

2017 Colorado Planning & Management Region Report

Region 2 – Larimer and Weld Counties

INTRODUCTION

The North Central portion of the State, consisting of Larimer and Weld counties, is a combination of expansive rural areas, agricultural areas, and concentrated urban areas. Many municipalities within the region are experiencing pressure to expand, a trend which is placing increasing demands on current infrastructure. Between 2010 and 2016, population growth in the region continued to outpace population growth in the state as a whole. This growth is likely to place additional pressure on the region's existing services and infrastructure.

Population:

County	Census 2010	July 2016	Annual Change
Larimer	299,630	338,663	2.1%
Weld	252,825	294,397	2.6%
Region 2	552,455	633,060	2.3%
Colorado	5,029,196	5,538,180	1.6%

Source: State Demography

Office

The September 2013 flood impacted the region by changing connections between communities, and temporarily displacing many people. The movement of people, goods, and services on the region's roads was significantly impacted. Some communities were impacted more than others, specifically the cities of Loveland and Evans. The City of Evans completed the last permanent repairs to flood-damaged roads in May 2017 and will break ground on the last flood recovery project at Riverside Park in August 2017. The grand opening of the park in summer 2018 will serve as a celebration of the City's flood recovery.

Throughout the rest of the region, permanent repairs have been made on many homes, businesses, roads, and bridges. These repairs will continue through 2018. Reconstruction of US34 through the Big Thompson Canyon continues as a partnership between CDOT and Larimer County. The project is removing and replacing much of the temporary asphalt, embankment fill, and temporary channel protection as well as re-vegetating, replacing guardrails, and repairing fencing along the corridor. In some places, US34 will be placed on an entirely new alignment moving it out of the riverway.

JOBS & THE ECONOMY

The unemployment rate for Larimer and Weld Counties is slightly lower than that for the rest of the State. Between August 2016 and August 2017, Larimer County's unemployment rate improved by a full percentage point while Weld County's unemployment rate fell by 1.3 percentage points.

Unemployment:

County	August 2016	August 2017	% Change
Larimer	2.8%	1.8%	-1.0%
Weld	3.4%	2.1%	-1.3%
Colorado	3.2%	2.2%	-1.0%

Source: Labor Market Information

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Another factor impacting Weld County in particular has been the dramatic decline in oil prices, which has significantly impacted employment. [Oil prices](#) continued to fall between 2015 and 2016, dropping below \$40 per barrel for the first time in over 10 years. The price of oil has increased in 2017, but prices have been range bound between \$45 and \$55 per barrel. However, hedging contracts and increased efficiency have enabled many producers to break even or turn a profit at these prices.

Despite a regional and statewide decline in oil production, the oil and natural gas industries remain an important part of the regional economy, especially in Weld County. According to the Colorado Oil and Gas Commission¹, in 2016, 90 percent of all oil produced in Colorado came from Weld County. Oil production declined 4.7 percent across the region, while natural gas production increased 16.4 percent. The tables below show that, while Larimer County experienced significant growth in both oil and natural gas production, the magnitude of production in Weld County drove regional trends. Natural gas may continue to expand in the coming years, following the development of Weld County's [Smart Energy Plan](#), which identifies investment in natural gas fueling facilities as an important strategy. In 2017, Weld County opened its eighth fueling facility within the last 10 years.

Oil Production (barrels):

Geography	2015	2016	% Change
Larimer	247,982	751,596	203.1%
Weld	109,429,793	103,992,468	-5.1%
Regional	109,537,944	104,447,133	-4.7%

Source: Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission

Gas Production (MCF):

Geography	2015	2016	% Change
Larimer	590,885	2,199,303	272.2%
Weld	552,552,647	641,700,530	16.1%
Regional	553,143,532	643,899,833	16.4%

Source: Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission

HOUSING

The housing industry demonstrated different trends for Larimer and Weld counties between 2015 and 2016. Though both counties experienced a slight decline in single family housing starts, the Fort Collins MSA experienced a sharp increase in multi-family permits, compared to a slight decrease in the Greeley MSA². In 2016, Larimer issued 2,526 total building permits and Weld County issued 2,911 total building permits for new residential construction, not including additions or remodels³. The majority of building

¹Oil and gas data for 2015 and 2016 calculated using the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission online database for Larimer County, Weld County, and Colorado. Regional tabulations represent the sum of Larimer County and Weld County data. Website could not be hyperlinked.

² Housing starts were tabulated from the U.S. Census Bureau tables for "New Privately Owned Housing Units Authorized Unadjusted Units by Metropolitan Area" for Greeley and Fort Collins MSA. Multi-family reflects the sum of permits for buildings with two or more units.

³ Building permit data sourced from Census Bureau.

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permits for multiple units were located in Fort Collins and Greeley. The Fort Collins MSA saw the sharpest rise in multi-family units, with a 168 percent increase in authorized multi-family units between 2015 and 2016.

New Privately Owned Housing Units Authorized, Unadjusted Units by MSA:

Fort Collins	2015	2016	% change	Greeley	2015	2016	% change
Single Family	1720	1622	-5.7%	Single Family	2624	2463	-6.1%
Multi-Family	714	1910	167.5%	Multi-Family	562	546	-2.8%
Total	2434	3532	45.1%	Total	3186	3009	-5.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Both median gross rent and median home value increased in 2016 in many parts of the region. Home values rose more sharply than rent, which reflects a housing stock shortage in the region.

Median Home Value:

Area	2015	2016	% Change
Fort Collins	\$ 325,000	\$ 355,900	9.5%
Loveland	\$ 215,000	\$ 238,704	11.0%
Greeley	\$ 160,000	\$ 180,958	13.1%

Source: Zillow Home Prices and Values Median List Price

Median Rent:

MSA	2015	2016	% Change
Fort Collins	\$ 1,663	\$ 1,726	3.8%
Greeley	\$ 1,495	\$ 1,564	4.6%

Source: Zillow ZRI Time Series 2015-2016

AGRICULTURE⁴

Weld

Wheat and corn remain the primary crops produced in Weld County. In 2016, corn production increased 8.4 percent from 2015 with a 9,000 acre increase in plantings offsetting a slight decrease in average yield. Wheat production continued to fall in 2016, but at a slower rate than the previous year. Production was down 9.1 percent in 2016 compared to a drop of 23.8 percent in 2015. In addition to wheat and corn, Weld County is a large cattle producer. In 2016, total cattle (including calves) increased by 35,000 to 520,000. The number of beef cattle increased by 3,000 to 56,000 and the number of dairy cattle increased by 8,000 to 89,000 during this time period. New calves make up the remainder of the total increase.

⁴ All agricultural data sourced from the United States Department of Agriculture [National Agricultural Statistics Service](#). All data reflects point in time data from the Survey Program.

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Weld County Cattle:

Year	Beef	Milk	Calves	Tot. (incl. calves)
2015	53,000	81,000	351,000	485,000
2016	56,000	89,000	375,000	520,000
2017	59,000	93,000	393,000	545,000

Larimer

Larimer County also produces corn, wheat, and cattle - but at a much smaller scale. Corn production in Larimer County continued to drop between 2015 and 2016, the result of combined lower yields and fewer acres planted. No data is available for wheat production in Larimer County for 2016. From 2015 to 2016, the total number of cattle (including calves) increased by 3,000 to 45,000. The number of beef cattle increased by 800 to 12,200, but the number of milk cattle decreased by 1,700 to 7,600. New calves make up the remainder of the total increase.

Larimer County Cattle:

Year	Beef	Milk	Calves	Tot. (incl. calves)
2015	11,400	9,300	21,300	42,000
2016	12,200	7,600	25,200	45,000
2017	12,700	9,000	25,300	47,000

NEW PROJECTS

In 2016, new projects continued to develop across the region. In Fort Collins, [Woodward, Inc.](#) (formerly Woodward Governor) completed construction on a new global headquarters in June 2016. The 60-acre campus includes a 303,320-square-foot Industrial Turbomachinery Systems building and a 60,000-square-foot corporate headquarters. The new headquarters will eventually replace the operations of the nearby Loveland plant, which remains operational for the time being. Construction for a new [DoubleTree Hotel](#) in Downtown Greeley began in 2016. The hotel, which includes a large convention center, is expected to open in September 2017. In Johnstown, [Scheels Sporting Goods](#) broke ground in 2016 and opened September 2017. The store, located at the intersection of North I-25 and US34, provides 250,000 square feet of shopping and includes an in-house Ferris wheel, aquarium, games, and café.

Transit remained a focus for Region 2 through 2016. Fort Collins' bus rapid transit (BRT) line, the [MAX](#), expanded service after transit [ridership increased](#) 26 percent between 2015 and 2016. Additional routes and the increase in ridership helped the City pursue a year-round service schedule, which includes the MAX line. The 365-day service began in August 2017 and [debuted at twice the Sunday ridership](#) expected by Transfort officials. Greeley recently completed construction on a new Regional Transit Center, scheduled to open in August 2017. Greeley adopted an updated [Strategic Transit Plan](#) in December 2016 and Fort Collins will be updating their [Transportation Master Plan](#) in 2017.

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Region 2 continues to expand alternative energy options with the implementation of several large solar projects in both Larimer and Weld counties. In 2015 and 2016, [Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association](#) (PVREA) developed 10 megawatts of solar generation between two facilities: the Valley View and Skylar Solar Facilities. The facilities, both located in Weld County, generate enough energy to power 3,125 homes annually. PVREA plans to construct two more solar farms in 2017. Coyote Ridge Community Solar Farm in Larimer County will generate an additional 1.95 megawatts of energy, while the Platte Valley Solar Farm in Weld County will provide 3.5 megawatts of energy. In addition to PVREA, the [Platte River Power Association](#) (PRPA) also provides alternative energy to Region 2. In fall 2016, PRPA completed the Rawhide Flats Solar Project, located just north of Wellington. The 30 megawatt facility generates enough energy to power 8,000 homes annually.

GOALS

Weld

In their [2017-2021 Strategic Plan](#), Weld County outlined a vision, a set of guiding principles, and priorities for Weld County. Priorities for Weld County include:

- Operating in a fiscally responsible manner
- Protecting the safety of all residents
- Providing a high quality of life for all residents
- Maximizing the performance and efficiency of County operations through innovation and technology
- Promoting a healthy, diverse economy
- Promoting responsible, comprehensive policy development for land use, transportation, and growth management planning
- Preserving the environment
- Promoting cooperation and coordination among all government services

Larimer

The Larimer County [2013-2018 Strategic Plan](#) outlines the vision, mission, goals and objectives for Larimer County. Larimer County's Goals include:

- Enhancing the safety and well-being of the community
- Encouraging smart business growth, more and better jobs
- Preparing for natural and human-caused hazards
- Providing an efficient, safe, and well maintained transportation system
- Fostering a culture of collaboration among towns, cities, businesses, non-profits and citizens
- Providing government services efficiently and effectively
- Providing excellent customer service

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North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO)

The NFRMPO provides an important regional perspective and transportation planning support to 13 communities and the urbanized portions of Larimer and Weld counties, which are included in DOLA Region 2. The NFRMPO goals include:

- Fostering a transportation system that supports economic development and improves residents' quality of life
- Providing a transportation system that moves people and goods safely, efficiently, and reliably
- Providing a multi-modal system that improves accessibility and transportation system continuity
- Optimizing operations of transportation facilities in the region.
- Update the Land Use Allocation Model and Travel Demand Model
- Implement the strategies identified in the [*2017 Coordinated Plan*](#), the region's newest mobility plan
- Implement the 12 Regional Non-Motorized Corridors
- Expand non-motorized data collection infrastructure