



ECONOMIC PROSPERITY STRATEGIC PLAN

A community driven vision for the future, intended to guide the County in implementing Goals, Priorities and Strategies that directly contribute to its economic development.

- Published: April, 2019

CUSTER COUNTY

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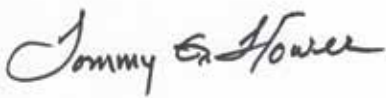
LETTER FROM THE COMMISSIONERS

It is our privilege to introduce to you the Custer County Economic Prosperity Strategic Plan. A thorough process over a period of five months by a task force composed of a diverse cross section of Custer County residents has produced a document that addresses the needs of every segment of the county's population.

By an extensive series of community meetings, interviews and surveys, our task force was able to uncover the strategic goals and objectives that will meet the community needs. This will enable the creation of policies and support that will encourage the best possibility for everyone in the county to succeed economically and socially, so the future of Custer County shines more brightly for all.

Three priority areas emerged as a result of professional research and evaluation of the data. They are: (1) business expansion, attraction and retention, (2) infrastructure, and (3) tourism. The knowledge gained by this, the first county-wide, community driven, issues-based research in the county's history, will be used by the county commissioners and other elected officials to direct the development of the upcoming years' budget and resource allocation decisions, and to make a clear and positive effect on the future prosperity of all citizens of the county.

We wish to thank all the residents who provided time and input to the task force, to the task force itself for its dedication of time and creativity in solving the problems associated with such a lofty plan, and to the partners and agencies throughout Custer County who will follow through by continuing to refine and update this plan annually.



Commissioner Tom Flower



Commissioner Bill Canda



Commissioner Jay Printz

Special thanks to these photographers and artist for courtesy use of their images to enhance these pages: Christoph Stopka, Lars Leber, SKYGLOW, Debbie Adams and artist Curt Gillespie.

CHRISTOPHSTOPKA.COM, LARSLEBER.NET, SKYGLOWPROJECT.COM, DLAPHOTO.COM, CURTGILLESPIE.COM

HISTORY OF CUSTER COUNTY



Hidden between two stunning mountain ranges, removed from the Front Range's bustling cities, the Wet Mountain Valley remains one of Colorado's last undiscovered gems. The imposing ridgeline of the sharply vertical Sangre de Cristo Mountains demands full attention, especially at sunrise when the alpine glow registers the 'blood of Christ'. To the east of the valley roll the Wet Mountains. They slope upward to the south where the peak of Greenhorn Mountain, at 12,200 feet, rivals the Sangres.

Native Utes inhabited the Wet Mountain Valley at least as early as the 1500s. As nomadic hunter-gatherers, they took advantage of southern Colorado's mild summers to hunt game and forage for edible plants. Spanish forces took control of the region in the following years, followed by French and American fur trappers in the early to mid-1800s. The 1870s, however, forever changed Custer County's landscape and culture. A group of German colonists arrived from Chicago and settled 6 miles south of Westcliffe in 1870.

The same year the Germans arrived, Elton and Edwin brought their first herd of cattle to the Wet Mountain Valley and would eventually own one of the largest cattle operations in Colorado. Other cattlemen followed, settling in all parts of the valley where land was prime for growing hay and raising livestock.

The 1874 discovery of copper and silver south of present-day Rosita brought people in by scores and put the Wet Mountain Valley on the map. As Rosita's population swelled, the Colorado Legislature officially created Custer County, naming it in honor of Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer, who died the previous year. By 1881, Silver Cliff's boom prompted the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad to extend its growing rail lines onto a property it purchased one mile west of Silver Cliff. The new spur followed the same Grape Creek path Zebulon Pike walked 75 years earlier. With a new depot, homes and businesses, the town of Westcliffe was born.

The San Isabel National Forest has an equally important history in Custer County. The San Isabel Lake area was designed and created to be one of the first recreational areas in Colorado and highway 165 one of the first roads created as a scenic drive.

Residents in Custer County value this important heritage. Not only does history inform a current lifestyle, it is also an opportunity to preserve a unique environment for others to share.

CUSTER COUNTY TODAY



Custer County, while well known for the amazing vistas of the Sangre de Cristos and a well-established heritage of ranching and agriculture, also has some lesser known assets. Most importantly, those assets include the knowledge, talent and dedication of the people who live here. From multi generational families that settled in the area in the late 1800's to the current day mix of families, retirees, second homes, faith-based communities, and veterans, everyone who lives in Custer County has a deep and abiding affinity for our lifestyle.

Partners in economic development include the over seventy-five active nonprofit organizations as well as the Custer County Economic Development Commission, the Town of Silver Cliff, the Town of Westcliffe, the Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Board, and C.A.R.T. to name but a few. The large Amish and Mennonite communities have brought both businesses and volunteer efforts, and the school district offers high quality education with dedicated teachers and staff.

You can visit a Centennial Ranch, or fully embrace the ranching lifestyle with a stay locally. The arts and cultural community holds world famous music festivals and hosts gallery events throughout the year. As the first Dark Sky <https://visitcustercounty.com/category/dark-sky/> Community in Colorado, the area offers visitors an unparalleled opportunity to view the majesty of the stars and bask in the benefits of viewing one of the nation's starriest skies.

A partial list of our assets are included in the Appendices – the ability to hike, bike, fish, hunt and recreate in the amazing natural outdoor playground; visit our historical buildings; check out our railroad museum and our agricultural and mining museum; shop in one of our many galleries and unique stores; catch a movie in our historical movie theater; or see a live performance production.

Go to <https://visitcustercounty.com/> to learn more about Custer County!

TODAY'S ECONOMY



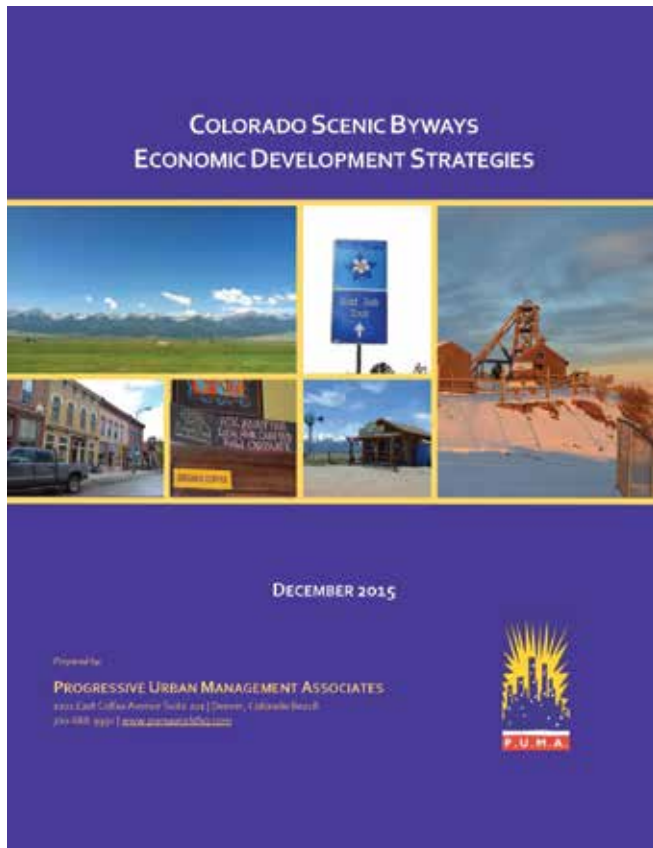
The history of Custer County is directly responsible for some of the amazing vistas and viewscape that is so important to the community and which is a main draw for tourism. The current economy in Custer County is based largely in two areas: outdoor recreational activities and tourism during the summer months. The outdoor recreational activities are year-round and include hunting, hiking, fishing, road and mountain biking, camping, star gazing, snowmobiling, snow shoeing, and much more. Tourism is attracted through events such as music, arts and the local ranches that attract visitors, weddings, and other gatherings.

The population of Custer County is forecast to reach 4,914 by 2020 and 5,208 by 2040. Overall, the growth rate for Custer County is expected to decrease between 2020 and 2040. Between 2010 and 2020 the forecast growth rate was 1.4 percent, between 2020 and 2030 the forecast growth rate is 0.1 percent, while the forecast growth rate between 2030 and 2040 is 0.5 percent. The change is due in part to population aging and changes in the proportion of the population in childbearing ages.

A main concern for sustainability of existing and new businesses is developing a year-round economy that does not depend upon the local residents for prosperity. With a large retiree and veteran population living in and moving to the County, there is an opportunity to capitalize in those areas. Another growing area of jobs are Internet based businesses providing technical and consulting services. Continuing to grow in this area will require investments in communications infrastructure.

Jobs in Custer County that are driven by tourism and construction could be severely affected by an economic downturn. A critical focus moving forward will be to create jobs with diversity in their base industries, as they tend to suffer less during downturns and recover more quickly. Additionally, labor force participation declines with age, especially among those eligible for pensions or social security.

Attainable housing will be another critical factor in maintaining and expanding jobs that could be created as a result of tourism and attracting families and a younger demographic back to Custer County. Due to the aging of our population and continued growth in our under 18 population – two segments of the population that are less likely to be employed, Custer County will need to respond to growing demands for health care while planning for the future of young families.



GENERAL INFORMATION

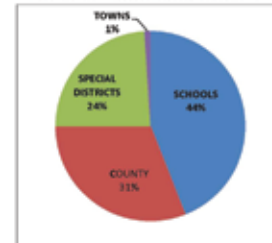
This abstract is compiled and sent out with the compliments of the County Assessor's office for your information and convenience.

It is the duty of the Assessor to list all assessable property in the County, and to make an equitable assessment of the same for equitable distribution of the tax load through the valuation of real estate, buildings thereon, and personal property based on its actual value.

The Assessor has nothing to do with setting the levies. County tax is levied by the Board of County Commissioners. School tax is levied by the District School Board. City tax is levied by the Town Board. Special District tax is levied by their Board of Directors.

The basic valuation of property is fixed by the Colorado Constitution and Statutory Requirement.

WHERE YOUR TAX DOLLAR GOES



ABSTRACT OF ASSESSMENT CUSTER COUNTY 2018



*Prepared by the
CUSTER COUNTY ASSESSOR
and approved by the
COUNTY BOARD OF EQUALIZATION
the
PROPERTY TAX ADMINISTRATOR
and the
STATE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION*

*Distributed for your information by
J.D. HENRICH, ASSESSOR
Custer County*

A review of primary economic, infrastructure, workforce and community assets has helped to shape the foundation for a discussion about future prosperity in Custer County.

In preparing the Prosperity Plan, the consultant and the community reviewed and analyzed several key documents including:

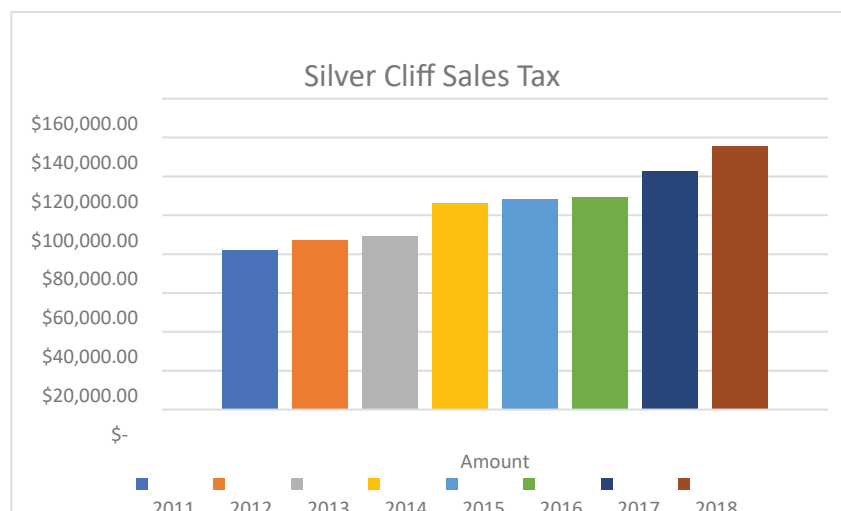
- Existing County Plans (list)
- Town of Westcliffe Master Plans 2017 - 2018 (list)
- Town of Silver Cliff Master Plans 2017 - 2018 (list)
- Demographic Data from the State of Colorado 2019
- 2010 and 2016 Census Data
- Housing Studies 2010
- Impact and Market Assessment Studies Economic Feasibility 2018
- Community Assessment in 2017
- Broadband Assessment 2018
- Broadband Strategic Plan 2018
- Sonoran Institute Report 1999
- Trails Management Plan 2018
- San Isabel Land Protection Trust Strategic Plan?
- Colorado Scenic Byways Economic Development Strategy
- Custer County Land Use Master Plan 2016

DEMOGRAPHICS

Attached in the Appendices to this Plan are demographic reports and data affecting the prosperity in the County. Here are a few of the most important pieces of information to understand.

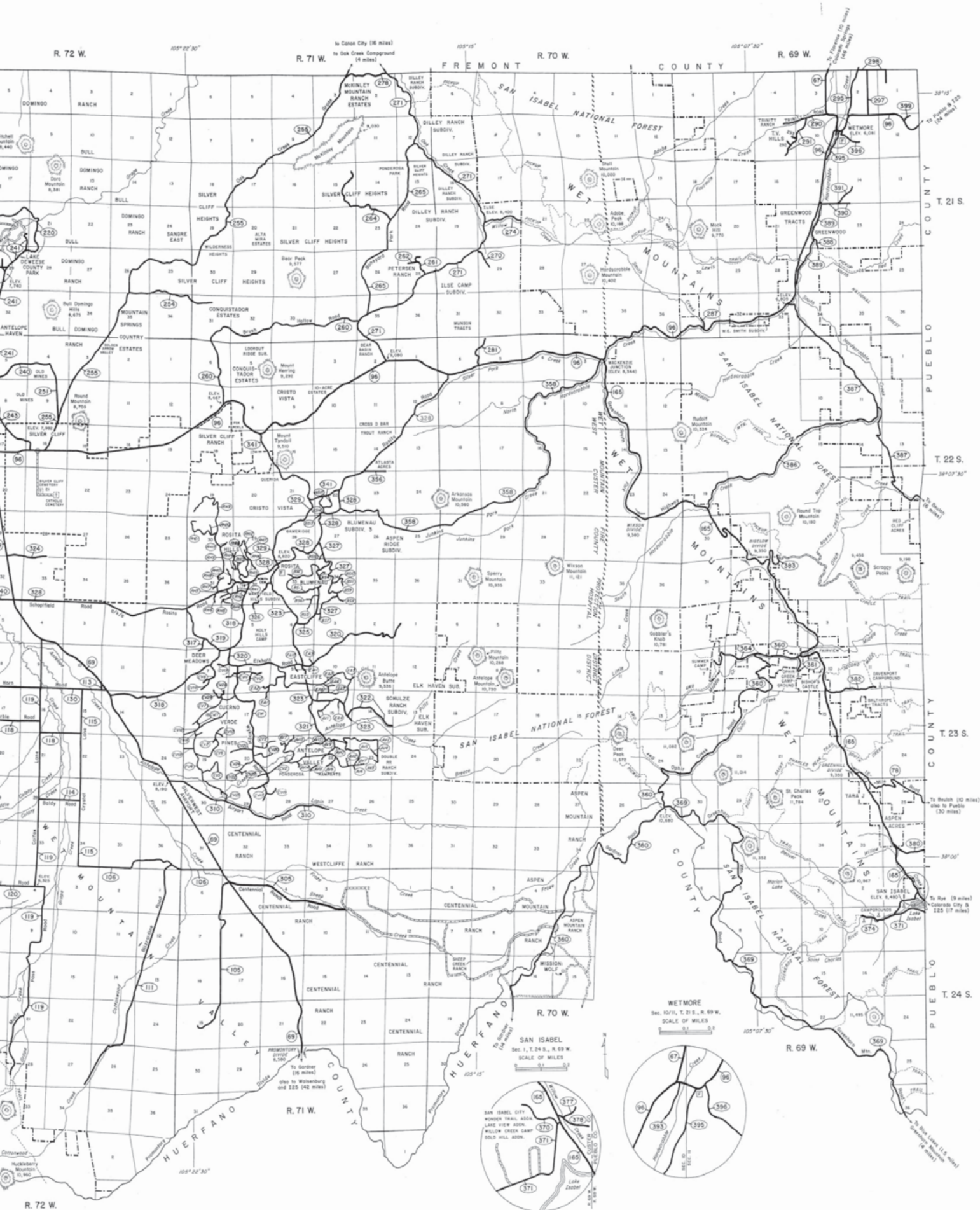
	Custer County	Colorado
Population (2017)+	4,859	5,609,445
Population Change (2010 to 2017)+	587	559,113
Total Employment (2017)+	1,632	3,309,391
Median Household Income [^]	\$41,330	\$65,458
Median House Value [^]	\$248,300	\$286,100
Percentage of Population with Incomes lower than the Poverty Line [^]	15.7%	11.5%
Percentage of Population Born in Colorado [^]	28.5%	42.7%

+Source: State Demography Office
[^]Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey, Print Date: 02/07/2019



(COUNTY - MAINTAINED ROADS)

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OVERVIEW & APPROACH



Custer County, one of Colorado's most beautiful mountain landscapes, honors its rural, agricultural, mining, and western heritage. we seek to connect its future with its past by protecting local values, preserving community assets, respecting property rights, accommodating managed growth and compatible economic development, and serving as responsible stewards of its inspiring natural environment.

Custer County ranges from the Sangre De Cristo Mountain Range on the west to Wetmore on the east and San Isabel on the southeast. The County seat is Westcliffe at an elevation of 7888 feet. Located south of Cañon City and west of Pueblo, Custer County has a population of 4,859 people.

As a popular outdoor vacation spot, the County boasts several 14,000 foot peaks as well as numerous fishing, hiking, hunting, and camping areas. People who live here enjoy an unparalleled lifestyle with friendly neighbors, strong non profit groups, opportunities to volunteer in many areas, and a small town approach to life. I suggest - our inspiring numerous 13,000' plus, and a few 14,000' plus peaks.

PROCESS

The Economic Prosperity Plan is designed to be a living document, which means that the Plan should be discussed by the community and updated on a regular basis. At least once a year an in depth meeting should be held to determine the most important Actions to work on moving forward.

Because the Prosperity Plan is a community document, the process used to create the Plan clearly reflects the decisions and agreements from the community. Six main inputs were used to gather information and gain consensus moving forward:

OVERVIEW & APPROACH

Community Feedback Form

600 responses to the feedback form were tabulated and recorded, which resulted in common themes and issues that the community determined were most important to economic prosperity in the County. That information was presented to the community and used to develop more specific Priorities and Values as well as to guide the creation of Goals.

Individual Interviews

Twenty three individuals were interviewed personally and those comments were added to the feedback themes to ensure a more complete and well rounded approach to the information contained in the Plan.

Communication in Media

Social media, radio interviews, ads in local newspapers as well as information on websites were all channels used to communicate back to the public.

Community Meetings

Four community meetings were held during the process. During the first two meetings, the community selected specific Priorities that they felt were most important as a focus for Economic Prosperity. During the second meeting, the community created a Vision (which was drawn by a sketch artist) of the future of Custer County. The final meeting was a review of the draft information for the Strategic Plan.

Task Force

The Commissioners asked several members of the public to serve on a Task Force that was responsible for taking all of the feedback, interview information, and information at the Community Meetings and creating specific Goals, Objectives and Action Steps.

Custer County Commissioners

The Commissioners were responsible for guiding the process, reviewing the final information, and adopting the Strategic Economic Prosperity Plan. They will also be the champions for managing the process moving forward.



OUTCOMES



This Prosperity Plan identified outcomes that the community wants to see happen as a result of the work and implementation of the Plan. The implementation time frame for these outcomes range from short term accomplishments (1 - 3 years) to long term projects (10 - 15 years). There are clearly many projects which will be ongoing over time, but there are specific actions that can be accomplished in shorter steps to reach the Goals. Regardless of the time frame, there is a common thread of not losing what the community currently has and values so strongly the lifestyle.

- Year-round economic vitality: thriving, successful businesses and people doing well Good paying jobs
- Opportunities to capitalize on local products, local food and local goods
- Family friendly: families live and thrive here
- Strong support for youth
- Increased tourism that benefits our tax base
- Community pride
- Community engagement and involvement
- Collaboration and communication among government partners including special districts
- Build on who we are and who we want to be

STRATEGY AT A GLANCE

VISION

PRIORITY 1

Business Expansion
Attraction and Retention

PRIORITY 2

Infrastructure

PRIORITY 3

Tourism

STRATEGIES

Strategies are the tools used to ensure success while implementing the Objectives.

GOALS

Expand local businesses to ensure year-round success by focusing on sustainable, diverse opportunities to grow.



Reliable, adequate, available and dependable communications (Cell and Internet) that is accessible and affordable county wide.



Community based analysis with professional support to drive decisions that create measurable results to support the needs of tourism.



Create sustainable employment that reflects our life style and values, while leveraging both our current and future state of prosperity.



Provide high quality water services to meet the long range needs of Custer County residents, businesses and visitors.



Market and promote all of the amazing assets in Custer County including businesses, lifestyle and opportunities.



A Starlit Oasis

CUSTER

FEBRUARY 4th 2019

Integrated water management plan

15/3/2019

Kite festival

Mine tours

Wilderness

Imagine...

15 years from now... what are you excited to share?

Home

Fire Mitigation

Trails

Historic Walk

Serenity

Volunteer

Mission Wolf Refuge

Rodeo + County Fair

We have a lot of these already... they need to be updated or grown.

Creative

Peaceful, Calming views

What can children do out here

Ranching Camp

4H

Year-End

Friendly, Cooperative Community

Living History Ranch + Western Arts

Individual is honored

Welcome

What does it feel like?

It feels like GO



GUIDING VALUES



As a part of the community process, several guiding values emerged that provide a framework for implementation of this Plan. The Values serve as a filter through which all prosperity decisions can be benchmarked.

Actively Preserve and Sustain our Lifestyle: We will preserve the vistas, the small-town feeling, the outdoor recreation opportunities, the ranching and agricultural base, and the feeling of being remote and undeveloped (night skies, stars and open space). Our children and grandchildren will return home to Custer County because we have valued our lifestyle and created a sustainable future through expanding business opportunities and jobs and protection of issues critical to ranching, such as water.

Supportive Community: Our community supports one another, respects individuality, and is actively engaged in preserving our lifestyle. We appreciate what it means to live in Custer County – we continue to be friendly, welcoming, down to earth, spirited, independent, proud, and authentic.

Government Collaboration: Government in Custer County is an active partner in prosperity, offering support and services in a sustainable way to ensure we protect what we have and leverage our assets to preserve them for the future. Appropriate policies are discussed with the community prior to implementation to ensure they match the Values and Vision for Custer County.

PRIORITIES

PRIORITIES

As part of the process of creating a Vision for Prosperity, a feedback form was filled out by over 600 people, and personal interviews were conducted. The themes and common issues that were mentioned were brought to a Community Meeting. The purpose of that first Community Meeting was to determine what is most important to Custer County for long term prosperity. A long list of potential issues were brainstormed and collated, which resulted in numerous Priorities.

After receiving that feedback from members of the public and business community, the Task Force took that long list and refined it to focus on the core aspirations that best fit Custer County. As a result, three Priorities emerged. These three Priorities are outlined below and will be the focus for resources and effort moving in to the future.



BUSINESS EXPANSION, ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

Support for existing local businesses would include shopping locally, services and programs to help create a year-round business economy and help expand to infill vacant spaces. Attraction for new businesses would focus on ranching and agriculturally based light industry as well as outdoor recreation focused businesses in both the retail and light industry sectors.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Includes housing, communication (Wi-Fi, cell service, broadband), the airport, medical services, water, sewer, roads, curb, gutter, sidewalk, drainage, and signage. Safety will always be a component and focus of any infrastructure. Water specifically includes water rights and the watershed as well as drinking water.



TOURISM

Marketing, outreach and signage to attract visitors to Custer County, focused on the outdoor recreation and lifestyle opportunities. This would include marketing new and existing events, arts and culture, trails, the rodeo, the airport, the stars, agriculturally based tourism, the faith-based community, historically based tourism – leveraging the existing assets within Custer County. Based on the community developed Vision, this Priority would also focus (in collaboration with other Priorities) on building new assets that would serve the local residents as well as attracting tourists. Many of these existing and new assets would be community amenities.

BUSINESS EXPANSION, ATTRACTION & RETENTION



Support for existing local businesses would include shopping locally, services and programs to help create a year-round business economy and help expand to infill vacant spaces. Attraction for new businesses would focus on ranching and agriculture, and light industry. A strong opportunity exists to support outdoor recreation focused businesses in both the retail and light industry sectors.

ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of available jobs in ranching and agriculture • Higher cost of local goods • Lack of diversity in local goods • Availability of attainable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing within the Towns • Partnering to create a prosperous business climate • Shop Local Program • New restaurants • Foster collaboration between Towns and County • Policy guidelines to support business growth • Local food movement • The County can support and foster current programs

INFRASTRUCTURE



Infrastructure is a Priority that will allow Custer County to focus support and resources in 6 critical areas:


- 1) Housing (attainable housing specifically within the Towns),
- 2) Communication (Wi-Fi, cell service, broadband),
- 3) Roads, curb, gutter, sidewalk, drainage, within the incorporated Town areas,
- 4) Water including the delivery of potable water, water rights and the watershed,
- 5) Airport and amenities
- 6) Signage

Safety will always be a component and focus of any infrastructure.

ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreasing revenue creates decreasing resources to build and maintain infrastructure• Water is the driving factor behind prosperity for business growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infrastructure such as roads can match our Values• Many partners in the community are working on this issue• Explore options for supporting health care in the community.

TOURISM



 Tourism is a critical Priority for maintaining and preserving the lifestyle the Custer County Community desires. Tourism will be focused on marketing, outreach and signage to attract visitors to Custer County, based on leveraging the existing outdoor recreation and lifestyle opportunities. This would include marketing new and existing events, arts and culture, trails, the rodeo, the airport, the stars, agriculturally based tourism, the faith-based community, historically based tourism and other assets. Based on the community developed Vision, this Priority would also focus (in collaboration with other Priorities) on building new assets that would serve the local residents as well as attracting tourists. Many of these existing and new assets would also serve as community amenities.

ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside of the County, there is no widespread recognition of the assets that exist • The area has unpredictable weather patterns that make planning difficult • The perception of Custer County does not match reality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnificent outdoor recreation opportunities • Recognized as a Dark Sky Community • San Isabel National Forest • Shop Local Program • Numerous activities currently exist • Partners are currently focused on this issue in a variety of ways • Many existing businesses that can support and accommodate a growth in tourism (ranches, retreats, weddings)

GOALS

Six Goals were created, driven by the three Priorities and designed to achieve the Vision of Prosperity for Custer County. They should be reviewed annually to ensure the community is still on track and focused in the right direction.



OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES



SMART Objectives:

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely Objectives were created for each Goal and are fully captured in the Implementation Plan that is attached in the Appendices. The Task Force focused on objectives that clearly met the Vision, Values, Priorities and Goals and, if implemented, would create prosperity in Custer County.

Strategies are the tools used to ensure success while implementing the Objectives. They include:

- Communication
- Education
- Data Based Decisions
- Leveraging Existing Assets
- Setting Expectations
- Funding Mechanisms
- Public and Private Partnerships
- Utilizing Local and External Expertise
- Reality Based Decisions
- Using the Vision as the Guide
- Working collaboratively to solve problems

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



The Implementation Plan is the heart of a living document. Designed to be updated every ninety days with new Action Steps, the details encourage focus and accountability. The key to success is to be specific, and the Implementation Plan details:

- Specific Action Steps.
- Who will be responsible for taking that Step.
- A due date for completion.
- Resources that might be needed.
- Measurements and Outcomes.
- Status.

There will always be blank areas in the matrix, because the Plan is always a work in progress. Even though an Action Step might not be currently in progress, it will remain on the Plan for future consideration.

Please see the Appendix for the full Implementation Plan.



For more information about the Custer County Economic Prosperity Strategic Plan, please reach out to the County Commissioners at 205 South 6th Street, PO Box 150 Westcliffe, Colorado 81252

Phone: (719)-783-2552

Fax: (719)-783-2885

www.custercountygov.com