

# Introduction

*“The trouble with the future is it usually arrives before we’re ready for it.” - Arnold H. Glasgow*

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## Purpose and Scope

The Countywide Comprehensive Plan (hereafter referred to as “the Plan”) provides the public policy base from which good planning decisions can be made. The Plan is intended to provide general policy guidance for decisions pertaining to land use, growth, and a number of related issues in the County. The Plan applies to all unincorporated lands in the County and will be used by the Countywide Planning Commission, the four basin planning commissions, and the Board of County Commissioners (“BOCC”) as a guide for decisions that affect the physical development of the County.

Major development proposals, such as rezonings, Planned Unit Developments PUDs, subdivisions, Conditional Use Permits (“CUPs”) and regulatory revisions must be evaluated to ensure that the proposals are in “*general conformity*” with the Plan’s advisory provisions. The Plan is also to be used as a guide for future work projects intended to enhance the County’s character, services and infrastructure. In addition, the Plan articulates a common vision for the future and informs citizens, landowners, and developers of the desired goals, and policies/actions, which will shape the future of the County. The Plan provides a means for the County to communicate planning issues with the towns and federal and state agencies.

The Plan is expressly intended to be applied consistently and in harmony with basin and subbasin plans. While the Plan sets overall or broader guidelines, the basin and subbasin plans are intended to set more specific guidelines and direction for that particular basin or area. Accordingly, this Plan, basin and subbasin plans shall not be deemed to be in conflict unless no other reasonable interpretation is available.

Throughout the development of the 2003 edition of the Plan, several key tenets were used to focus planning efforts: **consolidation**, **sustainability**, **implementation**, and **measurability**. Consolidation refers to the process of combining and harmonizing existing goals, policies, actions, strategies or guidelines from different basin master plans into one countywide policy. Sustainability is one of the key themes of the plan: whether the topic is environment, land use, or economy, the theme is maintaining our resources within the carrying capacity of our mountain setting. Implementation refers to the many future steps that will need to be taken to enact the policies/actions of the Plan. Measurability refers to the attempts in each element to set some baseline measurements and then to monitor those over time to determine progress.

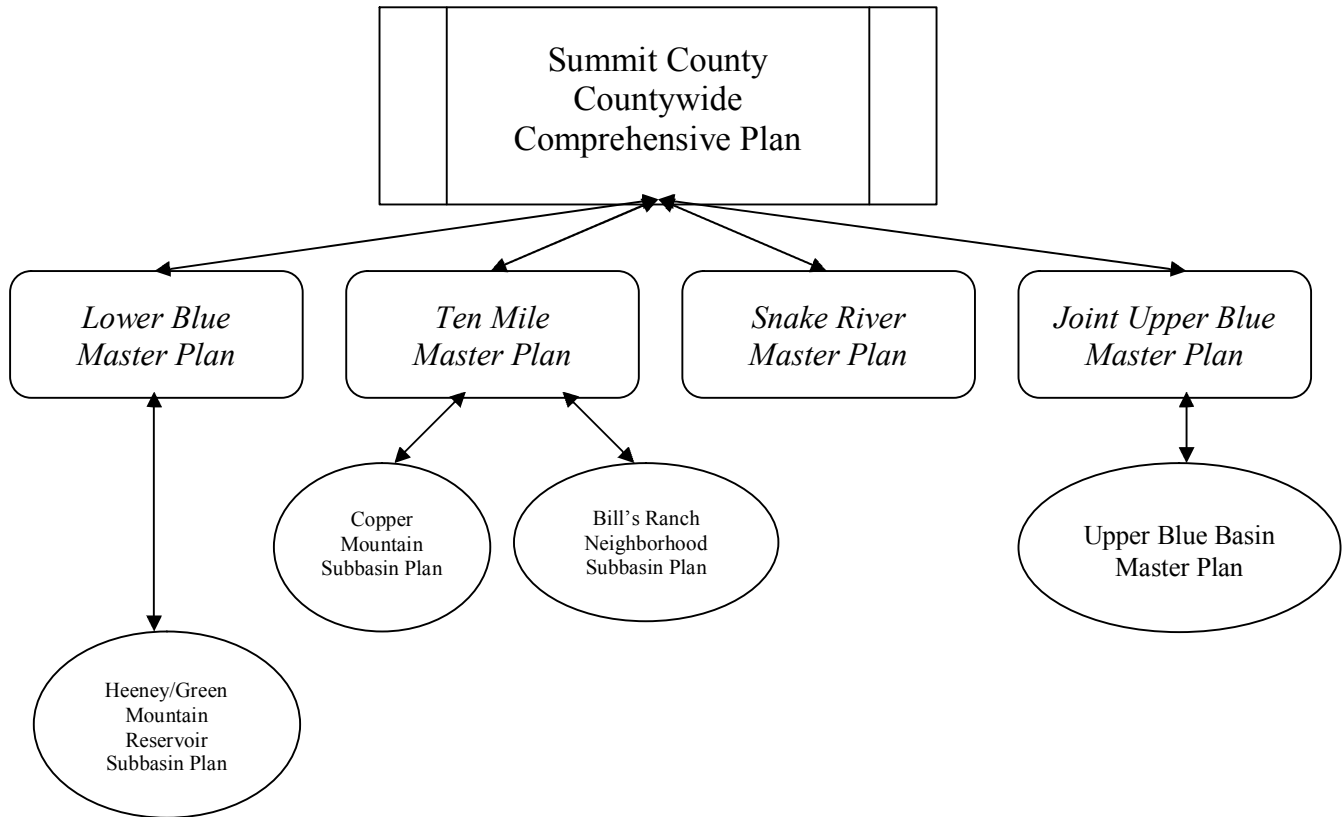
## Hierarchy and Relationship to Other Master Plan Documents

The Plan is the umbrella document, which sets forth the general parameters and fundamental planning concepts for other County basin and subbasin master plans, and establishes the broader policy foundation upon which these other master plans elaborate. In this regard, the Plan is not intended to restrict or confine basin plans, but rather to provide the platform for more specific and elaborate policy guidance.

The County utilizes basin master plans for each of its four planning basins: the Lower Blue, Snake River, Ten Mile and Upper Blue. There are also subbasin master plans established for select areas within each of these basins (i.e. Copper Mountain, Bill’s Ranch Neighborhood, and Heeney/Green Mountain Reservoir subbasin plans). The master plans are all intended to work in harmony and complement each other. Whereas the broader or general overall parameters are set in the Countywide Comprehensive Plan,

basin and subbasin plans are relied upon for more specifics. Accordingly, no conflicts, direct or indirect, within such plans or between such plans, or the goals and policies therein, shall be considered to exist if there exists any reasonable interpretation that would allow all the provisions of such plans at issue to remain in effect.

**Summit County Master Plan Hierarchy and Interrelationship**



Application and Interpretation of Master Plans

The Review Authority (whether BOCC, planning commission or planning staff) has the right and authority to interpret and balance master plans. A Review Authority is entitled to deference in evaluating whether there has been “*general conformity*” and compliance with the County’s master plans. In other words—it is up to the Review Authority to assign weight to particular policies in a master plan on a case-by-case basis in light of the particular circumstances. Moreover, master plan goals and policies have a legislative basis in numerous types of development applications or reviews. The scope and application of the goals and policies is a matter left to the sound discretion of the Review Authority.

Amendments to the Plan

Conditions in a community change over time and the Plan needs to be a dynamic document that can be modified. Since adoption of the 2003 edition of the Plan, the Countywide Planning Commission has and will continue to monitor the Plan and identify potential changes necessary to improve its effectiveness. The planning commission will review the Plan on a regular basis as required by the Summit County Land

Use And Development Code (at least once every five years).

Moreover, it is the goal of the Plan that future master planning efforts in the County continue to be developed with an emphasis on extensive public participation. The planning process should be structured so as to afford maximum opportunity for residents to effectively shape the future of their community. These public participation goals are articulated in the “Template for Future Master Plans”.

### Legislative Foundation

Enabling legislation in Colorado gives local communities the authority to plan their future. State statutes make the master plan the cornerstone for planning, while providing local government with several legally enforceable tools to assist in achieving the spirit of the plan. State law cites the general purpose of a master plan as “guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the county or region”, CRS §30-28-107, and further sets forth a broad set of appropriate considerations in the effort to direct the physical development of unincorporated territory in the County (Colorado Revised Statutes 30-28-106). Because this is the Countywide Comprehensive Plan, the Countywide Planning Commission is responsible for adoption of the Plan. The County has chosen to address issues in ten topic areas, corresponding to the Plan’s ten elements.

### Mandatory/Advisory Plan Provisions

The BOCC, by action taken in Resolution # 04-06, has determined that all policies/actions in this Plan are advisory. Currently no County master plan contains mandatory provisions. However, what is required is consideration of master plan goals and policies. The Summit County Land Use and Development Code makes “*general conformance*” with the provisions of master plans binding. The Review Authority has the authority to consider, and even require, compliance with master plans in applicable applications (i.e. zoning, rezonings, PUDs, subdivisions, CUPs, and regulatory revisions).

### Organization of the Plan

In addition to this Introduction section, a Countywide Vision Statement, Template for Future Master Plans, and Definitions sections are provided. The heart of the Plan is the ten elements, addressing different subject areas that are key issues in the County. These elements include:

- Land Use
- Environment
- Transportation
- Housing
- Community and Public Facilities
- Design and Visual Resources
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Open Space
- Recreation and Trails
- Economic Sustainability

Each Plan element includes the following sections:

1. **Introduction/Background** section, which introduces the element, provides relevant data on issues or background information related to the element, and discusses other pertinent issues.
2. **Goals and Policies/Actions** section, which sets forth the policy base upon which future actions and planning decisions will be based. This is the key section of each Plan element,

establishing the County’s policy direction.

3. **Sustainability Measures** section, which outlines measurements to take in the future to gauge progress on a particular issue.
4. **Implementation Strategies**, which identifies different action steps recommended to be taken to implement the element policies and the priorities for undertaking those action steps.

### Regional and Intergovernmental Coordination

Numerous municipalities, agencies, and other entities (e.g., utility districts) are responsible for the management of land use activities in the County. It is recognized that Summit County Government cannot bring the goals and policies of this Plan to fruition without the cooperation of these numerous other entities. Thus, many of the policies/actions and implementation strategies of the Plan emphasize coordination with these entities. For example, coordination with the towns is essential if land use is intended to be consistently planned near the County/Town borders. Likewise, many environmental issues in the County are ultimately affected by policies of agencies such as the state Division of Wildlife and the Colorado Department of Transportation.

The White River National Forest occupies over 80 percent of the total land area in the County. As such, the U.S. Forest Service, as the manager of these lands, plays a significant role in shaping the future of our County. Collaborative planning efforts with the Forest Service are encouraged in the Plan as a means of providing consistency across the County landscape.

<b>Property</b>	<b>Approximate Acres</b>
White River National Forest	313,977
Other Private and Public Lands	82,265
<b>Total Lands</b>	<b>396,245</b>

Source: Summit County GIS Department, 2009.

### The Geographic Setting

Summit County is located among the high peaks of the Colorado Rockies, just on the west side of the Continental Divide. Elevations range from a high point of 14,270 feet at the summit of Grays Peak to just over 7,500 feet at the northern end of the County where the Blue River enters Grand County. The County’s topography is made up of broad mountain valleys flanked by high peaks. Several mountain ranges converge in the County, including portions of the Gore Range, the Tenmile Range, and the Front Range. Two large reservoirs, Dillon and Green Mountain, are located in the central and northern portions of the County, respectively. These reservoirs impound the Blue River, the County’s primary river artery, which intersects with the Colorado River about 15 miles north of the County border. Two large tributaries, the Snake River and Tenmile Creek, also enter Dillon Reservoir.

The County is relatively small in geographic terms, occupying a total land area of approximately 396,000 acres (about 619 square miles). Vegetation found in the County is based primarily on elevation. The lowest elevation areas in the Lower Blue Basin are composed primarily of sage meadows. At around 9,000 feet and above coniferous forest predominates. Timberline is located at approximately 11,500 feet, with areas above that elevation comprised of snow, rock, and alpine tundra.

The County is centrally located in Colorado, being only an hour's drive from the Denver metropolitan area. I-70, the state's main east-west transportation corridor, bisects the County, and enhances the proximity of the County to Denver/Front Range communities. This proximity to a large metropolitan area has contributed greatly to the County's popularity as a mountain recreational area.

The County was not settled until 1859, when gold was discovered in the Breckenridge area. For the next century, development and growth ebbed and flowed with the bust and boom cycles of the mining industry. By the 1960s, however, ski areas started to draw a new wealth to the County in the form of tourism. Tourism and the accompanying second home industry continue to be the main economic forces in the County today. A more detailed description of the County's history can be found in the Historic and Cultural Resources Element.

### Demographics/Population

As of July 2009, the County's year-round population was approximately 29,000 residents. This is a 24% increase in fulltime residents or roughly 2.7% growth in permanent population per year since 2000. The population estimates are based on a methodology using: Certificate of Occupancy (CO) permits issued by the County and towns, vacancy rates, population per household, and forecasting methods utilized by the Colorado Division of Local Government State Demography Office ("State Demographer").

<b>Area</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2007<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>2009<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Incorporated Areas</b>								
Breckenridge	548	818	1,285	2,408	3,123	3,299	3,560	3,724
Blue River	8	230	440	685	711	744	764	764
Dillon	182	337	553	802	806	820	831	861
Frisco	471	1,221	1,601	2,443	2,630	2,700	2,798	2,837
Montezuma			60	42	43	46	50	54
Silverthorne	400	989	1,768	3,196	3,637	3,810	4,097	4,267
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,609</b>	<b>3,595</b>	<b>5,707</b>	<b>9,576</b>	<b>10,950</b>	<b>11,419</b>	<b>12,100</b>	<b>12,507</b>
<b>Unincorporated Areas</b>								
Lower Blue Basin			2,533	4,592	5,037	5,105	5,272	5,323
Snake River Basin			1,765	4,187	4,949	4,976	5,132	5,205
Ten Mile Basin			532	837	1,081	1,156	1,153	1,212
Upper Blue Basin			2,344	4,356	4,873	4,816	4,954	5,033
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,056</b>	<b>5,253</b>	<b>7,174</b>	<b>13,972</b>	<b>15,940</b>	<b>16,053</b>	<b>16,511</b>	<b>16,773</b>
<b>Total Summit County</b>	<b>2,665</b>	<b>8,848</b>	<b>12,881</b>	<b>23,548</b>	<b>26,890</b>	<b>27,472</b>	<b>28,611</b>	<b>29,280</b>

Source: US Census Bureau, State Demographer, and Summit County Planning Department.

<sup>1</sup> The 1970 - 2000 population numbers are based on U.S. Census data.

<sup>2</sup> The 2002 - 2007 populations reflect estimates prepared by the State Demographer.

<sup>3</sup> The 2009 population estimate was prepared by the Summit County Planning Department. The methodology uses the State Demographer's July 2007 estimates as a base or starting point, and then estimates population growth from July 2007 - June 2009 using: CO permits issued by the County and towns, vacancy rates, population per household estimates and forecasting methods utilized by the State Demographer. The 2009 population estimate incorporates all COs issued through July 1, 2009.

As displayed in the above table, approximately 57% of the permanent residents in the County live in unincorporated areas (properties located outside of town boundaries). With the reputation as a national and international center for winter sports and outdoor recreation, peak seasonal population may swell to nearly 160,000 people during peak periods (i.e. Christmas or March). In 2003, monthly average

population fluctuation indexes indicated that March has the highest seasonal population, with 147.4% of average occupation; and May has the lowest with 54.1% of average.

*Permanent Resident Population Growth – History, Trends & Projections*

1970 – Present

From 1970 – 1980 the County was considered to be the fastest growing county in the country with a 232 percent increase in permanent resident population. The following decade, from 1980 – 1990, the County experienced slower growth, as the increase was 45.6 percent. Between 1990 and 2000 the population nearly doubled, growing from approximately 12,881 to 23,548 residents, an increase of 82.8 percent. This ranked the County again as one of the fastest growing counties in the State of Colorado and the country, as it grew almost three times as fast as the state average and eight times faster than the national average.

From 2000 to 2009, the County added approximately 5,732 permanent residents, which represents a growth rate of approximately 24.3 percent, or 2.7 percent growth per year. In comparison, annual growth rates from 1990 through 2000 were higher, averaging approximately 7.2 percent per year. Nevertheless, from 2000 – 2006, the State Demographer’s estimates show that the County was again ranked among the top ten fastest growing counties in the State (#8). Moreover, from 2001 – 2002, the State Demographer’s estimates indicate that the County was ranked the fastest growing county in the state (in terms of percent change), with the permanent resident population growing 10.1 percent in one year.

<b>Time Frame/Years</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>New Residents Added</b>	<b>Estimated Ending Population</b>
1970 – 1980	232%	6,183	8,848
1980 – 1990	45.6%	4,033	12,881
1990 – 2000	82.8%	10,667	23,548
2000 – 2009	24.3%	5,732	29,280

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, State Demographer and Summit County Planning Department, 2009.

2010 Population Projections and Beyond

Looking forward 15 - 20 years, it is certain that some amount of population growth is inevitable. Per Jonathan Schechter, Executive Director of the Charture Institute, Summit County and similar resort communities (including Eagle, Pitkin, Routt, and San Miguel counties) are growing and continue to change more rapidly than the nation as a whole. As noted by Schechter, factors enabling more and more people to move to resort based communities include:

- Improved technology, and the increased ability for telecommuting.
- Broader, more diverse economic considerations (e.g. personal income generated from more diverse sources including a growing percentage from investments).
- Changes in transportation (i.e. the increased ease of air travel and freight).
- America’s values and customs, which are becoming increasingly aligned with what resort communities have to offer (e.g., healthy environment, abundant recreational opportunities).

Although a certain amount of growth is inevitable, the difficult questions to answer are “How much growth will occur?” and “How quickly will it occur?” Projecting the County’s permanent resident population into the future is a challenging endeavor, which can be described as both an art and a science.

Population projections are approximations determined based on the best information available at the time, and can be easily affected by factors that are constantly fluctuating. Examples of factors that contribute to the variability of population projections, include:

- The assumptions that are used change (i.e. estimated occupancy rates, estimated number of persons per household, etc.).
- The transient nature of the County’s permanent resident population.
- The large number of second homes/investment properties in the County.
- The implications of aging baby boomers potentially converting their second homes into permanent residences.

According to population projections prepared by the State Demographer, the growth rates experienced during the 1970s, 80s and 90s are not expected to continue. Per the State Demographer’s projections for population growth from 2000 to 2010, the County’s population is expected to grow 33.8% (7,389 residents). As shown in the table above, it is estimated that approximately 5,732 new residents have been added to the County’s population from 2000 – 2009. If this growth rate (approximately 637 people per year) continues over the next year, it appears that the County’s population in 2010 will be lower than projected (approximately 1,020 fewer people). Looking to the year 2025, the State Demographer projects that the County’s permanent resident population will grow by 92.0 percent (21,877 residents) between 2000 and 2025, with an average annual growth rate of approximately 2.9 percent per year.

<b>Time Frame/Years</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>New Residents Added</b>	<b>Projected Ending Population</b>
2000 – 2010	31.4%	7,389	30,937
2010 – 2015	14.9%	4,602	35,539
2015 – 2020	14.3%	5,081	40,620
2020 – 2025	12.8%	5,217	45,837

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and State Demographer.

<sup>1</sup> As mentioned, these projections could be overestimated.

In the later half of 2008, the County, along with the rest of the country, began to experience the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The effects of the downturn to the permanent population, economy and community are unclear, but could be more measurable in next update to the Countywide Comprehensive Plan

#### *Basic Characteristics of Summit County’s Permanent Resident Population*

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the County’s permanent resident population is young, with a median age of 30.8 years, compared to the state median age of 32.5 years. The 2000 Census data also showed that about 45% of the County’s permanent residents are between the ages of 25 to 44. The State Demographer projects that the County’s median age will increase to 37.5 in 2010 and 42.9 in 2020, indicative of an aging population.

An increase in ethnic diversity in the entire region is also evident in the 2000 Census data. The change in total non-white population in the County (Hispanic or Latino) increased 9.8% during the last decade (1990 – 2000). Between 1990 and 2000 Hispanics (any race) increased 613.9%, or 1,983 residents. Nearly 50% of Hispanics ranged from ages 20 to 34. Ethnic diversification of the permanent resident population is expected to continue, which will influence the demographic make-up of the County.

## U.S. Census 2010

The census is taken every ten years and will be conducted in the first half of 2010. The 2010 Census will be a count of everyone living in the United States, Colorado and the County, and is mandated by the U.S. Constitution. Census data are used to distribute congressional seats, to distribute federal funds to local, state and tribal governments each year and to make decisions about what community services to possibly provide. The data derived from the 2010 Census should reveal demographic trends, and provide insight into the changes in the County's permanent resident population and characteristics that have taken place over the last decade.

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