

# 8 PUBLIC SAFETY



## Overview

Covering roughly 1,700 square miles, La Plata County and its expanding population is home to a unique rural setting which includes mountainous terrain, high country mesas, two Native American Indian reservations and three municipalities. To maintain a viable community, the County must provide for planning and mitigation strategies pertaining to public safety so that the health and welfare of our constituents is accommodated. This element is intended to provide an outline of issues and events which have, or may, affect its residents; and additionally identifying agencies and their coordinated efforts which plan for those events.

## Law Enforcement

The La Plata County Sheriff's Office is the primary law enforcement agency for the unincorporated County, and also the second largest law enforcement division on the Western Slope. Other agencies providing law enforcement include: the Durango and Ignacio Police Departments; Bayfield Marshal's Office; Department of Homeland Security; Drug Enforcement Agency; Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Police; Colorado State Patrol; Colorado Bureau of Investigation; Colorado Division of Wildlife; Federal Bureau of Investigation and Bureau of Land Management; Fort Lewis College Campus Police; Immigration and Naturalization Service; and United States Forest Service.

Demand for law enforcement services has grown significantly in recent years. As discussed in *Element 2- Growth Trends* of this document, population in the County has seen a roughly 22% increase since 2000. As population increases and communities grow, a correlation can be drawn with increased crime rates.

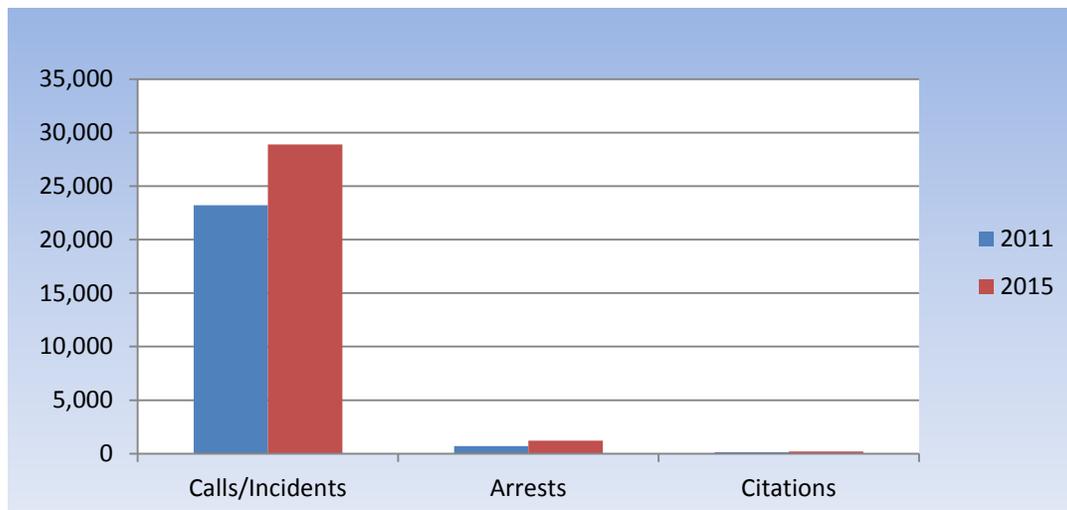
Between 2000 and 2011 the number of incidents investigated by the Sheriff's Department has increased by 5%, from 22,100 incidents investigated to 23,227. In more recent years, the incidents as documented by the Sheriff's Office has further increased reporting 23,227 calls/incidents, 705 total arrests, and 131 issued citations in 2011; to 28,890 calls/incidents, 1,201 total arrests and 199 issued citations in 2015; or a 24% increase overall. See *Chart 8-1* below for a graphical representation of this data.

The Sheriff's Office is also responsible for operating the jail and the juvenile detention facility. Constructed in 1987, the jail was designed to accommodate the County's through 2010. Due to increases in crime and stricter sentencing, overcrowding has been prevalent not only just in La Plata County, but on a national level as well. As stated in a 2015 report conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, local jail populations have increased 21% between 1999 and 2013.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics: *Census of Jails: Population Changes, 1999-2013 (2015)*.

Chart 8-1  
La Plata County Sheriff's Incident Data



Source: La Plata County Sheriff's Office

The County jail currently has the capacity for 184 inmates to be housed in the facility, with an average daily population of approximately 159 persons. As stated above, the state at large experiences the pressures of increased inmate populations. Locally, the Sheriff's department is strategizing ways to increase capacity with vacant space. In 2015, the "old" portion of the County jail was closed, leaving the maximum capacity for inmates at 184. As of late, the Sheriff's office has identified four (4) counties (Boulder, El Paso, Mesa, and Pueblo) with overcrowded jails that may relocate approximately 48 low level offenders to be housed in the once utilized jail space; after renovations, the population at the County jail could increase to 232 inmates. If achieved, the County jail will utilize a parole based treatment program for such offenders, which has proven to reduce recidivism. Moreover, by assisting those overcrowded jails, the County would see financial contributions for each inmate transferred.

La Plata, Archuleta, and San Juan County comprise the Sixth Judicial District of Colorado. The District Attorney is elected by voters in these counties and prosecutes criminal cases within the District, working closely with local law enforcement agencies. In recent years some new initiatives have been started in La Plata County, one in particular affectionately titled "Alternatives to Incarceration," focusing its efforts on non-violent offenders. Started in January 2009, the District Attorney's Office coordinated efforts to identify ways to reduce inmate jail sentences by way of strict community supervision, conversion of jail sentencing to electronic home monitoring, and work release programs, to name a few. The District Attorney's office has also taken it one step further to reduce inmate jail time by instituting an Adult Diversion program where low risk offenders (ex. driving with a suspended license due to inadequate finances for

## 8 PUBLIC SAFETY



prior fines) are taken completely out of the court system. This program, utilizing restorative justice<sup>2</sup>, has proven to reduce the number of offenders in an already backlogged court system, reduce the likelihood of repeat offenders, and create a strong community bond by hosting community conferences for offenders.

Local law enforcement agencies have also instituted mountain bike patrols in and around the local biking trails of Durango to combat the vagrant issues the community has been facing. Both the City of Durango and the Sheriff's office have purchased mountain bikes to patrol and document illegal, derelict camps, and to provide further public safety for the users of local trails. The Sheriff's office is also researching prospects for a renovation to the shooting range in the vicinity of Bodo Park, to be updated and used as a regional training facility for law enforcement and fire departments.

### Fire and Emergency Medical Services

In Colorado, fire protection districts are created under and operate within the statutory provisions of the Special District Act (Title 32, Article 1, C.R.S.). Once created, the fire protection districts are governed by a board of directors elected by registered voters whom either reside or own property within the boundary of their associated district. The local districts are funded by property tax mill levies. The board of directors has autonomous authority for managing their district within the scope of the district's authority, which includes a *Service Plan* approved by the Board of County Commissioners.

Fire protection in the County is provided by four (4) distinct protection districts: Durango Fire (DFPD), Fort Lewis Mesa (FLMPD), Los Pinos (LPFPD), and Upper Pine (UPFPD). Due to an increase in demand for services, coupled with the decrease in recruitment/retaining of volunteers, all departments employ both paid full time and volunteer staff to provide around the clock coverage within their districts (including fire and ambulance service)

Fire protection districts routinely provide comments specific to project design, as projects process through the County's development review. Although the districts do not play a major role in determining the location of new developments, their input typically comes in the form of site specific development fire flow requirements which often can be correlated to the location of development (based on water resource, and other infrastructure availability). Ultimately, the goal of the fire protection districts when dealing with new or established development proposals is to ensure their ability to access and have available means to combat fires at an appropriate level. In rural, mountainous communities such as La Plata County which lack infrastructure, this often can prove to be a challenging endeavor. The interface of development with wildfire is

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<sup>2</sup> Restorative Justice: a system of criminal justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large.

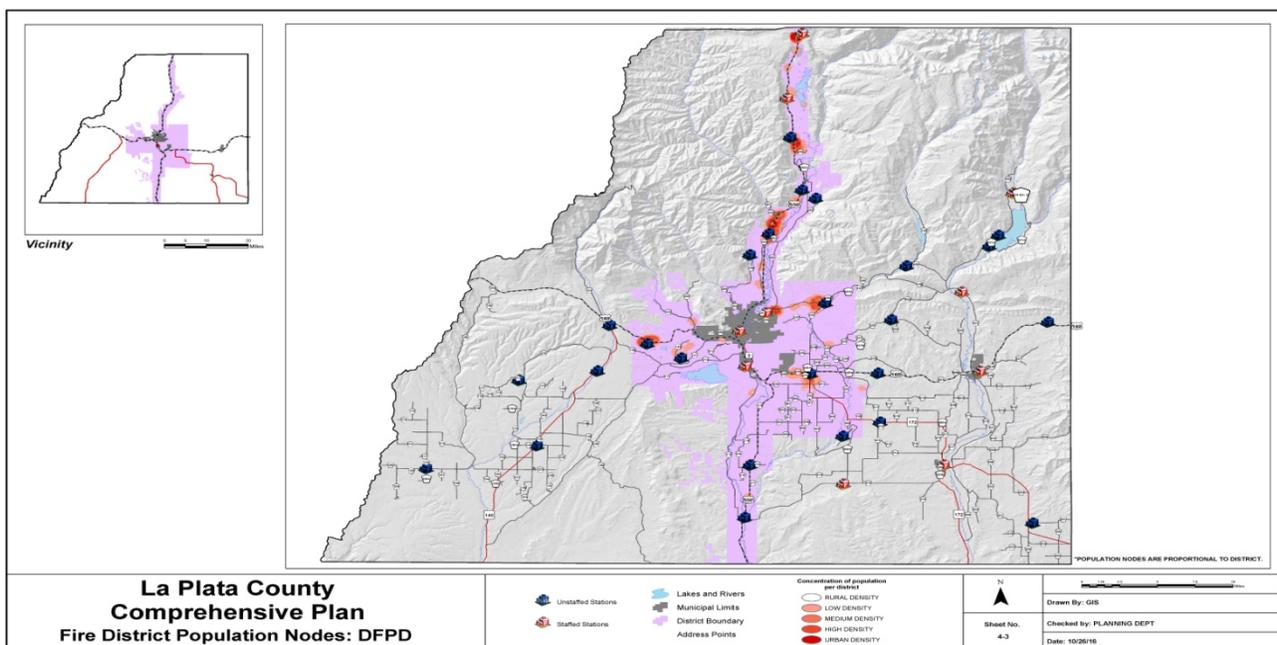
# 8 PUBLIC SAFETY



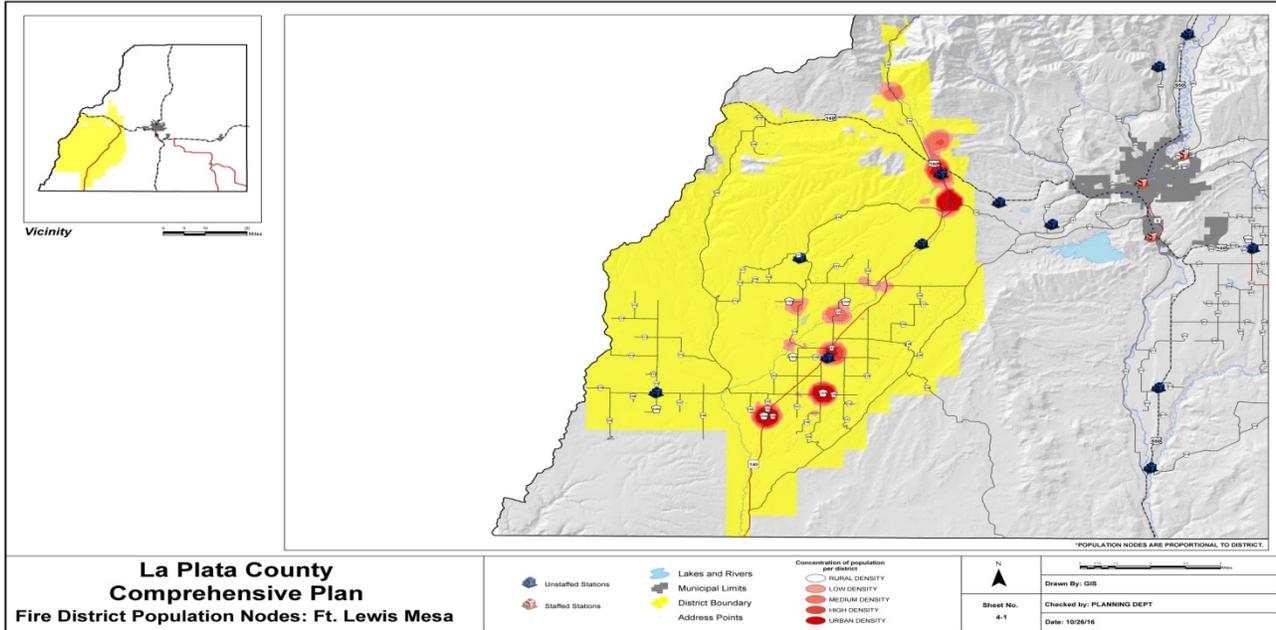
another important aspect of fire protection. Refer to *Element 4 - Environmental Resources*, for background information regarding wildfire and related firefighting service providers.

As land prices continue to rise in the City of Durango, development has been occurring in more rural parts of La Plata County. With this in mind, service levels as provided by the fire protection districts have become more complicated due to the lack of water availability to combat fires, in addition to difficult terrain when accessing properties. DFPD alone, with a servicing area of approximately 375 square miles, on average fields about 4,800 calls per year. As reflected on Maps 8-1 through 8-4, fire protection district boundaries can be seen as compared to fire house locations, and the proximity to varying densities of the County’s residential population.

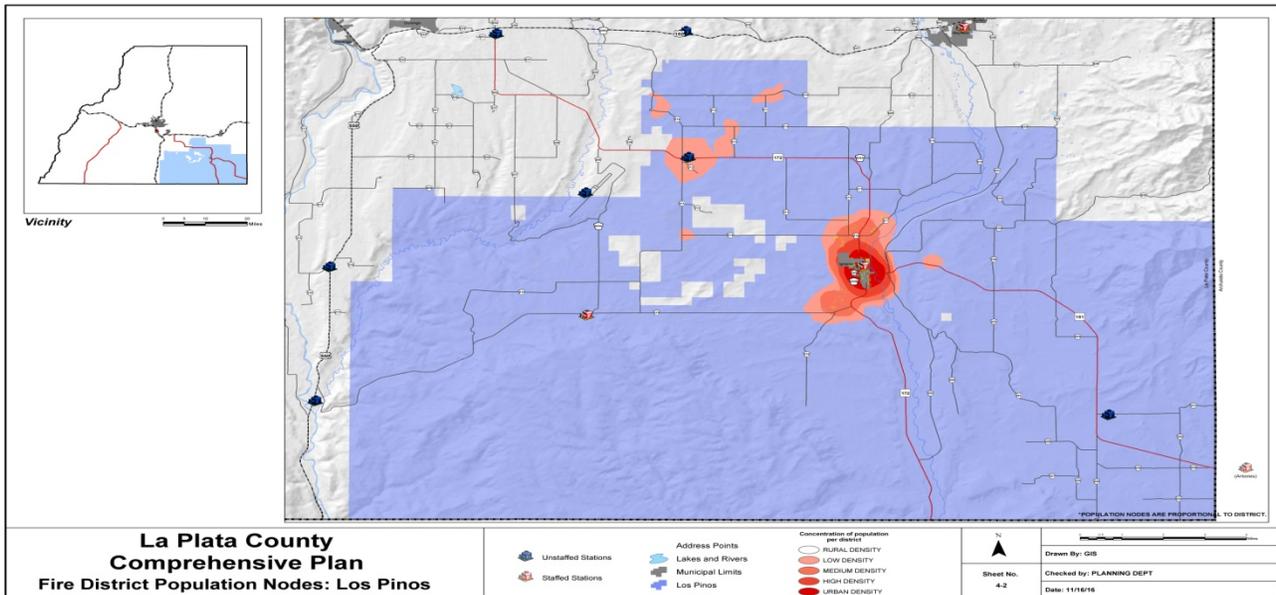
Map 8-1  
Durango Fire Protection District



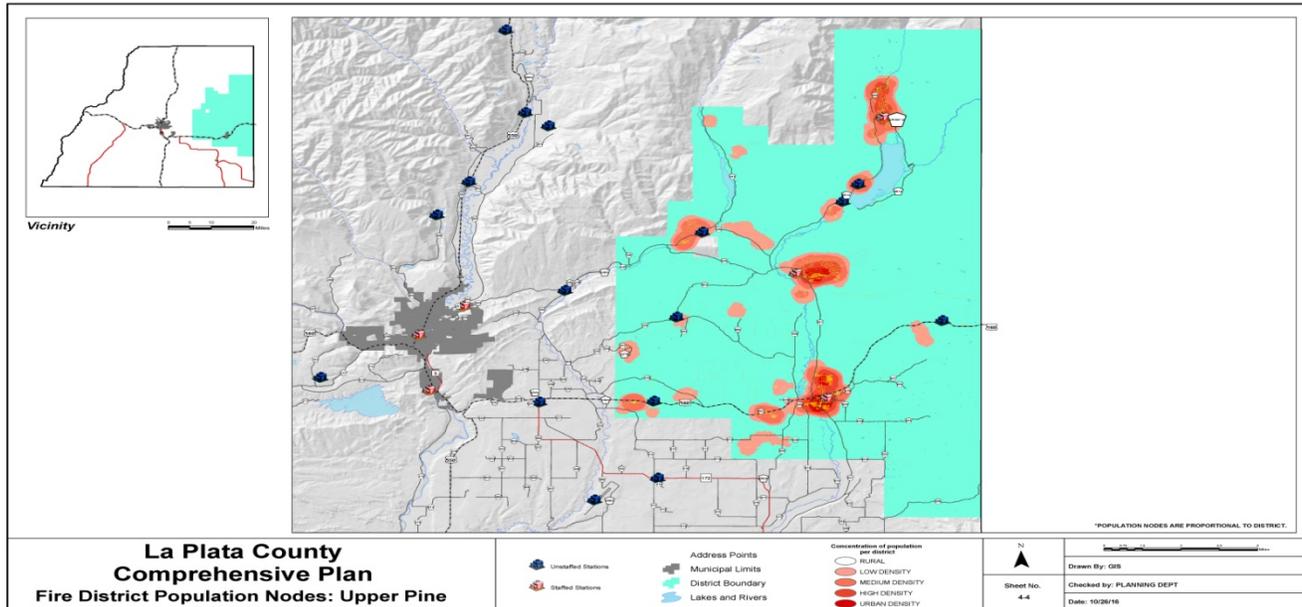
Map 8-2  
Fort Lewis Mesa Fire Protection District



Map 8-3  
Los Pinos Fire Protection District



Map 8-4  
Upper Pine Fire Protection District



Fire protection districts may also assume responsibility for emergency medical services (EMS), to include ambulance transport, in varying capacities. The state is broken into eleven regions, each of which has their own Regional Emergency and Trauma Advisory Council (RETAC). The four corners area includes five (5) counties within their RETAC: Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan, each of which provides representatives to the Council. Looking further within our regional area, La Plata and Montezuma also have an Emergency Medical Services Council, which is required when licensed ambulance services are provided; this Council is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation which works collaboratively at the County level. Statutorily, ambulance and personnel are separated within the State’s purview (notably when a County provides licensing for ambulatory services). It is the individual responsibility of the County for oversight of ambulance licensing, whereas the State monitors EMS services and has direct authority over all individual medical practice via the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).

With the exception of Fort Lewis Mesa, each fire district supports ambulance services within their district utilizing a number of medical facilities located in and around the County (see map below for locations) as well. EMS focuses on all types of medical trauma, which is provided by each of the fire districts utilizing 911 communication centers as the access point for dispatch. Depending upon the location of the event, district boundaries will determine which entity will be called to respond. As stated above, DFPD in 2015 received roughly 4,800 incident calls,

## 8 PUBLIC SAFETY



approximately 80% of which were EMS/ambulance related. Typically, those calls are population based, meaning where there are higher intensive uses, more call volume can be correlated with those areas (i.e. Horse Gulch needing trauma/medical services).

When needed, emergency air/helicopter transport services are available as well. Flight for Life, based out of Mercy Regional Medical Center, and operations based out of Farmington and Santa Fe New Mexico can be utilized to access difficult terrain. Within mountainous regions such as La Plata County, factors such as landing locations, weather issues, and accessible terrain can determine if the helicopter service is a viable option. These entities perform inter-agency trainings as well, fine tuning airlift patient transport services with emergency medical services from around the four corners region. When the service is limited, other collaborative medical resources can be called upon for assistance, including La Plata County Search and Rescue and Purgatory Ski Patrols.

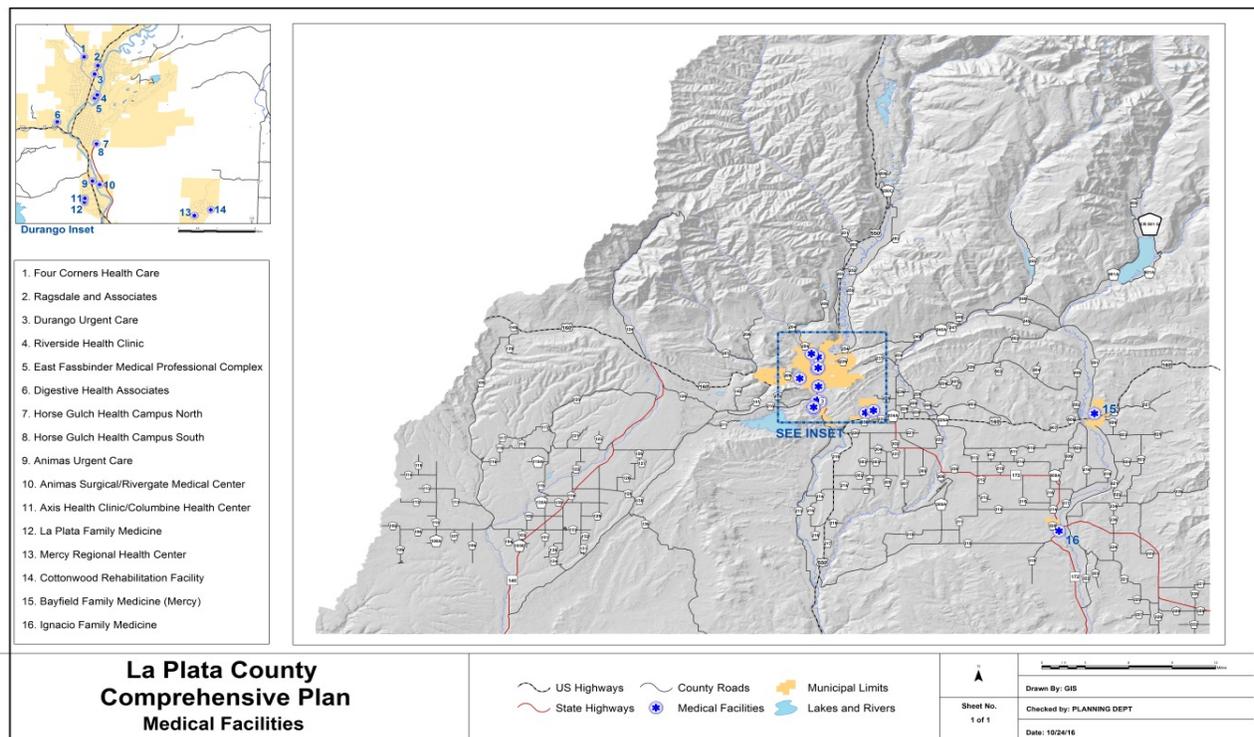
**Key Point**  
DFPD in 2015 received roughly 4,800 incident calls; approximately 80% of which were EMS/ambulance related.

Looking forward, the fire protection districts and EMS are anticipating a continued increase in call volume due largely in part to an increase in population within the County. As population increases, so will events and gatherings requiring dedicated services from emergency personnel, which may require the County to pursue guidance strategies and funding measures so those agencies can perform at the highest potential service level. Moreover, to keep up with the changing landscape, an update to the La Plata County EMS resolution may prove to be fruitful to stay in line with current state laws, in addition to fostering relationships which assure collaborative efforts are available in times of emergency events.

There are also needs for specialized emergency services, such as those at local airports. Aircraft rescue and fire fighting (ARFF) is a special category for fire fighting on airports for the response, evacuation and rescue of aircraft passengers and crew. The Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO) has professional aircraft firefighters with ARFF equipment. ARFF is not required at airports such as Animas Airpark which does not have regular passenger service containing 10 or more passenger seats. Aviation-rated fire extinguishers are available at Animas Airpark, and the Durango Fire Protection District responds to emergencies at there. Additional information for the facilities at DRO and Animas Airpark is contained in the respective master plans located in Appendices 16 and 21.

Identifying facilities for medical treatment is essential in determining service levels as well as target points for emergency responders. Where these are located and distributed throughout the County has been identified on Map 8-5.

Map 8-5  
Medical Facilities



## Office of Emergency Management/Search and Rescue

La Plata County operates both an Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and Search and Rescue (SAR). OEM is responsible for emergency planning with coordination housed within the Community Development Services (Building Department), staffed with one full time director. The director of OEM is also charged with collaborating efforts with La Plata County SAR, a volunteer organization under the purview of the Sheriff.

Drafted in 2013, the La Plata County Hazard Mitigation Plan<sup>3</sup> was created in a multi-jurisdictional effort to establish a document that outlines hazard mitigation and planning tools to better protect the people and property within La Plata County. Utilizing state and federal standards, types of hazards are identified within the document in addition to mitigation measures which can be implemented regarding potential hazards. By prioritizing locations, types and

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 23

standards via this document, La Plata County and those entities providing emergency services have an established baseline to work collaboratively during an event.

## Floodplain Management

The La Plata County Community Development team is tasked with the administration and regulation of floodplain management. In 2010, a much needed collaborative effort took place when a digital remapping process established flood zones in La Plata County, specifically focusing on the Animas River, Pine River, and Vallecito Creek drainages. Without this mapping system in place, floodplain studies often impacting development proposals were extremely expensive to perform for private entities. Accurate volumes were noted and calculated as part of this exercise, when historically those numbers were once unavailable. Currently, this mapping system is available for the public to utilize when contemplating development proposals via the La Plata County Geographic Information Systems free website<sup>4</sup>.

**Key Point**  
Rather than the ultimate exclusion of development in those [floodplain] areas, when analyzed early in the proposal stages, strategic steps can be implemented to allow for safe development.

Floods are viewed as a “community disaster”, meaning when one occurs, a coordinated effort at both the local and state level respond to associated impacts. Working collaboratively with the Fire Districts, La Plata County will be first responders to assess the situation at hand and determine if the event is within their management threshold. Should the flood be greater than what the local authorities can manage, via a declaration process, the State can utilize resources to provide assistance in the forms of financial, construction, and personnel.

In the context of development, floodplain management is regulated by a three-fold collaborative effort: 1. During initial project proposals, Planners are tasked with identifying the location and potential impact to the development project that may be caused by the floodplain<sup>5</sup> or floodway<sup>6</sup>; 2. The Building team then identifies site specific management for developments in those areas to curtail the potential for impacts; rather than the ultimate exclusion of development in these areas, when analyzed early in the proposal stages, strategic steps can be taken to allow for a safe development to occur in those areas while also implementing control measures to protect the site; and 3. Should it be challenged, the Board of County Commissioners are the appellate body for floodplain appeals.

<sup>4</sup> Website: <http://lpcgis.laplata.co.us/laplatajs/>

<sup>5</sup> Floodplain - the area that has been designated with the potential for 100-year volume discharge flows may occur.

<sup>6</sup> Floodway - the area that’s been designated on flood hazard maps identifying where highest velocities, highest erosion, highest debris movement, and highest impacts of flood waters may occur.

# 8 PUBLIC SAFETY



## GOALS

Goal 8.1: To ensure emergency preparedness planning and emergency services continues to meet or exceed the growing demands of the County's constituents and visitors.

Objective 8.1.A: Continue to work and coordinate with public safety and emergency service providers to ensure adequate development standards are implemented.

Policy 8.1.A1: Identify and obtain comments from key emergency service providers early in development process.

Policy 8.1.A2: In collaboration with emergency service providers, promote development standards to address unique characteristics of development in La Plata County.

Policy 8.1.A4: Identify and update pertinent documents to make sure emergency personnel have adequate resources to perform vital functions.

Objective 8.1.B: Continue to collaborate with emergency service providers to identify hazardous areas utilizing current technologies, and determine appropriate mitigation requirements for development in those areas.

Policy 8.1.B1: Continue to develop floodway mapping for all major drainages in La Plata County.

Policy 8.1.B2: Continue to coordinate with emergency service providers to identify mitigation measures for development in and around the urban wildfire interface.

Policy 8.1.B3: Promote collaborative efforts between governmental agencies to develop better response strategies when dealing with an emergency event.

Policy 8.1.B4: Encourage commercial development near existing infrastructure to ensure emergency service entities have adequate water and access to perform their duties.

## 8 PUBLIC SAFETY



Objective 8.1.C: Establish a system of measurement in order to regularly assess and evaluate level of service standards for public safety and emergency services within the County.

Policy 8.1.C1: Maintain and map an inventory of data to evaluate existing levels of service from each public safety resource including Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement, and Medical Facilities.

Policy 8.1.C2: Establish targeted level of service standards for measuring and projecting growth impacts.

Policy 8.1.C3: Inventory existing emergency response agencies to ensure future service to County residents will be a viable option.

Policy 8.1.C4: Coordinate with the various agencies in La Plata County associated with public safety to identify adequate levels of service necessary in order to accommodate weighted growth within the County (existing and projected).