

# Custer County Master Plan



July 6, 2010



## Vision Statement

Custer County, one of Colorado's most beautiful mountain landscapes, honors its rural, agricultural, mining, and western heritage, and seeks 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.



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# Introduction

## **Purpose**

The Master Plan is a framework and guide for accomplishing community aspirations and intentions. It states goals and objectives and recommends courses of action for future growth and development of land, public facilities and services, and environmental protection.

The purpose of the Custer County Master Plan is to anticipate inevitable growth-related challenges in Custer County and to help plan future development within the County. Wide community participation was solicited in preparing this document to provide a vision for future land use in Custer County that is acceptable to most of its citizens. It is an advisory document that respects individual property rights in balance with the best interest of the entire community. The Master Plan outlines intent, goals, and guidance for policies that shape more specific and binding land use documents including the Custer County Zoning Resolution and Subdivision Regulations. The Master Plan details recommendations and goals for action by the Board of County Commissioners, Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Adjustment, other appointed boards and County Staff.

This Master Plan will serve as a guide for the regulation of land use in the unincorporated portions of Custer County. Inevitably, decisions will be made that result in conflicts among goals set forth in the Master Plan. When these conflicts occur, the decision makers must find a balance that never loses sight of the County's vision: respecting its rural, agricultural, mining and western

traditions. Ranch and farm uses within Custer County are important physical, cultural, environmental, aesthetic and economic assets to both urban and rural residents. Additionally, preservation of these lands in huge tracts is desirable to maintain the agricultural economy of the County. Development of our agricultural properties is a matter of public concern. The objective is to perpetuate those values important to Custer County residents such as neighbors respecting each other, fewer regulations, a less stressful life, scenic beauty, abundant wildlife, good water resources and a safe place for families to live and prosper.

## **Background**

Despite several attempts over thirty-nine years, Custer County produced its initial Master Plan in April of 2002. This document represents the required review and update of that plan. A detailed account of Custer County's planning history is included in the separate Custer County Master Plan Supporting Document (MPSD).

## Use of the Plan

The Custer County Master Plan is an advisory document to guide land development decisions (C.R.S. 30-28-106). Although the plan is advisory, it serves as the basis for land use regulatory measures, primarily the Custer County Zoning Resolution and the Custer County Subdivision Regulations. The Custer County Master Plan serves as the foundation for future intergovernmental agreements, capital improvement programming, and detailed studies and programs; it is also used as supporting documentation for pursuing grant-based activities.

As a master plan, this plan is not regulatory or binding upon private land use activities until enforced through regulatory mechanisms such as zoning and subdivision regulations and has immediate binding effect only upon public activities as required by Colorado Revised Statutes. This Master Plan is not a zoning plan. Accordingly, the use herein of the words "shall", "must", "require", etc., are not to be interpreted as mandatory or regulatory except with respect to the public activities described at C.R.S. or where zoning and subdivision regulations require.

The Custer County Master Plan will be referenced by the Board of County Commissioners, Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Adjustment and the County Staff when reviewing Zoning Permit applications, updating the Custer County Zoning Resolution and the Custer County Subdivision Regulations, working on intergovernmental issues with Silver Cliff and Westcliffe and other agencies outlining work programs, preparing annual budgets, and evaluating the County's progress in meeting identified goals. The Custer County Master Plan will also be used to guide residents,

landowners, and developers concerning land planning and community development objectives within Custer County.

The Planning Influences section outlines land use, infrastructure and services currently available within Custer County that establish the basis for creating Planning Goals, Policies, and Actions. Other planning influences, supporting information and data are detailed in the Custer County Master Plan Supporting Document (MPSD).

The Plan Direction section establishes five Planning Areas within Custer County. Each Planning Area (Grape Creek, Sangre De Cristo, Foothills, Wet Mountain/Hardscrabble, and Cooperative) has a set of Plan Directions that are guidelines for public policy consideration and future land use decisions. Following the Planning Areas are Goals, Policies, and Actions that are organized into three major themes: Environment, Land Use, and County Services. Policies may not have specific action items connected with them. It is the intention that all policies be considered in general in all applications. The Plan Direction and the associated goals, policies and actions will be used in conjunction with the Custer County Zoning Resolution and Custer County Subdivision Regulations to guide the appropriate location, character, type, and intensity of new development.

Although the Master Plan guides Custer County toward the future, it is also a "living" document adaptable to changes the future will bring. The Custer County Planning Commission will conduct a comprehensive review of the Master Plan every five years. The Planning and Zoning Office will update data in the Master Plan Supporting Document annually.

# Planning Influences

## **Land Use**

### **Context**

Custer County is located in south central Colorado and is bordered by Fremont County to the north, Pueblo County to the east, Huerfano County to the south, and Saguache County to the west. Originally occupied by the Ute Indians, explored by Zebulon Pike, settled by German colonists, and named after the famous cavalry leader General George A. Custer, Custer County was established on March 9, 1877. Over the past 132 years, Custer County has become a special place with unique qualities and challenges which ultimately influence land use and development decisions.

Custer County's population has fluctuated over the years until 1970. Between 1970 and 1990 the population steadily increased with the growth of tourism and a relatively stable state economy. Population is expected to continue to grow, although not at rates experienced during the 1990's. More detailed population data are presented in Tables 1 and 2, MPSD.

## **Incorporated Towns**

Two statutory towns, Silver Cliff and Westcliffe, are located adjacent to each other with Westcliffe serving as the County seat.

Silver Cliff is one of Colorado's oldest mining communities, originating in 1879. Once one of Colorado's largest towns in terms of population, Silver Cliff is now one of Colorado's largest towns in terms of land area, having annexed over 7,000 acres in 1973. In January 2002, Silver Cliff adopted its first Master Plan and Subdivision Regulations.

Westcliffe, incorporated in 1887, serves as the economic, cultural and government center of Custer County. Originally conceived as a speculative development for a railroad terminus, Westcliffe evolved as a ranching community. The town of Westcliffe adopted its first Master Plan in December 2000, and updated its Land Use Code in February 2001.

## **Unincorporated Communities**

Additionally, the unincorporated communities of Wetmore, San Isabel, Lake DeWeese and Rosita/Querida are growing areas where population density requires attention to limit future infrastructure problems.

## Land Use, Zoning and Subdivision

Custer County is primarily a rural county, with urban uses generally located within the incorporated towns of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe. Of Custer County's 473,600 acres, 188,988 acres (40%) is public land, and 284,612 acres (60%) is private land. Public land is managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), State of Colorado and the local governments of Custer County, Silver Cliff and Westcliffe. USFS lands include portions of the San Isabel National Forest, the Greenhorn Wilderness Area, and the Sangre De Cristo Wilderness Area (see Table 3 Public Land Use Acreage, MPSD).

Agricultural land comprises approximately 75 percent of private land in Custer County. Custer County adopted a Right to Ranch and Farm policy in 1998 to protect the viability of agricultural land use activities. Since the early 1990's, organizations have been using grants and donations to preserve approximately 33,000 acres of agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and scenic open spaces in Custer County with conservation easements (see Table 4 Private Land Use Acreage, MPSD).

The majority of residential and vacant land is located in over 120 platted subdivisions in Custer County. Of the 8,681 tracts of land 80 acres or less 5,934 (68%) are privately owned and vacant. According to the 2000 census, Custer County has 2,989 housing units; approximately 50 percent are owner occupied. Another 44 percent are

seasonal or "second homes", leaving 6 percent vacant. Commercial property is predominantly located in the towns of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe (see Table 5 Selected Subdivision Activity, MPSD).

Custer County does not have a building code, although State electrical and plumbing, and State and County septic codes, must be followed. A zoning permit is required for all dwelling structures, and all accessory structures greater than 100 square feet in size. Custer County adopted a Compliance Inspection process that must be met before any dwelling owner completes their zoning permit requirements.

Ranching, farming, residential, commercial, industrial, natural resource, and other land uses found within Custer County can best be described based on the zoning district within which they are permitted. All zoning districts allow agricultural and residential uses as a "use by right", meaning that no additional approvals are required beyond a zoning permit. Only one single-family dwelling is permitted per parcel in any district, unless otherwise approved (see Table 6 Permit Activity and Table 7 Assessed Valuation, MPSD).

Special Use Permits (SUP's) are required for all non-permitted uses in the Custer County Zoning Resolution.

Custer County's zoning districts were adopted in 1971 and have been revised. The current districts are as follows:



Zoning District I:  
Grape Creek District

The Grape Creek Zoning District is located in the Wet Mountain Valley, west of Westcliffe, State Highway (SH) 69 and Grape Creek. The Grape Creek Zoning District is generally a rich alluvial environment dominated by agricultural land uses, including irrigated lands, meadow hay lands, and grazing lands along the Grape Creek drainage. The Grape Creek Zoning District is intended to have a low population density and to remain agricultural in character, with a minimum lot size of 80 acres. Special consideration is being given to original parcels described by the aliquot method. Few subdivisions exist in the Grape Creek District.

Zoning District II:  
Sangre De Cristo Zoning District

The Sangre De Cristo Zoning District is located along the Sangre De Cristo Range, and is generally a high mountain environment with substantial public lands, agricultural and residential uses, with a minimum lot size of 35 acres. Two public campgrounds and numerous hiking trails are also located in the Sangre De Cristo Zoning District, including the popular Rainbow Trail.

Zoning District III:  
Wet Mountain/Hardscrabble  
Zoning District

The Wet Mountain/Hardscrabble Zoning District is located east of the Foothills Zoning District, in the Wet Mountains covering generally the entire eastern third of Custer County. The Wet Mountain/Hardscrabble Zoning District is generally a forested mountain environment with some high plains and rolling terrain in the Wetmore area. This district contains

substantial public lands and limited agricultural and residential uses, with a minimum lot size of 10 acres. Several public campgrounds and hiking trails are located in this district. The settlement of San Isabel is also located in the district along SH 165. Commercial uses related to recreational activities associated with nearby Lake San Isabel, and residential uses with a minimum lot size of less than 10 acres, exist in the San Isabel area. Besides San Isabel City, subdivisions in the San Isabel area include Willow Creek Camp, God's Country Estates, Gold Hill Addition, Wonder Trail Addition, and Lake View Addition.

Wetmore is located at the intersection of SH 96 and SH 67, approximately 26 miles west of the city of Pueblo. Commercial uses, and residential uses with minimum lot sizes less than 10 acres, exist in the community of Wetmore. Major subdivisions west of Wetmore include T.V. Hills, Adobe Creek Ranch, and King Mountain Estates. In the Greenwood area south of Wetmore, subdivisions include Greenwood Tracts and Hardscrabble Homesites.

Zoning District IV:  
Foothills Zoning District

The Foothills Zoning District is located in portions of the Wet Mountain Valley and the Wet Mountains, and is generally a sagebrush-covered environment with patented mining claims and approved residential subdivisions of 5 acres or more. The largest subdivision is Silver Cliff Heights, located in the northern portion of the Foothills District. Over 30 subdivisions in the Foothills Zoning District are platted with lots of at least

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35 acres in size. Of these, the following 35 acre subdivisions, originally in the Foothills Zoning District, have been rezoned to Zoning District II: Bull Domingo Ranch, Centennial Ranch, portions of the Woods at Buck Mountain, Gem Mountain and McKinley Mountain.

The unincorporated community of Rosita is located at the junction of County Road (CR) 323, CR 328 and CR 329. The Rosita Townsite, as of April 2009, was 60 percent built out, with approximately 30 vacant parcels. Numerous other partially developed subdivisions are in the Rosita area, including Blumenau, Cristo Vista and Rosita Hills. Also located in the Foothills Zoning District is Lake De Weese Reservoir, with its related residential and recreational development. Lake De Weese Resort is the major subdivision in the Lake De Weese area, although several other smaller subdivisions include Lakeshore Acres, Sierra City and Mountain View. The Silver West Airport is a County airport with a related subdivision development.

## Sustainable Development

The history of Custer County is grounded in self sufficiency exhibited by the original settlers. Resourcefulness served generation after generation through sustainable practices of natural methods. The self reliant spirit of the past shall be used as a model to preserve and enhance the future.

A framework for sustainable development includes:

1. Maintaining stewardship of our natural environment;
2. Promoting water conservation, especially preserving our agricultural water for ranch and farm use;
3. Encouraging the use of energy efficiency and renewable energy;
4. Developing a local food supply;
5. Orientation of new buildings to optimize energy efficiency;
6. Supporting reuse and recycling

## Economic Development

As a result of the 2002 Custer County Master Plan, the Custer County Community Economic Development Committee (CCCEDC) was established in January, 2005 to coordinate economic development within the county. CCCEDC will participate with government entities, local businesses, organizations and citizens. Four areas of importance have been identified:

1. Natural Resources-Preserving them for the good of the community and encouraging more use of sustainable energy.
2. Business and community development-Assist the business community to stimulate business growth and opportunities.
3. Tourism and Marketing-Focus on increasing the growth of tourism in Custer County in cooperation with the Custer County Tourism Board.
4. Human Resources-Take advantage of the pool of expertise and talents of the community to encourage economic growth.

More detailed employment projections are presented in Table 8, MPSD.

## Services and Infrastructure

### Government

Custer County provides an array of services to county taxpayers, normally categorized as public works, public safety, social services, and administration. The County administrative offices are located in the Custer County Courthouse on 6th Street in Westcliffe. The courthouse also houses the Colorado State University Extension Office. The elected County Commissioners, the Planning Commission, and Board of Zoning Adjustment each conduct meetings at the courthouse addressing land use issues. Hanssen Haus, across the street from the Custer County Courthouse, is now used as an annex for county business.

Silver Cliff and Westcliffe are statutory town governments that provide services to residents within their incorporated boundaries. Both Silver Cliff and Westcliffe have administrative offices at their Town Hall located on Main Street in their respective communities. Each Town also has an elected Board of Trustees and an appointed Planning Commission that addresses community land use issues.

Several special districts operate in Custer County, including the Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District, the Round Mountain Water and Sanitation District (RMWSD), the West Custer County Hospital District, the West Custer County Library District, the Wet Mountain Fire Protection District (WMFPD), and the Consolidated C-1 School District (see Table 9 Custer County Revenue and Expenditures Ratio, MPSD).

### Transportation

Five State Highways serve Custer County: SH 69, SH 96, SH 165, SH 78, and SH 67. SH 69 transects Custer County from north to south, extending from Texas Creek at US 50 in Fremont County to Walsenburg and Interstate 25 (I-25) in Huerfano County.

SH 96, included in the Frontier Pathways Scenic and Historic Byway, is the principle east-west arterial in the county, originating as Main Street in Westcliffe and extending east through Silver Cliff and over the Wet Mountains to Wetmore, Pueblo and beyond.

Local public roads in Custer County, besides those in the jurisdictions of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe, consist of 357 miles of paved and unpaved roads maintained by the Custer County Road and Bridge Department.

The Silver West Airport has a 7,000-foot-long, 40-foot-wide runway and is centrally located in the Wet Mountain Valley, nine miles south of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe off SH 69. The Silver West Airport provides general aviation services, including hanger rental, tie downs and fuelling.

### Utilities

The current Custer County landfill opened in 1994. Private haulers transport refuse to the landfill located on CR 328 (Rosita Road). There are two recycling centers, one at the landfill and the second located east of the Custer County Sheriff's Department in Westcliffe.

The RMWSD provides water and wastewater service to the majority of businesses and residences in the vicinity of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe. The wastewater treatment plant is at 85% of design capacity. Properties located outside the

RMWSD boundaries require permits for water wells and septic systems. Well permits are administered by the State Engineer's Office. Septic permits are administered by Custer County.

Electric providers are Black Hills Energy, the Sangre De Cristo Rural Electric Association and the San Isabel Rural Electric Association. Alternative power sources include solar energy and wind generators. Propane is available through local providers; natural gas service is not available in Custer County.

CenturyLink Communications owns the majority of telecommunications infrastructure in Custer County. CenturyLink is installing fiber optic cable to improve digital telecommunication capabilities. Private providers also offer cellular, Internet, satellite and cable television services.

### **Emergency Services**

The Custer County Sheriff's Department provides law enforcement services throughout Custer County, including the towns of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe. The County has enhanced 911 services, and Custer County Search and Rescue operations are based at the Sheriff's Department. The Colorado State Patrol patrols the 162 miles of state highways in the County, and assist the Sheriff's Department as requested.

The WMFPD serves county residents west of McKenzie Junction from the main station in Westcliffe and five substations throughout the county. The WMFPD provides fire suppression, fire protection, advanced life support first response, specialty rescue and public education services to a 585 square mile area. Wetmore has a volunteer fire department with one fire station.

The West Custer County Hospital District recently constructed a new Custer County Medical Clinic in Westcliffe, offering comprehensive family practice, cardiac and trauma life support, 24-hour patient stabilization, rehabilitation, physical therapy, patient education, and EKG, laboratory and x-ray services. The Custer County Ambulance Corp is also located at the Custer County Medical Clinic.

### **Education**

Custer County is served by two public school districts; Custer County School District C-1 and Fremont County RE2. The Custer County School District C-1 provides kindergarten through grade 12 education at its Consolidated School on Main Street in Westcliffe. The Custer County Pre-School is located on Jerry Court in Westcliffe. Students in outlying districts are bussed to either Westcliffe or other school districts. The Sangre De Cristo Seminary is the only private school in Custer County.

### Libraries

Custer County is home to two libraries. The West Custer County library located on Main Street in Westcliffe and the Wetmore Community Center Library located off Highway 96 in Wetmore.

(The Custer County MPSD contains more detailed information on the following topics.)



# Plan Direction

## **Planning Areas**

The Master Plan consists of five planning areas, four of which have distinct physiographic features and are geographically consistent with Custer County zoning districts. The five planning areas are shown on the Plan Direction map in the MPSD and described as follows:

### **Grape Creek Planning Area**

The Grape Creek Planning Area is in the Wet Mountain Valley, west of Westcliffe, SH 69 and Grape Creek, and corresponds to Zoning District I: Grape Creek District.

#### Grape Creek Planning Area Directions:

- Land use will be primarily ranching and farming.
- Commercial or industrial uses which are supportive of ranching and farming operations will be considered through the Special Use Permit process.
- The minimum lot size of 80 acres for primary residential dwelling units will be maintained.

### **Sangre De Cristo Planning Area**

The Sangre De Cristo Planning Area is west of the Grape Creek Planning Area in the Wet Mountain Valley and along the Sangre De Cristo Range, extending to the County's western boundary, and corresponds to Zoning District II: Sangre De Cristo District.

#### Sangre De Cristo Planning Area Directions:

- Land use will be primarily ranching, farming, forestry, rural residential and recreational.
- Commercial or industrial uses which are supportive of ranching, farming, forestry or recreational operations will be considered through the Special Use Permit process.
- The minimum lot size of 35 acres for primary residential dwelling units will be maintained.

### **Wet Mountain/Hardscrabble Planning Area**

The Wet Mountain/Hardscrabble Planning Area corresponds to two original Zoning Districts, III and V, that were combined into one district, Zoning District III.

The Wet Mountain portion of this area is east of the Foothills District and generally extends to CR 387 and the eastern boundary of the San Isabel National Forest. This area is primarily a forested mountain environment with substantial public lands and limited ranching, farming, and residential uses. Several public campgrounds and hiking trails are located in the Wet Mountains.

The Hardscrabble portion of this Area is in northeastern Custer County between the Wet Mountains and the County boundary. The Hardscrabble area consists primarily of high plains and rolling terrain.

The settlements of Wetmore and San Isabel are in this Planning Area. Wetmore is located at the intersection of SH 96 and SH 67, approximately 26 miles west of the city of Pueblo. Commercial and residential uses on lots of less than 10 acres exist in Wetmore.

San Isabel is located along SH 165. Commercial recreation activities associated with Lake San Isabel, as well as residential use, occur on lots of less than 10 acres in the San Isabel area.

#### Wet Mountain/Hardscrabble Planning Area Directions:

- Land use will be primarily ranching, farming, forestry, rural residential and recreational.
- Commercial or industrial uses which are supportive of ranching, farming, forestry or recreational operations will be considered through the Special Use Permit process.
- The minimum lot size of 10 acres for primary residential dwelling units will be maintained.
- Commercial and residential uses with minimum lot sizes less than 10 acres in the communities of San Isabel and Wetmore, and the existing small lot subdivisions in these areas, will be considered through the Special Use Permit process.
- Lot consolidation and vacating lot boundaries to achieve larger lots will be encouraged.

#### **Foothills Planning Area**

The Foothills Planning Area is primarily in the central one-third of Custer County, encompassing portions of the Wet Mountain Valley and the Wet Mountains and corresponds to Zoning District IV: Foothills District.

#### Foothills Planning Area Directions:

- Land use will be primarily ranching, farming, forestry, mining, rural residential and recreational.
- Commercial or industrial uses which are supportive of ranching, farming, forestry, mining, or recreational

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operations will be considered through the Special Use Permit process.

- The minimum lot size of 5 acres for primary residential dwelling units will be maintained.
- Commercial and residential uses with minimum lot sizes less than 5 acres in the town site of Rosita, and the existing small lot subdivisions in the Rosita and Lake DeWeese areas, will be considered through the Special Use Permit process.
- Lot consolidation and vacating lot boundaries to achieve larger lots will be encouraged.

## **Cooperative Planning Area**

The Cooperative Planning Area contains the primary growth centers for the County where urban services are available or may become available. The Cooperative Planning Area corresponds to the incorporated towns of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe and their future growth areas. Future subdivisions in the county are encouraged near or adjacent to the Cooperative Planning Area.

### Cooperative Planning Area Directions:

- An intergovernmental agreement to address inter-jurisdictional planning issues, such as coordinated development review, annexation impacts, future road connections and mutual service provisions is in force and will be updated as needed.
- With annexation of unincorporated land to either Town, the Cooperative Planning Area boundaries will be updated.
- Decisions on future land use and growth within the Cooperative Planning Area will be guided by the Master Plans for Silver Cliff, Westcliffe, and Custer County, and the respective Zoning, Subdivision, and other development regulations for each entity.
- Future commercial and industrial development will be encouraged where it already exists.

## Environment

### Environment Goal:

To protect Custer County's scenic and environmental resources, and to maintain wildlife diversity, forest health, and access to public lands for current and future generations consistent with appropriate Planning Area Directions.

### Environment Policies:

- E-1 The County will encourage preservation of lakes and streams, scenic vistas, wildlife habitats and watersheds.
- E-2 The County will actively work to keep all adjudicated water rights within the county boundaries, to prevent dry-up of ranching and farming lands and prevent damage to existing water rights. The County will encourage the conservation and maintenance of water quality from all water resources.
- E-3 The County will encourage the protection of all mineral resources while ensuring that the impacts of extraction activities are mitigated.
- E-4 The County will encourage the protection of all forestry resources while ensuring the impacts of forestry activities are mitigated.
- E-5 The County will discourage development in ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas.
- E-6 The County will encourage the protection of native plant diversity and natural resources.

### Environment Actions:

- o Create incentives, such as special use allowances in exchange for site sensitive development, to preserve open space and foster land stewardship of both open and developed land.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- o Work with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), community groups and others to identify opportunities to preserve open space around wildlife habitat and migration corridors.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- o The County will stay apprised of water issues that pertain to county residents and explore strategies with water right owners and other stakeholders to keep water in the County. **Timeframe:** *On-going*
- o The County will continue the hydrological study in cooperation with the United States Geological Survey to determine the availability, quantity, and quality of water in Custer County in areas most susceptible to new residential growth where financially feasible.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- o Work with the Custer County Merchants and Chamber of Commerce, and the Tourism Board to continue efforts to bring clean businesses and industries to the county, emphasizing our ranching and farming heritage.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*

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- Adopt applicable 1041 regulations for mineral resource areas to address future coal bed methane gas extraction and sand and gravel extraction.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- The County will make a thorough investigation before any proposed explorations for gas and oil and extraction of commercial minerals is conducted, ensuring that all mining and drilling activities comply with state and federal regulations that pertain to minimal impact.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- Work with USFS, Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), BLM, CDOW, National Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), Custer County Conservation District, Colorado State University (CSU) Extension Office and other agencies to utilize their knowledge and resources to keep informed on Custer County's environmental health.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- The County will encourage use of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan on private and public lands and encourage using the refuse from these activities in biomass production.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- Cooperate with the Custer County Weed Advisory Board, USFS, BLM, NRCS, CSU Extension Service, Custer County Conservation District and the Upper Arkansas Cooperative Weed Management Area to map noxious weeds in Custer County.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- Support landowners in controlling and eradicating noxious weeds through consultation, cost sharing and identification of special resources.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- Custer County Planning and Zoning staff will keep abreast of actions of the State relative to air quality.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- Encourage cooperation with federal, state and private entities to enhance recreational potentials within the County to include year-round access to their lands.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*



## Land Use

### Land Use Goals:

To preserve Custer County's "rural" character traits - the existing agricultural economy; open space; scenic vistas; wildlife; forestry and mining - through managed development and economic growth.

To support development of a stable, diversified, year-round economic base.

### Land Use Policies:

LU-1 The County will consider environmental and fiscal impacts of development proposals.

LU-2 The County will consider land protection techniques and site development options to maintain agricultural lands, forests, and open spaces.

LU-3 The County supports the retention, expansion and recruitment of businesses consistent with the rural traits of Custer County.

LU-4 The County will direct commercial and industrial development into appropriate areas, with consideration for the type, need, and impact of specific uses.

LU-5 The County discourages any development which adversely impacts water courses, wildlife habitat, and other significant natural features.

LU-6 The County will encourage use of renewable energies.

LU-7 The County will maintain the Right to Ranch Policy, as it complies with Colorado Revised Statutes, 35-3.5-101.

LU-8 The County will encourage the selection of a National Veterans Cemetery to be located in Custer County.

LU-9 The County will encourage low impact tourism and environmental education.

LU-10 Cooperate with NRCS and other appropriate agencies to restore and reclaim pasture lands that have been adversely affected by land use and development.

LU-11 The County will use the Geographic Information System (GIS) overlay maps of different land ownership categories to aid in the making of Land Use decisions.

LU-12 The County supports preserving the natural night sky through the use of outside shielded light fixtures.

### Land Use Actions:

- Update the Subdivision Regulations:
  - The Custer County Planning Commission has updated and revised the Subdivision Regulations and submitted them to the Custer County Commissioners.
- Update the Homeowner's Packet to:
  - Provide information on energy conservation practices and alternative energies that include, but are not limited to, wind, solar, methane, biomass and hydroelectric.

- Include information on the advantages of orientating dwellings to take advantage of passive solar energy.
- Add information on the availability of recycling centers.
- Update information on the identification and control of noxious weeds.
- Address development activities in environmentally challenged areas such as on steep slopes, in wildlife migratory corridors, wildfire hazard areas and areas with adverse soil conditions.
- Work with all utilities to improve accountability for road damage, clean-up and reclamation after installation of utilities.

**Timeframe:** *On-going*

- Update the Zoning Resolution to:
  - Specify in depth what type of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational uses are appropriate to be considered for Special Use Permits (SUPs) and Special Event Permits in specific zoning districts, and the conditions for mitigating any adverse impacts.
  - Conduct an in-depth review of the PUD process including an assessment of which zoning districts are appropriate for PUD consideration and a review of PUD residential density.
  - Create standards and review procedures for the location and construction for secondary dwelling units and specify the criteria for each zoning district.
  - Require new commercial and industrial development to address aesthetic issues such as landscaping, architectural design, light pollution, light trespass, and screening.

**Timeframe:** *Short-term*

- Work with community groups and individuals to encourage the use of fully-shielded residential, commercial, street and utility lights, without jeopardizing safety or creating unnecessarily high energy use.

**Timeframe:** *On-going*

- Work with the Colorado Historical Society, community groups and individuals to preserve and maintain historic, archaeological and cemetery sites.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- Continue to work with state agencies and telecommunication utilities to provide facilities for high-speed digital data transmission and to include Pueblo in the local calling area for all Custer County telephone users.

**Timeframe:** *On-going*

- Clarify, identify, and update zone boundaries on the official zoning map and record it with the Custer County Clerk.

**Timeframe:** *Short-term*

- The County will maintain and update GIS overlay maps of Conservation Easements larger than thirty-five acres, sub divisions with parcels larger than thirty-five acres and other road and utility easements.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- The County will maintain and update a GIS overlay map designating all existing industrial areas such as Rangeview, DeWeese Industrial Park, and SilverWest Airport Industrial Area to encourage new industrial expansion in areas where it already exists. **Timeframe:** *On-going*
- The County will maintain and update an overlay map showing the location of all public and private recreational facilities available in the County.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*
- Work with property owners and others to create processes to re-plat parcels and offer land trades in pre-zoning subdivisions. **Timeframe:** *On-going*
- The County will encourage the Tourism Board to continue to add more Tourist Orientated Directional Signs (TODS) throughout the county.  
**Timeframe:** *On-going*

## County Services

### County Services Goals:

Provide the citizens and taxpayers of Custer County efficient and effective core services in a manner respectful of county employees and service recipients alike.

Provide a positive atmosphere of customer service, being consistent in dealings with the public at all levels of county services and throughout all departments within the county governmental structure.

### County Services Policies:

- CS-1 The County will encourage citizen participation, assuring the public they can make a difference in government decision-making.
- CS-2 The County will promote cooperation, collaboration and partnerships between public, private and social sectors of the community.
- CS-3 The County shall provide a reasonable and transparent permit process for dwelling and commercial construction throughout the County, with an emphasis on compliance.
- CS-4 The County shall continue a process of permitting and monitoring sanitary ISDS systems in accordance with state and local regulations and accepted technologies.
- CS-5 The County will continue to maintain a safe road system throughout the county, within funding limits, including access provided for emergency vehicles where feasible.
- CS-6 The County shall continue to maintain a landfill that applies the latest technologies and methods for safe and effective refuse disposal, reuse, and recycling and will pursue methods to extend the life of the present County Landfill.
- CS-7 The County shall collaborate with County education institutions and libraries to meet the educational needs of the citizens of Custer County.
- CS-8 The County will take advantage of state and federal programs to

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address the needs of our Veterans and aging population.

CS-9 The County will increase the awareness of the Custer County Lodging Tax and insure its compliance.

CS-10 The County will promote the Silver West Airport.

CS-11 The County shall buy locally wherever feasible and encourage its citizens to do the same.

CS-12 The County will strive to keep our business community viable through educational programs for current businesses and recruitment of new businesses.

CS-13 The County will develop an emergency operations plan reformatted into Emergency Support Functions as required by Department of Homeland Security

CS-14 The County should encourage business owners to inform their current and future employees of the availability of the affordable housing program through the Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments Mutual Self Help Housing Program.

CS-15 The County shall strive to meet the governmental needs of the agricultural community through its actions and services.

### County Services Actions:

- o Continue to develop and define the intergovernmental agreement that addresses coordination of land use issues between the County and the incorporated towns of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- o Continue to review policies, resolutions, regulations, ordinances, Master Plan, and programs to assure that they are consistent with each other and with community goals.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- o Develop a Capital Improvement Program that establishes funding priorities and specific improvements of public facilities and services.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- o The County shall work with other governmental entities to explore the advantages of bulk purchasing of goods and services to reduce cost of public service operations.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- o The County shall continue its policy of department head staff meetings to aid in consistency of government service and positive public interaction.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- o The County shall work with stock growers and the CDOW to develop fencing methods that meet the needs of the agriculture community and wildlife while also providing for safe and reasonable road maintenance and snow removal.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- Continue to develop and implement the Geographic Information System (GIS).  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- Maintain and update a transportation plan that specifies future County road improvements.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- Continue to work with Custer County Road and Bridge and Emergency Services to identify roads by name and number with signs in a consistent manner throughout Custer County.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- Develop and maintain a map of all streets and roads within Custer County; Emphasis shall be placed on consistent address signage, driveway access for emergency services and wildfire mitigation.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- The County shall continue to cooperate with town authorities, landowners and CDOT to improve the safety of road intersections by using grading, trimming and signage techniques to improve sight distances and traffic flow.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- The County shall promote energy efficient and safe building methods through adoption of a code for building.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- The County shall explore methods of making the landfill self sufficient in terms of process and energy efficiency.
- The County will encourage and promote recycling and reuse techniques where financially feasible.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- Pursue an information bulletin as a handout detailing businesses in the County that accept liquid and hazardous waste from citizens for proper disposal.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- The County will pursue the establishment of a central location to deposit septage.  
**Timeframe:** *Short-term*
- The County will continue to apply new approved technologies in ISDS construction. **Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- The County will explore along with other service providers a process for treatment of septic tank materials in Custer County.  
**Timeframe:** *Short-term*
- Work with public, private and not-for-profit interests to provide educational and recreational opportunities for all citizens through a shared use of all available facilities.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- Continue to endorse the Community Economic Development Committee, Merchants and Chamber of Commerce, and Tourism Board.  
**Timeframe:** *On-Going*
- The County shall actively seek methods to fill the gap created by the state reduction in Extension Services for the agriculture community and other rural citizens.  
**Timeframe:** *Short-term*
- Encourage a cooperative working relationship between the towns, county and federal agencies to protect the native plant communities through the management of noxious weeds;



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support and enforce the Custer County Weed Management Plan and Custer County Weed Management Plan Implementation.

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- Establish and maintain National Incident Management System (NIMS) training for all emergency services personnel and other entities as required by the Department of Homeland Security

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- Continue to develop and update Disaster Mitigation and County

Emergency Operations Plans in cooperation with the South Region All-Hazards Committee

**Timeframe:** *On-Going*

- Continue the development of a trail system that will connect our parks, other trails, schools, etc. for use by walkers, runners, bicyclists, and equestrians. A 24 page plan is on file in the Zoning Office, plus other trail information.

## Accomplishments

### **Airport**

An airport protection overlay district specifying appropriate land use activities surrounding the Silver West Airport. May, 2006

A maintenance building was constructed. 2009

### **Transportation**

Voters passed a 5 mil levy increase to help support Custer County Road & Bridge. November, 2007

Custer County Commissioners and the Town of Westcliffe, with the assistance of private grants and donations, in concert with the Wet Mountain Valley Rotary Club continue to support the Rotary Club van and bus to provide bus service to all citizens, especially the sick, elderly and disabled for grocery shopping and medical appointments.

### **Emergency Services**

Establishment of the Office of Emergency Management. 2004

Established a 911 Authority and implemented reverse 911. 1993

Completion of two 800 MHz radio towers to comply with the state-initiated Consolidated Communications Network of Colorado. Radio and tower equipment funded by \$1.3 million grant. 2006

Completion of new buildings for Custer County Ambulance (2004), Search and Rescue (2003), fire substation in Boneyard Park (2003), and the new Wetmore fire station (2004).

County-wide community wildfire protection plan adopted. 2007

Established the Custer Emergency Services Council. 2004

Establishment of Certified Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). 2006

Large scale multi-agency school incident exercise conducted. 2008

Joined Southeast Colorado regional 211 service. 2007

### **Environmental**

Custer County Noxious Weed Management and Implementation Plan approved by the Custer County Board of County Commissioners in September, 2008.

The County began a hydrological study in cooperation with the United States Geological Survey to determine the availability, quality and quantity of water by monitoring 60 wells throughout Custer County for the purpose of determining land use decisions. 2002

## **Economic Development**

The Custer County Community Economic Development Committee was appointed by the BOCC. January 2002.

The Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade assisted the Custer County Community Economic Development Committee in creating a Community Economic Development Assessment Report based on community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and recommendations. April 2007.

The Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade assisted the Custer County Community Economic Development Committee in creating a Community Action Plan based on recommendations from the Community Economic Development Assessment Report. May 2007.

All of Custer County was included in the Upper Arkansas Enterprise Zone (UAEZ). 1986.

Custer County is a candidate site for a National Veterans Cemetery. 2007.

The Custer County Lodging Tax passed. November, 2007.

The Custer County Tourism Board created. January, 2008.

## **County Services**

Custer County voters passed a Bond issue to support the addition to Custer County High School (2000) and a bond issue to construct a new gymnasium (2004).

Additional Recycle Drop-Off Center established at the Custer County Landfill. 2009.

Custer County Commissioners earmarked a portion of County Landfill fees to go to the non-profit group, High Country Recycling, for on-going recycling efforts. The fees are to provide alternative power at the landfill for the operation of a baler for corrugated boxes and plastics. 2009.

A grant was awarded to High Country Recycling for power and a building to house recycling equipment. 2010

Commissioners approved funding to purchase additional bins for the second Recycling Center at the landfill and for glass, newspapers, magazines and fine paper at both centers. 2009.

## **Community Improvements**

An intergovernmental agreement between Custer County, Westcliffe and Silver Cliff to address inter-jurisdictional planning issues, such as coordinated development review, annexation impacts, future road connections and mutual service provisions was signed. 2008.

Radio station KWMV-LPFM 95.9 began broadcasting as a community service to Westcliffe with local, national and global news plus local information, cultural and public service programming via its Low Power FM license. May, 2004.

KWMV-LPFM applied for a license to expand the current broadcast area and provide everyone in the Wet Mountain Valley access to news, weather, road conditions, community events and emergency communications. October 2007

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, San Isabel Land Protection Trust, and William J. Palmer Parks Foundation.

Private donations, grants and County in-kind donations provided labor and funds to add land to existing vacant Town of Westcliffe property to prepare the site known as Hermit Park. A multipurpose field, pavilion and tennis courts were constructed. 2007

County wide support in the form of private donations and grants has assisted in the purchase of the Club America Health and Fitness Center. 2010

Jones Theatre, through the use of public donations and private grants, opened a new addition, Stage #2, allowing for activities, especially for children of all ages, to participate in various phases of creative endeavors. 2003.

Hanssen Haus opened. State grants and in-kind labor made this annex to the Custer County Courthouse a gathering place for assistance and information for Veterans and other county groups. 2009

Community support, in the form of private donations, state and federal grants, and fund-raising events, has facilitated protection of about 33,000 acres of agricultural land, wildlife habitat, open space and historical areas with conservations easements. Organizations protecting properties under easement included Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado Historical Foundation, Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District,

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Grant funding, private donations, and many hours of volunteer time facilitated the development of several trails throughout Custer County along with the renovation of historic trails such as the Zebulon Pike Trail, Frontier Pathways, and Fremont Trail.

Through the efforts of the Dark Skies organization, many lights have been replaced or shielded to protect our night sky.

## **Historic Preservation**

Over \$500,000 of private donations and state and federal grants have funded numerous projects in Custer County including renovation of the historic Beckwith Ranch, an interpretive center in the "Westcliff" School, stabilization and restoration of several historic cabins, ranch houses and buildings in the County.



## Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

**Actions:** Measures to implement the Master Plan and ultimately achieve a desired goal. Each action includes a timeframe for completion: short-term (one to two years); midterm (three to five years); long term (beyond five years), and on-going.

### **Capital Improvement**

#### **Programming:**

A schedule and budget for future road, building or other projects to be carried out over a specified period of time.

**Density:** The number of dwelling units per unit of land. In this document, density is generally expressed as the number of acres required per dwelling unit.

**Dry-up:** The removal of irrigation from a parcel of land that was historically irrigated.

**Dwelling Unit:** A building designed to be used or being used as a full or part-time living place that includes both toilet and kitchen facilities, not including: hotels, motels, clubs, boarding houses or any institution, such as an asylum, hospital, or jail where human beings are housed by reason of illness or under legal restraint. The term dwelling unit shall also include a factory built home, which has been attached to a permanent foundation or which has been added to the ad valorem tax rolls to be considered as a taxable property.

**Easement:** Authorization by a property owner for use of the land by third parties for specific purposes.

**Farm:** A tract of land devoted to agricultural purposes.

**Goals:** The broad objectives to be achieved by the Master Plan.

**Infill Development:** Development of vacant lots within an existing townsite or subdivision.

**Intergovernmental Agreement:** An agreement between governmental entities for achieving coordinated planning and the efficient provision of services.

**Light Pollution:** Degradation of the night sky by artificial light rays above the projected horizontal plane of a light fixture.

**Light Trespass:** Direct illumination of a property by light fixtures located on another property.

**Master Plan:** A plan adopted by the Custer County Planning Commission pursuant to C.R.S. Section 31-23-201, et seq.; Also known as a Comprehensive Plan or General Plan.

**Master Plan Supporting Document:** A practical supplement for using the Master Plan that includes a reference guide, historical information, charts and graphs.

**Overlay District:** A special zoning district with standards for a particular type of use or area.

**Plan Direction:** A map that identifies the six Planning Areas.

**Planned Unit Development:**

"An area of land, controlled by one or more landowners, to be developed under unified control or unified plan of development for a number of dwelling units, commercial, educational, recreational, or industrial uses, or any combination of the foregoing, the plan for which does not correspond in lot size, bulk, or type of use, density, lot coverage, open space, or other restriction to the existing land use regulations." (C.R.S. § 24-67-103).

**Planning Area:** An area identified on the Plan Direction.

**Plat:** A document prepared by a Colorado registered engineer or surveyor in accordance with the Subdivision Regulations or the Custer County Zoning Resolution as an instrument that delineates property lines and shows monuments and landmark locations for the purpose of identifying and recording real property interests with the County Clerk and Recorder.

**Policies:** Guidelines for decision-making.

**Ranch:** A plot of land devoted to the raising of animals, especially domestic livestock.

**Rural Residential:** Dwellings located on subdivided lots ranging from five (5) acres to eighty (80) acres in size.

**Septic System:** An approved method of waste disposal comprised of all of the components necessary for full functionality.

**Special Event Permit:** A special event is defined as a temporary use for a specific purpose that is public or commercial in nature. A special event

shall not occur more than two times per year on the same parcel, be limited to one to four consecutive days, and have limited impacts beyond parcel boundaries.

**Special Use Permit:** A use allowed with permission of the County Commissioners.

**Sustainable Practices:** Behavior that allows the present generation to meet our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

**Watershed:** The region or area draining into a stream, stream system, or other body of water.

**Zoning District:** A zone shown on the County's zoning map for which there are regulations governing the use of that land.

## Appendix B: Common Acronyms

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CCCEDC	Custer County Community Economic Development Committee
CDOW	Colorado Department of Wildlife
CSFS	Colorado State Forestry Service
CSU	Colorado State University
GIS	Geographic Information System
IGA	Intergovernmental Agreement
ISDS	Individual Sewage Disposal System
MPSD	Master Plan Supporting Document
NIMS	National Incident Command System
NRCS	National Resources Conservation Service
PUD	Planned Unit Development
RMWSD	Round Mountain Water and Sanitation District
SH	State Highway
SUP	Special Use Permit
TODS	Tourist Orientated Directional Signs
UAEZ	Upper Arkansas Enterprise Zone
USFS	United States Forest Service
WMFPD	Wet Mountain Fire Protection District

*July 6, 2010*

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July 6, 2010

## Appendix D: Adoption Resolution

BEFORE THE PLANNING COMMISSION  
CUSTER COUNTY, COLORADO

WHEREAS, Custer County, Colorado, acting through its Planning Commission, is empowered pursuant to Section 30-28-106 through 30-25-100, C.R.S. to make and adopt a Master Plan, and

WHEREAS, the Custer County Master Plan is an advisory document, and if through State mandate it changes to become mandatory, then it shall be reviewed in its entirety by the Planning Commission using the same process as used to adopt the original Master Plan, and

WHEREAS, the Custer County Master Plan complies with the requirements of Section 30-28-106 and 30-26-107, C.R.S., and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on the Custer County Master Plan on July 6, 2010 and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission believes it is in the best interest of the County that the Custer Master Plan be adopted,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF CUSTER COUNTY, COLORADO:

1. The Custer County Master Plan, originally dated March 5, 2002, be and hereby is adopted with revisions, agreed upon today, July 6, 2010.

2. The Custer County Master Plan as adopted hereby, expressly includes maps and other matter, intended by the Planning Commission to form the whole of the Custer County Master Plan, all of which materials are contained within the plan document itself, and which plan document is hereby declared to be a part of the plan.

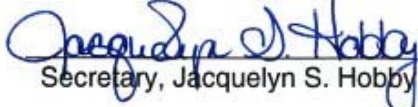
3. That the action of the Planning Commission adopting the Custer County Master Plan shall be recorded in the Custer County Clerk and Recorders Office with the identifying signatures of the Chairman and Secretary to the Commission.

4. A copy of this action shall be attached to each copy of the Custer County Master Plan and shall serve as an attestation that each such copy is a true and correct copy of the Plan as adopted.

5. That an attested copy of the Custer County Master Plan shall be, and hereby is, certified to the Custer County Board of Commissioners pursuant to § 30-28-109, C.R.S.

MOVED, SECONDED AND ADOPTED ON THE 6<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF JULY BY THE AFFIRMATIVE VOTES OF NOT LESS THAN A MAJORITY OF THE ENTIRE MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION, BY A VOTE OF X YES AND X NO.

  
Chairman, Victor G. Barnes

  
Secretary, Jacquelyn S. Hobby



# Acknowledgments



**Custer County Board of  
County Commissioners**

Lynn Attebery, Chairman  
Jim Austin, Vice Chairman  
Carole Custer

**Custer County Planning  
Commission**

Vic Barnes, Chairman  
Keith Hood, Vice Chairman  
Pat Bailey  
Rod Coker  
Bill Donley  
Sherry Rorick  
Paul Buckles

**Custer County Board of  
Zoning Adjustment**

Skip Northcross, Chairman  
Gerry Dearborn, Vice Chairman  
Dee Hoag  
David Tonsing  
Ken Patterson

**Associate Members**

Roger Camper  
Cindy Howard  
Ken Lankford  
Brad Stam  
Dale Mullen  
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**Custer County Staff**

Jackie Hobby  
Elizabeth French  
Chuck Ippolito

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**THANKS TO:**

Skip Northcross, *BZA Chairman*  
Chuck Ippolito, *Custer County Information  
Technology*

Present and former Board Members and County  
Commissioners

...and everyone who worked toward the  
completion of Custer County's Master Plan!