

**PITKIN  
COUNTY**

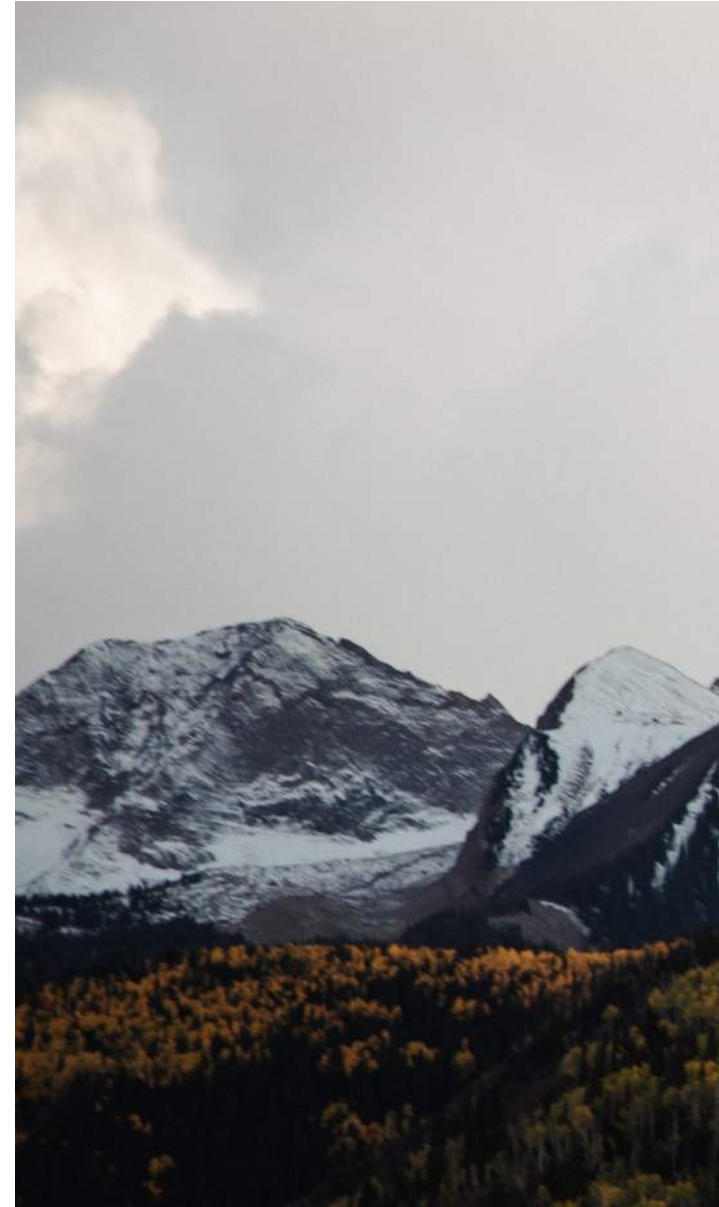


DRAFT

Pitkin County

# Comprehensive Plan

DRAFT





# 01

# Introduction



# Prologue

In July 2022, the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) formed a Community Growth Advisory Committee (CGAC) to develop recommendations for managing the impacts of growth and development to align our community values and climate action goals.

As community advisors, the CGAC was tasked with providing the BOCC with recommendations for meeting Pitkin County's 2050 climate goals while also ensuring we maintain and enhance the quality of life for our community. In order to guide the Committee's deliberations, the BOCC established a set of goals that were refined by the CGAC:

1. **Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 90% by 2050**
2. **Achieve residential net zero by 2030**
3. **Ensure a balanced level of economic activity**

## THE CRITICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN LAND USE, CLIMATE ACTION, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Land use may be one of the most powerful tools to influence quality of life and reflect our community values. In the 1970s, Pitkin County pioneered the development of land use codes to reflect the community's values. Long-held values embedded within the Pitkin County Land Use Code include environmental preservation, the pacing of development to manage growth in the community, and the preservation of rural and

wild lands. These same values still hold true today, but need to evolve to properly reflect the changing conditions of today, integrating climate, equity, economic balance.

Pitkin County's land use strategies influence the entire built and natural environments and are defined by zoning, building, and energy codes. Because land use touches everything – from open space to housing costs, carbon emissions to workforce demands – making code adjustments is a nuanced process that requires sophisticated and integrated solutions.

At the first meeting, the CGAC unanimously agreed that the Roaring Fork Valley remains an extraordinary place to live. They also recognized that there are problems that need fixing in order to “keep this place special.” The objective was to reduce the negative quality of life impacts of growth while balancing the upsides it brings to our economy and society.

After more than 20 public meetings, the CGAC delivered a final report in the summer of 2023 that included a comprehensive and interconnected set of recommendations designed to protect quality of life, balance community and economic health, and preserve rural and wild lands. The BOCC unanimously directed Pitkin County staff to move forward with implementing the full suite of recommendations. This direction launched the Pitkin County Vision 2050 process, which begins with an update to the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan.

## LIVING OUR VALUES AND IMPLEMENTING A SHARED VISION

The CGAC Recommendations defined the shared community values that make Pitkin County such a unique and desirable location. The CGAC identified diverse priorities and tools for shaping how our future community looks, feels, and functions. From the onset of the project, areas of common ground emerged that continue to serve as guiding principles for the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan:

- **Quality of Life:** Our quality of life is defined by much more than just our beautiful natural environment. It is also defined by our people, sense of community, and shared values. It encompasses the way our community looks, feels, and functions. It is made up of various components and is open to individual interpretation, but its core elements are deeply rooted in our shared community values: Bold Climate Action, Balanced Economy, Rural Preservation, and Equity & Affordability.
- **Balancing Economic Intensity with Quality of Life:** The health of our local businesses is critically important, however; we must intentionally manage and balance our economy so it doesn't displace the things we love about this place and its people.
- **Rural Preservation and Small-Town Character:** Our wild lands, open space, and agricultural producers are central to who we are as a community. We must use innovation and creativity – balanced with flexibility, adaptability and functionality to preserve the small-town look and feel of our community.
- **Equity and Affordability:** It has become increasingly difficult for working-class people to live in Pitkin County. The increased cost of living and housing shortages continue to push the workforce farther down the valley, which increases commutes, traffic and pollution along with significant effects on the quality of life for our essential workforce. To sustain our community we must create a pathway for future generations to live and work in Pitkin County.
- **Collaboration and Shared Leadership:** Envisioning the future of Pitkin County in 30 years is only the first step. Implementing the CGAC's comprehensive recommendations will require continued community leadership and bold political will to ensure the values that have shaped our community for the past 50 years, evolve to meet the demands of the next 30 years.
- **Doing Nothing Is Not An Option:** Emissions from residential buildings are the largest contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in unincorporated Pitkin County, accounting for 47% of total 2019 emissions. If Pitkin County chooses to make no changes to its land use, building, and energy codes, we will not meet our climate goals and will only see greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Are A Concern But Not The Only Concern:** There is an understanding that reliance on fossil fuels and energy use needs to be addressed but that we can't only focus on emissions. Meeting our climate action goals is a must, but so is dealing with the quality of life concerns, economic imbalance, and the sense of "overwhelm" that so many residents and visitors are feeling. We all want less reliance on fossil fuels, but we also want less traffic and congestion.
- **Balance Community Values With Economic Resiliency:** We must continue to prioritize the preservation of open and wild lands and maintain the rural character that defines our community. But we must also address the ways in which very large homes create imbalances in our economy and workforce.
- **Create Early Action:** Opportunities for near-term action have already been taken to prioritize areas where strong common ground exists, including energy code updates (2025) and reduction of maximum house size (2023), as approved by the BOCC.

# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

Vision & Values  
Community Engagement

## CHAPTER 2 | COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Existing Conditions

## CHAPTER 3 | NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

00 Chapter Overview  
01 Natural Resources & Biodiversity  
02 Water Quality/Quantity  
03 Agricultural Lands  
04 Air Quality  
05 Scenic Quality  
06 Public Lands & Open Space  
07 Recreation & Tourism  
08 Environmental Hazards

## CHAPTER 4 | BUILT ENVIRONMENT

00 Chapter Overview  
01 Climate Action in the Built Environment  
02 Land Use

- Land Use Patterns
- Development Standards
- Site Constraints

03 Community Housing  
04 Buildings  
05 Transportation & Mobility  
06 Waste Management  
07 Resilient Infrastructure  
08 Utilities  
09 Cultural & Historic Resources

## CHAPTER 5 | COMMUNITY/ ECONOMIC HEALTH

00 Chapter Overview  
01 Healthy Community  
02 Healthy Economy  
03 Lifelong Services  
04 Local Food  
05 Public Safety & Emergency Response  
06 Hazard Mitigation

## CHAPTER 6 | REGIONAL APPROACH

00 Chapter Overview  
01 Regional Transportation  
02 Regional Climate  
03 Watershed-Wide Environmental Protections  
04 Strategic Partnerships

## APPENDIX

Implementation Matrix  
Supplementary Reports

*Note: Appendix documents are provided for reference only and not formally adopted by Pitkin County appointed or elected officials.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to all those who participated and especially to the following individuals whose thoughtful discussions, insights, and ideas provided the basis for the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan:

### ***Pitkin County Planning and Zoning Commission***

Zachary Matthews  
Joe Mason  
Chelsea Clark  
Joe Krabacher  
Suzanne Caskey  
Doug Throm  
Debbie Kelly

### ***Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners***

Kelly McNicholas Kury  
Jeffrey Woodruff  
Patti Clapper  
Greg Poschman  
Francie Jacober

### ***Pitkin County Staff***

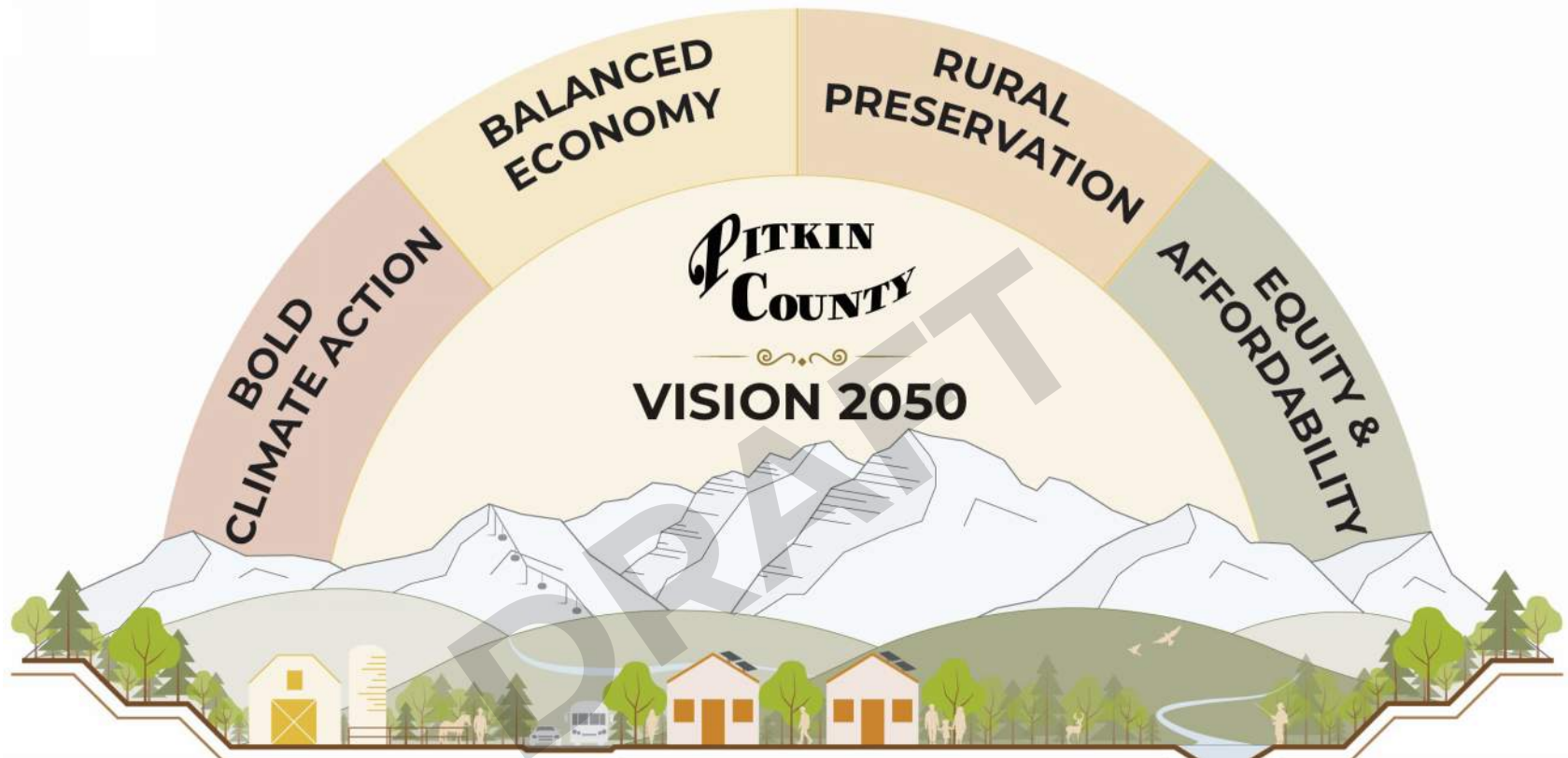
Kara Silbernagel  
Suzanne Wolff  
Nicole Rebeck-Stout  
Ellen Sassano  
Hannah-Hunt Wander  
Jeffrey Erickson  
Alex Sanchez  
Alycin Bektesh  
Rosa Saucedo  
Abbie Cheney

### ***Consulting Team***

Design Workshop, Inc.  
GBSM  
TG Malloy

### ***Vision 2050 Workgroup***

Adam Roy  
Allen Jones  
Barb Pitchford  
Barb Sullan  
Bill Sterling  
Bryan Hannegan  
Chris Menges  
Christi Blish  
Cliff Weiss  
Debbie Kelly  
Glen Horn  
Jennifer Olson  
Joe Wells  
Johno McBride  
Maciej Mrotek  
Marcella Larsen  
Max Fillis  
Melanie Buchholz  
Michael Miracle  
Morgan Boyles  
Nicolas Chan  
Randy Gold  
Rick Stevens  
Sierra Flanigan  
Stacy Keating  
Suzanne Caskey  
Tim Estin



## **Pitkin County Vision 2050**

*Implement bold climate action while balancing our economy, preserving our rural and wild lands, and supporting an equitable and affordable community.*

# Grounded in Our Values

***We are in a climate emergency that requires **Bold Climate Action.*****

Our climate and community goals demand dramatically more energy-efficient and higher-performing homes while reducing our energy and consumption needs. We have the opportunity to lead the way by empowering our community to create a more resilient, carbon-free future.

***To sustainably meet our climate action goals, we must work towards a **Balanced Economy** by incorporating community and economic health.***

A healthy economy is one where community-oriented and local businesses thrive; where jobs provide year-round financial security; and where our workforce is valued and supported regardless of whether they live within or outside of our county boundaries.

***Rural Preservation is integral to our community's character; maintaining our rural lifestyle and protecting our wild lands are values essential to most residents and visitors of Pitkin County.***

Preservation promotes the benefits of public lands, agriculture, and open space as limited resources of environmental, cultural, visual, and economic value for future generations.

***Supporting Equity and Affordability is crucial for building a thriving community and protecting our quality of life.***

By finding solutions that positively create social and economic benefits, we can work collaboratively with our partners to ensure Pitkin County continues to be a place where all people can live, work, and visit.



# Introduction

## WHAT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan is an overarching community planning document to guide county-wide policy direction and decision-making for the future. This plan establishes a vision for Pitkin County and provides a framework for our community to navigate its future in alignment with our community values. Counties in Colorado are authorized to develop comprehensive plans to guide, advise, and align our county's land use, regulations, investments, and public services with the values of the Pitkin County community and its citizens. In accordance with Colorado Revised Statute (C.R.S. 30-28-106), it is the duty of the Planning Commission to make and adopt the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan as the statutory master plan for unincorporated Pitkin County, subject to the approval of the Board of County Commissioners.

## WHY MAKE THIS PLAN?

The Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan is a forward-looking community road map providing a policy foundation to guide Pitkin County through challenging decisions and to support our decision makers as they navigate our community's most pressing issues.

Pitkin County is at a crossroads. While our full-time population is not growing significantly, residential development activity and seasonal influx of visitors peak our population beyond what our infrastructure and resources can sustainably

manage. Existential climate change, traffic congestion, limited housing and a general lack of affordability present pressures that substantially impact our quality of life.

In 2023, an appointed 26-member Community Growth Advisory Committee (CGAC) presented their final recommendations report to the BOCC and Planning Commission. Their recommendations advised regulatory changes to reshape land use and development standards in alignment with our desired quality of life. This work laid the foundation for Pitkin County Vision 2050:

**Pitkin County Vision 2050**  
*Implement bold climate action while balancing our economy, preserving our rural and wild lands, and supporting an equitable and affordable community.*

Creating the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan is a first step to implement the recommendations of the CGAC and establish the policy foundation to guide future code updates and support for administrative process and programs. Significantly, this plan also incorporates Caucus Master Plans, other existing community plans, addresses state requirements, and incorporates feedback from stakeholders, community partners, and the broader community through a rigorous public engagement process.

## WHO IS THE PITKIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR?

**Pitkin County's Community.** For all those who live, work, and visit Pitkin County, this document establishes our community-wide vision and values.

**Pitkin County's Planning Commission.** This document provides the Planning Commission with policy direction, especially for land use and development decisions and will be used as a basis for forthcoming code updates. Some planning applications are reviewed for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

**Pitkin County's Board of County Commissioners.** This document provides the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) with policy direction informing land use decisions as well as broader county programs, services and regional partnerships, in alignment with our community values.

**Pitkin County's Caucuses** This document provides the county-wide vision, priorities, and policies that can guide updates to Caucus Master Plans. At the same time, Caucus Master Plans directly guided the development of this plan as their input was informed by their specific geography, with consideration of the broader county-wide community benefits.

**Pitkin County's Staff.** This document provides a guide for Pitkin County staff to advise on land use applications based on compatibility with the policy direction established in the Plan and to implement the policies and programs identified in the plan as directed by Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners.

**Pitkin County's community partner organizations.** This document recognizes that Pitkin County cannot unilaterally solve the complex regional problems we face. Strategic partnerships are essential for supporting our interconnected communities through shared resources and programming that creates opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.

**Pitkin County's local businesses and workforce.** This document advocates for a sustainable economy that is available to all - where Pitkin County supports small businesses, living wage jobs, and the workforce across all sectors.

**Pitkin County's development sector and property owners.** This document articulates the desired land use and community character to guide upcoming land use and building code updates. Many development applications are evaluated for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.



## CAUCUSES AS A UNIQUE FORM OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN PITKIN COUNTY

*Article IV of the Pitkin County Home Rule Charter establishes the following purpose and functions of Caucuses, which are a unique form of grassroots democracy present in Pitkin County, one of only two home-rule charter counties in Colorado:*

### **Background & Purpose:**

In 1978, the Pitkin County voters adopted Article IV, Caucuses, as part of the Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, stating in the preamble that: “The word ‘caucus’ may derive from an Algonquin Indian term describing their advisory form of representative democracy. In the Pitkin County experience, the word connotes representative democracy at the most local level where policies are formulated and recommended by the people whom they most affect. Once formulated at the local caucus level, these policies provide elected and appointed county officials with recommendations to enact just laws and policies.” (*Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, Article IV, 4.0*)

### **Caucus Areas:**

“Recognized caucus areas to the greatest extent possible shall reflect geographically contiguous areas with social, economic, cultural and environmental communities of interest.” (*Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, Article IV, 4.5*)

### **Caucus Functions:**

- **Recommending Body:** Caucuses function as recommending bodies for planning matters as well as other county matters affecting the caucus area. (*Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, Article IV, 4.6*)
- **Caucus Master Plan Development & Purpose:** “The County Commissioners and the Planning and Zoning Commission will encourage the development of Caucus Master Plans. The County Commissioners shall specify the criteria for the Caucus Master Plan development procedures, and local caucus approval. Caucus Master Plans which satisfy such criteria shall be recognized by the Planning Commission, and County Commissioners. The Caucus Master Plan shall be considered as one of the primary advisory documents in the development of county laws, rules and regulations which affect caucus areas.” (*Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, Article IV, 4.11*)

### **State Requirement for Comprehensive Plans:**

Per the Colorado Revised Statute (C.R.S. 30-28-106), it is the duty of the Planning Commission to make and adopt a Comprehensive Plan as the master plan for the unincorporated territory of Pitkin County subject to the approval of the Board of County Commissioners. The Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan is an advisory document to guide, advise, and align county-wide land use, regulations, investments, and public services with the values of the community they serve.

### **Comprehensive Plan Applies to Unincorporated Pitkin County as a Whole:**

The Comprehensive Plan is an overarching community planning document that applies to the unincorporated Pitkin County area as a whole, with consideration for the recommendations and policies within Caucus Master Plans.

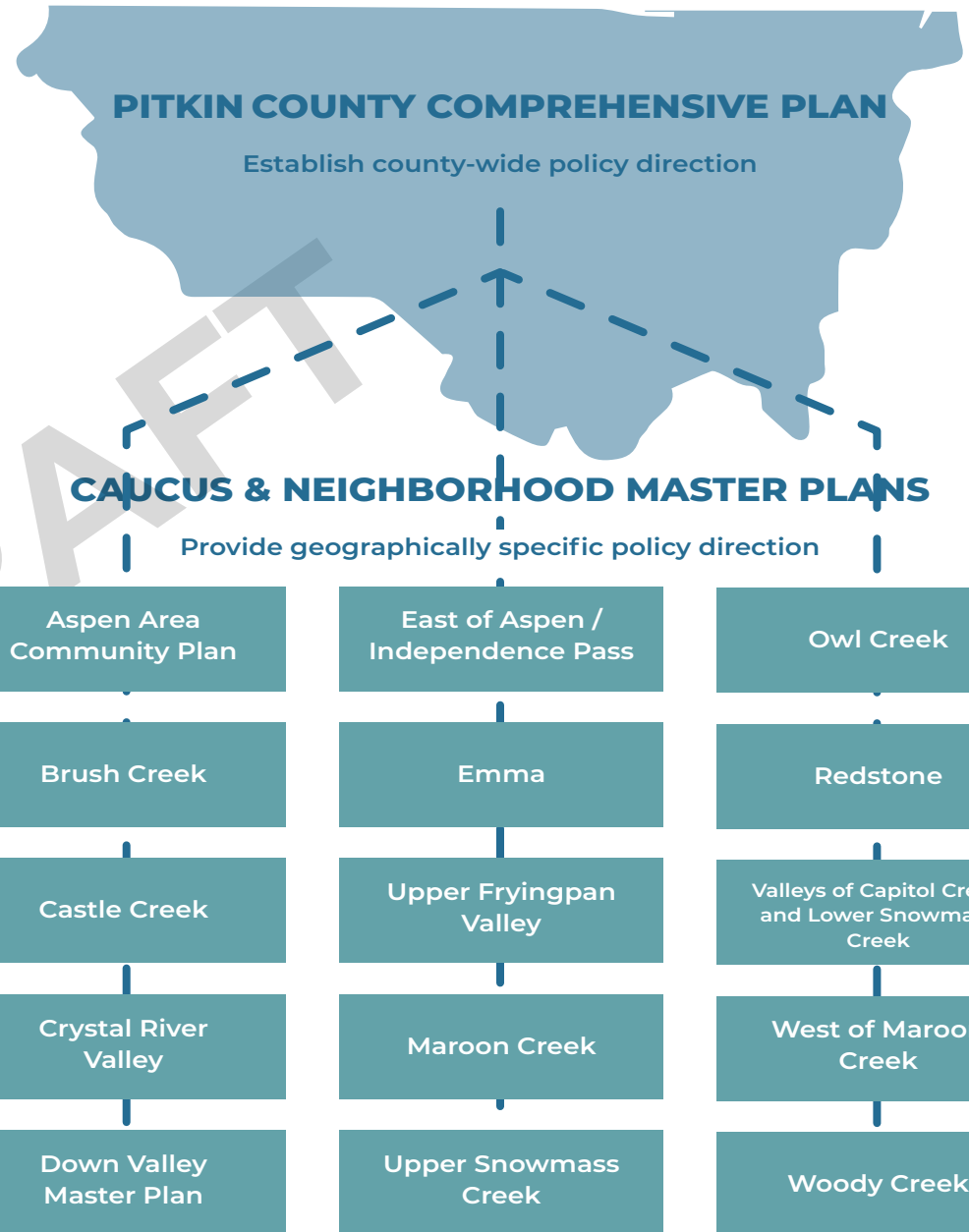
While Caucus Master Plans advise on matters specific to their geographic area, not all of unincorporated Pitkin County lies within a Caucus Area. Therefore, the Comprehensive Plan establishes the county-wide policy direction to advise on matters that impact the entire county in alignment with the county-wide values of bold climate action, rural preservation, balanced economy, and equity & affordability.

### Why Do Caucus Master Plans Matter?

Caucuses provide recommendations for their geographic area. In some cases based on specific local conditions, a Caucus Master Plan may make a recommendation that is more restrictive than the overall Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan and that furthers a county-wide goal. For example, several Caucus Master Plans recommend house size limits of 5,750 square feet. The policy direction in the Caucus Master Plans provided the basis for a zoning action and codification of overlay districts in the Pitkin County Land Use Code.

### Function of Caucus Master Plans and Comprehensive Plan:

The Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan provides the overall framework and direction for planning in Pitkin County in alignment with the county-wide values to implement bold climate action while balancing the economy, preserving rural and wild lands and supporting an equitable and affordable community. The Caucus Master Plans provide detailed and specific recommendations for their geographic areas. Any action committing land to development or a change in land use shall be reviewed for consistency with the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan and applicable Caucus Master Plan. Where there is any conflict between the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan and a Caucus Master Plan, the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan takes priority. (See Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 02 Land Use, Policy 02.1.5*)

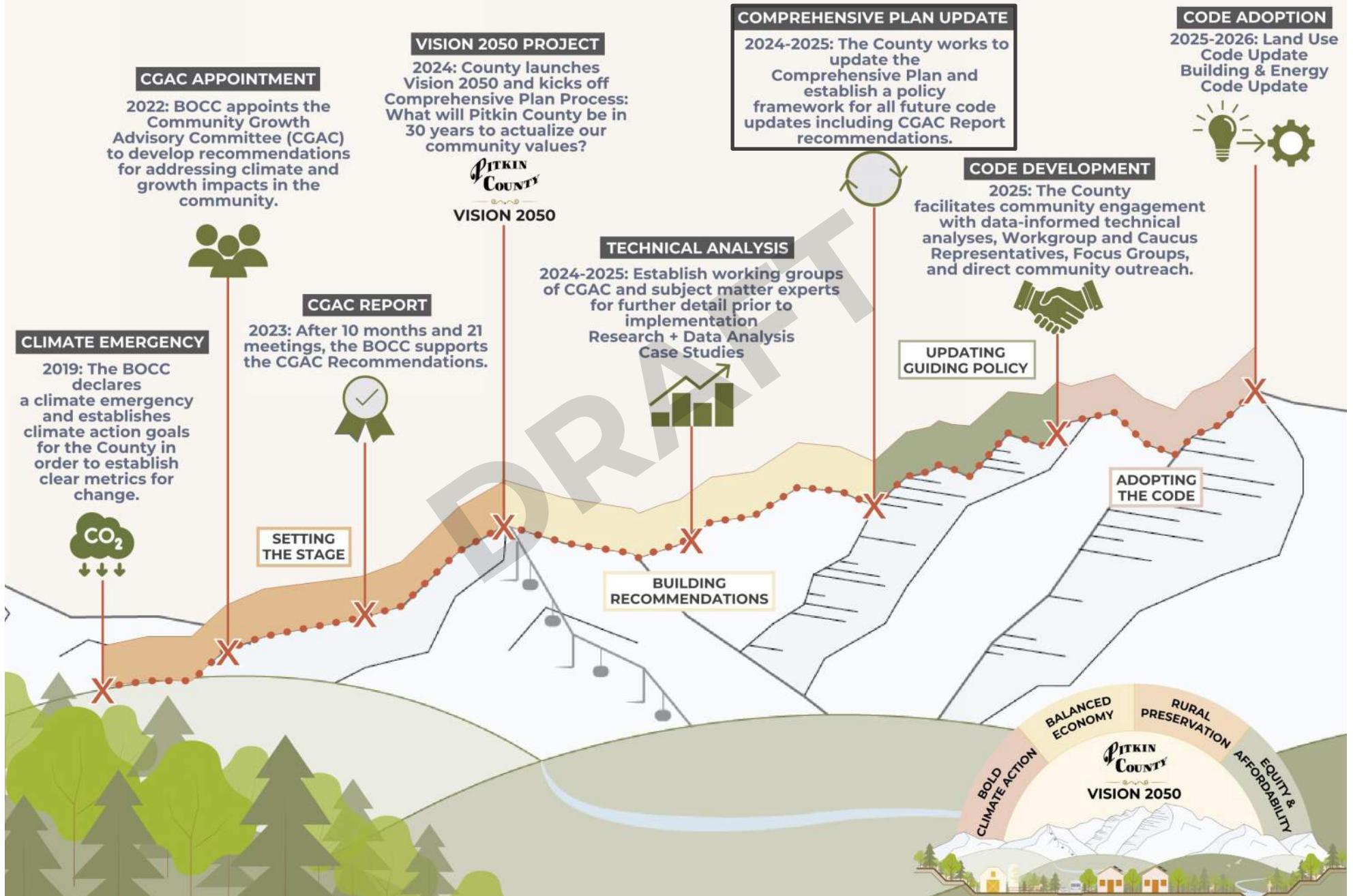


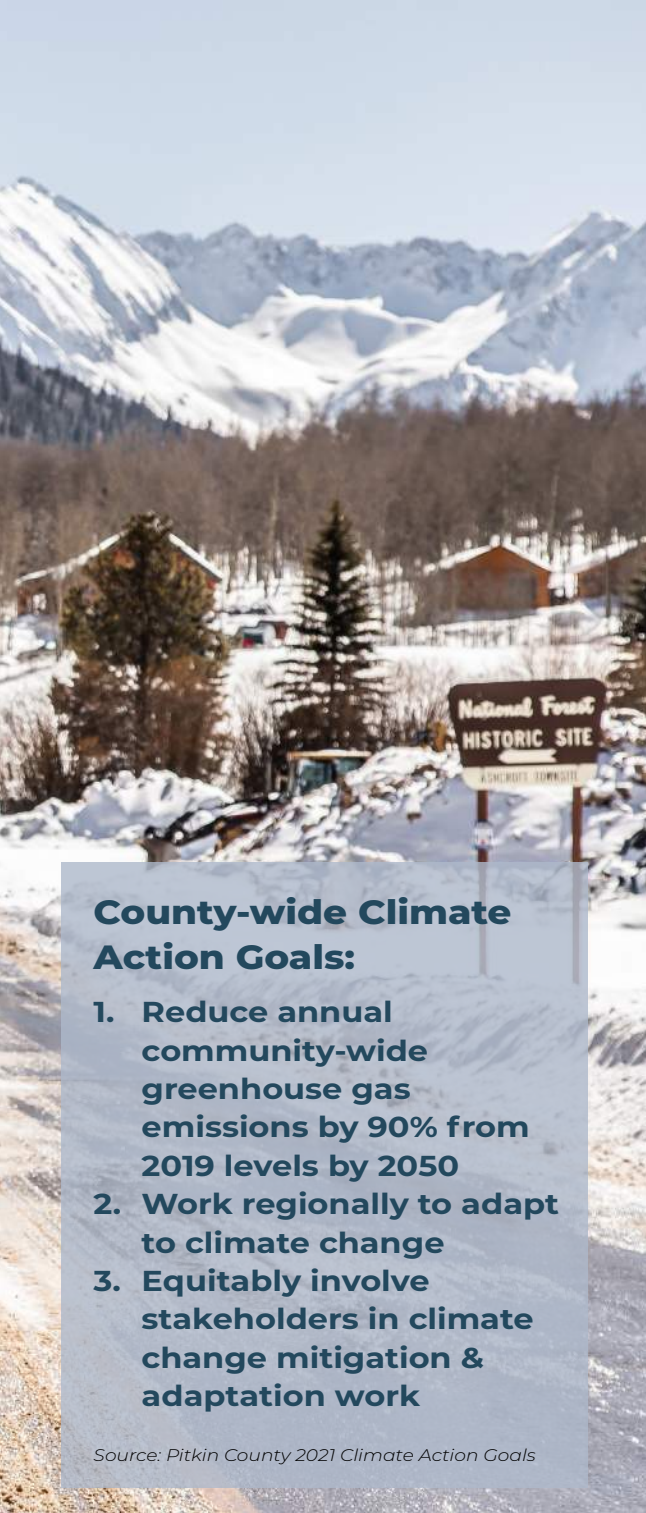
# Vision 2050 Approach

- **Values driven:** Vision 2050 is anchored in our shared community values which guide every decision and action.
- **Data informed:** We rely on strong and relevant data to shape strategies and measure impact for thoughtful decision-making.
- **Collaborative:** We prioritize partnerships and collective input, recognizing that shared efforts lead to stronger outcomes.
- **Process linked to an outcome:** Every step of the Vision 2050 process is intentionally designed to drive toward meaningful, measurable outcomes.
- **Regional in focus:** We address challenges and opportunities through a regional lens, respecting context while fostering broader impact.
- **Concise & clear:** We intend for our communication to be direct, purposeful, and easy to understand, ensuring the document and data is approachable for all audiences.
- **Beyond paper:** We plan to move ideas into action, ensuring that plans translate into tangible, real-world impact.



# PATH TO PITKIN COUNTY VISION 2050





# Establishing Our Goals

## IDENTIFYING OUR CHALLENGES AND COMMUNITY GOALS

The intent of a comprehensive plan is to confront complex issues in a big-picture way. Each of our plan elements are structured around the challenges and big questions that we face as a community as defined in our four plan elements:

### CH 03 | NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Preserving, conserving, and protecting our **Natural Environment** requires stewarding our lands and waters to maintain and enhance ecological and hydrological function. While our community is rich in public lands and wilderness areas, the integrity of our ecosystems and native biodiversity are increasingly threatened by human activity and climate change. Acknowledging our values and these challenges presents a key question: *How do we balance development and growth pressures with environmental sustainability and rural preservation?*

**GOAL:** *Preserve, conserve, and protect the rural character, wild lands, and natural environment of Pitkin County.*

### CH 04 | BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Our **Built Environment** encompasses all man-made elements in our community that provide the setting for human activity and directly influence how our community looks, feels, and functions. Pitkin County's Land Use and Building Code have far-reaching impacts on our community - from transportation to housing, renewable energy to utilities, residential development to workforce demands. One of the most pressing challenges facing our community is the intensification of residential development. While our full-time population is not growing significantly, the activity and daily population in Pitkin County continues to rise dramatically. We face the challenge: *How do we balance economic vitality and residential development intensity with our climate goals, rural character, and community values?*

**GOAL:** *Ensure that all elements of the built environment—land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure—work together to reflect our community values.*

## County-wide Climate Action Goals:

1. Reduce annual community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 90% from 2019 levels by 2050
2. Work regionally to adapt to climate change
3. Equitably involve stakeholders in climate change mitigation & adaptation work

Source: Pitkin County 2021 Climate Action Goals

## CH 05 | COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC HEALTH

Achieving **Community & Economic Health** means enhancing the social and economic wellbeing for all members of our community. While the economy today provides job opportunities and higher wages relative to our region, the largest quantity of jobs remain in lower paying sectors and many are seasonal in nature. Much of our workforce cannot afford to live in Pitkin County and face hours-long commutes on top of affordability and housing challenges. Navigating the dynamics between community health and economic health presents a key question: *How do we balance economic sustainability with development pressures and quality of life values that are essential to community health?*

**GOAL:** *Pitkin County is a healthy, safe and inclusive place with an economy that supports a sustainable, equitable, year-round quality of life.*

## CH 06 | REGIONAL APPROACH

Promoting a **Regional Approach** is about recognizing Pitkin County's role as part of the larger region. Municipalities, adjacent counties, and valley-wide community partner organizations all contribute to planning decisions made for our valley and region. As we consider our place in the broader region: *How do decisions made in Pitkin County impact and support a sustainable and resilient regional quality of life and economy for the future?*

**GOAL:** *Collaborate valley-wide to design and implement systemic solutions to our most challenging and complex challenges, from transportation to housing to climate. One jurisdiction cannot do it all.*



# Comprehensive Plan Update Process

**UPDATE GUIDING POLICY** An essential step along the path to realizing Pitkin County Vision 2050 is to update the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan to establish the guiding policy to drive our community goals and vision and set the stage for implementation.

01

## Where are we now?

JUNE -- SEPT 2024

Based on the core community values of Vision 2050, the process started by assessing the current conditions.

This involved reviewing existing county-wide planning efforts, analyzing demographic, economic, social, and geographic factors. Additionally, trends and future projections were evaluated using information from the Pitkin County Community Survey 2023.

The general public was engaged and informed about the project, targeted outreach with Focus Groups and the Vision 2050 Workgroup commenced. Pitkin County Staff began coordinating with the Planning and Zoning Commission.

**FINAL DELIVERABLE:**  
*Pitkin County Existing Conditions Report (CH 02 of this plan)*

02

## Where do we want to go?

OCT 2024 - - - - MAR 2025

Data research and analysis with community input were integrated to help shape specific policy direction, opportunities and recommendations within each topic area and plan elements:

- Natural Environment
- Built Environment
- Community/Economic Health
- Regional Approach

A solid framework and strategic vision for the plan was established by collecting specific feedback through an Open House, stakeholder expertise gathered through Focus Groups, the Workgroup, and general community input.

**FINAL DELIVERABLES:**  
*Intensity Studies White Paper (included in appendix), Table of Contents, Policy Chapter Drafts*

03

## How do we get there?

APRIL - - - - DEC 2025

Content was synthesized and the plan chapters drafted with input from the community, Workgroup and stakeholders. The draft plan was built from all the content produced during the earlier planning processes, establishing the strategic direction and vision, which, in turn, has guided the policy direction for each plan element and topic area.

The drafted plan was distributed to the community and opened for public comment. A series of Open Houses shared the draft plan with the public and gathered additional feedback. Concurrently, the Planning Commission refined each chapter through the fall during a series of 6 work sessions.

**FINAL DELIVERABLES:**  
*Comprehensive Plan Draft 8/15/25  
Policy Draft Update 12/16/25*

04

## Adopting the Plan

JAN - MAR 2026

Final feedback is incorporated into the full plan. The full Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan is referred to Caucuses, municipalities, adjacent counties, land managers, and other community partners.

Planning Commission works through adoption of the plan through a public hearing process and the BOCC approves the plan in accordance with CRS 30-28-106.

**FINAL DELIVERABLE:**  
*Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan adopted and approved*

# Our Community Engagement Approach

## WHAT STRATEGIES DID WE USE?

Our team employed a range of strategies to actively engage our community throughout the 2024 and 2025 Comprehensive Plan update process, with **emphasis on digital and in-person activities, designed to gather diverse perspectives, ensure that the plan reflects community values, and build support for its implementation.** The in-person activities included workgroup meetings, open houses, pop-up events, as well as small group discussions, interviews and one-on-one sessions with subject matter experts. Our digital tools included a project website, email newsletters, and online surveys. Both types of activities were supported and promoted with printed materials, advertisements, social media posts, and radio announcements.

- **Provide engagement grounded in community values** to ensure that Vision 2050 is aligned with a shared vision for Bold Climate Action, Balanced Economy, Rural Preservation, and Equity & Affordability.
- **Implement a values-driven and data-informed process** to guide land use planning for the overall economic and social well-being of the community.
- **Create a planning document that addresses both current and long-term needs** from what we heard, while balancing the trade offs inherent in the natural and built environments.
- **Reflect our unique community** within the context of regional conditions and impacts.
- **Clarify the connections** between the Comprehensive Plan and the Caucus Master Plans, integrating these relationships into Pitkin County's future.
- **Confirm that the Vision 2050** policy direction reflects community values and quality of life priorities.
- **Ensure accountability and ownership** through regular and ongoing community conversations, including updates to the P&Z, the BOCC and regional partners.

Note: The Vision 2050 Engagement Summary 2024-2025 is included as an appendix to this Plan.

# Engagement Activities Snapshot 2024-2025



## Digital

### Website



2571 - Page Views  
1253 - Active Users  
Users 6/1/24 - 11/4/25

### Newsletters - 8



July 2024 - Oct 2025  
Audience: 234  
Open Rate: 72%+

### Surveys - 5



Pulse Survey: 102 Responses  
Energy & Building Code: 66 Responses  
Comp Plan Survey: 65 Responses  
Housing: 35 Responses  
Wishbox Survey: 15 Responses

### StoryMap Views



Total Visits : 1,098

### Social Posts - 14



Facebook  
Instagram

### Press Releases - 4



7/25/24  
10/24/24  
7/29/25  
4/28/25

### Newspaper Ads - 30+



### Weekly Ads:

- Each Workgroup
- Open Houses
- Pop-ups

### APR & KDNK Underwriting



Vision 2050  
• 10/10-22/24  
Open House  
• 10-23-30/24  
Vision 2050 Comp Plan  
• 8/18-21/25  
Comp Plan Event  
• 8/22-27/25  
Vision 2050 Comp Plan Ad  
• 8/18-27/25  
Vision 2050 Project + Events  
• 9/23-10/16

## Engagement Activities and Events

### Pop-ups - 5



8/13/24 - Pitkin County Offices  
8/21/24 - Pitkin County Library  
8/27/25 - Pitkin County Offices  
9/13/25 - Aspen Farmer's Market  
11/7/25 - Carbondale 1<sup>st</sup> Friday

### Flying | Materials Distribution - 225+ locations



Summer / Fall 2024: 80+ locations  
Summer / Fall 2025: 145 locations

Aspen  
Snowmass Village  
Old Snowmass  
Woody Creek  
Basalt  
Willits  
Redstone



### Postcard Mailer - 2



3348 addresses in unincorporated Pitkin County  
August 2025: Comp Plan 8/27 Event + Survey  
October 2025: Comp Plan Oct Open Houses & Webinar

### Community Open Houses | Comprehensive Plan - 6



10/30/24 - Aspen (+ Breakout Sessions)  
10/7/25 - Aspen (x3)  
10/8/25 - Carbondale  
10/9/25 - Basalt  
10/16/25 - Webinar  
10/16/25 - Snowmass Village

### Workgroup - 10



1/24/24 - 17 Attendees  
6/3/24 - 13 Attendees  
9/4/24 - 22 Attendees  
11/13/24 - 16 Attendees  
1/15/25 - 15 Attendees  
2/5/25 - 17 Attendees  
3/5/25 - 8 Attendees  
5/7/25 - 17 Attendees  
6/4/25 - 15 Attendees  
7/22/25 - 14 Attendees  
[Includes P&Z]

### Focus Groups - 3

9/18/24 - Energy + Building Code: 29 Attendees  
10/16/24 - New Parcel/FAR: 17 Attendees  
11/18/24 - GMQS + TDRs: 31 Attendees



### Caucus Meetings - 6

8/11/25 - Frying Pan  
9/2/25 - Redstone Community Org  
9/11/25 - Crystal River  
9/16/25 - Snowmass Capital Creek  
9/23/25 - Emma  
9/25/25 - Woody Creek



# 02

# Existing Conditions

## Our Story

Pitkin County, Colorado, established in 1881 and named after Governor Frederick Pitkin, is known for its rich history, stunning landscapes, and vibrant cultural life. Located in the Rocky Mountains, it includes the City of Aspen, Town of Snowmass Village, a portion of Basalt, the historic Redstone town-site, and communities of Woody Creek, Meredith and Thomasville. The county's majestic mountain ranges, dense forests, and pristine rivers make it a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. Offering activities like skiing, hiking, mountain biking, and fly fishing, Pitkin County attracts visitors year-round with its breathtaking scenery and recreational opportunities. Culturally, Pitkin County is a dynamic blend of old and new, with Aspen standing out as a former mining hub turned world-famous resort town. Known for its upscale amenities and vibrant arts scene, Aspen hosts events like the Aspen Music Festival and School and the Aspen Ideas Festival. The county's small but diverse population includes long-time residents, seasonal workers, and affluent vacation-home owners. Governed by a five-member Board of County Commissioners, Pitkin County prioritizes sustainable development and environmental stewardship, reflecting a strong community commitment to preserving its natural beauty and rural character.

The following timeline traces our journey from the early Ute Native American settlements to the present-day status as a world-renowned resort destination. This visual guide highlights key events and developments, illustrating the transformation of the region over the centuries.

# Our History ...



Photo Source: Aspen Historical Society, and Roaring Fork Transportation Authority

## Early History



### Pre Settlers

The Ute Native Americans occupied the area for centuries before European settlers arrived.

### 1860s -1870s

Initial European settlement, primarily for mineral exploration and mining.

### 1881

Pitkin County is established during the Gold Rush. Aspen Mining and Smelting Company is organized.

### 1891

Aspen is the largest silver producing district in the nation with 1/6 annual U.S. production and 1/16 of world production.

### 1893

The repeal of the Sherman Silver Act crashes the silver market, causing mine closures and a sharp population decline.

### 1902

Redstone is established by John Cleveland Osgood as part of his coal mining enterprise; this also spurred construction of the Crystal River Railroad.

## Modern History



### 1937

Aspen Valley Ski Club is established, marking the beginning of Aspen's transformation into a ski resort town.

### 1946

Aspen Airport opens as a privately owned, public use gravel landing strip.



**1955**

Pitkin County zones Snowmass Village area as agriculture, forestry, and residential.

**1958**

Buttermilk Mountain and Aspen Highlands ski areas open.

**1964**

Herbert Bayer designs the Bayer-Benedict music tent.

**1966**

Cermaic Artist Paul Soldner founds Anderson Ranch Arts Center.

**1967**

Aspen Valley Land Trust is founded. Snowmass Ski Area opens.

**1978**

The Pitkin County Home Rule charter is adopted & Caucuses are established.

**1983**

The Roaring Fork Transit Authority (RFTA) is established.

**2015**

City of Aspen achieves its goal of sourcing 100% of electricity from renewable sources.

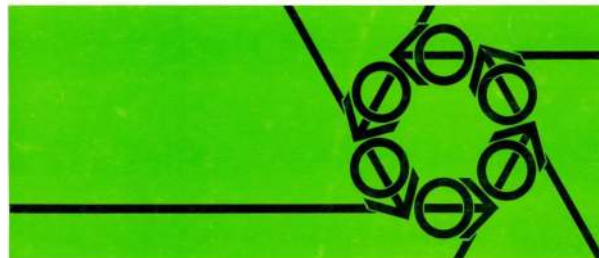
**2023**

The men's FIS World Cup races return to Aspen Mountain after a years-long hiatus.

## Planning History & Growth Overview

Pitkin County experienced aggressive development starting in the late 1960s, with annual increases in new residential development exceeding 10% for several years. This surge led to grassroots citizen advocacy that prompted zoning changes to enact tough growth-control measures and protect the community's rural character. In 1977, Pitkin County adopted the Aspen/Pitkin County Growth Management Policy Plan, colloquially referred to as 'The Green Book.' The Green Book laid the foundation for the Growth Management Quota System (GMQS), added to the Pitkin County Land Use Code in 1978. Initially, the regulations applied only to the Aspen Metro Area. In 1986, the county adopted the Down Valley Comprehensive Plan (DVCP) to guide planning within the area from Brush Creek Road to Basalt, excluding the Fryingpan and Crystal River valleys. Other notable milestones that further reflect Pitkin County's efforts to manage development and preserve the character and quality of its stunning natural environment include the following.

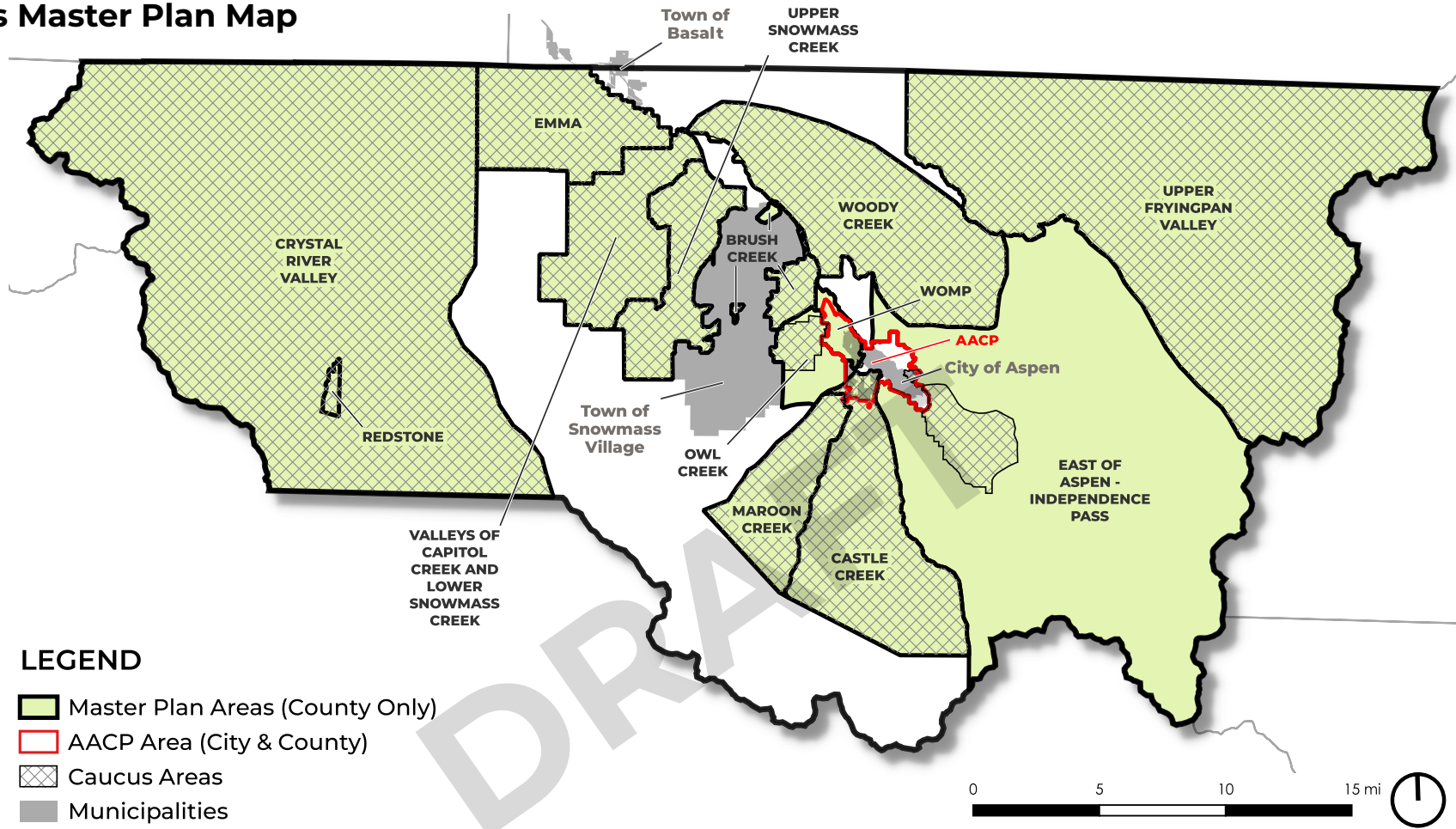
### THE ASPEN/ PITKIN COUNTY GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICY PLAN



THIRD DRAFT. PREPARED BY THE ASPEN/PITKIN PLANNING OFFICE

- ❖ **1985:** Scenic Foreground Overlay is established to increase protection for important visual corridors.
- ❖ **1993:** Pitkin County establishes a 15,000 square foot house size cap. The first Aspen Area Community Plan (AACP) is adopted by both the City of Aspen and Pitkin County.
- ❖ **1994:** Rural & Remote Zone District (RR) adopted, and major portions of the county are rezoned to the new RR district. The Transferable Development Right (TDR) program is also established.
- ❖ **2003:** County Planning Commission adopts Pitkin County's first county-wide Comprehensive Plan and Caucus Master Plans.
- ❖ **2000/06:** Permitted house size, without GMQS or TDRs, established at 5,750 square feet and TDRs allowed to be used for additional square footage.
- ❖ **2006:** The Pitkin County Land Use Code is amended to modernize and address contemporary land use issues.
- ❖ **2006/24:** Pitkin County updates existing rural master plans and adopts new master plans covering most of the county (see Master Plan Areas Map). Significant land acquisitions are completed to preserve critical open space and wildlife habitat.
- ❖ **2023:** The Community Growth Advisory Committee meets for 10 months and delivers final recommendations regarding growth

# Caucus Master Plan Map

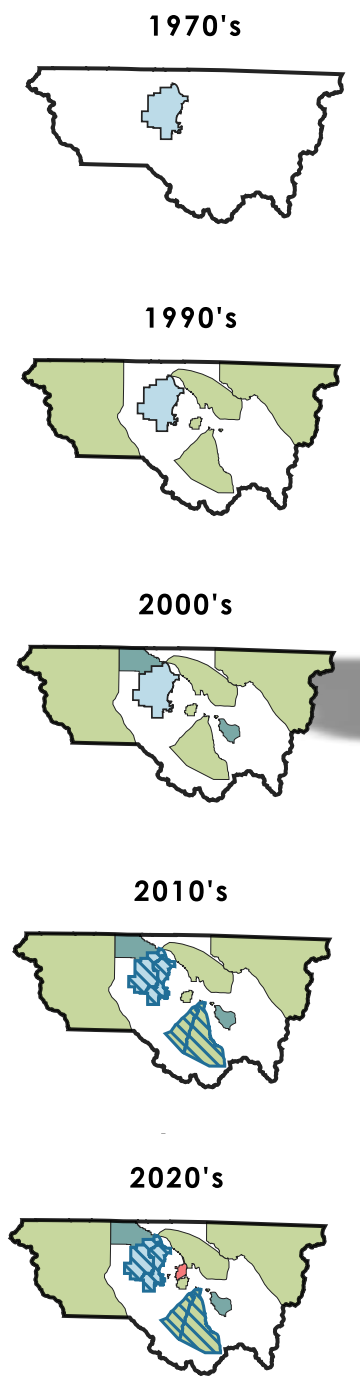
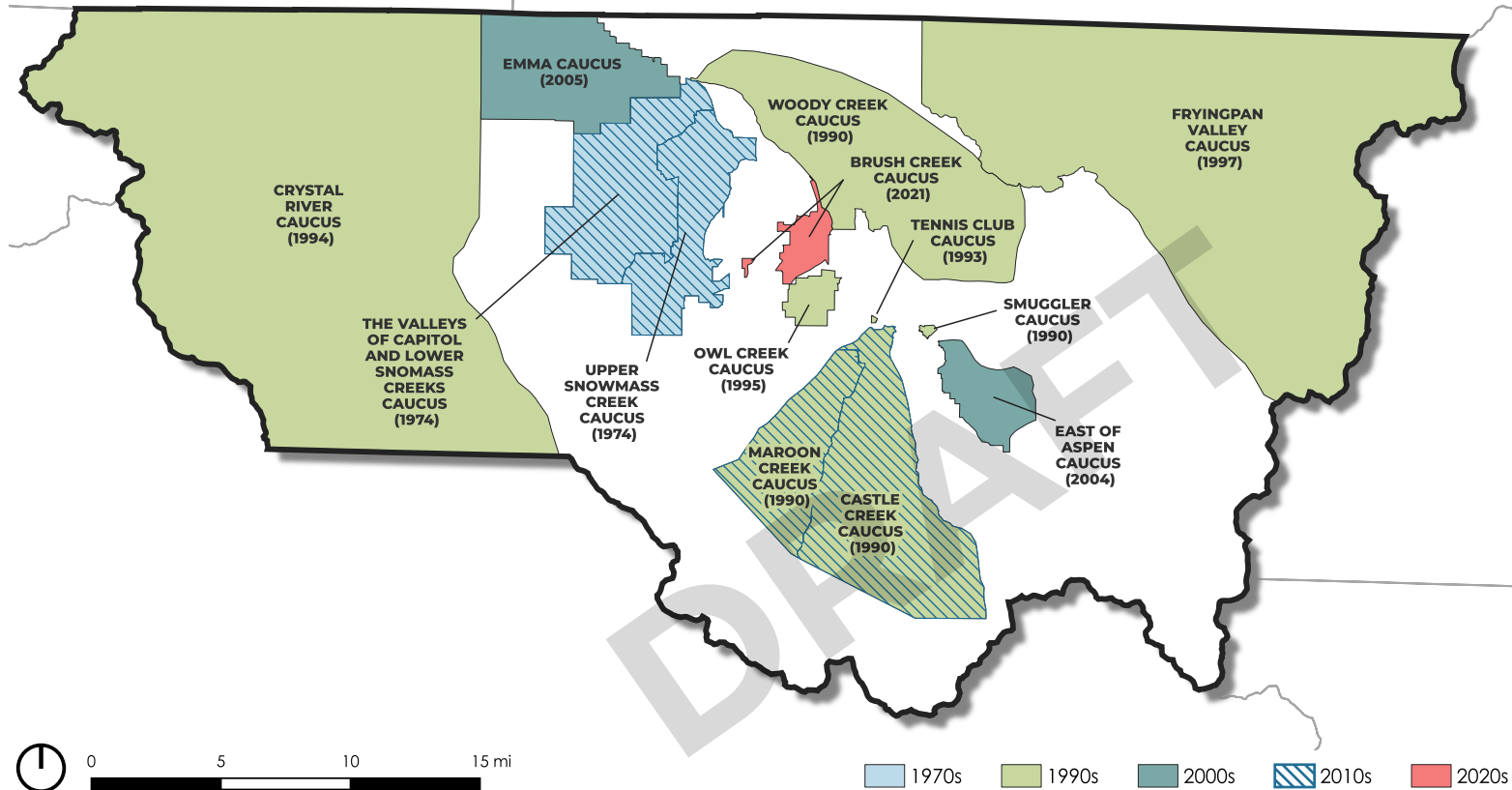


## Home Rule Charter and Caucuses

Pitkin County adopted a Home Rule Charter by a vote of the electorate in March of 1978. Establishment of the Home Rule Charter was done to gain greater local control over governance and decision-making processes and to empower the citizens of the county, through the establishment of caucuses, to participate in matters directly affecting them. Home rule counties can enact ordinances, manage resources, and implement policies independently of state legislation, provided they do not conflict with state or federal laws.

This enables more efficient local governance and responsiveness to residents' needs. The caucus areas have all developed Caucus Master Plans which provide grassroots input on policies and planning matters related to their Master Plan Area and advise on planning applications referred to their Caucus. *(Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, Article IV)*

# Caucus Area Chronology Map



## Caucus Chronology

In Pitkin County, a caucus area is a geographically defined region within the county that allows residents to participate in community planning and decision-making processes, including the development and adoption of caucus master plans. A master plan area refers to regions within the county for which master plans are developed. Master plan areas and caucus areas often share the same boundary, but not always, as shown on the Master Plan Areas Map.

# Demographics

## POPULATION

The Colorado State Demography Office reports Pitkin County's full-time population to be 16,856 as of 2022. However, visitors swell the population to more than double the permanent population during peak tourism months. The county's population has been growing over the past 20 years, though at a rate much slower than the State of Colorado or the surrounding Western Slope. Population grew rapidly from 1970 through 2000 but has tapered off over the past two decades. Since the year 2000, Pitkin County's population grew by 6.9% while the Western Slope's population increased by 26.5% and the State grew by 34.6%.

As documented by the Colorado State Demography Office, Pitkin County experienced a post-pandemic dip in population, however the population is projected to remain relatively stable over the next 25 years given current conditions. Forecasts by the demographer show a 3.6% growth in the county's population over the next 25 years, while Colorado is expected to grow 25% over the same period.

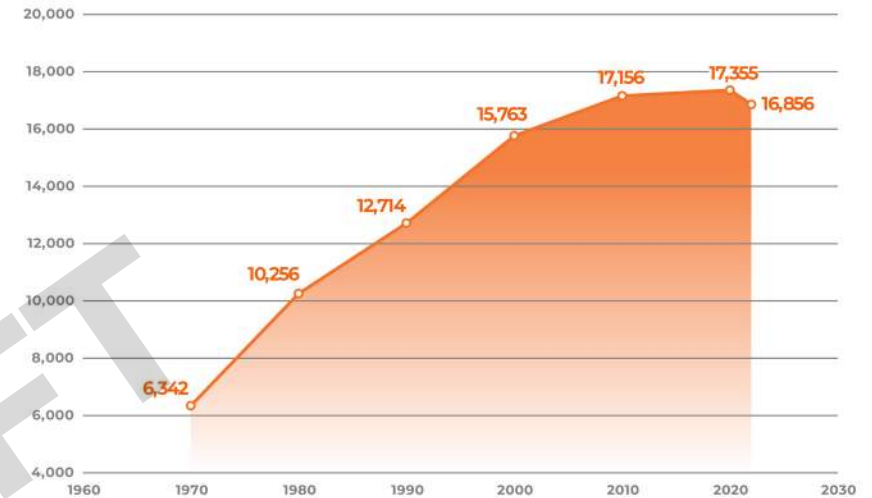
### Population Breakout (2022)

<b>6,718</b>	Aspen
<b>2,986</b>	Snowmass Village
<b>1,138</b>	Basalt (Partial)
<b>6,014</b>	Unincorporated Area

**16,856 Total Pitkin County**

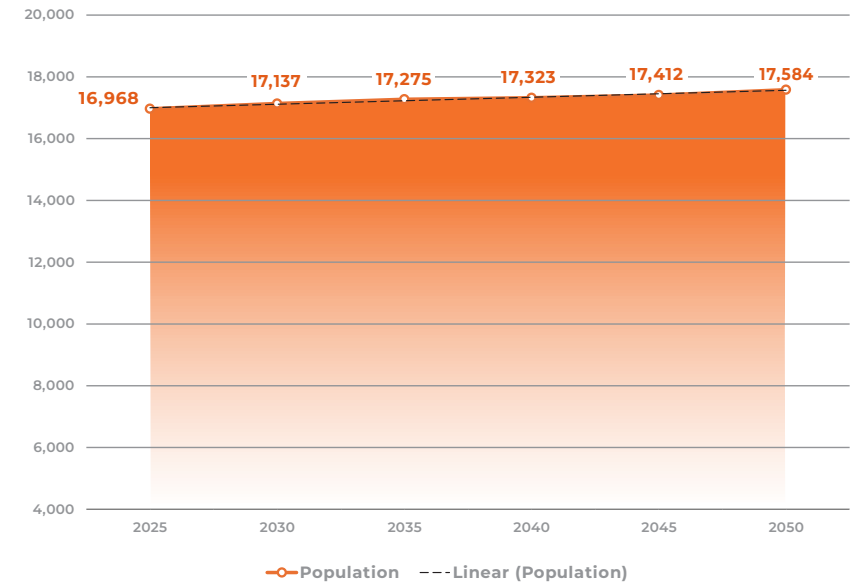
Source: Colorado State Demography Office, 2024

## Population Growth (1970-2022)



Source: Colorado State Demography Office, 2024

## Population Projection (2025-2050)



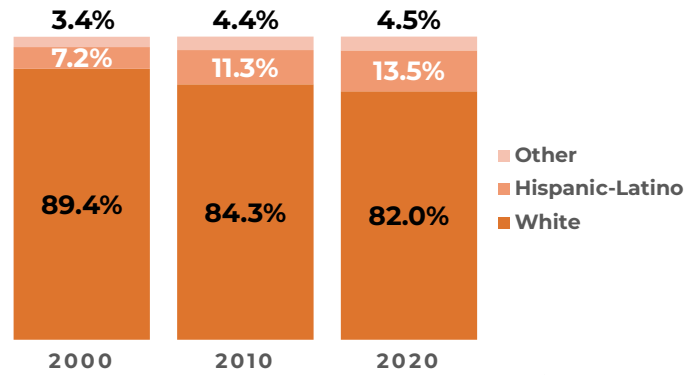
Source: Colorado State Demography Office, 2024

## ETHNICITY

### Growing Hispanic/Latino Population

While there is some racial and ethnic diversity, the majority of the county's population identify as White. As of the 2020 Census, 82% identified as white with individuals from all other racial groups comprising 18% of the total population. The county's Hispanic or Latino population has been growing steadily over the years and currently stands at 13.5% though informal estimates put this closer to 30%.

(US Census Bureau, 2020)



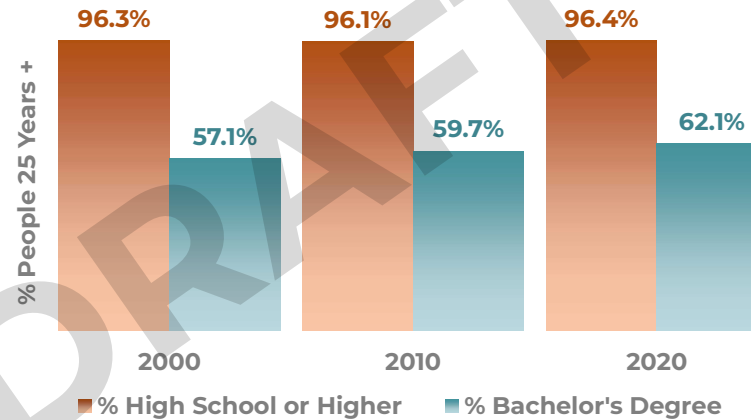
Source: US Census Bureau, 2020

## EDUCATION

### High Educational Attainment

Pitkin County's population has achieved relatively high education levels with nearly all its citizens graduating high school and 62.1% having completed at least a bachelor's degree. Education levels have increased slightly since 2000, especially for those with a college degree.

(CO State Demography Office, 2024)



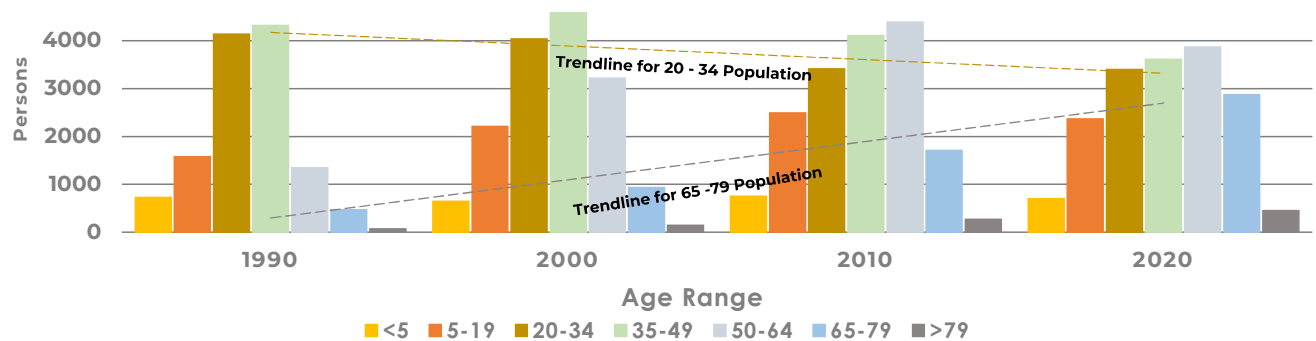
Source: Colorado State Demography Office, 2024

## AGE

### Aging Population

The current age distribution shows that nearly half the population is either at retirement age or will be transitioning to it over the next ten to fifteen years. Currently 20.6% of the population is 65 years of age or older and 42.3% is 50 years or older. The population distribution has been trending older for several decades. Since 1990, the percentage of those over 65 years of age has consistently grown, while the portion of the population between 20-34 years of age has declined.

(CO State Demography Office, 2024)



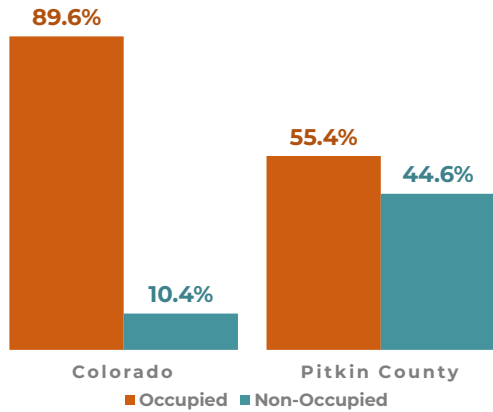
Source: Colorado State Demography Office.

## HOUSEHOLDS & HOUSING UNITS

Pitkin County's housing stock grew by more than 3,400 units between 2000 and 2022, but many of these are unoccupied homes not used as primary residences. Approximately one-third of the housing units are rentals, and the ratio between renter and owner-occupied units has remained relatively constant over the years. The average household size has hovered around 2 persons per household, which is lower than the national average of 2.53 as of the 2020 Census.

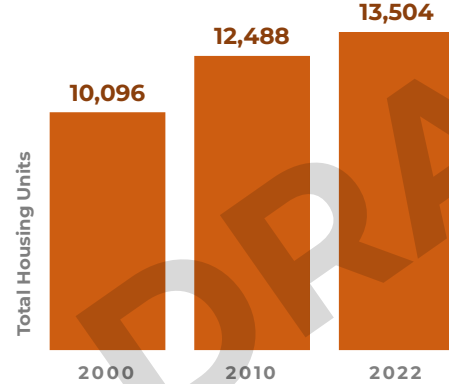
This smaller household size is consistent with other demographic and housing factors in the county, such as an aging population, a high number of single-person households, and numerous vacation homes. Of the total housing units, 3,143 (23%) are deed restricted affordable units which are part of the Aspen/Pitkin County Housing Authority and Town of Snowmass Village housing inventories. *(CO State Demography Office, APCHA 2024)*

### Occupancy Rate



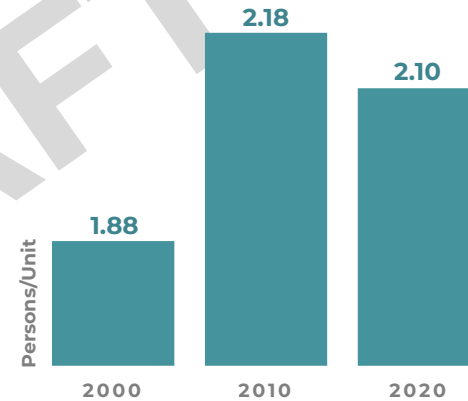
Source: US Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Table S1101.

### Housing Units



Source: Colorado State Demography Office

### Average Household Size



Source: Colorado State Demography Office

### Household Population to Total Housing Units Ratio

In Pitkin County, for every 1.24 people there is 1 housing unit, a ratio that has been declining for the past 20 years. This indicates that our housing stock is much less efficient at housing our population when compared to the state. This is consistent with the high number of unoccupied homes in the county which results in fewer homes accessible to our local community. *(CO State Demography Office, 2024)*



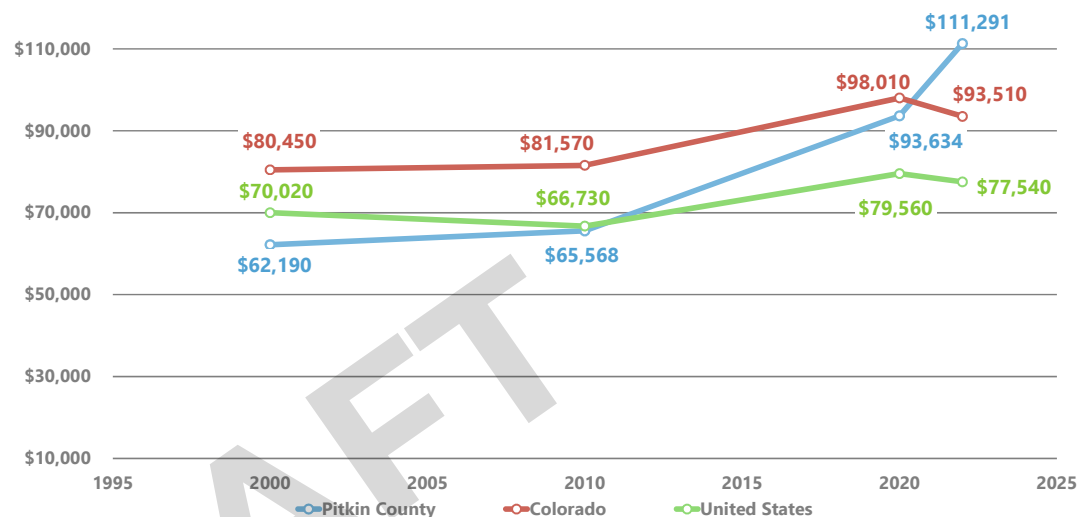
Source: Colorado SDO, County Population and Housing Timeseries, 2010 to Current Year spreadsheet.

# Socioeconomics

## MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Median household income in Pitkin County has shown significant growth since 2000. As of 2024, the median household income in Pitkin County is \$111,291. Income growth in the county has outpaced both the State of Colorado and the United States. However, the income increases are not shared equally by all households. One of the main factors driving the overall gains is the increasing prevalence of income generated by non-labor sources such as investment dividends and retirement earnings. For many households who rely on job earnings for the lion's share of their income, wage increases are not keeping pace with the market creating affordability challenges. (Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis; CO State Demography Office, 2024)

## Pitkin County Median Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Estimate of Median Household Income Pitkin County, CO; retrieved from Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2024

## COMPONENTS OF PERSONAL INCOME

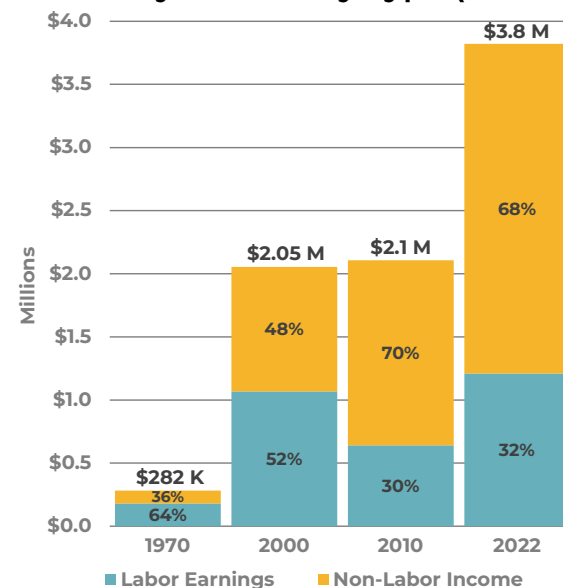
Personal income in Pitkin County increased by 69% from 2000 to 2022. This indicates significant economic growth and increased wealth in the region. Over the last several decades, there has been a significant shift from labor earnings to non-labor income. In 1970, most income was derived from labor earnings (63.9%). By 2022,

this trend had reversed, with non-labor income comprising 68.3% of the total income. This indicates an aging population relying on retirement income in addition to an influx of wealthier residents whose income includes significant investments and other non-wage sources. (US Dept of Commerce, 2023)

	1970	2000	2010	2022	Change 2000-2022
<b>Total Personal Income</b>					<b>86.1%</b>
<b>Labor Earnings</b>	<b>63.9%</b>	<b>52.1%</b>	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>31.7%</b>	<b>13.2%</b>
<b>Non-Labor Income</b>	<b>36.1%</b>	<b>47.9%</b>	<b>69.6%</b>	<b>68.3%</b>	<b>165.2%</b>

Data Source U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023 Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C., reported by [Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System](#).

## Pitkin County Income by Type (1970-2022)

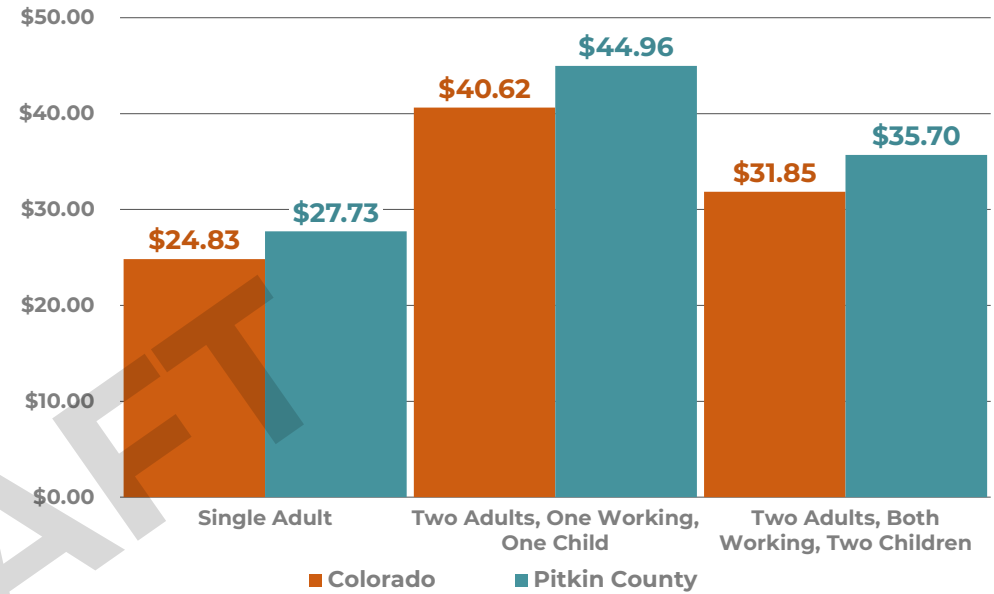


Data Source U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023

## LIVING WAGE

Living Wage is the hourly rate needed to support an individual or family working full-time, considered to be 2080 hours per year. The living wage for Pitkin County is significantly higher than in Colorado or the United States. Since 2000, the living wage for a family of four with both parents working has risen nearly 200%. While the median household income has increased by only 119%, this has contributed to ongoing financial hardship for many households. In 2000, the median household income exceeded the living wage by \$11,438 (22%), but by 2010, the living wage had overtaken the median income by \$11,392 (17%). As of 2024, the median household income was 33% below the living wage. (MIT Living Wage, 2024)

## Pitkin County Living Wage Comparison - 2024 (\$/hour)



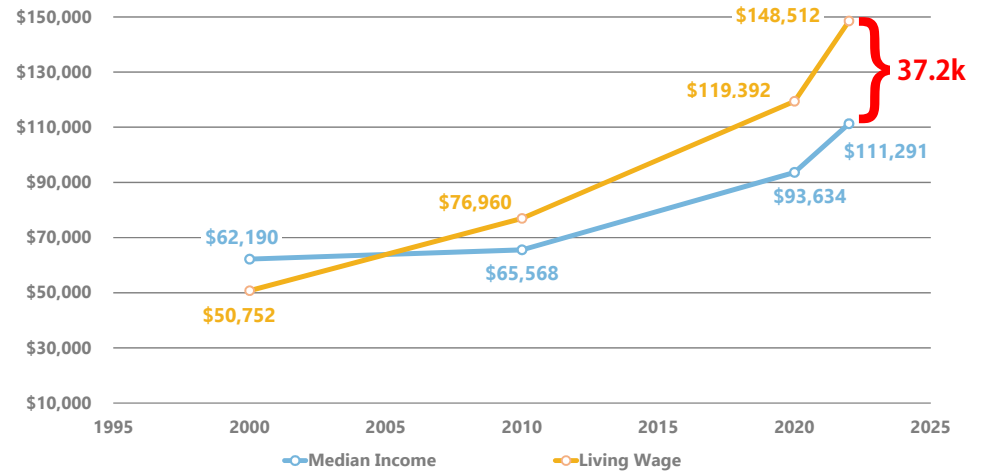
Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2024

## Pitkin County Living Wage Trend (2000 - 2024)

	Single Adult	Two Adults, Both Working w/Two Children	Two-Adult Annual Household Income Equivalent
2000	\$10.15/hr	\$12.20/hr	\$50,752
2010	\$15.30/hr	\$18.50/hr	\$76,960
2020	\$23.50/hr	\$28.70/hr	\$119,392
2024	\$27.73/hr	\$35.70/hr	\$148,512
% Increase (2000-2024)	173.2%	192.6%	

Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2024

## Pitkin County Living Wage vs. Median Income



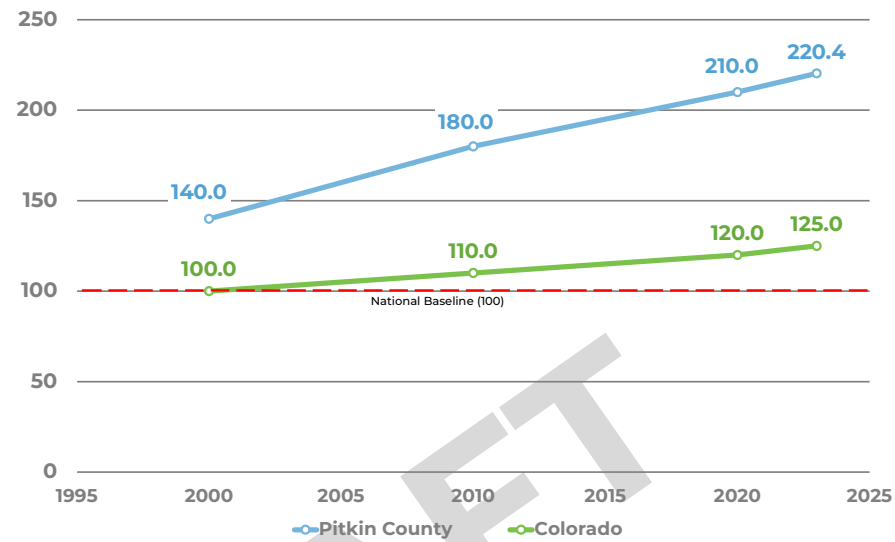
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Estimate of Median Household Income Pitkin County, CO; retrieved from Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

## COST OF LIVING

### Cost of Living Index (COLI)

The COLI measures the relative cost of living over time and between regions. It reflects the amount of money needed to cover basic expenses such as housing, food, taxes, and healthcare. The baseline index (100) represents the US national average. Values above 100 indicate a higher cost of living compared to the national average. Since 2000, the cost of living has been increasing much faster in Pitkin County than the rest of Colorado. The current COLI for Pitkin County, 220.4, is one of the highest in the country and reflects a cost of living 120% higher than the national average and 95% higher than the rest of the state. The high cost of living in Pitkin County is largely driven by the extraordinarily high housing cost. (C2ER Cost of Living Index, 2024)

### Cost of Living Comparison



Source: The Council for Community and Economic Research, Cost of Living Index, 2024

### Gini Index

Another measure of economic health within a community is the Gini index which measures income inequality within a population. The Gini Index scale ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents perfect equality (everyone has the same income) and 1 represents perfect inequality (one person has all the income). The index is widely used to gauge economic disparities and social inequality across different countries and regions. The Gini Index for Pitkin County is 0.588, which indicates a high level of income inequality greater than exists in the rest of Colorado or the United States. (US Census Bureau Gini Index, 2022)

### Gini Index Values

**.588** Pitkin County

**.456** Colorado

**.483** United States

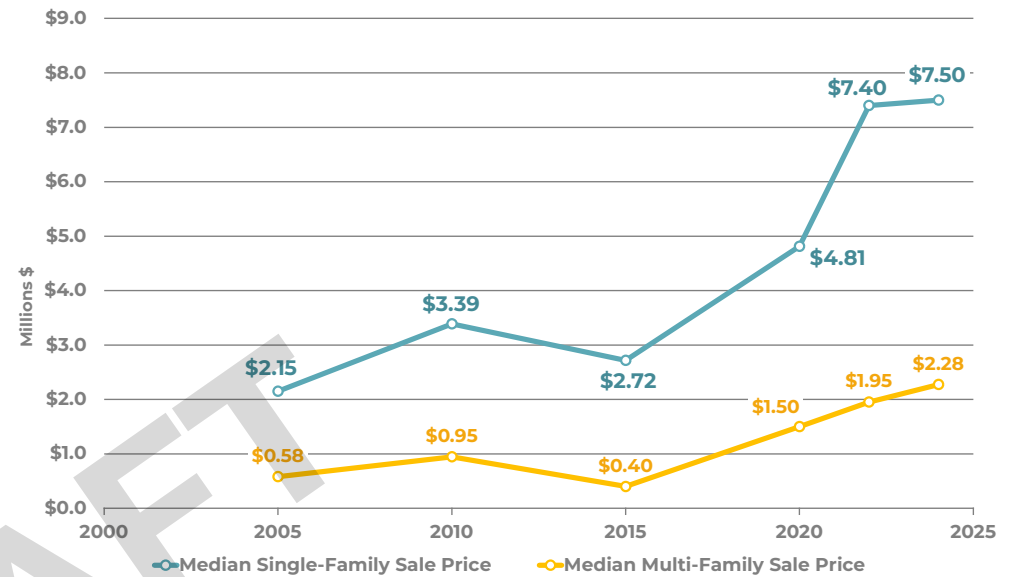
Source: U.S. Census Bureau "Gini index of Income Inequality." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B19083, 2022.

## Housing Cost

Pitkin County has experienced a steep increase in the median sale price for single-family homes, which has risen from \$2.72 million in 2015 to \$7.50 million in 2024. High and rising housing cost is the prime contributor to the county being one of the most expensive places to live in the country. While multi-family home prices have seen a more moderate rise from \$400,000 to \$2.28 million over the same period, current prices are beyond the means of most working families. These numbers, when considered with the modest increase in median income, underscore the ongoing housing affordability crisis the county has been dealing with for over 30 years, and highlight the growing reliance on subsidized housing. *(Aspen Board of Realtors, 2024; US Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates)*

## Pitkin County Median Sale Price

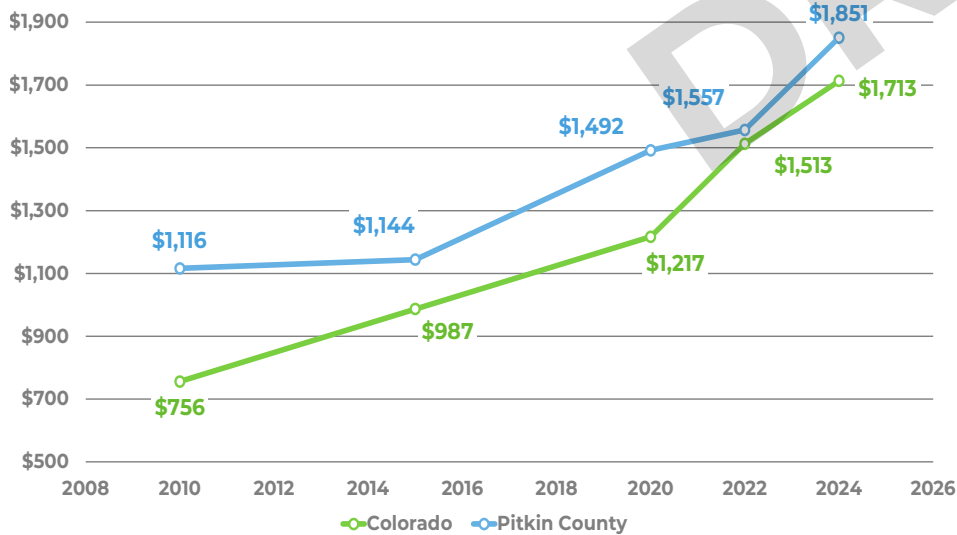
(Single-Family & Multi-Family Units 2005 - 2024)



Source: Aspen Board of Realtors, MLS 2024

## Median Contract Rental Rate

(Free-market Units 2010 - 2024)

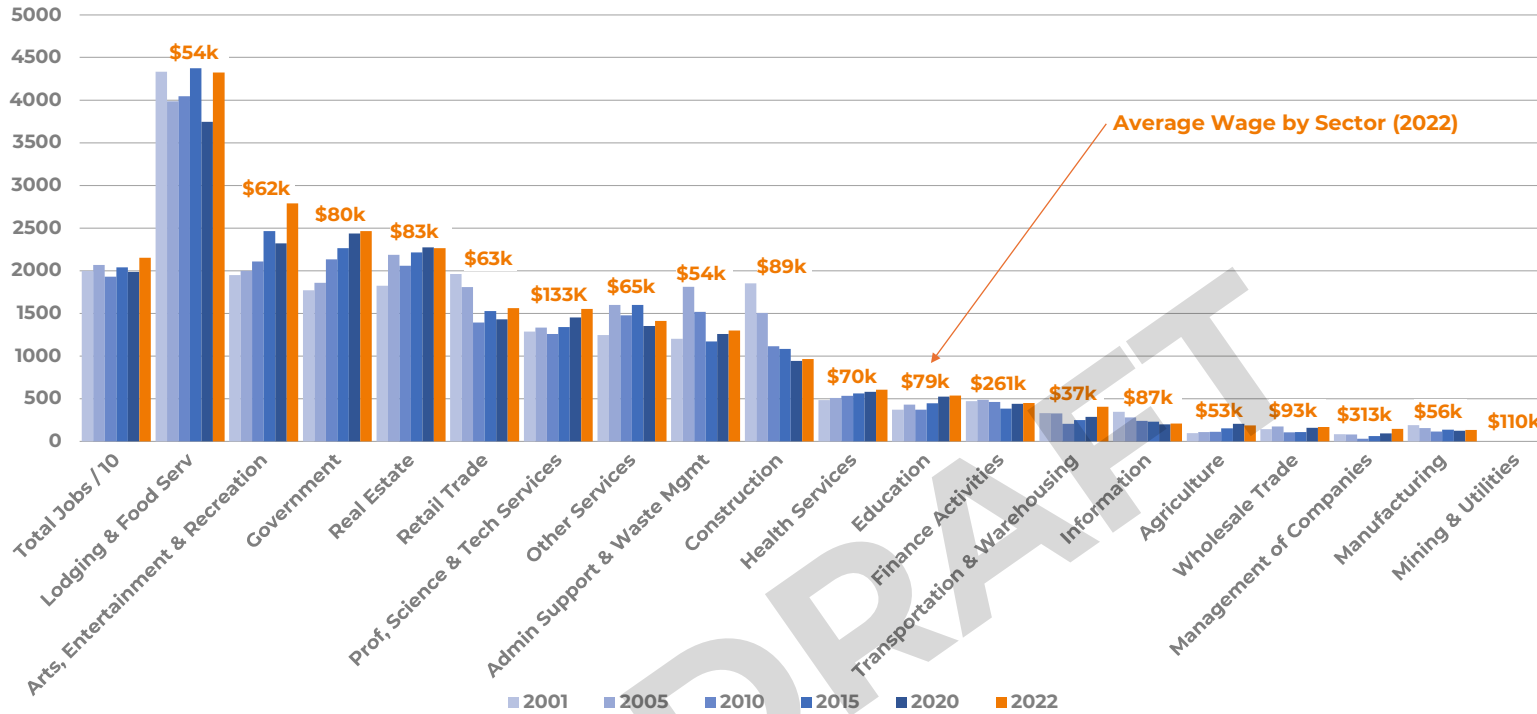


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "MEDIAN CONTRACT RENT (DOLLAR)", American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables for 2010-2022. Source for 2024, Redfin (Colorado) and RentData(Pitkin County).

*The median sale price for a single-family house increased by 176% from 2015 to 2024 in Pitkin County.*

# JOBS & EMPLOYMENT

## Job Growth Trend by Sector (2001-2022)



Data Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, July, 2022 (compiled by Colorado State Demography Office). [Jobs By Sector \(colorado.gov\)](https://colorado.gov/jobs-by-sector)

## Jobs & Employment

The socioeconomic trends over the last decades shed light on the changing dynamics in Pitkin County. There has been a relatively consistent upward trend in employment across multiple sectors in Pitkin County since 2001, despite fluctuations during economic downturns, such as the 2008 recession and Covid-19 pandemic. Job growth has expanded in many sectors in Pitkin County since 2010, especially in tourism related industries, real estate, government, and healthcare. Notably, the sectors with the most jobs, including

tourism, retail, and other services, are among those with the lowest wages in 2022, and often below the living wage for a single-income household in Pitkin County. The wages for these service and entry-level positions result in significant economic challenges for employees attempting to live in Pitkin County, where housing and other cost of living indicators are significantly high and often outpace wage-earnings.

(US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

## Key Takeaways

Pitkin County's economy is historically dependent on the resort/tourism sector. These jobs often pay low to mid wages, may be seasonal in nature, and do not always provide employee benefits such as healthcare. However, compared to our neighboring counties, Pitkin County has experienced the strongest growth in both jobs and wages from pre-Covid levels, and touts the highest average annual wages compared to Garfield and Eagle counties. This makes jobs in Pitkin County attractive to workers throughout the region, even if that means commuting long distances.

## Changes in Select Industries

Garfield and Eagle Counties offer growing job sectors and competitive wages in comparable industries to those in Pitkin County, especially lodging/food service, arts/entertainment/recreation, construction, and healthcare. The data also shows that construction jobs are increasing in Garfield and Eagle Counties while decreasing in Pitkin County. One key driver of this change is due to construction firms relocating their headquarters and payroll down valley where office space is more available and affordable. However, construction activity continues to take place at job sites in Pitkin County, as workers commute up to job sites located in the county. These shifts result in increased traffic on our highways and can further result in a hollowing out of our local base economy as firms and workers relocate to adjacent communities to seek affordable housing and office space. (CO State Demography Office, 2024)

## Change in Jobs (2010-2022)

	Pitkin	Garfield	Eagle
Lodging & Food Service	<b>+7%</b>	<b>+26%</b>	<b>+10%</b>
Arts, Entertainment & Rec	<b>+32%</b>	<b>+81%</b>	<b>+1%</b>
Real Estate	<b>+10%</b>	<b>+1%</b>	<b>+16%</b>
Construction	<b>-13%</b>	<b>+27%</b>	<b>+25%</b>
Local Government	<b>+18%</b>	<b>+2%</b>	<b>+8%</b>
Healthcare & Services	<b>+10%</b>	<b>+27%</b>	<b>-4%</b>

Source: CO State Demography Office, 2024

## Change in Population (2010-2022)

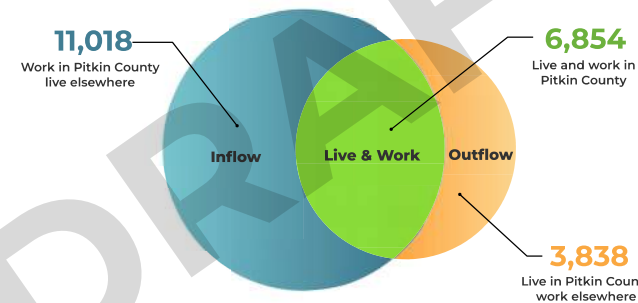
	Pitkin	Garfield	Eagle
2010	<b>17,156</b>	<b>56,150</b>	<b>50,057</b>
2022	<b>16,856</b>	<b>62,254</b>	<b>52,291</b>
% Change	<b>-1.7%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>

Source: CO State Demography Office, 2024

## Worker Inflow/Outflow

Worker inflow/outflow is a measurement of the number of workers commuting into and out of the county for employment. The data shows an increase from 8,009 in 2002 to 11,018 in 2022, indicating Pitkin County's ongoing role as an employment hub for the region. Since 2020, the county has seen an overall increase in jobs (+1175) despite a loss in population (-549), indicating that the county continues to import its labor force from outside the county boundaries. (US Census Bureau On the Map, 2025)

### Inflow/Outflow (2022)



### Inflow/Outflow Trend (2002 - 2022)

	Inflow	Live & Work	Outflow
2002	<b>8,009</b>	<b>6,837</b>	<b>2,276</b>
2010	<b>8,499</b>	<b>7,503</b>	<b>2,639</b>
2020	<b>9,653</b>	<b>6,137</b>	<b>3,054</b>
2022	<b>11,018</b>	<b>6,854</b>	<b>3,838</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - On the Map, 2024

## Labor Earnings Inflow/Outflow Trend

	IN (\$)	OUT (\$)	NET (\$)
2002	<b>\$49M</b>	<b>\$430M</b>	<b>-\$381M</b>
2010	<b>\$98M</b>	<b>\$423M</b>	<b>-\$325M</b>
2020	<b>\$295M</b>	<b>\$504M</b>	<b>-\$209M</b>
2022	<b>\$168M</b>	<b>\$577M</b>	<b>-\$409M</b>

Source: US Department of Commerce, 2024

## Earnings Inflow/Outflow

While Pitkin County experiences a significant inflow of workers, this results in a net outflow of labor earnings. Earnings data from the US Department of Commerce show that earnings flowing into Pitkin County increased from \$49 million to \$168 million over the twenty years from 2002 to 2022. However, the outflow of labor earnings has also grown significantly, from \$430M in 2002 to \$577M in 2022. This has resulted in a consistently negative net earnings outflow, with the deficit growing from -\$381 million in 2002 to -\$409 million in 2022.

This presents a risk to our local economy as adjacent counties may attract workers with competitive wages, growing industries and shorter commutes. In addition, the large and growing net earnings outflow indicates that a substantial portion of the money earned in Pitkin County is being spent or invested outside the county. This can lead to impacts such as reduced economic circulation and growth within the local economy, a decline in community engagement and civic participation, and instability in the county's population over the long term. (US Dept of Commerce, 2024)

## ECONOMIC INDUSTRY TRENDS:

### Emergence of the Private Residential Sector

Local economic trends indicate that Pitkin County is transitioning from an economy based in traditional ski resort tourism to one driven by the occupancy, construction, redevelopment and servicing of large private residences in rural areas. Historically, development in the unincorporated portion of the county has been characterized by rural residential and agricultural use. Over the last few decades, many of the rural properties have been redeveloped into high-value, high-amenity residential estates characterized by large square footage residential homes, accompanying outbuildings, and exterior amenities such as pools, ponds, and water features. Building, maintaining and servicing these rural large residential homes and properties is described as the private residential economy.

The private residential economy is defined as the onsite and related offsite services needed to develop, construct, remodel, operate and maintain a residential property in unincorporated Pitkin County. One portion of residential economic intensity originates from the residences themselves - the onsite jobs generated to build, operate and maintain a home. The other portion of economic intensity centers around the offsite industries such as real estate, development and wealth management entities that service the residential sector and that grow with the increase in larger homes.

### Measuring the Private Residential Economy

The data metrics used to measure the residential economy include:

1. Onsite jobs generated to construct, remodel, operate and maintain homes of increasing size in unincorporated Pitkin County;
2. The size of the economy related to onsite home construction, operations and maintenance and offsite residential services; and
3. The change in employment and personal income in sectors related to residential development.

#### Onsite and Offsite Jobs

Construction, operations and maintenance jobs increase proportionately to home size, both of which grow linearly with every 1,000 square feet increase in home size. As of 2022, onsite construction jobs in the private residential economy accounted for 1,001 (3.7%)

of total jobs and offsite jobs accounted for 8,333 (31.4%) of total jobs. Combined, these account for 9,334 (35.2%) of total jobs. By comparison, tourism jobs accounted for 9,055 (34.1%) total jobs. Offsite jobs increased by 49% from 2010 to 2022, adding 2,738 new jobs and accounting for 66% of all new job growth in Pitkin County. By contrast, tourism based jobs increased by only 13% and account for 25% of the job growth over the same time period.

Construction onsite jobs report a decline of 16% from 2010 to 2022 in Pitkin County. However, construction jobs increased by 27% in Garfield and 25% in Eagle Counties, as firms relocated their payroll offices down valley to adjacent and more affordable locations in Garfield and Eagle Counties, while maintaining construction activity in Pitkin County, as tabulated on the previous page, 'Change in Jobs' Table. (RPI Consulting, 2025)

Pitkin County Jobs by Industry Group					
Industry Group	2010	2022	Change 2010-22	% Change 2010-22	% Total Job Growth 2010-22
Tourism Group	7,994	9,055	1,061	13%	25%
Construction	1,194	1,001	-193	-16%	-5%
Real Estate, Development Services and Wealth Management	5,595	8,333	2,738	49%	66%
All Else	7,526	8,112	586	8%	14%
Total	22,309	26,501	4,192	N/A	100%

Source: Economic Profile System by Headwaters Economics; RPI Consulting

## Key Takeaways

Large homes have an outsized and intensive impact on job generation. Large residences with square footage above 5,750 sq ft account for 71% of the total residential square footage built in unincorporated Pitkin County between 2019-2024.

As employment numbers increase proportionately to square footage, it follows that 71% of new residential jobs in the past five years have been generated by large homes. *(EPS and RRC Employee Generation Study, 2025)*

Changes in the private residential economy in Pitkin County affect businesses located down valley in the adjacent counties of Eagle and Garfield. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the jobs occurring onsite at single-family residences in Pitkin County are generated by firms headquartered down valley from Basalt to Parachute. This economic reality generates traffic on Highway 82 as workers commute up valley to job sites during the work week. *(Economic Intensity Study, RPI, 2025)*

The shift to this private residential economy has consequences across our community. Understandably, growing opportunities and generally higher wages in the private residential economy entice workers to jobs away from traditional roles in the tourism industries. However, this emerging economy is reshaping the makeup of our workforce in service of select few privatized clients, risking job shortages in critical positions that serve our broader community and support the traditional tourist-based economy.

### Residential Construction, Operations, and Maintenance Employment Generation by Square Foot

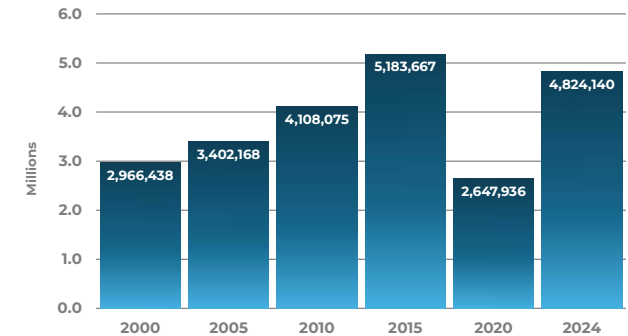
Heated Sq. Ft.	Jobs		
	Construction	Operations and Maintenance	Total
1,000	0.096	0.053	0.149
2,000	0.192	0.106	0.298
3,000	0.288	0.159	0.447
4,000	0.384	0.212	0.596
5,000	0.480	0.265	0.745
5,750	0.552	0.305	0.857
6,000	0.672	0.318	0.894
7,000	0.768	0.371	1.043
8,000	0.768	0.424	1.192
9,000	0.864	0.477	1.341
10,000	0.960	0.530	1.490
Each add'l 1,000 Sq. Ft.	0.096	0.053	0.149

Source: *Pitkin County Residential Employment Generation Study by Economic Planning Systems, 2025;*

# Transportation & Mobility



### RFTA Annual Ridership Trend



Source: RFTA, 2024

## Transportation Modes Description

Residents and visitors in Pitkin County have a variety of transportation options to navigate the region. Single-occupant vehicles (SOVs) remain a common mode of transportation, especially for those traveling to and from more remote areas. However, efforts to reduce traffic congestion and its associated environmental impact are perennial challenges and have led to the development and promotion of alternative modes.

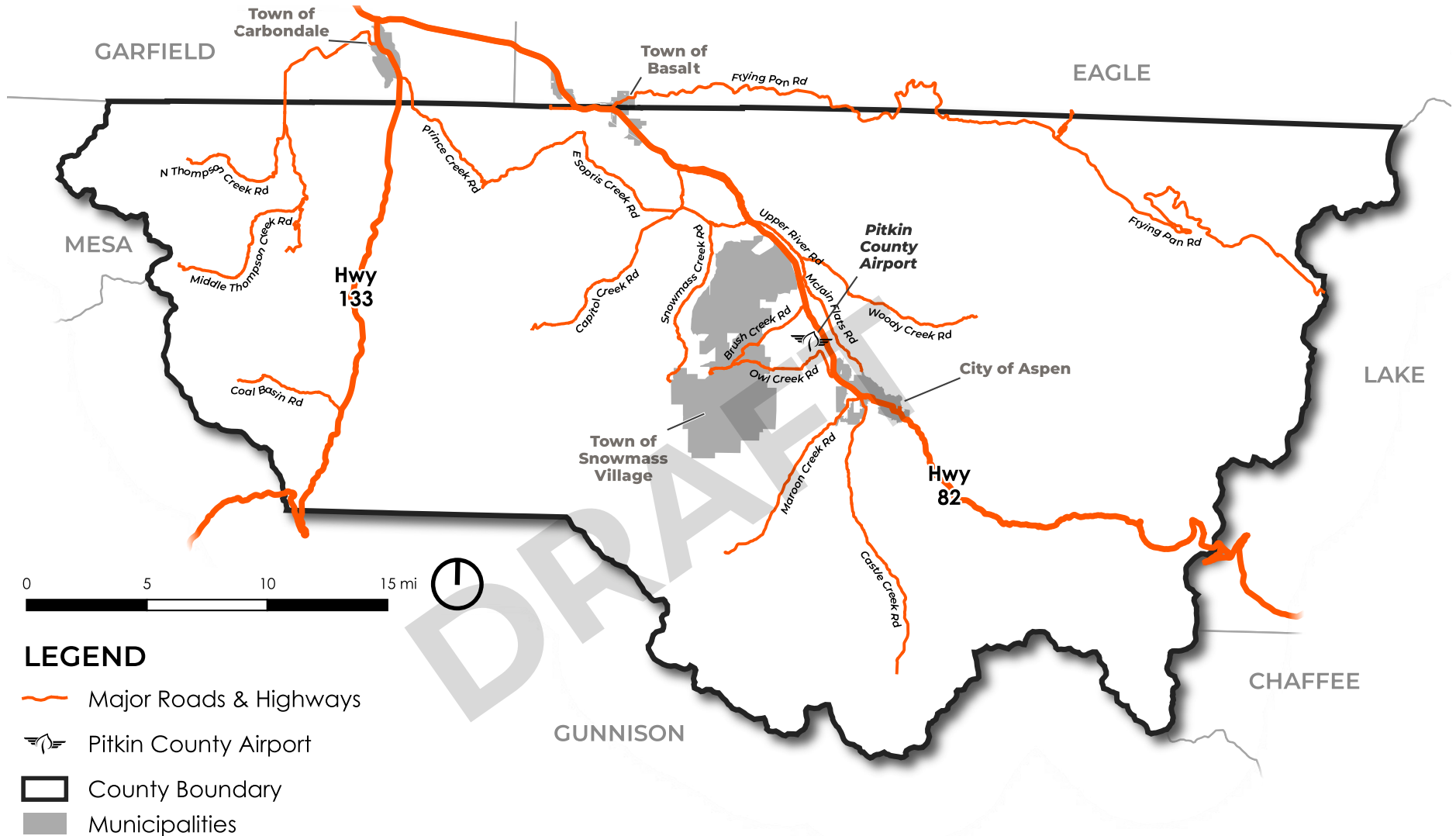
The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) plays a central role in public transit, offering extensive bus services throughout the county. The RFTA bus system includes both local routes and the VelociRFTA, the

first rural Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in the U.S. The VelociRFTA system provides fast, frequent service along the Highway 82 corridor between Glenwood Springs and Aspen. RFTA's success is evident in its annual ridership growth, which increased from 2.97 million in 2000 to an estimated 4.82 million in 2024, making it the largest rural transit agency in the nation.

Pitkin County also boasts an extensive and well-maintained network of commuter bike trails, connecting key areas and making cycling a viable option for both commuting and recreation. Complementing this, the WE-cycle bike-sharing program offers 456 bikes across 88 stations in Aspen, Snowmass Village, Basalt

and Carbondale. This system is designed for short trips, allowing users to utilize cycling for some of their daily transportation needs. In addition to these services, RFTA also operates a senior van service that provides transportation for older adults and those with disabilities, ensuring they have access to essential services and activities. These transportation options, along with walking and seasonal shuttles like the Maroon Bells shuttle, provide a comprehensive transportation network that caters to various needs, promoting sustainable travel with the intention to reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicles in Pitkin County. (RFTA, 2024)

# Major Roads Map



## Roadway Descriptions

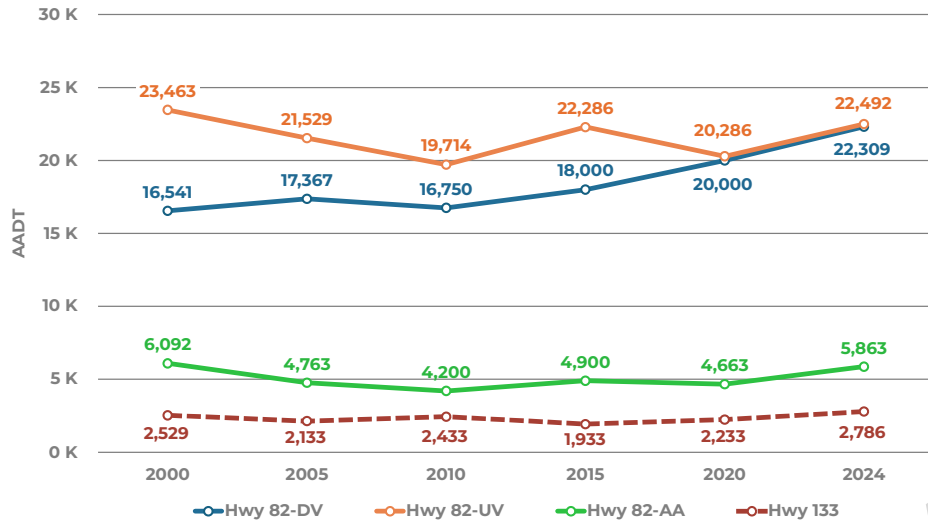
Pitkin County’s roadway system, shaped by its mountainous terrain, relies on Highways 82 and 133 as the main arteries connecting Aspen, Basalt, Snowmass Village, Carbondale, and Glenwood Springs. The rugged landscape leaves few alternative routes, leading to significant congestion

and challenges for traffic management, especially during peak times. The Historical Traffic Data chart shows the change in average annual daily traffic (AADT) for three segments of Highway 82 as well as for the portion of Highway 133 within the county. Data for Highway 82 covers the segments from the northern county line to Brush Creek Road (DV – Down Valley), Brush Creek Road to Mill Street in Aspen (UP

– Up Valley), and Mill Street to Independence Pass (AA – Above Aspen). This data highlights the increasing strain on these highways. Despite fluctuations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AADT on the Up Valley segment of Highway 82 increased from about 19,700 in 2010 to nearly 22,500 in 2024, with steady growth on the Down Valley segment since 2000 as well.

# TRANSPORTATION PATTERNS ON MAJOR HIGHWAYS

## Historical CDOT Traffic Data Highway 82 & 133



Source: CDOT, 2024

## DRIVERS OF TRANSPORTATION ACTIVITY

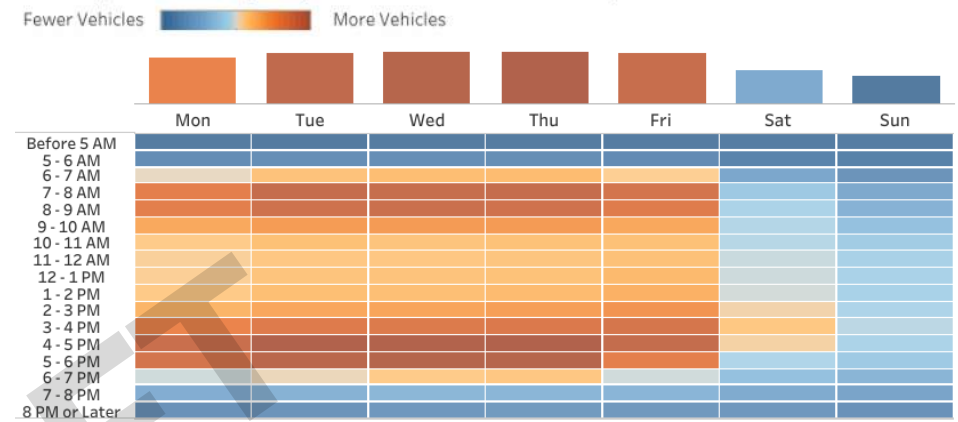
Transportation activity and impacts include the number of miles traveled and the associated effects on roads and bridges, as well as the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated by the trips. Traffic congestion and long commute times also have an impact on the overall quality of life for the community.

Pitkin County draws 62% of its workforce from outside the county and 24% travel over 50 miles. This leads to increased traffic congestion on Highway 82 and challenges to quality of life for our commuting workforce. Since 2001, annual average daily traffic (AADT) on Highway 82 has increased by 39.7%. (US Census Bureau On the Map, 2024; CDOT, 2024)

Beyond the major highways, transportation activity takes place throughout the county. Of the nearly 44,000 daily vehicle trips made in Pitkin County, 57% are related to residential land uses, encapsulating all vehicle trips related to residential land uses in unincorporated Pitkin County, including home operations, maintenance, construction and resident trips. (Transportation Intensity Report, Kimley Horn, 2025)

## AVERAGE TRAFFIC VOLUME ON HIGHWAY 82

By Day of the Week and Time of Day



Source: CDOT, 2024

## Measuring Transportation Activity

Transportation activity is defined here as the combined total of all daily trips related to residences, which are measured in three ways for trips in unincorporated Pitkin County:

1. Home-Based Work (Commute) trips, which are work-related trips made by residents who are commuting to work outside their homes;
2. Home-Based Other (Errands) trips, which are made by residents unrelated to work such as for recreating, grocery shopping or other errands;
3. Non-Home-Based (Operations & Maintenance) trips, which are made by employees of a residence to provide services related to that home's operations and maintenance.

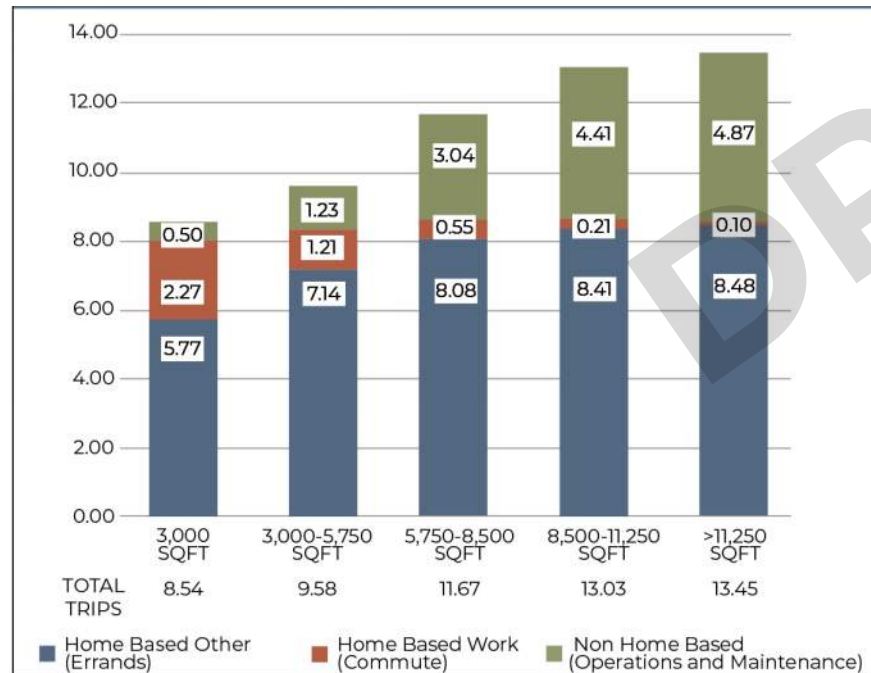
(Transportation Intensity Report, Kimley Horn, 2025)

## Transportation Activity and Home Size

Trips by residents are relatively consistent across house sizes. However, employee trips—those made by landscapers, property managers, cleaners, and contractors—rise significantly with increases in home size. The largest homes generate nearly ten times more employee trips (4.87) compared to smaller homes (0.5).

These employee-related trips also tend to be longer and persist year-round, regardless of whether the home is seasonally occupied. While homes above 5750 square feet represent only 14.36% of the housing stock, they account for 19.51% of all daily residential trips and 24.26% of all residential VMT. The analysis shows that large homes have a disproportionate impact on the trips and traffic seen on county roads. (*Transportation Intensity Report, Kimley Horn, 2025*)

### Average Daily Trips by Purpose: Household Trips



Source: Kimley Horn, 2024

## Key Takeaways

The growing traffic congestion has several quality-of-life implications for workers in Pitkin County. High traffic volumes increase stress and reduce time available for personal or family activities. Additionally, the cost of vehicle ownership and transit expenses impact household budgets. Most workers elect to live in more affordable down valley areas, which exacerbates congestion and increases the financial and time burden of commuting.

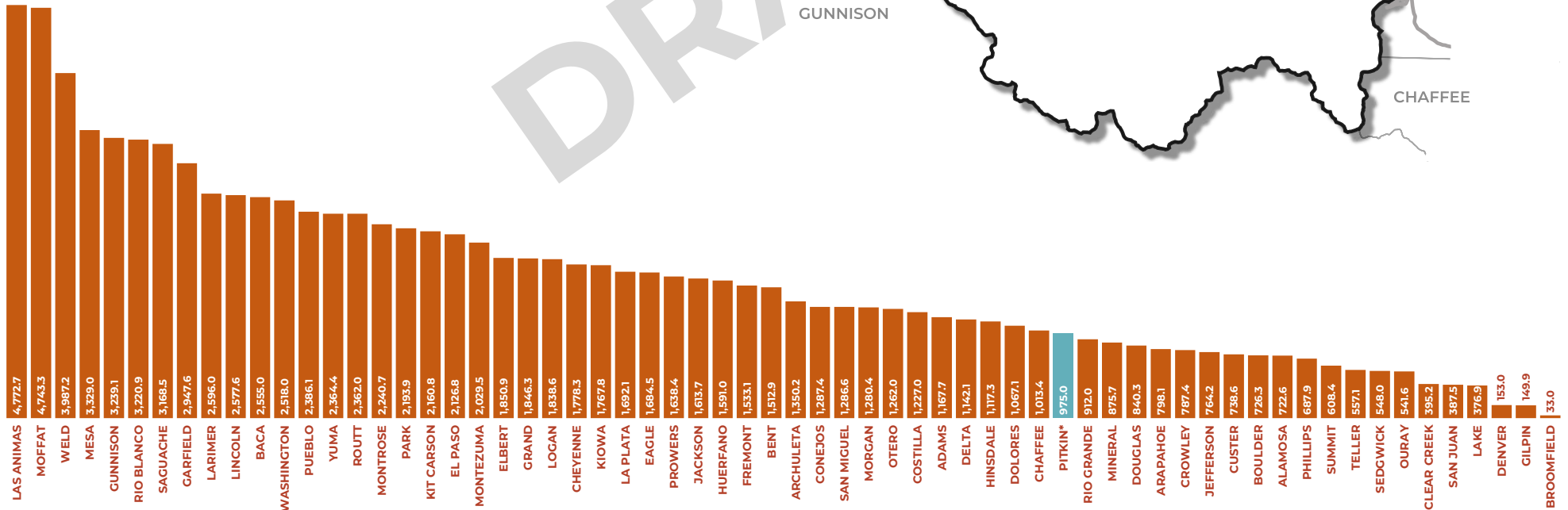
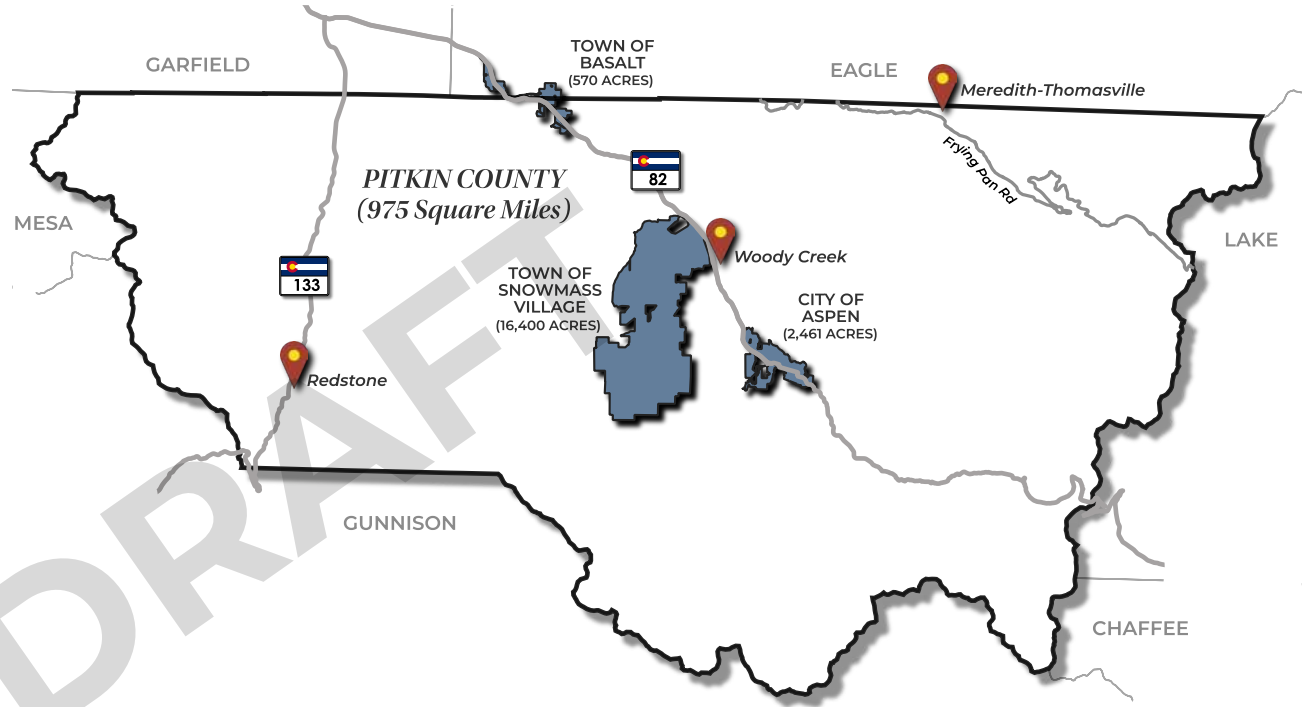
The environmental impacts of this traffic concentration are significant. In 2023, transportation accounted for 32% of unincorporated Pitkin County's total GHG emissions. This was largely driven by on-road gas and diesel-powered transportation, the emissions from which increased by 1% since 2019. On a per capita basis county-wide, regional transportation emissions represent 12.9 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e per person, which is similar to surrounding counties but is more than double the state average of 5 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e. Vehicle emissions and road dust (PM-10) contribute to air pollution, affecting both health and the natural environment. Continued reliance on vehicles as a primary mode of transportation also accelerates infrastructure wear, leading to higher maintenance costs.

The geographic and environmental constraints of Pitkin County make traditional traffic management solutions, such as road widening or the creation of alternative routes, impractical. As a result, addressing traffic congestion in Pitkin County requires innovative approaches that go beyond conventional road improvements, emphasizing the need for integrated transportation and land-use planning solutions that address the growing need for affordable housing and to address transportation from a regional perspective. (*Pitkin County GHG Inventory, 2024*)

# Geographic / Physical Context

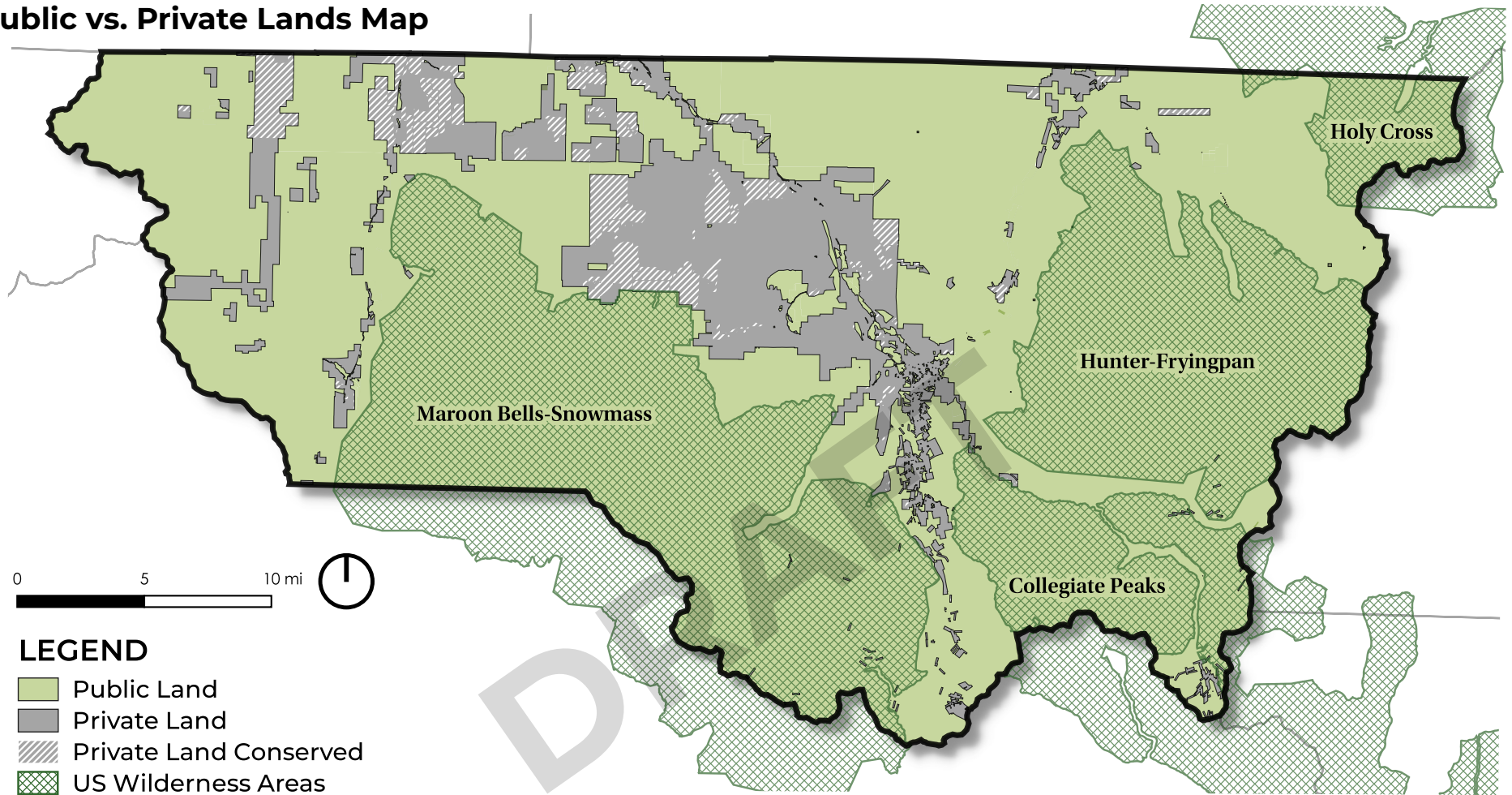
## Land Area & Political Boundaries

Pitkin County is located in western Colorado and contains 975 square miles, making it 44th among Colorado's 64 counties in terms of land area. The county contains the City of Aspen and the Town of Snowmass Village and surrounds the southern portion of the Town of Basalt. Pitkin County is a Home Rule county, having adopted its original charter in 1978. All three of the towns are also home rule municipalities. The county also includes the unincorporated communities of Redstone, Woody Creek and Meredith/Thomasville.



COLORADO COUNTIES BY LAND AREA (SQUARE MILES)

# Public vs. Private Lands Map



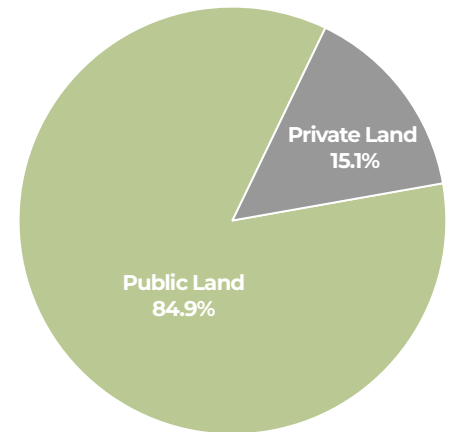
## LEGEND

- Public Land
- Private Land
- Private Land Conserved
- US Wilderness Areas

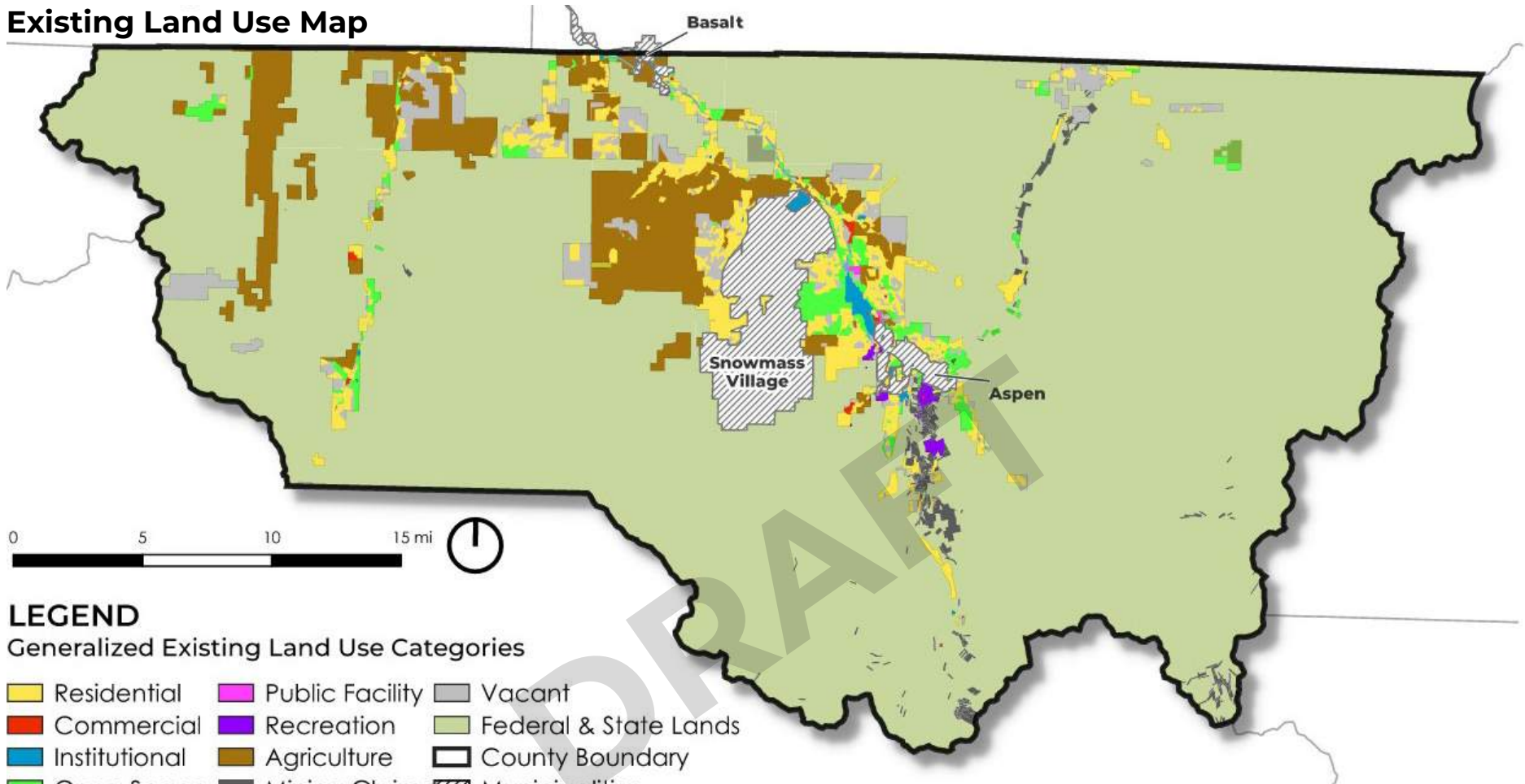
## Public vs. Private Lands

Much of the land within the County is publicly owned, constituting nearly 85% of the total land area. Of the 15% which is privately owned, nearly a quarter (23%) have been protected through conservation measures. Most of the private land is concentrated on the valley floor along the major rivers and streams. Significant portions of the county are located within federally designated Wilderness Areas.

The Wilderness Area designation has a significant impact on land use, imposing strict regulations to preserve the natural state of these areas, emphasizing minimal human impact and prioritizing conservation and recreation over development. *(Pitkin County Community Development, 2024)*



# Existing Land Use Map



## LEGEND

### Generalized Existing Land Use Categories

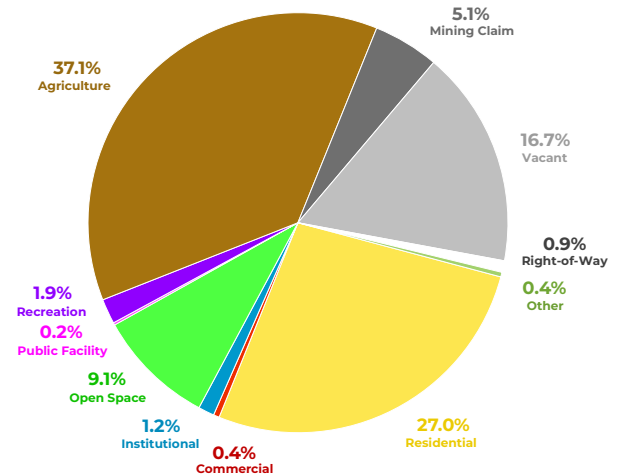
- Residential
- Commercial
- Institutional
- Open Space
- Public Facility
- Recreation
- Agriculture
- Mining Claim
- Vacant
- Federal & State Lands
- County Boundary
- Municipalities

Source: Pitkin County Assessor's Parcel Database

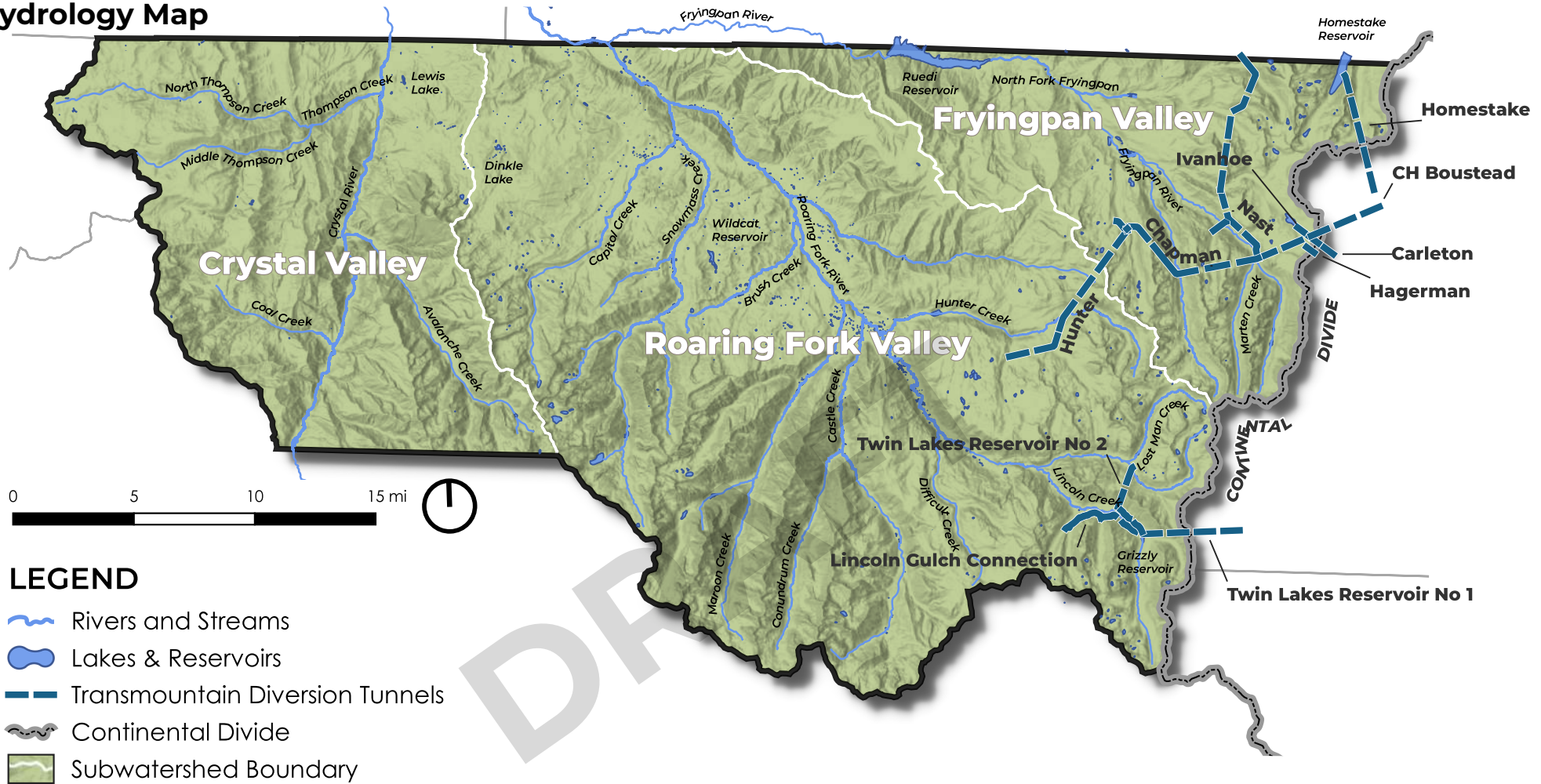
## Existing Land Use

The privately-owned land within Pitkin County is dominated by agriculture, residential and open space uses. Approximately 17% of the private land remains designated as vacant by the Pitkin County Assessor. Development is generally clustered along the major river and stream corridors, around the municipalities, and near the historic settlements of Redstone and Meredith/Thomasville. While mining claims show up as a land use type in the Assessor's

records, these parcels are used in a variety of ways including residential cabins, lift-served skiing, back-country skiing, and open space among others. Most of the mining claims are clustered along Richmond Ridge; between Lenado and Meredith/Thomasville; near the Ashcroft and Independence town-sites; and elsewhere in the eastern portion of the county. (Pitkin County Assessor Office, 2024)



# Hydrology Map



## LEGEND

- Rivers and Streams
- Lakes & Reservoirs
- Transmountain Diversion Tunnels
- Continental Divide
- Subwatershed Boundary

## Hydrology

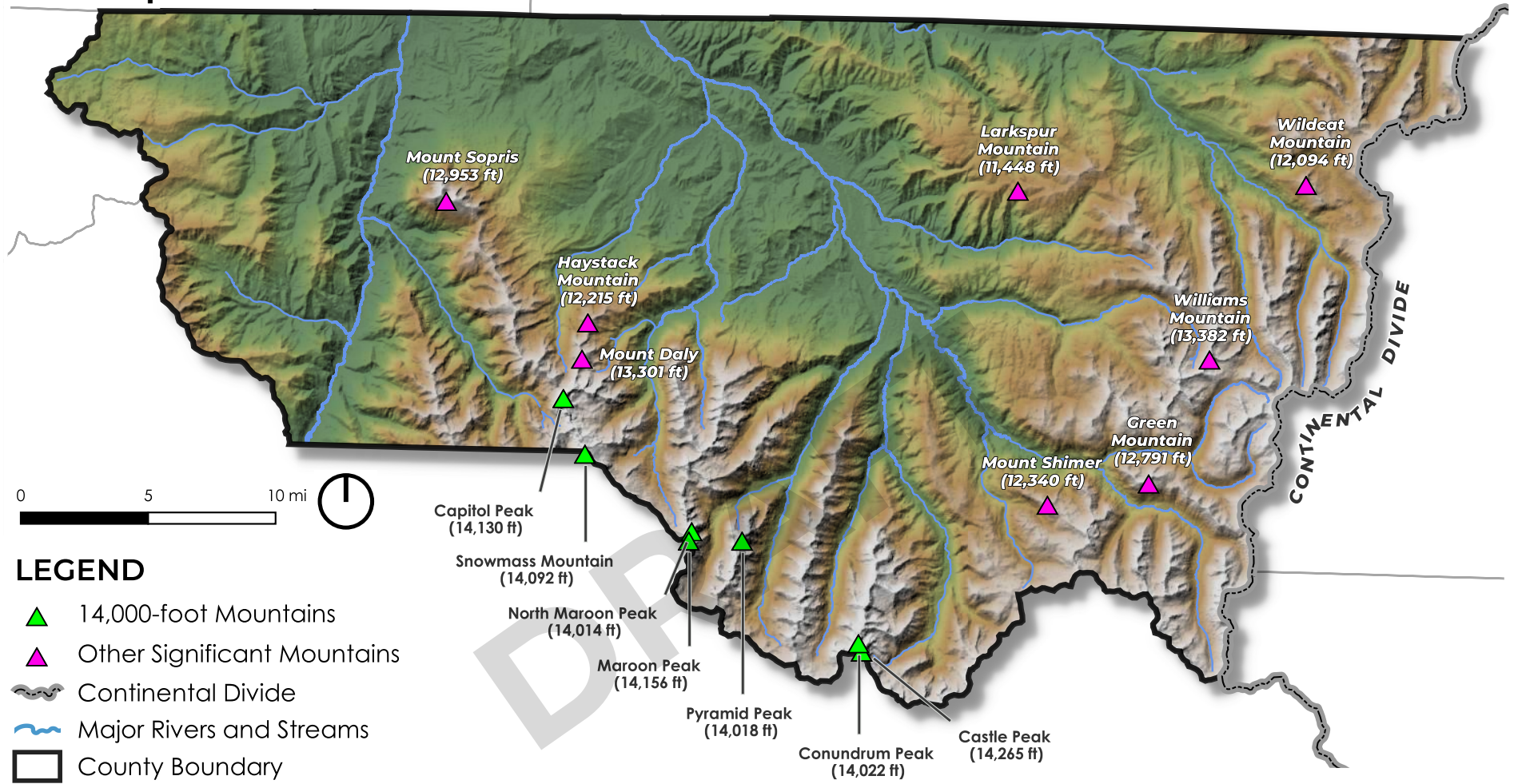
Pitkin County’s hydrology features a complex network of rivers, streams, and reservoirs essential for ecological health, water supply, and recreational activities. The county is divided into three major river basins: the Fryirngpan and Crystal which flow into the Roaring Fork and converge with the Colorado River. The Roaring Fork Watershed, one of the wettest in the state, contributes approximately 279 billion gallons of water annually to the Colorado River, which serves nearly 40 million people in the Southwestern United States.

## Transmountain Diversions

About 80% of Colorado’s population lives on the Front Range, while 80% of the state’s water is on the Western Slope. To meet the Front Range’s water demands, 24 major tunnels move water across the Continental Divide, including the Boustead and Twin Lakes Tunnels in Pitkin County. The Twin Lakes Diversion System collects water from the Upper Roaring Fork River basin, diverting 38,000 acre-feet annually, with rights to divert up to 46,000 acre-feet. The Fryirngpan River’s headwaters are diverted through the

Boustead and Busk-Ivanhoe Tunnels, part of the Fryirngpan-Arkansas Project, diverting about 58,000 acre-feet annually. Up to 40% of the Fryirngpan river headwaters are diverted across the Divide during spring and summer. *(Roaring Fork Conservancy, 2024)*

# Terrain Map



## LEGEND

- ▲ 14,000-foot Mountains
- ▲ Other Significant Mountains
- Continental Divide
- Major Rivers and Streams
- County Boundary

## Terrain

Pitkin County’s terrain features dramatic mountains, lush valleys, and numerous waterways, creating a visually stunning and ecologically significant landscape. The county includes high mountain peaks, extensive Montane and Subalpine forests, alpine meadows, riparian areas, high-elevation wetlands, ancient pinyon juniper stands, sagebrush steppe, and open grasslands. The Elk Mountains, with seven of Colorado’s 58 14ers, traverse the county. Elevation ranges

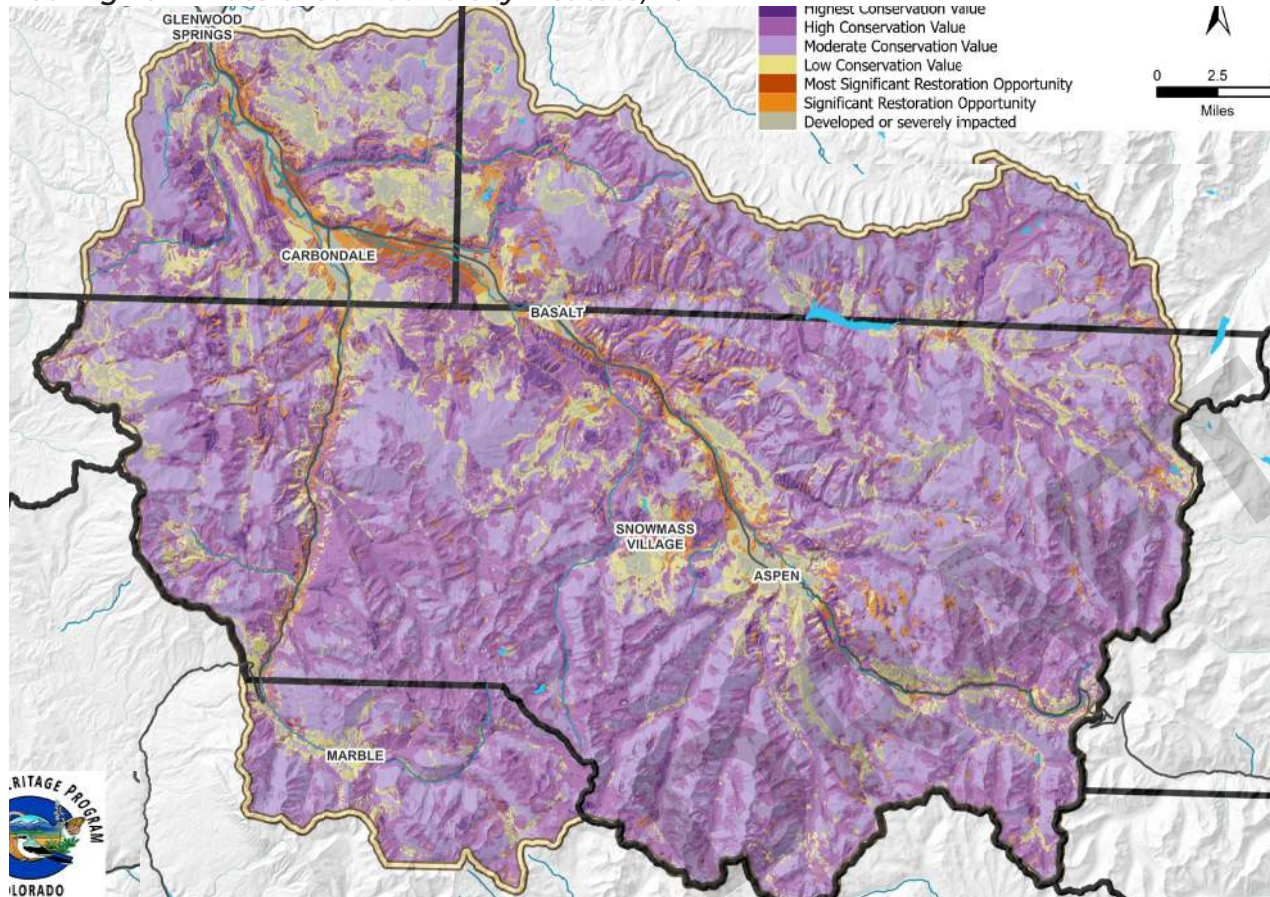
from 14,265 feet at Castle Peak to about 6,280 feet where the Crystal River enters Garfield County. Other notable mountains include Mount Daly and the double summit of Mount Sopris. Forests of aspen, spruce, and fir cover lower elevations, transitioning to alpine tundra and rocky outcrops higher up. The mountainous terrain presents environmental hazards like avalanches, landslides, rockfall, flooding, and wildfires. *(US Geologic Survey, 2024)*



Photo: Sky Mountain Park, Pitkin County, 2024

# Wildlife Conservation & Restoration Priority Areas

Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity Institute, 2022



## Wildlife Habitat

Pitkin County's diverse ecosystems provide habitats for a wide range of wildlife, including elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep, black bears, hundreds of bird species and thousands of insects, among others. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has documented the decline in elk and mule deer over the past few decades. These ungulates are considered to be important indicators for evaluating the health of the ecosystem more broadly. Concern regarding declining populations and the impacts of development, recreational activity, and transportation on wildlife habitat have resulted in numerous studies over the years.

*The Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity and Connectivity Study (2022)* is a landscape-scale study that identifies the highest priority areas for conservation, restoration and connectivity of habitat. *The Roaring Fork Safe Passages Prioritization Study (2023)* builds from this earlier study in an effort to further connectivity goals for local wildlife by identifying wildlife-highway mitigation priorities within our valley in an effort to inform local decision-making. (Colorado Parks and Wildlife, 2024; Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity Institute, 2022; Roaring Fork Safe Passages, 2025)

- ❖ “Mule deer populations in Western Colorado have been declining since the 1970s. Based on declining deer populations, CPW has taken numerous measures over the years to attempt to slow down and understand population declines.”
- ❖ “Habitat quality and quantity is the biggest factor affecting the potential for elk and mule deer population size and growth based on carrying capacity, nutritional value, competition for forage with other grazers, and protection from disturbance, weather, and predators.”

## Colorado Parks and Wildlife

*Big ideas to conserve biodiversity in the Roaring Fork Watershed:*

- ❖ Reconnect large landscapes that have been fragmented in the Watershed.
- ❖ Guide development and land conservation decisions to avoid additional fragmentation and maintain connectivity amongst swaths of large intact landscapes.
- ❖ Protect large, isolated landscapes for bighorn sheep.
- ❖ Protect and/or restore wetlands throughout the Watershed.

## Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity & Connectivity Study Executive Summary, 2022

## HISTORIC CLIMATE TRENDS Temperature and Precipitation

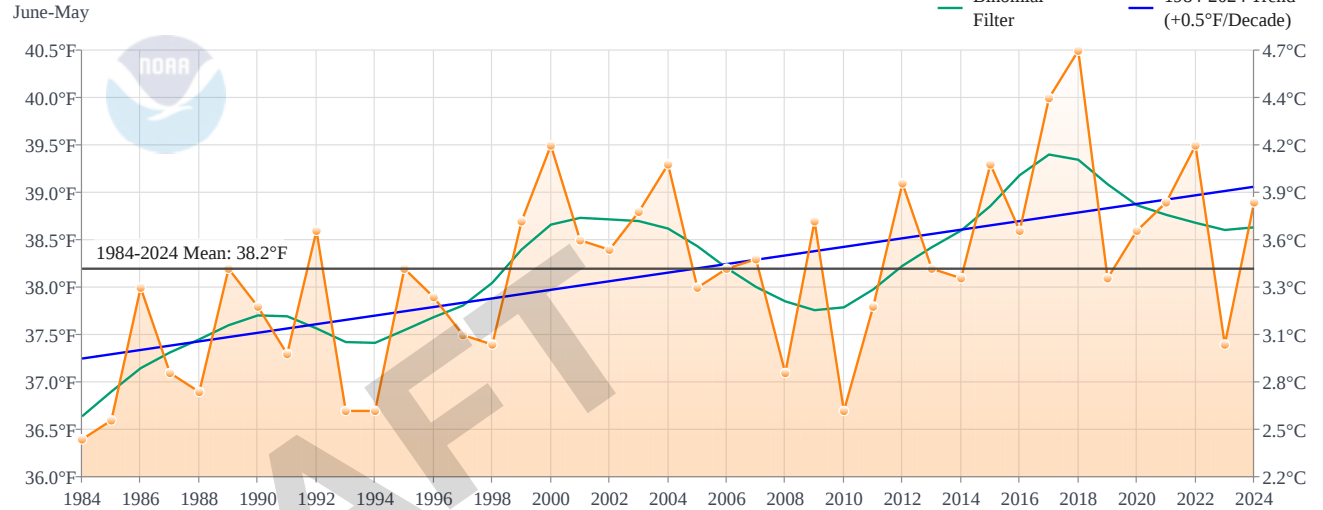
The adjacent line charts show the average annual temperature and total annual precipitation in Pitkin County from 1984 to 2024. The orange line on the Average Annual Temperature chart represents the annual average temperatures recorded from 1984 to 2024. The blue line indicates the linear trend of temperature change over the period, showing an increase of approximately +0.5°F per decade. The green line, a binomial filter, smooths out short-term fluctuations to highlight long-term trends in temperature variability.

The annual data points show considerable year-to-year variability but generally indicate an upward trend in average temperatures. The precipitation chart provides similar metrics as the temperature chart (total annual precipitation – green line; linear trend of annual precipitation – blue line; and binomial filter – red line). This chart shows a .94-inch per decade reduction in total annual rainfall. These charts clearly illustrate a trend toward a warmer, drier climate in Pitkin County over the past four decades, consistent with broader global climate change patterns. (NOAA National Center for Environmental

**0.5°F** Temperature increase per decade  
**.94"** Reduction in annual rainfall per decade  
**62%** Increase in average number of frost free days

## Average Annual Temperature - 1984 to 2024

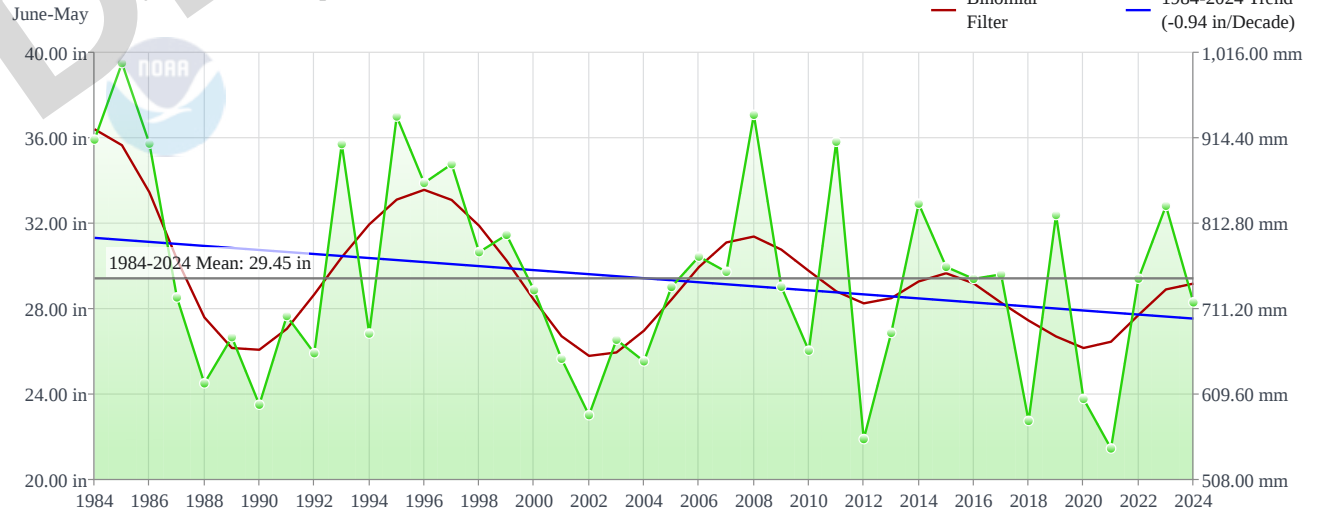
Pitkin County, Colorado Average Temperature



Source: NOAA National Centers for Environmental information, Climate at a Glance: County Time Series, published June 2024, retrieved on July 4, 2024 from <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/climate-at-a-glance/county/time-series>

## Average Annual Temperature - 1984 to 2024

Pitkin County, Colorado Precipitation



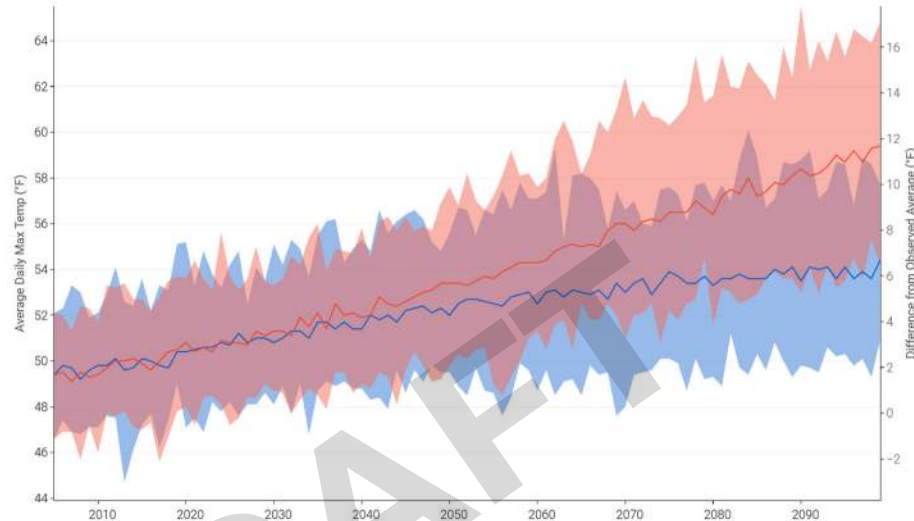
Source: NOAA National Centers for Environmental information, Climate at a Glance: County Time Series, published June 2024, retrieved on July 4, 2024 from <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/climate-at-a-glance/county/time-series>

## PROJECTED CLIMATE TRENDS Temperature and Precipitation

The line charts on this page illustrate the projected annual average daily maximum temperatures and total annual days with minimum temperature above freezing for Pitkin County, from 2005 to 2100. The red and blue lines provide the weighted mean of 32 global climate models under higher (red) and lower (blue) greenhouse gas emission scenarios, and the shaded areas reflect the range of potential values as we project into the future. The temperature chart illustrates that both scenarios result in a significant increase in average daily maximum temperatures, with the higher emissions scenario showing the most significant increase of + 12 degrees. The annual days below freezing projections demonstrate a steady decline in days below 32 degrees for both emissions scenarios. This data captures the ongoing trendline as more precipitation arrives as rain rather than snow due to warmer conditions.

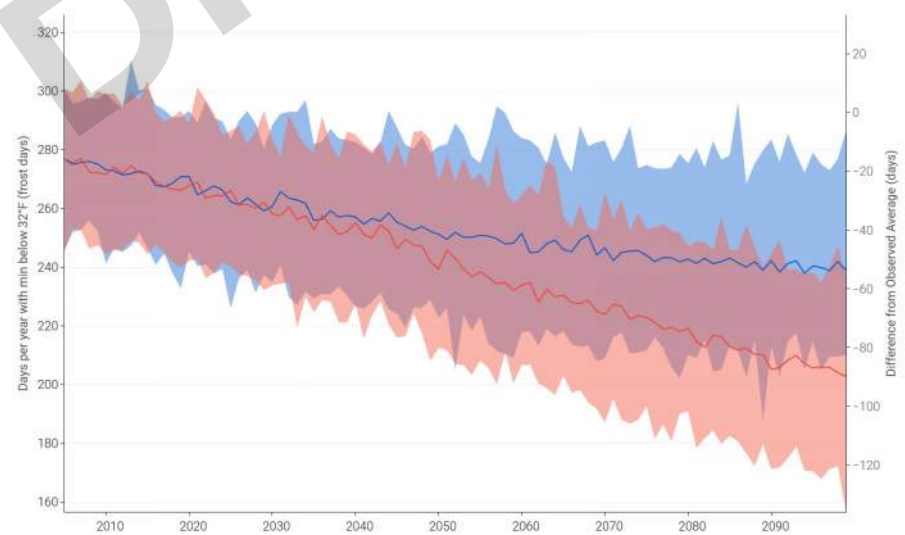
Colorado's climate is changing due to global surface temperature increases. The health of our residents and visitors, our economic growth, critical infrastructure, and natural resources are all being affected by these changes already and impacts are projected to get more severe. The increased severity and frequency of fires in recent years pose a clear threat to infrastructure and ecosystems. Changes in precipitation patterns can have a variety of impacts, from increased drought prevalence, which negatively affects agriculture and creates conditions for mudslides, to reduced snowpack, which affects winter skiing and summer river recreation. It is imperative that we recognize and prepare for the climate risks posed to our community and local economy. (NOAA National Center for Environmental Info, 2024)

**Average Annual Daily Max. Temperature - Projected (2005-2100)**



[U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit and Climate Explore](#), managed by NOAA's Climate Program Office, hosted by the National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center (NEMAC), University of North Carolina Asheville.

**Days with Minimum Temp Below Freezing (< 32°F)**



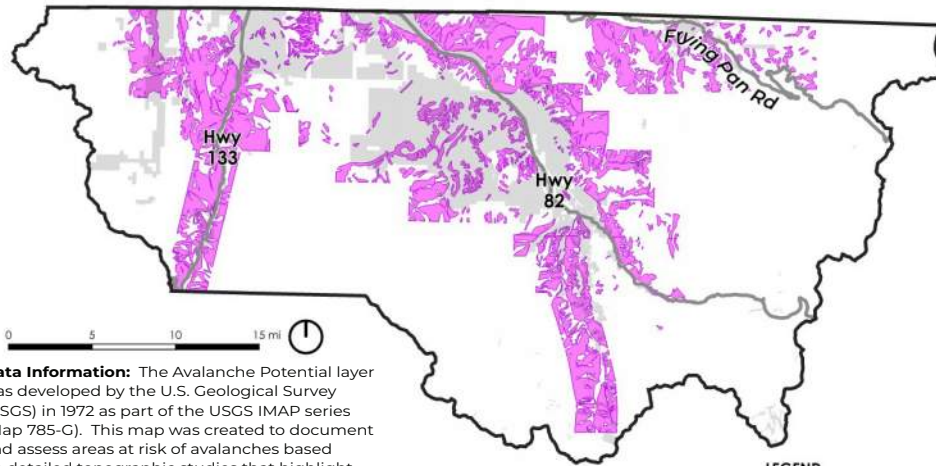
[U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit and Climate Explore](#), managed by NOAA's Climate Program Office, hosted by the National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center (NEMAC), University of North Carolina Asheville.

### Chart Key:

- Higher Emissions:**  
The red band shows projections based on higher emissions scenario. The darker red line is the weighted mean of projections for higher emissions.
- Lower Emissions:**  
The blue band shows projections based on a future with reduced GHG emissions. The darker blue line is the weighted mean of projections for lower emissions.

# ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD MAPS

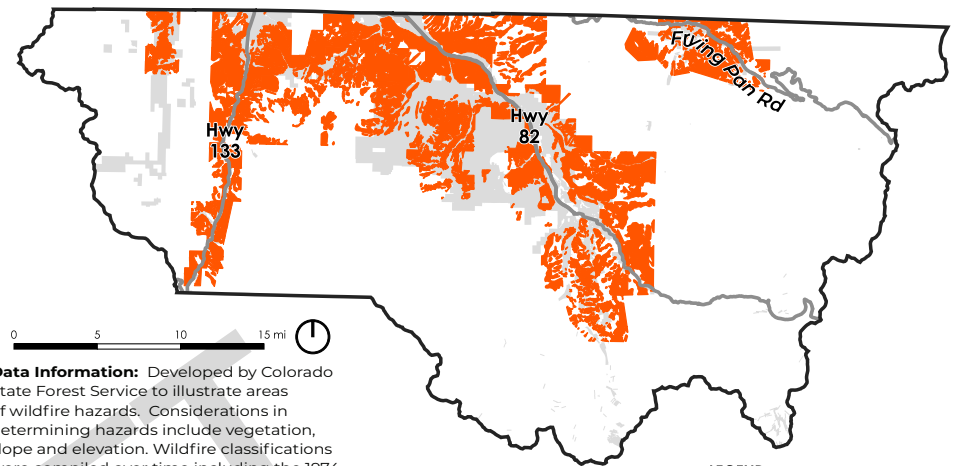
## Avalanche



**Data Information:** The Avalanche Potential layer was developed by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in 1972 as part of the USGS IMAP series (Map 785-G). This map was created to document and assess areas at risk of avalanches based on detailed topographic studies that highlight starting zones, tracks, and runout zones of past avalanches. This map indicates areas where avalanches have the potential to occur due to factors like slope angle, elevation, and snow accumulation patterns.

**LEGEND**  
■ Avalanche Potential  
■ Private Land

## Wildfire



**Data Information:** Developed by Colorado State Forest Service to illustrate areas of wildfire hazards. Considerations in determining hazards include vegetation, slope and elevation. Wildfire classifications were compiled over time including the 1974 Colorado State University Environmental Resources Analysis, 1991 State Forest Service field review, and 1996-97 State Forest Service grant project.

**LEGEND**  
■ Severed Hazard (Trees & Brush)  
■ Private Land

## Environmental Hazards

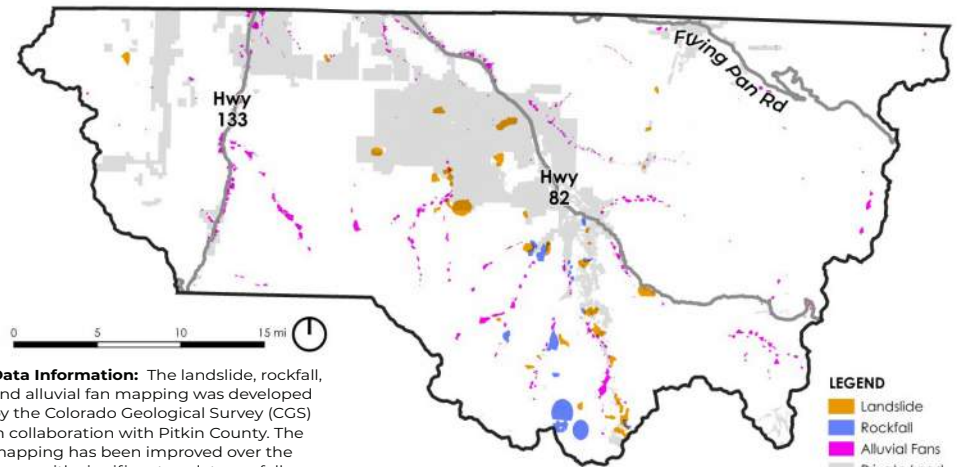
Pitkin County is prone to various environmental hazards due to its mountainous terrain and geology. These hazards include landslides, rockfall, avalanches, and wildfire among others. To reduce the long-term risk to people and property, Pitkin County worked with other municipalities and emergency service districts to develop the Pitkin County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), which was updated in April 2023. The HMP identifies risks, sets priorities for mitigation efforts, and outlines strategies to reduce their impact. In addition to the hazards identified on these maps, the Hazard Risk Summary lists the natural and human-caused hazards of greatest concern and the associated risk level. This can aid stakeholders in prioritizing mitigation efforts and resource allocation. (*Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2023*)

### Pitkin County Hazard Risk Summary

*Pitkin County Mitigation Plan (2023)*

HAZARD	PITKIN COUNTY
Avalanche	Medium
Contagious Disease	Medium
Cyber-Attack	High
Dam Inundation	Low
Drought	High
Flooding	Medium
Geologic Hazards	High
Ice Jam Release	Medium
Lightning	Low
Wildfire	High
Winter Storm	High

## Landslide, Rockfall & Alluvial Fan



**Data Information:** The landslide, rockfall, and alluvial fan mapping was developed by the Colorado Geological Survey (CGS) in collaboration with Pitkin County. The mapping has been improved over the years, with significant updates as follows: **Alluvial Fan:** Updated by CGS in 2024, based on LiDAR data and previous studies. Refined to better define areas at risk, following concerns about post-wildfire debris flows. **Landslide & Rockfall:** These layers were iteratively updated after 1974, with significant contributions from studies conducted by CGS. The most recent updates were in 2019 and included both new data and revisions to previous assessments.

**LEGEND**  
■ Landslide  
■ Rockfall  
■ Alluvial Fans  
■ Private Land

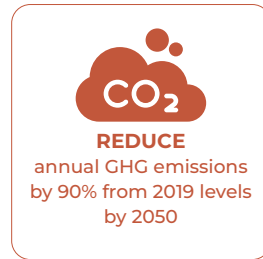
## PITKIN COUNTY CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

Pitkin County established bold goals for reducing its climate impact. The County's 2025 Climate Action Plan aims for a 65.3% reduction in annual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 and a 90% reduction by 2050 from 2019 levels. Furthermore, the plan proposes that Pitkin County and the community work to accelerate these goals by achieving 100% GHG emissions reductions by 2050 - or sooner.

The County makes and adopts a Climate Action Plan on a periodic basis as a strategic roadmap to address climate action goals road map to address climate action goals County-wide across all sectors. The 2025 Climate Action Plan brings together the County's diverse departments, public services and existing initiatives and highlights a comprehensive approach to reducing emissions and enhancing climate resilience. The Plan provides a mechanism for tracking and managing greenhouse gas emissions on a regular and ongoing basis with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving long term climate action goals.

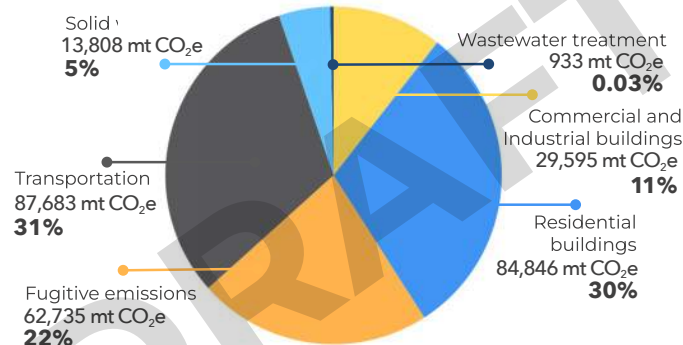
### Greenhouse Gas Inventory

To measure and manage the county's progress toward its goals, the County published a comprehensive inventory of 2023 greenhouse gas emissions. This inventory updated the previous emissions baseline established in 2019. The results show that unincorporated Pitkin County's greenhouse gas emissions in 2023 totaled 280,230 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents (mt CO<sub>2</sub>e), a 1% decline from 2019 (using the same methodology.) However, residents generated nearly 45 tons of emissions per capita in 2023 – more than double the state average.



Source: Pitkin County Climate Action Plan, 2025

### 2023 GHG EMISSIONS FOR UNINCORPORATED PITKIN COUNTY



Source: Pitkin County Climate Action Plan, 2025

- Buildings (electricity and natural gas consumption) account for 41% of emissions.
- Transportation (vehicles and aviation) accounts for 31% of emissions.
- Solid waste accounts for 5% of emissions.
- 22% of emissions come from abandoned coal mine methane leaks (limited control over these emissions).

Residential building emissions accounted for 30% of all GHG emissions within unincorporated Pitkin County. While natural gas and propane emissions increased by 3% in this timeframe, emissions from electricity declined by 8%. This decline can be attributed to the increasing deployment of renewable energy by Holy Cross Energy, which expanded its share of renewables from 44% in 2019 to 50% in 2023.

According to the 2023 Pitkin County GHG Inventory, average emissions per home in 2023 were greater for unincorporated Pitkin County than average emissions per home for the county as a whole. The average home

in unincorporated Pitkin County generated an average of 24.1 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e per home per year, compared with the average US home that generates about 7.1 mtCO<sub>2</sub>e per year (EPA). This suggests that homes in unincorporated Pitkin County are more carbon intensive, accounting for a disproportionate amount of emissions relative to its housing stock. (*Pitkin County GHG Inventory, 2023*)

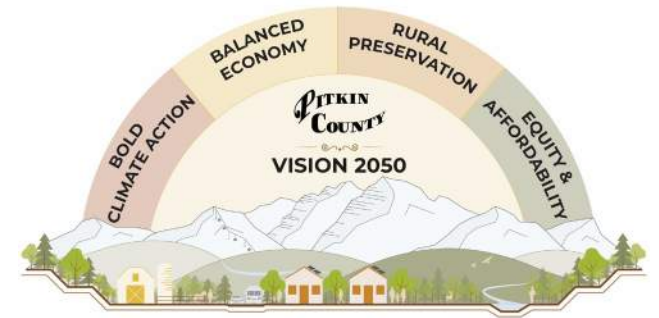
While Pitkin County is making progress on its GHG reduction goals, focusing on reducing emissions associated with residential buildings remains a top priority. The county's land use, building, and energy codes are key levers that can be used to adjust emissions related to residential development.

DRAFT





# Natural Environment



# Natural Environment Goal:

**Preserve, conserve, and protect the rural character, wild lands, and natural environment of Pitkin County.**

## GROUNDING IN OUR VALUES

*Protecting our Natural Environment* is interconnected with each of our community values. **Rural Preservation** is integral to our community's character and is a long-standing foundational value. It recognizes the benefits of agriculture, open space, and wild lands as limited resources of environmental, cultural, economic, and scenic value for future generations. Achieving our community value of a **Balanced Economy** recognizes that while our natural environment and public lands are fundamental to the recreation and local tourism economy, we aim to manage sustainable levels of recreational activity on these lands. **Promoting Equity and Affordability** means supporting access to our natural environment for all members of our community. Finally, our changing climate will result in warmer temperatures and a larger portion of precipitation arriving as rain instead of snow. This will require our community to lean into our community value of **Bold Climate Action** in order to minimize the human impact of climate change in support of protecting our natural environment.



## INTRODUCTION

### ***Preserving, conserving, and protecting***

our Natural Environment requires stewarding our lands and waters to maintain and enhance ecological and hydrological function, support ecosystem services, and benefit our community and local economy that depend on it. While our community is rich in public lands and wilderness areas, the integrity of our ecosystems and native biodiversity are increasingly threatened by human activity and climate change. Development pressures, loss of habitat, and warming temperatures pose threats to our precious natural environment. Acknowledging our values and these challenges presents a key question: ***How do we balance development and growth pressures with environmental sustainability and rural preservation?***

### ***Pitkin County Lands***

The County includes high mountain peaks, extensive montane and subalpine forests, alpine meadows, riparian areas, high-elevation wetlands, ancient pinyon juniper stands, sagebrush steppe, and open grasslands. The elevation ranges from 14,265 feet at Castle Peak to about 6,280 feet where

the Crystal River enters Garfield County. (*US Geological Survey*)

The Elk Mountains traverse the County with seven Fourteeners, peaks with an elevation above 14,000 feet. The physical and biological complexity make the County an ecologically significant landscape, perhaps one of the most intact in the state that supports a rich diversity of animal and plant life: from bighorn sheep to beavers, mule deer to marmots, columbine to quaking aspens, and thousands more amphibians, birds, fishes, and insects. The substantial biodiversity of our landscape is a critical natural resource that requires responsible stewardship. Much of Pitkin County's 971 square miles (621,251 acres) is publicly owned, accounting for nearly 85% of the total land area. The majority of public lands are part of the White River National Forest and are managed by the US Forest Service, with significant portions designated as Wilderness Areas. Of the 15% of privately owned lands, nearly a quarter (23%) have been protected through conservation easements. (*Pitkin County Assessor's Office, 2024*)

### ***Pitkin County Watershed***

Pitkin County lies entirely within the Roaring Fork Watershed. The Roaring Fork Watershed is one of the wettest in Colorado, with significantly rich biodiversity in our wetlands and riparian areas. Pitkin County's hydrology features a complex network of rivers, streams, and reservoirs essential for ecological health, water supply, and recreational activities. The Roaring Fork Watershed consists of three river basins - the Fryingpan and Crystal flow into the Roaring Fork which then flows northward, leaving the watershed to converge with the Colorado River.

As a headwaters county, protecting water quality and quantity in our rivers and streams is essential. The precious water resources face threats of pollution, warming temperatures, and depletion by transmountain diversions. On an annual basis substantial amounts of water are diverted to the Front Range to support urban water supplies, consisting of an average of 37% of flows in the Upper Roaring Fork Watershed (40,600 acre-feet) and 40% of flows in the Upper Fryingpan Watershed (61,500 acre-feet). Increasing water demands throughout the Colorado

River Basin will continue to pressure the already over-appropriated river, tributaries, and headwaters. Addressing a complex set of water rights and historic priorities is essential for protecting, defending, and enhancing our rivers and streams. *(Roaring Fork Conservancy, 2024)*

### **Rural Character and Agricultural Heritage**

Pitkin County has deep cultural roots that link our rural landscape to agricultural activity. After the decline in mining activity in the late 1800s, farming and ranching emerged as the mainstays of the local economy of the Roaring Fork Valley at the beginning of the twentieth century. During this period, many families produced potatoes, hay and grain crops and grazed their cattle on US Forest Service range land during summers. With the resurgence of Aspen as a skiing destination in the 1940s, the rural landscape of Pitkin County provided both a bucolic backdrop for the emerging resort economy and an opportunity for new development. Agricultural production experienced a slow decline - subdivisions and lot splits began to divide up agricultural lands to make way for new residential development as agricultural lands appreciated in value. *(Aspen Historical Society)*

Dating back to the 1987 Down Valley Comprehensive Plan (DVCP), our community has actively discussed the community value of agricultural lands as integral to our rural character and culture, with recognition of the need to maintain these lands for their intrinsic values: agricultural production of

food and livestock, grazing lands, migration corridors for wildlife, scenic and rural character of open space, and protection of air and water. Today, assessor records define 37% of private lands as agricultural, while only 0.01% of jobs in Pitkin County are attributed to agriculture. While our community consistently supports rural preservation, we continue to grapple with the best approach to acknowledge our agricultural heritage amidst a landscape of high value luxury ranches and the few lingering agricultural producers still working the land for their living. *(Pitkin County Assessor's Office, 2024)*

### **Balancing Conservation and Recreation**

The natural environment has an overarching presence in all aspects of life in our community. Our quality of life is dependent on our environment's many benefits – from world-class skiing to Gold Medal fishing waters; from pristine mountain air to clean drinking water; and scenic views of snowcapped peaks and high alpine meadows of native wildflowers. The natural beauty and public land amenities draw many people to Pitkin County to live, work, and recreate. Stewarding our landscape requires finding ways to balance the many demands placed on our environment. In particular, balancing conservation and recreation is a growing area of focus for our community. Supporting high-quality habitat for wildlife requires ensuring connectivity of large landscapes to sustain quality ecosystems for the future. Proactively managing recreational usage is key to equitably support public access while also mitigating the environmental impact of increased activity.

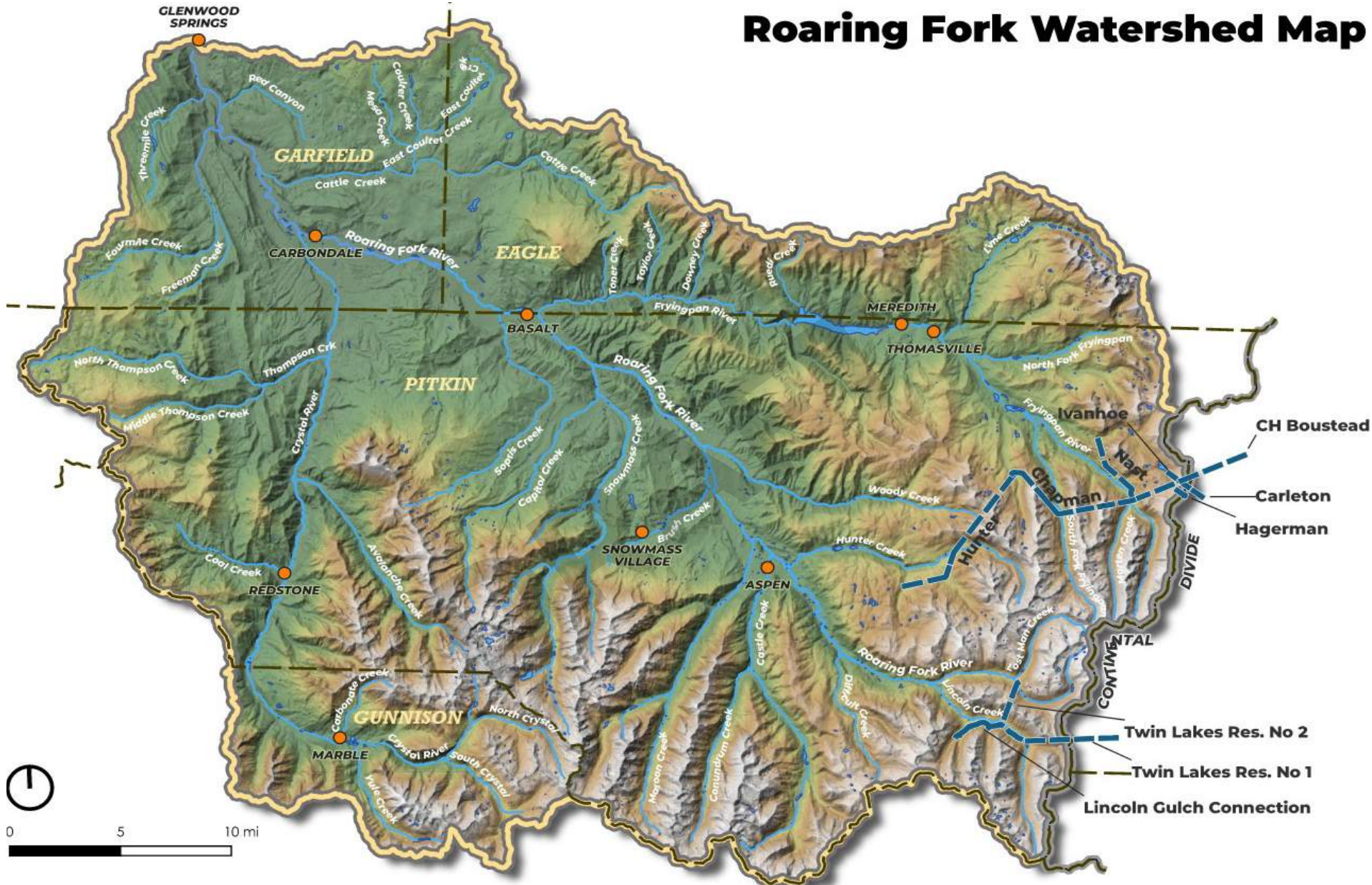
### **Challenges for our Natural Environment:**

Our natural environment faces threats both natural and human-caused. Our mountainous terrain and semi-arid, high-desert climate present environmental hazards such as wildfires, drought, flooding, avalanches, and debris flows. These natural hazards present current risks to our community and will likely be exacerbated by changes in our climate.

Climate projections indicate that our local climate will experience warmer average temperatures resulting in more frost-free days and more precipitation arriving as rain instead of snow. The increased severity and frequency of fires poses a clear threat to our community and ecosystems. Changes in precipitation patterns intensifies drought prevalence and reduces our snowpack, impacting snow and water-based recreation while also threatening both water quality and water supply. *(NOAA Climate Office, 2024)*

In addition to natural hazards, human pressures on our environment pose a threat. Development activity can lead to habitat loss and fragmentation, disruption of migration corridors, and subsequent stressors on wildlife populations in addition to other impacts on the landscape like loss of native plants, light pollution, erosion, etc. Concerning declines of our native elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep populations have heightened awareness of the need to identify and prioritize landscape-scale conservation to support these keystone species and our local biodiversity.

# Roaring Fork Watershed Map



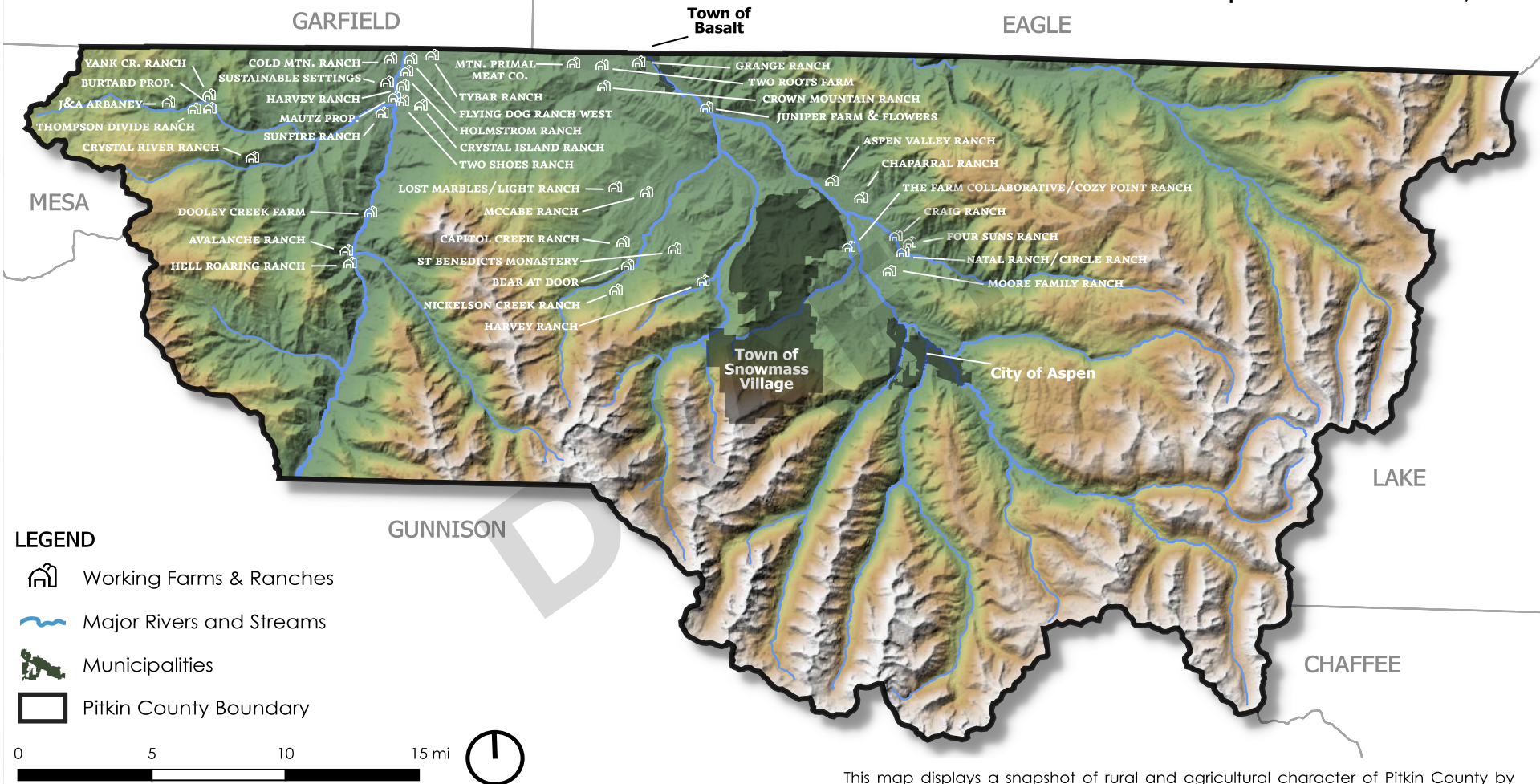
**LEGEND**

- Rivers and Streams
- County Boundaries
- Continental Divide
- Towns
- Transmountain Diversion Tunnels

Source Data: US Geologic Survey, Roaring Fork Conservancy, 2024

# Rural Agricultural Properties

Map Created: November 4, 2025



**Source Data:** "The Roaring Fork and Farms Map", 2023, Pitkin County Assessor's Office, Pitkin County GIS & Community Development.

This map displays a snapshot of rural and agricultural character of Pitkin County by locating many of the large swaths of lands and well-known properties where some level of local agricultural production is underway, including grazing, haying, raising livestock and crop production. In Pitkin County 37% of privately held lands are assessed as agricultural properties, not all of which are captured on this map.

## BROAD COMMUNITY DIRECTION

Our long-standing commitment to preserve and protect our natural environment remains strong today. In order to address competing interests and challenges, the overarching community input received through public engagement, Community Growth Advisory Committee (CGAC) Recommendations, Caucus Master Plans and community plans articulate the following strategies to inform our policy direction for the Natural Environment:

- ▶ **Preserve and Protect our Natural Environment:** Our community continues to adamantly support our long standing, unwavering and fundamental value of preservation and protection of our natural environment and our rural character.
- ▶ **Deploy County Regulations and Programs to Support our Natural Environment:** The use of conservation easements and land use regulations are and will continue to be powerful tools to protect wildlife habitat, migration corridors, biodiversity, water resources, working agricultural lands, support rural preservation, and protect our natural environment and the ecosystem services it provides.
- ▶ **Mitigate Human Impacts to our Natural Environment:** The natural mountainous and steep terrain features as well as substantial expanse of public land limit the amount of area available for private development. Regulations require that development avoids and adequately mitigates the impacts to our natural environment in order to prioritize habitat and wildlife.
- ▶ **Broad Partnerships for Broad Environmental Protections:** Our landscape and ecosystem are not limited to our county's political boundaries. As such, broad partnerships with adjacent communities, public land agencies, and community partner organizations are essential to manage and support our natural environment.
- ▶ **Recognize Caucus Master Plan Input for the Natural Environment:** Pitkin County's Caucus Master Plans each provide substantial direction for environmental preservation, protection of water resources, preservation of viewsheds and air quality in addition to identification of locations where development is inappropriate due to environmental hazards, scenic views, and lack of sufficient infrastructure. Many of the policies carry forward direction included in the Caucus Master Plans.





# Ecological Bill of Rights

*Adopted by the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners by Resolution 070-2000*

As the integrity of our ecosystem is increasingly challenged by human activity, and population growth and the accompanying sprawl are seriously damaging and threatening to destroy the ecological carrying capacity (environmental sustainability) of the region, it is the policy of the County to implement the following rights:

- a. The right to breathe clean air and enjoy clear vistas.
- b. The right to the preservation of natural riparian areas and wetlands.
- c. The right to permanently protected minimum stream flows in rivers and creeks.
- d. The right to the preservation and restoration of native wildlife and plant diversity by preservation of sufficient habitat.
- e. The right to protection of designated wilderness through management of adjoining land in a way that preserves the integrity of the wilderness areas.
- f. The right to a landscape kept free of noxious and invasive weeds.
- g. The right of appropriate access to public lands on roads and trails historically open to the public, consistent with the nature and designation of the public lands.
- h. The right to dedicated open space protected from urbanization and development.
- i. The right to the efficient and renewable use of energy.
- j. The right to be free from excessive noise.
- k. The right to see the night sky without the interference of unnecessary artificial light from growth, urbanization and highway development.
- l. The right to the absolute minimum involuntary exposure to toxic chemicals, radioactive substances and energy forms that are hazardous to health.
- m. The right to maintain and not exceed the carrying capacity (sustainability) of the land and water, including protecting water quality.
- n. The right to expect government legislation and active enforcement of land use and development regulations consistent with this Ecological Bill of Rights





## Overview of Policy Areas:

**01 Natural Resources and Biodiversity:** *Identifies policies supporting biodiversity, wildlife, habitat, and broad protections for our natural resources.*

**02 Water Quality & Quantity:** *Sets forth water policy direction regarding water conservation and efficiency, water quality, groundwater, water rights, and riparian and instream habitat. This section is supported by the Pitkin County Water Conditions Report included as an appendix in accordance with SB 24-174.*

**03 Agricultural Lands:** *Establishes policy direction to support agricultural lands and production and identifies priorities to be implemented through programs and land use regulation.*

**04 Air Quality:** *Reinforces efforts to monitor and maintain air quality in Pitkin County in alignment with the Pitkin County Environmental Health Department.*

**05 Scenic Quality:** *Supports policy direction in an effort to protect the scenic quality of our landscape and scenic viewsheds within Pitkin County.*

**06 Public Lands and Open Space:** *Provides policy direction in support of public land and open space management in alignment with Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Department and coordination with public land managers.*

**07 Recreation and Tourism:** *Identifies policies and programs to address the recreation and tourism needs of residents and visitors to the county in accordance with CRS 30-28-106.*

**08 Environmental Hazards:** *Supports policy direction to prevent and mitigate environmental hazards with particular focus on wildfire, flood, and geologic hazards.*

## Pitkin County Community Transect

The Community Transect provides a cross-section and characteristics of land use areas found across the Pitkin County landscape. Policies in the Natural Environment chapter support longstanding goals to preserve and protect our natural environment and maintain the characteristics of each distinct area along the continuum. We are committed to protecting and preserving our remote and rural areas, and focusing density toward urban areas of Pitkin County where infrastructure, utilities and services exist.



CHARACTERISTICS

**Remote areas** are defined by their natural landscapes with minimal human disturbance and limited if any infrastructure. These locations are typically in state and federal ownership as protected lands and support conservation of natural resources, wildlife habitat, backcountry access, and low-impact recreational use.

RELEVANT POLICIES

**Policies in this Natural Environment Chapter intend to maintain and preserve remote areas by:** protecting biodiversity, habitat, and migration corridors (Section 01 Natural Resources and Biodiversity); provisions to protect wilderness areas and public lands (Section 06 Public Lands & Open Space); and promoting a balanced approach to manage recreation and public access (Section 07 Recreation & Tourism).

**Rural areas** feature expansive open lands and natural landscapes, very low density single family residences and larger estate parcels and a low population density. These areas preserve Pitkin County's agriculture producing landscapes, scenic viewsheds, and rural character. Development in these areas relies on wells and septic systems.

**Policies that preserve the character of rural areas include:** protecting biodiversity and habitat (Section 01 Natural Resources & Biodiversity); protecting groundwater resources (Section 02 Water Quality & Quantity); supporting agriculture lands and producers (Section 03 Agricultural Lands); and maintaining scenic views (Section 05 Scenic Quality).



CHARACTERISTICS

RELEVANT POLICIES

**Semi-Rural areas** serve as buffers between rural and more developed areas, often including single-family homes and agricultural structures clustered together, while maintaining open space. These include established neighborhoods and are often served by utilities, but may be located on well or septic.

**Relevant policies for semi-rural areas include:** water conservation (Section 02 Water Quality & Quantity); minimize development impacts to agriculture (Section 03 Agricultural Lands); and hazard mitigation (Section 08 Environmental Hazards).

EXISTING URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY

**Semi-Urban areas** include established neighborhoods, open space, multi-family, and mixed-use areas. These include areas within an Urban Growth Boundary. Many of these areas are serviced by existing municipal infrastructure and utilities, or could be if developed.

**Relevant policies for semi-urban areas include:** water conservation (Section 02 Water Quality & Quantity) and hazard mitigation (Section 08 Environmental Hazards).

**Urban areas** are centers of more dense development and include a mix of residential, commercial, and civic uses, supported by municipal infrastructure and services. These areas include incorporated municipalities.

**Coordination with municipal partners in urban areas is especially important regarding:** water conservation (Section 02 Water Quality & Quantity) and open space coordination (Section 06 Public Lands & Open Space).

**Resort Recreation areas** are designed for seasonal and year-round tourism, anchored by recreational amenities like ski areas and trails. These areas include a mix of open lands, lodging, lifts, infrastructure and on-mountain service, commercial, and residential uses.

**Policies with importance to resort recreation are:** stewardship of public lands (Section 06 Public Lands & Open Space) and management of recreational activity (Section 07 Recreation & Tourism).

# Key Terms

**ADAPTIVE PLANNING:** A planning approach that prioritizes the capacity of communities to withstand and adapt to various uncertainties and changes, including climate change, economic shifts, and social transformations. This proactive approach anticipates future needs and challenges, incorporating flexibility and adaptability into the planning process from the outset.

**AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION:** The production of foods and other goods that come from plants, animals, and microorganisms. This includes grazing, haying, livestock raising, and crop production.

**BIODIVERSITY:** The variety of life, encompassing all native species of plants and animals, and the ecosystems they inhabit.

**CONSERVATION:** Protecting and managing natural resources and ecosystems through proper management of the resource for the benefit of both current and future generations.

**CRITICAL HABITAT:** The specific areas within the geographic area that contain the physical or biological features that are essential to the viability of all native species that may need special management or protection.

**ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE:** Environmentally sustainable agriculture supports and does not degrade hydrological and ecological functions.

**EXTRACTIVE OPERATIONS:** Activity by extractive industries that seek to produce minerals and energy-related resources by means of, but not limited to: mining, mineral exploration, commercial or large scale geothermal mining or exploration, oil and gas drilling and exploration, oil and gas pipe lines, sand and gravel pits, rock crushers.

**LARGE HOME:** The term “large home” generally refers to homes containing more than 5,750 square feet of floor area.

**ONSITE WASTEWATER TREATMENT (OWTS):** Also known as septic systems, are decentralized wastewater treatment systems that treat wastewater on the property and discharge is back into the environment, often through soil absorption fields.

**OUTDOOR RECREATION:** Activity undertaken in a natural or outdoor environment for leisure, enjoyment, or physical activity, including but not limited to hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, skiing, cross country skiing, rafting, fishing, boating, hunting; and inclusive of outfitting and guide services for hunters, fishermen, hikers, and well as ecotourism.

**PRESERVATION:** Safeguarding and maintaining natural environments, including ecosystems, wildlife, habitats, and natural resources, for their intrinsic value and to ensure their continued existence by protection from human activity.

**REMOTE AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County defined by their natural landscapes with minimal human disturbance and limited if any infrastructure. These locations are typically in state and federal ownership as protected lands and support conservation of natural resources, wildlife habitat, backcountry access, and low-impact recreational use.

**RESORT RECREATION AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that are designed for seasonal and year-round tourism, anchored by recreational amenities like ski areas and trails. These areas include a mix of open lands, lodging, lifts, infrastructure and on-mountain service buildings, commercial, and residential uses.

**RESTORATION:** The process of assisting the recovery of ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged, or destroyed, aiming to restore their natural functions and biodiversity.

**RIVER HAZARD:** River hazards are inclusive of floodplain hazards which are the area of land adjacent to a river that is periodically flooded, in addition to fluvial hazards which are risks associated with stream movement, erosion, and sediment/debris deposition in these areas.

**RURAL AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that feature expansive open lands that allow for very limited recreational and residential uses. These areas preserve the county’s agriculture producing landscapes, scenic viewsheds, and rural character. Development in these areas relies on wells and septic systems.

**SEMI-RURAL AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that serve as buffers between rural and more developed areas, often including single-family homes and agricultural structures clustered together, while maintaining open space. These include established neighborhoods and are often served by utilities, but may be located on a well or septic system.

**SEMI-URBAN AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that include established neighborhoods, open space, multi-family, and mixed-use areas. These include areas within an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). Many of these areas are serviced by existing municipal infrastructure and utilities, or could be if developed.

**URBAN AREAS:** Centers of more dense development and include a mix of residential, commercial, and civic uses, supported by municipal infrastructure and services. These areas include incorporated municipalities.

**WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES (WWTF):** A facility designed to remove pollutants and contaminants from wastewater before it is discharged back into the water cycle.

**WATERSHED:** An area of land where all surface water and groundwater eventually flows into a common outlet or larger body of water, such as the Colorado River.

**WILDLIFE:** All free-ranging animals that are not domesticated and live in our natural environment including terrestrial wildlife, birds, and aquatic species.

**WILDFIRE HAZARD:** A wildfire phenomenon that is so adverse to past, current or foreseeable construction or land use as to constitute a hazard to public health and safety or to property. The term includes, but is not limited to (a) slope and aspect, (b) wildfire behavior characteristics, and (c) existing vegetation types.

**WILDFIRE HAZARD AREA:** An area containing or directly affected by a wildfire hazard.

**WILDFIRE HAZARD CLASSES:** The differentiation of wildfire hazard areas into various levels of severity by considering wildfire behavior, vegetation types and slope.

**WILDLIFE HABITAT:** An area that includes: any area mapped by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife on Species Activity Maps (SAM) or Natural Diversity Information System (NDIS) maps; Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) maps of rare and imperiled species and natural communities; or any area determined by Pitkin County or the Colorado Parks and Wildlife to include: any portion of a wetland; riparian habitat; ungulate winter range, severe winter range, and or winter concentration areas; wildlife migration corridors or migration habitat; wildlife production, birthing, calving, or rearing areas; waterfowl, wading bird, feeding, nesting, or breeding habitat; significant mountain sage-, aspen-, or mountain shrub-dominated habitat; rare, sensitive, threatened, or endangered species habitat.

**WILDLIFE HIGHWAY CROSSING:** An area where bighorn sheep, elk, and/or mule deer movements traditionally cross roads or railroads, presenting potential conflicts between the animals and motorists/trains.

**WILDLIFE MIGRATION CORRIDOR:** A specific mappable site through which large numbers of bighorn sheep, elk and/or mule deer migrate and loss of which would result in a change to migration routes and/or significant negative impacts on migration behavior.

**WILDLIFE MIGRATION HABITAT:** Habitat between winter range and summer range where elk spend significant periods of time (often weeks) prior to their final seasonal destination. This is also known as transition range.

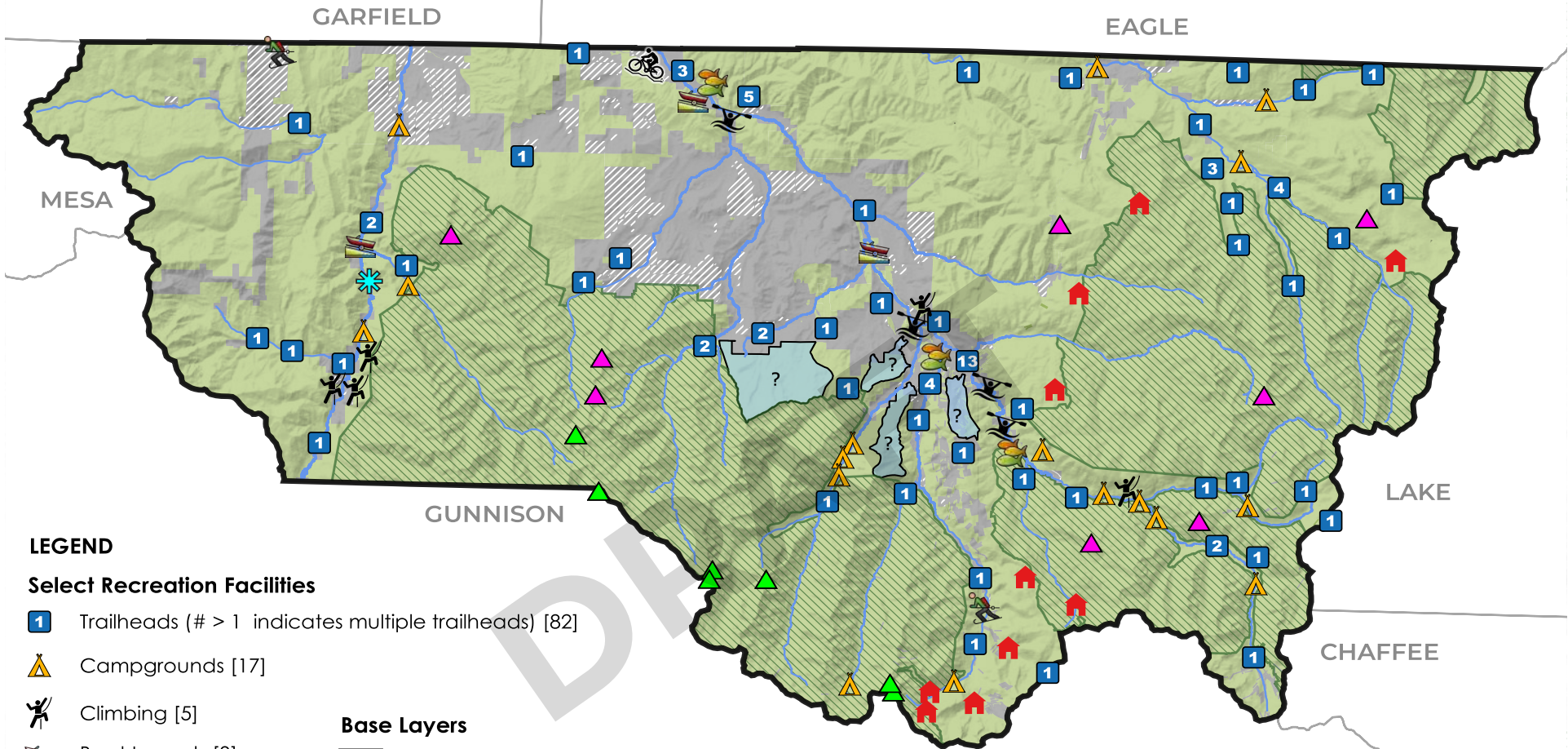
**WILDLIFE MIGRATION PATTERN:** Subjective indication of the general direction and pattern of the movements of migratory bighorn sheep, elk and/or mule deer.

**WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE:** The geographical area where human development, including structures and other infrastructure, meets or intermixes with undeveloped wildlands.

# Measures of Success

OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
Protect critical wildlife habitat, connectivity, and migration corridors to support native wildlife and biodiversity in the Roaring Fork Valley.	<i>Acres of land conserved by Conservation Easements and under Pitkin County Open Space &amp; Trails ownership of high conservation and restoration priority, as identified by the Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity and Connectivity Study</i>
Ensure the supply and reliability of water resources are protected and conserved, including minimum streamflows, surface and groundwater.	<i>Instream flow monitoring by Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB); Pitkin County Water Supply Baseline (2024, appendix to Comprehensive Plan)</i>
Increase protection for and monitoring of water quality in the Roaring Fork Watershed and its tributary rivers, streams, riparian areas and wetlands.	<i>Water quality monitoring by Colorado Parks &amp; Wildlife and Roaring Fork Conservancy</i>
Manage recreational activity to ensure our land, water, wildlife and quality of life are preserved and protected	<i>As monitored by Pitkin County Open Space &amp; Trails and community partners including but not limited to Roaring Fork Outdoor Coalition, Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers and Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association</i>
Support local working ranchers and farmers and incentivize the next generation of agricultural producers to remain in operation and maintain production.	<i>Irrigated acres covered by Conservation Easements; Annual Agricultural Program Reports (CSU Extension, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Department)</i>
Preserve public lands, especially designated Wilderness Areas, and protect natural conditions from incompatible development, out-of-basin diversions, and resource development.	<i>Crystal Wild &amp; Scenic Coalition; White River National Forest Management Plan including Travel Management Plan; Landowner Compliance with the Pitkin County Land Use Code</i>
Mitigate the impacts of environmental hazards with a particular focus on programs and policies to minimize the risk and severity of wildfire.	<i>Pitkin County Wildfire Protection Plan; Pitkin County Emergency Management; Fire Departments; Roaring Fork Valley Wildfire Collaborative</i>
Maintain and improve air quality throughout Pitkin County.	<i>As monitored by Pitkin County Environmental Health Department.</i>
Retain Pitkin County’s scenic quality for future generations, inclusive of the natural beauty of mountain and ridgeline views, natural topography, and the rural landscape.	<i>Compliance and enforcement of Pitkin County’s Scenic View and Steep Slope standards in the Pitkin County Land Use Code</i>

# Outdoor Recreation Facilities



## LEGEND

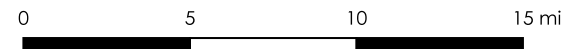
### Select Recreation Facilities

- Trailheads (# > 1 indicates multiple trailheads) [82]
  - Campgrounds [17]
  - Climbing [5]
  - Boat Launch [3]
  - Kayaking [4]
  - Fishing [3]
  - Hot Springs [1]
  - Bike Park [1]
  - Backcountry Huts [10]
  - Alpine Ski Areas [4]
  - Nordic Ski Areas [2]
- 
- ### Base Layers
- Pitkin County Boundary
  - Public Land
  - Private Land
  - Private Land Conserved
  - US Wilderness Areas
  - Major Rivers and Streams
  - 14,000-foot Peaks
  - Other Notable Mountains

[ ] Indicates number of facilities in each category.

**Source Data:** Pitkin County Open Space & Trails for all recreation facilities except campgrounds and alpine ski areas. USFS Recreational Opportunities dataset (campgrounds). Pitkin County GIS (alpine ski areas).

**Map Created: December 23, 2024**



# 01 Natural Resources and Biodiversity

## 01.1 **Preserve and Protect Biodiversity**

Support forest and land management strategies that preserve and protect biodiversity and those that focus on maintaining ecological function and integrity of native plant and animal species.

## 01.2 **Wildlife and Habitat**

Preserve, restore and perpetuate native wildlife and plant diversity by maintaining sufficient habitat such as reproduction areas, winter range areas, migration routes, nesting sites, wetlands and wildlife corridors.

## 01.3 **Evaluation of Habitat**

Utilize the best science available to evaluate wildlife habitat health and environmental impacts to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat and address issues such as habitat loss, ecosystem fragmentation, and the impacts of development.

## 01.4 **Wildlife Regulations Review**

Utilize referrals in the land use review process to obtain input regarding impacts of proposed development on wildlife and wildlife habitat; Administer and enforce wildlife regulations to preserve wildlife and wildlife habitat, open space, plant species,

cover and corridors for the healthy protection, reproduction, movement and migration of all native wildlife species.

## 01.5 **Migration and Movement Corridors**

Preserve areas with high wildlife or conservation values, including riparian corridors; restore movement corridors between key wildlife habitat areas, including maintaining areas undisturbed by human activity; and explore the creation of safe passages for wildlife.

## 01.6 **Land Conservation & Restoration**

Protect, maintain and restore lands that provide high conservation or connectivity value due to location and/or quality habitat for elk, mule deer, and bighorn in addition to lands identified for significant restoration opportunities.

## 01.7 **Noxious Weeds**

Enforce the Colorado Noxious Weed Act which requires property owners to control listed noxious weeds which out-compete native plants in an effort to support Pitkin County's ecosystem health.

## 01.8 **Mineral Extraction**

Ensure strict enforcement of all applicable local, state, and federal regulations governing extractive industries that seek to produce minerals and energy-related resources in order to minimize degradation to air and water quality or quantity and detriment to public lands, biodiversity, wildlife, agriculture, and rural character.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 02 Land Use, Development Standards* and Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 03 Watershed-wide Environmental Protections*

# 02 Water Quality & Quantity

*The following policies are aligned with Pitkin County's approach to managing water quality and quantity and do not replace or supersede any existing agreements or water rights decrees.*

In Colorado, in accordance with **SB24-174**, county comprehensive plans must include a water supply element that incorporates:

- **Consultation and coordination with local water provider(s);**
- **Includes water conservation policies; and**
- **Estimates a range of water supplies and facilities sufficient to meet public and private infrastructure needs to support the potential development described in the comprehensive plan.**

The Pitkin County Water Conditions Report included as an appendix to this Plan, informs policies that promote sustainable growth and water management now and into the future.

## **02.1 Land Use to Preserve and Protect Water Resources**

Land uses within the region should be designed to preserve and protect present water resources, including surface and groundwater, and to avoid significant adverse effects on the quantity, quality, or dependability of water resources in the County. Land uses and development should protect against significant pollution of water, including sediment, impairment of minimum instream flows, and the need for future major public expenditures to support water and wastewater resources.

## **02.2 Pitkin County Healthy Rivers and Streams Board**

Support the goals of the Healthy Rivers and Streams Board in efforts to maintain and improve water quality and quantity within the Roaring Fork watershed; protect water rights for the benefit of the Roaring Fork watershed; secure, create, augment and improve instream flows; and improve and construct facilities that contribute to these objectives.

## **02.3 Increase Water Adequacy Requirements**

Develop increased water adequacy

requirements for new development and redevelopment to ensure that the availability of a water supply is sufficient in terms of quantity, quality, availability, reliability, and sufficient pressure for fire protection. Require that water adequacy be legally and physically demonstrated prior to approval of a development application.

## **02.4 Water Efficiency and Conservation**

Ensure water conservation and efficiency are incorporated into land use, development and redevelopment regulations across all sectors and County operations.

## **02.5 Reduce Water Waste and Non-Essential Consumption**

Develop regulations and programs to reduce water waste across all water uses and pursue opportunities to convert non-essential consumption into instream flow or other uses to benefit the community and the environment in the County.

## **02.6 Effectively Manage Groundwater Resources**

Effectively manage groundwater resources to ensure a resilient and sustainable water supply that supports people and ecosystems.

- 02.7** ***Agricultural Water Use and Efficiency***  
Support the preservation and utilization of water for agricultural lands with consideration for:
- a. Supporting voluntary improvements to reduce water waste in agricultural uses
  - b. Encouraging implementation of best management practices inclusive of increasing irrigation efficiency, improving soil health, planting water efficient crops, and weed management.
- 02.8** ***Increase Requirements for Ponds to Support Functional Agricultural Use***  
Increase standards and requirements for ponds in an effort to support the functional agricultural use of ponds and limit non-functional amenity uses of ponds.
- 02.9** ***Limit New Outdoor Amenity Consumptive Uses***  
Limit new outdoor amenity consumptive uses in new development and redevelopment including but not limited to outdoor pools, spas, water features, and non-native landscaping.

- 02.10** ***Disallow Water Trucking***  
To the extent possible, disallow the trucking or hauling of water for new development and redevelopment as a primary source of water and require that available and reliable supplies of water are demonstrated prior to the approval of the use. However, allow for water trucking in order to support life safety concerns such as filling fire suppression tanks.
- 02.11** ***Water Quality Protection and Mitigation***  
Protect the health of the Roaring Fork Watershed and all its tributary rivers and streams from the impacts of land use and development. Require adverse impacts to the quality of the watershed to be fully mitigated. The mitigation of adverse impacts from a project should consider predicted changes to the watershed due to climate change.
- 02.12** ***Local Government Land Use Regulations for Water Quality***  
Require an applicant for a permit or approval of a project to demonstrate that the project is consistent with the Water Quality Management Plan for Regional Section 208. The local government may refer such projects to

the NWCCOG Water Quality Administrator for a determination of consistency.

- 02.13** ***Nonproliferation of Wastewater Treatment Facilities (WWTF)***  
New wastewater treatment facilities should not be developed in Pitkin County if existing facilities have the legal and physical capacity or can be expanded, rehabilitated or consolidated to provide additional wastewater treatment service.
- 02.14** ***Limit Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS)***  
Limit OWTS unless developing or connecting to an existing or consolidated wastewater treatment facility or system is not technically or legally practicable. Where no other alternatives are available, OWTS should be designed, installed, inspected, and maintained to assure effective wastewater treatment and watershed health.
- 02.15** ***Support Existing Water and Wastewater Infrastructure***  
Support the maintenance of well-functioning and cost-efficient water and wastewater delivery and treatment in order to protect water quality and avoid system failures.

- 02.16 *Hazardous Substances Not Degrade Water Quality***  
Require that any uses of pesticides, fertilizers, algaecides, fungicides and other hazardous substances; and road maintenance, including deicing and sanding, do not degrade water quality or the health of the watershed.
- 02.17 *Enhance Wetland and Riparian Habitat***  
Maintain, enhance, and restore wetland and riparian conditions to protect hydrological and ecological function in the Roaring Fork Watershed.
- 02.18 *Protect Senior Water Rights***  
Protect senior water right holders' entitlements in order to recognize the critical importance of water resources for the well-being of the Pitkin County community, environment, and economy.
- 02.19 *Increased Flexibility of Water Rights***  
Promote increased flexibility of water rights, uses, and management to benefit hydrological and ecological functions.
- 02.20 *Oppose Transbasin Diversions***  
Oppose new transbasin diversions

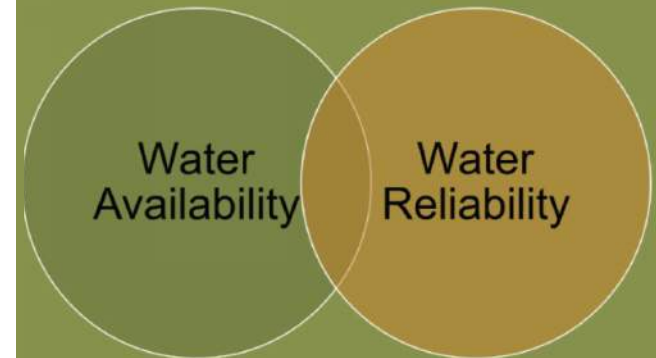
and the expansion of existing transbasin diversions originating in the Roaring Fork Watershed.

- 02.21 *Protect and Enhance Environmental and Instream Flows***  
Protect and enhance protections for environmental and instream flows in the Roaring Fork Watershed and all its tributary rivers and streams.
- 02.22 *Minimize and Mitigate Disturbance to Water Resources***  
Minimize and mitigate disturbance by development to protect water resources, wetland and riparian habitat.
- 02.23 *Identify and Map Flood and River Hazards***  
Identify, map, and plan for flood and river hazards associated with erosion, sediment, post-fire debris flows, and other dynamic river functions.
- 02.24 *Augmentation Plans Impact to Instream Flows***  
Encourage augmentation plans that replace the depletion in-location and in-time in an effort to maintain and enhance the quantity and quality of instream flows.

**Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 02 Land Use, Development Standards* and Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 03 Watershed-wide Environmental Protections*

**Sustainable Water Management** is an approach in which *water reliability* is considered alongside *water availability*.



**Water Availability:** *Is high-quality water consistently available?*  
**Water Reliability:** *Is water physically and legally available?*

*Source: Pitkin County Water Conditions Report, 2026, Brendle Group*

# 03 Agricultural Lands

**AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION** is defined as the production of foods and other goods that come from plants, animals, and microorganisms. This includes grazing, haying, livestock raising, and crop production.

## 03.1 Value of Agricultural Lands

Conserve and protect agricultural lands in Pitkin County in order to maintain the following community benefits:

- a. Agricultural production;
- b. Local jobs for agricultural producers;
- c. Cultural heritage of ranching and farming;
- d. Land for wildlife grazing and migration corridors;
- e. Ecosystem services benefits of clean air, groundwater recharge, pollination, and climate regulation; and
- f. Scenic and rural character of open space

## 03.2 Preservation of Agricultural Lands

Support the preservation of large tracts of land now committed to or capable of agricultural uses.

## 03.3 Connectivity of Agricultural Lands

Promote the connectivity of agricultural lands by discouraging the fragmentation of large parcels

of agricultural land and supporting the assemblage of smaller parcels into larger, agriculturally productive tracts.

## 03.4 Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture

Promote healthy and productive agricultural lands that contribute to local food production in addition to hydrological and ecological functions.

## 03.5 Minimize Development Impacts to Agriculture

All new development in areas surrounding or incorporated within existing agricultural properties should be designed to minimize impacts to agricultural operations.

## 03.6 Advocate for Centennial Farms and Ranches

Advocate for local farms and ranches to achieve the Centennial Farms and Ranches designation by the Colorado Department of Agriculture for families who have owned and operated their farm or ranch for at least 100 years.

## 03.7 Incentivize Agricultural Production

Develop strategies to retain and incentivize agricultural production on farms and ranches in order to

support land stewardship, local food production, and biodiversity benefits.

## 03.8 Update Regulations for Agricultural Structures for Local Agricultural Producers

Evaluate and update regulations for agricultural structures in order to define parameters for agricultural activities that are necessary for local agricultural production to support the essential agricultural activities of local producers.

## 03.9 Support Right-to-Farm

Support Colorado's Right-to-Farm legislation to conserve, protect, and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural land for the production of food and other agricultural products.

## Complementary Policies

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 02 Land Use, Land Use Patterns* and Chapter 5 – Community/Economic Health: *Section 04 Local Food*

# 04 Air Quality

## 04.1 **Clean Air Regulations**

Ensure that current regulations governing air pollution at the local, state, and federal levels are enforced within Pitkin County.

## 04.2 **Monitoring of Air Quality**

Maintain and improve the monitoring of air quality in Pitkin County throughout the county, with particular emphasis on monitoring the air quality impacts of the use and activities associated with Highway 82 and the Aspen/Pitkin County Airport.

## 04.3 **Climate Impacts on Air Quality**

Promote awareness and community education regarding the local impacts of climate change to local air quality, including increased prevalence of wildfire, heat, and aridity; and work with the community to develop local solutions to impacts to health from climate change.

## 04.4 **Development Impacts on Air Quality**

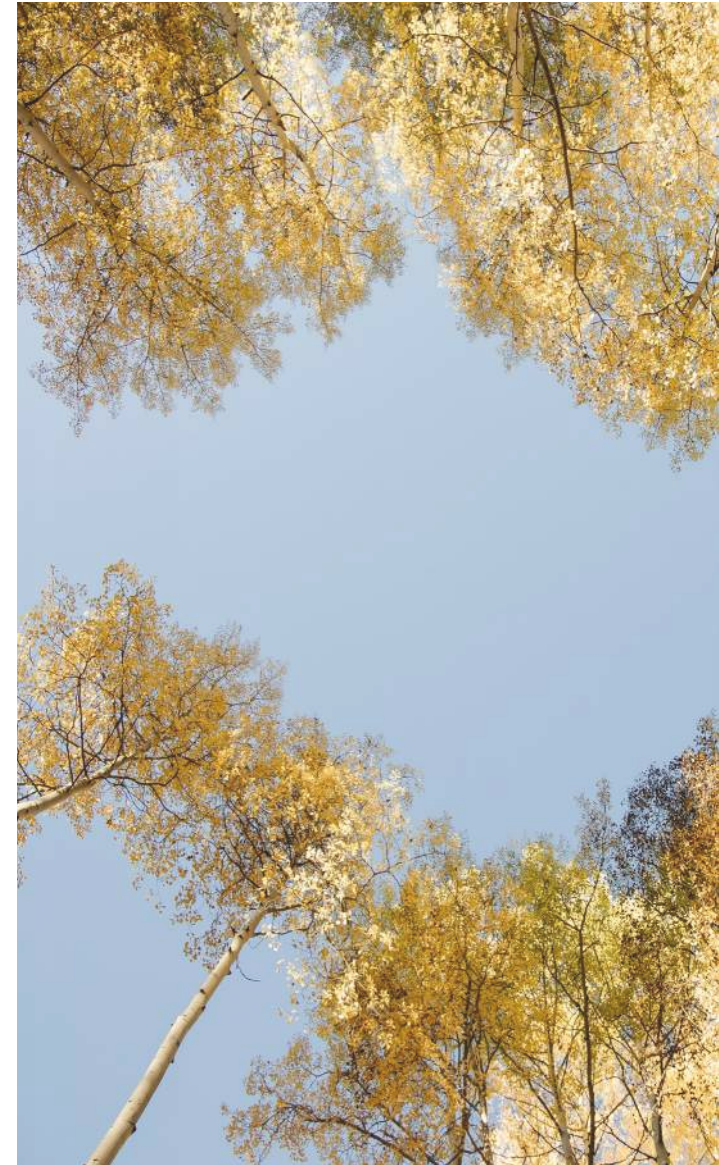
Enforce air quality regulations so that development does not degrade air quality and strengthen regulations, policies, and procedures to better address the impacts of construction on air quality.

## 04.5 **Federal Standards for Nanoparticles**

Advocate for the research and development of new standards at the state or federal level regarding potential health impacts from nanoparticles in order to better facilitate measurement and monitoring of these air pollutants.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 05 Transportation & Mobility*



# 05 Scenic Quality

## 05.1 **Protection of Landscapes, Views, Ridgelines**

Maintain and protect scenic views and rural scenery of open landscapes, pastures, meadows, mountain vistas and ridgelines as a community benefit and to the continued viability of the rural resort economy.

## 05.2 **Site Development to Minimize Impact to Scenic Views**

Site development and redevelopment should minimize the impact to scenic views in a manner that ensures the following community benefits:

- The size, scale, and density of development does not dominate the landscape, but instead is sited to be congruent with the site's natural features;
- Site development minimizes visual impacts and is subordinate to the natural landscape;
- Structures, driveways, parking areas and pathways are sited where they are compatible with natural topography;
- Site planning prioritizes existing and native plants and site features;
- Clustering of development such that structures are situated

in harmony with the natural environment;

- Maintain views of the natural environment seen as one travels along highways, county roadways, mountain road systems, and key public trails.

And avoid the following undesirable outcomes:

- Artificial site disturbance that detracts from native topography;
- Oversized structures that dominate the landscape;
- Reliance on landscape screening as a means to justify inappropriately sized and sited development for a site.

And to this end:

- Proposed development and redevelopment may be required to reduce the size, scale, density, and disturbance area to ensure adherence to the community benefits of scenic quality.

## 05.3 **Siting of Solar Arrays and Other On-Site Renewables**

Require the siting of solar arrays and other on-site renewable energy sources in order to address their associated impacts such as reflectivity and disturbance to scenic views; locate adjacent to development as feasible; and promote on-site renewable energy generation to achieve community climate goals.

## 05.4 **Preserve Dark Sky**

Preserve unimpeded views of the dark sky to minimize adverse offsite impacts of lighting such as light trespass and obtrusive light, curtail light pollution, reduce sky glow, and improve the nighttime environment for astronomy, migrating birds and other wildlife.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment; *Section 02 Land Use, Development Standards*

# 06 Public Lands and Open Space

## 06.1 **Support for County Open Space and Trails**

Acquire, preserve, maintain and manage open space lands in accordance with Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Charter, site-specific Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Management Plans, and adopted policies in order to support recreation, wildlife, agriculture, access, historic resources and scenic purposes.

## 06.2 **Support for Open Space & Trails Board**

Support the Open Space and Trails Board in the acquisition and maintenance of open space parcels, conservation easements, trails and facilities such as trailheads, parks, river access points for boating or fishing purposes and access to public lands. Parks, open space and public recreation facilities are encouraged throughout the county.

## 06.3 **Stewardship Coordination**

Support collaborative efforts between local, state, and federal agencies in the development and updating of Resource Management Plans for public lands.

## 06.4 **Protect Wilderness Areas**

Support protection of designated Wilderness Areas in accordance with the designating legislation for lands within and surrounding Pitkin County in order to protect the natural integrity of wildlands from the impacts of human-caused degradation, incompatible development, out-of-basin diversions, and resource development.

## 06.5 **Support for Federal, State Lands**

Support the management and permanent protection of federal and state lands to conserve landscapes that are critical to Pitkin County and the region's ecological health, economy, and local communities.

## 06.6 **Private Land Surrounded by Public Lands (Inholdings)**

Promote and encourage the transfer of private inholdings to public ownership with the objective of managing the inholding in a manner consistent with the management of the public lands surrounding the inholding, and to reduce conflicts between private owners and the interests of the public via their publicly held lands.

## 06.7 **Limit Privatization of Public Lands**

Federal land disposals are not supported, however the exchange of lands - where public lands may be exchanged and privatized - may be considered in circumstances where such an exchange achieves and furthers the policies of Pitkin County, including preserving or enhancing recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, watershed health, agricultural heritage, scenic viewplanes, climate action goals and public access. Such exchanges should not result in a net loss of publicly owned land within the Roaring Fork Watershed.

## 06.8 **Compatibility with Public Lands**

Support the preservation and protection of public lands from the impacts of incompatible development by promoting land uses within and nearby public lands that are compatible with public use of those lands and with the preservation of the natural environment.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 04, Watershed-wide Environmental Protections*

# 07 Recreation and Tourism

## 07.1 **Manage Recreational Activity**

Manage recreational activity in a manner that recognizes the importance of recreation and tourism to the local economy and supports the following community benefits:

- a. Protecting natural biodiversity;
- b. Protecting significant wildlife habitat connectivity and corridors;
- c. Protecting aquatic, riparian, and wetland areas;
- d. Preserving historic routes of ingress and egress to public lands and waterways;
- e. Providing access to and from public lands consistent with county and federal plans;
- f. Maintaining the quality of the recreational experience;
- g. Assisting with stewardship of federal lands; and
- h. Encouraging the provision of services and facilities necessary for the continuation of existing recreational activities in alignment with the community benefits listed above.

## 07.2 **Provide Public Access to Public Lands**

Provide for public access to public lands to support the tourism and recreational needs of residents and visitors in a manner that protects

the natural resource, encourages responsible recreation, supports access for a range of abilities, and maintains the quality of the recreational experience.

## 07.3 **Alpine Ski Areas**

Pitkin County does not support new alpine ski area proposals, but will consider the expansion of uses within or directly adjacent to existing permitted ski area boundaries, with a focus on expanding uses during non-peak periods. Coordination with the Forest Service and ski area proponents regarding ski area development will consider both on- and off-site impacts such as affordable housing, transportation, waterways, wildlife habitat, air quality and adjacent neighborhoods.

## 07.4 **Nordic Ski Areas**

Pitkin County supports existing nordic ski systems and the expansion of nordic ski systems in alignment with the Pitkin County Nordic Trails Management Plan, Ashcroft Ski Touring, and the Spring Gulch Mt. Sopris Nordic Council.

## 07.5 **Camping**

Pitkin County supports maintenance of existing public campgrounds at their current capacities. In the event that expansion of existing campgrounds is proposed, Pitkin County supports limited expansion that mitigates offsite impacts to the natural environment, roads, traffic patterns, and surrounding neighborhoods.

## 07.6 **Trails and Trail Connections**

Pitkin County supports the preservation and enhancement of access to trails and trailheads and development of bike and pedestrian ways that provide links between communities, residential and employment areas, commercial centers, recreational and open space areas, and educational facilities.

## 07.7 **Prioritize Non-motorized Recreation**

Prioritize non-motorized recreational activity and use of trails, such as cross-country skiing, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, rafting, kayaking, and other non-motorized uses on public lands.

- 07.8** ***Backcountry Huts***  
Support the existing publicly accessible backcountry hut systems managed by 10th Mountain Division Association and the Alfred A Braun Hut System as unique opportunities for backcountry skiing, mountain biking or hiking in areas connected by miles of trails and routes with huts for shelter along the way. These hut systems are an important component of the local and regional resort economy that facilitates backcountry travel, while fostering self-reliance and minimal impact to public forest lands.
- 07.9** ***Commercial Recreational Use***  
Commercial use should be managed to ensure that is compatible with an does not negatively impact non-commercial use of public lands, public right-of-ways, natural habitat or wildlife, or other recreational users. Commercial use may function as a tool to promote education, stewardship of public lands, and responsible access and recreation.
- 07.10** ***Coordination with State and Federal Agencies***  
Coordinate with state and federal land management agencies to preserve and maintain public

lands and trails consistent with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

- 07.11** ***Support for Monitoring Recreational Use***  
Support and coordinate with local, state, and federal entities to monitor and collect data regarding the use of recreational activity in an effort to better manage the impacts of human activity on roads, trails, and wilderness areas.
- 07.12** ***Recreational Education***  
Provide education to the public regarding safety, responsibility, and stewardship of the natural environment.

#### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 04 Watershed-Wide Environmental Protections*; Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 02 Land Use Development Standards*

# 08 Environmental Hazards

- 08.1** ***Adaptation & Resilience Planning***  
Approach planning for environmental hazards by developing strategies that anticipate and respond to current and future uncertainties in order to build in flexibility to modify plans as circumstances evolve.
- 08.2** ***Support for Neighborhood-scale Hazard Mitigation***  
Plan for programs and funding in order to support existing neighborhoods and subdivisions by identifying, preventing, and mitigating environmental hazards in alignment with county-wide goals to promote affordability in existing development.
- 08.3** ***Best Available Hazard Identification***  
Identify hazards by utilizing the best available hazard mapping tools that rely on the current science-based analysis, reputable source data, and are readily accessible to the public.
- 08.4** ***Living with Wildfire***  
Recognize the shared risk of living in an area with heightened wildfire risk and the subsequent need for proactive self-support and adaptive community planning efforts.

- 08.5** ***County Wildfire Protection Plan***  
Support the strategic planning promulgated by the Pitkin County Wildfire Protection Plan to reduce the threat of wildfire, particularly at the wild land/urban interface; to establish and administer wildfire policies, codes and programs; and to minimize the danger and destruction associated with wildfires and to respond to a wildfire event.
- 08.6** ***Collaborative Planning with Stakeholders***  
Plan collaboratively with private homeowner stakeholders and local, state, and federal entities to develop fire-adapted communities through hazard assessments, monitoring, and planning that is focused on reducing the threat of wildfire to human welfare, local economies, and ecological values.
- 08.7** ***Coordinated Wildfire Activities***  
Align management activities and collaborative planning across agencies throughout Pitkin County in order to synchronize strategies for wildfire mitigation, fire education, prevention, and hazardous fuels reduction.

- 08.8** ***Land Use and Forest Management***  
Promote coordinated and collaborative efforts between local, state and federal agencies to design and implement land use and forest management strategies that address the potential for wildfire, particularly at the wildland/urban interface, and to respond to and evacuate from a wildfire event.
- 08.9** ***Wildfire Education***  
Support a consistently funded, long-term public education outreach campaign to promote the public awareness of wildfire risk and preparedness, protecting personal safety and property, and current fire information.
- 08.10** ***River Hazard Resources***  
Identify and provide river hazard resources for the community including public access to the best available river hazard mapping resources, community mitigation projects, and community emergency response.

**08.11** ***Development in the Floodplain and River Hazard Areas***  
Develop, deploy, and enforce regulations for floodplain and fluvial hazards for new development, redevelopment, and public and private bridges.

**08.12** ***Hazardous Materials***  
Discourage the transport of hazardous materials on roads through Pitkin County where an accidental spill or fire may impact waterways, air quality and general public health safety and welfare.

**Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 02 Land Use, Development Standards* and Chapter 5 – Community/Economic Health: *Section 06 Hazard Mitigation*



Photo: Brush Creek Valley, Pitkin County, 2023

DRAFT

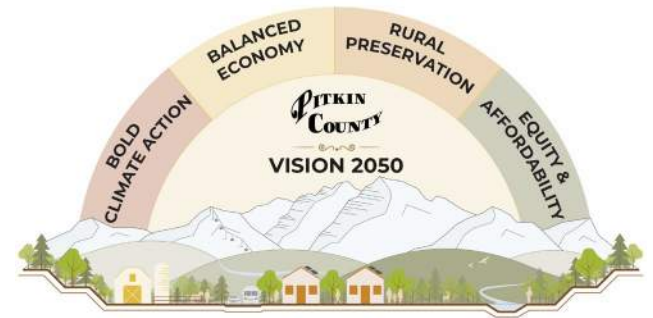




# 04

DRAFT

# Built Environment



# Built Environment Goal:

Ensure that all elements of the built environment—land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure—work together to reflect our community values.

## GROUNDING IN OUR VALUES

*Our Built Environment* directly influences our quality of life and reflects our community priorities. Dating back to the 1970s, Pitkin County has been a pioneer in developing land use codes to reflect community principles. Long-held values embedded within the Pitkin County Land Use Code include **Rural Preservation**, recognizing the benefits of agriculture, open space, and protection of wild lands and wildlife habitat as a limited resource of environmental, cultural, economic, and scenic value for future generations. These values still hold true but must evolve with our community's current and future direction. Integrating **Bold Climate Action** demands more energy-efficient and higher-performing buildings and transportation networks while reducing our energy and consumption needs. Seeking **Equity and Affordability** requires solutions that create social and economic benefits, and consideration of the ways county-wide decisions impact those who live, visit, and work in Pitkin County. Achieving a **Balanced Economy** necessitates finding a balance between job offerings and available workforce, between workforce needs and available housing opportunities, and between the pace of development and our ability to manage development in alignment with our community needs.



## INTRODUCTION

### *Our Built Environment*

Our built environment encompasses all human-made elements in our community that provide the setting for human activity and directly influence how our community looks, feels, and functions. Pitkin County's Land Use Code and Building Code regulations influence the built environment and have far-reaching impacts on our community fabric – from transportation to housing, renewable energy to utilities, and residential development to workforce demands.

One of the most pressing challenges facing our community is the intensification of residential development. While our full-time population is not growing significantly, the level of activity in the county continues to rise dramatically. Large homes (defined as residences above 5,750 square feet) act as activity and employment hubs, generating traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and a commercial level of economic intensity in rural portions of the County where it has not traditionally occurred. This shift has direct impacts on our climate and environmental values, transportation and mobility patterns, distribution of workforce

and community quality of life goals. There is broad community support for reducing the proliferation of large homes and associated impacts, and providing incentives for small homes throughout the County. Our big challenge is to address the question:

***How do we balance economic vitality and residential development intensity with our climate goals, preservation of rural character, and community values?***

### *Existing Land Use*

Land use impacts everything from open space to housing costs and carbon emissions to workforce demands. Therefore, making adjustments to the codes is a nuanced process that requires sophisticated and integrated solutions that reflect our community priorities. Driven by longstanding community values, the existing Pitkin County Land Use Code has sought to prioritize preservation of the natural environment and rural character, pacing of new development, and an urban/rural land use pattern that maintains distinct urban communities with rural areas in between. As development and employment patterns have shifted, additional approaches and methods to manage intensity are also needed.

Public land accounts for nearly 85% of the total land in Pitkin County. The remaining 15% of the total land area is privately owned and is located along the valley floors and drainages. The private lands are naturally constrained by our topography and terrain features of surrounding public lands including forests, rocky terrain, alpine ridges, and mountain peaks. Given the extensive presence of public lands and our commitment to protecting the natural environment, land use regulations for the limited privately held lands are all the more crucial. *(Pitkin County Assessor Office, 2024)*

Over the last decades, the land uses in the County have historically been agricultural and rural residential. Large parcels provided settings for family ranches and farms sprawling throughout the rolling valleys and along river corridors. Over time, many of these large parcels have been subdivided and many have transitioned from working and agricultural lands to residential uses. Importantly, about a quarter of our private lands are held in conservation easements which places limitations on future development. *(Pitkin County Assessor Office,*

2024)

Our rural setting affords open landscapes with ample scenic views, recreational access, and proximity to renowned mountain ski resort towns. These highly appealing qualities make our community enticing not only for locals but also for visitors, vacation home owners and investors. While the current Pitkin County Land Use Code has sought to manage the pace of new residential development, surging redevelopment and an increased level of activity in rural areas of the county require reconsideration and updates to our land use policies to manage the impacts effectively.

### Reframing Growth as Intensity & Activity

In 2022, the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) appointed a diverse group of citizens to the Community Growth Advisory Committee (CGAC) in order to develop recommendations for managing the impacts of growth and development in an effort to align climate action goals and community values, while enabling an equitable, sustainable, and resilient regional quality of life and economy for the future.

One of the most significant contributions of the CGAC was to reframe a significant land use challenge faced by our community: growth. While growth is most commonly measured by population increase, our community's full-time population has grown by only 6.9% since 2000 and is anticipated to grow at a mere rate of 3.6% over the next 25 years. However, our community experiences growth pressures less through population growth and more acutely through activity related to residential development and use. The lived experience of this intensity is apparent in the traffic congestion clogging Highway 82 and impacting our rural roads; an emerging economy solely devoted to the construction and maintenance of large

residential properties; and special events and short term rental activities taking place in rural areas of the county originally zoned for traditional residential and rural uses. In short, the CGAC recognized that to align our land use policies with our community values, we needed to first identify the problem that we're trying to solve by defining, measuring, and ultimately reducing intensity in rural portions of our County. (CO State Demography Office, 2024)

### Defining Intensity

**Intensity is defined as development and activities occurring in rural portions of the County that are not aligned with rural character and result in community impacts to the climate, transportation sector, and our local economy.** Development in the unincorporated portion of Pitkin County has historically been characterized by traditional rural residential and agricultural uses. Over the last few decades, many of the rural properties have been redeveloped into high-value, luxury residential estates complete with large homes and accompanying structures with luxury exterior and interior and amenities such as pools, ponds, and commercial grade systems in addition to premium imported materials for interior finishes. These amenities and systems not only drive high construction costs but also have substantial water and energy demands.

Building permit data demonstrates the substantial development and redevelopment pressures in Pitkin County. In 2000, the county issued 126 new residential building permits with an average construction valuation of \$629,442 or \$1,178,000 in 2025 dollars. In 2023, 11 new residential building permits were issued with an average valuation of \$6,847,777. While 90% fewer new residences were built, the valuation increased by 481%. Additionally, in 2000, Pitkin County issued 92 residential redevelopment building

### New Development and Redevelopment in Pitkin County 2020-2023

	2020	2023
<b>NEW DEVELOPMENT</b>		
Number Permits Issued	126	11
Total Permit Valuation	\$62,595,545.00	\$75,325,551.42
Average Construction Valuation	\$496,790.04	\$6,847,777.40
<b>REDEVELOPMENT</b>		
Number Permits Issued	92	92
Total Permit Valuation	\$14,737,975.00	\$116,352,544.41
Average Construction Valuation	\$160,195.38	\$1,264,701.57

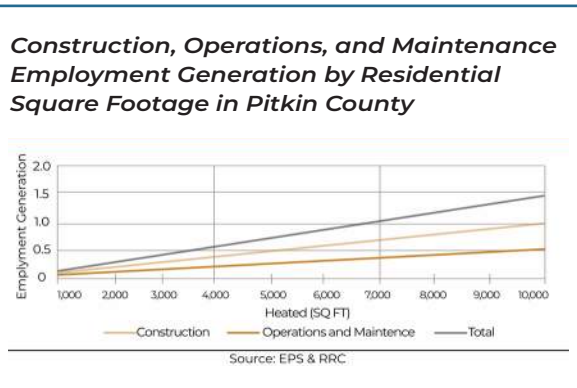
Source: Pitkin County Community Development Permit Data, 2025

permits with an average construction valuation of \$160,195 or \$293,000 in 2025 dollars. In 2023, 92 residential redevelopment building permits were issued with an average valuation of \$1,264,701. While the same number of redevelopment building permits were issued, the valuation increased in 2023 by 331%. Within that timeframe, the average size of homes built has increased by 18.8% - from 4,498 square feet in 2000, compared to 5,345 square feet in 2024. (Pitkin County Community Development Permit Data, 2025)

This stunning increase in valuation for both new development and redevelopment far outpaces inflation and is driven by substantial demand for high performing buildings, complex construction, commercial grade systems and high-end amenities. Constructing, maintaining, and operating these properties requires a substantial and sophisticated workforce. These large homes act similar to commercial activity nodes in the way that they generate jobs, traffic, and energy intensity historically associated with urban areas of the County. While the community sentiment suggests that residential development intensity is qualitatively contributing to loss of rural character and impacts to quality of life, the following quantitative analysis further defines the dynamics of intensity through the lenses of economy, transportation, and climate.

**Economic Intensity**  
*Driven by the Residential Sector*

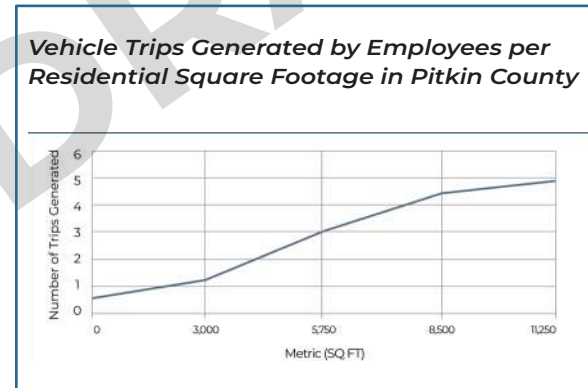
The residential economy is defined as the onsite jobs and related offsite services needed to develop, construct, remodel, operate and maintain a residential property in unincorporated Pitkin County. Economic Intensity is measured by the onsite jobs generated to build, operate and maintain a house, as well as the offsite real estate, development and wealth management businesses that service the residential sector and that grow as homes get bigger. As homes increase in square footage, they demand more labor and services—even when unoccupied. This generates more jobs and related vehicle trips and results in larger homes behaving more like commercial hubs and less like single-family residences. *(Residential Economic Intensity Study, RPI, 2025)*



Source: Residential Economic Intensity Study, RPI and EPS, 2025

**Traffic Intensity**  
*Driven by the Residential Sector*

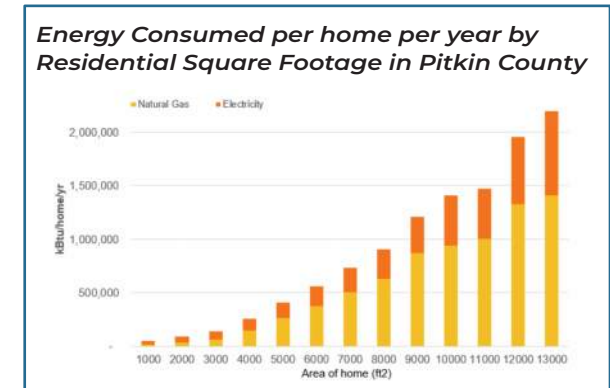
Transportation intensity is defined as transportation activity, including trips and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in unincorporated Pitkin County related to the construction, operation and maintenance of large homes in Pitkin County. As home size increases, employee trips—those made by construction workers, landscapers, property managers, cleaners, and contractors—rise significantly. These employee-related trips also tend to be longer and persist year round, regardless of whether the home is seasonally occupied. This employee-related travel is a major contributor to county-wide trips and overall vehicle miles traveled. *(Transportation Intensity Study, Kimley Horn, 2025)*



Source: Transportation Intensity Study, Kimley Horn, 2025

**Climate Intensity**  
*Driven by the Residential Sector*

Climate intensity related to residential development is defined as the climate-related impacts from operating homes in Pitkin County. As homes get larger, they require more energy per square foot to operate, resulting in a higher “energy use intensity” and greenhouse gas emissions. The analysis shows that larger homes in Pitkin County use more energy, not just because they are larger, but also on a per square foot basis. On average, the total gas and electric energy usage for a 13,000 sq ft home is 41 times more than for a 1,000 sq ft home, and the energy usage for a 10,000 sq ft home is 26 times that of a 1,000 sq ft home. *(Climate and Energy Use Intensity Study, REG, 2025)*



Source: Climate Intensity Study, REG, 2025

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** As homes get larger, their associated impacts rise significantly across the economic, traffic, and climate sectors. The charts above summarize the key findings of these ‘intensity studies’ and depict the quantifiable levels of intensity associated with residential square footage in our community. Therefore, the policy direction in this plan aims to minimize and manage the intensity and community impacts of large homes while incentivizing smaller homes and supporting our local workforce.

See the Pitkin County Intensity Studies White Paper, 2025 for further analysis.

The intensity data analysis establishes a correlation between the square footage associated with large residential homes and the associated impacts to economic, transportation and climate intensity. It also highlights the need to recognize and address the fact that large homes are not acting like conventional homes but more like commercial hubs with workforce-and vehicle-trip-intensive micro-economies. (Pitkin County Intensity Studies White Paper, 2025)

Our community infrastructure and services have been built to align economic activity, jobs, and development with more urban areas. However, these analyses highlight and quantify the disproportionate impacts of large-scale residential development activity on the rural areas of the county.

This level of intensity and activity is unwelcome in rural areas of Pitkin County primarily because of the disproportionate impact on rural character that occurs in locations where there is insufficient community infrastructure to support it. While our existing policies and code have managed the pace of growth, our land use policies need to be updated to address residential intensity impacts. Our land use policies must strategically work to minimize the impacts of large residential development intensity across economic, transportation, and climate sectors while incentivizing small homes, solving for solutions to house our local community, and supporting our local workforce. (Pitkin County Intensity Studies White Paper, 2025)

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- *Growth is no longer defined simply as density, but also as intensity and activity.*
- *Homes above 5,750 square feet have a disproportionate impact on unincorporated Pitkin County across the climate, transportation, and economic sectors.*
- *Due to the rise in intensity and activity generated by large homes in our rural areas, there is misalignment between Pitkin County community infrastructure and nodes of activity.*
- *These trends have direct impacts for our climate, transportation, and economic sectors.*
- *The Pitkin County Land Use Code can be used to influence our community values and directly shape the land use pattern we want to see in unincorporated Pitkin County.*

#### *Land Use as a Reflection of Community Values*

The goal for the Built Environment Chapter is to ensure that all elements of the built environment - land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure - work together to reflect our community values.

While the CGAC identified the challenges associated with large homes in rural areas of our community, they also provided direction about the land use and built environment that our community does want to support to better align with our values.

#### **Incentivize Small Homes**

Providing incentives for small homes is one of the key strategies that the CGAC identified in order to address the impacts of large residential homes above 5,750 square feet. Their final report identified a “system of tiers [that] could streamline the existing review process and associated costs for smaller homes, with requirements that get more stringent as house size increases” (CGAC Final Report, 2023 p.53). As demonstrated in the outcomes of the “intensity studies”, smaller homes have a quantitatively smaller impact on our community’s economic, transportation, and climate sectors. The term “small home” generally refers to homes containing less than 3,250 square feet of floor area, in alignment with the Pitkin County Building Code tiers.

The CGAC further described the alignment of smaller homes with community values: “Development of a program to provide financial incentives for smaller and more energy-efficient homes is consistent with core values and goals” (CGAC Final Report, 2023 p.28). The policies included in Section 02 - Land Use of the Built Environment Chapter carry forward this recommendation by providing direction to incentivize small homes.

#### **Strategies to House our Community**

In addition to reframing growth to include aspects related to intensity, the CGAC addressed community housing as a crucial community challenge: “The growth we do want as a community, that meets our community values, is more affordable and middle [income] housing. We want to grow the community that will participate in our community and create policies and a land use code that creates an environment to ensure we maintain the fabric of our community...” (CGAC Final Report, 2023 p.67).

For decades, the County's land use patterns and policies have prioritized locating community housing within Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs) where there is access to existing employment, services, and infrastructure. Preserving existing housing stock has also been a cornerstone of these policies, with limited exceptions to allow community housing outside UGBs when it preserves or enhances what exists and fits the character of the surrounding area. Prioritizing community housing within the UGBs and maintaining existing community housing stock remain key strategies to house our community.

Yet as jobs and economic activity increasingly extend into rural areas, new pressures are emerging that challenge the limits of our current housing supply and our commitment to preserve community character.

Recognizing this, the CGAC supported updating the Pitkin County Land Use Code in order to allow community housing outside of the existing UGBs: *"Allow small scale multi-family developments [that] can easily be less than 5,750 sq ft and fit well into our rural landscape and community...under the right context of zoning, hazard mitigation and sufficient infrastructure"* (CGAC Final Report, 2023, p. 68). Their report identified location criteria which was shared out to the broader community through a public engagement process in the fall of 2025 with particular emphasis on water availability, hazard avoidance, transportation and building scale.

While location of community housing within the UGBs is still the priority, the CGAC recommendations in conjunction with public input, merit policy new direction to allow for community housing beyond the UGBs in order to support attainable and available community housing in balance with our longstanding values for preservation of rural

character, the natural environment and water conservation. The policy included in *Section 03 - Community Housing of the Built Environment Chapter, Policy 03.14* articulates the CGAC direction informed by community input to guide the placement of community housing. Implementation of this policy may require changes to the Pitkin County Land Use Code.

Broad community support has been expressed for small single family and caretaker dwelling units as the most appropriate type and scale of housing to accommodate housing need in balance with community character, values and goals. See *Section 03 - Community Housing, of the Built Environment Chapter, Policy 03.8* for the full policy text to leverage Caretaker and Employee Dwelling Units (CDU and EDU) to house our community.

#### **Support Our Local Workforce**

While the CGAC identified the challenges associated with residential intensity, policies to minimize intensity must responsibly consider the impacts to the workforce of the large homes. In short, policies to mitigate the impact of development impacts must consider the ramifications for the workforce. The CGAC advised to *"Balance Community Values with Economic Resiliency: This balance is critical to preventing unintended consequences. We must not only address the ways in which large luxury homes influence our economy and workforce, but also consider quality of life implications and affordable housing solutions for the workforce that is an essential part of the community"* (CGAC Final Report, 2023, p. 68). See *Section 02 - Land Use of the Built Environment Chapter, Policy 02.2.19* and the full *Chapter 05 Community and Economic Health*.

## BROAD COMMUNITY DIRECTION

In order to maintain our long-standing and strong commitment to preserve and protect our rural character and natural environment, the overarching community input received through public engagement, CGAC Recommendations, and community plans articulates the following strategies to inform policy direction:

### ► Reduce Intensity Related to Large Residential Development in Rural Areas:

Provide clear guidance as to where we want distinct uses be located in order to align our land use patterns with community values and to that end, focus density toward urban areas of our county where infrastructure, utilities, and services exist and reduce disproportionate impacts of large homes and large scale residential development activity and intensity occurring in rural areas.

### ► Streamline and Incorporate Incentives into the Land Use and Building Codes:

Streamline and incorporate incentives into the Land Use and Building Codes to facilitate the kind of development we want to see, such as smaller homes and community housing to achieve higher energy performance and broad community benefits. Implement stringent standards that will reduce or eliminate the potential for development or redevelopment of large homes.

### ► Prioritize Community Housing that Meets our Community Values:

Prioritize the location of community housing within Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) areas and provide opportunities for housing in locations beyond UGBs in close proximity to transit and where sufficient infrastructure exists, while also preserving rural character and the natural environment.

### ► Stand Strong on Environmental Protections and Rural Preservation:

Strategically locate development in locations that avoid natural hazards, maintain wildlife habitat and movement corridors, support rural character and preserve the natural environment. Protecting our rural character is a long-standing and unwavering community value.



# Overview of Policy Areas:

## **01: Climate Action in the Built Environment**

Takes broad direction to achieve electrification, climate resilient development and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption to support the County Climate Action Plan.

## **02: Land Use**

Provides policies regarding land use code incentives and regulations to implement community direction relating to:

- **Land Use Patterns:** Locate higher intensity uses and activities within close proximity to infrastructure and urban areas and transition to less intensity, density and activity as the landscape transitions to more rural areas in the County.
- **Development Standards:** Incentivize small homes that are in character with the surrounding landscape and prioritize residential development with a minimal footprint, minimal environmental, transportation and climate impacts.
- **Site Constraints:** Limit development impact on the natural environment and avoid natural hazards.

## **03: Community Housing**

Supports policies that facilitate the following outcomes: mechanisms to promote and provide access to community housing of various types; a preference for the location of community housing within established Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs); and defined criteria for the location of community housing outside of UGBs; and strategies to promote regional housing partnerships.

## **04: Buildings**

Supports Building and Energy Code incentives and regulations for new and existing residences to achieve community goals for climate action including ongoing improvements for energy efficiency, reduction in energy consumption and resiliency to wildfire hazards.

## **05: Transportation and Mobility**

Provides multi-modal transportation alternatives as a means of reducing traffic intensity and vehicle emissions.

## **06: Waste Management**

Supports a comprehensive approach to minimize waste and encourage reuse and recycling of materials to extend the life of the Pitkin County Solid Waste Center and reduce greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the Climate Action Plan.

## **07: Resilient Infrastructure**

Provides broad direction for renewable energy infrastructure improvements to support the community as it transitions away from fossil fuel use.

## **08: Utilities**

Promotes coordination with local utilities to collectively achieve transition to a resilient renewable power supply and provides criteria for logical extension of utilities consistent with community goals for preserving rural character.

## **09: Cultural & Historic Resources**

Maintains historic and archaeological and cultural resources that are pertinent to the history of Pitkin County including Ute and indigenous history and culture, mining and ranching, railroads and historic town sites, and ski area development among other cornerstones in the history of the County.

## Pitkin County Community Transect

The Community Transect provides a cross-section and characteristics of land use areas found across the Pitkin County landscape. Policies in the Built Environment chapter support longstanding goals to maintain the characteristics of each distinct area along the continuum, with the intent of focusing density toward urban areas of Pitkin County where infrastructure, utilities and services exist, and reduce disproportionate impacts of large homes and large scale residential development intensity and activity occurring in rural areas.



CHARACTERISTICS

**Remote areas** are defined by their natural landscapes with minimal human disturbance and limited if any infrastructure. These locations are typically in state and federal ownership as protected lands and support conservation of natural resources, wildlife habitat, backcountry access, and low-impact recreational use.

**In the Built Environment Chapter, one of the key strategies to preserve remote areas is to utilize Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to preserve backcountry lands and transfer development to areas of Pitkin County more appropriate for such development. (Section 02 Land Use, Policy 02.2.10 - Transferable Development Rights)**

RELEVANT POLICIES

**Rural areas** feature expansive open lands that allow for very limited recreational and residential uses. These areas preserve Pitkin County's agriculture producing landscapes, scenic viewsheds, and rural character. Development in these areas relies on wells and septic systems.

**In order to protect rural areas, the following Built Environment Chapter provides direction to implement standards to limit intensity and activity related to large-scale residential development, short term rentals, and special events in rural areas. (Section 02 Land Use, Policy 02.1.2 - Intensity Reduction in Rural Areas)**



**CHARACTERISTICS**  
**RELEVANT POLICIES**

**Semi-Rural areas** serve as buffers between rural and more developed areas, often including single-family homes and agricultural structures clustered together, while maintaining open space. These include established neighborhoods and are often served by utilities, but may be located on a well or septic system.

*In order to maintain the character of our community in semi-rural, semi-urban and urban areas of our community, the policy statements in the Built Environment Chapter support a land use pattern that focuses large-scale residential development and activity toward areas within Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs) and prioritizes community housing within UGBs while providing standards for community housing outside of UGBs. (Section 02 Land Use, Policy 02.1.1 - Land Use as a Reflection of Community Values, Section 03 Community Housing, Policy 3.14 - Community Housing Location)*

**Semi-Urban areas** include established neighborhoods, open space, multi-family, and mixed-use areas. These include areas within an Urban Growth Boundary. Many of these areas are serviced by existing municipal infrastructure and utilities, or could be if developed.

**Urban areas** are centers of more dense development and include a mix of residential, commercial, and civic uses, supported by municipal infrastructure and services. These areas include incorporated municipalities.

**Resort Recreation areas** are designed for seasonal and year-round tourism, anchored by recreational amenities like ski areas and trails. These areas include a mix of open lands, lodging, lifts, infrastructure and on-mountain service buildings, commercial, and residential uses.

*Relevant policy direction for Resort Recreation areas supports existing outdoor recreation - including skiing - within existing areas of activity. (Section 02 Land Use, Policy 02.1.1 i - Land Use as a Reflection of Community Values)*

# Key Terms

**ADDITION:** An extension or increase in the size, number of stories or height of a building or structure.

**BASE MAXIMUM FLOOR AREA:** The largest amount of gross floor area that may be constructed on the lot or parcel pursuant to Table 5-1 of the Pitkin County Land Use Code without the approval of a Growth Management Quota System allocation and without the utilization of Transferable Development Rights.

**CARETAKER DWELLING UNIT:** Caretaker Dwelling Unit (CDU) means a separate, accessory dwelling that is deed restricted to occupancy by qualified residents, as defined in the employee housing guidelines, and is subject to the restrictions of the Pitkin County Land Use Code.

**CAUCUS:** “A caucus, upon recognition by the Board, shall have a recommendatory function for all matters directly affecting the caucus area, and shall permit its members to report minority views, as well as majority views, and division of votes with any such recommendation. Further, a caucus shall have a recommendatory function for all planning matters affecting the caucus area, as well as other County matters affecting the caucus area including, but not limited to, budgetary and work program matters.” (*Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, Article IV*)

**CAUCUS MASTER PLAN:** “The County Commissioners and the Planning and Zoning Commission will encourage the development of Caucus Master Plans. The County Commissioners shall specify the criteria for the Caucus Master Plan development procedures, and local caucus approval. Caucus Master Plans which satisfy such criteria shall be recognized by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and County Commissioners. The Caucus Master Plan shall be considered as one of the primary advisory documents in the development of county laws, rules and regulations which affect caucus areas.” (*Pitkin County Home Rule Charter, Article IV*)

**COMMUNITY HOUSING:** Community Housing refers to housing that is intentionally planned, developed, or preserved to meet the diverse needs of the local community. It includes housing for the workforce, seniors, and people in transitional situations, ensuring that residents of all income levels, ages, and stages of life can live and thrive locally.

Community housing prioritizes affordability, accessibility, and long-term availability to support a resilient, inclusive community fabric and to maintain opportunities for those who work, contribute to, and call the community home

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:** In accordance with Colorado Revised Statute (CRS 30-28-106), the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan is an advisory document that guides and provides the overall framework and direction for county-wide land use, regulations, investments, and public services in Pitkin County in alignment with county-wide values.

**CLIMATE ACTION PLAN (CAP):** A Plan adopted by the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners, providing a comprehensive strategy developed to outline goals, strategies and actions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and address climate impacts.

**CLIMATE ADAPTATION:** Adjustments in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climate impacts to reduce harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

**CLIMATE MITIGATION:** Actions aimed at reducing or preventing greenhouse gas emissions to minimize the pace and extent of climate change.

**CLOSE PROXIMITY TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSIT:** Considered to be immediately adjacent to or within an existing utility service area; immediately adjacent to or within an existing community water system or municipal water district with available and reliable water supply and capacity to serve additional units; and within 1/4 mile walking distance of a transit stop and along major transportation corridors.

**DEVELOPMENT:** The carrying out of any building activity, the making of any material change in the use or appearance of any structure or land, or the subdividing of land into two (2) or more parcels. Development includes, but is not limited to, the following: 1) A reconstruction or alteration of the size or building footprint of a structure; 2) A change in the intensity of use of land, such as the establishment of, or an increase or decrease in, the number of dwelling units or floor area; 3) Commencement of drilling, mining, or excavation on a parcel of land;

4) Total demolition or partial demolition of a structure; 5) Clearing of land, including clearing or removal of vegetation, and including any significant disturbance of vegetation or substrate (soil) manipulation.; 6) Deposit of refuse, solid or liquid waste, or fill on a parcel of land; 7) The construction, installation and operation of oil and gas facilities, facilities for logging, or facilities for mineral extraction.

***DISTURBANCE AREA:*** Area including buildings and all development activity on a parcel of land.

***DOWN VALLEY:*** In the Roaring Fork Valley, down valley refers to the direction towards Glenwood Springs (northwest) along Highway 82. Locals generally refer to Glenwood Springs and sometimes even communities further west along I-70 in Garfield County as down valley.

***EMBODIED CARBON:*** Embodied carbon encompasses all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions from building material extraction through the end of that material's useful life. These emissions may come from sourcing raw materials, manufacturing, transporting materials, construction and/or installation of that material, ongoing use, maintenance and repairs, and disposal.

***EMPLOYEE DWELLING UNIT:*** Employee Dwelling Unit (EDU) means a separate, accessory dwelling unit of less than one thousand five hundred (1,500) net livable square feet attached to, within, or detached from a principal dwelling unit situated on the same parcel. An EDU is deed restricted to occupancy by qualified residents, as defined in the employee housing guidelines, and is subject to the restrictions of the Pitkin County Land Use Code.

***FEASIBLE:*** All possible efforts to comply with the requirements or regulations have been taken given the available resources, information, and circumstances.

***GROWTH:*** While growth is most commonly measured by the increase in full-time population, our community experiences growth pressures more acutely through activity related to residential development (see 'Intensity' definition) in addition to seasonal peaks in population when vacation homeowners and tourists alike flock to our community which

can lead to overcrowding, strains on infrastructure, and reduced quality of life for residents.

***DECARBONIZATION:*** Decarbonization in the built environment includes shifting building energy use to zero emissions renewable sources, promoting the use of lower embodied carbon building materials, and promoting lower carbon transportation options.

***DISTRIBUTED ENERGY RESOURCES:*** Small, modular, energy generation and storage technologies that provide electric capacity or energy where it's needed.

***ELECTRIFICATION:*** The process of replacing technologies that use fossil fuels with those powered by electricity.

***ENERGY EFFICIENCY:*** Using less energy to perform the same task, reducing energy waste.

***GREENHOUSE GAS (GHG):*** Gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere and contribute to global warming. Human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are a main driver of climate change.

***INTENSITY:*** Development and activities occurring in rural portions of the County that are not aligned with rural character and result in community impacts to the climate, transportation sector, and our local economy.

***LARGE HOMES:*** The term "large homes" generally refers to homes containing more than 5,750 square feet of floor area.

***MICRO-GRID:*** A localized group of electricity sources and loads that typically operates connected to the grid but can disconnect and function autonomously.

***MODE SHIFT:*** The transition from one mode of transport to another, typically from private cars to sustainable options like public transport, bicycle and pedestrian modes.

**NET ZERO ENERGY BUILDING:** A highly efficient, all-electric structure designed to operate entirely on renewable energy. The building generates as much energy as it consumes over the course of a year, achieving a net zero energy balance. A net zero building has the following attributes:

- > Is powered by electricity;
- > Uses renewable energy from the grid and/or onsite generation;
- > Has the ability to store energy and/or shift energy use to reduce peak demand on the electric grid;
- > Achieves energy performance above base International Energy Conservation Code;
- > Is designed to minimize embodied carbon; and
- > Is electric vehicle ready.

**NET ZERO EMISSIONS BUILDING:** A highly efficient, all-electric structure that achieves a balance between the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere and the amount removed or offset. The goal is to ensure that human-caused emissions are reduced as much as possible, and any remaining emissions are neutralized by a 100% renewable grid in alignment with the currently adopted Pitkin County Building Code.

**REDEVELOPMENT:** A “scrape and replace,” involving the demolition of an existing structure and the construction of a new structure and/or alteration to a building’s thermal envelope that exceeds 75% of the total thermal envelope in alignment with the currently adopted Pitkin County Building Code.

**REMODEL/ALTERATION:** Any construction, retrofit or renovation that does not change the original size or location of the building’s footprint.

**REMOTE AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County defined by their natural landscapes with minimal human disturbance and limited if any infrastructure. These locations are typically in state and federal ownership as protected lands and support conservation of natural resources, wildlife habitat, backcountry access, and low-impact recreational use.

**RENEWABLE ENERGY:** Energy sourced from natural processes that are replenished constantly, such as solar, wind and hydroelectric power.

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

**RESORT RECREATION AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that are designed for seasonal and year-round tourism, anchored by recreational amenities like ski areas and trails. These areas include a mix of open lands, lodging, lifts, infrastructure and on-mountain service buildings, commercial, and residential uses.

**RURAL AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that feature expansive open lands that allow for very limited recreational and residential uses. These areas preserve the county’s agriculture producing landscapes, scenic viewsheds, and rural character. Development in these areas relies on wells and septic systems.

**SEMI-RURAL AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that serve as buffers between rural and more developed areas, often including single-family homes and agricultural structures clustered together, while maintaining open space. These include established neighborhoods and are often served by utilities, but may be located on a well or septic system.

**SEMI-URBAN AREAS:** Areas of unincorporated Pitkin County that include established neighborhoods, open space, multi-family, and mixed-use areas. These include areas within an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). Many of these areas are serviced by existing municipal infrastructure and utilities, or could be if developed.

**SMALL-SCALE ATTACHED UNIT:** Considered to be two (2) to four (4) multi-family residential units, each containing up to 2,000 square feet of floor area.

**SMALL HOME:** The term “small homes” generally refers to homes containing less than 3,250 square feet of floor area, in alignment with the currently adopted Pitkin County Building Code tiers.

**SUFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE:** A location with sufficient infrastructure typically includes roads, utilities, water supply, wastewater management, energy sources, and public services with capacity to serve the existing or proposed development.

**THERMAL ENVELOPE:** In simplest terms, what makes up the thermal envelope are the parts of a house (or building) that separate the heated/cooled area from the outside (or a non-heated/cooled area, such as a garage or attic). Exterior walls, doors and windows can all be part of the building’s thermal envelope. They each play a role in the overall air flow and energy balance of a building.

**TRANSFERABLE DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (TDR):** are the right to sever development rights that exist under the land use regulations, codes and plans of Pitkin County for lands that have been designated within the Rural/Remote zone district and to transfer such rights to lands that are designated as suitable for on-site development. Once a development right is severed from a preservation site, it becomes a transferable development right or TDRs until it is attached to a receiver site.

**UP VALLEY:** In the Roaring Fork Valley, up valley refers to the direction toward Aspen (southeast) along Highway 82. Locals generally describe the communities of Aspen and Snowmass Village as up valley.

**URBAN AREAS:** Centers of more dense development and include a mix of residential, commercial, and civic uses, supported by municipal infrastructure and services. These areas include incorporated municipalities.

**URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY (UGB)** Urban Growth Boundary means a limitation on urbanization of land or the types of development that can occur outside of areas surrounding existing municipalities and unincorporated settlements, that is negotiated between one or more governmental entities, and that concerns areas over which those

governmental entities have regulatory jurisdiction.

**WASTE DIVERSION:** Practices such as recycling and composting that divert waste from landfills in an effort to minimize environmental pollution, conserve resources, and promote sustainability.

# Measures of Success

OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
Direct development in a way that supports community quality of life, economic sustainability, transportation and climate action goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Land Use &amp; Building Permit Data</i></li> <li>• <i>Climate/Economic/Transportation Intensity analyses</i></li> </ul>
Increase incentives and standards to achieve smaller scale residential development and a reduction in energy and water consumption, embodied carbon and material waste.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Permitted and Built Floor Area Data</i></li> <li>• <i>Zoning Overlays with Maximum Floor area Caps</i></li> </ul>
Achieve climate resilience in the built environment by requiring that development be built to withstand natural disasters and avoid natural hazard areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pitkin County Land Use &amp; Building Code Standards</i></li> </ul>
Increase availability of affordable housing near jobs for the workforce, especially for first responders, educators and essential service providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pitkin County Housing Team</i></li> <li>• <i>Housing Action Plan</i></li> </ul>
Reduce rural traffic and highway congestion with fewer single occupancy vehicles on Highway 82.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Traffic Counts</i></li> <li>• <i>Transportation Intensity Analysis</i></li> </ul>
Enhance access to a multi-modal transportation network that encourages mode shifts and first and last mile solutions, including bike and pedestrian connections to transit stops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Elected Officials Transportation Committee (EOTC)</i></li> </ul>
Facilitate continuous year-over-year reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from waste, buildings, transportation and the airport.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory &amp; Climate Action Plan</i></li> </ul>
Increase electrification of buildings, transportation, and infrastructure using renewable energy with less reliance on fossil fuels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pitkin County Building Codes Standards</i></li> <li>• <i>GHG inventory &amp; Climate Action Plan</i></li> <li>• <i>Percentage of Fully Electric Buildings in Pitkin County</i></li> </ul>
Improve energy efficiency in the existing building stock.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pitkin County Building Code Standards</i></li> <li>• <i>Building Department Data</i></li> <li>• <i>Residential Energy Assessment Data (HERS Rating Scores)</i></li> </ul>

# 01

## Climate Action in the Built Environment

### 01.1 **Residential Net Zero Energy**

Implement standards and incentives to reduce both interior and exterior residential energy usage and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for new development, redevelopment and alterations to advance the county goal of residential net zero by reducing community-wide emissions by at least 65.3% from 2019 levels by 2030 and accelerating the goal of achieving a 100% emissions reduction by 2050—or sooner.

### 01.2 **Small Home Alignment with Climate Action Goals**

Implement land use and energy code standards to incentivize small homes as a mechanism for reducing energy consumption of renewable and non-renewable energy sources, embodied carbon and associated climate, resource and traffic impacts.

### 01.3 **Reduce House Size to Achieve Community and Climate Goals**

Reduce allowable maximum residential floor area in order to minimize community impacts associated with large residential development in addition to achieving climate goals.

### 01.4 **Climate Action Plan**

Adopt, support, implement, and periodically update a Climate Action Plan with the intent of reducing community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, working regionally to adapt to climate change and equitably involving stakeholders in climate mitigation & adaptation work. Review, align and adjust climate action goals for the built environment with consideration of Science Based Targets as identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

### 01.5 **Tracking Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

Update greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventories on a periodic basis to track progress toward long-term climate action goals.

### 01.6 **Reduce Energy Consumption**

Implement land use and building code standards and incentives to promote a reduction in building and overall site energy consumption and to reduce the energy use and cost associated with building construction.

### 01.7 **Electrification of Built Environment**

Implement standards and incentives that result in electrification of buildings, transportation, and infrastructure by incorporating diverse distributed energy resources, using progressively more renewable energy with increasingly less reliance on fossil fuels to reduce operational carbon emissions. Ensure that the transition towards electrification proceeds with consideration for overall redundancy, reliability, resilience and availability of renewable energy sources to prevent service interruptions.

### 01.8 **Embodied Carbon of Built Environment**

Implement standards and incentives that address and reduce impacts associated with emissions generated during the entire lifecycle of a product, from mineral extraction to disposal, for building materials, infrastructure, and renewable energy technologies.

**01.9**

***Climate Resilient Development***

Implement land use code standards that facilitate climate-resilient development and infrastructure located and built to avoid, withstand and/or adapt to climate change and natural disasters, including but not limited to wildfire, floods and drought. Incorporate standards that facilitate energy efficient development and the use of renewable energy.

**Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 6 – Regional Approach:  
*Section 02 Regional Climate*



*Photo: Fall mountain foliage, Pitkin County, 2023*

# 02 Land Use

## 02.1 LAND USE PATTERNS

### 02.1.1 *Land Use As Reflection of Community Values*

Promote a land use pattern that focuses more intense development use and activity in urban and Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) areas and transitions to smaller scale, less intense residential development in the rural portions of the County. Support a land use pattern that reflects Pitkin County's community values and provides the following community benefits:

- a. Preservation of rural character as defined by agriculture, natural habitat, environmental resources, open space and rural residential uses;
- b. Separation between urban areas to maintain a distinction between more densely populated employment and service centers and the rural areas that lie between and define the character of the unincorporated portion of the County;
- c. Support for county-wide climate action goals;
- d. Reduction in traffic congestion and vehicle emissions;
- e. Clustering of development to integrate siting in harmony with the environment in

order to minimize the cost of governmental and other services, maximize open space, preserve agricultural lands and minimize disturbance;

- f. Support for targeted development of small scale community housing in areas outside of the UGBs that have access to sufficient infrastructure.
- g. Location of new commercial uses only within the adopted Urban Growth Boundaries unless the size, scale, intensity of use, outdoor lighting, traffic generation and noise are compatible with rural character;
- h. Location of new development in areas with sufficient infrastructure and service levels to maximize the utility of funds invested in public facilities and services;
- i. Support for existing outdoor recreational activities including skiing, within existing areas of activity;
- j. Limited development to maintain a balance between residential, commercial and tourist sectors that can accommodate the conservation and protection of the natural environment and its resources without degradation;
- k. Promotion of land uses within

and nearby public lands that are compatible with public use of those lands and with the preservation of the natural environment in order to support the protection of public lands from the impacts of incompatible development.

### 02.1.2 *Intensity Reduction in Rural Areas*

Preserve rural and residential neighborhood character by implementing standards to limit the allowance for and reduce the intensity of large-scale residential development, short term rentals, special events and other commercial use and activity of residential properties outside of Urban Growth Boundary areas.

### 02.1.3 *Compatibility with Existing Neighborhoods*

Ensure that new development and redevelopment is compatible with the character of existing neighborhoods.

### 02.1.4 *Facilitate Updates to Caucus Master Plans*

Facilitate updates to Caucus Master Plans to acknowledge the function of Caucuses as valuable local, geographically specific input informing land use patterns and other county policies and programs moving forward in alignment

with the Pitkin County Home Rule Charter.

### **02.1.5 Function of Caucus Master Plans and Comprehensive Plan**

The Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan provides the overall framework and direction for planning in Pitkin County in alignment with the county-wide values to implement bold climate action while balancing the economy, preserving rural and wild lands and supporting an equitable and affordable community. The Caucus Master Plans provide detailed and specific recommendations for their geographic areas. Any action committing land to development or a change in land use shall be reviewed for consistency with the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan and applicable Caucus Master Plan. Where there is any conflict between the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan and a Caucus Master Plan, the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan takes priority.

#### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 3 – Natural Environment: *Sections 01 Natural Resources & Biodiversity, 03 Agricultural Lands, 06 Public Lands & Open Space, 07 Recreation & Tourism, and 08 Environmental Hazards*

## **02.2 DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS**

### **02.2.1 Manage Growth**

Manage growth in order to align development with the community benefits and values of bold climate action, balanced economy, rural preservation, equity and affordability:

- a. Manage the rate, type, location, quality and ultimate quantity of growth within the rural and urban areas of unincorporated Pitkin county to ensure that new growth occurs in a controlled, paced, and orderly manner;
- b. Manage the location of growth to ensure access to community infrastructure and services in an effort to avoid sprawl and not exceed the capacity of public facilities;
- c. Maintain a distinction between the unincorporated rural areas and the urban areas of Aspen, Basalt, Carbondale, and Snowmass;
- d. Direct growth to appropriate locations within Urban Growth Boundaries as a preferred location while considering appropriate locations for community housing outside of the Urban Growth Boundaries with close

proximity to infrastructure and transportation;

- e. Incentivize the preservation of rural character including historic structures, agricultural lands and open space;
- f. Support the preservation of the natural environment including the protection of air and water quality; and the conservation of natural resources and wildlife habitat;
- g. Support new residential development that collectively reflects community values, has a small carbon footprint, minimal impacts to traffic, employee generation and achieves climate action goals consistent with the County Climate Action Plan;
- h. Discourage large homes and incentivize small homes as a mechanism for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption of

#### **Base Maximum Floor Area:**

The largest amount of gross floor area that may be constructed on a lot or parcel without the approval of a Growth Management Quota.

#### **Final Maximum Floor Area:**

means the largest amount of gross floor area that may be constructed on a lot or parcel.

renewable and non-renewable energy sources, embodied carbon, and associated climate, resource and traffic impacts.

- i. Support commercial development that addresses impacts to traffic, employee generation, affordable housing, climate and waste;
- j. Support commercial development that facilitates small, community-oriented, local serving and locally based businesses;
- k. Support tourist accommodations and ski area specific commercial spaces that reflect community values and result in limited impacts to traffic and employee generation, and sufficiently address affordable housing, climate, and waste.

#### **02.2.2 Maximum Residential Floor Area**

Allow for new residential floor area up to the allowable base maximum floor area and implement a residential final maximum floor area of up to 8,750 sq. ft. in the unincorporated rural portion of Pitkin County and up to 9,250 sq. ft. within Urban Growth Boundary portions of unincorporated Pitkin County, unless zone district or Master Plan area overlay district floor area standards are more

restrictive. Preclude the use of any exemptions for new homes in unincorporated Pitkin County to exceed this overall limit.

#### **02.2.3 Considerations for New Floor Area Allocation System**

Establish a new floor area allocation system to allow for residential development that exceeds the residential base maximum floor area, and is consistent with updated review criteria that consider community values of bold climate action, balanced economy, rural preservation, equity and affordability and address impacts to traffic, employment generation, affordable housing, climate and waste. Under no circumstances should allocated additional floor area result in a residence that exceeds the allowed final maximum floor area.

#### **02.2.4 Remove Below Grade Floor Area Exemption**

Eliminate the existing 4,000 square foot residential below grade floor area exemption in the Aspen Urban Growth Boundary to acknowledge related community, climate and resource impacts associated with residential development.

#### **02.2.5 Limit Exemptions from Growth Management System**

Address the pace of development by restricting Growth Management exemptions to achieve development that is consistent with community values of bold climate action, balanced economy, rural preservation, equity and affordability and does not result in an increase in economic, transportation and/or climate intensity.

#### **02.2.6 Incentivize Small Homes**

Streamline and prioritize land use applications and building permit reviews to incentivize small homes and associated disturbance areas in order to reduce impacts to climate and traffic generation.

#### **02.2.7 Site Development Standards to Accomplish Climate Action Goals**

Implement bold site development standards to accomplish climate action goals that effectively consider: building siting and orientation; driveway location, length and design; passive energy strategies; siting for renewable energy infrastructure; and design for energy efficiency.

**02.2.8 Site Development Standards to Mitigate Impacts of Increased Square Footage**

As square footage for new residential development and redevelopment increases, implement increasingly more stringent development standards and fees in order to mitigate community impacts such as the associated greenhouse gas emissions, energy and water consumption, increased traffic generation and community housing need.

**02.2.9 Manage Intensity of Large Homes**

- a. Identify land use standards and incentives to address the impacts of large residential development on economic/ climate/transportation intensity which is frequently occurring in rural areas of the community. To that end, support a land use pattern and zoning that aligns appropriate uses and levels of intensity with locations in close proximity to infrastructure.
- b. Reduce economic, climate and transportation intensity by incentivizing and implementing standards for small homes associated with new residential development and redevelopment.
- c. Implement standards to locate,

focus and reduce intensity to achieve community value; allow for the mitigation of intensity impacts, but as the least preferred intensity management tool.

**02.2.10 Transferable Development Rights (TDR)**

Maintain the intent of the TDR program as a tool to preserve and protect rural character, open space, scenic features and environmental resources, and to avoid development in environmentally constrained areas, by providing for the transfer of development and intensity from Sending Sites to Receiving Sites where development will be more consistent with the values and goals of the community.

**Sending Sites:**

- a. Prioritize and incentivize the use of TDRs to preserve backcountry lands in the Rural and Remote Zone District. Ensure that any changes to the TDR program do not compromise, destabilize or undermine the ability of TDRs to preserve Rural and Remote lands, and place greater value on TDRs from the Rural and Remote Zone District than from other Sending Sites.

- b. Support Sending Sites that have backcountry, agricultural, historic or other resource value that benefits the community, and/or are identified as visually or physically constrained.
- c. Explore the use of TDRs to incentivize a reduction in future developable floor area in order to preserve smaller, existing residential housing stock.

**Receiving Sites:**

- d. Locate development on receiving sites that results in activity and intensity in locations that are consistent with community values and goals and a desirable land use pattern.
- e. Continue to allow the use of TDRs as an alternative to Growth Management competition to establish development rights for new lots/parcels.
- f. Continue to allow the use of TDRs for residential development up to the final maximum floor area, while ensuring that the development also addresses community values and addresses impacts to traffic, employment generation, affordable housing, climate and waste.

**Additional TDR Standards:**

Explore the following modifications to TDR standards to facilitate the continued integrity of the TDR supply and demand market and achieve the primary goals of the program, consistent with the values and goals of the community:

- g. Modify the square footage value of TDRs with the intent of reducing the impacts of additional floor area on receiving sites.
- h. Establish a square footage value for TDRs originating from the rural and remote zone district that exceeds the square footage value of TDRs from other sending sites.
- i. Place a limit on the number of TDRs that may be severed from sending sites other than those located within the rural remote zone district.
- j. Establish a ratio that exponentially increases the number of TDRs required for additional floor area as house size increases on a receiving site.
- k. Manage the amount of additional residential floor area on receiving sites by establishing an annual limit on the creation of new TDRs from sending sites.

**02.2.11 Commercial Uses in Residential Neighborhoods**

Implement standards that restrict commercial uses in rural residential areas outside of the Urban Growth Boundaries, except as may be appropriate subject to special review, in areas where a small scale, home-based commercial use is secondary to the residential use of the property and aligns with - and does not negatively impact - neighborhood character.

**02.2.12 License and Regulate Short Term Rental (STR) Activity**

License and regulate residential Dwelling Units used as Lodging Units for Short Term Stays.

- a. Establish a system of registration, licensing, tax collection, and regulation of Short Term Rental activity for the health, safety and welfare of the citizens and property owners of Pitkin County. Such regulations should define locations in which and criteria under which such uses can occur and will not apply or pertain to hotels, motels, lodges, resort cabins, guest ranches, country inns or bed and breakfast establishments as these uses are defined in the Pitkin County Land Use Code.
- b. Implement standards to

manage the waste associated with commercial short term rental use of residences.

**02.2.13 License and Regulate Special Events**

Implement and update standards as needed to regulate the time, place and manner in which special events may be conducted on county roads, county property or private property. These standards are necessary to ensure that an event's demands for health, fire, police, transportation, and other public facilities and services do not exceed the level of service that is normally provided in that area of the county and that the event does not create undesirable impacts on the residents of that area of the county. Give particular consideration to the proximity of special event venues to surrounding residential areas and whether events that are proposed to occur at the venue would be consistent with the character of the neighborhood or would be disruptive to neighbors.

**02.2.14 Licensing for Retail Marijuana**

Establish specific standards and procedures for local licensing of retail marijuana establishments engaged in the cultivation, manufacture, sale, and testing

of retail marijuana and retail marijuana products, as provided by state law to protect the health safety, and welfare of the residents of Pitkin County.

**02.2.15 Reduce Disturbance Area**

Develop standards to limit the area disturbed by buildings and development activity in order to mitigate impacts on the natural environment and rural character, address physical site constraints, environmental hazards and natural resource impacts.

**02.2.16 Reduce Material and Water Waste**

Develop and implement land use standards that reduce water consumption and material waste, including earthwork associated with new residential development and redevelopment.

**02.2.17 Leverage Development Mitigation to Support Community Benefit**

Leverage development mitigation and impact fees as a tool to support community benefit.

**02.2.18 Equitable Share of Burden**

Require new development to make or pay an equitable share contribution that would otherwise be borne by the general public, and/or make equitable

contributions, commensurate with its impacts, to ensure that no reduction in the quality of services, public facilities or programs occurs as a result of the development.

**02.2.19 Ensure Development Mitigation Does Not Burden Workforce**

Ensure that the impacts of development are mitigated by the development entity and ensure that the associated costs do not create a burden that is shouldered by the workforce.

**02.2.20 Location and Rate of Development to Align with Public Services and Facilities**

Manage the location and rate of development in the residential, commercial, and tourist accommodation sectors to accommodate for the provision and location of sufficient public services and facilities.

**02.2.21 Development Impacts to County Roads**

Discourage development that generates traffic volumes in excess of the capacity of the county road system or that causes significant service level reductions.

**02.2.22 Noise Standards**

Implement and enforce standards to address noise impacts of

development and activity on adjacent properties and surrounding neighborhoods.

**Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 3 – Natural Environment: *Sections 01 Natural Resources & Biodiversity, 02 Water Quality & Quantity, Section 03 Agricultural Lands, Section 05 Scenic Quality, and 08 Environmental Hazards*

## **02.3 SITE CONSTRAINTS**

### **02.3.1 Land Use Standards to Promote the Natural Environment**

Update and implement land use standards to address and promote biodiversity, watershed protection, wildlife habitat preservation, and wildfire prevention, incorporating the best available science.

### **02.3.2 Natural Hazards**

Avoid development and redevelopment in natural hazard areas, and where avoidance is not feasible, mitigation should be designed and implemented to minimize potential harm to life, safety, health, property, and the natural environment.

### **02.3.3 Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)**

Implement and enforce requirements for land use and the built environment to safeguard property from the intrusion of fire and prevent structure fire from spreading to wildland areas.

### **02.3.4 Drainage & Erosion**

Avoid land use and development that disturbs the integrity of existing and natural drainage patterns, or subjects areas to increased potential for damage by flood, erosion or sedimentation or increases the

potential for water pollution; and implement standards that require development activity to maintain natural vegetative cover and to revegetate areas disturbed by land use or other development activities.

### **02.3.5 Protect Native Vegetation**

Implement standards to require the use of only native and regionally adapted plants to Pitkin County's climate zone in order to promote biodiversity and water efficiency.

#### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 3 – Natural Environment: *Sections 01 Natural Resources & Biodiversity and 08 Environmental Hazards*

# 03 Community Housing

## Community Housing as Community Value

*Affordable and community housing has long been one of Pitkin County's most critical and complex challenges. Public input underscores this: in the 2023 Pitkin County Public Satisfaction Survey, more than half of respondents identified affordable housing as their top priority followed closely by "managing growth." This was reaffirmed by voter approval for the 2024 mill levy dedicated to affordable and attainable housing, with nearly 60% of Pitkin County voters supporting the measure mandating that Pitkin County respond to community needs and address the housing crisis head-on by supporting housing that is affordable, accessible, attainable and available.*

*As jobs and economic activity increasingly extend into rural areas of the county, new pressures are emerging that challenge the limits of the current housing supply and the commitment to preserving community character.*

*The **Community Housing** policies in this section focus on facilitating the kind of housing availability in line with community direction, and threading the needle between the community values of addressing community housing needs and standing strong on rural preservation and environmental protections.*

### **COMMUNITY HOUSING:**

*Housing that is intentionally planned, developed, or preserved to meet the diverse needs of the local community. It includes housing for the workforce, seniors, and people in transitional situations, ensuring that residents of all income levels, ages, and stages of life can live and thrive locally. Community housing prioritizes affordability, accessibility, and long-term availability to support a resilient, inclusive community fabric and to maintain opportunities for those who work, contribute to, and call the community home.*

### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING OR EMPLOYEE HOUSING:**

*Deed-restricted dwelling units that are restricted to the housing size and type for individuals meeting asset, income and minimum occupancy guidelines or other types of restricted units, as approved by the Board of County Commissioners or its housing designee.*

### **03.1 Increase Access to Community Housing**

Support programs and policies that increase access to community housing in order to promote affordability, accessibility, and long-term availability to support a resilient, inclusive community fabric and to maintain opportunities for those who work, contribute to, and call the Pitkin County community home.

### **03.2 Expand Availability and Supply of Community Housing**

Promote strategies to expand the supply of affordable, diverse, and desirable housing types in order to support stable and long-term community housing opportunities for the range of individuals and families.

### **03.3 Preserve Existing Community Housing**

Preserve and maintain affordable and attainable deed restricted and free-market community housing where it currently exists in locations throughout unincorporated Pitkin County.

**03.4** ***Maintenance and Replacement of Existing Community Housing***

Support the maintenance and replacement of existing community housing of both free-market and deed restricted homes in order to continue to house local residents and promote affordability.

**03.5** ***Conversion of Existing Housing to Deed Restricted Housing***

Provide incentives for conversion of existing free-market housing to deed-restricted housing to accommodate local workforce and promote long-term affordability.

**03.6** ***Job Related On-site Housing***

Enable on-site job-related housing for workforce in order to reduce traffic intensity and related greenhouse gas emissions associated with travel to and from employment on site.

**03.7** ***On-site Housing to Support Local Agriculture***

Develop strategies to support on-site housing for agricultural producers to encourage the current and next generation to achieve local agricultural production.

**03.8** ***Leverage the Caretaker Dwelling Units to Support Community Housing***

Leverage the Caretaker Dwelling Units (CDUs) to Support Community Housing:

- a. Enforce use and occupancy of existing CDUs for community housing and require and enforce deed restriction of new units for use and occupancy.
- b. Promote the creation and utilization of new deed-restricted CDUs throughout Pitkin County by streamlining the land use and permit process and removing barriers to creating new CDUs.
- c. Require sufficient availability of a legal and physical water supply as a standard for the development of CDUs.
- d. Implement a land use code standard allowing CDUs to contain up to 1,500 square feet of floor area.

**03.9** ***Housing for Older Adults***

Develop resources to support diverse housing and living opportunities for older adults.

**03.10** ***Funding for Community and Affordable Housing***

Establish diverse mechanisms to fund community and affordable housing for Pitkin County residents and workforce to ensure that residents of all income levels, ages, and stages of life can live and thrive locally.

**03.11** ***Evaluation of Housing Needs***

Coordinate and continue to participate with other jurisdictions and community organizations to better understand and plan for the housing needs for Pitkin County residents as well as Pitkin County workforce.

**03.12** ***Innovative Building for Community Housing***

Encourage and support the use of energy conservation and innovative building performance techniques for community housing in order to reduce construction and operating costs without sacrificing safety or desirability of the housing.

**03.13 Affordable Housing Mitigation**

Require that applications for development, redevelopment and remodels in Pitkin County mitigate the impacts to the workforce by providing income or workforce restricted (ex: deed-restricted) employee housing for the workforce generated by the development activity.

1. Where affordable housing mitigation is required in association with a land use development application, a developer or property owner shall pay an impact fee or avoid full payment of the scheduled impact fee through one or a combination of the following options:
  - a. Construction of deed restricted employee housing, on-site in circumstances where a site can accommodate an additional unit(s), or off-site;
  - b. The acquisition and deed restriction of existing residential housing units;
  - c. The dedication of real property to Pitkin County that will be used for the construction of employee housing.
2. Explore an affordable housing credit program and other types

**03.14 Community Housing Location with Consideration for Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs)**

of incentives to support private development of affordable housing mitigation at or above that required by the Pitkin County Land Use Code.

- a. Community Housing within Urban Growth Boundaries:
  - ▶ Prioritize adding density to existing development and opportunities for new development to increase the supply of community housing within established Urban Growth Boundaries, because transit, services, job-centers, and infrastructure are generally established within UGBs.
- b. Community Housing outside of Urban Growth Boundaries:
  - ▶ Enable added density to existing development and opportunities for new development to increase the supply of community housing outside of established Urban Growth Boundaries, under the following criteria:
    - i. Adjacent to or within an existing community water

- system or municipal water district service area with an available and reliable water supply and capacity to serve additional units;
- ii. Close proximity to transit stops and along major transportation corridors;
- iii. In locations that avoid the presence of natural hazards and wildlife habitat; and
- iv. Of a site-appropriate density and scale including typologies such as small single-family, small-scale attached units, or clustered development of up to 10 dwelling units.

- ▶ New high density development is not appropriate in rural areas of Pitkin County where there is an insufficient level of infrastructure or absence of services to support such development.

**03.15** ***Support for Regional Housing Programs***  
Support a flexible and resilient regional workforce by advocating for effective local and regional housing programs and projects. Actively enable workforce mobility, advance collective regional housing goals, and coordinate resources to expand housing access throughout the region by working across jurisdictions inclusive of the City of Aspen, Town of Snowmass Village, Town of Basalt, Garfield and Eagle Counties.

**03.16** ***Partnerships to Support Housing Within Urban Growth Boundaries***  
Work together with local governments and community partners to explore the remaining opportunities for housing within the Urban Growth Boundaries of the City of Aspen and the Town of Basalt and within the municipal boundaries of the City of Aspen, the Town of Basalt and the Town of Snowmass Village.

**03.17** ***Engage Private Developers***  
Engage with private developers and employers to explore opportunities and incentives needed to create public-private partnerships in support of increasing community housing in the region.

**03.18** ***Creative Partnerships***  
Develop strategies to build formal and informal community networks between housing advocacy organizations and coalitions in an effort to nurture creative partnerships and identify bold solutions to increase access to housing throughout the region.

**03.19** ***Efforts to End Homelessness***  
Advance efforts to end homelessness in Pitkin County by developing transitional housing, supportive housing, and housing stability services.

#### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 5 – Community/  
Economic Health: *Sections 01  
Healthy Community and 02  
Healthy Economy*

# 04 Buildings

For a full list of definitions, please reference the 'Key Terms' at the beginning of this Built Environment Chapter.

- 04.1 Performance Standards**  
Implement and continually improve bold baseline building performance standards and incentives to achieve climate action goals and reflect community values.
- 04.2 Residential Building Electrification & Reduction in Energy Consumption**  
Pursue ongoing updates to Building and Energy Codes to achieve energy conservation, a reduction in energy consumption and all-electric residential buildings powered by 100% renewable energy.
- 04.3 Building Performance Standards to Mitigate Impacts of Increased Square Footage**  
As square footage for new residential development and redevelopment increases, implement increasingly more stringent building performance standards in order to mitigate community impacts such as

associated greenhouse gas emissions, energy and water consumption, and community impacts.

- 04.4 Existing Residential Buildings**  
Leverage county programs and explore funding opportunities to incentivize homeowners to improve efficiency and reduce energy consumption in existing residential buildings in alignment with climate goals and community values
- 04.5 Redevelop Larger Homes at a Smaller Size**  
Provide incentives to encourage residential redevelopment to utilize the existing building footprint or smaller, and to not exceed the codified maximum final floor area in effect at the time, in order to limit impacts to the site and achieve community climate action goals.
- 04.6 Residential Building Demolition**  
Discourage residential demolition and replacement of recently constructed homes to reduce construction and demolition waste, construction related traffic congestion, embodied carbon, and associated impacts to greenhouse gas emissions.

- 04.7 Substantial Remodel**  
Implement standards for substantial residential remodels and alterations above 500 square feet that incentivize and result in increased energy efficiency, reduction in energy consumption, reuse and recycling of construction materials and minimum construction waste.
- 04.8 Preference Remodel When Feasible**  
Where warranted based on existing building conditions, encourage residential remodels as a preference to “scrape and replace” to address site impacts, reduce embodied carbon and achieve community climate action goals.
- 04.9 Limit Exterior Energy Use**  
Implement and enforce a restrictive residential BTU/yr Exterior Energy Budget for new development, redevelopment and alterations with the intent of phasing out exterior energy use for both new and existing residential development in order to support climate action goals and a reduction in overall building energy consumption.

**04.10** ***Structure Hardening & Resiliency***

Develop and implement building code standards to address climate resiliency, including requirements to harden structures and create defensible space to withstand wildfire and other natural disasters for new and existing structures.

**04.11** ***Meet and Exceed Commercial and Multi-Family Residential Building Code***

Meet and exceed the IECC energy code, State Minimum Code, Low Carbon and Energy Code to drive energy efficiency in commercial and multi-family residential buildings; and encourage electrification, energy storage, and the use of renewable energy for new commercial and multi-family building construction.

**04.12** ***Coordinated Building and Energy Codes***

Work with municipalities, adjacent counties, and community partner organizations to coordinate the implementation of building and energy code updates.

**04.13** ***Phase Out Natural Gas in Public Facilities***

Pursue ongoing efforts to ensure that public facilities achieve energy conservation goals including

reduction of energy consumption and conversion to all-electric buildings powered with 100% renewable energy. Phase out the use of natural gas concurrent with replacement schedules for public facilities with consideration of the ongoing need for public facilities to maintain back-up power to function as needed for critical operations.

**Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 6 – Regional Approach  
*Section 02 Regional Climate*

# 05 Transportation & Mobility

**05.1 Reduce Traffic Intensity**  
Identify and implement strategies to reduce traffic intensity and congestion on Highway 82 and County roads.

- a. Reduce the number of employee-generated commuter trips and vehicle miles traveled on Highway 82 to accommodate the operation and maintenance of large homes.
- b. Locate community housing in close proximity to employment to reduce trips and vehicle miles traveled associated with the commuting workforce.

**05.2 Multi-Modal Transportation**  
Identify and implement strategies that encourage transportation programs, modes, and land use patterns that minimize traffic congestion, promote safety, and reduce vehicle emissions and single occupancy vehicle travel.

- a. **Reduce Single-Occupancy Vehicles**  
Reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicle commuter trips by improving access to alternative transportation options, promoting walking, biking, vehicle sharing,

consolidated trips and other alternatives.

- b. **Encourage Public Transportation**  
Support accessible, safe, efficient, environmentally sustainable local and regional public transportation.
- c. **Multi-Modal Access and Connectivity**  
Connect communities in the region and diminish reliance upon the automobile by supporting and enhancing access to affordable, efficient public mass transit and multi-modal transportation connectivity and first and last mile solutions, including bike and pedestrian connections to trail systems and transit stops.
- d. **Micro Transit Options**  
In addition to fixed route public transit, increase use of flexible route, on-demand types of micro-transit in portions of the County where traditional public bus access is less frequent or available.
- e. **Employer Supported Transportation Alternatives**  
Encourage employers to

implement creative solutions for transporting employees to and from their place of work, including van pools, ride-sharing, and other similar solutions.

- f. **Shared Roadways**  
Manage and sign county roads intermittently used for bicycle travel to notify travelers that the road is to be shared between bicycles and vehicles alike.
- g. **Non-Motorized Access**  
Encourage non-motorized transportation alternatives, such as trails for bicycles, horses, pedestrians, and cross-country skiers to provide links between residential and employment areas, commercial centers, recreational and open space areas, and educational facilities.
- h. **Preserve Rail Corridors**  
Support preservation of existing rail corridors for the potential development of rail or other improved transit/trail alternatives in the future. No development should be allowed that would prevent the options of the community to pursue rail, trail or other

improved transit alternatives along such corridors.

- i. Airport/Transit Connectivity**  
Facilitate alternatives and innovative solutions to mitigate the use of single occupancy vehicles recognizing the Airport/Highway 82 has a main transportation node for the county by providing and promoting intermodal transportation options at the Pitkin County Airport as part of an integrated transportation and transit system.
- j. Support Passenger Rail**  
Support passenger rail on existing rail infrastructure and/or rights-of-way as a local or regional transportation alternative at such time as alignment, infrastructure, funding, and regional stakeholder coordination is available.
- k. Aerial tramways/Gondolas**  
The consideration of aerial tramways or gondolas should include a corresponding parking needs and availability assessment and ensure that impacts to wildlife, visual and scenic resources, and rural

character are minimized to the greatest extent feasible. Associated infrastructure, development and maintenance should also be designed to reduce such impacts and the system's susceptibility to inclement weather should not compromise its functionality.

- l. Support Electrification of Transportation**  
Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supporting the replacement of fossil fuels with electricity as the means of powering all vehicles and associated infrastructure necessary to support electrification of transportation systems.

**05.3 Highway 82 Traffic Flow & Safety**  
Coordinate with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to implement the existing Highway 82 Access Control Management Plan to address the location of access points on Highway 82 to manage traffic flow and safety.

**05.4 Development Concurrency with Existing Transportation Infrastructure**  
Ensure that new development in unincorporated Pitkin County can be accommodated by existing transportation infrastructure, including but not limited to roads and bridges and alternative transportation options at no increased cost to Pitkin County.

**Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 - Built Environment, *Section 07 Resilient Infrastructure* and Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 01 Regional Transportation*

# 06 Waste Management

## 06.1 **Solid Waste Management**

Commit to all environmentally and economically appropriate solid waste management processes in an effort to achieve the following goals:

- a. Landfill lifespan extension: Prolong the life and utility of the current Pitkin County Solid Waste Center infrastructure by setting a standard for environmental responsibility and resource conservation;
- b. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions through diversion efforts;
- c. Promote and encourage proper community-based recycling to minimize contamination in both single-stream and composting program;
- d. Strengthen and expand waste diversion initiatives, ensuring their success and inspiring their adoption in other sectors.

## 06.2 **Solid Waste Diversion Targets**

Maximize waste reduction and diversion practices as part of Pitkin County's broader sustainability and greenhouse gas reduction efforts. Support the Pitkin County Waste Diversion Plan targets:

- a. Achieve a 50% diversion rate from 2022 baseline by 2030
- b. Achieve a 75% diversion rate

from 2022 baseline by 2040

## 06.3 **Construction Waste Diversion**

Reduce and/or recycle debris generated by construction projects, thereby diverting debris from disposal facilities, saving landfill space and reducing environmental impacts. Incentivize both the separation of recoverable materials from the construction and demolition waste stream, and a reduction in the consumption of resources in order to protect the public health and welfare in Pitkin County.

## 06.4 **Reduce Household Waste**

Implement standards and incentives to support the reduction of household waste for every household, including support for composting and recycling and reducing single use plastics.

## 06.5 **Waste Disposal Pricing**

Implement and maintain a waste disposal pricing structure that reduces environmental impacts through incentivizing or regulating practices that reduce waste, support organic waste composting and recycling incentives, the use of recycled content materials for new construction, and increasing recycle-ability and re-usability of

building elements at their end of life.

## 06.6 **Coordinate Waste Management Standards**

Coordinate with municipalities and adjacent community waste facilities to implement consistent waste reduction incentives and requirements across jurisdictions to achieve common climate action goals, reuse and recycle objectives and prolong the life of the Pitkin County Solid Waste Center.

## **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 02 Regional Climate*

# 07 Resilient Infrastructure

**07.1** **Siting of Renewables**  
Facilitate the location, siting and development of community-scale renewables, micro-grids, energy storage systems and other electrification infrastructure. Support sites that are accessible for maintenance; have close proximity to distribution lines and utility grids; avoid natural hazards and wildlife habitat; and achieve the community-wide climate action goals.

**07.2** **Distributed Energy Resources**  
Partner with utility providers to address community-scale infrastructure, energy storage and efficient technologies needed to respond to future energy demand and reliability. To that end, coordinate with utilities to integrate local distributed energy resources (DERs) such as rooftop solar and battery storage into the local utility grid to manage all energy sources (both distributed and utility-scale) as part of a unified system to enhance grid resilience.

**07.3** **Electrification Infrastructure**  
Support improvements to the utility grid including transformers and utility-side upgrades integral to the use of charging stations,

solar and wind energy and energy storage, transmission and distribution.

**07.4** **Electric Vehicle Charging Stations**  
Identify and support installation of electric vehicle charging stations to accommodate the use and uptake of electric vehicles as one component of reducing county-wide carbon emissions.

**07.5** **Support for Aging Infrastructure**  
Plan for programs and funding to support and improve, modernize existing infrastructure in our community, inclusive of water supply, sewer, electricity, and communication systems, in alignment with county-wide goals to support affordability in existing development.

**07.6** **Maintain and Improve County Road Infrastructure**  
Fully fund maintenance and improvement of existing Pitkin County road infrastructure, to ensure that roads and bridges are sufficient to safely accommodate existing and projected traffic.

- a. Design, engineer and construct roadways in a manner to minimize environmental and aesthetic damage and future maintenance costs consistent

- b. Maintain rural character where feasible by retaining existing unpaved roads and precluding the extension of winter maintenance on rural roads in alignment with the Pitkin County Road Maintenance & Management Plan.

## Complementary Policies

See Chapter 4 - Built Environment: *Section 05 Transportation & Mobility*; Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 01 Regional Climate*; Chapter 3 – Natural Environment: *Section 02 Water Quality & Quantity re: wastewater infrastructure*

# 08 Utilities

## 08.1 *Logical Extension of Utilities*

With the exception of extensions to serve existing development and need for community housing, limit extensions of public utilities such as municipal water and sewer lines outside of the Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs). Where extension outside of the UGBs is considered, ensure that areas served by such extensions are consistent with the following parameters:

- a. Support infrastructure upgrades to expand existing community and metro water utility districts where there is sufficient, and reliable, supply and capacity to serve existing housing and/or new community housing located within or adjacent to existing districts;
- b. Upgrade or expand existing community and metro water utility districts only when development aligns with land use pattern that ensures any resulting growth can be accommodated and sustained within the financial and environmental capacity of the surrounding area;
- c. Prioritize electric utilities in an effort to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

## 08.2 *Telecommunications*

Support adequate regional and community telecommunications facilities to establish reliable, redundant, secure, and affordable fiber internet and wireless broadband service with sufficient capacity to enhance resiliency and allow for communication to serve the needs of governments, emergency services, businesses, residents, and visitors of Pitkin County.

- a. Where a telecommunications system utilizes a network of facilities, encourage a comprehensive approach for evaluating potential sites in Pitkin County with an aim to minimize the number of sites required and any adverse impact.
- b. When practicable and not otherwise detrimental, telecommunication sites should be designed with capacity for consolidation of multiple telecommunications facilities on common towers, and/or located adjacent to, on or incorporated into existing or proposed buildings or other structures, and maintained to an adequate standard to address resiliency.

## 08.3 *Underground Utility Lines*

Underground new utility line installations and convert existing distribution systems from overhead to underground in order to reduce vulnerability of utility transmission and distribution lines to disruption from extreme weather and wildfires, improve reliability and resilience, and minimize visual impacts.

## 08.4 *Partner with Utilities to Achieve Resilience*

Partner with energy utilities and local governments to collectively pursue efforts around grid hardening and other tactics to ensure a resilient and redundant power supply for Pitkin County as whole, to serve the needs of governments, emergency services, businesses, residents and visitors of Pitkin County.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 01 Regional Climate*

# 09 Cultural & Historic Resources

## 09.1 *Protect and Maintain Local Cultural & Historic Resources*

Identify, protect, and maintain historic and archaeological and cultural resources that are pertinent to the history of Pitkin County including Ute and indigenous history and culture, mining and ranching, railroads and historic town sites, and ski area development among other cornerstones in the history of Pitkin County.

## 09.2 *Identify and Protect Historic Sites*

Identify and protect prehistoric and historic sites that meet national, state, or local criteria for historic designation from neglect, destruction or harmful alteration.

- a. Encourage property owners, whose property contains historic or archaeological resources that may meet local, state, or national designation standards to explore the requirements and benefits of seeking protection for such resources under the Historic Preservation Regulations in the Pitkin County Land Use Code;
- b. Maintain the integrity of the Redstone Historic District and buildings as representative of the Osgood era and other historic resources that

characterize the town;

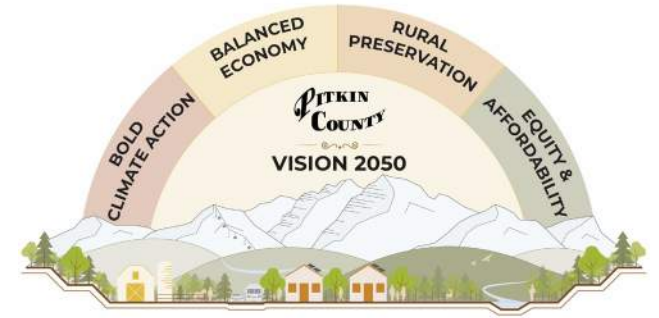
- c. Preserve the unique rural and agricultural heritage of the Emma, Brush Creek, Owl Creek, Crystal River, Lenado, Woody Creek, Ruedi, Independence townsite, Meredith and Thomasville and other rural portions of Pitkin County, as expressed by the existing historic structures that embody the historic ranching and farming community;
- d. Identify historic sites and structures that have gained significance in the more recent past, such as the growth of winter and summer tourism related development, works by renowned architects and artists, and other trends that define the growth of the valley in the mid 1900s.

DRAFT





# Community & Economic Health



# Community & Economic Health Goal:

**Pitkin County is a healthy, safe, and inclusive place with an economy that supports a sustainable, equitable, year-round quality of life.**

## GROUNDING IN OUR VALUES

*Community & Economic Health* is interwoven with our community values of *Equity and Affordability* and *Balanced Economy*. A *healthy community* is one where all members of the community experience a strong sense of belonging and connection; where community members are able to establish roots, access stable housing, raise a family and age in place; and where all community members have access to community services to support their quality of life. A *healthy economy* is one where community-oriented and local businesses thrive; where jobs provide year-round financial security; and where our workforce is valued and supported regardless of whether they live within or outside of our county boundaries.



## INTRODUCTION

**Achieving Community & Economic Health** means enhancing the social and economic wellbeing for all members of our community. However, carrying out these values requires recognition of our current conditions. While the economy we have today provides ample job opportunities and higher paying wages relative to our region, the cost of living has far outpaced wage growth. Additionally, many jobs in the tourism sector are seasonal and pose challenges to creating a sustainable, year-round quality of life. Navigating the dynamics between community health and economic health presents a key question: **How do we balance economic sustainability with growth pressures and quality of life values that are essential to community health?**

### **Rural Resort Economy**

In Pitkin County, jobs related to the resort tourist economy employ a significant portion (41%) of our workforce. This includes jobs in the sectors of lodging and food service; arts, entertainment, and recreation; and retail. These jobs often pay low to mid wages, may be seasonal in nature, and do not always provide employee benefits such

as healthcare. However, compared to our neighboring counties, Pitkin County has experienced the strongest growth in both jobs and wages from pre-Covid levels, and as of 2024, touts the highest average annual wage at \$76,394 compared to Garfield (\$63,281) and Eagle (\$63,148) counties. This makes jobs in Pitkin County attractive to workers throughout the region, even if that means commuting long distances from outside the county. *(US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024)*

In fact, Pitkin County draws an estimated 62% of its workforce from other communities outside the county and over 24% of these commuting workers travel over 50 miles each direction to/from their place of employment. This transportation dynamic results in increased traffic congestion on Highway 82, more labor earnings leaving the county each year than remaining, and added stress for our commuting workforce. *(US Census Bureau On the Map, 2024)*

### **Emerging Private Residential Sector**

More recently, the local economy is experiencing the rise of the privatized

residential sector. This is defined as jobs that support large-scale residential properties through construction, home maintenance & operation, and in-home services. Many of these jobs may provide comparable skill sets of the current labor force, such as culinary, healthcare, or administrative skills. These private in-home jobs often offer higher wages than the tourism industry and may provide supplementary income above a primary occupation. Though difficult to quantify, jobs in this sector also include day laborers who provide home services to private clients for cash-only.

The consequences of this privatized and often unaccounted for economy are impactful across several sectors, resulting in job shortages in critical positions that serve our broader community and support the traditional tourist-based economy. Understandably, higher wages and growing opportunities entice workers into these jobs. However, this emerging economy is reshaping the makeup of our workforce, our base economy, and the critical services our community relies upon. *(For further data, see Chapter 02 Existing Conditions)*

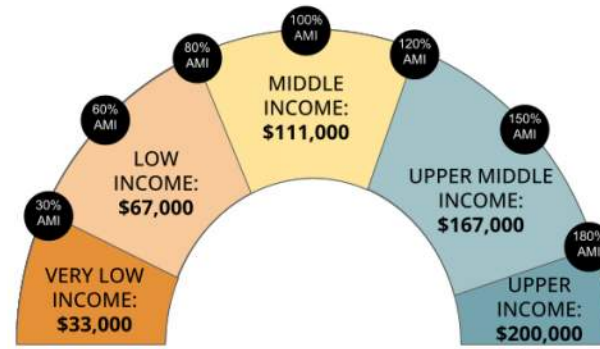
### Economic Imbalance

Our current socioeconomic conditions expose a stark contrast between the haves and have-nots. Today, 68% of personal income of Pitkin County residents is derived from non-labor sources, such as investments, interest, dividends, or retirement accounts. This means that only 32% is derived from wage-earnings from jobs. By contrast, at the national level this is the reverse: two-thirds of income is derived from wage earnings and only one-third from non-labor income. This paints a picture of a very wealthy community where many who live here rely on investment wealth. And, the wealthy are getting wealthier. Since 2000, the percentage of total personal income from non-labor income has increased by 165%, far outpacing the increases in wage-earnings which have only increased by 13%. In short, this data reveals a community with a wide and widening income gap between the extremely affluent and the ordinary wage-earner. (US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023)

### Cost of Living

The presence of wealth is a driving factor that increases the cost of living in Pitkin County for everyone. As of 2024, the Cost of Living Index (COLI) for Pitkin County is 120% higher than the national average and 95% higher than the rest of the state. In order to make a living wage in Pitkin County, a household must bring in \$148,512 annually. However, the average median household income is \$111,291 resulting in a \$37,200 wage gap, contributing to financial hardship for median income earners. (US Census Bureau, Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis, 2024)

The high cost of living in Pitkin County is largely driven by the extraordinarily high housing cost. The average sale price for a single-family home in Pitkin County has risen from \$2.79 Million in 2018 to \$7.90 Million



Pitkin County Average Median Household Income  
Source: US Census Bureau, FRED, 2024

in 2024 – this is an astounding increase of 183% in just six years. Even with a successful Aspen/Pitkin County Housing Authority (APCHA) program, with over 3,000 deed restricted properties, the program cannot keep up with the number of community members and workforce that are being priced out of the area. A household would need to be making \$1.6 to \$2.0 Million annually in order to afford a \$7.9 Million house. Even for middle income and high wage earners, these housing prices put home ownership firmly out of reach. (Aspen Board of Realtors, 2024; US Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates; APCHA Housing Inventory, 2025)

### Quality of Life Impacts

On one hand, the unique characteristics of Pitkin County's environment and economy fuel a vibrant recreation, arts and cultural community. However, equitable access to these resources is a challenge. While economic opportunity is present in Pitkin County, yet the realities of wealth disparities, long commute times, and affordability challenge our community's quality of life. For many, the high cost of housing in Pitkin County is the biggest hurdle. As expressed by members of our community, there is a sense of risk of being one life changing event away from displacement. A change of employer,

a change in a relationship, or an unexpected financial hardship can lead to loss of housing or losing a foothold in the community.

This level of precarity results in substantial stress, and associated mental and behavioral health risks. Even for middle and high wage-earners, the lack of affordability is a barrier to putting down roots, finding a sustainable career path, and raising a family. Reliance on a workforce that is strained to meet ends meet or that must commute long distances to find an affordable place to live is a substantial challenge for our community to address.

### Supporting Community Health

The local government of Pitkin County seeks to support our community through programming and resources. Pitkin County Human Services and Public Health Departments work closely with community partners to understand residents' goals and deliver culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and accessible services tailored to their needs. This collaborative model strengthens the systems that support daily life, reduces barriers, and creates effective pathways to wellbeing. Strategic focus areas include meeting basic human needs, strengthening financial security, modernizing policies and programs, and preparing for emergencies through coordinated, equity-centered response plans. Together, these efforts aim to ensure that all community members can establish roots, build meaningful connections, and experience a high quality of life in Pitkin County.

The following policies carry forward the work of Pitkin County Human Services and Public Health and are informed by community partner organizations. Collaboration is essential to promote a healthy community and economy.



Photo: Snowplowing county roads, Pitkin County, 2023

## BROAD COMMUNITY DIRECTION

Recognizing these challenges enables us to identify opportunities and community needs to: support affordable housing, advocate for our commuting workforce, and collaborate with community partners. In order to address competing interests and challenges, the community input received through public engagement, Community Growth Advisory Committee (CGAC) Recommendations, and community plans articulate the following strategies to inform policy direction:

### ► **Commitment to Engage the Workforce:**

While the majority of our workforce does not live in Pitkin County, they play an invaluable role in supporting our local economy. As decisions are made surrounding housing, transportation, and the local economy, our commuting workforce should be engaged and participate in decision-making regardless of whether or not they live within Pitkin County boundaries.

### ► **Prioritize Mental and Physical Health**

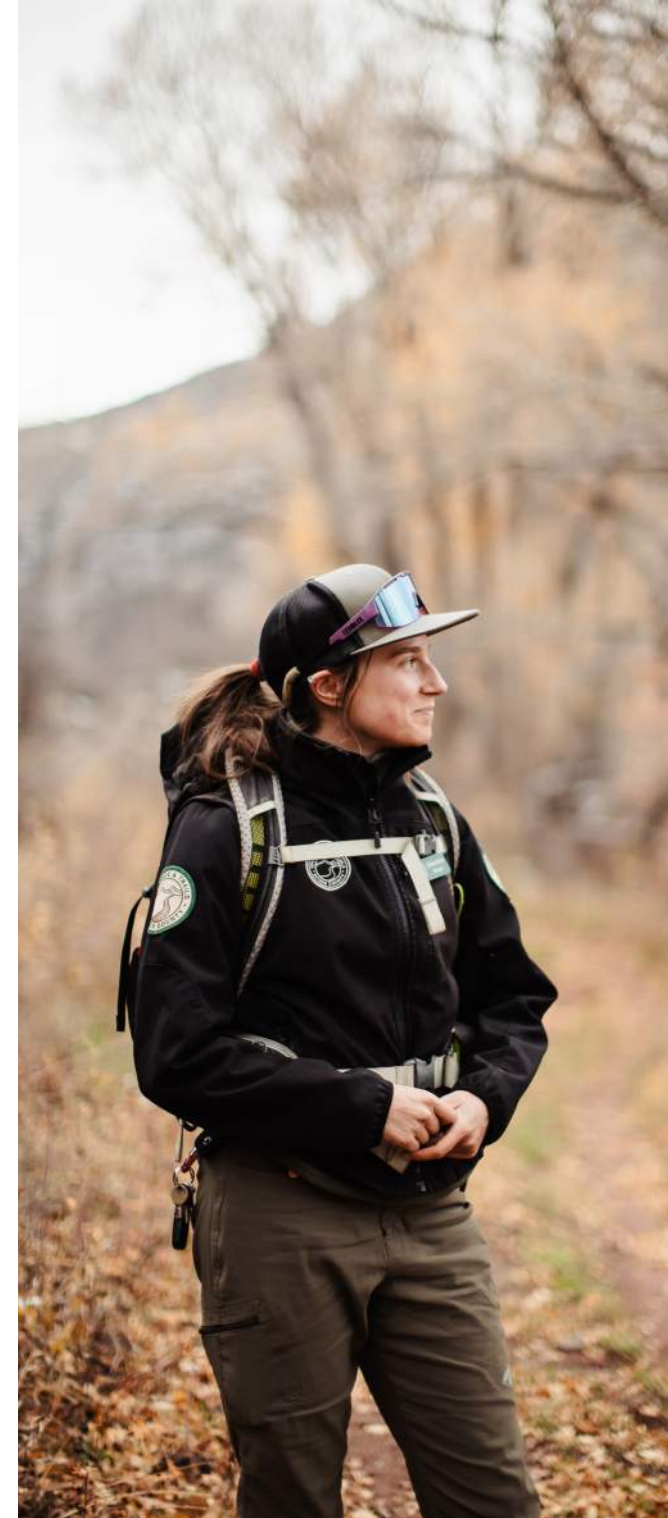
The community recognizes that prioritizing mental and physical health are critical and must address the root causes which are often directly tied to economic stressors and specifically the challenge of housing affordability.

### ► **Critical Community Services**

Our policies must support critical community services. These jobs are essential for our community to function and those who perform them are essential to our community fabric.

### ► **Support Our Next Generation:**

Supporting our youth is key to a healthy community - from childcare, K-12 school, and extra curricular community activities. It is important to enable opportunities for our youth to remain or return to our community as they grow up.



# Overview of Policy Areas:

## **01: Healthy Community**

Identifies policies and programs supporting social, physical, emotional, and behavioral health in alignment with Pitkin County Public Health and Pitkin County Human Services Departments.

## **02: Healthy Economy**

Provides policy direction in support of a sustainable and balanced local economy and support for Pitkin County's workforce.

## **03: Lifelong Services**

Identifies programs that support the Pitkin County community throughout the course of life and in alignment with Pitkin County Human Services Department.

## **04: Local Food**

Reinforces the community-wide need for policy direction in support of local food security and food system resilience.

## **05: Public Safety & Emergency Response**

Supports Pitkin County's Emergency Management operations and identifies policy priorities in Pitkin County's Emergency Operations Plan and Continuity of Operations Plans.

## **06: Hazard Mitigation**

Elevates the priorities and points to the policy direction established by the Pitkin County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

# Key Terms

**BELONGING:** The feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, connection, and identity for a member of a certain group.

**CLIFF EFFECT:** When a family's income rises to a point where they become ineligible for certain public assistance programs (such as food stamps, housing assistance, or childcare subsidies), but their new income is not high enough to cover the cost of those lost benefits.

**COMMUNITY SAFETY:** A holistic approach that goes beyond simply reducing crime; it aims to create a safe and livable environment where everyone feels secure in their homes, on the roads, in public settings, and can participate in daily life without fear or risk.

**DOWN VALLEY:** In the Roaring Fork Valley, down valley refers to the direction towards Glenwood Springs (northwest) along Highway 82. Locals generally refer to Glenwood Springs and sometimes even communities further west along I-70 in Garfield County as down valley.

**EQUITY:** Providing what each community member needs to succeed, acknowledging that people start from different places. In our community, supporting our community equitably means that community members are able to establish roots, access stable housing, raise a family, and age in place; and where all community members have access to community services to support their quality of life.

**HOUSING FIRST:** Pitkin County's housing strategy recognizes that while many residents and members of the local workforce may require more than just affordable, available, and accessible housing to get by in this community, prioritizing housing stability is the essential first step that lays the foundation for other supportive services to follow afterwards.

**INCLUSIVITY:** Programs, policies, and culture that foster an environment of belonging and connection for all types of people who live, visit, and work in Pitkin County.

**LIVING WAGE:** A living wage is an hourly pay that would allow a full-time employee to meet their basic needs - including housing, food, and childcare - without needing more public or private financial assistance.

**QUALITY OF LIFE:** The way our community looks, feels, and functions; its core components are deeply rooted in our shared community values of bold climate action, rural preservation, balanced economy, and equity and affordability.

**SELF-SUFFICIENCY:** An individual's or family's ability to meet their basic needs and maintain a healthy, stable life without relying on external assistance.

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY:** A sustainable community is one that balances social, environmental, and economic needs to ensure a high quality of life for current and future generations, prioritizing community character, environmental preservation, and social equity.

**SOCIAL SAFETY NET:** Programs and policies designed to protect individuals and families from financial hardship, help manage risk, and provide support during times of crisis or instability.

**WORKFORCE:** Individuals who participate in jobs in Pitkin County's local economy, regardless of where they live. The majority of Pitkin County's workforce lives outside of Pitkin County and commutes daily up valley along the Highway 82 corridor.

**UP VALLEY:** In the Roaring Fork Valley, up valley refers to the direction toward Aspen (southeast) along Highway 82. Locals generally describe the communities of Aspen and Snowmass Village as up valley.

# Measures of Success

OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
Improved sense of belonging and connection for our community's workforce, residents, and visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Health Indicators as captured by the Pitkin County Community Engagement &amp; Behavioral Health Survey Human Services Client &amp; Staff Satisfaction Survey</li> </ul>
More community members are able to establish roots, raise a family, make strong connections, and age in their community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Net migration population trends by age</li> <li>School district enrollment trends</li> </ul>
More of the Pitkin County workforce have access to affordable and attainable housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change of home occupancy %</li> <li>Behavioral Health Risk Factor System State Survey</li> </ul>
Equitable access to community resources that strengthen the quality of life and wellbeing for all people in our community by providing access to services such as education, public safety, affordable and quality health care, and access to recreation, arts and culture through all phases of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pitkin County Human Services and Public Health Departments</li> </ul>
More resources allocated to support both local-serving and locally owned businesses, including food production.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of locally owned businesses</li> <li>Number of local agriculture producers</li> <li>Pounds of food delivered to local food banks &amp; mobile pantries</li> </ul>
Increased participation in civic activities and public service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community board openings</li> </ul>
Enhanced public safety in our community with a focus on preparing a coordinated wildfire evacuation plan and minimizing Highway 82 accidents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accidents on Highway 82</li> <li>Community education via Roaring Fork Valley Wildfire Collaborative and Pitkin County Wildfire Protection Plan</li> <li>Community participation in wildfire preparedness activities</li> </ul>
More diversified employment opportunities for Pitkin County's workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job sector changes over time (CO State Demography Office)</li> <li>Development of pipeline workforce programs (Colorado Mountain College)</li> </ul>

# 01 Healthy Community

*A healthy community* is one where all members of the community experience a strong sense of belonging and connection; where community members are able to establish roots, access stable housing, raise a family, and age in place; and where all community members have access to community services to support their quality of life.

## 01.1 **Support Healthy Community Fund**

Promote a healthy community by allocating sufficient funding to Pitkin County programs and community partners in order to help Pitkin County citizens and employees be independent, healthy, and safe.

## 01.2 **Prioritize Prevention for Physical and Behavioral Health**

Prioritize prevention for physical and behavioral health (including mental health and substance use) by addressing the social, economic, and environmental factors that affect health outcomes for all community members who live, visit, and work in Pitkin County.

## 01.3 **Promote Access and Coordination of Care**

Promote access to and coordination of behavioral health needs of Pitkin County, across the continuum of needs including mental health conditions, emotional well-being, substance use disorders, physical and dental care.

## 01.4 **Strong Community Networks**

Foster and strengthen relationships with non-profits and community partners to ensure goals are shared, services are streamlined, resources are efficiently allocated and feedback loops are established in order to create cohesive partnerships between local government and community partners.

## 01.5 **Public Engagement & Participation**

Create opportunities for public participation by Pitkin County residents, visitors, and workforce regarding decisions that affect the community by supporting the formation of topical citizen advisory groups to participate in planning-related matters.

## 01.6 **Access to Recreation, Arts, and Civic Activities**

Support opportunities for people of all ages - from youth to older adults - to participate and engage in the community, inclusive of outdoor recreation, civic participation, the arts, and sport activities.

## 01.7 **Multilingual & Multicultural Resources**

Support programs to increase multilingual and multicultural resources and accessible information to ensure that all people who live and work in Pitkin County can engage with public resources, education, and decision-making.

## 01.8 **Equitable Access and Functional Needs Services**

Promote resources to support access to Pitkin County services for all community members and adequately account for inclusion of people with access and functional needs.

## 01.9 **Support K-12 Education**

Advocate for youth in the community by supporting K-12 education by providing funding and resources in order to benefit the next generation.

**01.10** *Support Self Sufficiency*

Plan for programs and resources to support all people and families in Pitkin County to have access to the resources they need to satisfy their basic needs and to be financially self-sufficient.

**01.11** *Climate Change Impacts to Health*

Educate and promote awareness about the effects of climate change on public health in Pitkin County and neighboring jurisdictions by connecting with community-based organizations and identifying populations that may be especially impacted.

**Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment:  
*Section 03 Community Housing*



*Photo: Pitkin County Administration Building entry, Pitkin County, 2023*

# 02 Healthy Economy

**A healthy economy** is one where community-oriented and local businesses thrive; where jobs provide year-round financial security; and where our workforce is valued and supported regardless of whether they live within or outside of Pitkin County boundaries.

**A sustainable economy** is one that is available to all - where our county supports small businesses, living wage jobs, and the workforce across all sectors, while responsibly managing the impacts of large homes and residential intensity, while not penalizing the workforce.

Our **local economy requires balance**: between job offerings and workforce; workforce and housing; rural and urban areas; between the pace of growth and the ability of our civic and social infrastructures to keep up with that growth.

Our community relies on **critical community services** to keep our school and hospitals staffed, our roads safe, our busses running, our children cared for, and be at the ready in case of emergency. These jobs - and most importantly our friends and neighbors who perform them - are necessary for our community to function and are essential to our community fabric.

## 02.1 **Advocate for Critical Community Services**

Advocate to maintain and bolster critical community services and allocate resources for the community members who perform these critical community services.

- a. Support incentives to attract, retain, and support critical community service providers for critical community services including, but not limited to, emergency response, transit, road and bridge, healthcare, adult and child welfare, teaching and childcare;
- b. Coordinate with community partners to develop local pipelines for youth to pursue careers in needed community services;
- c. Allocate resources and funding to support the staffing of critical community services;
- d. Provide housing opportunities to ensure that those who provide critical functions for the local community have access to housing within the local community.

## 02.2 **Economic Resilience**

Support the development of strategies to encourage a diverse economy in order to respond to

changing snowpack and other climate-related factors as they may impact tourism; and develop plans and regulations for rebuilding in the aftermath of a natural disaster to promote a rapid return to economic sustainability.

## 02.3 **Economic Diversification**

Identify opportunities to expand the availability of employment and income-generating activities that provide a livable wage by supporting a diversity of sectors that economically support the local community and workforce.

## 02.4 **Year-Round Financial Stability**

Promote opportunities and resources for year-round financial stability for those employed in the seasonal resort economy.

## 02.5 **Pursue and Leverage Economic Partnerships**

Pursue and leverage opportunities to collaborate with municipalities, economic development and businesses, community based nonprofits, and educational institutions to create and foster partnerships and networks in an effort to advance a sustainable, local economy that supports our workforce.

- 02.6** ***Engagement with Workforce***  
Develop forums and communication channels with the Pitkin County workforce to provide opportunities for participation and the provision of feedback regarding planning decisions that affect those who participate in Pitkin County's workforce.
- 02.7** ***Workforce Development***  
Identify resources to support workforce development, training, technology, and education to address the evolving needs of the workforce and promote diversification within the economy.
- 02.8** ***Local Pipelines for Local Youth***  
Plan for pipelines that enable local youth to find professional opportunities in the community in an effort to ensure those who grow up in the community have the ability to remain in the community.
- 02.9** ***Community-Oriented and Local Businesses***  
Maintain, prioritize and encourage small-business development for community-oriented, local serving and locally based businesses.
- 02.10** ***Improve Financial Security***  
Provide education around skill building and financial literacy

that promotes financial security and financial self-sufficiency for individuals and families who live and work in Pitkin County.

#### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 – Built Environment: *Section 03 Community Housing* and Chapter 6 – Regional Approach: *Section 04 Strategic Partnerships*

# 03 Lifelong Services

## 03.1 **Lifelong Advocacy**

Advocate for policies, programs, and standards in support of the health, wellbeing, and safety for all members of the Pitkin County community throughout their life course.

## 03.2 **Early Childhood**

Advocate for the health, safety, education, support and care for children in the community through programs including affordable childcare, coordinated resources, and support for working families.

## 03.3 **Youth & Family**

Promote the social, emotional, physical, educational and economic wellbeing of youth and families through programs including resources for K-12 education, organized sports, access to the outdoors, and civic education.

## 03.4 **Adult Services**

Plan for supportive services for adults in the community to achieve independence and self-sufficiency to provide for basic needs.

## 03.5 **Older Adult Support**

Promote and enhance programs to support the physical, social, educational and recreational

activities for older adults that support physical health, social belonging and community connections, mindful of community needs as demographic trends evolve.

## 03.6 **Age-Friendly Community**

Plan for and maintain Pitkin County's status as an Age-Friendly Community by dedicating resources and programming to make the community more livable for people of all ages, especially older adults.

## 03.7 **Non-English Speaking Adults**

Create opportunities for non-English speaking members of the community to connect with each other and promote community with other older adults.

## 03.8 **Intergenerational Connections**

Expand intergenerational opportunities for community members of all ages to learn, socialize and connect together.

## 03.9 **Lifelong Education**

Partner with community organizations to provide accessible and quality education for lifelong learning from early childhood education, K-12, community learning and throughout their life

course.

## 03.10 **Life-Cycle Stage Specific Support**

Work with specific populations to identify how and when services can be provided in an accessible manner as a complement to other lifecycle appropriate activities in an effort to recognize that community members and workforce require different types of services at different stages of life.

# 04 Local Food

- 04.1 *Improve Food Security***  
Develop programs to identify, engage, and connect food insecure families, adults, youth and older adults with resources in order to meet their nutritional needs.
- 04.2 *Food System Resilience***  
Support investments in local food production and food systems in order to enhance community resilience in the face of supply-chain interruptions or the impacts of other community disasters.
- 04.3 *Local Food Production***  
Collaborate with community partners to maintain and increase local food production in order to improve access to nutritious food; develop food production that reduces the impact on climate change; and foster community connection to the local agricultural communities.
- 04.4 *Support Local Growers***  
Support local growers and markets in order to provide reliable access to a sufficient supply of affordable, nutritious, and locally grown food.

- 04.5 *Education for Food Security***  
Educate and engage the broad community in order to increase awareness regarding food insecurity.

## **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 3 - Natural Environment: *Section 03 Agricultural Lands*

DRAFT

# 05 Public Safety & Emergency Response

- 05.1** **Emergency Operations**  
Develop emergency operations programs and commit resources to save lives and minimize injury to persons and infrastructure, the environment, and property (both public and private) in the event of natural or human-caused disasters.
- 05.2** **Emergency Management**  
Plan for emergency management by supporting pre-disaster operations, emergency response operations, and post-disaster recovery operations in order to achieve prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.
- 05.3** **Prevention**  
Develop actions that prevent, stop, or reduce the likelihood of a natural or human-caused disasters
- 05.4** **Protection**  
Plan for actions that protect Pitkin County's citizens, residents, visitors, infrastructure, and assets against the threats and hazards identified to pose the greatest threat to the community.
- 05.5** **Mitigation**  
Advance actions that reduce loss of life and damage to property by lessening the impacts of future disasters.

- 05.6** **Response**  
Design actions that support an effective emergency response to quickly save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs.
- 05.7** **Recovery**  
Plan for actions that support the timely restoration; strengthening and revitalization of infrastructure; housing and a sustainable economy; as well as the health, social, cultural, historic and environmental fabric of communities impacted by a catastrophic incident.
- 05.8** **Emergency Communications**  
Ensure that communications plans reach everyone in the community in order to increase awareness of emergency communications and response for those who live, visit, and work in Pitkin County including non-English communications.
- 05.9** **Emergency Evacuation**  
Support emergency evacuation planning and infrastructure in order to facilitate evacuation in the event of natural disasters and identify and develop secondary egress routes for various population centers throughout

Pitkin County.

- 05.10** **Emergency Health Service Coordination**  
Support healthcare system coordination between hospitals, emergency medical services, outpatient physicians, and community partner organizations.
- 05.11** **Promote Public Safety Education**  
Promote public safety education regarding hazards, risks, and local concerns in order to ensure that both residents and visitors to Pitkin County are promptly informed of public safety risks in the area.

## **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 3 - Natural Environment: *Section 08 Environmental Hazards*

# 06 Hazard Mitigation

## Pitkin County Hazard Risk Summary

Source: Pitkin County Mitigation Plan (2023)

HAZARD	PITKIN COUNTY
Avalanche	Medium
Contagious Disease	Medium
Cyber-Attack	High
Dam Inundation	Low
Drought	High
Flooding	Medium
Geologic Hazards	High
Ice Jam Release	Medium
Lightning	Low
Wildfire	High
Winter Storm	High

The 2023 Pitkin County Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies the natural and human-caused hazards of greatest concern to Pitkin County. The information generated through the risk assessment helps communities to prioritize and focus their efforts on those hazards of greatest concern and those assets or areas facing the greatest risk(s). The best available information on the impacts of changing weather conditions was taken into account for each hazard. The hazards profiled in the 2023 Plan are listed in the table above.

### 06.1 Plan for Hazard Mitigation

Support ongoing planning efforts to address hazards in Pitkin County through periodic comprehensive risk assessment and hazard mitigation evaluation.

### 06.2 Impacts on Human Life & Safety

Reduce the potential for impacts on human life and safety, property loss and damage to critical facilities and the natural environment by natural and human-caused hazards.

### 06.3 Public Awareness

Increase the public's awareness of Pitkin County's hazard vulnerabilities and promote hazard mitigation activities by residents.

### 06.4 Resilience to Hazards

Increase Pitkin County's resiliency to hazards by integrating mitigation into all planning initiatives in order to enable faster recovery from disasters.

### 06.5 Collaborative Planning

Recognizing the common issues and mutual goals of hazard mitigation and climate adaptation, promote collaborative planning and identify opportunities to dovetail actions that reduce risks from both natural hazards and climate warming.

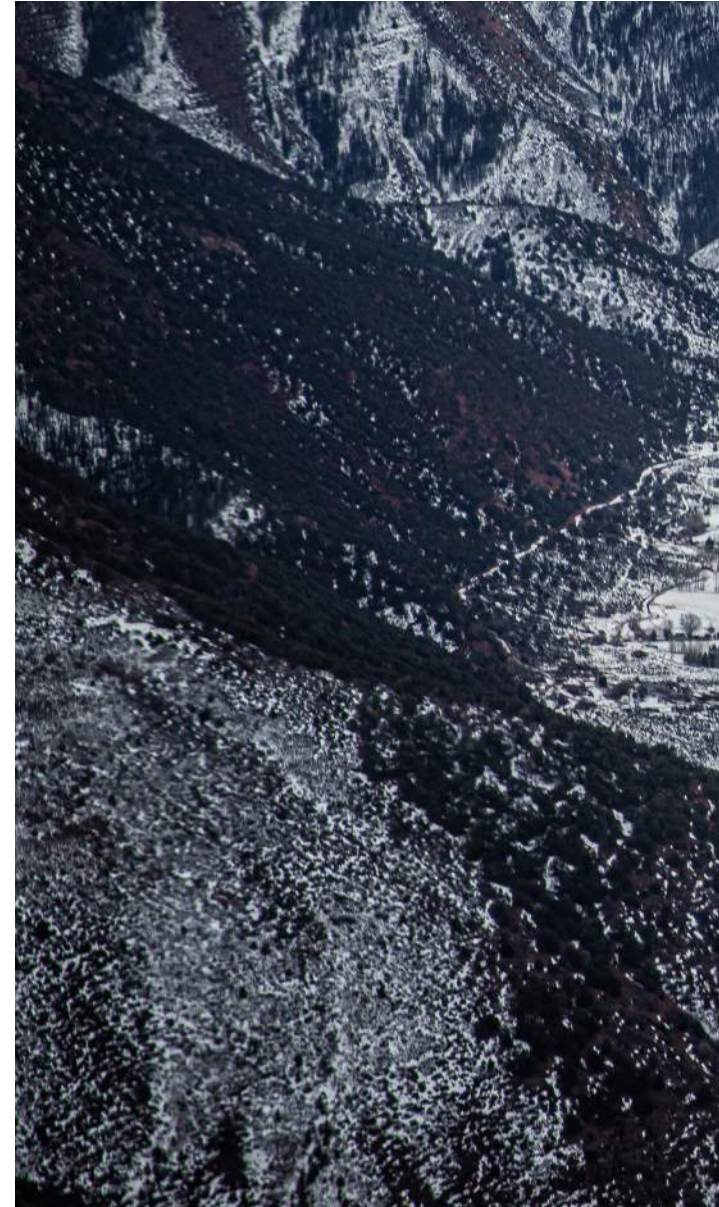
### 06.6 Promote Equity in Hazard Mitigation Planning

Promote equity by ensuring those with access and functional needs are planned for and included in all stages of hazard mitigation planning and preparedness.

### Complementary Policies

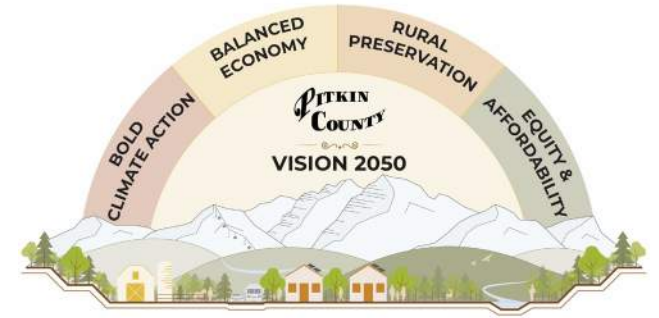
See Chapter 3 - Natural Environment: Section 08 Environmental Hazards

DRAFT





# Regional Approach



# Regional Approach Goal:

**Collaborate valley-wide to design and implement systemic solutions to our most challenging and complex challenges, from transportation to housing to climate. One jurisdiction cannot do it all.**

## GROUNDING IN OUR VALUES

*A Regional Approach* enables Pitkin County to influence the issues that are of most concern to our community and align our values across our broader region with partner municipalities, counties, and adjacent communities. Taking **Bold Climate Action** means working with regional partners to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Seeking **Rural Preservation** requires a land use code that reflects community values and strategic partnerships to conserve and protect our landscape at the watershed scale. At the regional level, striving for a **Balanced Economy** necessitates inter-jurisdictional coordination to support our regional economy and workforce. And above all, our value of **Equity and Affordability** means addressing complex challenges with solutions that aim to benefit the community both within and beyond our county boundaries.



## INTRODUCTION

### *Promoting a Regional Approach*

Promoting a Regional Approach is about recognizing Pitkin County's role as part of the larger region. The complex challenges we face and the opportunities they present, cannot be solved unilaterally. Municipalities, adjacent counties, and valley-wide community partner organizations all contribute to planning decisions made for the Roaring Fork Valley and our region.

Pitkin County maintains its deep roots in its agricultural and ranching history. Today however, Pitkin County is a regional economic driver given its status as a premier ski area and rural resort destination for tourism, recreation, and vacation homes. Highway 82 is a major connector between communities, as many travel from our homes between communities for work, school, services and recreation. Housing, transportation, and watershed-wide environmental protections are challenges that must be addressed at the regional scale. As we consider our place in the broader region: ***How do decisions made in Pitkin County impact and support a sustainable and resilient regional quality of life and economy for the future?***

### *Regional Economy*

From 2018 to 2023, wages have grown in Pitkin County by 45% and average annual wages in Pitkin County are \$13,000 higher in Pitkin than in adjacent Garfield and Eagle Counties. Pitkin County draws 62% of its workforce from surrounding jurisdictions, primarily pulling from communities from Basalt to Glenwood Springs along the Roaring Fork and from Edwards to Parachute along the Colorado River Valley. Significantly, 24% of workers whose primary jobs are located in Pitkin County travel over 50 miles to work, living as far away as Grand Junction (130 miles), Montrose (135 miles) and even Denver (200 miles). (*US Census Bureau, On the Map, 2023*)

The influx of workers swells Pitkin County's daytime population as Highway 82 surges with commuters traveling up valley on their way to jobs in residential construction, home operations, resort services, among others. The regional impact of Pitkin County's economy makes evident the importance of planning that reflects the county's role as part of a larger region.

### *Greater Roaring Fork Valley*

Functionally, the Greater Roaring Fork Valley operates as an archipelago of jurisdictions strung together along major transportation corridors over 80-miles, from Aspen to Parachute. This spans Independence Pass at the Continental Divide to the Frying Pan Valley, up the Colorado River passing Glenwood Canyon to Edwards and downriver to the mouth of De Beque Canyon. This reach extends along Highway 82 and Interstate 70 through three counties, nine municipalities, and four school districts. It is commonplace to live in one community and work in another. While politics, culture, and socioeconomics may differ between communities, the fluidity and connectivity within our region underscores our interdependence.

### **Regional Connections**

While many shared challenges and opportunities cross-cut our communities, workforce, and local governments, planning regionally is hard work. Tax revenue and financial resources are generally located in up valley communities of the City of Aspen, Town of Snowmass Village, and unincorporated Pitkin County where higher property values, major employment hubs, and resort tourism drive the economy. These up valley communities are wealthier and trend older than communities down valley.

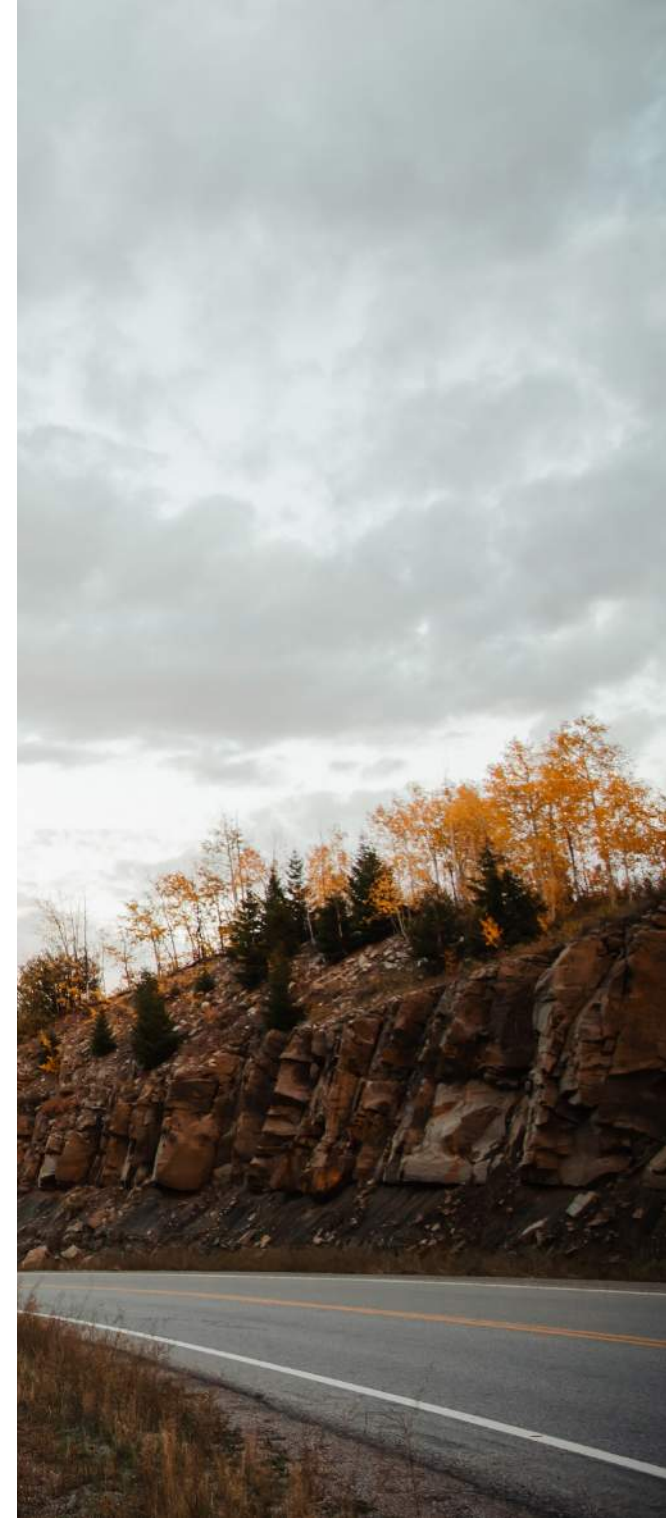
Demographically, down valley populations in Garfield and Eagle Counties are younger, more ethnically diverse, and growing at a faster pace in contrast to those in Pitkin County. This growth is driven by net migration, especially by the Latino community whose population increased by 22% in Garfield since 2010. Locally appointed and elected representatives are charged with advocating for their local constituents. The differences and disparities across regional economics, demographics, and politics contribute to the challenge of inter-jurisdictional collaboration. However, increased recognition of our shared values and

interdependent quality of life has advanced the need for regional collaboration. *(CO State Demography Office, 2024)*

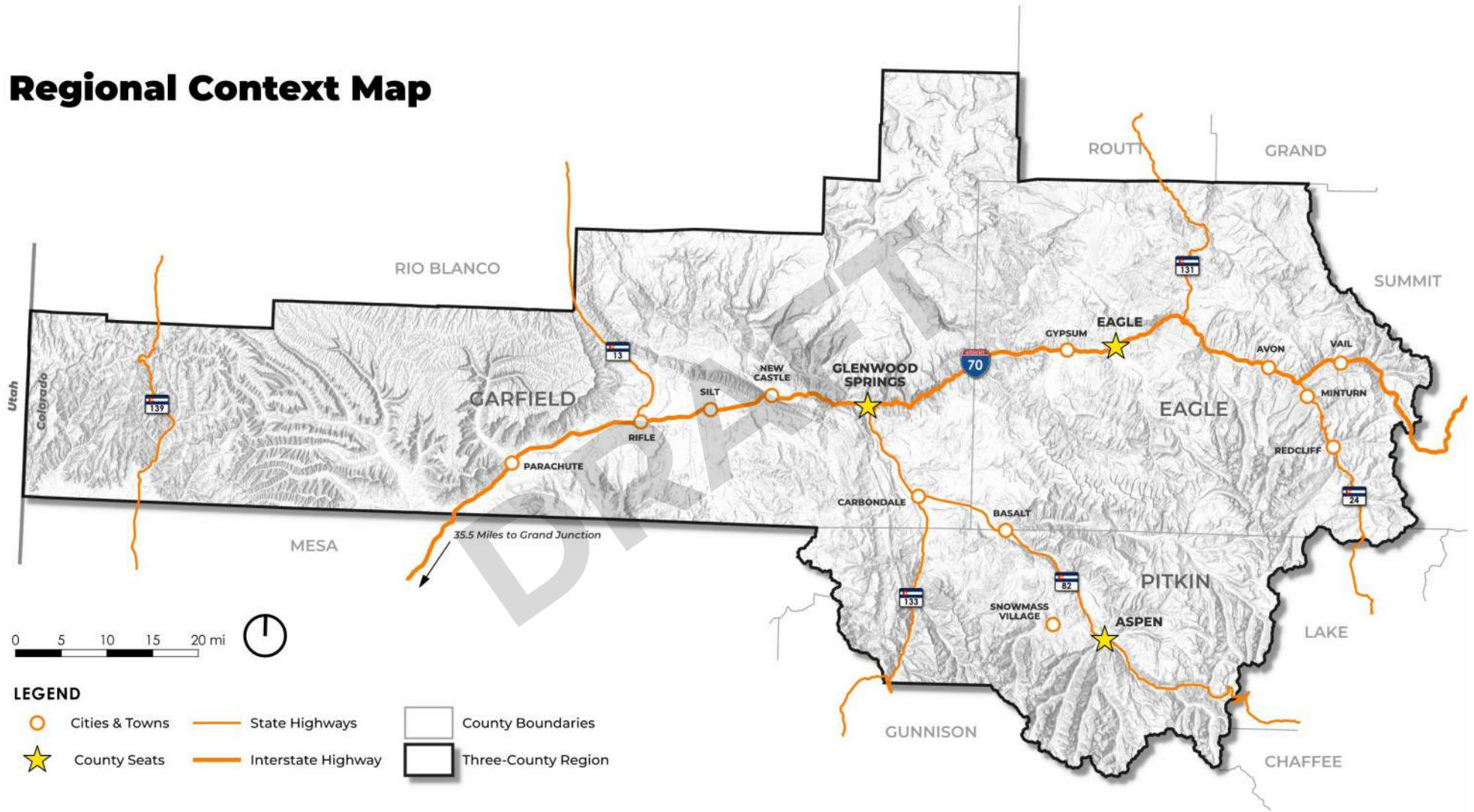
Notably, the Community Growth Advisory Committee (CGAC) called for a regional approach to carry out their recommendations: *“Create an equitable, sustainable, and resilient regional quality of life and economy for the future.”* As we embark on the Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan, it is important to recognize our role and impact in the region as we make decisions through our policies and planning. *(CGAC Final Recommendations Report, 2023)*

*“We travel for work, recreation and even for services... many of our community members might have their child care in a county, their job in a different county, their home in a different county.”*

**State Representative Elizabeth Velasco, House District 57**



# Regional Context Map



Source Data: US Geologic Survey,  
Map Created 2024

## BROAD COMMUNITY DIRECTION

From the CGAC Recommendations to community input and stakeholder feedback, regionalism is top of mind for many in our community. The following statements synthesize the community strategies that inform policy direction:

- ▶ **Regional Coordination Priorities of Housing and Transportation:**  
Foster and strengthen regional partnerships in order to remove barriers to regional coordination in an effort to redefine and prioritize strategies to support community housing and transportation.
- ▶ **Preserve and Protect Regional Environmental Systems:**  
The natural environment does not conform to the same jurisdictional boundaries as the built environment. Pitkin County relies on connections with its regional partners to preserve and protect biodiversity across our watersheds, mountain ranges, and valley floors.
- ▶ **Quality of Life is a Regional Concern:**  
The CGAC underscored the need for policy in order to: “Create an equitable, sustainable, and resilient regional quality of life and economy for the future.”
- ▶ **Up Valley Decisions Down Valley Consequences for our Workforce:**  
Policy making and planning decisions in Pitkin County can impact those who may not live in Pitkin County but work in the local economy, especially related to transportation and mobility; commuting traffic and congestion; job opportunities and wages; and housing and affordability.



## Overview of Policy Areas:

**01 Regional Transportation:** *Establishes broad support for regional transportation policies and programs.*

**02 Regional Climate:** *Identifies opportunities and partnerships that connect local climate action work to climate action efforts across our region.*

**03 Watershed-Wide Environmental Protections:** *Promotes strategies to engage regionally to support the lands and waters within the Roaring Fork Watershed and the Western Slope of Colorado.*

**04 Strategic Partnerships:** *Recognizes the value of regional partnerships, including public-private partnerships.*

# Key Terms

**COMMUNITY HOUSING:** Community Housing refers to housing that is intentionally planned, developed, or preserved to meet the diverse needs of the local community. It includes housing for the workforce, seniors, and people in transitional situations, ensuring that residents of all income levels, ages, and stages of life can live and thrive locally. Community housing prioritizes affordability, accessibility, and long-term availability to support a resilient, inclusive community fabric and to maintain opportunities for those who work, contribute to, and call the community home.

**DOWN VALLEY:** In the Roaring Fork Valley, down valley refers to the direction towards Glenwood Springs (northwest) along Highway 82. Locals generally refer to Glenwood Springs and sometimes even communities further west along I-70 in Garfield County as down valley.

**ELECTRIFICATION:** The process of replacing technologies that use fossil fuels with those powered by electricity.

**ELECTRIC GRID:** An electric grid is an interconnected regional network for electricity transmission and delivery from producers to consumers.

**EOTC:** The Elected Officials Transportation Committee (EOTC) in Pitkin County, Colorado, is an advisory body comprised of elected officials from Aspen, Snowmass Village, and Pitkin County. It was established to oversee the fixed-route public transit system in the Roaring Fork Valley. The committee's purpose is to advise on transportation matters and ensure the effective allocation of funds from a county-wide sales and use tax dedicated to public transit.

**INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT:** Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. It is an essential criteria in development review to ensure that proposed developments have sufficient water supply.

**MULTI MODAL TRANSPORTATION:** Types of transportation that typically diminish reliance upon the automobile by supporting and enhancing access to affordable, efficient public mass transit and connectivity, and first and last mile solutions, including bike and pedestrian connections to trail systems and transit stops.

**REGIONAL PLANNING:** Planning that considers not just a single jurisdictional area, but includes municipalities and adjacent counties. Regional planning aims to address issues that transcend local jurisdictional boundaries.

**TRANSPORTATION NETWORK:** A regional transportation network refers to the interconnected transportation infrastructure and routes that facilitate the movement of people and goods, linking multiple communities within a broader geographic area.

**UP VALLEY:** In the Roaring Fork Valley, up valley refers to the direction toward Aspen (southeast) along Highway 82. Locals generally describe the communities of Aspen and Snowmass Village as up valley.

**WATERSHED:** An area of land where all surface water and groundwater eventually flows into a common outlet or larger body of water, such as the Colorado River.

# Measures of Success

OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
Strengthen partnerships at the local, state, and federal levels to address affordable housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Multi-jurisdictional Housing Needs Assessment.</i></li> <li>• <i>West Mountain Regional Housing Coalition.</i></li> </ul>
Increase multi-jurisdictional planning to achieve progressive tactical climate resiliency and environmental adaptation measures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Regional Wildfire Collaborative.</i></li> <li>• <i>Pitkin County Hazard Mitigation Plan.</i></li> <li>• <i>Regional Climate Roadmap.</i></li> <li>• <i>Roaring Fork Conservancy Watershed Management Plan (and other watershed management plans).</i></li> <li>• <i>Watershed Biodiversity Initiative Plan.</i></li> <li>• <i>Roaring Fork Outdoor Coalition.</i></li> </ul>
Support consistent coordination between local and regional efforts to facilitate transportation, affordability, climate action, and environmental protections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Transit/RFTA Ridership.</i></li> <li>• <i>EOTC.</i></li> <li>• <i>Multi-jurisdictional GHG Inventory.</i></li> <li>• <i>Tracking regional socioeconomic performance indicators.</i></li> </ul>
Reduce overall regional congestion, vehicle miles traveled, and the associated greenhouse gas emissions and quality of life impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Transit/RFTA Ridership.</i></li> <li>• <i>VMT and Traffic Counts.</i></li> <li>• <i>Transportation Intensity Study.</i></li> <li>• <i>Multi-jurisdictional GHG Inventory.</i></li> </ul>

# 01 Regional Transportation

## 01.1 **Aspen/Pitkin County Airport**

The Aspen/Pitkin County Airport is a critical element of the region's transportation network. Continue to ensure safe, reliable, and clean commercial air service for the region and multi-modal ground transportation.

## 01.2 **Work Collectively to Support Regional Transportation**

**Goals** Foster and strengthen relationships with municipalities, adjacent counties and community partners throughout the region in an effort to work collectively to align goals and priorities, and achieve a convenient, equitable, innovative and efficient regional transportation system.

## 01.3 **Explore New Regional Transportation Technologies**

Explore emerging technologies intended to address regional transportation challenges with a focus on sustainability, safety, and integrated mobility

## 01.4 **Support Regional Planning, Funding and Programs for Public Transportation**

Support planning, funding and programs that encourage the utilization of public transportation inclusive of:

- a. Direct coordination with Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA);
- b. Participation in the Elected Officials Transportation Committee (EOTC);
- c. Reducing barriers to promote affordable and accessible public transportation through the region;
- d. Planning for multi-modal transportation access throughout the region;
- e. Support for planning and programs to mitigate and reduce single occupancy vehicle travel throughout the region;
- f. Support for Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) planning, funding, and implementation of statewide and regional transportation plans.

## 01.5 **Road Management Partnerships**

Work with adjacent and partner jurisdictions such as the City of Aspen, Eagle County, and Garfield County, Town of Snowmass Village, Town of Basalt, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service (USFS), and private interests to manage roads across jurisdictions consistently and

effectively.

## 01.6 **Coordinated Transportation Data Collection**

Coordinate data collection efforts between jurisdictions in the region in order to monitor and analyze traffic patterns in an effort to support inter-jurisdictional planning and management efforts throughout the region.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 4 - Built Environment: *Section 05 Transportation & Mobility*

# 02 Regional Climate Action

## 02.1 **Integrated Resilience & Adaptation**

Integrate stream, watershed, forest management, hazard mitigation, and public health planning efforts, using a holistic approach to identify crosscutting projects that are high priority, impactful to improving climate and natural hazard resiliency, and provide multiple resiliency benefits.

## 02.2 **Regional Partnerships for Climate Action**

Coordinate with municipalities, local government associations, utilities and other local and regional climate partners to ensure consistency and efficiencies and amplify impact relating to climate action across agencies and jurisdictions.

## 02.3 **Regional Waste Coalition**

Develop a regional waste coalition engaging municipalities, businesses, nearby landfills, and other stakeholders to strengthen and align regional waste diversion efforts, including effective strategies to reduce the waste streams of new and emerging renewable and high-performing building technologies.

## 02.4 **Alternative Fueling Infrastructure**

Promote equitable access to alternative fueling infrastructure, including electric vehicle charging stations throughout the region.

## 02.5 **Reduce Climate Change Driven Wildfires & Related Costs**

Encourage state, local, and regional funding and actions to support implementation of wildfire mitigation strategies and actions, reduce the risk of wildfire, and the related cost of homeowners insurance.

## 02.6 **Local and Regional Benefits of Agricultural Landscapes**

Recognize the local and regional climate benefits associated with agricultural production and conserved landscapes, including carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas mitigation.

## 02.7 **Continued Coordination and Shared Resources**

Convene with regional partners and jurisdictions for continued collaboration to achieve mutual goals. Specific topics include but not limited to:

- a. Supporting the work of inter-jurisdictional the Regional Net Zero Roadmap effort to achieve alignment on net-zero energy

and net-zero emissions goals for new construction by 2030 in building and energy codes.

- b. Collecting and sharing regional climate data including on community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, vehicle counter data, and other sources.
- c. Finding opportunities for clean energy production, storage, and demand response demonstration projects and sharing learnings to support the clean energy transition.
- d. Planning with the region on existing building decarbonization policies.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 3 - Natural Environment: *Section 03 Agricultural Lands* and Chapter 4 - Built Environment: *Section 01 Climate Action in the Built*

# 04 Strategic Partnerships

- 04.1 Support Regional Planning**  
Foster and strengthen relationships between municipalities, counties, state, and federal agencies in order to plan for efficient and effective solutions relating to region-wide topics including: transportation, wildfire mitigation, health services, childcare, emergency response, landscape conservation, and data collection.
- 04.2 Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs)**  
Maintain existing and pursue new intergovernmental agreements to facilitate implementation of common land use goals, shared community values, and cooperation in order to address issues of mutual concern.
- 04.3 Regional Wildfire Collaboration**  
Partner and collaborate cross-jurisdictionally by identifying, prioritizing, and implementing strategies to increase wildfire mitigation and fire-resilience in the region.
- 04.4 Regional Emergency Response**  
Support and maintain regional multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional hazard coordination and incident management through the Public Safety Council.

- 04.5 Regional Emergency Health Service Coordination**  
Support regional emergency health service coordination with Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE), the Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response field manager, regional epidemiologist, and Northwest Regional Healthcare Coalition.
- 04.6 Regional Childcare Collaboration**  
Support and strengthen regional partnerships to expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare by coordinating planning, funding, and program delivery across jurisdictions. Partner with counties, towns, school districts, state agencies, and community organizations to develop sustainable childcare solutions that meet the needs of families and the regional workforce.

## **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 5 - Community/Economic Health: *Sections 01 Healthy Community and 02 Healthy Economy*

# 03

## Watershed-Wide Environmental Protections

### **03.1 Support for Regional Biodiversity, Habitat and Wildlife**

Support regional efforts and landscape-scale management planning with land managers to protect critical habitats to restore and support native wildlife and biodiversity in the region.

### **03.2 Regional Environmental Conservation Coordination**

Coordinate Pitkin County's environmental conservation planning with regional conservation partners and planning efforts.

### **03.3 Preserve and Enhance Roaring Fork Watershed**

Work with regional partners to preserve and enhance the health and habitat of the Roaring Fork watershed health by protecting the rivers, streams, and riparian resources.

### **03.4 Protect Western Slope and Headwaters Water Resources**

Protect the water resources of the western slope and headwaters by seeking support of other local governments, community partners, and water coalitions.

### **03.5 Integrated Water Resource Management**

Foster cooperative regional management of water resources by pursuing an integrated water-resource management approach in order to collaborate across sectors, jurisdictions, and agencies for planning and implementation.

### **03.6 Regional Coordination for Drought Management**

Support regional coordination regarding drought management and water shortage communications.

### **03.7 Regional Support for Federal and State Lands**

As a unified region, support the continued public management and permanent protection of federal and state lands to conserve watersheds and landscapes that are critical to Pitkin County and the region's ecological health, economy, and local communities.

### **Complementary Policies**

See Chapter 03 – Natural Environment: *Sections 01 Natural Resources & Biodiversity, 02 Water Quality & Quantity, and 06 Public Lands & Open Space*

# Appendix

## Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan Implementation Matrix, January 2026

### Supplementary Reports

- Community Growth Advisory Committee Final Report, May 2023
- Final Vision 2050 Intensity White Paper, July 2025
- Pitkin County Utility Study, July 2025
- Economic Intensity Study, July 2025
- Final Transportation Intensity Study, July 2025
- Vision 2050 Engagement Summary 2024-2025, December 2025
- Pitkin County Water Conditions Report, January 2026

*Note: Appendix documents are not formally adopted by Pitkin County appointed or elected officials and are provided for reference purposes only. These documents are available digitally on the Pitkin County website and in hard copy at the Pitkin County Community Development Office located at 530 E Main St, Aspen, CO 81611.*

