

Rio Grande County



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This has been designed to help you understand
“Living in a rural area”

It is important for you to know that life in the country is different from life in the city. County governments are not able to provide the same level of service that city governments provide. To that end, the following information is provided to help you make an educated and informed decision to purchase rural land.

Access: the fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency service vehicles can achieve the same level of access at all times. Please consider:

Access to or from county road for a new residence, will require an approved permit by the Rio Grande County Road and Bridge Department. This permit is issued by the Building Department and has an associated fee. (719) 657-9472. The permit must be signed off by the Road & Bridge Dept. Supervisor or someone he has designated.

Emergency response times (sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) cannot be guaranteed. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow and expensive.



There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise.

You can experience problems with the maintenance and cost of maintenance of your road. Many rural properties or subdivisions are served by (non-maintained private, non-maintained public roads, county maintained roads and privately maintained by private road associations). There are even some public roads that are not maintained by anyone! Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide that maintenance.

Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. It is wise to determine whether or not your road was properly engineered and constructed.

Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access.

School buses travel only on maintained county roads that have been designated as school bus routes by the school district. You may need to drive your children to the nearest county road to meet the school bus.

In extreme weather, even county maintained roads can become impassable. You may need a four wheel drive vehicle with chains for all four wheels to travel during those episodes, which could last for several days.

Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. Rio Grande County will repair and maintain county roads; however, all other roads are the responsibility of the landowners who use those roads. A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges, and culverts. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges have been hit with large bills for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods.

Unpaved roads generate dust. It is a fact of life for most rural residents.

If your road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely the Rio Grande County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check carefully with the County Road and Bridge Department when any statement is made by the seller of any property that indicates any unpaved roads will be paved or maintained!!

Mail delivery is not available to all areas of the county. Ask the postmaster to describe the system for your area.

Newspaper delivery is not always available to rural areas. Check with the newspaper of your choice before assuming you can get delivery.

Standard parcel and overnight package delivery can be a problem for those who live in the country. Confirm with the service providers as to your status.

It may be more expensive and time consuming to build a rural residence due to delivery fees and the time required for inspectors to reach your site.

Utility Services, water, sewer, electric, telephone and other services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer.

Telephone communications can be a problem, especially in the mountain areas of Rio Grande County. Cell phones may be the only phone available. If you have a private line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem uses.

If sewer service is available to your property, check with the developer for tap fees and charges.

If sewer service is not available, you will need to use an approved septic system. The type of soil you have for a leach field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your system. The Rio Grande County Building Department issues these permits (719-657-9472.) Individual septic systems require a minimum of ½ acre lot size.

If you have access to of treated domestic water, the tap fees can be expensive. You may also find that your monthly cost of service can be costly when compared to municipal systems. If you do not have access to a supply of treated domestic water you will have to locate an alternative supply. The most common method is a well. Permits for wells are granted by the state engineer and the cost of drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can be vary considerably from location to location and from season to season. It is strongly recommended that you research this issue very carefully.

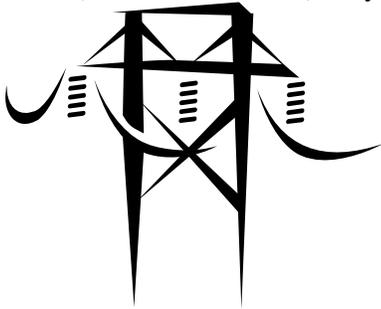
Not all wells can be used for watering of landscaping and /or livestock. Permits from the state engineer may restrict water to use for inside use only. If you have other needs, make certain that you have the proper approvals before you invest. It may also be difficult to find enough water to provide for your needs even if you can secure the proper permit.

Electric service is not available to every area of Rio Grande County. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power.

It may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service to your property in the most cost efficient manner. It is important to make sure that the proper easements are in place to allow lines to be built to your property.

Electric power may not be available in two phase and three phase service configurations. If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.

If you are purchasing land with the plan to build at a future date, there is a possibility that electric lines (and other utilities) may not be large enough to accommodate you if others connect



while you are waiting to build and the cost to expand the utilities for your needs may be at your own expense.

The cost of electric service is usually divided into a fee to hook into the system and then a monthly charge for energy consumption. It is important to know both costs before making a decision to purchase a specific piece of property.

Power outages can occur in outlying areas with more frequency than in more developed areas. A loss of electric power can also interrupt your supply of water from a well. You may also lose food in freezers or refrigerators and power outages can cause problems with computers as well. It is important to be able to survive for up to a week in severe cold with no utilities if you live in the country.

Trash removal can be much more expensive in a rural area than in a city. In some cases, your trash dumpster may be several miles from your home. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on

your own land. In some cases, your only option may be to haul your trash to the landfill yourself. Recycling is more difficult because pick-up is not available in most rural areas.

Not all lots are buildable. The Rio Grande County Assessor has many parcels that are separate for the purpose of taxation that are not legal lots in the sense that a building permit may not be issued. You must check with the Rio Grande County Land Use Office to find out if a piece of land can be built on.

Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. (There may be easements that are not of record.) Check these issues carefully.

Many property owners do not own the mineral rights on their property. Owners of mineral rights have the ability to change the surface characteristics in order to extract their minerals. It is very important to know what minerals may be located under the land and who owns them. Much of the rural land in Rio Grande County can be used for mining. However, a special review by the county commissioners is usually required. Be aware that adjacent mining uses can expand and cause negative impacts.

You may be provided with a plat of your property, but unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor, you cannot assume the plat is accurate.

Fences that separate properties are often misaligned with the property lines. A survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.

Many subdivisions and planned unit developments have covenants that limit the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with those rules. Also, a lack of covenants can cause problems between neighbors.

Homeowners Associations (HOAs) are required to take care of common elements, roads, open space, etc. A dysfunctional homeowners association or poor covenants can cause problems for you and even involve you in expensive litigation.

Dues are almost always a requirement for those areas with HOAs. The by-laws of the HOA will tell you how the organization operates and how the dues are set and what is permissible within the HOA.

The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are, indefinitely. You can check with the Rio Grande County Land Use Office to find out how properties are zoned and to see what future developments may be in the planning stages. The view from your property may change.

Water rights that are sold with the property may not give you the right to use the water from any ditches crossing your land without coordinating with a neighbor who also uses the water. Other users may have senior rights to the water that can limit your use or require you to pay for the over sizing or other improving of the ditch. You should make sure that what a Realtor/seller tells you is really fact when it comes to an agricultural producing piece of land. The water that has been used in the past probably will not follow to a new land owner. The generosity of one person to allow you to use water when they don't need it may not be the same when they sell out.

If you have a ditch running across your property there is usually a recorded easement of a at least ten feet on both sides of the ditch (and could be more) that the owners of the ditch have the right to



come onto your property with heavy equipment to maintain the ditch.

It is important to make sure that any water rights you purchase with the land will provide enough water to maintain trees, pastures, gardens or livestock. The water flowing in irrigation ditches may belong to someone. You cannot assume that the water that flows across your property is yours to use.

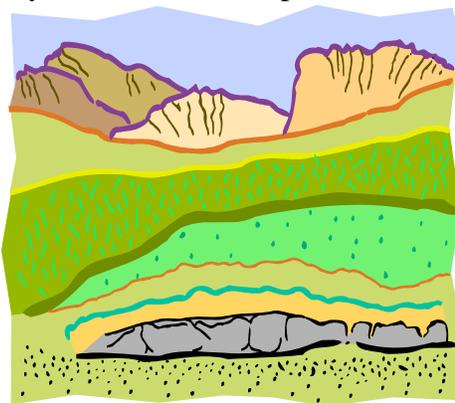
Flowing water can be a hazard, especially to young children. Before you decide to locate your home near an active ditch, consider the possible danger to your family.

Mother Nature, residents of the county usually experience more problems when the elements and earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts for you to consider.

The physical characteristics of your property can be positive and negative. Trees are a wonderful environmental amenity, but can also involve your home in a forest fire. Building at the top of a forested draw should be considered as dangerous as building in a flash flood area. Defensible perimeters are very helpful in protecting buildings from forest fires and inversely can protect the forest from igniting if your house catches fire. If you start a forest fire, you are responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire.

Steep slopes can slide in unusually wet weather. Large rocks can also roll down steep slopes and present a great danger to people and property.

Expansive soils, such as Bentonite Clay (which is common in the foothills) can buckle concrete foundations and twist steel I-beams. You should and can determine the types of soil on your property if you have a soil test performed or you can contact the Soil Conservation District.



North facing slopes or canyons rarely sees direct sunlight in the winter. There is a possibility that snow will accumulate and not melt throughout the winter.

The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. When property owners fill ravines, they have found that the water that drained through that ravine now drains through their house.

A flash flood can occur, especially during the summer months, and turn a dry gully into a river. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building.

Spring run-off can cause a very small creek to become a major river. Many residents use sand bags to protect their homes. The county does not provide sand bags, equipment or people to protect private property from flooding.

Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer and eagles are positive additions to the environment. However, even “harmless” animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, bears, mosquitoes and other animals that can be dangerous and you need to know how to deal with them. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance and know that if you do not handle your pets and trash properly, it could cause



problems for you and the wildlife. The Wildlife is a good resource for information. They have many free publications to help educate you about living in the wild.

Colorado Department of

Agriculture, the economy of Rio Grande County is dependent upon agriculture, and the agriculture in Rio Grande County is dependent on irrigation. The main cash crops are potatoes, wheat and barley, both malting and feed. Other crops include spring wheat, oats, alfalfa and native hay. Smaller acreages produce other vegetable crops, including spinach, cabbage, carrots and lettuce. There are a few things you need to know:

Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Dairy operators sometimes milk without stopping and hay is often swathed or baled at night. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet.



Land preparation and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.

Farmers occasionally burn their ditches to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable.

Chemicals (mainly fertilizers and herbicides) are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people actually have severe allergic reactions. Many of these chemicals are applied by airplanes that fly early in the morning.

Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors. What else can we say?

Agriculture is an important business in Rio Grande County. If you choose to live among the farms and ranches of our rural countryside, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal



day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors. In fact, Colorado has a “Right to Farm” legislation that protects farmer and ranchers from nuisance and liability lawsuits. It enables them to continue producing food and fiber.

Colorado has an open range law. This means if you do not want cattle, sheep or other livestock on your property, it is your responsibility to fence them out. It is not the county’s responsibility or that of the rancher to keep his/her livestock off your property.

Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds. It may be expensive to control and control is a requirement. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock.

Animals can be dangerous. Bulls, stallions, rams, boars, etc. can attack human beings. Children need to know that it is not safe to enter pens where animals are kept.

Much of Rio Grande County receives less than 15 inches (38cm) (estimation) of precipitation per year. As a result, we have a problem with overgrazing, and fugitive dust. Without irrigation, grass does not grow very well. There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. The Colorado Extension Office can help you with these issues.

In conclusion: Even though you pay property taxes to the county, the amount of tax collected does not cover the cost of services provided to rural residents.

This information is by no means exhaustive. There are other issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked and we encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and examine those things that could cause your move to be less than you expect.

We have offered these comments in the sincere hope that it can help you enjoy your decision to reside in Rio Grande County. It is not our intent to dissuade you, only inform you.

Frequently needed offices and phone numbers are provided below for you assistance.



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| Division of Water Resources | 719-589-6683/for well permits/information |
| SLV Rural Electric | 719-852-3538/1-800-332-7634 |
| Xcel Energy | 1-800-895-4999 |
| RCG Commissioners | 719-657-2744 |
| Building Dept | 719-657-9472 |
| Land Use | 719-657-4003 |
| Clerk & Recorder's Office | 719-657-3334 |
| Assessor | 719-657-3326 |
| Nursing | 719-657-3352 |
| EPSDT | 719-657-2296 |
| Museum & Cultural Center | 719-657-2847 |
| Sheriff | 719-657-4000 |
| Road & Bridge Dept | 719-852-4781 |
| Human Resources | 719-657-2744 |
| Options for Long Term Care | 719-657-2138 |
| Social Services | 719-657-3381 |
| Treasurer | 719-657-2747 |
| Veterans Service | 719-657-5118 |
| Weed District | 719-657-4804 |
| NRCS | 719-852-5114 |
| Bureau of Land Management | 719-852-5941 |
| Div. of Wildlife | 719-587-6900 |
| CO. St. Plumbing Inspector | 719-589-0565 |
| CO. St. Electrical Inspector | 719-754-0214 |

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO LIVE IN A HIGH RURAL COUNTY?

The beautiful landscape that lured you to the high country during the summer will differ considerably in the winter.

Periods of drought create the perception of mild winter, when in fact, Colorado winters can cause heavy snowfall and blocked access to roads and homes. Research the cycle and find out what the

historical average snowfall is. Droughts are not reflective of the reality of real winters in the high country.

Emergency snow operations are not the same as routine maintenance.

Services that may have been provided to you in an urban setting on “24/7” basis may not be available to you in a rural setting.

You must plan to take care of yourself. The isolation that you treasure can become a real hazard that can keep emergency assistance or other services from reach you.

If, when you purchased your home, it was o a dirt road, the chances are almost a certainty that it will remain a dirt road.

A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency for the local government.

Your 2-wheel vehicle that is your best friend in the summer will become your worst enemy at some point in the winter.

The winter months will be longer than summer and spring combined.

In the high country winds will create ground blizzards that will make roads impassable and impossible for the county to keep open. Remember, that before modern technology, this area was uninhabitable in winter.

You are responsible for snow removal on your own driveway.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE YOUR FAMILY?

You must learn to be self-sufficient. The local government will not always be able to take care of you.

Keep your propane tank filled. You are not wise to purchase or lease a 500-gallon tank and only purchase 100 gallons of propane.

Be aware if you contact the county and claim that you have an emergency situation that requires county assistance, and it is not a true emergency, the county will charge you for the assistance.

If you use prescription medications, make sure you have enough of a supply to last in the event that you are trapped in your home due to inclement weather. Also, the effects of some medications are altered by high elevations you may want to consult your doctor to see if yours are among those affected.

If you have a serious medical condition, determine if the services provided by a rural county will be sufficient to meet your needs before you move to the high country.

If you are not planning on spending the winter in your mountain home, winterize it before you leave in the summer. This means that you should drain all pipes, turn your well pump off, make sure your propane tank is filled and set your thermostats to the lowest setting to preserve your propane supply.

If you plan on living in the high country all year round, winterize your 4-wheel drive vehicle. Make sure you have good snow tires, keep the gas tank full, and the radiator fluid at an adequate sub-zero rating.

Plan for power outages keep an adequate food and water supply, along with other safety items, such as flashlights, candles, battery-powered radio, etc. Oil lamps are perfect for these situations. Make sure you have plenty of winter clothing and underclothing because you may not be able to do laundry for several days. If you have an electric kitchen stove, think of going to a gas stove. If this is not feasible, make sure your wood-burning stove has a flat surface for heating water and cooking. Consider purchasing a generator.

To allow for all contingencies, it would be wise to invest in a wood burning, heat producing stove and make sure you have adequate firewood. If you purchase a pellet stove that requires electricity select one with a battery back-up system.

Find out if the road upon which you live is a public or private road. If it is a public road, find out what the classification and level of service is. Find out if it is on the snow route. If it isn't, chances are, it will NOT be added.

Getting to your job is your responsibility. Give yourself plenty of time to get to it. In inclement weather, consider spending the night in a hotel near your employment.

