

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

Overview

Many demographic changes have occurred in La Plata County in recent years. Since 1990 alone, the population of the County has grown nearly 36 percent. With this growth in population, a number of other significant changes have occurred. *Growth Trends* are documented in this section of the comprehensive plan.

Population Change

Significant changes have occurred in the County's population over the past several decades. Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 and Charts 2-1 and 2-2 outline this change. During the 1970 to 2000 period, the County's total population increased by approximately 129 percent, from 19,199 in 1970 to 43,941 in 2000. During the 1990s alone, the County's total population grew by over 36 percent. The growth in the unincorporated portions of the County has been particularly significant, increasing by over 11,000 during the 1990 to 2000 period. By contrast the City of Durango's population increased by approximately 1,500 residents, or nearly 12 percent, during the same period.

**Table 2-1
Historic County Population Levels: 1970 - 2000**

	1970		1980		1990		2000		Change By Decade			
	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	70 - 80	80 - 90	90 - 00	70-00
Bayfield	320	1.7	724	2.6	1,090	3.4	1,549	3.5	126.3	50.6	42.1	384.1
Durango	10,333	53.8	11,649	42.1	12,439	38.5	13,922	31.7	12.7	6.8	11.9	34.7
Ignacio	613	3.2	667	2.4	720	2.2	669	1.5	8.8	7.9	-7.1	9.1
Unincorporated *	7,933	41.3	14,607	52.8	18,035	55.9	27,801	63.3	84.1	23.5	54.2	250.4
La Plata County	19,199	100.0	27,647	100.0	32,284	100.0	43,941	100.0	44.0	16.8	36.1	128.9

* Includes Tribal and non-Tribal

Source: Colorado Division of Local Affairs and the U.S. Census Bureau

**Table 2-2
Historic Population Levels: 1991 - 2000**

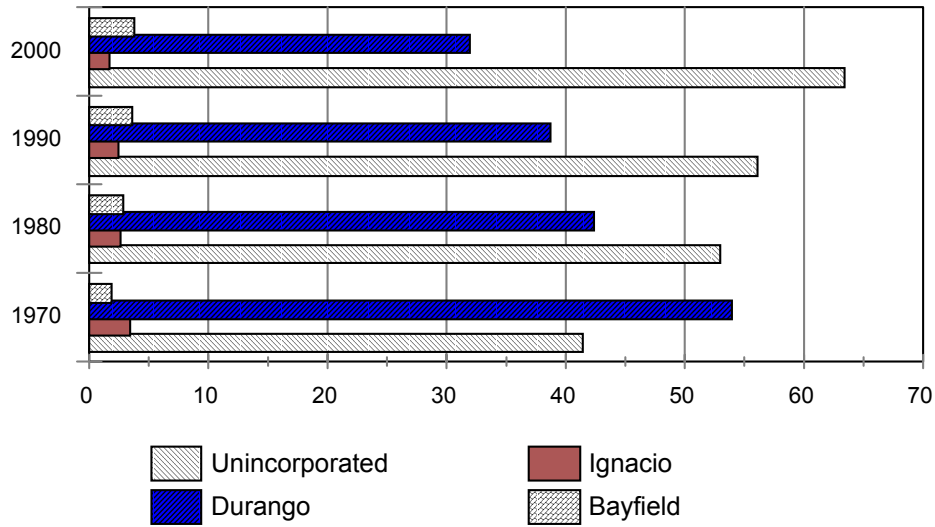
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Percent of Total
Bayfield	1,126	1,163	1,239	1,356	1,452	1,590	1,590	1,607	1,611	1,549	3.5
Durango	12,751	13,167	13,350	13,582	13,713	14,095	14,151	14,485	14,913	13,922	31.7
Ignacio	727	741	740	745	742	773	788	792	784	669	1.5
Unincorporated *	18,879	19,547	20,444	21,439	23,129	23,435	24,410	25,012	23,840	27,801	63.3
La Plata County	33,483	34,618	35,773	37,122	39,036	39,893	40,939	41,896	41,148	43,941	100.0

* Includes Tribal and non-Tribal

Source: Colorado Division of Local Government and the U.S. Census Bureau

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

**Chart 2-1
Historical Population Distribution: 1970 - 2000**



**Chart 2-2
Population Distribution: 2000**

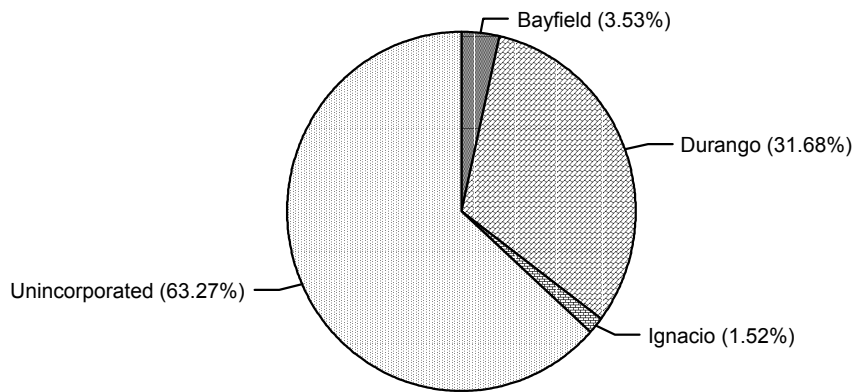
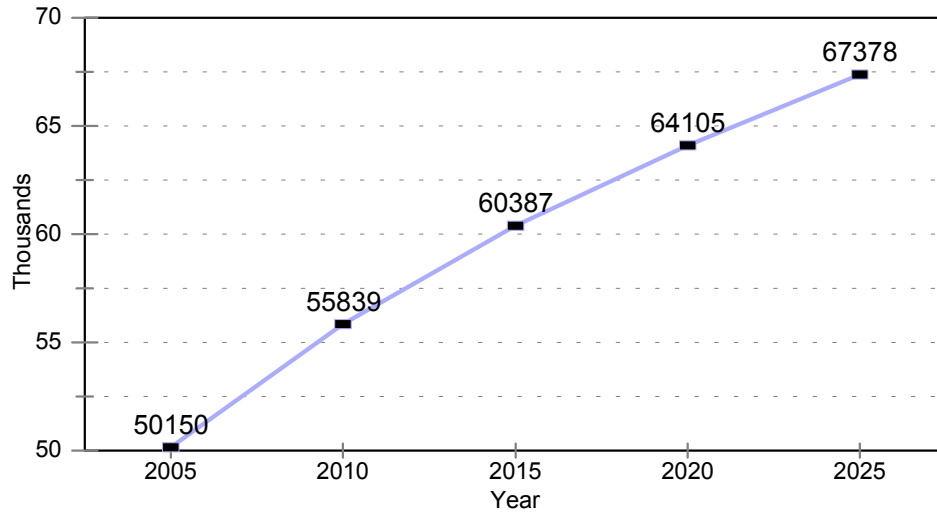


Chart 2-3 shows County population projections for the 2005 to 2025 time period. Consistent with statewide

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

trends, future growth is projected to slow over the next 25 years. The County's total

Chart 2-3
Projected County Growth: 2005 - 2025



popul
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is expected to grow from 43,941 in 2000 to 67,378 in 2025, a 53 percent increase. This corresponds to just under 2 percent annual growth rate. By contrast, during the 1990 to 2000 period, the annual growth rate for the County was 2.8 percent, and 3.5 percent in the unincorporated areas. By most accepted standards, growth rates of 2.5 percent or higher are considered very high rates of growth.

Building Permits

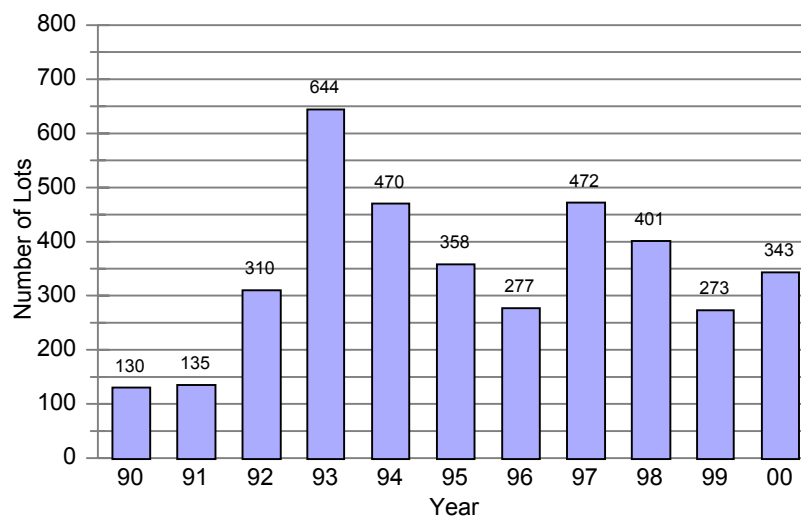
Historically, the population of La Plata County was concentrated in and around Durango, with smaller concentrations in Bayfield and Ignacio. The rest was thinly spread throughout the unincorporated countryside. In recent years, however, growth rates have increased significantly in the unincorporated parts of the County. Major areas of growth within the past decade include: Rafter J, Shenandoah, Durango West I and II subdivision in the west, The Animas Valley in the north, and areas such as Grandview, Loma Linda, Sunnyside, El Rancho Florida, Ticolote, and Forest Lakes in the east. During the 1990s the number of building permits issued annually in the County increased nearly 80 percent, from 673 in 1990 to 1,201 in 2000, providing yet another indication of the County's consistent growth.

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

Subdivision Activity

The pace of subdivision activity has remained relatively steady. Chart 2-4 shows the number of new lots approved during the 1990 to 2000 time period. These figures do not include lots 35 acres or larger which do not require County review or approval. The County Assessors Office estimated that 160 lots 35 acres or greater in size were created in 1999. The number of new lots created does not always correlate to new development. In fact, as Table 2-3 indicates, as of 2000 there were nearly 8,500 unbuilt lots in the County ranging in size from less than one acre up to 100 acres.

**Chart 2-4
Subdivision lots Approved: 1990 - 2000**



**Table 2-3
Vacant Parcels: 2000**

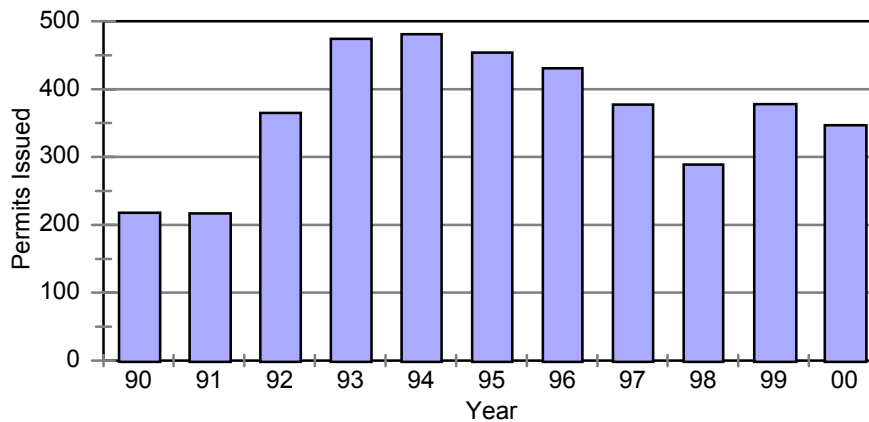
Acres	0 - 2.99	3 - 4.99	5 - 7.99	8 - 9.99	10 -35	35 -100	Total
Number	4,410	876	400	217	1,017	1,473	8,478

Individual Sewage Disposal Systems

Linked to development is the construction of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems (ISDS). The majority of developments in the unincorporated County rely on ISDS. As shown in Chart 2-5, the number of ISDS permits issued annually has fluctuated during the past decade but has, in general, experienced significant increases since 1988.

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

**Chart 2-5
ISDS Permits Issued: 1990 - 2000**



The Changing Economy

It has been estimated that as much as 57 percent of the County's economy is dependent upon the tourism industry. Table 2-4 and Chart 2-7 depict the number and percentage of jobs within nine major employment sectors in the County. During the 1990s, the most significant job growth was experienced in the Wholesale and Retail Trade sector, the Services sector and the Construction sector. These sectors are largely related to tourism and the construction of new homes.

**Table 2-4
County Employment By Sector**

	1980		1990		1999		Change 1980 -1990		Change 1990 -1999	
	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change
Agriculture	948	6.5	1,104	5.9	949	3.2	156	16.5	-155	-14.0
Mining	104	0.7	263	1.4	333	1.1	159	152.9	70	26.6
Construction	1,101	7.5	1,677	8.9	3,519	11.8	576	52.3	1,842	109.8
Manufacturing	633	4.3	711	3.8	1,063	3.6	78	12.3	352	49.5
Transportation, Communications, and Public Utilities	626	4.3	700	3.7	969	3.2	74	11.8	269	38.4
Wholesale and Retail Trade	3,410	23.4	4,131	22.0	7,115	23.8	721	21.1	2,984	72.2
Finance, insurance, and Real Estate	751	5.1	1,104	5.9	1,698	5.7	353	47.0	594	53.8
Services	4,583	31.4	5,890	31.3	10,515	35.2	1,307	28.5	4,625	78.5
Government	2,428	16.6	3,212	17.1	3,751	12.5	784	32.3	539	16.8
Total	14,584	100.0	18,792	100.0	29,912	100.0	4,208	28.9	11,120	59.2

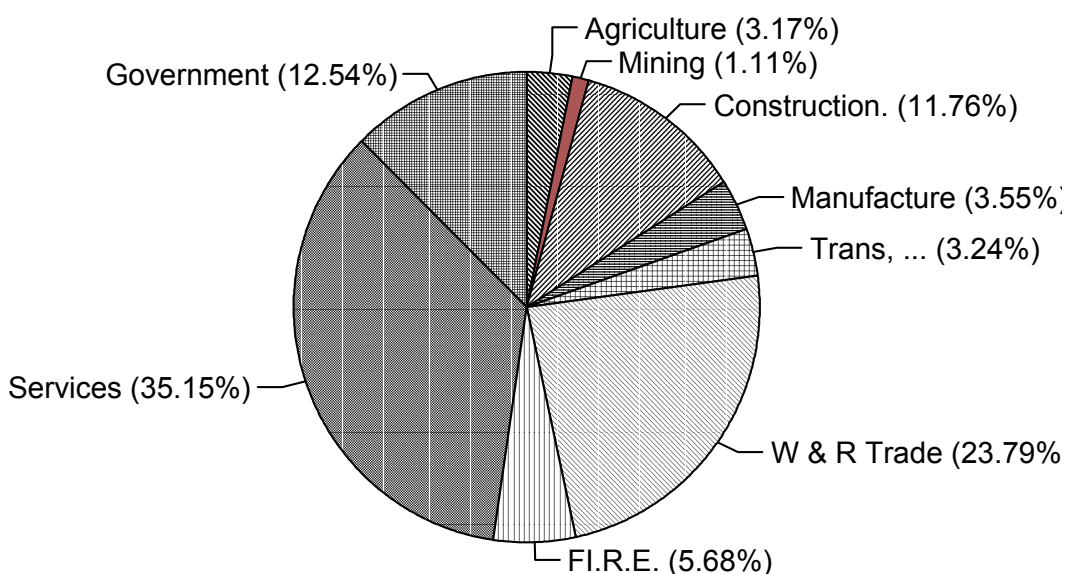
Source: Federal Bureau of Economic Assistance

The coal bed methane extraction and distribution industry has also played a significant role in the

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

La Plata County economy. Employment associated with this industry is broken into two sectors—the Mining sector, and the Transportation, Communications, and Public Utilities sector, both of which experienced significant increase in employment from 1990 to 1998.

**Chart 2-7
Employment by Major Job Sector: 1999**



Property Valuation

During the 1990s tax revenues in the County increased dramatically, partly due to appreciating property values, and partly due to a significant growth in natural gas production. Table 2-4 depicts total assessed value and change in values during the 1990 to 1999 time period.

**Table 2-4
Total Assessed Value of Taxable Property**

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

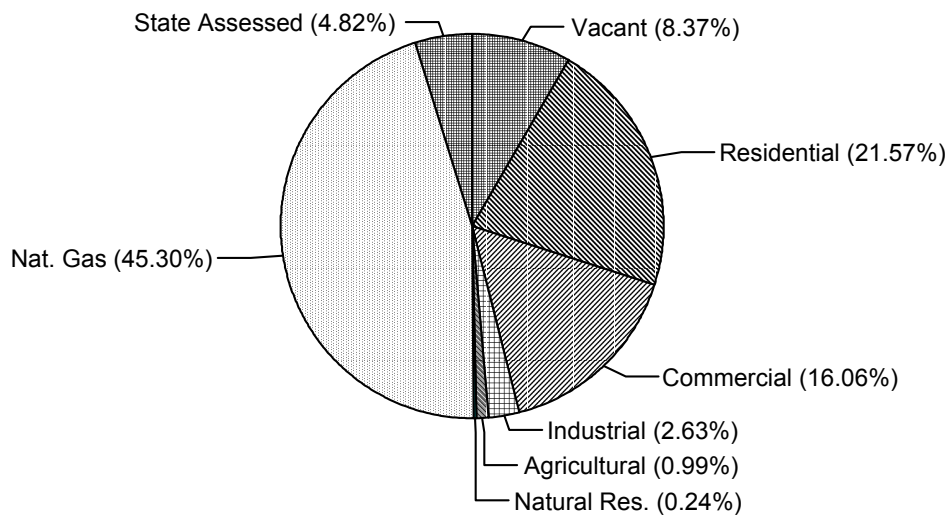
in La Plata County: 1990 - 1999

Year	Assessed Value	Percent Change From Previous Year
1990	\$396,535,120	---
1991	\$430,374,210	8.5
1992	\$445,216,120	3.4
1993	\$516,832,600	16.1
1994	\$624,804,060	20.9
1995	\$752,063,090	20.4
1996	\$706,256,580	-6.1
1997	\$918,132,090	30.0
1998	\$1,125,640,730	22.6
1999	\$1,163,142,350	3.3

As mentioned, the coal bed methane extraction industry has played a significant role in the La Plata County economy. As shown in Chart 2-7, this industry accounted for approximately 45 percent of the total County assessed value by class in 2000.

Chart 2-7
County Assessed Value by Property Class: 2000

Recent industry projections indicate that over the next six to eight years production may decline by as much as 8 to 10 percent annually. This, however, seems to contradict recent trends. State policy



changes allowing additional gas wells to be drilled on the same acreage already occupied by one or more wells, as well as an emerging national energy policy that encourages energy exploration have

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH TRENDS

led to a steady increase in the number of gas permits issued by the County in recent years.

Southern Ute Tribe

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe also plays a significant role in the growth of La Plata County. Employment opportunities created by the tribal government center, the casino, as well as numerous natural gas operations provide jobs for non-tribal residents of the County. Additionally, there were only limited commercial and retail operations within tribal boundaries in 2000, and as a result, most purchases of goods and services by tribal members took place elsewhere, injecting additional revenues into the local economy. Based on the sound financial stability reported by the Southern Utes, it is anticipated that the Tribes role in shaping the economy and development patterns within La Plata County will likely increase in the coming years.

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