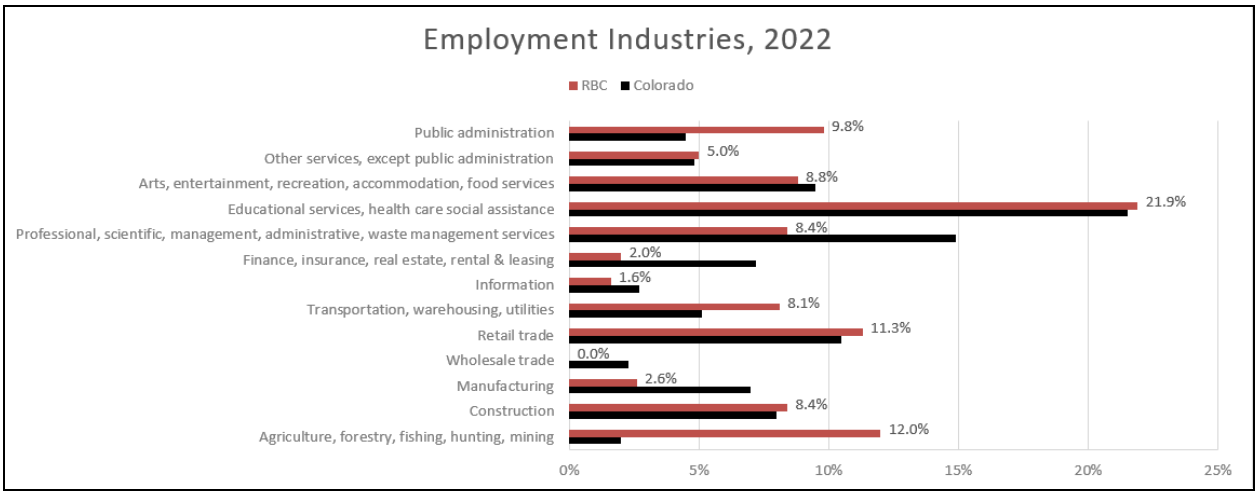


Figure 2.10c: Chart, Employment Industries, RBC, 2022
Data Sources: ACS DP03, 2022

2.11 Households [51 / 52]

Based on the most recent American Community Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 2,513 households living in Rio Blanco County. This is a 1% decrease since 2012, indicating that the number of households in Rio Blanco County has been relatively stagnant in the past ten years. Comparatively, the number of households in Colorado as a whole increased by 16% from 2012 to 2022. See Table 2.12a for a complete ten year breakdown.

The average household size in Rio Blanco County is now 2.45 people but was 2.26 people in 2012. In Colorado, the average household size is 2.48 people but was 2.51 people in 2012. Over the past ten years, the average household size in Rio Blanco County grew by 8% while it shrunk by 1% in Colorado as a whole. In 2012, the average family size was 2.88 people in Rio Blanco County and 3.11 people in Colorado overall. Currently, the average family size is 3.03 people in Rio Blanco County and 3.07 people in Colorado as a whole. In summary, while Colorado as a whole has experienced shrinking families in the past ten years, Rio Blanco County has seen an increase in family size.

Housholds			
	RBC	RBC as % of CO	% Annual Change - RBC
2012	2,540	0.13%	-
2013	2,638	0.13%	3.86%
2014	2,644	0.13%	0.23%
2015	2,482	0.12%	-6.13%
2016	2,450	0.12%	-1.29%
2017	2,417	0.12%	-1.35%
2018	2,403	0.11%	-0.58%
2019	2,301	0.11%	-4.24%
2020	2,513	0.12%	9.21%
2021	2,488	0.11%	-0.99%
2022	2,513	0.11%	1.00%

Figure 2.11a: Table, Number of Households
Data Sources: ACS DP02, 2012 -2022

2.12 Median Household Income

Based on the most recent 5-year ACS data, the median household income is $87,598 in Colorado and $69,882 in Rio Blanco County.[49] Comparatively, in 2012, the median household income was $58,244 in Colorado and $58,393 in Rio Blanco County.[50] Therefore, in ten years, Colorado's median household income increased by 50% while Rio Blanco County's median household income increased by only 20%. Ten years ago, Rio Blanco's median household income was slightly higher than Colorado's median household income, but now, it is 20% less than Colorado's median household income.

2.13 Housing Units, Vacancy, and Tenure [53 / 54]

There are 3,274 housing units in Rio Blanco County, which is 3.48% more housing units than were present in 2012. Of the housing units currently present, 23.2% are vacant. In 2012, 19.7% were vacant. Therefore, vacancy of residential structures in Rio Blanco County is increasing. The housing units that are occupied consist of 78.6% owner-occupants and 21.4% renters.

2.14 Year of Construction [53]

More homes in Rio Blanco County were built between 1970 and 1979 than any other timeframe. Only 4.2% of homes were built since 2010. Collectively, 52.3% of housing units in Rio Blanco County are at least 50 years old. As a home ages, more intensive upkeep is required to

maintain effective operation. Increased housing stock age experienced in tandem with vacancy could be a challenge in the future. See Figure 2.15a for details regarding construction years.

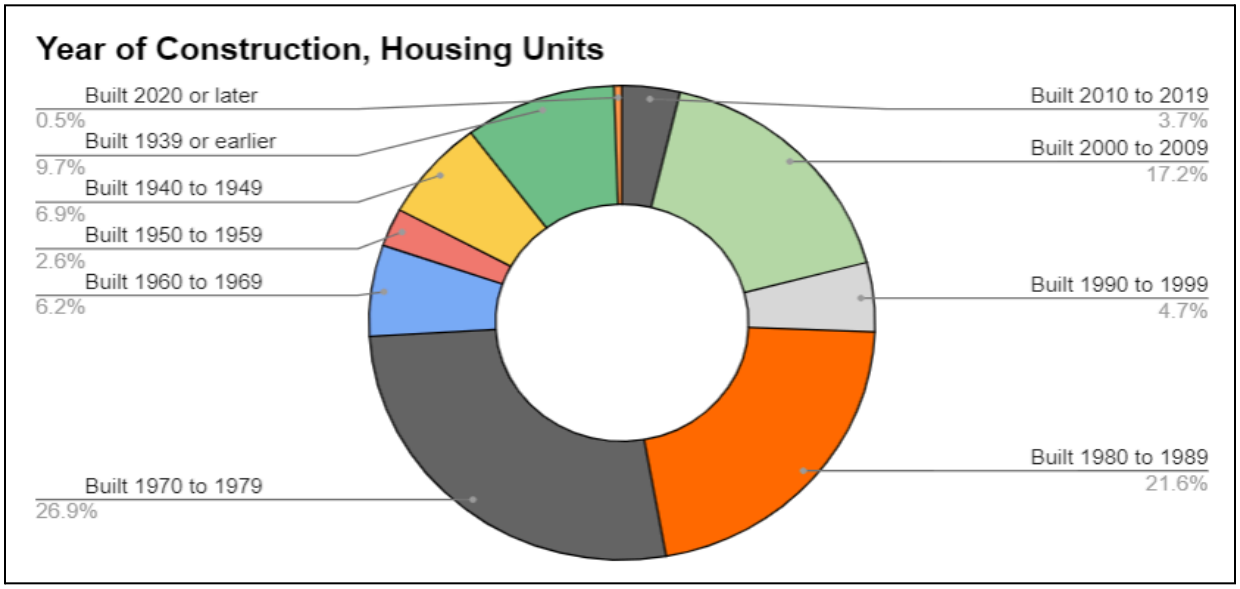


Figure 2.14a: Chart, Year of Construction, RBC
Data Sources: ACS DP04, 2022

2.15 Number of Units in each Residential Structure [53]

Homes in Rio Blanco County are of a predominantly single-family nature. Currently, 79.4% of homes are detached single-family homes. The next most prevalent unit typology consists of mobile homes: 6.6% of housing units in Rio Blanco County are mobile homes. Comparatively, only 3.7% of units in Colorado as a whole are mobile homes. The flexibility and inexpensive cost of mobile homes make them attractive housing options, but over time, mobile homes deteriorate faster than traditional stick-built housing if they are not maintained regularly.

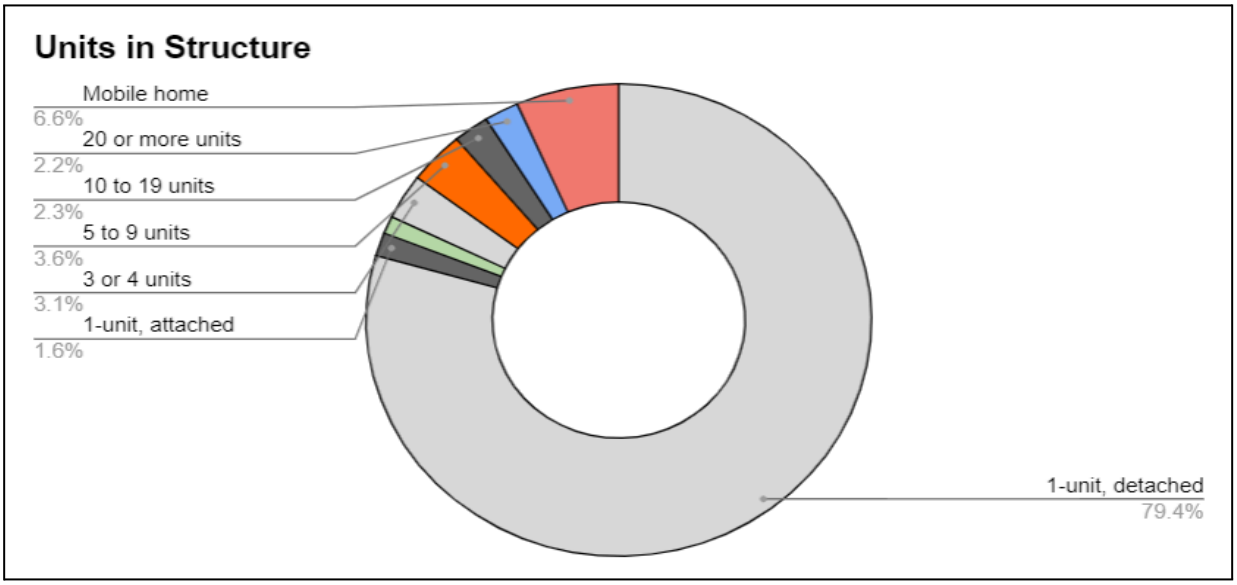


Figure 2.16a: Chart, Units in Structure, RBC
Data Sources: ACS DP04, 2022

2.16 Housing Cost [53 / 54]

The median rent in Rio Blanco County is $893 per month. In Colorado as a whole, the median rent is $1,594. Since 2012, rent increased by 26% in Rio Blanco County. As indicated in Section 2.13, since 2012, median household income increased by 20% in Rio Blanco County. Therefore, rent increased at a higher rate than income in Rio Blanco County over the past decade.

The housing costs for owner-occupants increased since 2012 as well. More specifically, according to the latest American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau, the median home value in Rio Blanco County is $231,800, which is 9% higher than in 2012, when it was $212,000. The median monthly housing cost for owner-occupants with a mortgage is now $1,392, compared to $1,326 in 2012. Comparatively, since 2012, the median monthly housing cost for owner-occupants increased from $1,650 to $2,109 and the median home value increased from $236,800 to $465,900. The consistency in monthly owner-occupant housing costs in Rio Blanco County over the past ten years is most likely associated with the fact that very few new units have been constructed since 2010, as indicated previously in Section 2.15.

2.17 Need for Affordable Housing [53 / 54]

Affordable Housing that is deed-restricted to remain affordable for an extended period of time, (typically the compliance period, which aligns with the term of the permanent financing loan associated with the construction of the affordable unit), has an income-limit set on it to ensure that it is set-aside for households who truly need it. According to the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority[55] (CHFA), to be eligible for Affordable Housing in Rio Blanco County at 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI), a four- person household would have to earn less than $56,520 annually before taxes. They could then be income-qualified through CHFA to apply for housing in a unit set-aside for renter households earning up to 60% AMI. To ensure that said household was not housing cost-burdened in the future, the rent assigned would be around 30% of their monthly income, which at an annual income of $56,520, would be approximately $1,413.

County HERA	AMI	2024 Income Limits							
		1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person	7 Person	8 Person
Rio Blanco	120%	79,200	90,480	101,760	113,040	122,160	131,160	140,280	149,280
Rio Blanco	100%	66,000	75,400	84,800	94,200	101,800	109,300	116,900	124,400
Rio Blanco	80%	52,800	60,320	67,840	75,360	81,440	87,440	93,520	99,520
Rio Blanco	70%	46,200	52,780	59,360	65,940	71,260	76,510	81,830	87,080
Rio Blanco	60%	39,600	45,240	50,880	56,520	61,080	65,580	70,140	74,640
Rio Blanco	55%	36,300	41,470	46,640	51,810	55,990	60,115	64,295	68,420
Rio Blanco	50%	33,000	37,700	42,400	47,100	50,900	54,650	58,450	62,200
Rio Blanco	45%	29,700	33,930	38,160	42,390	45,810	49,185	52,605	55,980
Rio Blanco	40%	26,400	30,160	33,920	37,680	40,720	43,720	46,760	49,760
Rio Blanco	30%	19,800	22,620	25,440	28,260	30,540	32,790	35,070	37,320
Rio Blanco	20%	13,200	15,080	16,960	18,840	20,360	21,860	23,380	24,880

Owner-occupied units can be deed-restricted up to around 100% AMI and sometimes even 120% AMI. According to the table above, a four-person household intending to buy an affordable unit would need to earn less than $84,800 annually to be eligible for unit set-aside at

100% AMI. As such, they could expect to pay 30% of their income, that is $2,120 per month, on their mortgage and property taxes combined.

There are approximately 1,008 households earning less than $56,520 (the 60% AMI rental threshold) and approximately 1,086 households earning less than $84,800 annually[41] (the 100% AMI owner-occupant threshold) residing in Rio Blanco County. It should also be noted that there have been no Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) units constructed in Rio Blanco County, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) LIHTC Database,[56] though a very limited number of existing affordable housing options do exist within Rio Blanco County within Rangely and Meeker. These units can be found on each municipality's website.

A household is "housing cost burdened" if it pays more than 30% of its income on housing costs alone. In Rio Blanco County, 42.3% of renters and 28.7% of owner-occupants with a mortgage are housing cost burdened. Additional affordable housing options in Rio Blanco County are urgently needed. [53 / 54]

3.0 Inventory of Resources

3.1 Transportation

The surface transportation system for Rio Blanco County consists of the network of state highways, county roads, local streets, Forest Service roads, and Bureau of Land Management roads. Due to the rural nature of the county, the automobile is the predominant means of transportation. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the county are generally limited to the areas within the downtown portions of Meeker and Rangely. Abundant forest service and BLM trails and multi-modal roads are also scattered throughout, especially in scenic areas. Public transportation is provided only for seniors and school children. Independent taxi service exists, though its capacity is limited. There are two local airports and one operating non-passenger railroad corridor in the county.

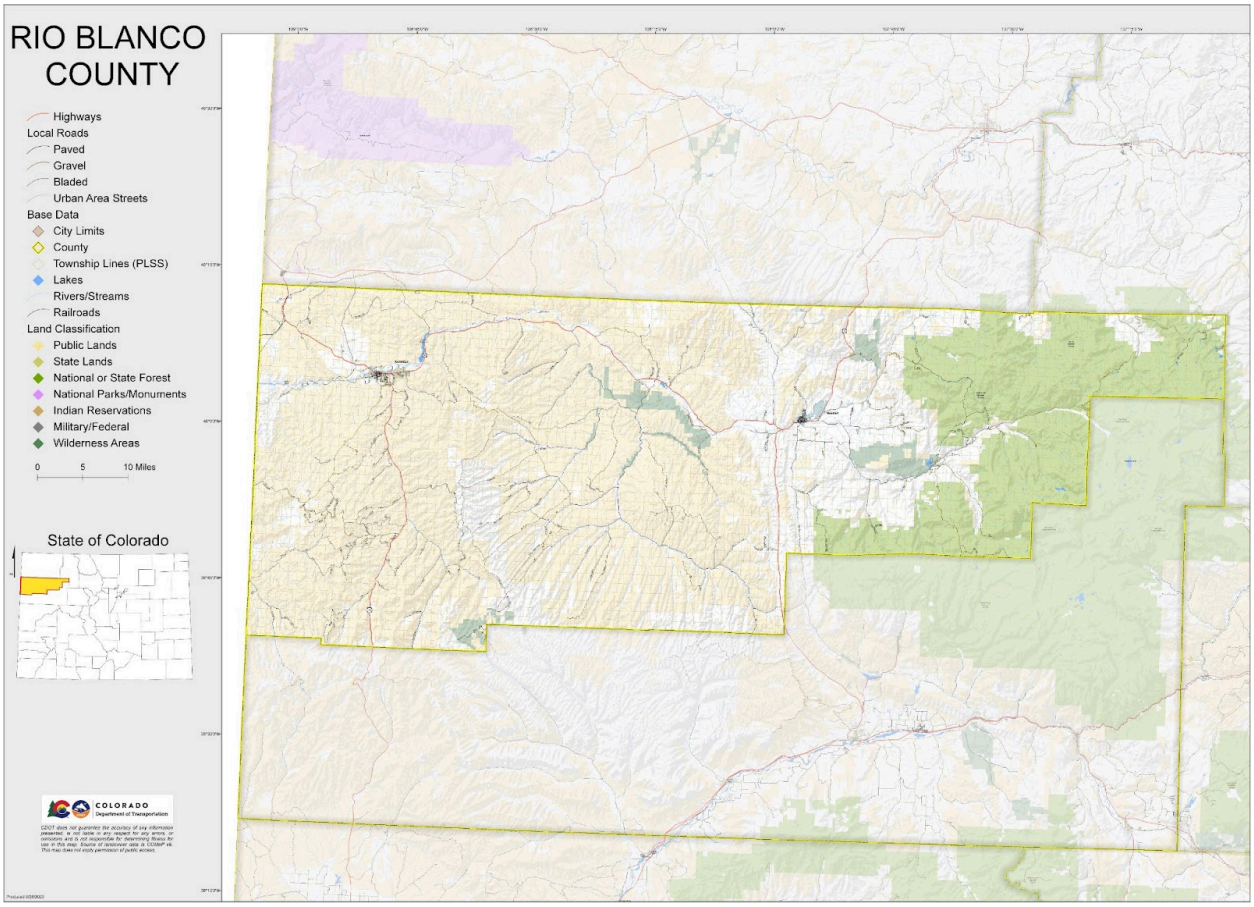


Figure 3.1a: Map of RBC Roadways
Data Sources: CDOT, 2023

Roadway Network

Rio Blanco County is served by three State Highways (SH), 13, 64, and 139, which provide most of the regional mobility within the county and to adjacent counties. County roads, local streets, private, Forest Service, and BLM roads generally extend out from intersections with the primary state facilities.

State Highway 13 is a 41.5-mile corridor extending from the Garfield County line on the south through the Town of Meeker to the Moffat County line on the north. Generally, SH 13 is classified as an “R-A” (Regional Highway) in the State of Colorado State Highway Access Category Assignment Schedule. An approximate 2-mile section within Meeker exists where the highway is classified as a “NR-B” (Non-Rural Arterial).

State Highway 64 extends from the intersection of US 40 in Moffat County (Dinosaur) east through Rangely and along the White River valley to SH 13 near Meeker with approximately 72 of the total 74 miles of highway occurring within Rio Blanco County. Generally, the highway is classified as an “R-A” (Regional Highway) with an approximate four mile section within the Town of Rangely that is classified as “NR-B” and “NR-A” (Non-Rural Principal Highway). The initial section of highway between Dinosaur and Rangely (SH 139) is designated part of the “Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway” (scenic byway). The final two-mile section as SH 64 approaches SH 13 is classified as an “R-B” (Rural Highway) by CDOT.

State Highway 139 extends south about 72 miles from Rangely to intersect with Interstate 70 in Loma. SH 139 is classified as an “R-A” highway within Rio Blanco County. The highway is rural in nature and forms part of the “Dinosaur Diamond Scenic and Historic Byway” from Douglas Pass on the south to the Town of Rangely. Travel across Douglas Pass can be a daunting task during periods of bad weather.

The county maintains over 920 miles of roads and approximately 29 bridges that are more than 20 feet in length. Approximately 193 miles of county road have an asphalt surface while the remaining 727 miles are primarily gravel roads. The roads are all two-lane, with a few climbing or passing lane sections existing on the state highways. All intersections are stop- controlled or have no control posted in rural locations. There are no stop lights in Rio Blanco County.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Because of the rural nature of the county and relatively low traffic volumes on most of the roadways, dedicated pedestrian and bicycle facilities are rare and have not been a priority to plan and construct. Bicycles and pedestrians are required to share the roadway with vehicular traffic. In some locations of newer development, dedicated bike and pedestrian facilities have been established, predominantly in the municipal hubs of Rangely and Meeker.

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Transit and Public Transportation

There is no regional transit authority established in Rio Blanco County or local public transit system within either Meeker or Rangely. However, van transit services are provided by senior care centers in Meeker and Rangely. The public school districts provide transportation service to

students and the community colleges in the county also provide limited transportation, but only for enrolled students.

Railroads

There is one existing rail line currently in operation in the county that runs from the Deserado coal mine northeast of Rangely to the Deseret Power Plant in Utah just over the state line. This line is an exclusive line for the power plant, with no spurs or connections to any mainline. A historic narrow-gauge rail grade exists from Bonanza, Utah, west of Rangely that traveled south over Baxter Pass to Mack, Colorado. This was used to transport mined Gilsonite from the mine to the mainline of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. There are places where track still exists, but most of this has been removed and remains a rural dirt grade and is of scenic and historic interest. There are no passenger rail lines within RBC.

Airports

There are two airports in the county. They are owned and operated by Rio Blanco County and serve general aviation. Meeker Airport was originally established by the Town of Meeker but was turned over to Rio Blanco County in 1959. Originally constructed to 4,500 feet long, by 1991, the 6,500 foot long by 60 feet wide runway was completed. Meeker airport serves a multitude of general aviation users including recreational and student pilots, Federal agencies, medical flight operators, aerial spray operators, air taxi operators, and business use by mining, tourism, and other interests. Types of aircraft using the airport include small single-engine aircrafts, business jets, and helicopters.

The Rangely airport is located two miles east of the Town of Rangely. The airport has a single 6,400 foot long by 75-foot wide runway in fair condition. Considerably more air traffic exists at the Rangely airport, primarily because of the Colorado Northwest Community College's (CNCC) flight training programs. Annual operations at Rangely exceed 47,000 per year, while annual operations at Meeker have been in the 8,000 range for the past several years. An operation is classified as a take-off, landing, or touch-and-go procedure by an aircraft on the runway.

Scenic Byways

The Flattops Scenic Byway and the Dinosaur Diamond Scenic and Historic Byway are two designated highways that link to recreational, cultural, and historic resources in the county and surrounding counties. The Flattops Scenic Byway extends 81 miles from Meeker to Yampa, in Routt County. The route follows County Road 8 within Rio Blanco County. This route is maintained by the Forest Service at the end of county service (above Snell Creek) and is closed to through traffic throughout the winter. Motorized winter vehicles utilize the many miles of groomed trails. The Flattops Scenic Byway provides endless recreational access opportunities throughout the year to approximately 115,000 acres of land in the Routt and White River National Forests.

The Dinosaur Diamond Scenic and Historic Byway follows the entire length of SH 139 from Loma to SH 64 in Rangely. The Byway then follows SH 64 west to the county line near Dinosaur. This is part of a 512-mile loop stretching west into Utah through Vernal, Price, and

Green River that encompasses one of the world's most concentrated dinosaur, fossil, and archeological regions.

2024 Traffic Volumes

The Annual Average Daily Traffic volumes for State Highways (SH) 13, 64, and 139 are shown in Figure 3.1a, sourced from the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).[71] According to this data, SH 13 averages between 1,700 to 5,200 Vehicles Per Day (VPD), SH 64 averages between 630 and 3,400 VPD, and SH 139 averages 810 VPD. Therefore, State Highways 13, 64, and 139 are all sized appropriately for current needs and the desired level of future growth, with only 57% of the design hour value utilized at present (DD in Figure 3.1b).

County Roads 3, 5, 8, 26, and 29 have carried historical daily volumes in excess of 1,000 VPD but less than 3,000 VPD. However, according to recent data, County Road 5's VPD has decreased to around 880 VPD. All other county roadways carried less than 1,000 VPD. County Road 5 is no longer the County's busiest roadway.[73]

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Capacities of two-lane facilities typically range in the 10,000 VPD to 20,000 VPD, depending on the roadway's geometry and design. A rural highway with no shoulders or turn lanes may carry only 8,000 VPD, while an improved two-lane highway with turn lanes and generous shoulders may carry 18,000 VPD.

Given the current volumes of traffic on county roads, roadway and intersection capacity does not appear to be an issue throughout the county. At intersections with State Highways where volumes are greater, the volumes on the state highway are still within reasonable limits to allow sufficient intersection and roadway operations.

Station ID	Route	Start	End	Description	AADT	Year	Single Unit	Comb Trucks	% Trucks	20 Year Factor	DHV	DVMT	DD
100573	013A	18.268	39	ON SH 13 SW/O SH 64, MEEKER	2,400	2023	140	260	16.6	1.06	11	49,802	57
100574	013A	39	40.753	ON SH 13 E/O SH 64, W/O MEEKER	3,200	2023	200	310	16	1.04	11	5,555	57
100575	013A	40.753	41.421	ON SH 13 W/O 6TH ST, W/O MEEKER	5,100	2023	240	180	8.4	1.14	12	3,453	57
100576	013A	41.421	41.946	ON SH 13, MARKET ST E/O 6TH ST, MEEKER	5,200	2023	170	220	7.5	1.04	12	2,714	57
100577	013A	41.946	42.122	ON SH 13, MARKET ST E/O 3RD ST, MEEKER	5,000	2023	210	260	9.2	1.08	12	925	57
100578	013A	42.122	42.712	ON SH 13, MARKET ST W/O AIRPORT RD, M...	3,500	2023	220	220	12.8	1.04	12	2,065	57
100579	013A	42.712	43.373	ON SH 13, MARKET ST SW/O CR 8. TO BUF...	2,600	2023	150	230	14.4	1.05	12	1,724	57
100580	013A	43.373	44.452	ON SH 13, MARKET ST N/O CR 8, TO BUFO...	2,500	2023	140	230	15	1.09	12	2,530	57
100581	013A	44.452	64.158	ON SH 13 N/O CR 15	1,700	2023	130	230	21.3	1.07	12	33,551	57
102834	064A	5.781	14	ON SH 64 SE/O CR 21	1,200	2023	60	120	14.7	1.03	12	9,797	57
102835	064A	14	16	ON SH 64 E/O CR 1, BLUE MOUNTAIN RD	2,200	2023	80	120	9.2	1.06	12	4,393	57
102837	064A	17.27	18.143	ON SH 64, MAIN ST W/O STANOLIND AVE, R...	3,000	2023	150	110	8.5	1.06	12	2,940	57
102838	064A	18.143	18.347	ON SH 64, MAIN ST W/O WHITE AVE, RANG...	2,900	2023	130	80	7.1	1.01	12	626	57
102839	064A	18.347	18.687	ON SH 64, MAIN ST E/O WHITE AVE, RANG...	3,200	2023	120	140	7.9	1.01	12	1,094	57
102840	064A	18.687	18.771	ON SH 64, MAIN ST W/O COLOROW ST, RA...	3,300	2023	110	130	7.2	1.01	12	277	57
102841	064A	18.771	19.282	ON SH 64, MAIN ST E/O COLOROW ST, RAN...	3,400	2023	100	150	7.3	1.03	12	1,693	57
102842	064A	19.282	19.792	ON SH 64 W/O SH 139, RANGELY	2,500	2023	90	170	10.4	1.05	12	1,268	57
102843	064A	19.792	27.312	ON SH 64 E/O SH 139, RANGELY	1,300	2023	50	60	8.3	1.07	12	9,766	57
102844	064A	27.312	56.243	ON SH 64 NE/O CR 65	630	2023	40	60	15.8	1.03	12	18,078	57
102845	064A	56.243	72.546	ON SH 64 E/O CR 5, PICEANCE CREEK RD	630	2023	50	60	18.2	1.11	12	10,207	57
102846	064A	72.546	73.705	ON SH 64 NW/O SH 13, W/O MEEKER	1,800	2023	80	100	10	1.03	11	2,070	57
104628	139A	65.153	72.065	ON SH 139 S/O SH 64, RANGELY	810	2023	40	40	9.6	1.08	12	5,477	57

Figure 3.1b: Chart, Annual Average Daily Traffic Value
Data Sources: CDOT, 2024

3.2 Archaeological Sites

Local amateur anthropologists, the State of Colorado and the U.S. Department of the Interior have located several archaeological sites in Rio Blanco County. These sites are shown on their respective Registers of Historic Places. These sites are inventoried on the Colorado Historical Society's website and are listed below:

CANYON PINTADO HISTORIC DISTRICT

Coordinates: 40.00671, -108.78078

Canyon Pintado is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, located south of Rangely on Colorado Hwy 139. The Fremont Indians settled here more than 1,000 years ago, later followed by the Ute and the Shoshone Indians. Each of these native people left very distinct Petroglyphs (image that has been pecked or rubbed into the stone) and Pictographs (image painted on to the stone). Due to the arid nature of the area, the archeological sites within the District are well preserved.[18]

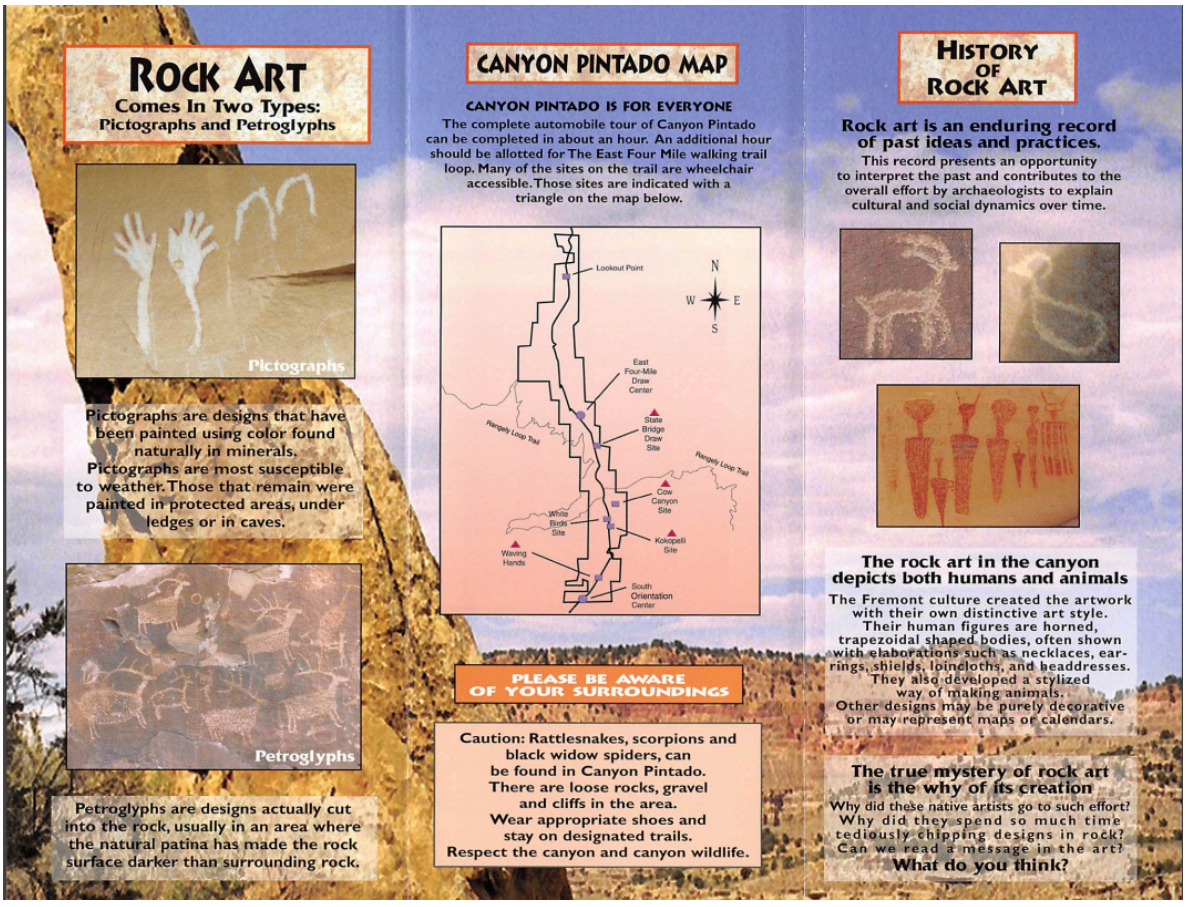


Image Source: https://www.npshistory.com/brochures/blm/co/canyon-pintado-nhd.pdf

DUCK CREEK WICKIUP VILLAGE

Coordinates: Not available on NRHP.

The Duck Creek Wickiup Village is located about 36 miles west of Meeker. The site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 for its rich archeological importance and was used by Utes into the late 19th century during their annual fall and winter gathering of pinion nuts.[63] / [64] "Unfortunately, these perishable structures are rapidly disappearing from the landscape due to the effects of natural weathering, wildfires and human impact. They face certain decay, disintegration and disappearance." [65] Therefore, this site was studied extensively as part of the Colorado Wickiup Project from 2005 - 2020. [66]

Image Source:
https://www.dargnet.org/Publications/CWP_4.pdf?

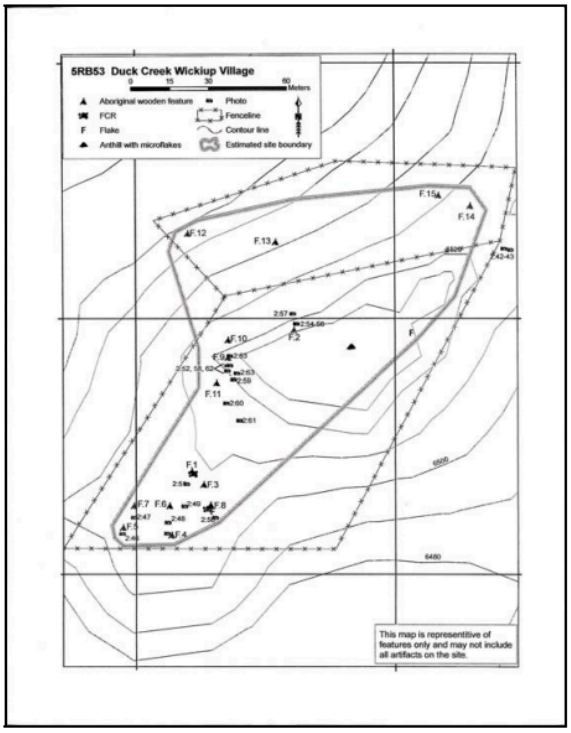


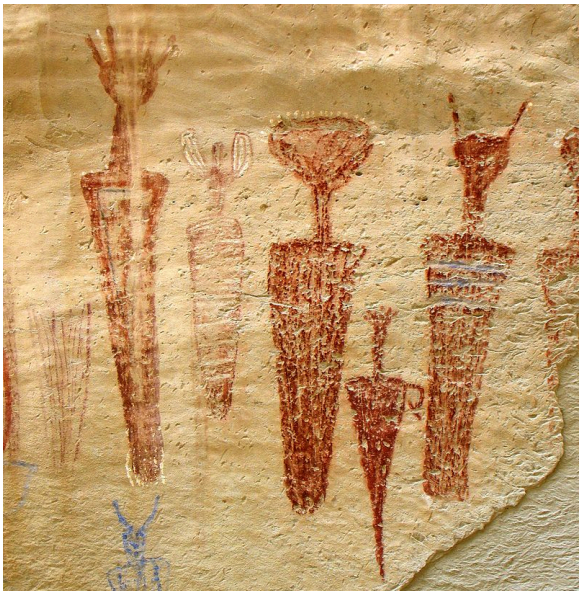
Figure 12. Site plan of 5RB53, Duck Creek Wickiup Village.

CARROT MEN PICTOGRAPH SITE

Coordinates:39.968762, -108.774974

The Carrot Men Pictograph site is located about 11 miles southwest of Rangely and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 for its archaeologically significant Pictographs. The Fremont Indians painted carrot-shaped figures on the rock walls. Other figures of animals, birds and corn can also be seen at the site.

Image Source:
https://nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/co/rio+blanco/state.html



COLLAGE SHELTER

Coordinates:Not available on NRHP.

Collage Shelter is a prehistoric site near Rangely and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 for its potential to yield important information about prehistoric land use patterns and population movements between core and marginal use areas.

Image Source: Recline, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons



FREMONT LOOKOUT FORTIFICATION SITE

Coordinates: 40.030178, -108.772432

This site, near the Town of Rangely, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 because it is “the only known example of a defensive structure in Colorado. The Fremont Indians built the stone lookout to defend their fields of corn, beans, and squash as well as their hunting areas.

Image Source: Recline, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons



3.3 Historic Sites:

In Rio Blanco County, there are several historic sites that are registered on either the State of Colorado or the National Register of Historic Places. Currently on one or both lists are the following (those located within municipalities are included, since they are located within Rio Blanco County).

MEEKER MASSACRE

Coordinates: 40.02583, -107.99389



Image Source: Diana Orr, Google Maps

The Meeker Massacre site is located approximately 1/2 mile south of Highway 64 and approximately 2 miles west of the intersection of Highway 64 and Highway 13. The site is identified by a historical marker sign. In 1878, Nathan C. Meeker was appointed Indian Agent at the White River Indian Reserve to oversee the Ute Indians. Meeker moved to the territory with his wife and daughter. A prevailing mindset of the white settlers was to remove the Utes so the settlers could occupy the lands for mining and farming. The original agency site was moved by Mr. Meeker 11 miles downstream on the White River to what is known as "Powell Park" a site used by the Utes to pasture their ponies. Nathan Meeker aggravated the Native Americans with this act as well as other policies he tried to implement. The general discontent between the Native Americans and the Indian Agent came to a head in summer of 1879 when Meeker plowed up the Ute horse racetrack. An initial confrontation between the Utes and the Indian Agent resulted in Meeker sending a telegram to Washington seeking support from Major Thornburg's troops stationed at Fort Steele. On September 29, 1879, the conflict erupted into a battle in which Major Thornburg was killed. The Utes attacked the Indian Agency, burned the buildings and killed 11 men, including Agent Meeker. The Indians took women captive to ensure their safety as they left. The Meeker Massacre became the final justification by the US Government to remove the Utes from Colorado and forcing them into Utah.[19]

BUFORD SCHOOL

Address: 42600 County Road 17, Meeker, CO



Image Source: Dale Hallebach, ColoradoEncyclopedia

The Buford School is listed on the State Register of Historic Places and the Rural School Buildings of Colorado. The 1902 school and its privy convey the rural school experience and have long been the educational center of the rural area near Buford, serving as the local school until 1952. The building then became a community center, an important gathering place for social events such as dances, meetings and other activities. Eleanor Roosevelt attended the dedication of the building when it became a community center.[20]

BATTLE OF MILK CREEK SITE / THORNBURGH MONUMENT

Coordinates: 40.201964, -107.690697



Image Source: KGA, Google Maps

The Battle of Milk Creek site is located about 17 miles outside of Meeker on County Road 15 (Thornburgh Road). The site was added to the National Register of Historic Places and it gives us a glimpse at the Indian uprisings of the 1800s. Located in the remote Milk Creek Valley, the battle site covers approximately 1,600 acres. Portions of a historic wagon road remain visible.[21]

HOTEL MEEKER

Address: 560 Main St, Meeker, CO



Image Source: Jeffrey Beall, Wikimedia Commons

Susan Wright, a widow, was one of the original pioneers of the Town of Meeker. In 1883, when the government auctioned off the remaining buildings of the Army Post, she purchased one of them and opened the first Meeker Hotel. Susan died in 1893 and left the property to her brother, Sanford Ball. In 1896, Mr. Ball built the new Hotel Meeker located at 560 Main Street in Meeker. This two-story brick building reflects the characteristics of commercial structures built in small western towns during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While hunting in the area, Theodore Roosevelt stayed at the historic hotel for one night. The hotel's historic significance is the reason that it was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

J. W. HUGUS COMPANY BUILDING

Address: 594 Main St, Meeker, CO

The J.W. Hugus Building was designed by the prominent Denver architectural firm of Fisher and Fisher. This two-story brick building was constructed in 1911 to house the Meeker operations of J.W. Hugus & Co. The company was founded by J.W. Hugus in 1877. He operated numerous general and dry goods stores in southern Wyoming and western Colorado. Hugus liquidated his assets in 1919, selling the building to the retail firm of A. Oldland and Company. This building was added to the State Register of Historic Places in 1991.[23]



Image Source: HistoryColorado.org

RIO BLANCO COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Address:555 Garfield St, Meeker, CO

The Rio Blanco County High School was built in 1924. This two-story building of rough-cut thinly coursed local sandstone was designed by noted architect Robert K. Fuller. The floor plan is similar to many secondary educational facilities built during the period, and has a gymnasium wing extending from the rear of the rectangular classroom portion. The building served as the county's only high school facility from 1924 until 1951. The building was added to the State Register of Historic Places in 1993.[24]



Image Source: HistoryColorado.org

ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

Address: 368 Fourth St, Meeker, CO

St. James Episcopal Church was designed by a New York Architect and built by master artisans out of Denver. "St. James Episcopal Church is a provincial example of church architecture influenced not only by these ideas and principles but also by the contemporary architecture of its own time. The building material (native stone), the rectangular shape, the heavy roof, the use of buttresses, and the arched doors and windows all reflect the revival of Romanesque and Medieval forms. Other elements of the Church, however, such as the colored band on the roof, the shingled, patterned gables, and the wooden



Image Source: Jeffrey Beall, Wikimedia Commons

tower encased in shingles were inspired by contemporary late nineteenth-century architecture."[67] The church opened in 1890 and remains open today. It is included in the National Register of Historic Places. The stone building was the first church in Meeker and one of the oldest Episcopal churches in Colorado. The church bell was imported from Cincinnati and is housed over the main entrance, topped by a unique bell tower faced with wood shingles.[25]

PYRAMID GUARD STATION

Coordinates: 40°09'10"N, 107°13'26"W

The Pyramid Guard Station is located 15 miles west of the Town of Yampa; the buildings were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps between 1934 and 1936. Pyramid is an excellent example of the kind of work done by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the national forests during the Great Depression. The dwelling includes a barn, blacksmith shop and wood shed. The buildings exhibit key characteristics such as log walls, overhanging eaves with exposed rafters, small paned windows, and the use of local materials in construction. The buildings reflect a local manifestation of a regional style mandated by the USFS for rural areas..[26]



Image Source: Laurenmax, Wikimedia Commons

THE WHITE RIVER MUSEUM /
WHITE RIVER OFFICERS BLOCK

Address: 565 Park St, Meeker, CO

The White River Museum is located where two of the original officers' quarters were built at the Indian Agency after the Meeker Massacre. This museum contains Indigenous artifacts and items belonging to the Indian Agencies, including the plow that started the fighting which led to the massacre. There are two other officers' buildings located on this block, one is a private home and the other is a business.[27]



Image Source: Meeker Chamber of Commerce

COAL CREEK SCHOOL

Address: 617 Co Rd 6, Meeker, CO



Image Source: Meeker Chamber of Commerce

"The Coal Creek School is the oldest rural school in the area, established in 1884. The present building was built in 1892. Its unique and elaborate construction included stone walls and a gabled end with shingles arranged in scalloped and diamond patterns. A neat belfry originally adorned the front of the building. The bell now resides at the White River Museum. Coal Creek School was placed on the Rio Blanco County Historic Preservation list in 2013 and added to the State and National Historic Register in July 2014. At History Colorado in Denver the 2018 Stephen H. Hart Award for Historic Preservation was presented to the Rio Blanco County and Rio Blanco County Historical Society for the restoration of Coal Creek School." [68]

THE RANGELY OUTDOOR MUSEUM

Address: 200 Kennedy Dr, Rangely, CO



Image Source: Rangely Outdoor Museum

The Rangely Outdoor Museum preserves the history of the Rangely area. Although Rangely is a relatively new town, incorporated in 1946, the area has a rich and fascinating history. The museum portrays this history in several historic buildings located on the grounds, by interpreting three distinct periods: Native American and Prehistory (from the distant past until 1883), Pioneer and Ranching (from 1883 until 1946), and Energy Development (from 1946 to the present day). The museum is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and protecting historic buildings. It has acquired, and moved to the museum grounds, an old jail cell, a camp house, and the Wolf Canyon School. The Wolf Canyon School was open from 1931 to 1942, was run by four teachers, and housed about 25 students.[28]

3.4 Natural Resources:

In 1877, the Federal Government commissioned a survey of large sections of the mountains and western territories and their resources by F.V. Hayden, and paid him $75,000 for his survey. The Hayden Survey located, mapped and named several assets on the White River: Marvine Peak and Marvine Lake, on the Flat Tops, were named for the division chief, Archibald Marvine.

TRAPPERS LAKE & MARVINE LAKE

These two great glacial cirque lakes in glaciated valleys are located about 35 miles east of Meeker. Trappers Lake, located in Garfield County, is known as the “Cradle of the Wilderness,” due to the efforts of Arthur Carhart in 1919. He recommended that there be no further construction of roads or homes around the lakes. This concept started the Wilderness movement and eventually led to the Wilderness Act in 1964. Today the lakes hold the largest population of native Colorado Cutthroat trout in the world.

BIG MARVINE PEAK

This peak is located in the Flat Tops Wilderness Area about 29 miles east of Meeker. The Peak is named for Archibald Marvine who was the division chief at the time of the Hayden Survey. Big Marvine Peak’s elevation is 11,879 feet.

ROAN PLATEAU

The Roan Plateau offers a variety of resources from its scenic beauty; rare plants, fish habitats, and natural animal habitats to its oil and natural gas wells. The Roan Plateau’s lakes and streams are home to the rare Colorado Cutthroat trout. Also, calling this Plateau home is a variety of big game, deer, elk, mountain lions and bears. The dramatic changes in elevation throughout the Plateau are prized by hikers, nature enthusiasts, campers and hunters. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management 2008 plan for the area allows natural gas and oil recovery beneath the Plateau while setting aside 21,034 acres as areas critical for the environment.

FLAT TOPS WILDERNESS AREA

This area is unique in that it does not offer fourteen thousand foot tall mountains like other wilderness areas, but tall plateaus of massive rock capped on the north and by massive lava flows that tower thousands of feet above the surface. Today, the Flat Tops Wilderness Area is Colorado’s second largest wilderness area at 235,035 acres.

WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST

The northwestern part of this forest lies in Rio Blanco County and includes the Flat Top Mountains and the upper White River drainage. The White River Forest contains 2,285,970 acres of land.

PICEANCE BASIN

The Piceance Basin is characterized by high plateaus and deep valleys. The basin encompasses 7,110 square miles in northwestern Colorado and encompasses portions of Mesa, Pitkin, Delta, Gunnison, and Montrose Counties. Oil resources are prevalent throughout.

THE WHITE RIVER

The White River runs through Rio Blanco County and is the namesake for the county. It is a tributary to the Green River and is about 160 miles long. The White River's water is used by the ranching industry, but also is being purchased for oil and gas exploration and potential oil shale extraction. The White River offers an abundance of fishing opportunities, rafting and wildlife viewing.[29]

RANGELY OIL FIELD (WEBER SAND UNIT)

Rio Blanco County is known internationally for its profound supply of natural resources, especially oil, which has historically been the primary economic driver of the region. The Rangely Oil Field is a well-known compilation of extraction sites located near the Town of Rangely in the western portion of RBC.

DESERADO COAL MINE

The Deserado Mine was created in the 1970s to overcome an energy crisis and has proven to be a reliable, low cost energy provider despite countless obstacles since its inception.[76] It is a critical economic driver for the region.

NATURAL SODA

In 2003, AmerAlia Inc. acquired the operation and leases, producing approximately 103,000 tons of sodium bicarbonate in that year. The company later became known as Natural Soda Inc. Utilizing solution mining techniques, Natural Soda injects hot water into underground nahcolite beds to dissolve the mineral, then brings the solution to the surface for processing into pure sodium bicarbonate. Today, Natural Soda stands as a significant industrial presence in western Colorado, leveraging the region's unique geological resources to produce high-quality sodium bicarbonate while maintaining a commitment to environmental stewardship and community involvement.

3.5 Special Districts:

Rio Blanco County is unique in that it contains a number of Special Districts that independently control different aspects of governmental operation that might typically be handled by the county itself in other regions of the State of Colorado. Therefore, the services covered by the following special districts are not within Rio Blanco County's control and are therefore outside the scope of this Comprehensive Plan.

- Health:
    - Western Rio Blanco Metropolitan Recreation & Park District
    - Eastern Rio Blanco Metropolitan Recreation and Park District
    - Rangely Hospital District
    - Eastern Rio Blanco Health Service District
- Education
    - Rangely RE-4 School District
    - Meeker RE1 School District
    - Rangely Junior College District
- Conservation
    - Douglas Creek Conservation District
    - White River Conservation District
    - Colorado River Water Conservation District
    - Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District
    - Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District
- Pest Control
    - Lower White River Pest Control District
    - Piceance Creek Pest Control District
- Fire Protection
    - Rangely Rural Fire Protection District
    - Rio Blanco Fire Protection District
- Sanitation
    - Meeker Sanitation District
- Cemetery
    - Rangely Cemetery District
    - Meeker Cemetery District
- Library
    - Rangely Library District
    - Meeker Library District

4.0 Planning for the Future

4.1 Vision Statement

In the future, Rio Blanco County will preserve its rural western heritage, as well as a healthy, safe, and family-friendly living environment highlighted by access to plentiful opportunities for employment and outdoor recreation. Development is concentrated around Rangely and Meeker, and unincorporated regions of the county remain rural, characterized by a mix of agricultural uses, natural resource extraction sites, and preserved public lands. Housing is well-maintained and affordable options are available to enable existing residents to continue enjoying life in Rio Blanco County as they age in place and as their families grow. Resources are available to serve the needs of residents of all ages to encourage the existing slow-and-steady natural growth pattern within the county to continue. Rio Blanco County is known to a limited number of tourists but municipal hubs retain their small-town character and charm. A diversified and stable economy persists, ensuring that Rio Blanco County continues to be an attractive place to live, work, and explore.

Best practices and industry collaboration minimize negative environmental impacts. Land-use policies continue to enable resource extraction while protecting agriculture and water resources by directing conflicting uses away from productive lands. Responsible development and thoughtful resource management have protected air and water quality. Residential development continues to be concentrated in Rangely and Meeker while commercial and compatible industrial activities are steered to growth areas around Meeker and Rangely where urban services/utilities are available, thereby avoiding the high costs of sprawl. Industrial uses incompatible with the municipal hubs are present within a limited number of designated locations throughout the unincorporated regions of the county to minimize land use conflicts and to take advantage of the unique industrial opportunities afforded by the sparse settlement patterns within Rio Blanco County.

Regular analysis of condition and need for county infrastructure and facilities are conducted, recorded, and made available to the public to ensure the prolonged quality and long-term operation of these resources.

Task-forces involving citizens, municipal leaders, industry, and businesses maintain economic diversity and high-quality education, healthcare, and housing. There are regularly planned meetings between citizens, businesses, special districts, municipalities and the county to ensure ongoing communication and interaction, enabling meaningful public involvement in decision making. Public outreach through citizen surveys, social media and remote conferencing, committees and public meetings deliver valuable feedback on governance and services. The county advocates a philosophy of working for the people with quality customer service. All county departments strive to educate the public about their function and procedures. Policies and procedures are designed to ensure fair treatment and equal access for all citizens.

4.2 Strengths, Challenges, & Opportunities

Strengths are things that currently have a positive impact. Challenges are things that currently have a negative impact or will have a negative impact soon if not addressed appropriately. Opportunities have the potential to result in positive impacts but have not yet been actuated or capitalized upon. The following Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities were developed collectively by municipal leaders and stakeholders in Rangely and Meeker, in coordination with Rio Blanco County staff, officials, and consultants.

STRENGTHS

- Open Space/ Protected Lands
- Rivers and Lakes
- Camping Areas
- Clean Water and Air
- Wildlife and Hunting Opportunities
- Trail Network
- Plentiful Outdoor Activities
- Friendly People
- Lack of Crime
- Educational System(s), K-12 and CNCC Programs
- Active Chamber of Commerce
- Medical Services
- Broadband Infrastructure
- Low Utility Costs
- Resources, Events and Facilities for Families with Children
- Agriculture / Ranching
- Irrigated Lands
- Abundant Natural Resources
- Natural Resource Extraction Industries
- Archaeological, Cultural, and Historic Resources
- Public involvement in Government operations

CHALLENGES

- Isolated location
    - Lack of public transportation to and within Rio Blanco County
    - High cost for freight / shipping of commercial goods
    - Limited professional services related to home maintenance and construction
- Encouraging continued support of local business
- Lack of available / flexible commercial space
- Limited housing supply
- Maintaining the long-term health of the White River
- Fluctuating resource extraction economy
- Limited Workforce

OPPORTUNITIES

- Tourism
    - Hunting and fishing
    - Hiking, Biking & OHV trails
    - Snowmobiling, sledding, snowshoeing, cross country skiing
    - Natural beauty and open space
    - Watersports
        - Kenney Reservoir
        - White River
    - Historic and cultural resources, specifically, The TANK for Sonic Arts, Rangely Automotive Museum, Rangely Outdoor Museum, White River Museum, Meeker National Historic District, and Canyon Pintado National Historic District
    - Medical Facilities
- Facilitate Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial uses
    - Renewable energy
    - Retail related to outdoors
    - Recycling & reuse industries since RBC is half-way between Salt Lake City and Denver, making it an ideal location for reuse and recycling operations that turn raw materials into new products
- Available Housing
    - Infill development within Meeker and Rangely
    - Residential homestead sites in unincorporated areas of the county
    - Encourage affordable, sustainable, and alternative housing projects

4.3 Goals

Goals are intended results and policies are possible steps to achieve goals. All goals align with the Vision Statement and will help to maintain Rio Blanco County's existing character while building upon strengths and opportunities and minimizing the negative impact of challenges.

LAND USE

Irrigated Agricultural Lands

- Limit non-agricultural development in agricultural zones.
- Protect ranchers and farmers with "right-to-farm" regulations as authorized by state law.Strengthen "right-to-farm" regulations, as authorized by state law, to protect ranchers and farmers from nuisance lawsuits and other development-related interferences.
- Protect water rights, irrigation systems and maintenance access.

Continue to implement clear and predictable development standards and procedures for new development by maintaining, and updating, the current Land Use Regulations (LUR)

- Continue to apply the LUR process in a consistent and equitable manner.
- Provide a public-review period for all new LURs to ensure that they are easy to understand and actuate.
- Create templates for LUR applications to reduce paperwork and processing timeframes.
- Ensure the Land Use Regulation process encourages and incorporates public participation by requiring proper noticing for all LUR approval meetings that require Planning Commission or Board of County Commissioners' approval.
- Communicate proposed regulatory changes with property owners in the planning stage of said changes to ensure that private property rights are maintained.

Ensure that all development is compatible with adjacent uses.

- In unincorporated areas, development should achieve compatibility within neighboring uses
- In land use decisions, the County will balance the needs of County residents overall with the needs of individual property owners so that costs of development and/or capital improvements do not disproportionately burden individuals.
- Development near the Municipalities should comply with, and utilize local Municipal infrastructure when possible. In addition, development should be compatible with the adjacent Municipality.

TRANSPORTATION

Maintain safe and adequate transportation-related infrastructure within Rio Blanco County

- The County will not be financially responsible for additional transportation infrastructure associated with new development.

- New development shall use existing roadways for primary access and will be required to improve roadway access commensurate with new development

Provide adequate access for pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle traffic where suitable.

- New development should be encouraged to provide access for pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle traffic where it has historically existed or where it may improve access to adjacent public lands and other Quality of Life resources.
- Actively participate in the development/amendment process for travel management plans developed by public land agencies.
- Support the development and improvement of regional trail networks.
- Encourage new development to conform and integrate with municipal and county-wide trail plans

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Protect and enhance historic and cultural resources in Rio Blanco County

- Continue to support the preservation of and promote continued access to cultural and historic resources within the county.
- Work with landowners to protect known historic and cultural sites from development that would degrade historic or cultural significance.

ECONOMY

Actively support the creation of new industries when they can enhance economic stability and create new jobs for residents of the county.

Ensure that Rio Blanco County continues to benefit from Natural Resource Extraction within its borders.

Continue to expand broadband and fiber-optic capacity to attract new businesses and remote workers.

Work to protect the goals and objectives of the scenic byways to ensure that their qualities are maintained.

Cooperate with local schools to continually enhance educational opportunities.

Capitalize on existing resources within the county to encourage tourism.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Supports the continued operation and expansion of responsible natural resource extraction.

Protect access to public lands and waters.

Promote the preservation of open lands.

Protect sensitive environmental areas from development.

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RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO

WATER SUPPLY ELEMENT

2026 Addendum to the 2025 Comprehensive Plan

Prepared for	Rio Blanco County Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners
Prepared by	Rio Blanco County Community Development Director – J. Leif Joy PLS, GISP
Planning Area	Unincorporated Rio Blanco County; coordinated with the Towns of Meeker and Rangely
Status	Draft for water-provider consultation, public review, and adoption

September 2026

Prepared to address SB 24-174 / C.R.S. § 30-28-106 water supply element requirements

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Executive Summary

Rio Blanco County is a large, rural county whose unincorporated development pattern is expected to remain dispersed, with most residential growth and urban-scale development concentrated around Meeker and Rangely where municipal services and utilities are available. The County does not operate a countywide municipal drinking-water utility. Water for unincorporated development is therefore supplied through a combination of individual wells, central or public systems where available, and hauled potable water stored in cisterns where approved. The Towns of Meeker and Rangely currently provide bulk water, making both municipalities important water providers for rural residents and development outside municipal boundaries.

This Water Supply Element is structured as a streamlined, narrative plan appropriate for a slow-growth rural county. It establishes a land-use framework that requires an adequate, reliable, legal and safe water supply for development; favors connection to existing central systems when feasible; protects water rights, irrigation systems, surface water and groundwater; and commits the County to continued coordination with water providers and a five-year update cycle.

1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 Statutory Framework

This Water Supply Element is intended to amend and supplement the Rio Blanco County Comprehensive Plan 2025 and to satisfy the water supply element requirements applicable to counties under SB 24-174 and C.R.S. § 30-28-106. The element addresses provider consultation and coordination, water conservation policies, a range of current and future supply and facility needs, consideration of the Colorado Water Plan, and an update cycle of no less than every five years.

1.2 Relationship to the 2025 Comprehensive Plan

The 2025 Comprehensive Plan establishes a 2025-2035 planning horizon and describes a slow-and-steady growth pattern. It directs residential development toward Meeker and Rangely and states that commercial and compatible industrial activities should be steered to growth areas around those municipalities where urban services and utilities are available. This Water Supply Element carries that direction forward by linking development intensity to demonstrated water availability and infrastructure capacity.

1.3 Planning Area

The County comprehensive plan governs the physical development of unincorporated Rio Blanco County. Meeker and Rangely are separate incorporated municipalities; however, both towns are integral to this element because municipal systems serve incorporated populations, influence development near municipal boundaries, and currently provide bulk potable water used by some customers outside town limits.

2. Local Water Context

2.1 Physical and Community Setting

The White River is the County's defining surface-water resource and flows west through the county to Utah. It supports agriculture, recreation, wildlife, and other economic uses. Settlement historically concentrated in irrigated valleys, while much of the remaining unincorporated county is sparsely developed. Maintaining the long-term health of the White River is identified as a County challenge.

2.2 Growth Pattern and Water Implications

Rio Blanco County experienced significant resource-driven growth cycles in the past, but recent growth has been limited. The 2025 Comprehensive Plan reports that the County population decreased between 2010 and 2020 and remained relatively stagnant from 2020 to 2022. During 2020-2022, Meeker and Rangely gained residents while unincorporated areas experienced the net loss. This pattern supports a water-planning approach focused on maintaining reliable existing supplies, evaluating individual development proposals, and avoiding premature extension of costly infrastructure.

Development setting	Likely water approach	Planning implication
Meeker / Rangely municipal areas	Municipal treated-water systems	Municipal providers manage system capacity and service decisions.
Near municipal boundaries	Municipal connection where available and feasible	County policy favors use of municipal infrastructure when possible.
Rural residential / homestead sites	Individual wells or approved hauled-water/cistern supply	Adequacy, legality, quality, dependability, storage and delivery must be demonstrated.
Larger / denser development	Existing public system or central water distribution system	County LUR prefers central systems and requires them in specified circumstances.
Agricultural lands	Irrigation rights, ditches and agricultural water systems	Protect water rights, ditch operations, maintenance access and agricultural use.
Industrial	Individual wells or approved hauled-water/cistern supply	Adequacy, legality, quality, dependability, storage and delivery must be demonstrated.

3. Water Provider Consultation and Coordination

The County will develop and maintain this element in consultation with entities that supply water for use within Rio Blanco County. Because the County does not control municipal or special-district water operations, provider input is essential to confirm current capacity, bulk-water practices, constraints, planned capital improvements, drought procedures, and service-extension policies.

Entity / provider	Role in county water planning	2026 consultation item
Town of Meeker	Municipal potable water provider; currently supplies bulk water	Confirmation and Response received on 9/22/2026.
Town of Rangely	Municipal potable water provider; currently supplies bulk water	Confirm bulk-water availability, source/treatment capacity, service-extension policy, drought limitations, and anticipated capital needs. No Objections Received.
Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District	Regional water storage, supply, and conservation entity	Coordinate on long-term storage planning and augmentation options following DWR's 2025 over-appropriation designation. Recommendation and Reference received on 9/30/2026.
Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District	Regional water storage, supply, and conservation entity	Coordinate on long-term storage planning and augmentation options following DWR's 2025 over-appropriation designation. Recommendation and Reference received on 10/12/2026
Colorado River Water Conservation District	Regional basin planning and water resources	Coordinate on basin-level planning, conservation, funding and Colorado Water Plan implementation. No objections received.
White River & Douglas Creek Conservation Districts	Agricultural and natural-resource conservation	Coordinate on irrigation, watershed health, soil/water conservation and land-use impacts. Recommendation and Reference received on 9/21/2026.
Colorado Division of Water Resources / State Engineer	Well permitting, water rights and subdivision water review	Continue referral and obtain State Engineer comments where required by County regulations and statute. Recommendation and Reference received on 10/7/2026.

3.1 Ongoing Coordination Protocol

- Maintain a current contact list for municipal water departments, water conservancy/conservation districts, and the Division of Water Resources.
- Request provider confirmation of bulk-water policies and material capacity changes during each five-year update.
- Route development proposals to affected water providers and the State Engineer when required by the Land Use Regulations or state law.
- Coordinate water planning with housing, subdivision, hazard mitigation, wildfire recovery, floodplain, and capital planning efforts.

4. Current Water Supply and Facilities

4.1 Municipal and Bulk Water

The Towns of Meeker and Rangely operate municipal potable-water systems and, as of preparation of this document, both towns supply bulk water. Bulk water is an important component of rural water availability because the County Land Use Regulations expressly allow cisterns to satisfy water-supply requirements for minor subdivisions when adequate evidence of quality, quantity and dependability is provided. The County should not assume that bulk-water sales are guaranteed indefinitely; provider confirmation is required for proposed developments that depend on hauled water.

4.2 Individual Wells and Groundwater

Individual wells remain a practical water source for dispersed rural development where groundwater is legally available and physically adequate. County application materials require information regarding potable groundwater availability, expected quality and long-term well yield when an individual water system is proposed. Well permitting and water-right administration remain under the jurisdiction of the Colorado Division of Water Resources / State Engineer.

4.3 Central and Public Systems

The County Land Use Regulations prefer a central water distribution system where connection to an existing public system is not physically or economically feasible, and require connection to a central water system when an available and adequate system is within 400 feet and connection is practicable and feasible, or for residential developments of six or more dwelling units. This framework supports compact development and reduces the proliferation of individual systems at higher densities.

4.4 Agricultural and Surface-Water Resources

Agricultural water rights and irrigation infrastructure are foundational to the White River Valley. County policy calls for protecting water rights, irrigation systems and maintenance access. New land uses should avoid impairing ditch operations and should evaluate effects on existing domestic and agricultural water supplies, groundwater, aquifer recharge, runoff and water quality. Both the Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District and the Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District are instrumental in supporting feasibility studies aimed at water storage and enlargement studies as well as new reservoir opportunities throughout Rio Blanco County to facilitate the agricultural needs of our producers.

5. Future Demand, Supply, and Infrastructure Constraints

5.1 Planning Scenarios

The County uses a scenario approach rather than a single precise demand forecast for this first Water Supply Element because the supplied County documents do not contain verified countywide municipal production, bulk-water sales, groundwater yield, or firm-yield data. The scenarios below are therefore land-use planning scenarios, not utility engineering forecasts.

Scenario	Growth / demand condition	Expected water-supply response
Low / declining	Unincorporated population remains flat or declines; limited new lots	Existing wells, municipal bulk water and limited public connections generally continue; focus on reliability, water quality and replacement/maintenance.
Baseline / slow growth	Slow-and-steady growth continues; housing added mainly in or near Meeker/Rangely with scattered rural homes	Municipal systems absorb most urban demand; rural demand met through demonstrated wells, bulk-water/cistern systems, or small central systems. Provider capacity letters remain important.
Resource / project-driven surge	Temporary or sustained industrial/resource activity creates localized housing or workforce demand	Project-specific water plan, provider commitments, central systems, storage and/or augmentation may be required; County evaluates effects on existing and future domestic/agricultural supply.

5.2 Key Constraints

- Distance and terrain can make extension of municipal water lines economically impractical in remote areas.
- Individual groundwater availability, quality and long-term yield can vary by location and must be demonstrated for proposed development.
- Hauled-water users depend on a dependable bulk-water source, adequate cistern storage, reliable transportation access, and provider willingness to continue bulk sales.
- Drought, reduced snowpack, wildfire effects, changing runoff patterns, and competing agricultural, municipal, environmental and industrial demands can affect reliability.
- Higher-density development may trigger the need for central water infrastructure and professional engineering, financing, operation and maintenance arrangements.
- Development must not materially reduce water available for existing or future domestic and agricultural needs
- The Division of Water Resources designated the White River basin upstream of the Taylor Draw Power Conduit as over-appropriated in 2025, requiring new well permits or expanded groundwater uses in this area to provide a Court-decreed augmentation plan or Substitute Water Supply Plan (SWSP) to demonstrate non-injury.

5.3 Facility Needs

Under the low and baseline scenarios, the County does not identify a need for a county-owned centralized potable-water utility. Anticipated facilities are instead provider- or development-specific: municipal treatment/distribution improvements within or near Meeker and Rangely; individual wells and service equipment; approved cisterns and hauling arrangements; and central distribution systems for developments where required. Under a project-driven growth scenario, additional storage, treatment, transmission, distribution, augmentation or interconnection facilities may be necessary and must be evaluated through the applicable land-use review.

6. Water Conservation and Water-Smart Land Use Policies

Rio Blanco County will use land-use planning and development review to conserve water, protect existing rights and supplies, and reduce avoidable infrastructure costs while respecting the County's rural character and agricultural economy.

Policy	County direction	Status
Adequate Water Supply	Continue requiring each applicable land use and division of land to demonstrate an adequate, reliable, legal physical water supply that complies with safe drinking-water standards.	Existing / ongoing
Provider Commitment	Require a commitment letter when a development proposes connection to an existing public water system, including evidence that the system has an adequate legal supply to serve the development.	Existing / ongoing
State Engineer Review	Continue using State Engineer / Division of Water Resources review and comments in water-adequacy determinations where applicable.	Existing / ongoing
Central Systems	Continue preferring central systems over individual wells when public connection is infeasible, and apply existing central-system requirements for proximity and higher-density residential development.	Existing / ongoing
Municipal Infrastructure	Encourage development near Meeker and Rangely to use municipal infrastructure when possible and avoid unnecessary extension of county-supported infrastructure.	Existing plan policy
Agricultural Water	Protect water rights, irrigation ditches, systems and maintenance access; avoid development that interferes with agricultural operations.	Existing plan policy
Water Quality	Evaluate effects of development on surface water, groundwater, aquifer recharge, wastewater disposal, runoff and pollutants.	Existing / ongoing
Water-Wise Site Design	For larger subdivisions, PUDs and commercial/institutional projects, encourage climate-appropriate landscaping, efficient irrigation and limitation of nonfunctional high-water turf where consistent with state law and local context.	Planned
Bulk-Water Reliability	For development dependent on hauled water, require evidence of a dependable bulk-water source and appropriate storage/delivery arrangements; periodically confirm municipal bulk-water policies.	Planned clarification
Public Education	Coordinate with towns, districts and watershed partners on voluntary conservation, drought awareness and water-quality education.	Planned / ongoing
Regional Storage & Infrastructure Support	Support regional water storage initiatives to enhance long-term water security, drought resilience, and augmentation capacity for present and future growth.	Planned / Regional Coordination

7. Colorado Water Plan Alignment

This element considers the Colorado Water Plan by emphasizing wise water use, efficient infrastructure, protection of healthy watersheds and agricultural water, integration of water and land-use planning, and collaboration among local governments and water entities. For Rio Blanco County, those statewide concepts are applied through site-specific water adequacy review, concentration of higher-intensity growth near existing municipal services, protection of the White River and irrigation systems, and ongoing coordination with regional water organizations.

Colorado Water Plan theme	Rio Blanco County application
Wise water use	Water-adequacy review, efficient site design, voluntary conservation and drought awareness.
Efficient infrastructure	Use existing municipal systems where feasible; avoid unnecessary infrastructure sprawl; require central systems where warranted by density/proximity. Support regional water storage, to enhance long-term water security, drought resilience, and augmentation capacity for future growth.
Healthy watersheds / environment	Protect White River health, groundwater, aquifer recharge, floodplains, riparian systems and water quality.
Agriculture	Protect agricultural water rights, ditches and maintenance access and consider impacts to existing agricultural supply.
Land-use integration	Tie development approvals to demonstrated water availability and provider/system capacity.
Collaboration	Coordinate with Meeker, Rangely, water conservancy/conservation districts, State Engineer and basin partners.

8. Implementation and Five-Year Update Cycle

Action	Timing	Lead / partners	Measure
Complete formal provider consultation and objection record before adoption.	2026 adoption	Rio Blanco County Staff; Meeker; Rangely; water districts	Consultation log and written provider comments.
Create a simple annual record of land-use approvals by water source: municipal connection, well, cistern/bulk water, central system.	Beginning 2027	Rio Blanco County Staff	Annual development water-source log.
Confirm Meeker and Rangely bulk-water policies and material service/capacity changes.	At least annually; before reliance by major development	Rio Blanco County Staff; municipal providers	Current provider confirmation on file.

Action	Timing	Lead / partners	Measure
Continue State Engineer referrals and water-adequacy findings for applicable subdivisions and land-use changes.	Ongoing	Rio Blanco County Staff; DWR	Referral letters and BOCC findings.
Evaluate whether water-wise landscaping or bulk-water/cistern standards need LUR clarification.	2027-2028	Rio Blanco County Staff; Planning Commission; BOCC	Staff review / code amendment if warranted.
Update this Water Supply Element.	No later than 2031, and at least every five years thereafter	Rio Blanco County; Planning Commission; BOCC; providers	Updated element with current provider data and adoption record.

Rio Blanco County is responsible for initiating the five-year review, re-engaging water providers, compiling development and provider data, identifying material changes in supply or infrastructure constraints, and bringing any needed amendment to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.

9. Adoption and Approval Record

Action	Date / record
Planning Commission public hearing	Date: Resolution No.:

Appendix A. Provider Consultation Record

Date	Entity	Contact / method	Information received / objection	County response / plan change
9/17/26	Town of Meeker	email	No Objection Received	
9/17/26	Town of Rangely	email	No Objection Received	
9/17/26	RBWCD	email	No Objection Received	
9/17/26	WRDC CD	email	No Objection Received	

Appendix B. Compliance Crosswalk

DOLA / statutory component	Where addressed	Draft status
Consultation with water providers	Section 3; Appendix A	Framework complete; consultation record completed.
Water conservation policies	Section 6	Addressed through existing and planned land-use policies.
Range of supplies and facilities needed	Sections 4 and 5	Qualitative range provided; provider-specific capacities intentionally left for confirmation.
Key assumptions / open questions	Sections 3, 5; Appendix C	Addressed.
Five-year update	Section 8	Explicit commitment; RBC Staff
Colorado Water Plan consideration	Section 7	Addressed.
Planning Commission adoption / governing body record	Section 9	To be completed upon adoption.

Appendix C. Data Gaps for Five-Year Update

- Annual bulk-water volumes sold by Meeker and Rangely and any geographic/customer limitations on bulk sales.
- Municipal source-water portfolio, firm yield, treatment capacity, storage, peak-day demand, distribution constraints and planned capital projects.
- Number and spatial distribution of unincorporated residences relying on cisterns versus individual wells.
- Well permit trends, typical well depths/yields, known groundwater quality constraints, and areas where augmentation may be required.
- Drought contingency measures and triggers used by municipal providers.
- Any water-supply constraints associated with projected housing development, major industrial projects, wildfire recovery, or changes in agricultural water use.

Source Documents Used

- DOLA, Water Supply Element Templates and Additional Modules, revised June 9, 2026.
- DOLA, Water Supply Element Compliance Rubric, 2026.
- Rio Blanco County Comprehensive Plan 2025, adopted June 26, 2025.
- Rio Blanco County Land Use Regulations, effective July 1, 2016, last amended June 10, 2026.
- Rio Blanco County Housing Needs Assessment, 2026.

RESOLUTION NO. PC 2026-01
PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE COUNTY OF RIO BLANCO
STATE OF COLORADO

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF
RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO ADOPTING THE WATER SUPPLY ELEMENT
AMENDMENT TO THE RIO BLANCO COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF 2025

WHEREAS, Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) 30-28-106 & 31-23-206 provide that it is the duty of a county planning commission to make and adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the physical development of the unincorporated territory of the county; and

WHEREAS, it is the duty of the Rio Blanco County Planning Commission to make and adopt a plan for the physical development of the territory within the boundaries of Rio Blanco County, but outside of the incorporated limits of the Towns of Rangely and Meeker; and

WHEREAS, it is in the interest of Rio Blanco County to adopt a revised Comprehensive Plan that sets forth a vision for the future and includes accompanying maps, charts and narratives describing the future development of the county that will guide the recommendations of the Planning Commission to the Board of County Commissioners; and

WHEREAS, the development of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan involved review and comment by a Technical Advisory Group, and public review meetings; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted Comprehensive Plan public hearings on May 15, 2025 in Meeker, Colorado and June 19, 2025 in Rangely, Colorado after notice of such public hearings was properly made in conformance with statutory requirements; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission is required by CRS 30-28-109 to certify the Comprehensive Plan to the Board of County Commissioners;

Now, Therefore, the Planning Commission of Rio Blanco County, Colorado, finds as that based upon the evidence and testimony presented in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan the Rio Blanco County Comprehensive Plan of 2025 has been created to align with the best interests of the health, safety, morals, convenience, order, prosperity and welfare of the citizens of Rio Blanco County.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO, THAT THE 2025 RIO BLANCO COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, AS AMENDED, A COPY OF WHICH IS ATTACHED HERETO AND INCORPORATED HEREIN BY REFERENCE, IS HEREBY APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS 12TH DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2026. DULY MOVED, SECONDED, AND PASSED ON A VOTE OF 7 FOR AND 0 AGAINST, THIS 12TH DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2026.

THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF RIO BLANCO COUNTY (2026)

By:	Signature
CHAIRMAN **TRAVIS DAY**	
VICE-CHAIRMAN **CLINT CHAPPELL**	
SECRETARY **LEE OVERTON**	
MEMBER **ADAIR NORMAN**	
MEMBER **EMMA BAKER**	
MEMBER **DIANA SIZEMORE**	
MEMBER **JAY SULLIVAN**	

Chariman:

11-12-2026
Date: