



# 2026 NORTHEAST COLORADO

## INTERSECTIONS



PURSUING COMMUNITY  
WELL-BEING



COLORADO STATE  
UNIVERSITY



NoCo Foundation  
Community is Our Business

## Welcome to the Northeast Colorado Intersections Report

Northeast Colorado has long played a vital role in shaping our state, feeding communities, powering economies, stewarding land and water, and strengthening the fabric of rural life. The contributions of Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties extend far beyond their borders, and the work taking place here matters deeply to Colorado's future.

This report reflects what we know to be true: Northeast Colorado is defined by resilience, ingenuity, and a strong sense of responsibility to one another. Through conversations, data, and shared reflection, we see clearly the impact of generations of hard work, and the opportunity ahead to support communities as they continue to adapt and lead.

As Colorado's land-grant university, Colorado State University has a mission to advance teaching, research, and service to improve the quality of life for people in Colorado, across the nation, and around the world. In partnership with the NoCo Foundation, we share a deep commitment to listening first and working alongside local leaders, producers, educators, nonprofit partners, and residents.

At the NoCo Foundation, our work is not just about today; it's about tomorrow and the success of future generations. We are committed to the Northeast Colorado region and the people who created its strong foundation. When regional institutions and community members collaborate with trust and purpose, the results can be galvanizing, expanding opportunity while honoring what makes each place unique.

We are proud to stand alongside the communities of Northeast Colorado and are grateful for the insight that shaped this report. Our leadership teams and colleagues remain committed to ongoing collaboration that recognizes the region's contributions, supports its priorities, and helps ensure that the legacy being built here continues to make a difference for generations to come.

With appreciation,



*Amy L. Parsons*

**Amy Parsons**  
President,  
Colorado State University



*Kristin Todd*

**Kristin Todd**  
President & CEO,  
NoCo Foundation

## If you've spent any time in Northeast Colorado, you know this already: people here take care of each other.

Neighbors pitch in, show up, and find a way forward, even when the road isn't easy. This region is shaped by wide-open spaces, hard work, deep roots, and a strong sense of responsibility to place and people.

### The Northeast Colorado Intersections Report grew out of listening.

Over the past year, we've had conversations with residents, local leaders, nonprofit partners, educators, producers, and community members from across the region. We heard pride in what makes Northeast Colorado special, and honesty about the pressures communities are facing. This report brings those voices together with data to help tell a fuller story of who we are and where we're headed.

Rather than looking at issues in isolation, this report highlights the fact that issues intersect every day in real people's lives. By organizing the report around six shared intersections, we hope to make those connections easier to see and talk about.

### This isn't a report meant to sit on a shelf.

It's meant to be used, as a conversation starter, a planning tool, a shared reference point, and a way to work better together across county lines and sectors. Whether you're shaping policy, leading an organization, running a ranch, teaching students, or simply caring about the future of your community, we hope you'll find something here that resonates.

Most of all, we hope this report reflects the spirit of Northeast Colorado: practical, thoughtful, and grounded in relationships. The challenges are real, but so are the capacity, creativity, and care that exists across this region.

Thank you for being part of this story.

With gratitude,



*John Chapdelaine*

**John Chapdelaine**  
Vice President, Eastern Colorado  
NoCo Foundation



*Tim Stahley*

**Tim Stahley**  
Director,  
Northeast Regional Engagement Center  
Colorado State University Office of  
Engagement and Extension

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Grit and Resilience are Ingrained in Northeast Colorado

Northeast Colorado (sometimes also referred to as NECO in this report) is a region defined by resilience.

Across the six counties located at the northeast corner of Colorado, people have built strong communities in a place shaped by agriculture, weather, distance, and deep ties to the land. This region feeds the country, produces energy, steward's water resources, and sustains a way of life rooted in independence, responsibility, and care for neighbors.

At the same time, Northeast Colorado is facing real and growing pressures. Across the region, strength and strain exist side by side.

Economic uncertainty, water scarcity, aging infrastructure, workforce shortages, rising costs of living, limited access to healthcare and childcare, and increased exposure to weather-related hazards all affect daily life across the region. These challenges don't stop at county lines, and they rarely exist on their own.

Agriculture remains the backbone of the regional economy and identity, producing outsized value with a relatively small population. Energy production, including renewables, continues to evolve, bringing both opportunity and concern. Communities value their safety, relationships, and quality of life, yet face growing gaps in healthcare access, childcare availability, housing options, and infrastructure capacity.

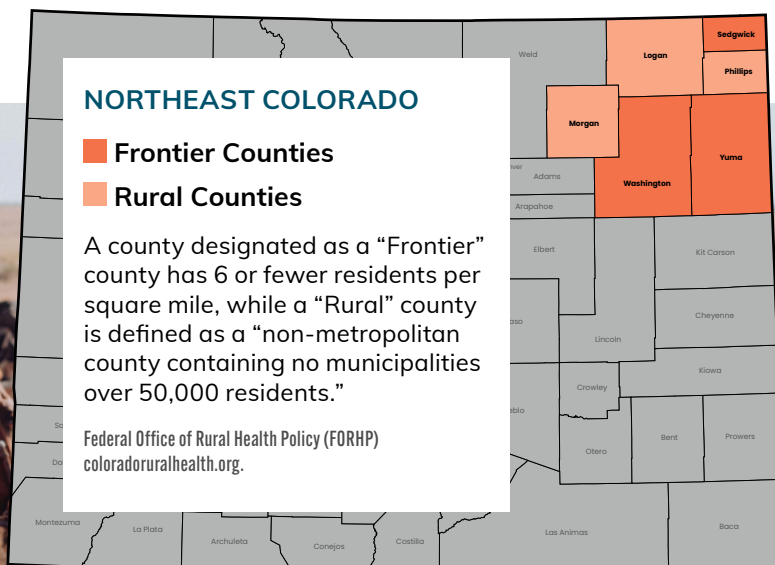
Demographic shifts, including an aging population and changes in workforce composition, are reshaping communities. At the same time, schools, churches, volunteer networks, and local organizations continue to serve as vital anchors of connection and care.

These are meaty issues. No single community or sector can address these challenges alone. Regional collaboration, grounded in local identity and shared respect, is both necessary and possible.

## Northeast Colorado Intersections

The Northeast Colorado Intersections Report was created to help make sense of this complexity.

This report brings together regional data and community perspectives to tell a shared story of well-being and resilience. It reflects what we heard from residents, leaders, and partners through regional conversations, workshops, surveys, and interviews, alongside publicly available data and local knowledge. We did not include all of the data and perspectives we found in this report. Instead, we focus on telling the story of the opportunities and challenges being felt across the region right now. The goal is not to rank communities or prescribe solutions, but to provide a common foundation for understanding, and a starting point for working together.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Executive Summary ..... 2
- Overview of NECO Region & Focus on Well-Being/Resiliency ..... 4
- Framework Introduction ..... 5
- Community Intersections ..... 6
  - Nourishing:** Agriculture, energy, food security, and the natural systems that sustain life ..... 7
  - Sheltering & Caring:** housing, healthcare, childcare, aging, and support for vulnerable populations ..... 16
  - Transacting:** rural economies, workforce, infrastructure, and how people access jobs and services ..... 23
  - Connecting:** education, social connection, mental health, and belonging ..... 28
  - Beautifying:** culture, arts, heritage, conservation, and recreation that make places meaningful ..... 32
  - Renewing:** civic engagement, philanthropy, leadership, and community contribution ..... 36
- Moving Forward Together ..... 40
- Sponsors & Team Recognition ..... 41
- Sources ..... 41



info@nocofoundation.org  
nocofoundation.org



colostate.edu

# THE NORTHEAST COLORADO REGION

The broader Northeast Colorado (NECO) Region, is made up of a wide geography, but a common essence exists: one of grit, tenacity, and resilience. The area is facing some tensions and challenges, but the community has and will always figure out how to thrive.

Resiliency is apparent across all scales, regional down through community to local organizations, families, and individuals, and lies at the heart of well-being.

## Definition of Resilience

*(from Colorado Resiliency Office):*

**“The ability of communities to rebound, positively adapt to, or to thrive amidst changing conditions or challenges—including human-caused and natural disasters—and to maintain a quality of life, healthy growth, durable systems, economic vitality, and conservation of resources for present and future generations.”**



## WELL-BEING & RESILIENCY ACROSS SCALES

Well-being is multi-dimensional and resiliency involves all aspects of well-being. Generating and maintaining well-being and resiliency happens at the intersection of “who we are” and “where we want to go”. It takes continued action, participation, and contribution—it is a way of living.



People in the NECO Region are already doing this every day by creating close-knit, welcoming communities, building on trust & responsibility, pitching in to help and take care of one another, being proud and able to contribute a hard day’s work for the benefit of all.

## The Framework: Life’s Processes for Generating Well-Being

In Northeast Colorado, well-being isn’t created by any one program, policy, or organization.

It’s created in the everyday intersections of life—where work meets home, where land meets water, where community meets care, and where people come together to solve shared problems. These intersections look different from place to place, but they are deeply connected across the region.

This report uses a simple framework to help make those connections visible.

Rather than organizing information by sector or agency, we look at six key processes where well-being and resilience are built and sustained:

- Nourishing
- Sheltering & Caring
- Transacting
- Connecting
- Beautifying
- Renewing

These six processes are where issues intersect with each other and with our daily lives. The framework is meant to be practical, not theoretical. It’s a way to:

- See how challenges overlap
- Understand why solutions in one area affect others
- Identify opportunities for collaboration that reflect real life, not silos
- Reveal where potential interventions may intersect with several interconnected issues and achieve bigger impacts

**Together, these six intersections tell a more complete story of the regions.**



Photo by Sadie Fritzier



Photo by Sadie Fritzier

# COMMUNITY INTERSECTIONS

Life in Northeast Colorado doesn't happen in silos. When one system is strained, others feel it too. This report looks at Northeast Colorado through six key "intersections" where well-being and resilience are created. These intersections reflect both what residents told us matters most and what the data shows shapes daily life in Northeast Colorado. This framework was originally developed by the Regenes Institute for Regenerative Practice and adapted for this work by the Living Regions Lab in CSU's Institute for the Built Environment.



## NOURISHING

The process of providing essential nutrients, resources, or positive influence that contributes to the overall health, vitality, and flourishing of an individual, relationship, or system.



## CONNECTING

The process of sharing a common experience, state, or bond with others, which may include spiritual, emotional, or cultural connections and gathering, conversing, and/or sharing a common experience, state, or bond.



## SHELTERING & CARING

The process of providing a place of respite and protection, enabling individuals to find temporary or permanent relief from adverse circumstances.



## BEAUTIFYING

The process of enhancing, improving, or adorning to emphasize desirable features and/or to express significance, meaning, or value.



## TRANSACTING

The process of exchanging goods, services, or information with the intention of fulfilling a particular need, desire, or objective.



## RENEWING

The process of continuing and bettering our communities through civic engagement, philanthropy, volunteerism, and renewing both ourselves and the world around us.



# NOURISHING

How do we care for the resources that care for us?

## What sustains life and livelihoods in Northeast Colorado

In Northeast Colorado (NECO), nourishing begins with the land and extends to the systems that keep communities strong. NECO is highly productive, deeply knowledgeable, and increasingly stretched.

Agriculture, energy, water, and weather are not abstract concepts here, they shape daily life and anchor the region's identity and economy. These systems sustain livelihoods, support families, and connect Northeast Colorado to the rest of the nation. The region contributes food, energy, and water far beyond its borders, while carrying much of the risk locally.

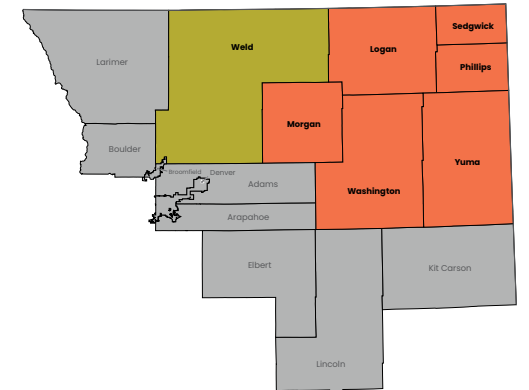
Strengthening these systems means balancing production with stewardship, innovation with tradition, and regional needs with external demands. Decisions about land affect water. Weather influences production. Energy development intersects with agriculture and community planning. At the same time, these systems face growing pressures from drought, shifting markets, and policy changes.

Water, energy, food, and land decisions cross county lines and sectors, underscoring the need for collaboration. Addressing them well depends on shared understanding, trusted relationships, and solutions grounded in rural realities.

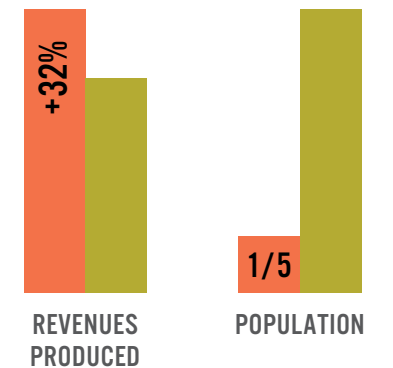
### Agriculture: The Backbone of the Region

Agriculture is the foundation of Northeast Colorado's economy and identity. When production, processing, and related industries are included, agriculture supports **nearly half of all jobs in the region**. Five of the six counties rank among Colorado's top agricultural producers, with several also ranking in the top 100 producers nationally. While nearby Weld County is the top agricultural producing county in the state, the NECO region produced more in agricultural revenues than Weld County with a much smaller population. This reveals how important agriculture is in this region, as well as the incredible productivity of its people. Despite a relatively small population, the region produces outsized agricultural value.

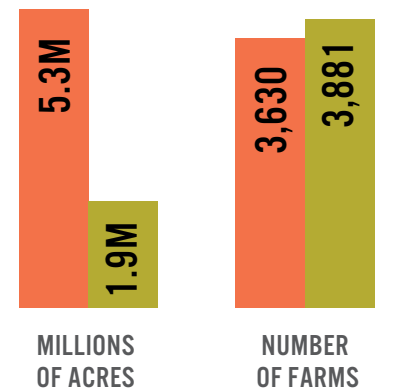
Livestock dominates in some counties, while crops play a larger role in others, reflecting both landscape and long-standing expertise. Residents consistently describe agriculture as more than work. It is tradition, stewardship, and pride passed down through generations. At the same time, producers are navigating rising costs, labor shortages, water constraints, and market uncertainty, making long-term planning more complex than ever.



NECO Weld County



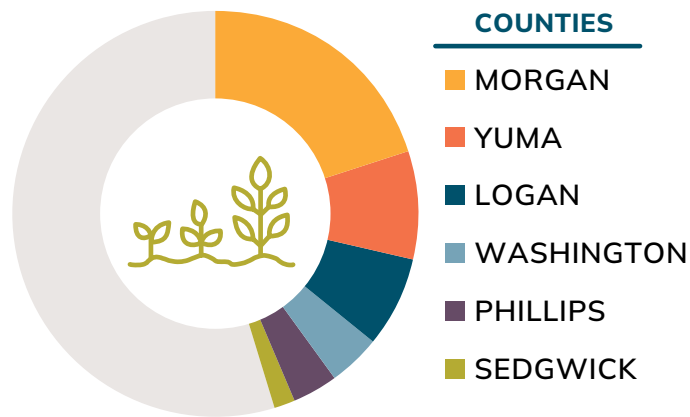
More than \$44,000 in revenue per capita per year for NECO



# AGRICULTURE

## Agriculture and Food Production

Top industry in NECO region, providing **45% of all regional jobs**



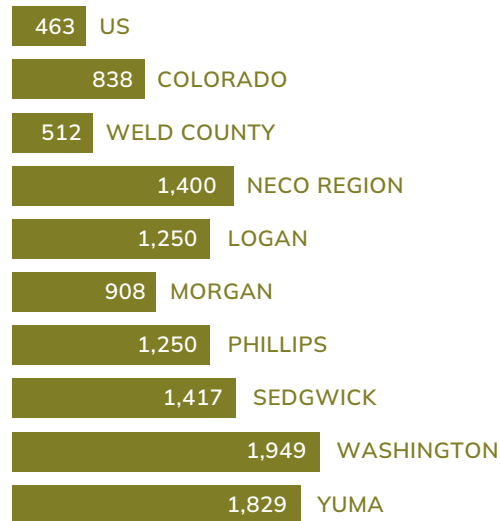
Five of the six counties are in the **TOP 10 AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS** in Colorado, with **YUMA COUNTY #2 IN THE STATE**, just behind Weld County.



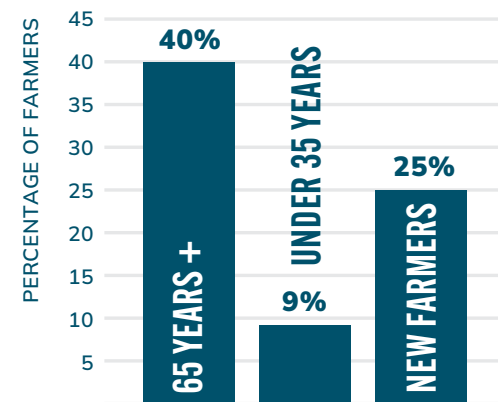
Weld County is ranked #11 in the Nation (as of 2022), but the **NECO region is outproducing Weld County by 32%** with only 1/5 the population and 2/3 more land (Weld = 1,987,213ac; NECO region = 5,319,497ac).

**Ag Revenue**  
NECO: \$44,000 per capita  
Weld County: \$6,800 per capita

## Average Farm Size in Acres



## Ages/Experience of NECO Farmers



USDA Census of Agriculture defines "new farmers" as farmers who have operated a farm or ranch for fewer than 10 years.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THIS REGION WITH WELD COUNTY IS IMPORTANT, AS WELD COUNTY HAS MORE PEOPLE, MORE ENERGY, AND MORE RESOURCES, BUT SIMILAR INTERESTS.

Statistics: 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture

YUMA COUNTY (#47) is in the **TOP 50 PRODUCING COUNTIES** in the nation, while MORGAN (#84) and LOGAN (#91) are in the **TOP 100**

## YUMA COUNTY

Top in the state in the production of hogs & pigs as well as grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas—producing more of these crops than Weld County, and #2 (behind Weld) for cattle & calves, ranking #18 in the nation for cattle and calves.

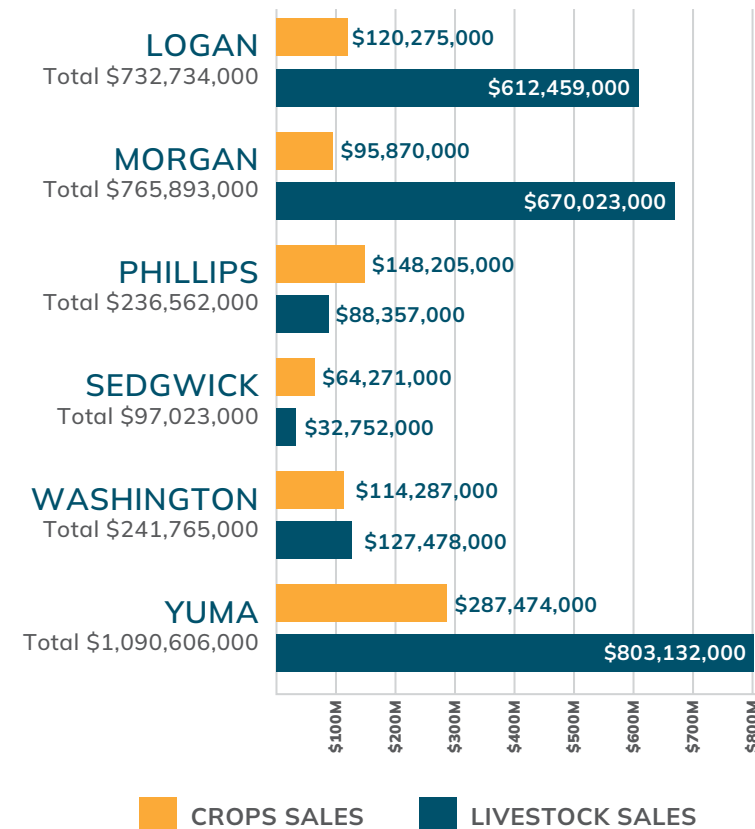
## LOGAN COUNTY

#3 in the state and #22 in the nation for cattle and calves.

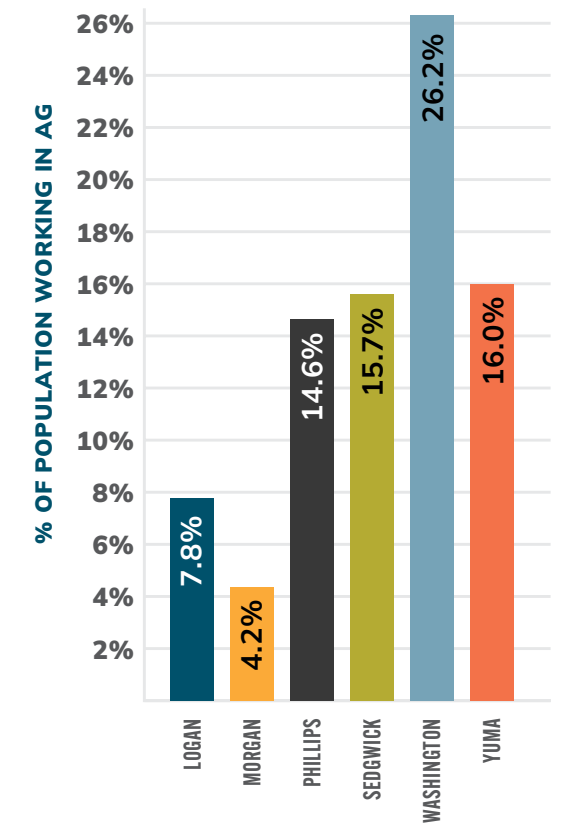
## MORGAN COUNTY

#2 in the state in milk production (behind Weld) and in the top 50 in the nation (#42).

## Ag Revenues by County

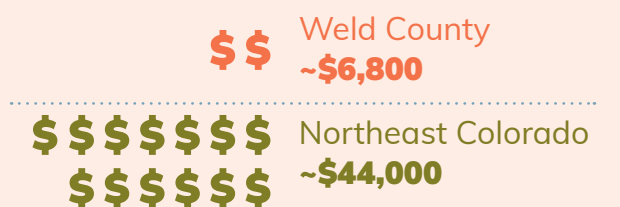


## Ag Employees by County



Agriculture in Logan, Morgan, and Yuma counties are dominated by livestock sales, while crops are dominant in Phillips & Sedgwick counties. Washington county is nearly 50/50 with a slight dominance in livestock sales.

## Ag Revenues Per Capita



Statistics: 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture

## Food Security: Producing Food, Facing Gaps

Even in a region that produces so much food, not everyone has reliable access to it. A higher share of residents report food insecurity compared to the state average. Use of nutrition assistance programs and food banks varies by county, but food access remains a concern, particularly for seniors, families with children, and people living far from grocery stores. This contrast highlights an important reality: food production does not automatically equal food access. Transportation, income, housing costs, and health all influence whether people can consistently get the food they need.



SNAP enrollment in Northeast Colorado counties are nearly **16% of the population.**

The average across all Coloradans is **10%.**

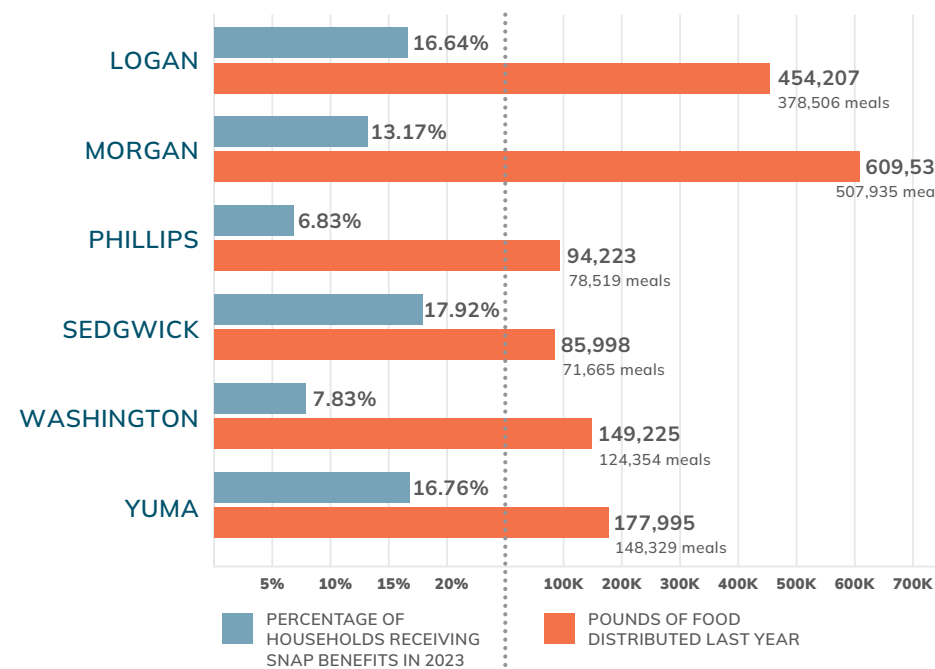


**Food Insecurity:**  
**14%**

in this region reported eating less than they should because they could not afford food.

The average across all Coloradans is **10.5%.**

### Snap Benefits and Food Distribution



“For generations, people from around the world have been drawn to the Northeastern plains of Colorado to grow food. From backyard gardens, to family farms and ranches, to global leaders in agriculture, the food grown and shared has been as richly diverse as those who raise and tend it. At United Way we imagine our region once again, as a food oasis, rather than a food desert, where we welcome and celebrate all who arrive in Morgan County with unique stories, traditions, and skills rooted in agriculture. Growing enough healthy food to feed our NECO community is possible if we grow together.”



Sue Boyett,  
Executive Director,  
United Way of Morgan County

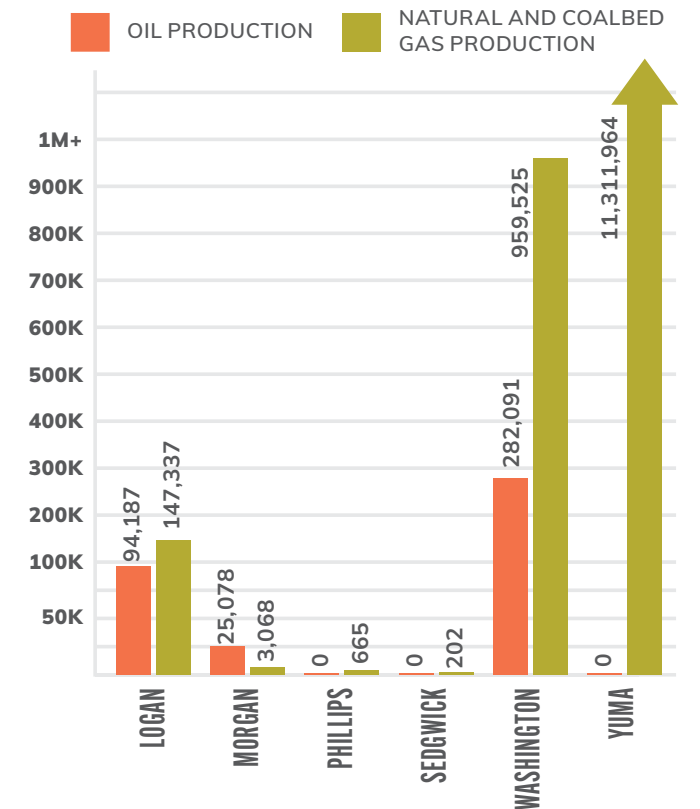
## ENERGY

### Opportunity, Change, and Community Impact

Northeast Colorado plays a significant role in Colorado’s energy system, producing energy from oil, gas, coal, and renewable sources. Some counties generate more electricity than they consume, contributing well beyond the region. Renewable energy, particularly wind, has grown quickly, bringing new jobs and economic diversification.

At the same time, residents shared thoughtful concerns about land use, infrastructure, local control, and the long-term impacts of large-scale projects. Energy decisions are closely tied to land, water, and community well-being, making local voice and regional coordination especially important. Resiliency is something each county has to consider due to local interests, capacity for land use shifts, and potential impacts to water, workforce, and community lifestyle.





### NECO Oil And Gas Production



2025 data from the Colorado Energy & Carbon Management Commission



## ENERGY

	 Wind Energy Use	 Average County Electricity Cost	 Total Electricity Production in Colorado	 Energy Jobs
<b>LOGAN COUNTY</b>	<b>100%</b> of residential electricity needs served from local wind energy	<b>LOWEST</b> average residential electricity cost (county)	<b>13th</b> in total electricity production	<b>Highest number of clean energy jobs</b> per capita in the state & <b>45%+ growth</b> in the sector*
<b>MORGAN COUNTY</b>		<b>HIGHEST</b> average monthly residential electricity cost (county)	<b>9th</b> in electricity production (from coal and natural gas)	The coal-fired plant is being closed.

\*Clean Jobs Colorado 2024 Report | Colorado Energy & Carbon Management Commission, Colorado Energy Office, findenergy.org, & U.S. Energy Information Administration

### BRIGHT SPOT

The City of Fort Morgan in Morgan County has the **LOWEST** municipal electricity rates in the region and one of the lowest in the state, **~45% lower than the state average and 48% lower than the national average.**

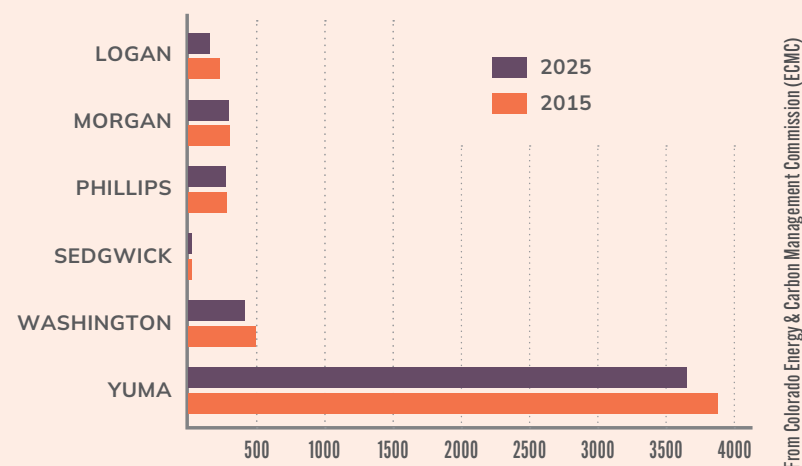
City of Fort Morgan, Colorado Association of Municipal Utilities, findenergy.org

According to the state's Energy & Carbon Management Commission, the total number of active wells (including oil, gas, and water) have declined overall across the region over the last decade.

While oil and gas will continue to be important to the region's economy for a long time to come, the region is also continuing to develop new ways to fulfill its role as energy producer through renewable sources as well. While Morgan County (at large) has the highest energy rates in the region, the City of Fort Morgan is investing in renewable energy from solar production that has allowed both residents and businesses to enjoy some of the lowest electricity rates in the state.

In addition, Northeastern Junior College (NJC) has created one of the top wind technician training programs in the U.S. Hourly wages for these jobs typically range between \$26-\$31 per hour, well above the base living wage of \$21.50/hour.

### Number of Active Wells (Oil, Gas, & Water)



### BRIGHT SPOTS

NJC has a top nationally recognized wind technician training program.

Nearly 100% of the electricity produced in Logan County is from renewable sources (mostly wind) and the county enjoys the lowest county-wide residential energy costs in the region.



As of 2023, Colorado is the **4th largest onshore oil producer in the U.S.** This accounts for only 4% of the total U.S. crude oil production.



Nationwide, Colorado is the **8th largest in both natural gas reserves and production,** accounting for almost 4% of the total U.S. reserve.



Oil and gas declined 20% across the region during COVID but has since **substantially recovered.** Colorado's total oil and gas production in 2023 is estimated to be nearly **\$16 billion,** 37.5% lower than the all-time high in 2022.

Colorado Rural Health Center / State Office of Rural Health 2025 Report

## WATER AND WEATHER: LIVING WITH LIMITS

Water is one of the most defining challenges facing Northeast Colorado. The region sits within major river basins governed by long-standing interstate agreements, while groundwater decline and drought increasingly affect agriculture and community planning. Agriculture accounts for most water use, and decisions about water shape everything from crop choices to long-term viability.

Weather adds another layer of uncertainty. Drought, severe storms, hail, wind, and extreme temperatures are becoming more frequent and costly. These impacts ripple beyond farms and ranches, affecting infrastructure, emergency response, and local economies. Residents described water and weather not as distant concerns, but as daily realities that demand adaptability and resilience.



**“Since its very beginning, Logan County has been dependent upon and grown around our water resources. From having access to watering holes for cattle to the development of irrigation ditches and reservoirs used to quench our thirsty soils making a desert bloom with an abundance of crops, water continues to be vital to the success of our communities and it is important that we keep it in the forefront of our vision for the future of our area.”**

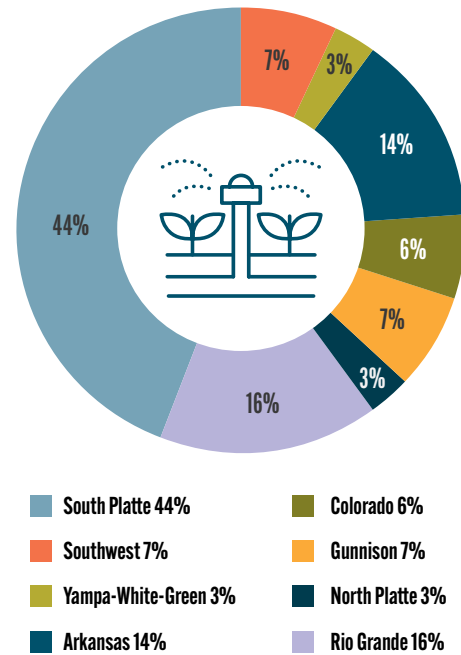
Jim Yahn, Logan County Commissioner

## WATER

In whole, Colorado water supplies 19 other states and Mexico with water. We keep only 40% of what is generated here. Agriculture uses 89% of the water that we keep within the state. Of that, 44% of the total irrigated acres are within the South Platte Basin, and 15% are within the Republican Basin.

The NECO region has both surface supply water from the South Platte Watershed but is also supplied by groundwater in the Ogallala (or High Plains) Aquifer. The aquifer is non-tributary, designated groundwater —meaning that it does not significantly recharge or supplement any continuously flowing surface streams. The aquifer does, however, play a role in the Republican Water Compact and water pumped from the aquifer is now included in the compact’s water accounting because it reduces the baseflow of the Republican River, requiring management of the aquifer’s water depletion. The Republican River Water Conservation District (RRWCD) helps to plan for water usage (especially irrigation) in the basin, helps to mitigate impacts, and seeks funding for conservation.

### Total Irrigated Acres by Basin in Colorado



In 2023 Colorado Water Plan by Colorado Water Conservation Board

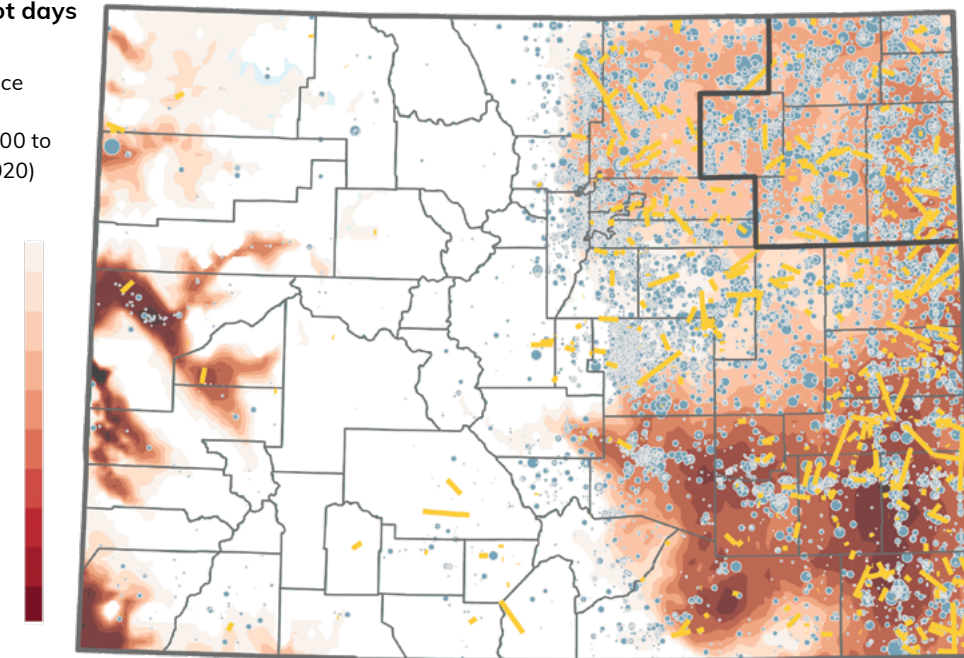
### FEMA'S NATIONAL RISK INDEX AND REGIONAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLANS PROJECT RISING VULNERABILITY THROUGH 2035.

- Drought expected most frequent hazard with longer dry spells & deeper groundwater depletion.
- Severe storms projected increase in frequency and intensity.
- Wildfire risk grows due to grassland fuel buildup and prolonged dry conditions.
- Flooding along South Platte and Republican tributaries may worsen due to extreme precipitation events.
- Agricultural pests and soil degradation will intensify under climate stress.



## Extreme Weather Reporting

More hot days (>95 F)  
(Difference between 1971–2000 to 2000–2020)



Hail Magnitude (1955–2024)  
Tornadoes

Map created by The Geospatial Centroid at CSU, including data from CSU's Colorado Climate Center showing historical heat days, hail magnitude, and tornado reportings.

## NATURAL HAZARDS

- Over the past decade, the NECO counties have collectively incurred an estimated **\$150–\$200 MILLION in economic damage from natural hazards**, primarily drought, severe storms, and agricultural losses.
- Over 70% of economic damage is due to drought.** This economic damage has increased by over 130% from 2015 to 2024.
- In 2025, USDA designated **all six counties as Primary Natural Disaster Areas due to severe drought (D2)** conditions during growing season.
- The region is **part of Tornado Alley's western edge**, with frequent spring and summer storms.

National Center for Environmental Information, Colorado Fiscal Institute, & Colorado Energy Office





# SHELTERING & CARING

What does it take to ensure people can live, work, and age well in Northeast Colorado?

## How people are supported across the lifespan in Northeast Colorado

In Northeast Colorado, sheltering and caring begins with basics: having a safe place to live and access to the support people need at every stage of life. Sheltering & caring systems in Northeast Colorado are **holding but are under strain**.

Housing, healthcare, childcare, and eldercare shape whether individuals and families can remain in the communities they call home. In a region defined by distance and limited workforce capacity, access matters as much as availability. Aging populations, shifting demographics, and rising costs add complexity to systems that many already rely on.

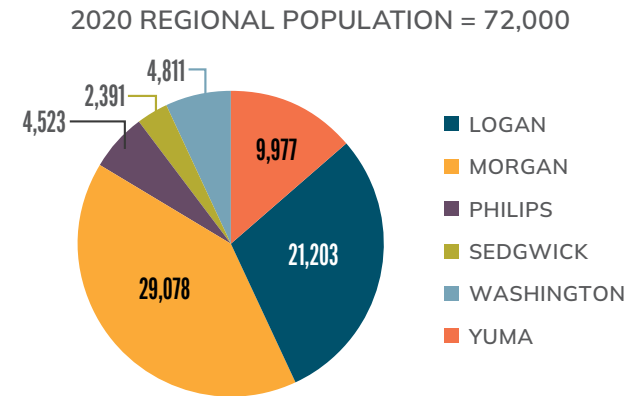
Addressing these challenges requires solutions that reflect rural realities, from workforce development and infrastructure investment to regional collaboration that shares resources across county lines. These services are strengthened by strong community ties and local leadership, yet infrastructure gaps and workforce shortages still need solutions.

## Who Lives Here

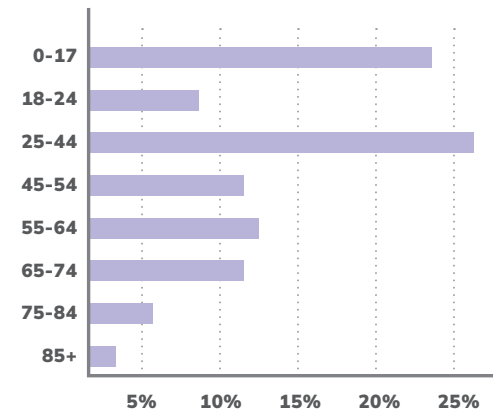
Northeast Colorado is home to just over 72,000 people spread across a wide geography. For generations, Northeast Colorado drew new residents as they developed farmland, created churches, schools, and community centers resulting in dozens of small towns. As culture, workforce, and infrastructure have changed, this region has experienced a change in demographics.

The population is aging. The fastest-growing age group across the region is residents age 75 and older, while young adults and working-age families remain essential to the region's future. Many communities are navigating how to support older residents while also creating conditions that allow younger people to stay or return. Single-parent households, non-English-speaking residents, and low-income families make up a significant share of the population in several counties, shaping demand for services and support. Population growth has been modest overall, with only Morgan County expected to see sustained growth over the coming decades.

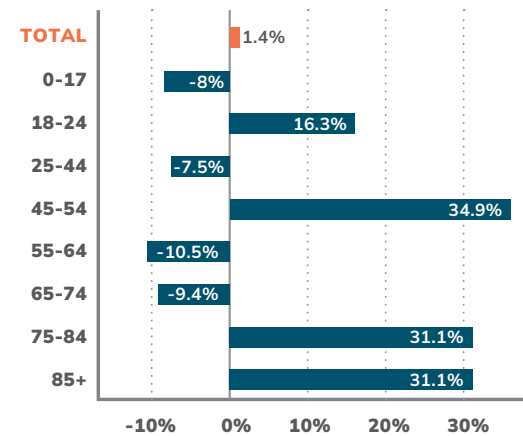
## Demographics & Vulnerable Populations



REGIONAL POPULATION BY AGE GROUP (2023)

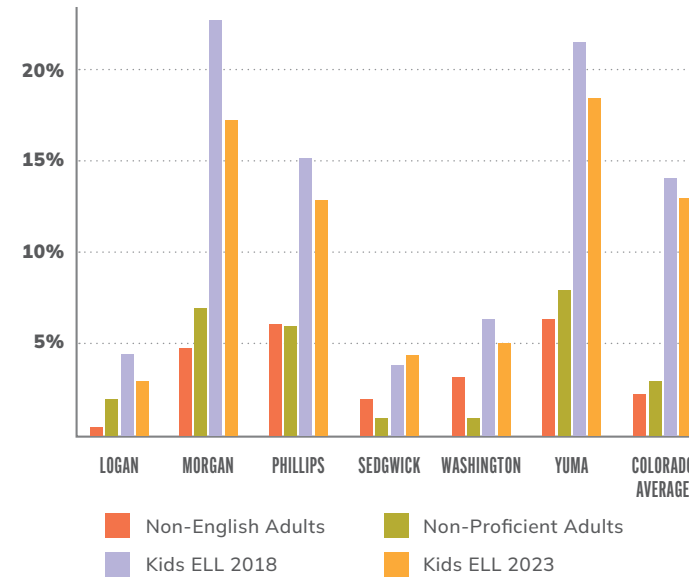


PROJECTED REGIONAL POPULATION CHANGE BY AGE GROUP (2024 TO 2034)



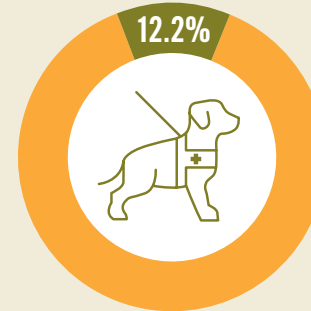
Colorado State Demography Office

## English Language Learners & Proficiency



ELL: English Language Learners  
From Census.gov and University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

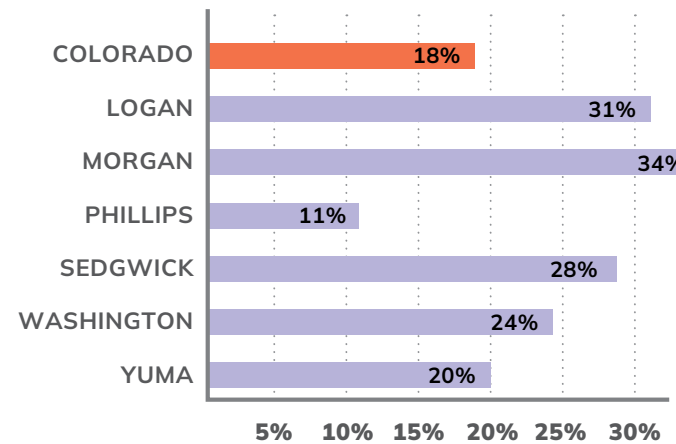
## People Living with a Disability in NECO



Colorado Average: 10.8%

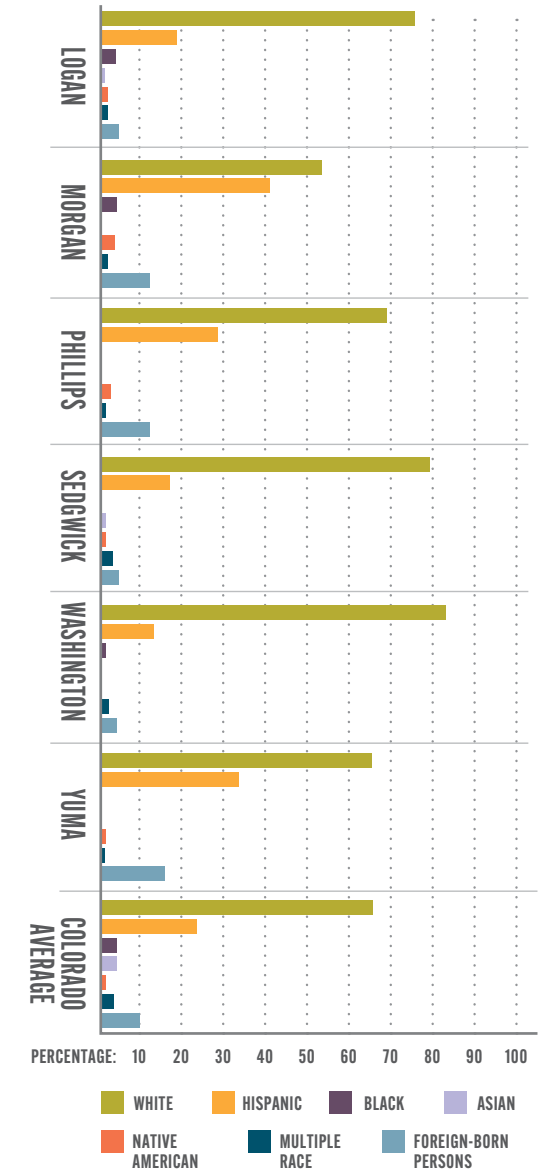
Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2017-2021  
Note: Data is for the civilian non-institutionalized population, so it does not include those people living in long-term care living arrangements like correctional or skilled nursing facilities.

## Single Parents in NECO



All statistics (except the upper left) on this page from U.S. Census ACS 2017-2021.

## Race/Ethnicity by Percentage



## TAKEAWAYS

The Northeast Colorado region has long been shaped by hard work, resilience, and a deep connection to place.

Today, it reflects a diverse and evolving population. Most counties have a higher percentage of White residents than the state overall, while Morgan, Phillips, and Yuma Counties have larger Hispanic and foreign-born populations, patterns closely tied to the region's agricultural economy.

Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, and Yuma Counties also have Native American populations at or above the state average, reflecting longstanding ties to the land.

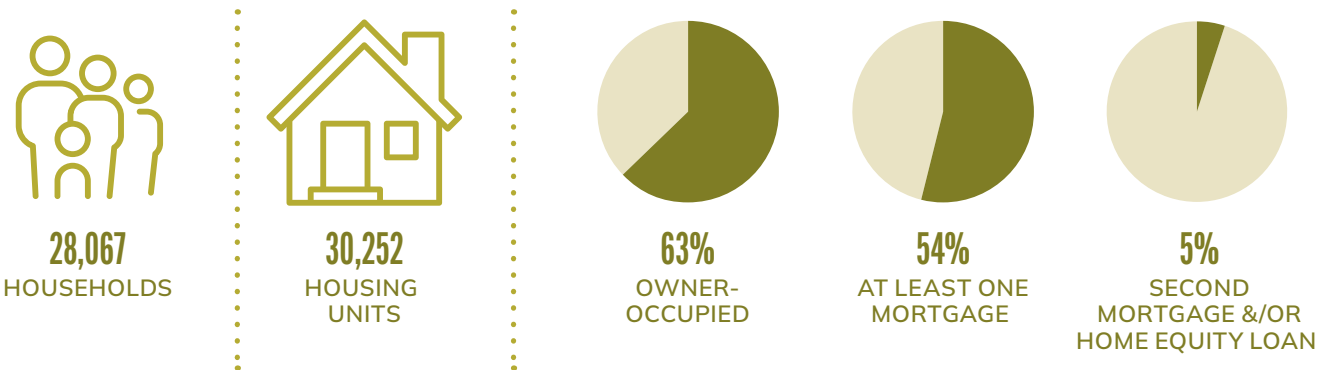


### Housing: Stable, but Aging

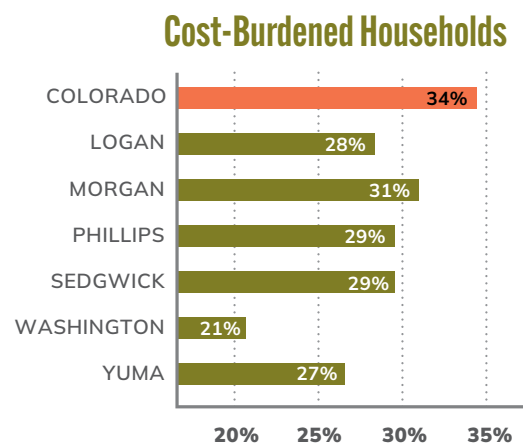
Most households in the region own their homes, and overall housing cost burdens are lower than the state average. At the same time, much of the housing stock is old, significantly older than Colorado's average, and in need of repair or replacement. Communities shared concerns about limited housing options for seniors, workers, and young families. While affordability is often better than in urban areas, availability and condition are growing issues, especially for people seeking rentals, accessible housing, or smaller homes. Housing is more than shelter, it influences workforce recruitment, health outcomes, and whether people can remain in their communities as their needs change.

The region has an opportunity to look at the housing inventory through several lenses: How can we protect and keep enjoying our existing housing inventory? Where is new housing needed to provide for the needs of current or new residents? Who are the partners or organizations who can come together to explore regional solutions to these issues together?

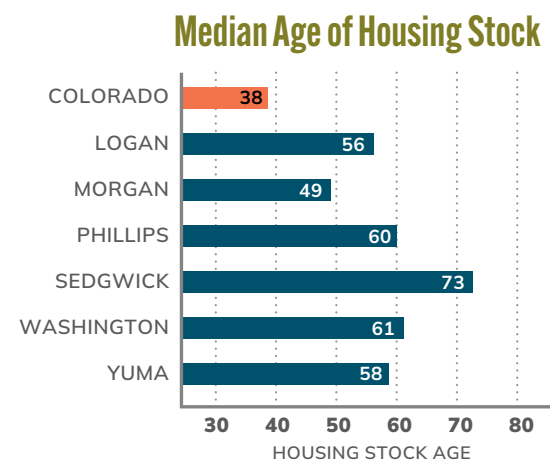
### Sheltering & Caring: How are we doing in the NECO region?



PHILLIPS COUNTY HAS THE HIGHEST RATE OF HOME OWNERSHIP IN THE REGION



**Cost-burdened Households:** Those spending more than 30% of their household income on rent/mortgage + utilities.



**Older housing stock** means possible deferred maintenance, more expensive repairs and maintenance, reduced property value, and potentially unsafe conditions or materials used during construction (asbestos, lead pipes or paint, etc.). The extra expenses are a burden on the homeowner and potential deterrent to a new buyer.

FRED is the Federal Reserve Economic Data website at fred.stlouisfed.org | Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) and the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)

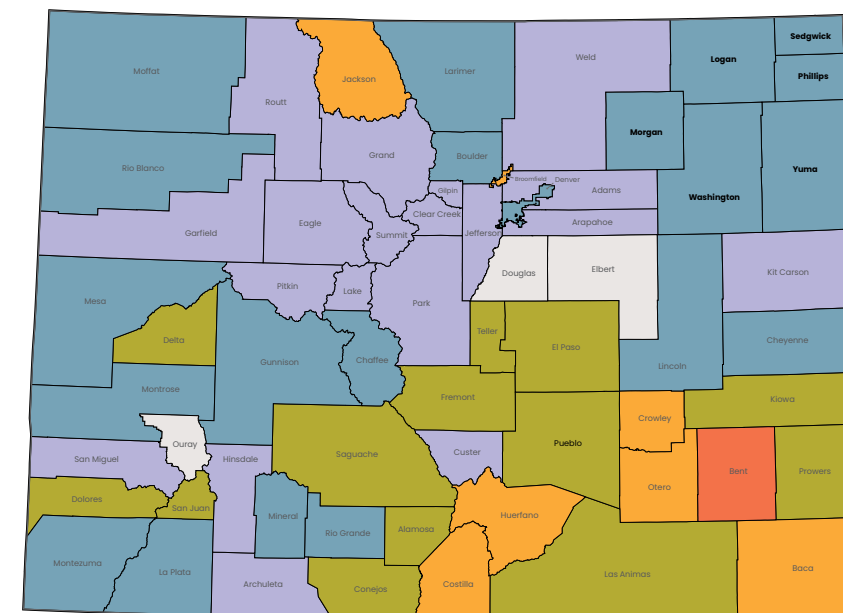
### Work, Wages, and Household Stability

Some measures show higher rates of financial strain in Northeast Colorado compared to the state average. These comparisons, however, come with important context. Rural counties operate in a different environment than metropolitan areas or resort communities, with distinct cost-of-living problems, housing markets, and job structures. In Northeast Colorado, financial stability is shaped by factors such as the availability of local jobs, seasonal or variable income, long distances to services, and limited housing options, not by a lack of effort or engagement. Many residents work in essential industries that sustain communities locally and contribute far beyond the region.

At the same time, Northeast Colorado is rich in community leadership, mutual support, and civic commitment. Residents, organizations, and local leaders work every day to support neighbors facing hardship, strengthen community ties, and preserve the region's strong sense of place.



### Colorado Percentage Experiencing Poverty



Five out of six counties higher than the state average in percentage of families below poverty (all except Washington County)

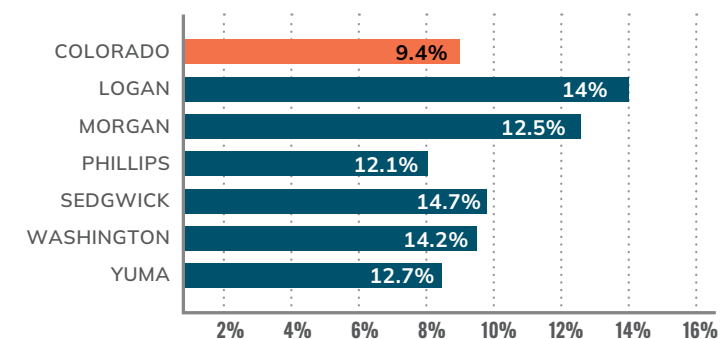
**In Colorado:**

Phillips County is 5th highest

Sedgwick is 10th

Yuma is 15th

### NECO Percentage Experiencing Poverty



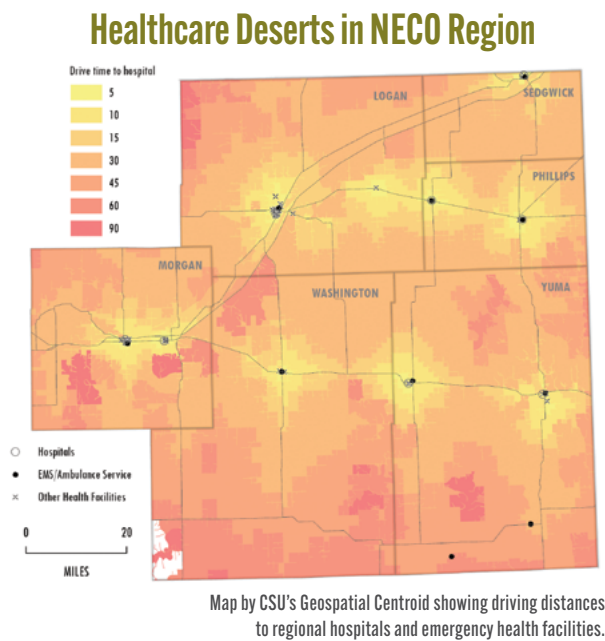
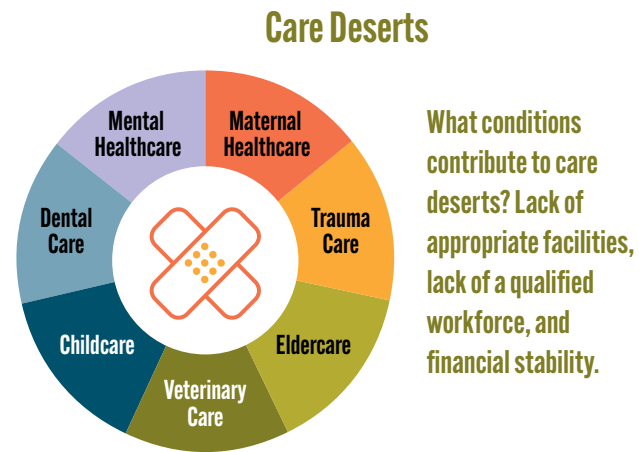
Cite the National Institutes of Health 2019-2023



## Healthcare and Care Access: Distance Matters

Access to care is one of the most consistent challenges raised by residents. This sentiment and experience is backed by results from the Colorado Rural Health Center/State Office of Rural Health 2025 Report. The region faces shortages of healthcare professionals, particularly specialists and nurses with advanced degrees and experience. Many services, including mental health, maternal care, trauma care, dental specialties, and pediatric care are limited or unavailable locally, requiring long travel times. Use of telemedicine remains lower than the state average, further limiting access. Childcare and eldercare are also in short supply. Costs, staffing challenges, and limited facilities make it difficult for families to find care close to home, affecting workforce participation and family stability.

Volunteer EMTs, firefighters, and healthcare workers play a critical role in filling gaps, underscoring both the strength of community commitment and the fragility of relying on limited capacity. By supporting, funding, and training more volunteer EMT's, Northeast Colorado communities could find better ways to address these gaps and care deserts. As the region is very broad and vast, centers of medical care are few and far between. Training neighbors and community members in emergency medical response is a concrete way to provide up close and personal care during someone's worst days in lieu of driving hours to a facility in times of grave crisis.



## BRIGHT SPOT: HEALTHCARE INVESTMENTS IN THE REGION BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY

One example of rural investment and community-driven care in Northeast Colorado is **Wray Community District Hospital**. Established as a 15-bed critical access hospital serving Wray and surrounding counties, this facility provides a range of services from emergency and primary care to radiology and maternity services, that many rural communities have lost over recent years. Wray has not only maintained these services but expanded them in response to growing demand as neighboring hospitals reduced offerings, especially for births and other essential care.

Wray's patient load has increased significantly, drawing patients from Nebraska, Kansas, and Eastern Colorado because of its continued capacity and commitment to local care. Recent healthcare infrastructure investments, including plans for expansion and renovation funded through rural development programs, reflect community and state leadership support for sustaining critical services close to home.



## Health and Well-Being: Strength and Strain

Residents in Northeast Colorado report higher rates of fair or poor health and face higher poverty rates than the state average. At the same time, fewer people report having a regular primary care provider or accessing care when they need it, often due to cost or availability. Mental health is an emerging concern. While the region historically reported fewer poor mental health days than the state average, recent data shows that trend shifting, with more residents reporting loneliness and stress. These patterns reflect the intersection of distance, workforce shortages, income, and access, not a lack of care or commitment within communities.

According to the Colorado Health Access Survey (CHAS) in 2024, there are more people in Northeast Colorado on Medicaid and Medicare than the state averages and less employer-sponsored insurance, and more uninsured. Also, more people did not get care because of the cost of care. Rural areas will continue to see these trends if not for innovations in workforce housing (to attract specialists to live in the area), regional health care collaborations, and sharing service providers. Stressors sometimes lead to the best inventions and solutions.



**“For hospitals on the Eastern Plains to survive and thrive, they must collaborate. A hub-and-spoke system is forming, where each facility identifies its core strengths and partners with other hospitals for services it cannot provide. Capital is limited and needs to be allocated where it benefits the most people.”**

Jim Hendrix, Yuma County, Board President, Wray Hospital

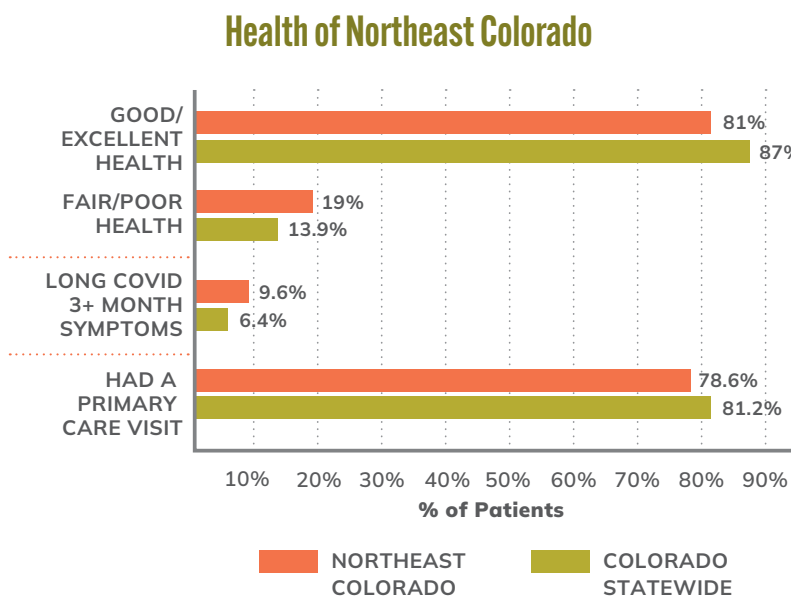
**USDA DATA SHOWS SEDGWICK COUNTY AS A “RETIREMENT DESTINATION” WHERE THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS AGES 55–74 INCREASED BY >15% FROM 2010–2020**

**Most concerning regional health issues are:**

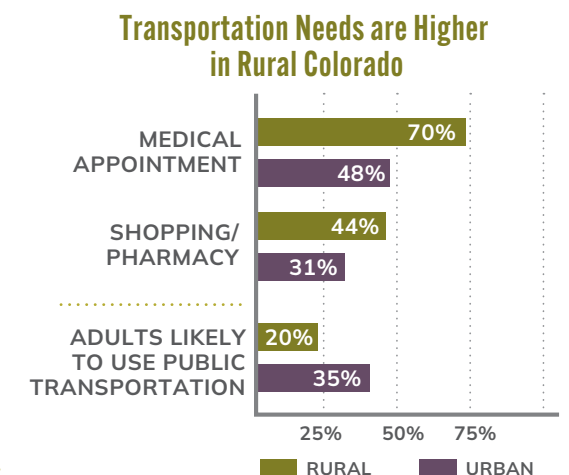


- Depression
- Obesity
- Lack of Insurance

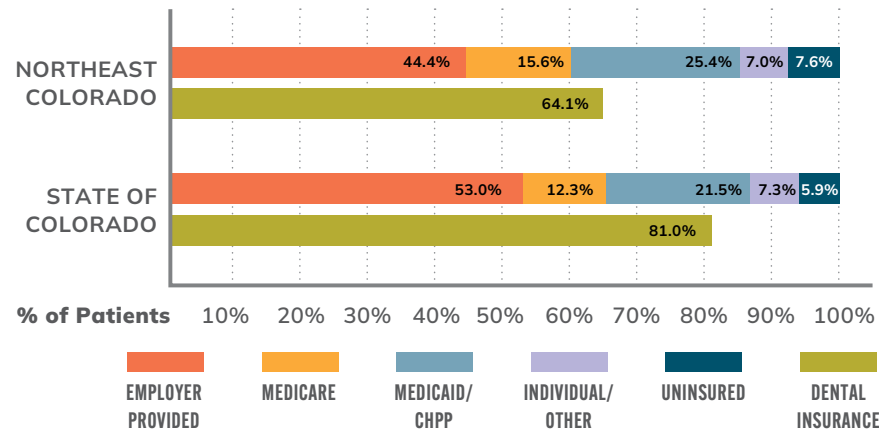
Colorado Rural Health Center / State Office of Rural Health 2025 Report



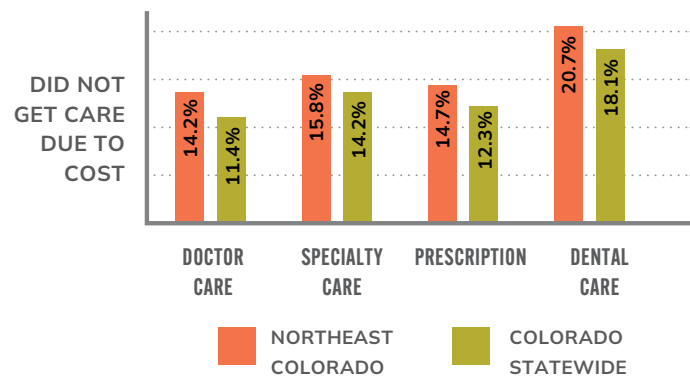
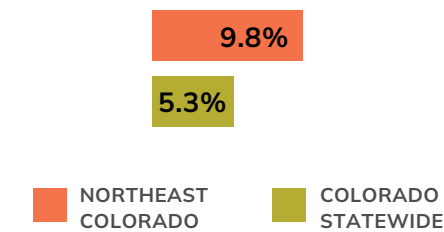
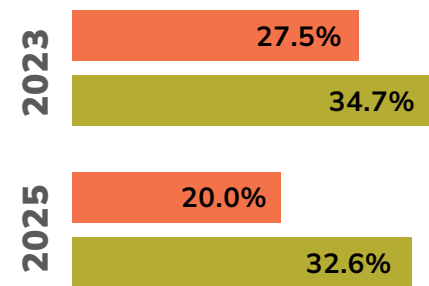
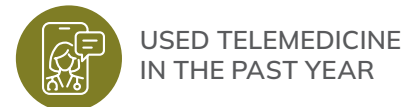
**24% of older adults** have trouble finding transportation options for trips wanted/needed.



### Health Coverage in NECO



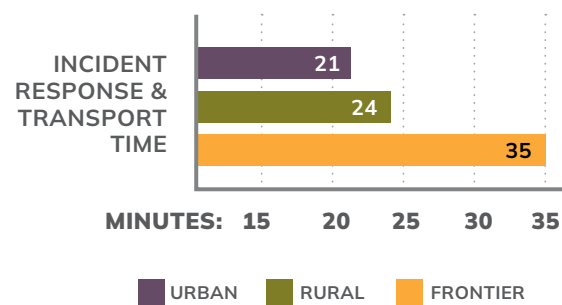
### Accessing Healthcare Online



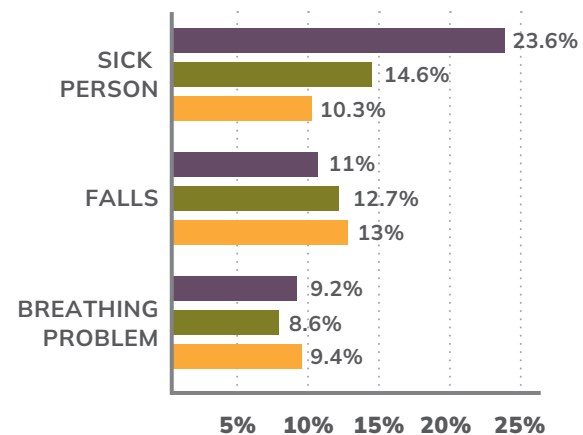
## TAKEAWAY

More people in the NECO region do not have sufficient access to health care either due to lack of insurance, lack of facilities & providers, and/or lack of reliable infrastructure such as transportation & internet.

### Average Incident Response and Transport Times in Colorado\*



### Top 3 Reasons for Dispatch 2022-2023



\*Excluding on-scene time. | See pg. 2 for map with county designations.

## TRANSACTING

How can Northeast Colorado strengthen economic opportunity while honoring the character and strengths of rural life?

### How people work, earn a living, and access opportunity in Northeast Colorado

The Transacting intersection reflects the everyday mechanics of life in Northeast Colorado: how people make a living, move through their communities, and access jobs and services. The Transacting intersection reveals that the region is economically productive, deeply interdependent, and facing important transitions.

Distance shapes opportunity here. Hubs of activities, services, and resources are critical. Reliable transportation, broadband access, and strong local institutions influence how individuals and businesses can thrive. The region is facing an aging population, and with it, an aging workforce, however this creates great opportunity for young people and talent development. As industries evolve and development pressures grow, thoughtful coordination becomes increasingly important.

Agriculture and food production anchors the regional economy, supported by manufacturing, healthcare, construction, government, and service industries. Workforce shortages, infrastructure needs, and limited economic diversity, however, create challenges that cross county lines.



“Through my work over the years, I’ve seen firsthand how workforce, housing, and childcare are intertwined economic drivers, and that lasting solutions depend on regional collaboration.”

Trisha Herman, Community Relationship Manager, Eastern Colorado, Colorado Housing and Finance Authority

### The Regional Economy: Strong Roots, Limited Diversity

Agriculture is the backbone of Northeast Colorado’s economy, supporting about 45% of all jobs in the region when related industries are included. Many counties are considered “farm dependent,” meaning a significant share of earnings comes directly from agriculture. It’s not a surprise as the earliest European settlers poured their hard work into the nutrient-rich soil and created a legacy of agricultural success. And following the Dust Bowl in the 1930’s, the same area of farmers and ranchers figured out a new way of farming, irrigation, and production to keep providing for their families, communities, and the country.

Beyond agriculture, the regional economy includes manufacturing, government, healthcare, construction, transportation, and services. Some counties show stronger ties to manufacturing or government employment, while others are less specialized.

Across community conversations, participants consistently shared that greater economic diversity would strengthen the region, especially opportunities that provide living-wage jobs, support families, and allow young people to build careers close to home.



### KEY INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

- Food & Agriculture
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Health & Wellness
- Transportation & Logistics
- Energy
- Natural Resources

Total 2024 Jobs = 34,445

### Workforce: Aging, Essential, and Stretched

The workforce in Northeast Colorado is essential to the region's productivity, yet many industries are experiencing workforce strain. Several key sectors including healthcare, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and services for older adults have a growing share of workers nearing retirement age, even as demand for those services increases. Unemployment rates are lower than the state average across the region and employers report challenges recruiting and retaining workers across all skill levels.

Healthcare stands out as a critical workforce need. From nurses and technicians to direct care workers, shortages affect not only the healthcare system but also economic participation and quality of life across the region.

**24% of regional workforce is age 55+**

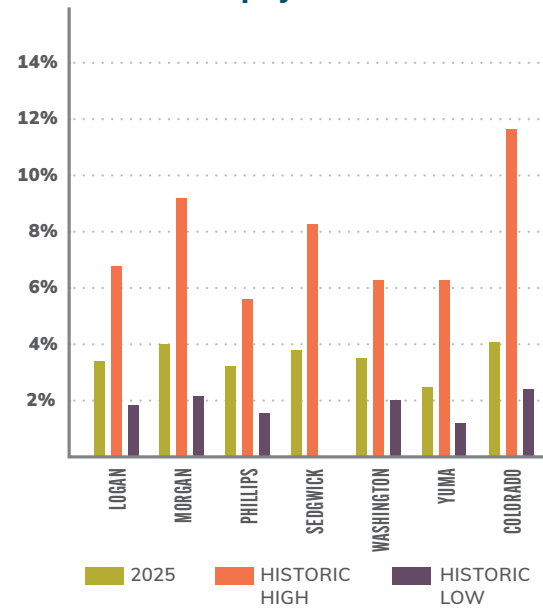
(16% age 55-64; 9% age 65+)

This is higher in some key industries, including Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, and Healthcare.

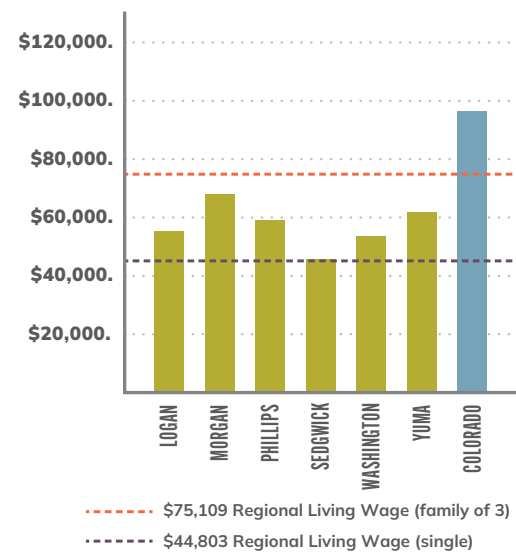
### Income and Cost of Living: A Delicate Balance

Incomes across Northeast Colorado vary by county but generally remain below the state average. While the cost of living is often lower than in urban areas, rising costs for housing, utilities, food, and care are narrowing that gap. For many households, maintaining stability depends on steady employment, multiple income sources, or long commutes. Economic shocks, whether from weather, market shifts, or health issues, can quickly ripple through families and communities.

### Unemployment Rates



### Median Household Income



### Total Jobs in Region Per Industry

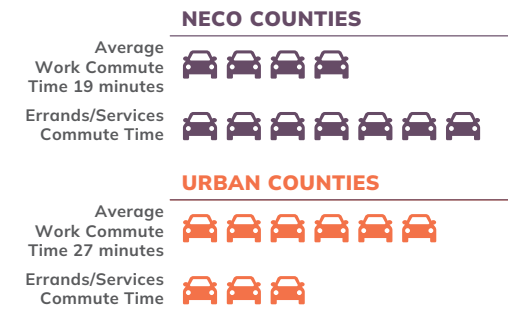
Accommodation and Food Services	2,068	Health Care and Social Assistance	2,988	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	728
Administrative and Support and Waste	1,119	Information	387	Retail Trade	3,660
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2,815	Local Government	5,345	State Government	1,453
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	500	Management of Companies	82	Transportation and Warehousing	1,694
Construction	2,046	Manufacturing	4,159	Unclassified	3
Educational Services	207	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas	463	Utilities	468
Federal Government	264	Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,215	Wholesale Trade	1,108
Finance and Insurance	823	Professional, Scientific, and Technical	838		
				<b>Total All Sectors</b>	<b>34,445</b>

Statistics on this page from Colorado State Demography Office

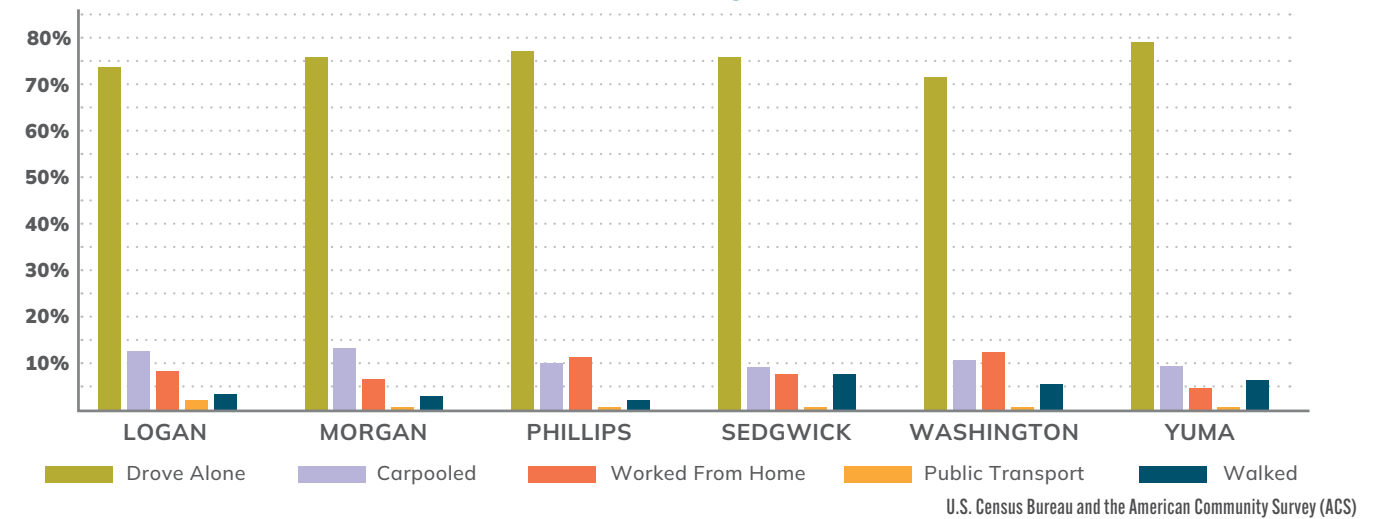
### Infrastructure: Distance Shapes Everything

Infrastructure plays an outsized role in rural economies. Most residents rely on driving to reach work, healthcare, education, and services, with average commute times reflecting both distance and limited transportation options. Aging roads, bridges, and water systems add to long-term maintenance and investment needs. Broadband access has improved across the region, but gaps remain, especially related to affordability and reliability. Where access is strong, broadband opens doors to remote work, education, telehealth, and entrepreneurship. Where it is limited, distance becomes an even greater barrier.

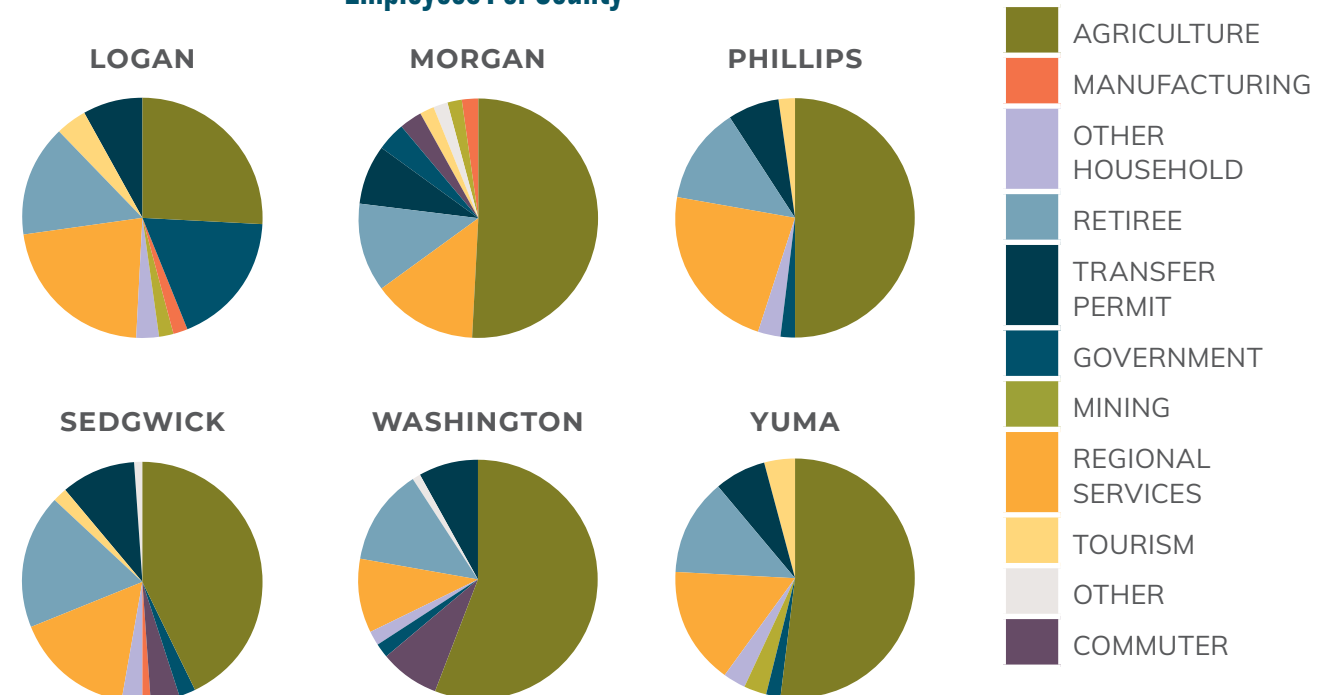
### 2023 Mean Commute Times



### Modes of Commuting to Work



### Employees Per County



U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

## Land Use Changes Across the Region

Over the past decade, land use across Northeast Colorado has remained largely agricultural, with only limited conversion to non-agricultural uses. Even in counties experiencing the greatest change, conversion has been modest relative to total acreage. Rather than broad urbanization, land use changes have been targeted and incremental, including utility-scale energy development, modest housing and industrial growth near county seats, and parcel-level residential development.

Land use patterns vary by county. Sedgwick County has seen the least change, reflecting low population growth and limited development pressure. Morgan County shows greater diversification, with new industrial and light manufacturing sites and modest residential growth clustered around Fort Morgan and the I-76 corridor. In Logan County, most non-agricultural development has occurred around Sterling, including housing infill, commercial expansion, and agricultural support facilities, with increased parcelization near town edges. These patterns reflect how important it is for proximity to services and resources, jobs, and access to care centers.

In contrast, Yuma, Washington, and Phillips Counties are experiencing or anticipating more visible change tied primarily to utility-scale energy projects. In these counties, large solar and energy storage developments are driving ag-to-energy land conversion. Because utility projects often involve hundreds or thousands of acres, even a small number of approvals can significantly alter local land use patterns and agricultural acreage totals. This might mean new housing or employment centers are created even farther away to accommodate the new land use.

Throughout this report's outreach, communities expressed interest in balancing economic opportunity with preservation of agricultural land and rural character. These conversations highlight the importance of thoughtful planning and regional coordination as new development pressures emerge.



Photo by Sadie Frizler



## BRIGHT SPOT: WHERE ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

Based on 2025 data from CSU's Regional Economic Development Institute (REDI), the region sees greatest opportunity in these kinds of industries:

### GROWING INDUSTRIES FOR BOTH EMPLOYERS & NON-EMPLOYERS

- Professional & Technology Services
- Administrative & Waste Services
- Healthcare & Social Assistance

### REGIONALLY GROWING

- Transportation & Warehouse
- Real Estate
- Other Services
- Advanced Manufacturing.

### JOBS CREATION POTENTIAL

- Manufacturing
- Wholesale Trade
- Lodging & Food Services

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Construction (growing most in Morgan County)
- Transportation & Warehouse

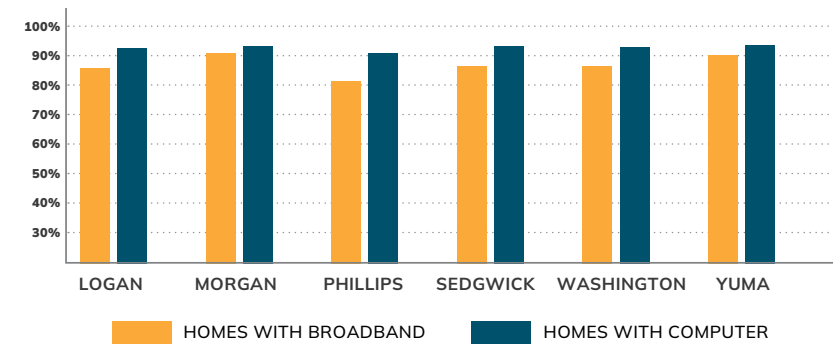
## Some Opportunities for Community Action

- Internet/broadband coverage is increasing in the region, but there are still barriers (cost & geographical distance)
- Increased broadband could offer opportunities for innovation, remote work, increased care, economic opportunities, education, etc.
- Updates to aging & failing water infrastructure in the region could provide jobs and opportunities for economic and/or domestic growth.
- Repair and/or updates for aging roads & bridges could provide opportunities for improved transportation options as the population ages.
- Increased access to reliable broadband internet services could provide opportunities for economic diversification (remote working, technology, innovation, etc.) as well as improved access to healthcare, retail, education, and other resources.



Photo by Sadie Frizler

## Household Computer and Internet Use



U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

# CONNECTING

How do relationships, trust, and shared purpose sustain resilience across generations?

## How people learn, belong, and support one another

The Connecting intersection reveals that Northeast Colorado's greatest strength may be its relationships, where connection is more than social, it's foundational. Schools, faith communities, volunteer networks, and informal community ties form a web of support that helps communities adapt, endure, and navigate change. These institutions anchor local identity and provide pathways for leadership, education, and belonging.

Meanwhile, demographic shifts, declining enrollments, workforce strain, and evolving participation patterns are reshaping how connection happens. Mental health needs are evolving and access to services can be limited by geography, workforce capacity, and infrastructure. Sustaining connection will require investment in education, leadership development, mental health access, and inclusive spaces that allow both long-time residents and newcomers to feel at home.



## Education: A Foundation for Opportunity

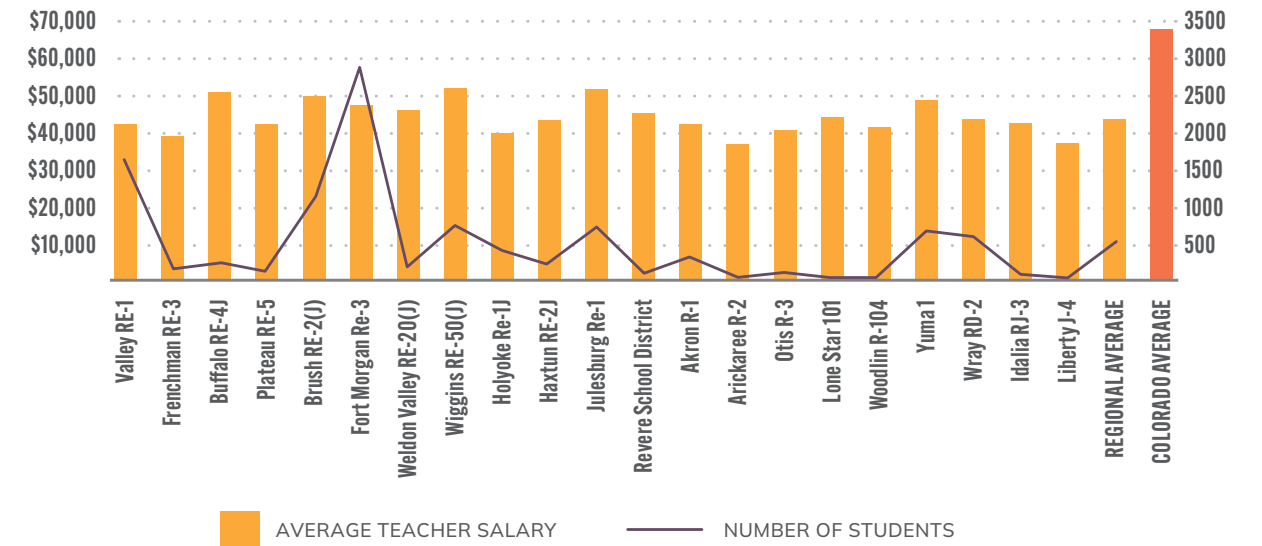
Schools are central to community life across the region. They serve not only as places of learning, but as hubs for connection, leadership development, and local pride.

At the same time, Northeast Colorado faces educational challenges common to many rural areas. A higher share of adults do not have a high school diploma compared to the state average, and all six counties rank in the lower half of the state for residents with a bachelor's degree or higher. The region has two higher education institutions serving the community and beyond. Northeastern Junior College in Sterling offers dozens of trade professions and programs that are standalone and lead to lifelong careers. Students can also take credits earned to other higher education institutions. Morgan Community College offers important degree pathways including Bachelor Degrees in business management, technology education, and nursing.

Kindergarten-12th grade enrollment across the region has declined over the past decade, placing financial pressure on school districts. Teacher salaries remain below the state average, and turnover rates are higher in several counties. These trends influence not only educational outcomes, but also workforce development and long-term economic vitality.

Even with these challenges, schools remain one of the strongest connectors in the region, bringing together families, supporting youth leadership, and anchoring community identity.

## School Enrollment and Average Teacher Salaries



There are 12,852 K-12 students in the region in 58 schools and 22 districts.

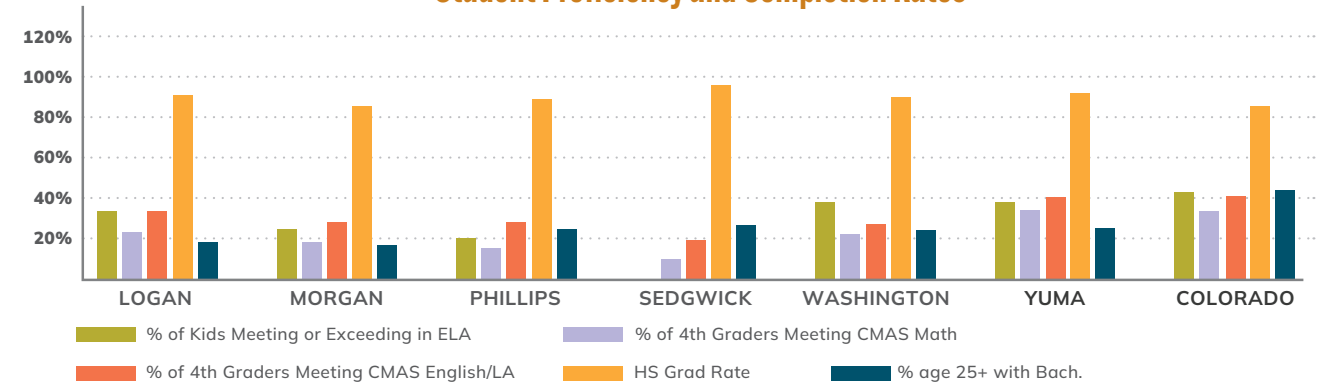
Enrollment is down in all school districts across the region over the last decade, though more severe in some, ranging from losses of up to 38% and as little as 1.5%. The average across the region is a loss of ~7%.



**“Education today goes beyond earning a degree or certificate. Instead, it is a direct link to economic mobility and career choices. Northeastern Junior College and Morgan Community College seek to provide valuable learning opportunities for the people of Northeast Colorado so that our communities and families thrive long into the future. This Intersections report will inform and motivate our teams to embrace this work and deliver results for everyone in our region.”**

Mike White, President, Northeastern Junior College

## Student Proficiency and Completion Rates



## FAITH AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS: TRUST IN ACTION

Faith communities and civic organizations continue to play an important role in Northeast Colorado. Church adherence rates across much of the region remain at or above the state average, even as participation patterns evolve. While the number of congregations has shifted over time, these institutions, along with service clubs, volunteer groups, and informal networks, provide essential support. They help coordinate assistance during crises, connect residents to resources, and reinforce shared values. Like many kinds of informal networks and volunteer groups, participation can vary. With lower turnout or involvement, communities can suffer. The more people find their group or groups, the more positive impact a community can feel.

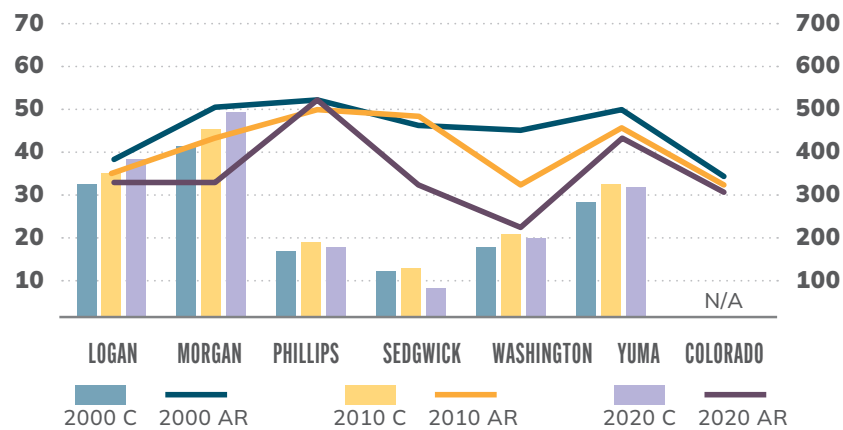
In many communities, trust and accountability are built through long-standing relationships. Leaders often wear multiple hats, and progress frequently happens through conversation and collaboration rather than formal systems alone. You might be a rancher by day, a baseball coach in the afternoon, and attend church group meetings at night. Imagine all the connections and conversations that can be had when community members participate in multiple activities.



**“In rural areas especially, faith-based communities foster strong connections through multi-generational relationships, shared values, and consistent presence. These relationships reduce isolation and create natural support systems that allow mental wellness to thrive. Faith communities are also home to many “natural helpers”—trusted individuals who notice when someone is struggling, offer compassion, and connect people to care when needed.”**

Maranda Miller,  
Centennial Mental Health Center

### Congregations & Adherence Rates



From the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) showing number of congregations (left vertical axis and bars designated by 'C' in graph) and adherence rates per 1000 residents (right vertical axis and lines designated by 'AR' in graph) for years 2000, 2010, and 2020.

### TAKEAWAYS

- Adherence rates across the region are consistently higher than the state average across all years.
- The number of congregations has gone up in all counties in the region, except Sedgwick, but adherence rates have fallen in all counties since 2000.
- Faith communities play an important role in the region and there may be more opportunities for congregations to come together &/or provide resources, services, & events to increase belonging, decrease loneliness, & serve their communities.

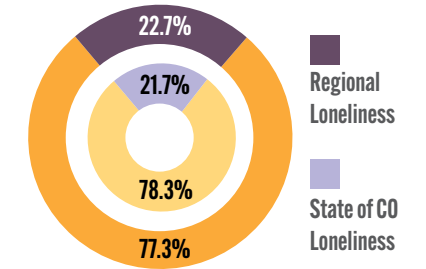
## MENTAL HEALTH & BELONGING: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Historically, residents in Northeast Colorado reported fewer poor mental health days than the state average. Recent data, however, suggests that this pattern is shifting. More residents are reporting feelings of stress and loneliness, even as use of mental health services remains lower than statewide levels. Access remains a challenge. Behavioral health providers are limited, and long travel distances can create barriers to care. At the same time, informal support networks, family, friends, faith communities, neighbors, continue to serve as first lines of connection, as well as virtual or telehealth check-ins. The stigma behind mental health services and when to access them can be embedded in communities, but as mental health becomes a priority in families and communities, more people seek support.

Belonging matters deeply in rural communities. As populations shift and social dynamics evolve, maintaining inclusive, welcoming spaces will be important to sustaining well-being across generations.

### Loneliness

Often felt left out, isolated from others, or lacking companionship



### Suicide Rates by county in 2024 with 10-year average

(Colorado Center for Health & Environmental Data):

<b>Logan:</b> 6 (5)	<b>Sedgwick:</b> No Data or None
<b>Morgan:</b> 13 (5)	<b>Washington:</b> No Data or None
<b>Phillips:</b> No Data or None	<b>Yuma:</b> 3 (<1)

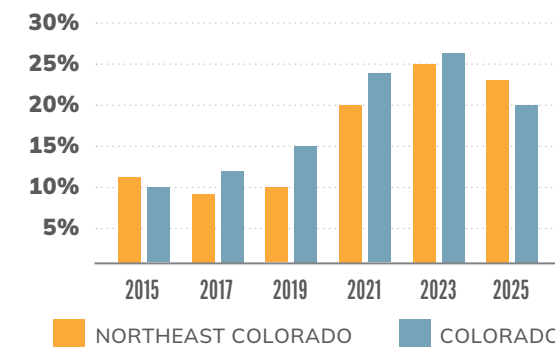


**“In rural northeastern Colorado, progress is personal and moves at the speed of trust. Meaningful change rests on the shoulders of a small number of volunteers who continually step up. Steady, strategic work depends on managing the handoff between the long-term volunteers nearing the end of their civic life, to a group of younger fledging leaders.”**

Catie Green, Colorado State University Extension, Sedgwick County

### Mental Health Shifts

Percentage of residents reporting eight or more days of poor mental health in the past month



2025 Colorado Health Access Survey

### Social Connectivity & Belonging Survey Responses

How connected do you feel within the community at large (your area, town or region)?



Do you feel more connected with a particular part of the community?



Please describe the part of the community that you feel more connected to.



From community survey administered by CSU's Institute for the Built Environment, 2025 Intersections process



## BEAUTIFYING

How do we honor and protect what makes Northeast Colorado unique, while ensuring it remains attractive and vibrant for generations to come?

The Beautifying intersection reveals that place matters deeply in Northeast Colorado, including what makes this region meaningful and worth calling “home”. Cultural heritage, natural landscapes, arts, music, creative expression and community traditions do more than enhance quality of life, they support economic opportunity, strengthen identity, and reinforce resilience.

**In Northeast Colorado, beauty is not an extra, it is a part of daily life.**

Wide open skies, working landscapes, vibrant main streets full of history, local festivals, and cultural gatherings all express the beauty of this place and its people. These elements reflect the identity, memory, and pride of this region, contributing to both the quality of life and the economies here.

### Culture, Heritage, and Local Identity

Each county carries a strong sense of history and place. Museums, county fairs, rodeos, music festivals, and seasonal celebrations bring generations together and preserve stories of resilience and ingenuity. From agricultural heritage to cultural traditions and community arts programs, these experiences strengthen belonging. They also create opportunities for tourism and economic vitality, especially as interest grows in heritage travel, local events, and small-town experiences.

Cultural expression in Northeast Colorado is often community-led and volunteer-driven, a reflection of deep local commitment and pride.

Northeast Colorado reflects a rich blend of heritage and tradition, including strong Hispanic and Native American communities, multigenerational farm and ranch families, and residents representing a wide range of cultural and lived experiences. This diversity strengthens the region’s social and cultural fabric. Community events, faith traditions, local businesses, and shared spaces all contribute to a sense of belonging and identity. Whether you were born in Northeast Colorado or faraway lands, the community’s ability to embrace diversity reflects a region that is resilient and welcoming.

As communities evolve, maintaining welcoming, inclusive environments will be important to sustaining both cultural vitality and long-term resilience.



Photo by Sadie Fritzier



Photo by Sadie Fritzier

## CONSERVATION SUMMARY

Northeast Colorado is changing, but there are several entities focused on conservation and preservation initiatives for sustainability of the natural ecosystems; investing funding, resources, and technical assistance. Here are a few examples of projects:

- USDA Farm Service Agency Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) program that focus on grassland protection.
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) RESTORE wetland projects in Logan, Morgan, and Yuma counties.
- Conservation Plan for Grassland Species through the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (CO DNR).
- Colorado Wetland Program through the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CO CPW).
- Colorado Division of Wildlife (Pheasant Habitat Improvement Program - PHIP).
- Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) focuses on preserving working ranches
- Southern Plains Land Trust protects significant grassland ecosystems in eastern part of state.
- Multiple conservation efforts by the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, CO Open Lands, Pheasants Forever Inc. + local Pheasants Forever Chapters in Colorado (PHIP).

The region’s natural landscapes, including grasslands, reservoirs, rivers, and wildlife areas, are central to its character. Conservation efforts, often in partnership with federal, state, nonprofit, and local organizations, help sustain these landscapes while supporting working agriculture. Water scarcity, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and energy development present ongoing challenges. At the same time, conservation programs, land trusts, and stewardship initiatives demonstrate strong regional leadership in balancing economic productivity with environmental care.

Recreation, from hunting and fishing to birdwatching and dark-sky viewing, connects residents and visitors to the land and reinforces its value.

## KEY CONSERVATION ISSUES IN THE REGION

### WATER SCARCITY

- Ogallala groundwater decline
- South Platte surface flows

### WATER QUALITY

- Salinization & sedimentation
- Nutrient Loads & Algal Blooms in rivers and reservoirs

### HABITAT LOSS/FRAGMENTATION

- Grassland bird declines across all counties, with Washington/Yuma retaining more intact prairie

### BIRD POPULATION DECLINES

- Likely pollinator population declines

### INVASIVE RIPARIAN TREES

- Russian olive and tamarisk in river counties

### ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

- Wind & transmission projects (Washington, Yuma, Morgan) intersect with raptor/bat flyways





Photo by Stacie Fritzier

Whether you like the beach, mountains, or prairies, it is hard not to feel attached to the rolling plains and diverse ecosystems found in Northeast Colorado. The area is rich in nature, natural resources, and people who have thrived here for thousands of years due to its fertile soil, endless blue skies, and four seasons.



Conservation tourism, including bird watching, dark skies touring, and hunting are increasing in Northeast Colorado.



Music, culture, arts, and history events and locations are identified as opportunities by communities in the region.



## WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER

### HERITAGE & CULTURAL

#### LOGAN

- Overland Trail Museum
- Logan County Fair & Rodeo
- Sugar Beet Days Festival

#### MORGAN

- Fort Morgan Museum
- Morgan County Fair
- 3-day 4th of July Parade & Rodeo
- Oktoberfest

#### PHILLIPS

- Phillips County Historical Society Museum
- Historic Peerless Theater & Burge Hotel
- Phillips County Fair

#### SEDGWICK

- Fort Sedgwick & Pony Express historical sites
- Fort Sedgwick Historical Museums
- South Platte Trail Scenic & Historic Byway
- Annual Car Show

#### WASHINGTON

- Washington County Museum
- Annual 4th of July Celebration with fireworks
- Eastern Colorado Roundup County Fair

#### YUMA

- Wray Museum
- Several archaeological sites
- Annual Old Thresher's Day Event
- Yuma County Fair

#### ACROSS THE REGION

- Native American battle sites

### ARTS & MUSIC

#### LOGAN

- City of Living Trees Art Exhibit
- July Jamz Free Summer Concert Series

#### MORGAN

- Childhood home of Glenn Miller
- Annual Glenn Miller Swingfest
- Annual Bobstock Music Festival
- Free Thursday Night Concert Series
- Summer People's Market

#### PHILLIPS

- Phillips County Art Show
- Dandelion Daze Car Show
- Haxtun Corn Festival
- Old Fashioned Saturday Night

#### SEDGWICK

- Hippodrome Arts Centre

#### YUMA

- Dancing with the Yuma Stars

### RECREATION

#### LOGAN

- Large outdoor pool in Sterling with water slides & two golf courses
- North Sterling Reservoir (boating, fishing)

#### MORGAN

- Rainbow Arch Bridge & Riverside Park
- Longmeadow Game Resort & Event Center (hunting)
- Jackson Lake State Park (fishing, boating)

#### PHILLIPS

- Phillips County Raceway (car racing)
- Ballyneal Golf & Hunt Club
- Several hunting expedition outfitters

#### SEDGWICK

- DePooter Lake (fishing)
- Jumbo Reservoir State Wildlife Area (camping, boating)

#### WASHINGTON

- Prewitt Reservoir State Wildlife Area (camping, boating, hunting)
- Washington County Golf Club

#### YUMA

- Lake Yuma with year-round events
- Annual 5:10 to Yuma 5k/10k Run





# RENEWING

How can Northeast Colorado continue to build upon its legacy of service and stewardship to shape the next generation of opportunity?

## How Northeast Colorado invests in its future

Renewing is about participation in the life of the region, the ways that people show up, lead, and contribute to their communities and the things they care about. The Renewing intersection reveals that Northeast Colorado's future depends on its people as much as its systems.

Across Northeast Colorado, civic engagement and helping one another runs deep. Residents serve on school boards, volunteer as first responders, organize local events, mentor youth, support churches and service clubs, and contribute to community initiatives. Much of this work happens quietly, driven by relationships and a shared sense of responsibility.

Community leadership, philanthropy, civic engagement, and collaboration create the conditions for adaptation and progress. At the same time, sustaining this momentum will require intentional investment in leadership development, cross-county coordination, and inclusive participation. The spirit of renewal reflects the region's long-standing tradition of stepping in when something needs to be done.

## Community Engagement and Volunteerism

Formal volunteering across Colorado has declined in recent years, yet informal helping, neighbors supporting neighbors, remains strong and often exceeds formal participation rates. In rural communities, these informal networks are essential infrastructure. Local leaders frequently carry multiple roles, balancing professional responsibilities with civic leadership. While this demonstrates commitment, it also raises concerns about leadership burnout and succession planning.

Supporting the next generation of community leaders will be key to sustaining long-term resilience.

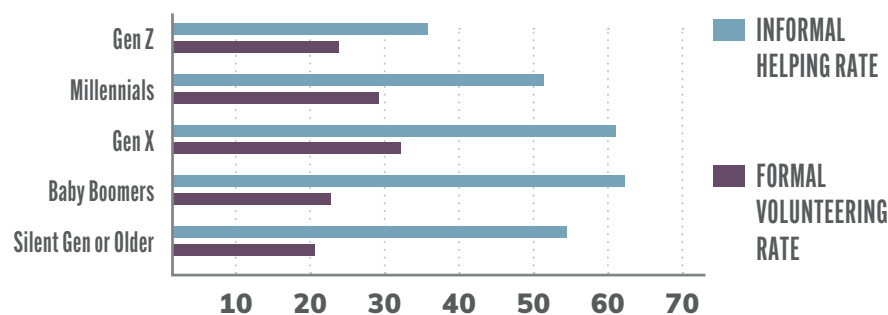


In Colorado, **informal volunteering rates (62.8%) are nearly double** those for formal volunteering (33.9%).

Rates for **both types of volunteering** went down during the COVID pandemic but have **come back up** over recent years.

Over **20% of Coloradans** report that they worked with other people from their neighborhood to do something positive for their neighborhood or the community in the past year.

### Generational Volunteering Trends



From 2023 AmeriCorps data

# PHILANTHROPY AND LOCAL INVESTMENT

We are in the midst of the largest transfer of wealth in history; our communities in Northeast Colorado are seeing this firsthand as heirs move away from rural America. This wealth is often forever lost from these rural communities. Philanthropy plays a growing role in strengthening regional well-being. Funding across sectors, including health, education, human services, arts, and civic initiatives, supports community priorities and fills gaps where resources are limited.

At the same time, grant capacity and administrative resources vary across counties, affecting how communities access funding opportunities. Continued coordination among nonprofits, local governments, and regional partners can help ensure resources align with community needs.



## Renewing: Philanthropy & Charitable Giving

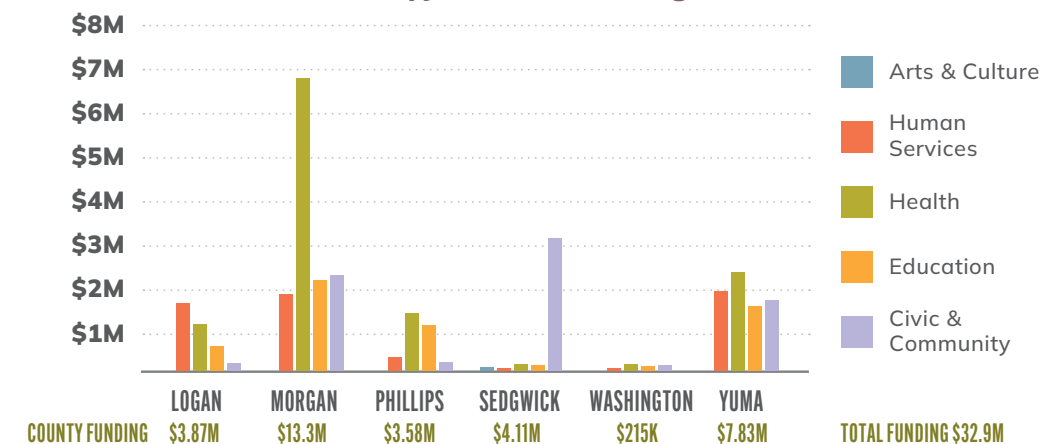
According to data from El Pomar Foundation, the region received nearly \$33 million in philanthropic funding in 2024. This is just a snapshot in time and does not represent ongoing donations or trends. A takeaway is that some counties might benefit from grant writing support or other donor engagement expertise to increase contributions that create positive impact in the community.



**“Legacies are built by giving of our time and treasure to benefit people other than ourselves and, I believe, there is tremendous opportunity to positively impact the future when investing in rural communities. On the Eastern Plains we share the values of both staunch independence and an over-riding, old-fashioned sense of Community—the importance of taking care of one another. We understand that giving back, through volunteerism and philanthropy, is an essential component of a meaningful life and a successful community.”**

Cindy Horner, Logan County, former Board of Trustee at the NoCo Foundation

### Philanthropy & Charitable Giving



**Charitable giving** by residents is strong in Colorado, typically **higher than the national average**

**Around 59.5% of residents regularly give** money or possessions with a value of more than \$25 to a non-political group or organization each year.

El Pomar Foundation's 2025 Foundation Giving in Colorado Report



## BRIGHT SPOT: EASTERN COLORADO OFFICE OF THE NOCO FOUNDATION

Established in 2016, the Eastern Colorado office of the NoCo Foundation, is the main philanthropic resource in Northeast Colorado. As stated before, a large transfer of wealth will occur in this region, and the heirs don't always stay in the region, and the family's hard earned assets don't either. If just a small percentage of inter-generational wealth was gifted back to its community of origin, it could provide substantial dollars for long-term community benefit.

All donor accounts established to benefit Eastern Colorado communities, whether donor advised, scholarship, designated, field of interest, or unrestricted, are part of the Eastern Colorado portfolio of funds. A local Eastern Colorado Office advisory board, comprised of two members from the six Northeastern Colorado counties, is responsible for grantmaking from the unrestricted portion of Eastern Colorado portfolio of funds.

Donors are encouraged to consider leaving a lasting legacy for Eastern Colorado through major gifts such as real estate, mineral rights, water rights, and estate gifts. Over the long term, these gifts will strengthen future generations in education, the arts, recreation, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and more. These community assets will provide the basis for creating and retaining jobs, attracting new commercial ventures, and expanding existing businesses and industries. The combined effect will be heightened opportunities and economic growth across the region.

## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: CSU EXTENSION

For more than 100 years, Colorado State University Extension has connected university research with the needs of local communities, providing trusted, science-based education and resources across Colorado. In Northeast Colorado, Extension specialists work alongside residents, producers, and local organizations to address community priorities and strengthen rural resilience.

Through programs in 4-H youth development, agriculture and ranch management, horticulture, food systems, nutrition, and community development, Extension helps individuals and communities access practical tools that improve quality of life and economic vitality.

In 2024 alone, CSU Extension reached more than 12,500 residents in the Eastern Region through consultations, workshops, and presentations demonstrating the power of regional partnerships to support thriving communities across Northeast Colorado.



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



**“I want to come back to Northeastern Colorado because of the compassion the people have for another. Especially in the agriculture sector, everyone supports each other in both the good and bad times and I want to be part of a community that is built on compassion and the kindness for others. My hopes and dreams for this place are to see it continue this care we have for one another.”**

Siena Donnelson, Logan County Fair Queen, Fleming High School Senior, Boettcher Foundation and Daniels Fund Scholarship Recipient

### Which states are the most neighborly?

#### Utahans

- Most likely to informally help their neighbor, 2023 rate of informal volunteers was 68.2%

#### Montanans

- Coming in second at 68.0%

#### Coloradans

- Ranked third at 67.4%

From 2023 AmeriCorps data



Around **30% of Coloradans** report belonging to a **community group, organization, or association** over the past year.



Only around **12% of Coloradans** report **attending a public meeting** in the past year, a rate that has been falling over the past decade.



**More than 65%** (higher than the national rate) of Coloradans over the age of 18 who were eligible **reported voting in the last local election**, such as for mayor, school board, and other elected officials.

## Civic Participation and Regional Voice

Local leaders across Northeast Colorado actively engage in policy conversations at the state and interstate levels, particularly on issues such as water, land use, and economic development. Participation in elections remains meaningful, even as turnout trends fluctuate. Renewing also includes long-range planning, county comprehensive plans, zoning updates, and regional collaborations that shape how communities respond to growth, development pressures, and infrastructure needs.

Strong civic participation ensures that rural perspectives remain part of statewide decision-making.





# MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



Northeast Colorado has everything it needs to shape its future: strong leadership, deep relationships, essential industries, and a tradition of stewardship. When communities come together across county lines, those strengths multiply. This report can serve as a tool for advocacy, for securing resources, and for aligning efforts whether in conversations about water compacts, conservation funding, land use planning, workforce development, or infrastructure investment.

Regional well-being is not built by a single organization. It is built through participation, partnership, and shared purpose. This report is an invitation to stay engaged, to listen deeply, and to work together in ways that honor both the distinct identity of each community and the power of the region as a whole.

## How to Get Involved

- Participate in local planning and zoning meetings
- Attend Rural Philanthropy Days (July 2026 and beyond)
- Engage in water and conservation district discussions
- Join regional collaboration efforts
- Connect with local leaders, nonprofits, and CSU Extension partners
- Visit [nocofoundation.org/necointersections](https://nocofoundation.org/necointersections) for opportunities

## Reader's Guide

- Start a conversation. Use the Intersections framework to explore how issues connect.
- Which Intersections feel most urgent in our community?
- Where do challenges overlap?
- Who should be part of the conversation?
- What should we do next?

## Use the Report to Inform Planning and Decision-Making.

### This report can support:

- Comprehensive plans and land use discussions
- Water and conservation conversations
- Workforce and economic development strategies
- Housing, healthcare, and infrastructure planning
- Grant applications and philanthropic investment



**“Strong municipal leadership means understanding that no community succeeds alone. Our communities are too interconnected, and our challenges too complex, for isolated decision-making. If we are serious about serving the public well, collaboration across municipalities is imperative. It is how we stretch limited resources and strengthen our region. It is imperative if we want sustainable, responsible outcomes that allow our residents to remain in place and preserve our way of life.”**

Gillian Laycock, CPM, PHR,  
Town Manager, Town of Akron

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



## Sources & Data Links

The Colorado State University's Institute for the Built Environment (IBE) relied on hundreds of data sources for this report.

For a full list of sources and their links, please visit [nocofoundation.org/necointersections](https://nocofoundation.org/necointersections)



### EXAMPLE DATA SOURCES

#### National/Federal

- U.S. Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/>

#### Statewide (Government / Non-profit, etc.)

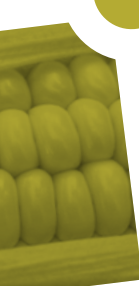
- State Demography Office, <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/>
- El Pomar Foundation, <https://www.elpomar.org/programs/regional-partnerships/2025-funders-report/>

#### Local

- Regional survey
- Local & regional engagement events
- Interviews with local residents & leaders
- Municipal & county websites
- Organizational websites (e.g. Northeastern Junior College)
- Local articles & news outlets

## Report Research, Content, and Design Team

- Clayton Bartcza
- Aliria Bello de Delgado
- Claire Bouchard
- Valentina Brienza
- Wendy Brookshire
- Jonathan Cable
- John Chapdelaine
- Mike Duffert
- Taylor Garske
- Catie Green
- Katie Hayhurst
- Trent Hollister
- Dennis Kaan
- Sophia Linn
- Emma McMurphy-Chicon
- JoLynn Midcap
- Paula Mills
- Rose Parham
- Elicia Ratajczyk
- Colleen Rodriguez
- Jen Schill
- Patti Schmitt
- Oliver Smock
- Tim Stahley
- Peggy Stoltenberg
- Kristin Todd



NOCO FOUNDATION  
4745 WHEATON DR.  
FORT COLLINS, CO 80525  
[nocofoundation.org](http://nocofoundation.org)

