

# HOW POLICIES AFFECT GROWTH AND THE COST OF SERVICES IN DELTA, MESA, MONTROSE AND OURAY COUNTIES, COLORADO



*Increasing population pressures are threatening to strain current systems of growth and land protection measures in Colorado's Tri-River region.*

*Delta, Mesa, Montrose and Ouray counties are home to some of our state's most valuable agricultural land and important conservation areas.*

*Using county and municipal data, analysts evaluated how land use policies might influence development patterns, and estimated their associated costs to local governments in Delta, Mesa, Montrose and Ouray counties in Colorado.*



ALTERNATIVES FOR  
FUTURE GROWTH IN THE  
TRI-RIVER REGION



*American Farmland Trust*



# GROWTH WILL CONTINUE: IN 25 YEARS,

*To get a clear picture of possible futures, we looked at land use issues in Delta, Mesa, Montrose and Ouray counties from several different angles.*



## **ANALYSES INCLUDED:**

- ▶ *Conducting a policy audit of existing comprehensive plan statements, regulatory measures and programs related to growth management and agricultural land protection in city and county governments in Delta, Mesa, Montrose and Ouray counties.*
- ▶ *Building an urban growth model that describes possible growth patterns resulting from selected policy alternatives.*
- ▶ *Producing a cost of services analysis to identify costs to local governments under each scenario.*

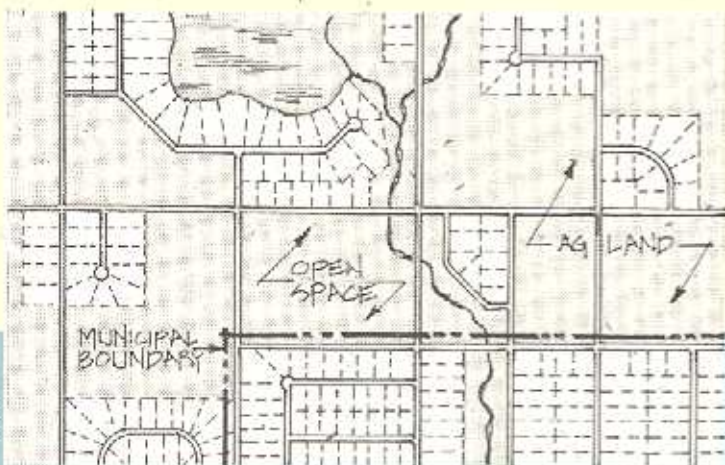
## **THREE ALTERNATIVE POLICY STRATEGIES WERE COMPARED TO A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL FUTURE (NO CHANGE IN CURRENT PLANNING AND POLICIES):**

**RURAL CLUSTERS**, which allow higher densities on portions of a property in order to preserve adjacent agricultural or other valuable open space;

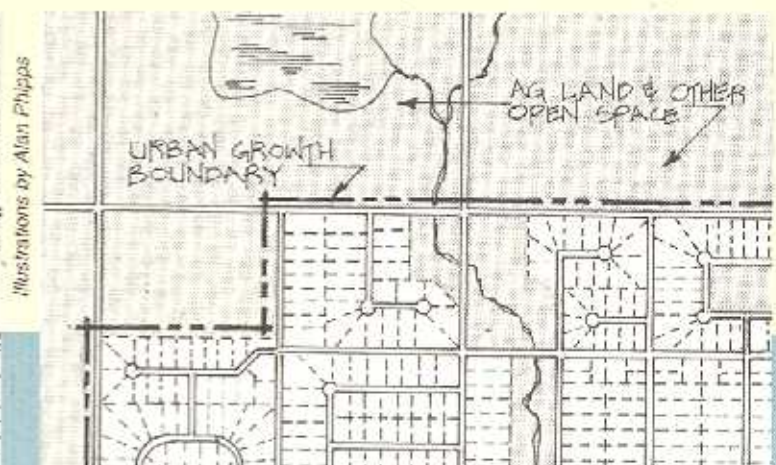
**LAND PROTECTION**, which prohibits development on highly-productive agricultural lands and habitat areas; and

**URBAN GROWTH AREAS**, which focus new development within growth boundaries drawn around existing jurisdictions.

*We found that agricultural valleys tend to build out in a scattered pattern, and development then spreads to other regions with nearby roads, compatible slopes and existing development.*



*Illustration of development under business-as-usual scenario*



*Illustration of development under urban growth area scenario*

The results of the analysis suggest that future development in the region will be highly fragmented without the adoption of a growth management strategy.

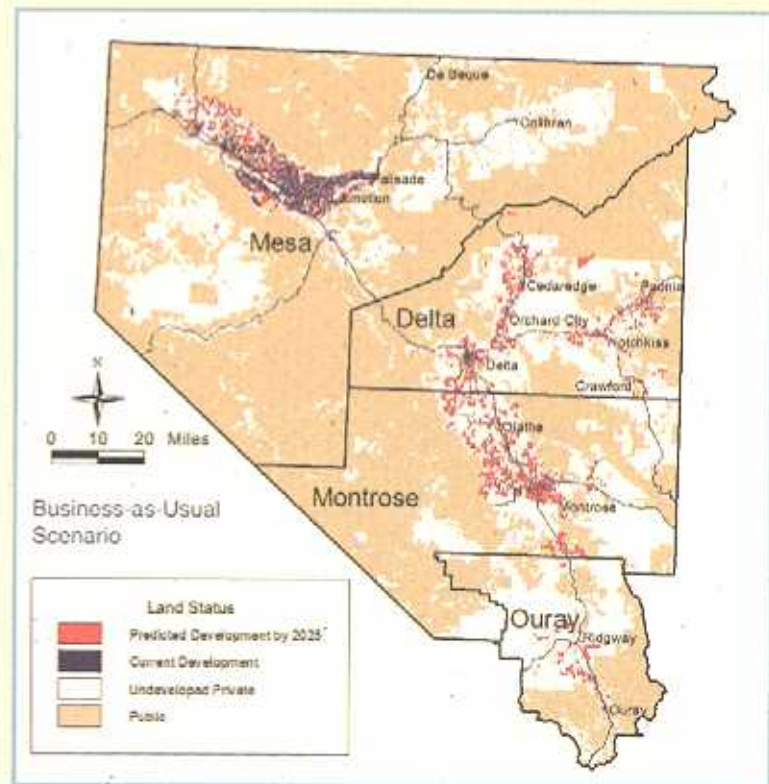
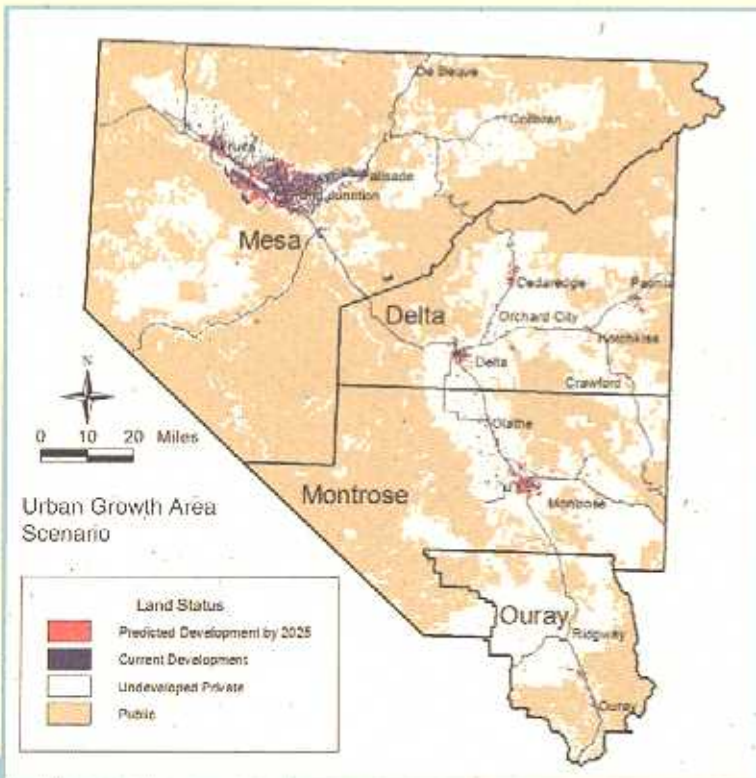


# WHAT WILL THE TRI-RIVER LANDSCAPE LOOK LIKE?

The policy audit found that each county has adopted its own approach to protecting agricultural and other sensitive lands, but adoption of growth management measures - voluntary or regulatory - is uneven across the jurisdictions. Although there are strong statements of intention to protect these landscapes, many jurisdictions in the region may not be prepared for the high rates of population growth predicted over the next 25 years.

The wide array of land protection and growth management measures has varying implications for landscape change in the region. For example, adoption of measures promoting geographical compactness and higher development densities may lead to rural cluster patterns or to more contiguous growth around urban centers. Protection of sensitive lands may lead to a scattered development pattern, while emphasis on urban growth boundaries may permit sprawling ranchette development outside designated boundaries.

Total land developed is greatest under the **business-as-usual scenario**, where 100,000 acres of open space are consumed in the Tri-River region, including 23,000 acres of agricultural land and 9,500 acres of other privately-owned open land.

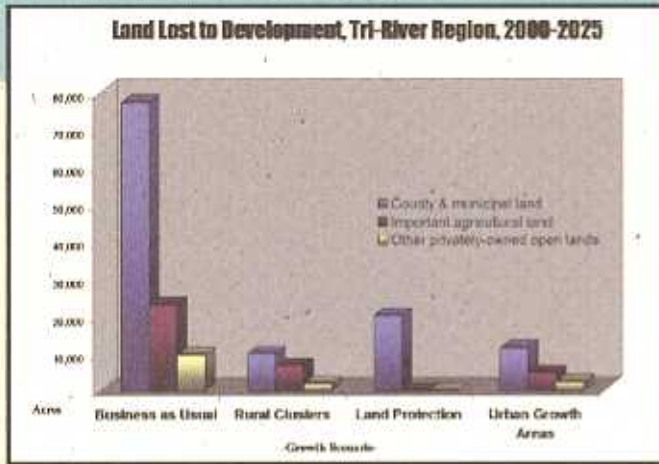


← The **urban growth area scenario** illustrates how all new development could easily be absorbed by the expansion of existing urban areas, leaving sensitive areas and valuable agricultural lands primarily intact.

With guidance and voluntary incentives, growth can be directed away from important landscapes. For example, by allowing small increases in the density of new development, the region can absorb the projected population growth without fragmenting valuable agricultural lands and other important landscapes.



# Tri-River communities can save \$82 million in tax revenue over the next 25 years by adopting a plan to protect sensitive lands.



Without an effort to redirect development, much of the agricultural land and sensitive areas in the region are likely to be lost to a highly dispersed, very low-density growth surge, at a high cost to local governments.

The cost of services analysis illustrates how the development patterns associated with each policy scenario would impact county and municipal finances. This analysis revealed that policies aimed at land protection (the alternative development strategies) are not just physically more efficient, but fiscally efficient as well. If the savings associated with adopting a growth management strategy are shown over 25 years, the more efficient, land-protecting scenarios help each county save millions of dollars more than the business-as-usual scenario.

**25-Year Fiscal Savings Associated with Alternative Development Strategies, Tri-River Region**  
 What Each County Can Save by Redirecting Future Development, 2000-2025

Scenario <sup>1</sup>	Montrose County	Mesa County	Delta County
Urban Growth Areas	\$29,257,637	\$49,419,720	\$3,282,463
Land Protection	\$4,923,587	\$8,610,867	\$3,922,660
Rural Clusters	\$4,187,759	\$17,767,837	\$669,251
Business as Usual	no savings	no savings	no savings

<sup>1</sup> Fiscal data for Ouray County were unavailable.

These savings represent tax dollars that need not be collected from residents.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ▶ Build a future for Tri-River agriculture by purchasing locally-grown products.
- ▶ Support the Tri-River Legacy planning process efforts to develop public finance programs that protect agricultural land. Contact American Farmland Trust at 970-464-4963 for more information.
- ▶ Encourage local governments in the Tri-River region to dedicate sales tax or mill levy revenues to the protection of agricultural lands and open space areas.
- ▶ Support the Mesa Land Trust (970-464-5750) and the Black Canyon Regional Land Trust (970-252-1481) by volunteering time or contributing much-needed dollars for land protection.

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For more information or to obtain a complete copy of this report, visit [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org), or contact the Rocky Mountain Regional Office of American Farmland Trust at 970-464-4963.