

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DOLORES COUNTY

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Because of its location, borders, infrastructure and rugged topography, Dolores county is one of the least populous counties in the State of Colorado with just over 2,000 people. It qualifies as a rural and economically depressed county based on stipulations of state and federal programs.

The county has a rich history based around industry borne from the land. The eastern third of the county is comprised of rugged high peaks that include iconic 14,000 foot peaks. These mountains are rich in ore and were the basis of a boom-and-bust mining industry that cycled from the late 1800's till the mid 1900's. The eastern third of the county is rich in Pueblos and artifacts from native peoples. It is also well suited to the agricultural production of gourmet dryland beans. It experienced a uranium mining boom during the mid 1900's. The middle of the county is rich timberland composed mainly of Ponderosa Pine.

The goal of this project was to create a document to highlight the resources within the county and provide relevant information to potential entrepreneurs or businesses that may be interested in initiating or relocating operations in Dolores County. Creating a more resilient local economy through entrepreneurship and business attraction that aligns with community values is the ultimate goal of this project.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

The goal of this internship is to create a comprehensive resource inventory for Dolores County. The inventory includes an assessment of relevant demographic data to better understand the workforce and community needs. It also includes identification of developable land based on existing utilities, land use, and land prices, and a compilation of existing incentives for businesses from local, state, and federal institutions.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO YOUR EDUCATION

As an economics major, it is occasionally unclear what types of work and careers are available and how work in economics can directly affect people and industries. Through this project I was able to gain an understanding of existing policies that are meant to spur economic development in rural communities. I interpreted census and demographic data in order to better inform interested parties about Dolores county. Additionally, I gained insight into how the unique culture of a community informs its needs and how to utilize this understanding to make recommendations regarding development and policy.

WHAT YOU DID

For eight weeks of the ten-week internship I relocated to Dove Creek Colorado and worked in the main county office. Living in the county proved immensely valuable. I was able to explore the county's more remote areas and experience the local economy and communities. Through interactions with local business owners and community members, I was able to gain an understanding of community values and needs.

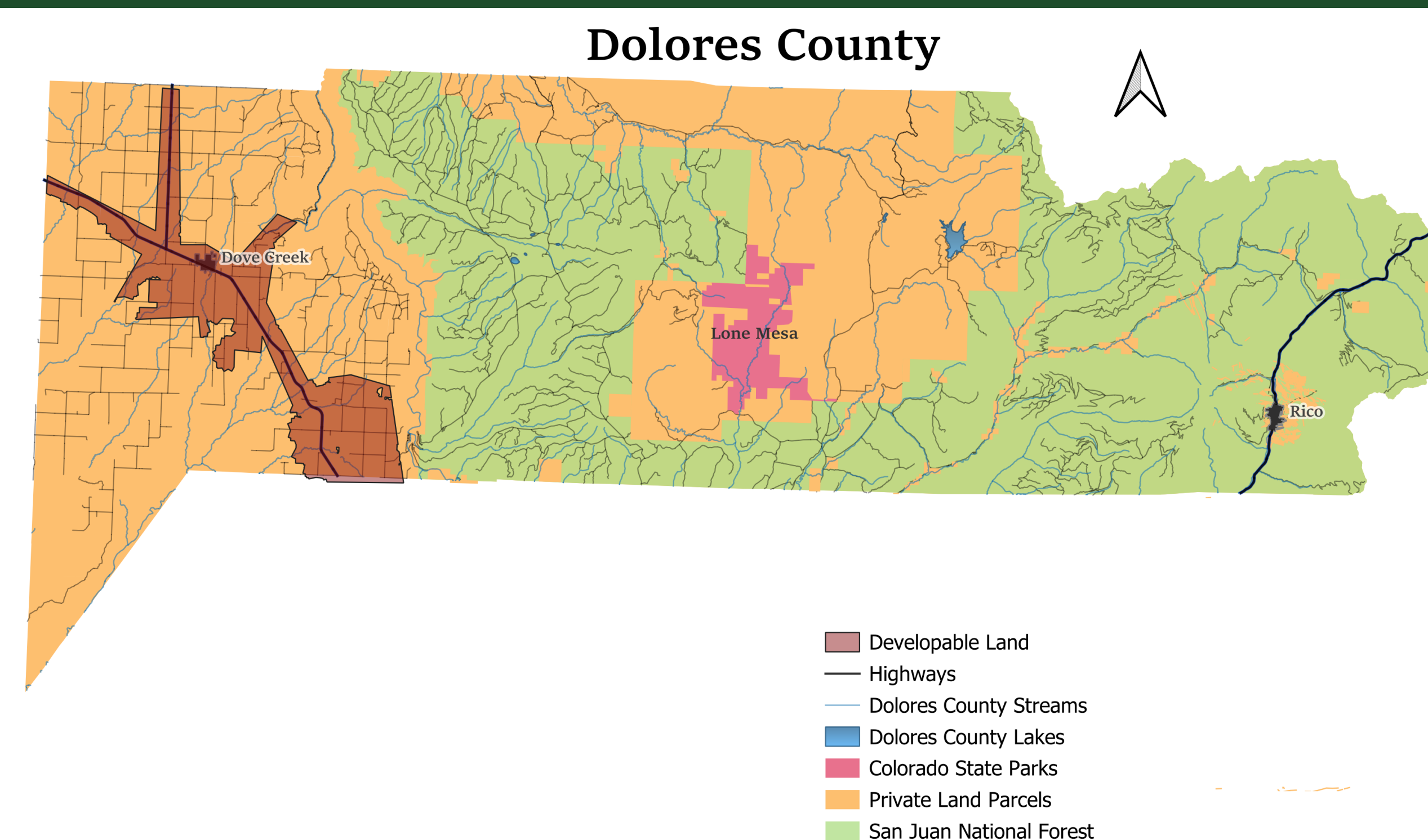
I initially began the internship by developing a framework and for the project. Next, I contacted local and regional stakeholders who would be integral to the completion of the project. I then created a tentative timeline which, for the most part I was able to keep to as the internship progressed.

I was able to collaborate with Region 9, a regional economic development nonprofit. With the help of Region 9 and REDI I was able to build off existing economic reports to compile relevant economic data to better inform potential employers or businesses that may relocate to the county.

I compiled economic incentives from across institutions including the USDA, State of Colorado, and Department of Energy. I also communicated with local and regional nonprofits that offer capital to businesses like the Dolores County Development Corporation and Region 9, along with the regional business development center Southwest Colorado Small Business Development Center, who offers free trainings and education to potential entrepreneurs.

I met with local government officials including the Town Manager of Rico, and the Mayor of Dove Creek to discuss infrastructure and housing projects along with zoning and visions for the future that align with community values.

Figure 1. (image)



WHAT YOU LEARNED

I learned what economic development looks like in practice in a place where it is ongoing. I learned how important it is to understand a community and its values when working in economic development. I learned the value of data and how it can be used to provide information in a format that is appealing and easier to understand. I learned that utility companies are very guarded about their information. I learned how an extension office runs and the vast array of responsibilities and day to day task of a sole agent.

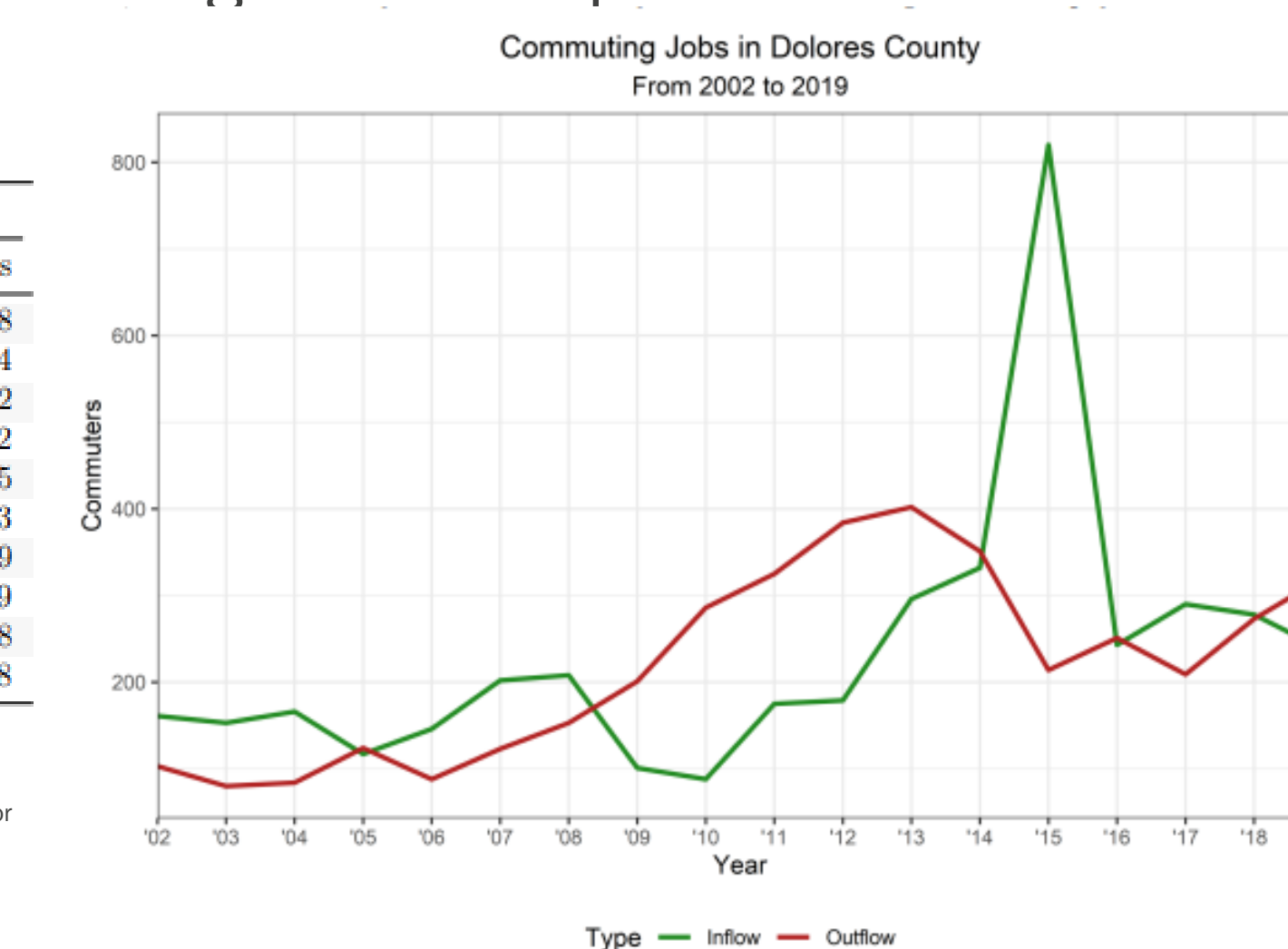
Workforce Commuting

In the Eastern portion of the county, most commuters live in the town of Rico and commute to Telluride. According to the Regional Economic Development Institute or REDI, eighty-eight people commute from Dolores County (Rico) to San Miguel County (Telluride). On the West side of the county, it is more common for people to commute from Dolores County south to Montezuma county's largest city, Cortez. Fifty-four people commute from Dolores County to Montezuma County. In total there are 258 people living within the county that are exporting their labor to outside of the county according the REDI report, which is significant because with a county of only 2,326 people this means that over 10% of the population is making substantial commute to work and only roughly fifty percent is participating in the labor force. This creates an environment in which a new employer could utilize either the half of the labor force that is not participating or the laborers that are commuting but would prefer not to.

Table 2: Top 10 Inflow/Outflow Counties for Dolores County Commuters

Rank	Inflow Source		Outflow Destination	
	County	Commuters	County	Commuters
1	Montezuma County, CO	77	San Miguel County, CO	88
2	San Miguel County, CO	22	Montezuma County, CO	54
3	La Plata County, CO	21	Mesa County, CO	32
4	Montrose County, CO	18	La Plata County, CO	22
5	San Juan County, NM	11	Denver County, CO	15
6	Larimer County, CO	8	Jefferson County, CO	13
7	Mesa County, CO	8	Arapahoe County, CO	9
8	Ouray County, CO	8	Larimer County, CO	9
9	San Juan County, UT	7	Douglas County, CO	8
10	Delta County, CO	6	Garfield County, CO	8

Miller, G. R. (2023). Commuting Jobs in Dolores County From 2002 to 2019. REDI@CSU Economic Indicator Report for Dolores County. REDI@CSU. Retrieved August 7, 2023, from https://csuredi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/REDI_ER_Dolores.pdf.



Acknowledgements

Without the help of Oma Fleming, the administrative assistant of the Dolores County Extension Office, this would not have been possible. I received support from everyone at Region 9 including but not limited to Heather Otter, Shalako Powers, Brian Rose, and Laura Lewis Marchino. Their kindness and enthusiasm is contagious. Both the Town Manager of Rico Chauncey McCarthy, and Mayor of Dove Creek Brett Martin provided invaluable insights. I had the pleasure to work alongside Gus Westerman for most of this project and learn how an extension office runs. And of course, thank you to Dr Stephen Weiler for his expertise, wisdom, and words of encouragement when I needed them most.