



# ***DELTA COUNTY MASTER PLAN***

***FINAL DRAFT***

***OCTOBER, 1996***

Over the past two years, the citizens of Delta County have been involved in a grassroots planning process to revise the 1990 Delta County Master Plan. The primary purpose of this effort was to address the impacts of growth on the rural lifestyle and natural resource base of Delta County. The approach considered resource conservation and management as the basis for planning in Delta County rather than traditional urban planning models.

The process divided the County into seven planning areas based on watersheds and communities within each watershed. Citizens within each planning area volunteered to serve on a resource team. Each team defined its community vision, identified its natural and human resources and recommended strategies to achieve the vision for its desired social and physical landscape. Public meetings were held throughout the process in each planning area to get input from area residents.

The revised Delta County Master Plan is the result of this grassroots effort and addresses the five concerns shared by all seven planning areas. The Plan may not incorporate all of the desires and recommendations of each planning area, but it does represent the common ground among them.

The revised Delta County Master Plan will serve as an advisory document to guide both public and private entities in making sound decisions, based on a shared community vision for the future growth and development of Delta County.

## ***PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULE***

The Delta County Planning Commission, Future Growth Steering Committee and Planning Area Committees will host public hearings on the draft of the Revised Delta County Master Plan on the following dates.

<i><b>Area</b></i>	<i><b>Date</b></i>	<i><b>Time</b></i>	<i><b>Location</b></i>
Escalante Planning Area	Tues., Nov. 12, 1996	7:00 p.m.	Delta High School Commons
Peach Valley Planning Area	Tues., Nov. 12, 1996	7:00 p.m.	Delta High School Commons
Uncompahgre Planning Area	Tues., Nov. 12, 1996	7:00 p.m.	Delta High School Commons
Crawford Country Planning Area	Wed., Nov. 13, 1996	7:00 p.m.	Crawford Town Hall
Surface Creek Planning Area	Tues., Nov. 19, 1996	7:00 p.m.	Cedaredge Com. Center
Leroux Creek Planning Area	Wed., Nov. 20, 1996	7:00 p.m.	Memorial Hall, Hotchkiss
Upper North Fork Planning Area	Thurs., Nov. 21, 1996	7:00 p.m.	Paonia Town Hall

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The Delta County Master Plan is a blueprint for the County's future. It is a tool for providing coordinated guidance and direction for meeting such challenges as population and economic growth, provision for public services and natural resource protection. The Master Plan provides a look at the natural resources and infrastructure of Delta County; at the issues, needs and opportunities the County and its citizens are facing; and recommended activities the County can undertake to implement citizens' visions for the future of this area.

In 1990, Delta County adopted a Master Plan to guide future growth and development in the unincorporated area of Delta County. At that time, the County's population was less than in 1980. The County's economy is just beginning to recover from the mining bust and agricultural decline of the mid-80's. The 1990 Master Plan set forth broad based goals and objectives addressing the future growth and development but it did not suggest or recommend implementation strategies to realize the goals or objectives of the Plan.

Since 1990, Delta County has experienced considerable growth. In 1994, a citizens' ad hoc committee conducted two series of meetings throughout the County to discuss the impacts of growth on the rural landscape and quality of life. At the conclusion of the meetings, the ad hoc committee submitted recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. One recommendation was to review and revise the 1990 Master Plan to address the County's current issues and to provide a framework for planning the future of Delta County.

Any plan is only a prologue. Its usefulness lies in its implementation. What is essential therefore, is the willingness of the community to concern itself with its own future. Building on that concern, the Master Plan can be a catalyst for responsible and productive measures to guide the changes that inevitably will come.

Finally, a master plan is an advisory document only and has no regulatory or restrictive powers. It is not written in stone but is meant to be evaluated by the community at large at least every five years to reflect changing circumstances within the community.

## **PART ONE**

### **COMMUNITY PROFILE AND PLANNING PROCESS**

Part I contains a general profile of Delta County as it exists today and a description of the planning process that was utilized to revise the 1990 Delta County Master Plan. The community profile provides a very broad snapshot of the current conditions and resources within the County and describes some of the current growth trends. The planning process outlines the two year citizen-based process that addressed three questions: (1) what does the County look like today? (2) what does the County want to look like in the future? and (3) how will the County accomplish its vision for the future?

### **COMMUNITY PROFILE**

#### **Geographic Resources**

Delta County is located in the west central part of Colorado and has a land area of 1,157 square miles. The County has unique and diverse land forms and a varied topography: flattop mesa and "adobe" badlands, river canyons, flat irrigated farm lands, and high mountain peaks. Elevations range from 4,750 feet in the Gunnison River Valley to well over 11,000 feet in the West Elk Mountains. Escalante and Dominguez Canyons are outstanding landscape features to the west, and Grand Mesa dominates the northern landscape at an elevation of 10,000 feet.

The North Fork of the Gunnison River enters the County from the east, the Gunnison River and the Uncompahgre River flow from the south. These rivers and their tributaries provided a force that helped shape and enrich the character of the unique land forms cut from the geologic landscape of Delta County.

#### **Economic Resources**

Traditionally, Delta County's economy has been based on agriculture and mining. Earnings: from mining employment within Delta County have declined by more than 50% within the past decade as a result of mine closures and the implementation of technological efficiencies within the industry. Agriculture has cushioned the busts of the mining industry and agriculture remains the mainstay of the County's economy. But it is challenged by declining cattle market prices and pressures from population growth.

Delta County now is facing a transition from its traditional resource-based industries of agriculture, mining and timbering to the "New West" economy of tourism and recreation. Wedged between the resort areas of Aspen, Crested Butte, and Telluride, the County is experiencing an in-migration of urbanites and more tourists. This is bringing economic opportunities, but at a price: it will inevitably change the County's social fabric and rural landscape.

### **Population Resources**

The County experienced its first significant population growth in the 1970s. This was followed by a decline in the latter half of the 1980s caused by mine shutdowns in the North Fork Valley. Now the County is growing again: Since 1990 its population has shot up by nearly 20 percent, to 25,023 from 20,980. The new residents are retirees, "lone eagle" telecommuters, service employees who cannot afford to live where they work, and "baby boomers" seeking a better quality of life.

The County's Hispanic community also is growing. About 6,000 Hispanic farm workers now reside in the Delta and Montrose areas. Farm workers used to come for the harvest season and then return to Mexico. Now, they stay because of the growth of the winter job market in the region's ski resorts.

#### **Natural Resources**

Delta County has a variety of natural resources which have been the basis for its economy over time. 55 percent of the County's 740,000 acres of land is federally owned and managed by the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest and the Uncompahgre Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management. Early settlers in Delta County developed and improved the land in order to irrigate fields for produce, fruit orchards and cattle ranching: Over the years other farm products (sugar beets, barley, broccoli, and poultry) have been introduced. Today, of the 330,900 privately owned acres, most remain in some form of agricultural production - either fruit orchards, row crops or pasture. This has led to an agricultural diversity within the County and has allowed the County to be a major producer of agricultural products within the State.

Two other natural resources have played an important role in the history of Delta County: forests and coal. National forestry began in 1893 with the establishment of the Battlement Mesa Forest Reserve. This area was later divided to establish the Grand Mesa National Forest and the Gunnison National Forest. Today, controlled grazing, lumber production and a multitude of recreational opportunities abound on the national forests within Delta County. Coal mining has been cyclical in nature, but current mine production in the North Fork Valley is at its highest production level, although mining employment has declined due to technological efficiencies within the industry.

Wildlife is another natural resource that adds value to the rural character of Delta County and contributes significantly to the local economy particularly during hunting seasons: The Division of Wildlife has estimated that the total economic value of wildlife exceeds \$18 million annually for Delta County.

## **Cultural Resources**

Delta County has a history rich in Indian lore, mining, railroads and agriculture. Preservation of the cultural heritage of this area has been identified as an important value and is ensured by a variety of initiatives: Delta County has two state designated Scenic and Historic Byways. Both Scenic Byways are developing corridor management plans to provide for the protection and interpretation of the cultural heritage and natural resources of the areas.

Local communities are trying to capture tourists by marketing the history and cultural heritage of the area. Pioneer Town in Cedaredge is a collection of historical buildings that provides a replica of early living in the Surface Creek Valley. Fort Uncompahgre in Delta is a living history museum that captures the early fur trading days at the confluence of the Gunnison and Uncompahgre rivers. All communities host annual summer festivals that highlight the heritage unique to their community.

## **Government Resources**

Delta County is comprised of six Incorporated municipalities, each with its own governing body. The County's current philosophy of governance relies heavily upon citizen participation and advisory groups. The County Commissioners convene quarterly meetings with the elected officials of each community to discuss common issues and seek cooperative solutions. In addition, the County has actively initiated and supported regional coalitions to address issues of regional concern and impact, e.g. air quality, public lands policy and management, housing, transportation and growth issues.

## **Community Infrastructure and Services**

Each of the incorporated municipalities is responsible for providing basic infrastructure and services to their residents. Most residents in the unincorporated areas of the County are served by small domestic water companies and individual sewage disposal systems. With the exception of the City of Delta, communities are experiencing pressure on their existing water and sewer systems and have either imposed moratoriums on water taps or are making substantial improvements to their water and wastewater systems to accommodate the new growth.

Electrical services are provided by both Delta-Montrose Electric Association and the City of Delta. Telephone service is provided by Delta County TeleComm in part of the County and US West in the greater Delta area. Both electrical and telephone providers say they have the capacity for a moderate rate of growth.

Health care services are provided by area physicians, medical clinics, three independent ambulance services, area nursing homes and the Delta Memorial Hospital. Educational needs are addressed by the public school system and the Delta/Montrose Area Vocational-Technical Center. The Delta County Library system has libraries in the communities of Cedaredge, Crawford, Delta, Hotchkiss and Paonia.

The residential growth pattern has increased demand for public safety, fire protection, rural health care, social services, transportation, housing and road systems. A variety of local and regional efforts are underway to address many of the impacts on the various community systems that are not the direct responsibility of local governments or special districts.

## **PLANNING PROCESS**

### **Background**

Delta County currently has no zoning or land use plan in place that guides land use decisions on a county-wide basis. There are three existing special planning districts within the County that have adopted zoning regulations for properties within their boundaries. In addition, the County does have regulations that govern the subdivision of land, development in floodplains, mobile home parks and utility and access permits.

In 1993, a diverse group of citizens approached the County Commissioners to sponsor a series of community meetings on the impacts of growth and how citizens would like to address the issues. The Commissioners supported this citizen effort because they believed that any new planning initiative should come from the people of Delta County. The Ad Hoc Growth Committee conducted two series of meetings in each of six geographic areas of the County during late 1993 and 1994. In the summer of 1994 the Committee presented its recommendations to the County Commissioners.

In response to the Committee recommendations, the Commissioners appointed a Growth Steering Committee to work with the County Planning Commission and the County Commissioners to rewrite the County's Master Plan. The Growth Steering Committee is comprised of about 25 members who represent not only different interests but different geographic areas of the County and each municipality. Its primary function is to help with the public process and to act as a sounding board for the staff, and Planning Commission as the Master Plan is rewritten.

The County was then divided into seven planning areas based on watersheds and social communities within each planning area. The seven areas are Escalante (north Delta area), Uncompahgre (river valley floors and mesas lying to the east, west and south of the City of Delta from 1800 Road to Delta/Montrose County line),

Peach Valley, Surface Creek Valley, Leroux Creek (Hotchkiss and Redlands mesa area), North Fork (Paonia area), Crawford County (see Appendix A for a map of the planning areas).

At public meetings held throughout the County in the spring of 1995, each planning area was presented with 14 issues related to growth and development that had been identified within the region since 1992. The areas were asked to prioritize the issues they felt were most important. The results of those public meetings identified the following as the most important county-wide issues:

- 1) Preservation of agricultural lands and open space
- 2) Protection of private property rights
- 3) Maintaining the rural lifestyle
- 4) Scarcity of availability of domestic water
- 5) Lack of land use planning

Following the public meetings, each planning area identified a work team to work with County staff and technical resource persons, e.g. DOW, water companies, Soil Conservation, irrigation companies, to begin to define their vision for the future social and natural landscape of their area. Over 350 people attended the various public planning area meetings and some 75 citizen volunteers have worked with the Future Growth Steering Committee and Planning Commission.

During the spring and summer of 1995 the planning area resource teams defined their future visions, identified natural and manmade community resources, and developed strategies to recommend to the County Commissioners to achieve their goals. In November 1995 the planning areas met with the Future Growth Steering Committee and Planning Commission to report on the progress in each planning area and to identify any common concerns. The planning areas listed five:

- Preservation of agriculture
- Maintaining the rural lifestyle
- Require new development to pay its own way and be directed to areas with adequate infrastructure
- Protection of private property rights
- Economic development

During the winter and spring of 1996 representatives of each planning area and the Planning Commission have met in monthly work sessions to develop goals, objectives and implementation strategies that provide a framework for addressing those common concerns.

The five common concerns noted above represent the basis for the rewriting of the 1990 Delta County Master Plan. The Plan may not incorporate all of the desires and recommendations of each planning area, but it does provide a starting point and it represents a minimum level of standards to be considered for the County.

Individual planning areas may wish to develop more comprehensive plans for their area that address the concerns specific to their area. The County Commissioners have agreed to consider the level of planning each community wants when reviewing development proposals within the respective planning areas. When and if each planning area elects to develop a separate plan to achieve its vision for the future, the plan will be incorporated as an appendix to this County Master Plan. The revised Delta County Master Plan and individual planning area plans, as developed and adopted by the residents of each planning area, will serve as the basis for future land use decisions.

# DELTA COUNTY MASTER PLAN

## PART TWO

### GOALS, POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

PART II contains the goals to realize Delta County's vision for the future and represent the common concerns that were identified by the seven planning areas. These goals reflect the values that are important to the citizens of Delta County. They establish the direction to be followed in the future to protect and enhance our quality of life.

The specific policies provide a framework for achieving the goals. The implementation strategies are recommended actions that can be taken by the County's citizens, community and business leaders, and elected officials. They are not regulations or a final commitment but could lead to the adoption of the necessary regulatory tools after the Master Plan is approved.

#### **MASTER PLAN GOALS:**

#### **I. Preservation of Agricultural Land and Agricultural Operations**

##### **Introduction**

Delta County is an agricultural County where the importance of the agricultural economy is real and not merely a symbol of a western life style. In 1995 the market value of agricultural products grown in Delta County was \$44,593,000. The total economic impact of agriculture and related industries was an estimated \$134,760,840. Agriculture, including forestry, and agricultural related business directly employ an estimated 23 percent of the total County workforce. Agriculture accounts for approximately 40 percent of the total workforce, when indirect employment is included.

Agriculture is critical to the economy of Delta County. The seven planning area committees all recognized that any threats to the agricultural base resulting from development could be a major detriment to the overall economic well being of the County. They also recognized that agriculture, more than any other factor, defines the rural character of the County. The planning area committees want a viable agricultural economy. In addressing this concern, these issues emerged.

##### **Issues**

- **Equity.** The preservation of agricultural land through land use regulation puts the economic burden of preservation on the farmer or rancher. An agricultural preservation program must also provide voluntary incentives and flexible land use approaches that recognize and fairly compensate landowners for keeping land in agriculture.

**Definition.** Not all open space is agricultural land, nor is all agricultural land prime agricultural land as defined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. An agricultural preservation program must focus on agricultural land and identify the land that can support a viable agricultural operation.

- **Interrelationships.** The economic viability of agriculture is dependent, in part, upon the continued multiple use philosophy of the public lands that have historically provided summer grazing lands for Delta County's cattle and sheep ranchers. This interdependency between agriculture and public lands has been a cultural tradition and custom within Delta County. Any weakening of the current multiple use philosophy will threaten the viability of this agricultural community. The County also should promote businesses and industries that support agricultural land use. This would include activities that add value to existing raw products as well as the promotion of new marketing mechanisms.
- **Incompatibility.** If maintaining a critical mass of agricultural land use is the County's highest priority, the County must be willing to restrict other uses that are incompatible with agriculture and related business. This means residential subdivisions and other types of development adjacent to agricultural operations may have to be denied or required to mitigate adverse impacts on existing agricultural land use.

The concern over the future of agriculture in Delta County and the issues that are associated with that concern resulted in a goal statement that went beyond the land preservation issue.

##### **Goal Statement**

**Maintain Delta County as an agricultural community by preserving agricultural land, enhancing the viability of agricultural operations and encouraging a social, economic and political environment that reflects a positive attitude toward agriculture.**

##### **Policies**

- A. An agricultural preservation program must identify the lands that are important to agriculture and focus on the preservation of land that is critical to the agricultural economy of Delta County.**

##### **Implementation Strategy**

Establish the criteria for identification of important agricultural land and, perform the analysis necessary to identify and map the important agricultural lands and agricultural uses within each planning area.

**B. An agricultural preservation program should be equitable by providing a variety of options and incentives to landowners who keep lands in agriculture.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. Fully explore the potential for a successful Transferable Development Rights (TDR) program for the County that includes the possible sources of funding for both pilot programs and a TDR Bank.
2. Establish a strong liaison with the private and public agencies that advocate agricultural land preservation in order to fully utilize conservation easements and other tools to preserve agricultural land.
3. Provide flexibility in the subdivision review process for those landowners who are willing to cluster development to preserve agricultural lands.

**C. An agricultural preservation program must include efforts to preserve and enhance the overall agricultural economy through programs that promote the County's agricultural products and provide support to those related industries and businesses' critical to agriculture.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. Provide financial support for promotional and marketing programs.
2. Identify the economic contribution of those industries and businesses that are agriculturally related and publicize their contributions.
3. Conduct research and develop programs that will add value to existing agricultural products.
4. Encourage local economic development organizations to support and recruit value-added processing and food and fiber manufacturing opportunities.

**D. An agricultural preservation program must include provisions that protect viable agricultural operations from development that would have adverse impacts on the operation.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. The County Commissioners should recognize that preserving agricultural land and sustaining the agricultural economy have primary status in the adoption or revision of County regulations.

2. The County staff should work with agricultural organizations and representatives of agricultural related businesses to identify those types of land uses that have or may have a direct and negative impact on agriculture, agricultural infrastructure and agricultural industries. Methods of mitigating the adverse impacts of new development on agriculture should be developed as part of the regulation and review of new development.

3. The County should utilize its authority under state laws to develop a local planning area review process for any change in land use from agricultural use to residential, commercial or industrial use, and to develop mitigation standards to minimize the potential negative impacts on agricultural lands.

4. The County should consider including preservation of agriculture in the "Purpose" or "Intent" sections of existing regulations.

5. The County should direct growth and infrastructure development to protect productive agricultural lands.

6. The County should strengthen its Right-to-Farm policy by adopting a Right-to-Farm ordinance.

7. The County should educate people moving in next to ranches and farms about agricultural practices.

**E. An agricultural preservation program should discourage the conversion of irrigation water for agricultural use to domestic or municipal use.**

**Implementation Strategy**

Explore alternative mechanisms and methods to ensure that development of water for municipal, or domestic uses does not adversely affect irrigation water resources.

**II. Preservation of the Rural Lifestyle and Landscape. The Natural Environment and Unique Physical Characteristics of Delta County.**

**Introduction**

Delta County is a rural community as defined by both objective and subjective measurements. 23 percent of the County workforce is employed in agriculture. 54 percent of the County residents live in the unincorporated area which has a population density of 26 persons per

square mile. All of these are objective criteria for defining a rural community.

But a rural lifestyle is not measured solely by objective criteria. There is a sense of community, e.g. how people view the community in which they live, their relationships with their neighbors, their philosophy of how community interrelationships work and the pace of their daily activities. The residents of Delta County perceive themselves as living in a community that values hard work, self-reliance, honesty, involvement in civic activities and a caring attitude about their neighbors.

A rural lifestyle also includes the natural resources that are associated with a rural landscape. The planning areas identified wildlife habitat and migration corridors, open space, agricultural lands, clean air, scenic viewsheds, wetlands and riparian areas. In addition, Delta County has unique and diverse land forms and a topography that varies from high mountain peaks to semi-arid adobe badlands. The two major rivers, the Gunnison and the Uncompahgre, add to this unique landscape through the constant reshaping of the land.

### Issues

The area planning committees were virtually unanimous in their desire to preserve and maintain the County's rural character. The major issues are:

- **Density.** A rural community is defined, in part, by its population density. The current population density in the unincorporated areas of Delta County is 26 persons per square mile. However, given the different resources and values within each of the planning areas, opinions differ as to what the density level should be. What density level can be supported by the County road system and services? What is the carrying capacity of the local landscape and natural resource base?
- **Natural Resources.** Development can change the rural landscape and natural resources if measures are not taken to protect these resources. Does the County have the tools and resources available to preserve the environmental character of the County and still accommodate a reasonable rate of growth and respect individual property rights?
- **Rural Sprawl.** Few things change the rural character or affect its natural resources more than the conversion of the natural areas to development. Although most residents take such resources for granted in their daily lives, they are strongly affected when such lands and resources begin to sprout buildings and parking lots. Rural sprawl impacts agricultural viability, reduces open space and increases wildlife pressure on remaining agricultural lands. It is difficult and expensive for local governments to provide services for rural sprawl.

### Goal Statement

**Preserve the rural character and natural environment, and protect the unique physical resources of Delta County through programs that provide an equitable balance of preservation and respect for individual property rights**

### Policies:

- A. Establish a range of densities appropriate for each planning area within the County.**

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Undertake the research and analysis necessary to objectively define a rural population and recommend that each planning area establish density levels appropriate for its community vision and the carrying capacity of its natural and manmade resources.
2. Prepare an objective public information program on the advantages and disadvantages of a density limitation for Delta County. Use reasonable growth rates or target year population limits (year 2020?) as a basis for the density calculations. Present alternatives including, (a) no new regulations, (b) voluntary growth management strategies and (c) additional and more restrictive land use regulations such as zoning.
3. Undertake infrastructure (capital improvements) planning and service delivery programs for the designated rural areas that are tailored to meet only rural needs.

- B. Inventory and classify the physical features and environmental resources of the County..**

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Collect and analyze the data necessary to map the significant physical features and environmental characteristics of the County. The data base should include, at a minimum; areas of steep or unstable slopes, soils, floodplains, wetlands and riparian areas, critical watersheds, wildlife migration paths and (critical) winter habitat, important scenic viewsheds and areas with a high potential for wildfires.

2. Develop criteria for assessing the impact of new development on the significant physical features and critical environmental resources. Utilize mapped data and impact assessments to designate areas as “more” and “less” suitable for development.

**C. Identify the developmental pressures that could threaten the preservation of the important physical features and environmental resources of the County.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. The County staff should work with agencies and/or groups associated with the different resources to identify those types of land uses that may have direct and negative impact on the significant physical features or resources.
2. Develop mitigation standards or development restrictions to minimize the adverse impact of development on each specific resource.

**D. Develop programs and resources that provide compensation and/or incentives to landowners who preserve resources and restrict development.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. Prepare a resource manual that includes the full range of incentives and compensation available to landowners who withhold land from development. This would include programs from other agencies such as: the Colorado Division of Wildlife, federal and state agricultural programs, land trusts, the Nature Conservancy and private foundations.
2. Develop a Resource Preservation Program to provide landowners who elect to preserve specific natural resources an expedited development review process.
3. Develop a Landowner Outreach Program that is designed to educate landowners about all the development options before they proceed to develop their land.

**E. Utilize existing regulations to preserve and protect the significant physical features and environmental resources of Delta County,**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. Inventory and review existing regulations, i.e., subdivision, floodplain, Area of State Interest (1041 powers), to determine their effectiveness in preventing or mitigating the adverse impacts of new development.

2. Develop a local planning area review process for any change of land use or new development and develop mitigation standards to minimize the potential negative impacts on resources identified as important to maintaining a rural character, e.g. wildlife, agricultural lands, riparian areas and open space.

**III. Encourage New Development to Locate In Areas with Adequate Infrastructure and Require that Development Pay Its Own Way**

**Introduction**

This position is derived from concerns that were reflected in the planning area committees' meetings and draft plans. The intent is to deal with the pace and impact of growth as it relates to public infrastructure and services, and, to identify the real costs of growth in order to require that those who cause or benefit from growth also pay the costs.

The concern over the impacts of growth and the financial responsibility for those impacts is supported by the costs of corresponding improvements to the infrastructure and the increased demand for County services. According to current information released by the Census Bureau, the County's 1995 population has increased by 19.6 percent since 1990 or an average annual growth rate of 4 percent. The State Demographer's office has projected that Delta County's average annual growth rate will be at 2.5 percent through the year 2010. For the past several years, however, Delta County has exceeded the State Demographer's estimates. The planning area committees have expressed major concerns over the impacts of an annual growth rate that exceeds 2 percent.

**Issues:**

- **County Infrastructure and Services.** The increasing population and residential development is outstripping the County's ability to improve and maintain the County road system. A road system designed to accommodate traditional farm-to-market demands is now expected to accommodate commuter traffic. The Sheriff's Department, staffed to deal with the level and complexity of rural crime, is now expected to respond to calls that are more urban in character. Emergency services are finding it more and more difficult to access and properly fight fires that are occurring in areas attractive for new development but isolated from adequate infrastructure.
- **Domestic Water.** The unincorporated areas of the County are mostly served by small water providers that are designed to serve a rural, farm or ranch community. They have limited available water resources and lack financial capability to expand services. Most cannot meet current minimum water pressures for fire protection. The result has been moratoriums or limitations on domestic water taps, which has resulted in requests to approve sources of domestic water that are generally not acceptable.



- **Sewage Disposal.** The common sewage disposal method in the unincorporated area is individual septic tank/leach field systems. This is adequate for areas of low density and suitable soils. The growing demand for smaller lots without regard to soils suitability is creating concern about the possibility of groundwater and surface water contamination. Compounding this, problem is the inability of some municipalities to expand their municipal sewer service.
- **Fire Protection.** The inability of many water providers to supply adequate pressure, and undersized water lines place unusual burdens on the local Fire Protection Districts. In addition, some County roads are not always able to handle modern fire trucks because they are too narrow, are not constructed to meet all-weather road standards and have steep grades.
- **Schools.** The school enrollment in Delta County increased by 838 students between 1990 and 1995. This is an annualized rate of over 4.2 percent which exceeds the population growth rate. The School District presently has classroom capacity for 444 students. The overall system is at 91 percent of capacity but there are several schools that are in excess of 96 percent. Garnet Mesa and Delta High School are over their rated capacity.
- **Housing.** Affordable housing and safe housing were issues that were raised at the County level. At this time there is a county-wide housing task force that is addressing the lack of affordable housing, senior housing and safe housing issues. This was not seen as an issue to be addressed at this time in the Master Plan.

The lack of standards for mobile homes in Delta County and the influx of older mobile homes that have been restricted from neighboring counties was raised in most planning areas. Mobile homes were recognized as an acceptable form of affordable housing that should be integrated into a community rather than segregated in mobile home parks, if health and safety standards are met.

- **Transportation.** The automobile is the primary source of transportation in Delta County and is likely to remain so. Public transportation is unlikely to become a significant factor in the County within the near future. Delta County participates in the Gunnison Valley Transportation Planning Region. The Region has developed a 20 year plan for addressing public transit and intermodal transportation issues, and meets regularly to review and implement the local and regional objectives of the Plan.

The County's current transportation issues concern the County road system. The County road system is managed by three separate Road and Bridge Districts that are responsible for road improvements and road maintenance. Transportation as an issue separate from the County road system and capital improvements program is not addressed in this Master Plan.

### Goal Statement

**The growth policies of Delta County should ensure that the financial impacts of new development are paid by those who benefit, and that development is directed to those areas where there is adequate infrastructure and services.**

### Policies

- A. New development must be fiscally equitable in that the investment in public facilities and services is an obligation of the developer and not subsidized by existing residents.**

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Develop a fiscal impact model that assesses the costs and benefits of new development and the cumulative effect of all subdivisions on rural services and facilities.
2. Require that any fiscal inequities be addressed as part of the development review process.

- B. Development should occur in and near municipalities where adequate infrastructure is available and services can be efficiently provided.**

#### Implementation Strategies

1. the County and the municipalities should establish joint planning areas that define the urban service boundaries around each town.
2. Municipalities should be encouraged to allow the expansion of their water and sewer service areas, to accommodate a reasonable rate of growth.
3. The County should require that residents who benefit from any extension of municipal utility services must pay the costs of those extensions.
4. Utility service districts should be formed to finance the improvements necessary for the expansion of municipal utility services.
5. The County should explore an "Adequate Public Facilities" requirement for new development.

- C. **The County Capital Improvement Plan should help implement the Master Plan by directing capital investment in ways that encourage sound growth management and by ensuring that the population standards for public infrastructure and services are adequate.**

#### **Implementation Strategies**

1. Develop a county-wide road improvement plan with input from local planning areas to prioritize road improvements and develop a long-range schedule for such improvements.
2. Develop a county-wide water and sewer plan that contains an inventory of existing domestic water and sewer resources and identifies opportunities and constraints for expansion of such systems throughout the County.
3. Update the existing County Capital Improvements Plan to ensure that existing public infrastructure, e.g. parks, libraries, roads, water, sewer, fire protection, administrative and maintenance facilities meet the standards for current and projected population growth.

- D. **In areas of less intensive development emphasis should be placed on the adequacy of the existing County roads and fire protection services.**

#### **Implementation Strategies**

1. Develop a county road classification system that establishes minimum travel safety and grade thresholds for existing County roads. New development should keep within these thresholds. If not, such development should pay for upgrading the road(s).
2. Where water main sizes, storage or pressure is inadequate for minimal fire safety standards, alternative mitigation standards should be established.

### **IV Protect Private Property Rights**

#### **Introduction**

All of the Planning Area Committees call for the preservation of property rights for all property owners. This is a value strongly embraced by the citizens of Delta County. Land use planning and land use controls, however, limit property rights. Land use planning reflects community goals that may conflict with property rights. The Planning Area Committees, in recognizing this conflict, have identified these issues.

#### **Issues**

- How can the County ensure the preservation of basic property rights and still engage in responsible planning and management of growth?
- How can the right of a property owner to use and enjoy his property be balanced with the rights of neighboring property owners to be protected against potentially adverse impacts on their property or their property values?
- How can individual property owners' rights to use and enjoy their land be balanced against the need and desire to protect and preserve the physical, economic and environmental resources that are valued by the majority of the residents of Delta County?
- How can individual property owner be protected against land use controls that demand unrealistic compliance and processing requirements?
- How can the County ensure that land use regulations that are designed to implement the Master Plan are responding to a real problem or the high potential of a real problem?

#### **Goal Statement**

**The right to use, enjoy and protect property should not be diminished by policies and regulations that are not consistent with the goals and objectives of this Master Plan**

#### **Policies**

- A. **Any land use regulation or restriction adopted by the County must necessarily either:**
- (a) **protect the public health and safety,**
  - (b) **make fair and efficient use of public funds or**
  - (c) **provide for the orderly division, sale, development and financing of private property consistent with the goals and objectives of this Master Plan.**

#### **Implementation Strategies**

1. **Burden of Proof.** Implementation of the subdivision regulations and other County land use regulations will assume that a particular division or use of land should be authorized unless the division of land or use would violate existing regulations, would adversely impact neighboring property owners or residents, or contradict the goals and objectives of the Master Plan.

2. The County should offer a variety of development options and incentives to landowners who develop, or who pursue the goals and objectives of this Plan.

**B. The right to develop and improve private property does not constitute the right to physically damage or adversely impact the property or property value or neighboring landowners.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. In the implementation of the County's land use regulations the compatibility of a new development with the existing land uses should be given priority consideration.
2. In cases where there is incompatibility between an existing and a proposed land use, the property right of the existing use should be given priority.

**C. The right to own and use private property should not be adversely affected by unreasonably complex land use regulations or an unreasonable time frame for review.**

**Implementation Strategies**

1. All land use regulations should have a precise statement of intent and purpose and should be written clearly and concisely.
2. Land use cases should include findings and be processed within a reasonable time frame. This time should be directly proportional to the complexity of the case and available staff resources.
3. The County should develop a faster mechanism for property transfers within families, yet provide for the eventuality, that such parcels may be sold on the open market.

**V. Promote an economic climate that increases job opportunity and overall economic well being.**

**Introduction**

The preservation and enhancement of the County's economic base is a prerequisite to achieving the goals of the Master Plan. The environment and rural lifestyle valued by the County residents depend on the availability of employment, jobs that pay a "living wage", and an economy that can provide basic goods and services. Experience has shown that the planning vision of a community suffers in economic downturns when planning standards are sacrificed for economic reasons.

The planning area committees recognize the critical interrelationship between the planning vision and the economy, and have identified these issues.

**Issues**

- Colorado's Western Slope economy has a history of "boom and bust" caused primarily by the cyclical nature of resource extraction industries such as mining. Delta County has been more fortunate than some areas because its strong agricultural base has cushioned the impact of these cycles. While mining will continue to be an important part of the County's economy, technological advances have increased production with fewer miners. Recently, the timbering and wood products industry in Delta County have declined. So the future of the traditional natural resource industries in the County is unpredictable and will be influenced more by national policy decisions and global economic trends than local efforts.
- There can be conflicts between the County's landscape and environmental goals and its economic development. Care must be taken to balance sound physical planning to protect environmental resources with realistic economic development.

**Goal Statement**

**Promote and maintain a stable and diversified economic base that builds on local resources to sustain and expand existing businesses and create new business opportunities that are compatible with the quality of life valued by the residents of Delta County.**

**Policies**

- A. Encourage retention and expansion of existing businesses. Encourage new and different business opportunities and commercial, industrial and recreational activities that enhance existing resources and support and stimulate the County's economic base.**

**Implementation Strategy**

The County should support the research necessary to determine how small local businesses can be assisted in their expansion efforts and how new enterprises could be started. The County should also support the business outreach programs designed to assist existing or potential new businesses.

- B. Recognize that economic, development planning requires different skills and experience from land use planning, and that the primary responsibility for economic development lies with the focal and regional economic development organizations and the private sector.**

### **Implementation Strategy**

The County should give clear direction to the area planning committees and County staff that the responsibility for economic development planning lies with those local organizations that possess the necessary skills and experience.

- C. Provide for cooperation between those involved in the planning process and the economic development organizations in order to coordinate economic development with the goals of the Master Plan.**

### **Implementation Strategies**

1. Provide for liaison between those involved in economic development planning and the planning area committee involved in the Master Plan.
2. Provide the economic development planners with the general criteria that has been established by the planning area committees concerning what types of economic growth to encourage and what types to avoid.

## PART THREE: IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Part III contains a suggested implementation schedule for completing the strategies recommended in Part II to accomplish the goals of the Master Plan. The strategies are condensed and listed under each major goal. The page number is noted where each strategy is stated in more specific detail. A time frame suggested to complete each strategy. For strategies that are on-going, no specific date is noted. The Implementation schedule suggests entities or organization that may be responsible for implementing each strategy. The Implementation schedule is not carved in stone and is only a suggested schedule to provide guidance to the County, its citizens and other entities that have a stake in the implementation of this Master Plan.

### GOAL 1: PRESERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND AGRICULTURAL OPERATION

	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES	PAGE	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBILITY
1.	Identify and map important agricultural lands in each planning area	4	1997-1998	County/Planning Areas
2.	Explore the feasibility of a Transferable Development Rights Program/ Pilot Project	4	When funding/ grant allows	County/Planning Area
3.	Establish liaison with agencies that advocate agricultural land preservation	5	1997-1998	Land Trust/GOCO/County
4.	Provide flexibility in subdivision review process	5	1996-1997	County
5.	Provide financial support for promotional and marketing programs	5	On-going	County/Ec. Dev. Orgs. /Try River Extension
6.	Identify & publicize economic contributions of agricultural related businesses	5	On-going	County/Ec. Dev. Orgs. /Tri River Extension
7.	Conduct research/develop programs to add value to agricultural products	5		
8.	Encourage local economic development organizations to support value-added industries	5	On-going	DADI, Region 10
9.	County should recognize primary status of agriculture in adopting or revising County regulations	5	On-going	County
10.	Work with ag organizations to identify land uses that have negative impact on agriculture	5	Immediate	County/local agricultural assns.
11.	Develop local review process for a change of land use or new development	5	Immediate	County, Planning Areas
12.	Include preservation of agriculture in the "Purpose" of existing regulations	5	Immediate	County
13.	Direct growth and infrastructure to protect productive agricultural lands	5	Immediate	County
14.	Adopt a "Right to Farm" ordinance and educate newcomers about agricultural practices	5	Immediate	County

### GOAL 2: PRESERVATION OF RURAL LIFESTYLE AND RURAL LANDSCAPE

	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES	PAGE	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBILITY
1.	Define a rural population and establish density levels for each planning area	6	1997-1999	Planning areas/County
2.	Prepare an objective public information program on density limitations in Delta County	6	1997	County
3.	Undertake capital improvements planning for rural areas that meets rural needs	6	On-going	County/Planning areas
4.	Map the significant physical features and natural resources of each Planning Area	6	1997-1998	County/Planning Areas
5.	Develop criteria for assessing impact of new development on physical features/environmental Resources	6	1997-1998	County/Planning Areas
6.	Work with resource representatives to identify land uses that may have adverse impact on resources,	6	1997-1998	County/Area Resource & Public Agencies
7.	Develop mitigation standards to minimize adverse impact of development on resources	6	1997-1998	County/Planning Areas/Resource Agencies
8.	Prepare resource manual of incentives available to landowners who protect resources	7	1998	County Planning
9.	Develop a Resource Preservation Program to provide expedited review process	7	1996-1997	County
10.	Develop a Landowner Outreach Program to educate landowners of development options	7	1997-1998	County
11.	Review existing regulations to determine effectiveness in mitigating impacts on resources	7	1997	County Planning/Staff/Attorney
12.	Develop local review process for any change of land use/new development	7	1998	County/Planning Areas

### GOAL 3: ENCOURAGE NEW DEVELOPMENT TO LOCATE IN AREAS WITH ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE/PAY OWN WAY

	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES	PAGE	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBILITY
1.	Develop a fiscal impact model to assess costs/benefits of new development	8	1998	Planning Staff
2.	Address fiscal inequities as part of development review process	8	Ongoing	County
3.	Establish joint planning areas with County and municipalities	8	1997-2000	Planning Commission/Municipalities
4.	Encourage municipalities to allow expansion of water and sewer service areas to accommodate reasonable rate of growth	8	On-going	County/Municipalities
5.	Require residents who benefit from utility extensions pay for the extensions	8	On-going	County
6.	Establish utility service districts to finance improvements for municipal extensions	8	As needed	Residents/Developers
7.	Consider an "Adequate Public Facilities" ordinance to direct new development	8	1998	Attorney/Planning Staff
8.	Develop a county-wide road improvement plan		1997-1998	Road and Bridge/Commissioners/Planning Areas
9.	Develop a county-wide water and sewer plan	8	1998-1999	Planning Staff/Water/Sewer Providers
10.	Update the existing County Capital Improvements Plan	8	1997	County/Planning Areas
11.	Develop a County road classification system	9	1997	Road & Bridge/Commissioners
12.	Establish minimum mitigation standards for fire safety in areas with inadequate water supply	9	1996-1997	FireDept/Planning/Commissioners

### GOAL 4: PROTECT PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES	PAGE	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBILITY
1.	Assume new development/change of land use is permissible unless it violates regulations, adversely impacts neighboring property owners or contradicts goals of the Master Plan	9	Ongoing	Planning Commission/Commissioners
2.	Offer a variety of development options and incentives to landowners	9	Ongoing	Planning Commission/Commissioners
3.	Give priority consideration to the compatibility of new development with existing development	9	Ongoing	Planning Commission/Commissioners
4.	Give priority to property right of existing land use when there is incompatibility with new	9	Ongoing	Planning Commission/Commissioners
5.	Land use regulations should have statement of intent and purpose and be written clearly and concisely	9	Ongoing	Planning Commission/Commissioners
6.	Provide findings and process land use cases in a timely manner	10	Ongoing	Planning Commission/Commissioner
7.	Develop a faster mechanism for property transfers within families	10	1996-1997	County

### GOAL 5: PROMOTE AN ECONOMIC CLIMATE THAT INCREASES OVERALL ECONOMIC WELL BEING

	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES	PAGE	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBILITY
1.	Support new and existing business development to stimulate the County's economic base	10	Ongoing	Government/Private Sector/Education/SBDC
2.	Acknowledge that economic development planning lies with organizations with those skills	10	Ongoing	County/Planning Area/EcDevAssn
3.	Provide for liaison between economic development organizations and planning areas	10	Ongoing	County/Planning Area/EcDevAssn.
4.	Provide economic development planners with economic development criteria established by planning areas	10	On-going	County/Planning Area/EcDevAssn.

# Proposed Delta County Planning Areas

- Planning Area Boundary
- County Boundary
- Roads
- Highways
- Major Rivers
- Lakes
- Towns

