

APPENDIX C – Region 9 Disaster Preparedness

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DISASTER PLANNING

A disaster can be defined as *any event that threatens to, or actually does, inflict damage to people or property that cannot be dealt with using only internal and mutual aid resources.*

In the event of a disaster, the Region 9 Economic Development District (Region 9), plays a support role to other partners in the planning and recovery efforts as outlined in the following strategy document. This brief summary of strategy is in no way intended to undermine or replace existing federal, state, or local disaster plans, but simply establishes Region 9's role in both pre- and post-disaster planning and recovery. Pre-disaster strategies are based on an awareness and support of already existing partnerships and emergency plans. Post-disaster strategies rely on a decision-making process consistent with local economic comprehensive plans.

In the event of a disaster, Region 9 is committed to:

- Providing local officials, business leaders, and other community partners with access to regional demographic, economic, and hazard vulnerability data.
- Developing technical expertise and economic analysis tools for conducting initial disaster assessments and long-term economic impact analysis.
- Establishing collaborative relationships with local government officials and non-government organizations that may provide data, funding, technical expertise, and other resources essential to intermediate and long-term economic recovery following a disaster event.
- Offering grant writing expertise and technical assistance to regional and local entities, both for pre-disaster resiliency initiatives as well as post-disaster recovery efforts.
- Establishing familiarity with traditional economic and community recovery funding sources, including resources for business development assistance programs, such as EDA's Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) programs as well as private, nonprofit, and philanthropic resources.
- Providing technical support to impacted businesses.
- Encouraging concepts and principles of economic resiliency strategies into the existing. planning and development plans and activities within the region.
- Leveraging assets.
- Offering a neutral forum to convene diverse stakeholders and facilitate discussion and planning initiatives around the issues of economic resiliency preparedness and recovery.

Phase I: Pre-disaster Preparedness

This phase asks communities to plan and prepare for the unexpected and build disaster-resiliency practices. Region 9 encourages the existing coordination between the organizations and regular updates to all local and regional disaster plans.

- Engage in pre-disaster recovery and mitigation planning.
- Know the community's risks and vulnerabilities.
- Inventory and organize the community's recovery resources (people, businesses, public services...etc.)
- Engage in business continuity planning.
- Ensure there are resources available for the elderly and those with special needs.
- Identify shelters, and recovery partners (Federal, state, local, and private sector), type of assistance and resources they can provide.
- Develop an interagency action plan.
- Identify what recovery activities will take place immediately, short-term, intermediate, and long-term.
- Develop and disseminate a community evacuation plan.
- Establish a communication chain.
- Engage the community. Take advantage of opportunities to communicate the process and protocols to follow in the event of a disaster and what recovery efforts will be undertaken.

Knowing where to prioritize spending requires some basic knowledge of what is covered under insurance policies, which projects will be eligible for federal reimbursement through the Public Assistance Program, which projects can be funded through grant programs, and what financial reserves can be targeted for grant matching funds or local investment. When a community begins to address its infrastructure issues as part of the initial planning process or as a pre-disaster implementation action, it can launch an assessment of county or municipal insurance policies to determine which facilities are covered and for what extent of damage. They can then use this assessment to make decisions about increasing coverage or financing repairs to uninsured structures. They can also determine whether mitigation enhancements would be covered under current policies and Public Assistance or whether additional funding would be needed.

Southwest Colorado Disaster Planning

There are several different levels of strategic disaster planning in the region that address these guidelines. It is a requirement of the State Emergency Management Grant (a funding mechanism) to have an emergency operation plan (disaster plan). Every county and tribe receives those funds and all have prepared plans of varying scope and complexity, tailored to their territories and constituents. Please see below for a list of emergency contacts within the region.

Southwest Colorado Emergency Management Contact List:

Archuleta County – Emergency Management Contact: Mike Le Roux
Office: (970) 398-0612
email: mleroux@archuletacounty.org

Dolores County – Emergency Management Contact: Keith Keesling
Office: (970) 769-0005 -24 Hour Contact: (970) 769-0005
Email: dcem@fone.net

La Plata County – Emergency Management Contact: Shawna Legarza
Office: (970) 375-6274-24 Hour Contact: (970) 385-2900
Email: shawna.legarza@co.laplata.co.us
Durango- (970) 375-4739

City of Durango – Terry Hoecker
Email: HoeckerTL@ci.durango.co.us
Cell: (970) 759-4312

Montezuma County – Emergency Management Contact: Mike Pasquin
Cell: (970) 564-4134 24 Hour Contact: (970) 565-8441
Email: mpasquin@co.montezuma.co.us

San Juan County – Emergency Management
Contact: Jim Donovan
Office: (970) 387-5531 - 24 Hour Contact: (970) 387-5531,
Email: oem@sanjuancountycolorado.us

Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Emergency Management Contact: Don Brockus
Office: (970) 563-0100 ext. 2449, Fax: (970) 563-4853
Email: dbrockus@southernute-nsn.us

Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Emergency Management Contact: John Trochek
Office: (970) 564-5441
Email: jtrocheck@utemountain.org

At the regional level there is a Southwest Region All-Hazards Advisory Council (SWRAHAC), established in 2005. The Council consists of emergency managers from each tribe, county, and some municipalities, as well as representation from the following disciplines: communications, hazardous materials, fire services, emergency medical services, healthcare, Citizen Corps, transportation, education, law enforcement, and public health. Annually, SWRAHAC members participate in the State's capability review process. As part of that process, SWRAHAC members set the Southwest Colorado priorities. This is a collaborative effort to determine the best needs for the entire region as a whole. This council has prepared a document called ***The Southwest Colorado Homeland Security Strategy (SWCHSS)*** in order to develop, implement, and maintain a viable planning capability (Revised draft April 5th, 2011). That document was updated and approved as the ***Southwest Colorado All-Hazards Region Homeland Security Strategic Framework 2016 – 2018***, Adopted October 15, 2015.

Planning Departments in each county are currently in process of updating emergency plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is expected that the Regional SWCHSS plan will be updated when that process is complete. Approved county plans are available at <https://mars.colorado.gov/mitigation/hazard-mitigation-plans/approved-plans/southwest-region>.

Region 9 has reviewed the currently available SWCHSS document and agrees with the identified areas of outstanding "SW Region" risks and vulnerabilities that must be considered and planned for. They are as follows:

Regional Risks and Vulnerabilities

Remote Location – The SW Region has approximately 85,625 citizens consisting of five counties: Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan counties, as well as the State's two Sovereign Nations, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT) and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Depending on location within the region, drive time to Denver can range from six hours to eight hours and drive time to Albuquerque can range from four to six hours. The region has two commercial airports and two private aviation airports. Because of remoteness, to provide service and protection, the SW Region often depends on internal resources, and resources from other states."

Infrastructure Challenges – The region has a number of other infrastructure challenges. There are two recreational trains; one of these trains traverses an extremely remote and rugged area. Any major incident with these trains will involve a multi-state response (The Cumbres Toltec Train straddles New Mexico and Colorado). The region also has ski areas, three of these areas are in the region, and another (Wolf Creek Ski Area) is between this region and another. The extreme western part of the region is very dependent on agriculture and its associated risks. The region has a very limited power and internet feed; a single power transmission line and a single fiber optic line serve large parts of the region. The region also has an interstate high-pressure gas pipeline, and associated compressor, that feeds all of central Colorado."

Economic Risks – "The region's economy depends heavily on tourists; other economic dependencies include agriculture and oil/gas operations. Similar to other areas of Colorado, the region's population fluctuates seasonally, including the summer and other key holiday times. This "transient" population presents unique challenges and risk."

Wildland Fire Risks – Because of the vegetation, elevation, and semi-arid climate of the inhabited areas of the region, urban interface/wildland fires are a large risk. The mid elevations of the region are mostly over grown forest; the low elevations are a volatile oak brush / juniper mix. Lightning starts most of the regions wildland fires naturally. In an average fire season, the region has at least one large wildland fire. Due to the loss of tourist revenue, every large fire has the potential to have devastating economic consequences.

Flood Risks – “All low-lying areas in the region are prone to flash flooding. The National Weather Service (NWS) uses radar, stream gauges, and rain gauges to issue products that warn of these floods. In Southwest Colorado, this is a challenge: the NWS radar system is ineffective. Many of the stream gauges are located in populated areas, not upstream, and a rain gauge network does not exist.”

The SWRAHAC Council also prepared a **Prioritization of Planning Scenarios** as an illustrative tool for determining which scenarios pose the greatest threat to the region based on the individual local criteria. Region 9 supports the strategy of focusing on building capability for the two most probable scenarios, which include toxic industrial chemicals events and major snowstorm/blizzard events. Both scenarios represent a moderate to high threat to the region and present potentially devastating consequences for our communities.

“Planning Scenario: Toxic Industrial Chemical Events: The history of toxic industrial chemical events in the region is rare, but has been catastrophic. Oil and gas exploration, has boomed in the last 10 years, bringing with it the potential for major oil/gas-related events. Three major state highways in the region are designated as hazardous materials routes (US Hwy 160, 491 and 550). These highways function as vital east-west / north-south routes for both tourists, and commercial vehicles, as well as providing access to all of the region's tribes and counties. These highways are highly traveled, and have a number of vulnerable points (tunnels, high mountain passes, landslide / avalanche areas). These highways are the primary transportation route for a wide range of toxic industrial chemicals via commercial motor carrier. The headwaters of several major water sources that service large metropolitan areas lie within the boundaries of the region as well, and a chemical attack or spill is likely to contaminate the water for large population areas such as large cities in New Mexico and Arizona, in addition to many smaller communities.”

“Planning Scenario: Major Snowstorm / Blizzard Events: The *probability* of a major snowstorm / blizzard event in the region is frequent. Multiple major snowstorms occur every year. Every one of these events temporarily isolates the five counties and two tribes of southwest Colorado from the rest of Colorado. During major snowstorms, all passes through the mountains to the North and East close. Some locations, such as Silverton, will be completely isolated. Commercially, Southwest Colorado has approximately three days of food, with the routine supply coming from Denver. With the exception of isolation, a major winter storm alone does not create too much concern in Southwest Colorado. The secondary events that very often accompany these storms are the concern. Our largest concern is power outages; in cold weather, the outcome could be catastrophic. Some other concerns include special needs population support, debris removal, isolation of individual communities, sheltering, and food/fuel supply. Another side consequence of the isolation is a negative impact to the economies of communities and to the overall region.”

Yet another level of strategic planning occurs at the State level. Colorado has prepared a State Emergency Operations Plan (2015). This plan, which addresses most, if not all, of the items identified in the following guidelines. Once again, this plan is far too lengthy to be included here, but can be perused at <http://dhsem.state.co.us/emergency-management/operations/state-emergency-operations-plan>.

Phase II: Post Disaster Planning and Implementation

This phase will include disaster assessment, the development of a recovery timeline, and the implementation of a long-term recovery plan.

The assessment phase will involve partners at the local, state and possibly federal level. Local officials have authority under their local ordinances and resolutions and Colorado Revised Statutes to take responsible and appropriate actions in the direction and control of disaster recovery activities. The role of affected state, local and tribal governments in defining and addressing risk reduction and long term recovery priorities is recognized. If an effective recovery is beyond a local jurisdiction's capability, State assistance may be required.

If the situation is beyond State and local capability, the Governor may ask for Federal assistance by requesting a Presidential Declaration of an "emergency" or "major disaster". The declaration triggers the implementation of Federal disaster assistance programs, which are coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in cooperation with the Division of Emergency Management (DEM). Response and recovery operations in both State- and Federally-declared disasters will be conducted in accordance with the standards set forth by the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the National Response Framework (NRF).

These authorities should provide oversight for the following assessments:

- Assess the nature and magnitude of the disaster.
- Assess the impact on the economy (business, industry sectors, labor market...etc.).
- Assess the impact on transportation and public infrastructure.
- Assess the impact on housing, schools, and health care facilities.

Once these assessments have been made, regional partners will develop and implement a recovery timeline:

- List and prioritize recovery activities to be performed.
- Identify resources (Federal, state, local, private sector) needed for each activity.
- Determine the level and type of assistance needed.
- Identify roles and responsibilities.
- Determine the timeframe for each recovery activity:
- Establish recovery benchmarks.

Long-term recovery and mitigation efforts will be based on a variety of factors and priorities, including public safety, economic development, environmental protection, and preservation of social, cultural and historical resources:

- Identify business, economic and entrepreneurial rebuild initiatives.
- Identify workforce initiatives to employ workers and rebuild economy.
- Describe the Federal, state and local funding programs and management plans to ensure the most effective use of Federal, state, local, and private sector funds.

Region 9's Role in Economic Recovery

As a regional economic development organization Region 9 is particularly concerned with post-disaster economic recovery. Long-term recovery efforts focus on redeveloping communities and restoring the economic viability of disaster areas, including:

- Restoring the economic base of disaster-impacted communities, including lost jobs and employment opportunities.
- Identifying hazard mitigation opportunities and implementing long-term hazard mitigation plans, projects and measures (e.g., land use plans, hazard-zone restrictions and building codes).

Post-disaster Relationships

There are many agencies, jurisdictions, and stakeholders involved in providing infrastructure, public facilities, and utility services. Before and after a disaster, these private and public entities need to establish communication and coordination procedures to ensure that long-term recovery and redevelopment occurs in an efficient and organized manner. Each agency or company should have its own recovery plan; however, if any opportunities for directing redevelopment are to be pursued then coordination and communication are critical.

Limited time, funds, and materials are going to make simultaneous redevelopment of all damaged areas difficult. In some circumstances, opportunities may arise after a disaster to move forward with planned physical economic development projects or to create new projects that take advantage of post-disaster funding, available land, or public will. Communities may want to encourage redevelopment in areas that correspond to their vision for the future and those less vulnerable to disasters by providing incentives for development in these areas. For instance, local comprehensive plans include many policies that determine where and to what extent redevelopment can, or ideally should, occur. As a starting place, affected communities can use their locally developed Comprehensive Plans, including this CEDS document, to identify specific land use codes and regulations. In addition, Region 9 has worked with each county to develop Community Development Action Plans (CDAP's) to identify priority projects, partnerships and action steps that will aid in the recovery process

A "small business" is often perceived as a family-owned business that provides services solely to the local community. Small businesses comprise the majority of businesses in the region. Small businesses are more likely than large businesses to either never reopen after a major disaster or fail shortly after reopening. Several factors may be involved in these failures, including the extent of damage to a community, timing of reopening, and lack of financial reserves. During the recovery process Region 9 will work closely with the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) as well as other identified partners to provide technical assistance to business owners and operators impacted by a disaster concerning economic redevelopment plans, investment strategies, small business development, and available resources and assistance to facilitate economic recovery.

Rapid resumption of existing major employers is key to a community's economic recovery after a disaster, especially as employment provides a reason for most residents to return and rebuild quickly. Region 9 will assist the Department of Labor and Employment to identify job losses and create opportunities for employment. Some of these opportunities may actually be a result of disaster impacts, such as providing adequate housing for displaced persons and long-term rebuild of public and private infrastructure (housing, roads, utilities, etc.)

When a community starts to make decisions about which structures to relocate after a disaster or which mitigation projects it should invest in pre-disaster, they should consider funding availability. Region 9 will support the Department of Local Affairs and other applicable funding sources and technical assistance partners to provide the needed technical assistance to local officials and help to identify and apply for state and federal grants that may be available.

It is essential that cultural resources be considered during recovery efforts. Engaging state and local historic preservation organizations in the planning and implementation process can ensure that the unique considerations involved with preserving and restoring historic structures and archeological sites are included in a community's recovery plan. The loss of historic resources due to a disaster can have a major impact on the community. Some losses may be unavoidable, but others could occur accidentally during recovery operations if procedures are not in place to watch for these concerns. Historic structures are particularly vulnerable to damage due to their age, and repair of these structures must meet certain requirements to maintain their character and historic designation. There may also be funding opportunities before or after a disaster for implementing mitigation measures to prevent further damage to historic resources.

To unify the region in COVID-19 recovery, Region 9 recovery funds support a variety of regional initiatives. First, Southwest Colorado Disaster Assistance (SWCODA) is a grassroots effort that shares resources and raises awareness during emergencies by matching those who want to help, with those who need help. This website¹ was previously used during emergencies such as the 416 Fire in 2018 that primarily impacted La Plata and San Juan Counties. It was reactivated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and expanded to include all five counties and two Native American tribes in southwest Colorado. Region 9 supports this website as the new hub for all five counties' recovery work. One key purpose it serves is to reduce duplication of resources and provide tools for communities that do not have the financial or technical support needed for today's on-line communications.

Second, Region 9 maintains a dynamic, engaging tool for tracking movement on key economic and social indicators of recovery with a regional economic data dashboard. We know that providing reliable data that is easily accessible helps community leaders anticipate problems and make informed decisions around their recovery.

Third, the Pagosa Springs Community Development Corporation (Pagosa CDC) in Archuleta County recently completed a key goal from their strategic plan by hiring an Economic Development Coordinator. This funding is allowing the Pagosa CDC to lead recovery efforts, accomplish their strategic plan priorities and to fully fund an economic development professional by the end of the grant. In particular, it is fostering private and non-profit partnerships to assist in recovery planning efforts for pandemic response and recovery. Every effort is being made to enhance and not duplicate existing activities.

Fourth, there is a huge need for technical assistance and capacity building for local stakeholders impacted by the pandemic. Montezuma County has three Chambers of Commerce (Tri Chambers) serving the towns of Dolores and Mancos, and the City of Cortez. Despite limited staffing, they are collaborating around business recovery efforts. The Tri Chambers banded together dividing duties of communication, outreach, and administration for the Recovery Task Force. With businesses struggling, there are limited funds to support chambers who often provide the training, networking and education needed to help businesses reopen, recover, and succeed. This effort will connect to the regional plan by using the SWCODA website as a landing page for their recovery efforts as well as regional Rise and Recover marketing, catered to the individual needs of each county and community. In Dolores County, recovery efforts include a business microloan fund, weekly business recovery meetings hosted by the chamber. This county of less than 3,000 people requires technical assistance to move forward with recovery efforts. Region 9 aims to support their evolving situation by committing staff time dedicated to the county's recovery work. The SWCODA website provides a much-needed platform that ties them into the larger regional recovery efforts and resources. Region 9's Rise and Recover funding focuses staff efforts to help ensure the region recovers and thrives with measurable progress beyond the two-year grant cycle. Region 9 participates on the county recovery taskforces to engage in recovery efforts that serve the local communities and align strategically to the region's efforts.

¹ <https://www.swcoda.org/>