

FLORIDA ROAD DISTRICT LAND USE PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

La Plata County, like many other Southwestern Colorado communities, has been experiencing considerable growth in recent years. Population growth rates of over 3% per year have been recorded between 1992 and 1996. Until the adoption of this land use plan, development proposals in the Florida Road Planning District were considered on a case by case basis. The case by case review did not provide an opportunity for citizens, the Planning Commission, and County Commissioners to consider the cumulative impacts that individual projects could have on the County. This land use plan was prepared in order to provide the citizens and County with a framework for evaluating development proposals with the perspective of how the project relates to the Planning District and County as a whole. This plan will also provide the citizens and County the opportunity to begin to shape future development within the Florida Road District to insure that it is compatible with the current lifestyles, businesses, homes, and natural features. The Plan is intended to provide citizens with more predictability about what kinds of communities, commercial developments, recreational areas, residential areas, and agricultural areas may exist in the future within the District.

This Plan was created under the premise that it would provide landowners with general guidance and positive incentives for developing their property. Development proposals submitted to the County for review by the La Plata County Planning Commission will be reviewed for conformance with this plan's goals, objectives, and Land Use Classification Map, which were developed by the District's residents. This is not to say that the plan cannot be changed. However, it is important that changes to the plan be considered outside the context of the details of a specific project. Therefore, if a specific application is not in conformance with the Plan, this application should be preceded by a plan amendment to bring it into conformity. It is the policy of the Planning Commission that projects that are not in conformance with the Land Use Classification Map will be recommended for denial.

Plan amendments will be reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission at a public hearing prior to consideration of the project by the Planning Commission. Issues to be considered when reviewing plan amendments include:

- Road Capacities
- Water and Sewer Availability
- Visual Impacts
- Wildlife Impacts
- Conformance with Goals / Objectives / Vision of Plan

2. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The mountainous forests, rugged terrain, narrow valley meadows and the sparkling Florida River create a picturesque setting for the Florida Road Planning District of La Plata County. This rugged beauty also creates natural constraints to growth. The risk of wildfire, landslides, soil erosion flooding, and the availability of water, should dictate the location and density of housing.

The District's sole access to Durango -- Florida Road (CR240) -- is located along the narrow Florida River Valley. Florida Road is a very scenic drive and serves as a connector to other parts of the County, such as Lemon Reservoir, Vallecito, Forest Lakes and the Florida Mesa, yet the capacity of this roadway to accommodate substantial increases in traffic is constrained by the road's narrow width and sharp curves. Roadway conditions and increasing traffic volumes are important concerns when considering new development. Many sections of Florida Road are substandard. Dangerous curves, limited sight distances, narrow width and deteriorating roadbed are among some of the problems associated with Florida Road. While the County is in the midst of a long range program to upgrade the road, financial considerations and physical constraints will continue to limit the extent to which the road will be upgraded and thus traffic capacity will continue to be limited in the foreseeable future.

Other defining attributes of the Florida Road Planning District are the scenic views afforded throughout the Florida River and Texas Creek Valleys. Preventing degradation of these views from prominent development on hilltops, ridge lines, or in open meadows is a concern of residents in the District.

In the past, a number of subdivisions were approved in areas possessing significant development constraints. Such constraints include: steep hillsides, underlying geological hazards, and poor groundwater availability. It is recognized that the County's land use permitting system provides some important safeguards to ensure that new developments are designed in a sensible manner. Nevertheless it is important that significant development constraints are more precisely identified in order that they can be adequately considered in the design and approval of new developments in the Florida Road Planning District.

There are several large ranches throughout the District, some adjacent to CR240 and CR245. The open meadows of the ranches are considered a defining attribute of the District's rural and scenic character. Careful consideration must be given to protecting these meadows and open spaces while respecting the rights of property owners.

The riparian corridor along the Florida River (a large portion within the floodplain) is also considered an important attribute of the District as well as an important wildlife habitat and migratory corridor. The potential for flood damage to structures within the floodway and the desire to develop incentives for the protection of riparian corridors, makes this area very sensitive to development. As with the meadows, consideration of property rights must be considered.

A large portion of the District consists of heavily wooded hillsides. While wooded house sites are part of the draw for the area, they also pose a significant wildfire hazard. Strategies are needed to minimize wildfire hazards throughout the District, and will likely require the participation of developers, existing residents, government agencies, and local fire districts.

A large portion of the Florida Road District lies within National Forest lands. Maintenance of existing access points to these public lands is an important issue. However, residents of the District have concerns about conflicts between recreational users of public lands and impacts on surrounding private land. It is desired to preserve existing access points but not to develop new or expanded access points to public lands. Given the potential of "land exchanges", which cause public lands to become privately owned, these lands should be given appropriate land use designations in anticipation of land exchanges.

Residents of this District recognize that all planning districts within the County must seek to provide their fair share of affordable housing. To that end, the western end of the District (west of Edgemont Ranch) is most suited for affordable housing projects due to this area's proximity to Durango, and the better road conditions (higher traffic volumes that can be handled safely) in this part of the District.

There are 3 primary types of commercial uses in the District:

- ***Several small cottage businesses*** are mixed with residences in the western end of the District. Such businesses include an excavation contractor, an automotive repair shop, and a jeweler. It is desired that existing, legally established, cottage businesses be allowed to continue but not to encourage their expansion or the establishment of new businesses.
- ***Neighborhood commercial:*** Helens's Store, a small, single story wood structure provides convenience services, with parking in front for the neighborhood. The Blue Spruce commercial area contains a gas pump, bar, small store and a few lodge rooms. This establishment consists of 2-2 story log buildings in a "L" configuration. Parking is designated within the courtyard yet setback away from the face of the buildings to allow pedestrian uses. New commercial uses should be directed to concentrate around these existing commercial establishments or in the planned commercial area at Edgemont.
- ***Home Occupations:*** Small scale home occupations exist throughout the District. Generally, they have minimal traffic impacts from employees, customers, and deliveries. Such small scale home occupations can coexist in residential neighborhoods providing the impacts associated with these home occupations are minimal such as: no outside storage, minimal signage and lighting, and minimal traffic generation.

District Vision

The vision developed by the residents of the Florida Road District is to maintain the natural aesthetics and beauty of the area, man-made structures are designed to enhance visual quality and the location of development will avoid environmental constraints and preserve visual aesthetics. Commercial development will be located in and adjacent to the presently established areas with an emphasis on blending with the scenic nature of the valley. Offsite advertising billboards will be discouraged. Optimum improvement of roads and infrastructure will be achieved with sensitivity to aesthetics and the environment.

3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Goal: Preserve scenic beauty and visual appeal of the District and its semi-rural atmosphere.

Objective 1. Encourage development in wooded areas (out of meadows) and setback from prominent ridges.

Objective 2. Encourage screened, buffered and clustered development.

Action a. Utilize the County's proposed agricultural preservation subdivision

Action b. Cluster development in small areas preserving a larger percentage of open space.

Objective 3. Help shape future growth with fair and equitable development standards that will keep a high quality of development and preserve natural beauty and lifestyle consistent with existing conditions.

Action a. Prepare Design Guidelines that establish design review criteria for use by the Planning Commission and the County Commissioners when reviewing development proposals and help guide decisions on "compatibility of uses" as well as standards for physical development.

Action b. Provide density incentives to preserve the District's unique features.

Objective 4. Direct new commercial businesses to locate adjacent to existing or expand existing commercial facilities (Helen's Store, Blue Spruce and the proposed Edgemont commercial parcel).

Objective 5. New structures within the commercial areas should blend with the rural character of the area.

Action a. Prepare Design Guidelines.

Objective 6. Subdivisions, Minor Exempt Subdivisions, and Class II projects shall be designed in such a manner so as to prevent the location of buildings or other structures that create a silhouette on top of a ridge or hilltop as seen from public roads¹.

¹ A "ridge" is a long narrow, conspicuous elevation of land, a "hilltop" means a knoll or small hill.

2. Goal: Maintain environmental quality and values of the District.

Objective 1. Maintain wildlife habitat and migration corridors

Objective 2. Maintain ground and surface water quality.

Objective 3. Encourage development to locate outside of the riparian corridor.

Objective 4. Encourage Land Trusts for the preservation of the riparian corridor.

Objective 5. Develop a Grading and Drainage ordinance to ensure that safety, engineering and aesthetics are properly considered prior to site preparation and road construction.

Action a. Require cluster development

Action b. Review, clarify and if necessary, revise the building setbacks from floodways standards of the County land use code.

3. Goal: Maintain recreational access to Public Lands.

Objective 1. Preserve existing access points and avoid establishing new trailheads.

Action a. Work cooperatively with the Forest Service, Division of Wildlife, and Bureau of Land Management.

Action b. Minimize parking and trespassing conflicts between residents and public land access points. Promote the development of adequate parking areas at established trailheads.

4. Goal: Promote safety enhancement for automobiles, recreational vehicles, bicyclists, equestrians, and all other travelers.

Objective 1. Control population growth in a manner consistent with safe traffic capacity on roadways leading to and within the district.

Objective 2. Ensure that necessary roadway improvements are made concurrently with the approval of new development.

Action a. Make provisions for the construction of bike lanes when making road improvements on Florida Road.

Objective 3. Consideration must be given to aesthetics and the environment when undertaking road construction and improvements.

Action a. Effective erosion control and revegetation measures must be implemented when undertaking road construction and improvement.

5. Goal: Ensure that new development minimizes wildfire danger.

Objective 1. Guide existing development towards implementing steps in landscaping, fire service, and design modifications that may prevent wildfire tragedies.

Action a. Adopt wildfire prevention standards.

F. Goal: Oppose any flagpole annexations into the City of Durango.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN

The proposed land use plan is based on a vision for the Florida Road District that will evolve over the next ten to twenty years. The following section discusses the land use classifications that are included in the *Land Use Classification Map* that accompanies the text of this plan. The *Land Use Classifications / Descriptions Table* contained in Section IV of the Plan also discusses the various land use classifications. The recommended land uses, their locations and the approximate densities are based upon the goals and objectives set forth in Section II, and are guided further by a desire to maintain compatibility with adjacent and neighboring existing uses. Development proposals must be reviewed for consistency with the plan's goals, objectives, and Land Use Classification Map.

1. RESIDENTIAL

The predominate land use on developed private lands within the district is residential. Existing and proposed residential development densities vary considerably throughout the District. Several residential land use classifications are included in the Plan. It must be noted that the residential densities contained within land use classifications are intended to be used for the purpose of calculating overall density for Class II projects, Subdivisions and Minor Exempt Subdivisions. Minimum lot sizes are determined via the land use code and the subdivision requirements contained within. Class I projects are also reviewed via the land use code

Home occupations are acceptable in all residential classifications, providing the use appears to be residential in nature and the impacts are minimal such as: no outside storage, minimal signage and lighting, and minimal traffic generation.

Suburban Density Residential

Many existing subdivisions and developments exist throughout the District with varying lots sizes, generally ranging from 1 to 5 acres. These areas are designated *Suburban Density Residential*. No new *Suburban Density* areas are established in this plan.

Agricultural / Rural Residential

The majority of unsubdivided private lands within the District have been classified as *Agricultural / Rural Residential*. The overall development densities envisioned under this classification are 1 unit per 10 to 20 acres. This represents a density that preserves rural character and is consistent with state well permit requirements in over-appropriated watersheds, such as the Florida and the Pine. The *Agricultural / Rural Residential* Land Use Classification is prescribed — to preserve, insofar as possible the semi-rural and scenic characteristics of the District. Development densities within this range are determined through utilization of the Plan's public benefit criteria. Minimum lot sizes are determined via the code and the subdivision requirements contained therein.

2. CRITICAL LANDS

This classification is an overlay category, which identifies areas that possess significant constraints to development and public safety hazards. This category encompasses lands with slopes over 30%, lands possessing landslides and unstable slope hazards², lands within 100 year floodplains, and wetlands³.

The base density for lands in this category is 1 unit per 35 acres. If critical lands within a proposed development are protected and permanent development exclusions or dedicated open space, such as conservation easements are established, a density bonus may be granted to transfer development to more suitable portions of a project. Such density bonuses may not exceed one unit per 17.5 acres of critical lands. i.e. if *Critical Lands* are protected, allowable densities are 1 unit per 17.5 acres verses 1 unit per 35 acres if *Critical Lands* are developed.

The *Land Use Map Classification Map* identifies the general location of some of the District's *Critical Lands*. In most cases, however, site specific studies must be conducted to determine the exact location and extent of these lands. The *Land Use Classification Map* identifies the general location of slopes over 30%, and lands classified as *Landslides* and *Unstable Slopes*. The 100 year flood plains, and wetlands are not designated on the *Land Use Classification Map*.

² The location of landslides and unstable slopes is determined using the County's Geological Hazard Maps, Circa 1976.

³ Wetlands are those areas as defined by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual, Technical Report Y-87-1, January 1987.

3. SCENIC CORRIDOR

The Land Use Map identifies the general boundaries of the *Florida Road / Texas Creek Road (CR245) / CR234 Scenic Corridor*. The maintenance of the visual and scenic appeal to this corridor is a primary goal of this plan.

This category identifies lands prominently visible from Florida Road, Texas Creek Road, CR234, and includes many of the large parcels and meadowlands, the river corridor and the cliffs above. This category acts as an overlay to all underlying categories. Areas not visible from the major roadways, such as the benches or lands up side canyons, can be excellent areas for future development to cluster. When clustering development in this corridor, additional care shall be taken to locate away from the meadows and the ridgetops. The Public Benefit Criteria included in this plan is intended to provide an incentive maintain the District's scenic values.

4. COMMERCIAL

Local Commercial: This type of commercial is oriented toward providing services for the residents in the district. Presently, a small existing store (Helen's Store) and a bar, cafe, lodging, and small retail operation at the former Blue Spruce are the only commercial operations of this type. This category allows for the expansion of commercial development at Blue Spruce, and at or adjacent to Helen's store. New or redeveloped commercial establishments should utilize the Commercial Design Recommendations contained in Appendix 1 to maintain the rustic character of commercial development in the District.

On the southwestern end of the Florida Road District there are several existing cottage businesses. These uses will be considered pre-existing non-conforming uses and will be grandfathered but no new or expanded cottage businesses will be developed in this area.

Country Tourist / Dude Ranch: There is an existing dude ranch/horse stables, cabin rentals operation and a summer camp located within the District. These uses can entail the boarding and use of horses, overnight accommodations and associated traffic. This designation is applied to existing operations in order to ensure that new residents are aware of the existence of these facilities.

5. EDGEMONT RANCH

This category encompasses the previously approved master plan for the Edgemont Ranch property. This plan includes a variety of single family and multi-family residential, lodging, commercial, recreational and agricultural uses.

6. AGRICULTURE/TIMBER/RECREATION

A large portion of the District is on US Forest Service lands. This category identifies public lands within the District that are used primarily for agricultural, timber and recreational uses. These lands are given a base density of 1 unit per 35 acres in order to discourage a land trade undertaken for speculative purposes.

7. PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

This land use designation identifies public and community facilities. Two fire stations within the District are included within this classification.

H. MEADOWS

Along Florida Road, CR245 and CR234 there are numerous open meadows visible from the roadways. These meadows contribute significantly to the appeal and character of the District. The general location of meadows are identified on the *Land Use Classification Map* in order to highlight their importance. When undertaking development in meadow areas, care shall be taken to locate structures and improvements in a manner that preserves the meadows to the maximum extent practicable. The public benefit criteria included in the plan will be used to achieve this goal.

I. WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

The black arrows on the *Land Use Classification Map* identify the generalized location and path of wildlife migration corridors within the District. Maintenance of wildlife corridors is an objective of the plan. Care must be taken to avoid disturbance of established wildlife corridors when undertaking development within the District. The public benefit criteria included in this plan will be used to achieve this goal. Appropriate fencing requirements should be included in new development approvals in order to allow the safe passage of wildlife through new developments.

6. LAND USE CATEGORIES/DESCRIPTIONS

Land Use	Resid. Density / Size Restrictions	Description
Agricultural/Timber/ Public Recreation	1 unit per 35 acres	Public land that is used primarily for agricultural, forestry or land/water recreation uses. Public lands that are transferred to private ownership will retain a one unit per 35 acres density designation.
Agriculture/Rural Residential	1 unit per 10-20 acres ³	Private land that can be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per 10 to 20 acres.
Suburban Density Residential	1 unit per 1/2 to 3 acres ⁴	Private land that can be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per 1/2 to 3 acres.
Local Commercial	1 unit per 1/4 acre. (Lodging=5 rooms/residential unit.)	Small-scale commercial development (not malls or large establishments) providing goods and services primarily oriented to the needs of the local and tourist community (<i>e.g.</i> , convenience stores, hair salons, video stores, liquor stores, restaurants and gas stations). May include 2nd floor residential units (over the shops), or bed-and-breakfast type lodging. ⁵
Edgemont Ranch	n/a	Previously approved master plan for the Edgemont Ranch, includes single family and multi-family residential, lodging, commercial, recreational, and agricultural uses
Country Tourist/ Dude Ranch	1 unit per 10-20 acres.	Day use, overnight accommodations, recreational uses and incidental commercial uses such as gift shops, and restaurants. Uses may entail the boarding and use of horses and other pack animals for-hire public rides. May be converted to single family residential uses at the designated density without plan amendment.

³ Overall project density within given range is determined by Public Benefit Criteria. Proponent is encouraged to cluster density on smaller lots, creating permanent open space. Minimum lot size is determined by County Subdivision regulations and land use code.

⁴ Lot size contingent upon compliance with County Subdivision regulations and land use code criteria including water, sewer and access and access requirements. Lots less than 1 acre in size require *both* central water and sewer, from 1 to 3 acres require *either* central water or central sewer.

⁵ Commercial Design Guidelines contained in the Appendix apply.

Land Use	Resid. Density / Size Restrictions	Description
Critical Lands ⁶	1 unit per 35 acres	Land with steep slopes (over 30%), significant geological hazards (landslides, unstable slopes), wetlands and flood plains. If density is transferred to non-critical lands, a density bonus of 1 unit per 35 acres will be granted (Maximum Bonus = a total of 2 units for each 35 acres of critical land that is left permanently undeveloped).
Scenic Corridor Overlay	n/a	Open Lands visible from Florida Road and Texas Creek Road. Special attention to the maintenance of scenic qualities is encouraged.
Medodows	Per underlying land use classification	Open meadows visible from the major roads within the District. When undertaking development in meadow areas, care shall be taken to locate structures and improvements in a manner that preserves the meadows to the maximum extent practicable. The public benefit criteria included in this plan should be utilized to achieve this goal.
Wildlife Corridor	n/a	The generalized location and direction of wildlife migration corridors within the District.
Public and Community Facilities	Per Code.	Public and quasi-public uses, such as schools, fire stations, government facilities, cemeteries, hospitals, churches, trail heads, and recreation facilities.

PUBLIC BENEFIT CRITERIA

In order to determine the allowable density for a project within the *Rural Residential* Classification, the County will allocate densities above the lower end of the density range (1 unit per 20 acres) upon demonstration that there is a public benefit in doing so. To make this determination as objective as possible the density range shall be granted based upon the following criteria and percentages:

- 35% Clustering the units so as to preserve the maximum portion of the land in contiguous open space, which could be owned by a single entity or multiple entities with undivided interests, or overlain by a open space or agricultural easement. (50% open space = full 35% of density range).
- 25% Structures located so as to preserve open meadows, located in or against trees if present and not within floodplain's.
- 10% Houses located near other houses — so as to maximize clustering on an area-wide basis.
- 15% Preservation of designated wildlife corridors or habitats.
- 15% Granting of easements for trails for public use and/or public lands access.
- 100% Total

⁶ Critical Lands designation only applies to unsubdivided land. Environmental conditions on subdivided land are regulated through the approved subdivision plan and land use code. Critical Lands designation on Land Use Classification Map only partially or generally portrays the Critical Lands. Site Specific analysis may be required to refine location of Critical Lands boundary.

Full compliance with all of the above would result in granting of 100% of the density range. For example, if the range is 1 unit per 10 -20 acres, and all of the criteria were fully met, the proponent would qualify for a density of 1 unit per 10 acres. If only the first two criteria were met (35% + 25% = 60%) the owner would qualify for only 60% of the range, or 1 unit per 12 acres.

Subdivisions, Minor Exempt Subdivisions, and Class II projects shall be designed in such a manner so as to prevent the location of buildings or other structures creating a silhouette on top of a ridge or hilltop as seen from public roads⁷. The ridgeline or hilltop silhouette should be composed predominantly of trees and land forms. Building envelopes and plat notes shall be the primary method of implementing this policy on subdivision plats and MES's. Site plan review and conditions of approval shall be the primary method of implementing this policy for Class II projects. It is the applicant's responsibility to demonstrate the project's avoidance of ridges and hilltops to the satisfaction of the Planning Commission using appropriate visual or graphic techniques (e.g. photos, drawings, site visits).

If site conditions do not permit compliance with any specific criteria, credit for compliance will be granted. e.g. if a site does not possess any wildlife corridors then the applicant would receive the full 15% density bonus for avoiding wildlife corridors.

APPENDIX

Commercial Design Guidelines:

1. Site Planning:
 1. Locate new buildings or additions near existing facilities.
 2. Create large meaningful pedestrian-oriented spaces by grouping buildings together in clusters and thereby preserving large blocks of open space. Outdoor "rooms" require enclosure (walls) on at least 2 sides. These walls can be formed by a building or the juxtaposition of several buildings, or even by landscaping.
 3. Let the landscape setting dominate the views by encouraging landscape standards within the commercial parcels. (i.e. tuck buildings into trees, or plant groves of trees to mimic existing landscape)
2. Setbacks:
 1. To preserve the rural quality of the road, set the buildings back an appropriate distance from the edge of the road.
3. Parking:
 1. Designate parking and service areas to the rear of the commercial buildings.
 2. Screen parking areas with hedges, fences, etc.
 3. Require landscape to provide shade and buffer cars from neighboring properties.
 4. Encourage consolidation and sharing of parking lots.

⁷ A "ridge" is a long narrow, conspicuous elevation of land, a "hilltop" means a knoll or small hill.

5. Create new roads and interconnected parking lots behind commercial buildings to reduce traffic exits off the highway.
 6. Provide adequate snow storage with parking lots
4. Lighting:
1. Coordinate lighting standards within the district.
 2. Shield light to preserve the visibility of the night sky.
5. Building Massing
1. **Architectural style:** Add to/blend with the existing style created with the district.
 2. **Height:** Encourage buildings of 2 to 2 1/2 stories to create a strong sense of enclosure and add diversity of uses on upper floors.
 3. **Materials:** Use materials that present a sense of permanence (ie. large log or timbers, rock, large overhangs, etc.)
 4. **Roof Pitches:** Use pitches within the 8/12 to 12/12 range found in most mountain communities.
 5. **Colors:** Use colors that blend with the surrounding landscape
 6. **Sun/Shade/Views:** Sun is important factor in the region. Encourage building massing to step back on south sides to allow the sun to reach the ground

VI. Signage

1. Offsite billboards and signs shall be discouraged throughout the District.
2. Onsite signs shall be small scale. For example, attached signs should not exceed 3 square feet/per linear frontage foot of building and free standing signs should not exceed 1.5 square feet/per linear frontage foot of building. Signs should be compatible with the District's country setting (i.e. wood or ornamental metal are appropriate - urban signs such as neon, internally lit, or plastic signs should be avoided).