

# Chaffee County



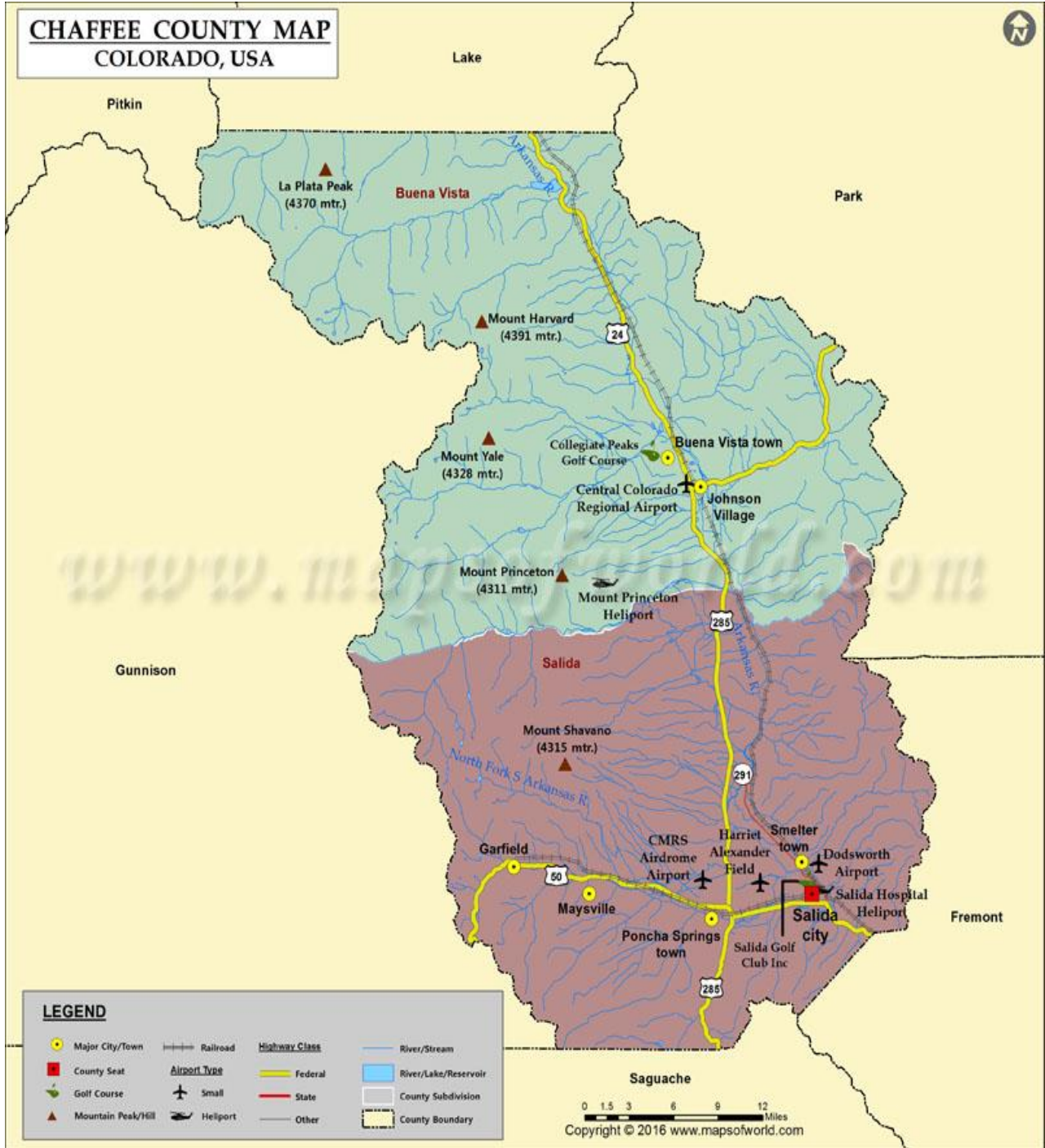
## 2017 CEDS

Prepared by Southern Colorado Economic Development District  
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# Table of Contents

Map of Chaffee County	3
Background	4
SWOT	7
Strategy	9
Resiliency	10





**“To assure that Chaffee County is open for business, and to retain, expand and create jobs in Chaffee County.”**

**-Mission of the Chaffee County Economic Development Corporation.**

**SUMMARY BACKGROUND**

Chaffee County is centrally located in Colorado on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. The county is 1,014 square miles with a population density of 16.9 per square mile. The average elevation is 7,500 feet.

Established in 1879, the county was named after the first Colorado U.S. Senator, Jerome Chaffee. Chaffee County is sometimes referred to as one of the “Fourteener” Regions because it features fifteen peaks reaching 14,000 feet. Over 80% of the County is in public ownership, with the Pike National Forest on the east and the San Isabel National Forest on the west. The huge tracts of public land in the form of long established national forests and the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area have resulted in an economy with a strong focus on outdoor recreation, retail sales and services.

**County Commissioners**

Keith Baker  
Dave Potts  
Greg Felt

**Legislative District**

Congressional District	5
Senate District	5
House District	60

**County Seat**

Salida

**Population**

The population of Chaffee County for 2015 was 18,521 which was 0.3% of the State of Colorado. Population growth for the last five years for Chaffee County was at 4.0% while the State growth was 7.5%.

### Population by Age

Under 5 years	756	5 to 9 years	797	10 to 14 years	864
15 to 19 years	821	20 to 24 years	924	25 to 29 years	1,074
30 to 34 years	1,126	35 to 39 years	1,006	40 to 44 years	1,090
45 to 49 years	1,057	50 to 54 years	1,360	55 to 59 years	1,546
60 to 64 years	1,715	65 to 69 years	1,520	70 to 74 years	1,172
75 to 79 years	726	80 to 84 years	502	85 years and older	485

### Population by Community

Buena Vista	2,617
Poncha Springs	777
Salida	5,467
Unincorporated	9,660

County and State Population data retrieved from State Demography Office – DOLA  
[www.data.state.co.us](http://www.data.state.co.us)

### Poverty

In 2014, Kids Count reported 37.9% of school age children qualified for free/reduced lunch and 12% of children under 18 years of age were living in poverty compared to 14.9% in the State. Chaffee County has the lowest level of poverty in the District.

Data retrieved from kids count  
[www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org)

### Housing

The average household size is 2.15 compared to an average family size of 2.64. The homeownership vacancy rate is 3% and the rental vacancy rate is 6.3%. There were 105 building permits issued in Chaffee County in 2014.

According to the National Low Income Coalition, affordable rent represents the generally accepted standard of not spending more than 30% of gross income on gross housing costs. The fair market rent in 2015 for Chaffee County is \$843 for a two bedroom home. In order to afford rent at this amount, a household in Chaffee County must earn \$49,160 annually. At the minimum wage of \$8.31 hour, one minimum wage earner would have to work 78 hours per week. A recent Housing Needs Assessment and Strategy Study indicated that 30% of households in Chaffee County were “cost burdened” or pay over 30% of gross income for housing costs.

Data retrieved from State Demography Office - DOLA  
[www.dola.state.co.us](http://www.dola.state.co.us)

## **Education**

K-12 education is provided by two districts in Chaffee County. Higher education is available locally at Colorado Mountain College (Junior College) and four year and post graduate universities are available outside of Chaffee County in Pueblo, Gunnison and Colorado Springs. Colorado Mountain College also offers several four year degree programs.

The 2014 Census American Community Survey estimates that 90.5% of the total population 25 years of age and older has attained a high school diploma or higher; 34.2% have attained a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

Student enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year for Buena Vista R-31 is 1,016 and the student enrollment for Salida R-32 is 1,197.

The dropout rate for Buena Vista R-31 for 2014 is 2.4% and the dropout rate for Salida R-32 is 2.0%.

The graduation rate for Buena Vista R-31 is 78.1% and the graduation rate for Salida R-32 is 75.0%.

*Data retrieved from Colorado Department of Education*

[www.cde.state.co.us](http://www.cde.state.co.us)

## **Agriculture**

In 2012, Chaffee County had 77,665 acres of agricultural land. There are 223 farms, with an average of 348 acres. The market value of products sold was \$9,618,000 of which \$2,936,000 (31 percent) were crop sales and \$6,682,000 (69 percent) were livestock sales. The average per farm was \$43,128. Government payments in 2012 were \$74,000 with an average per farm of \$4,376.

*Data retrieved from US Department of Agriculture*

[www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov)

## **Travel Impact**

Dean Runyon and Associates report that eighty two million dollars were spent by visitors to Chaffee County in 2015. Not only does travel affect the revenues to a community, but jobs must be created to maintain services to visitors. Approximately 1,000 full and part time jobs were attributed to travel and tourism in Chaffee County in 2015 with twenty four million dollars in earnings, three million in local tax revenue and two million in state tax revenue.

*Data retrieved from Dean Runyan and Associates*

[www.deanrunyon.com](http://www.deanrunyon.com)

## **Local Economy**

Since 2005 the unemployment rate for Chaffee County has ranged from 2.3% in August 1997 to 10.6 in January 1990. The current unemployment rate for Chaffee County is 2.4% in September 2016. The average earnings for Chaffee County is \$37,829 in 2015 which is 63% of the National average.

The top regional businesses in Chaffee County are the Corrections Facility with 375 employees, Monarch Mountain with 350 employees, Walmart Supercenter with 230 employees and the Correctional Industries Ranch with 215 employees. The Heart of the Rockies Medical Center is also a major employer, employing over 400 employees.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

### **SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis**

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

#### **Strengths**

##### **1. Sense of Community**

- Willing to invest
- People helping others
- People have to want to be here (they are like minded and make sacrifices to live this lifestyle)
- Kids want to come back
- Small communities
- Intelligent people

##### **2. Quality of Life**

- Access to recreation
- Access to metro areas
- Simplicity of everyday (example includes short commute)
- Work/life balance
- Abundance of natural resources

## **Weaknesses**

### **1. Access to Services (human and maintenance)**

- Lack of childcare
- Lack of transportation options
- Lack & expense of shipping options
- Incomplete internet coverage (Note: there have been improvements with the establishment of a local Internet company since the last CEDS).
- Shortage of maintenance services (examples include plumbing and electric)
- Shortfall of accessible amenities for guests/visitors (examples include lodging, dining and shopping)

### **2. Housing**

- Shortage of long-term rentals
- Increasing purchase prices
- Large numbers of short-term rentals and second homes
- Shortage of senior housing
- Lack of affordable housing

### **3. Economic Diversity**

- Poverty levels
- Variety of jobs requiring a college degree
- Communications barriers between some population segments and city and county organizations
- Population diversity (ethnic, religious, etc.)

## **Opportunities**

### **1. State focus on Chaffee County**

- Designation of Highway 285 as alternative to I-70
- Inclusion in state PR push
- Inclusion in state resiliency study
- CDOT transportation plan



## **2. Balancing Growth and Development**

- Front Range population growth
- Economic progress of surrounding areas
- Business interest in pursuing quality of life
- Expanding jobs for local graduates
- Growing enterprises that are currently here

### **Threats**

#### **1. Natural Resources**

- Water availability (for recreation and other uses)
- Hunting and fishing resources

#### **2. Deterioration of Quality of Life**

- Designation of Highway 285 as alternative to I-70
- Front Range population growth
- Business interest in pursuing quality of life

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

- Availability of affordable workforce housing
- Main Street development
- Diversification of local economy
- Workforce
- Childcare
- Development of Outdoor recreation industry
- Improve telecommunications

### **Goal: Develop Housing**

The lack of workforce housing stymies economic growth and diversity when businesses can't recruit employees because there is no place for them and their families to live. Rising rents, simultaneous increases in vacation rentals by owners and decreases in long-term rentals, a lack of low price housing stock have been identified as factors contributing to a housing crisis.

**Goal: Main Street Development**

Expanding on current resources and creating new jobs is a focus for Chaffee County. The development of Chaffee County's Main Streets will increase the viability of current businesses and put Chaffee County in a position to compete for employers.

**Goal: Diversification of local economy**

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

**Goal: Workforce**

Providing a well-trained, skilled workforce is vital to the economy. Recruitment of skilled workers as well as education and training programs will enable a diverse workforce for businesses to draw from. Skilled workers also command higher wages.

**Goal: Childcare**

The lack of childcare has been identified as a strategic priority to focus resources. The demand for childcare in Chaffee County outweighs the supply.

**Goal: Development of Outdoor recreation industry**

Outdoor recreation and tourism brings new money and visitors into the community. Chaffee County's abundance of natural resources makes outdoor recreation and tourism an industry that needs to be developed.

**Goal: Improve telecommunications**

Areas without adequate telecommunications such as broadband, cell service, etc., have fewer opportunities for businesses to start, grow and succeed, and are less desirable places to live for employees and families.

**Resiliency**

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

**Chaffee County Emergency Contact Information:**

In Chaffee County, the Office of Emergency Management is a department within the County Government.

**Chaffee County Emergency Management  
16550 US Highway 285  
Salida, Colorado 81201  
719-539-6853**

**Phil Graham, Director  
pgraham@chaffeecounty.org**