

# VALLECITO DISTRICT LAND USE PLAN

Adopted October 16, 1996  
Revised August 18, 2005

---

## *I. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN*

La Plata County, like many other Southwestern Colorado communities, has been experiencing considerable growth in recent years. Population growth rates of over 3% per year were recorded between 1992 and 1996. Until the adoption of the 1996 land use plan, development proposals in the Vallecito Planning District were considered on a case-by-case basis. The case-by-case review did not provide an opportunity for citizens, the Planning Commission, and County Commissioners to consider the cumulative impacts that individual projects could have on the County. The 1996 land use plan was prepared in order to provide the citizens and County with a framework for evaluating development proposals with the perspective of how the project relates to the Planning District and County as a whole. The plan was intended to provide the citizens and County the opportunity to shape future development within the district to insure that it is compatible with the current and desired lifestyles, businesses, homes, and natural features; and to provide citizens with more predictability about what kinds of communities, commercial developments, recreational areas, residential areas, and agricultural areas may exist in the future within the District.

Since the adoption of the 1996 Plan, the devastating Missionary Ridge Fire of June 2002 occurred in La Plata County. The Vallecito area was especially hard hit; 28 homes or cabins were lost to the fire. Many businesses, dependent on summer tourists, were severely impacted for several years. The entire area was evacuated for several weeks, driving home the very real need for evacuation plans and effective communication strategies. The fact that C.R. 501 provides the only way into and out of the area is a concern for all.

This Plan was created under the premise that it would provide landowners with general guidance for stewarding their property. Development proposals submitted to the County for review by the La Plata County Planning Commission will be reviewed for conformance with this plan's goals, objectives, and Land Use Classification Map [available online at <http://co.laplata.co.us/maps.htm> -- click on Vallecito], which were developed by the District's residents. This is not to say that the plan cannot be changed. However, it is important that changes to the plan be considered outside the context of the details of a specific project. Therefore, if a specific application is not in conformance with the Plan, this application should be preceded by a plan amendment to bring it into conformity. It is the policy of the Planning Commission that projects that are in general conformance with the Land Use Classification Map and Plan goals, objectives and policies will be recommended for approval.

Plan amendments will be reviewed and acted upon by the Planning Commission at a public hearing prior to consideration of the project by the Planning Commission. Issues to be considered when reviewing plan amendments include:

- Road Capacities and Emergency Egress
- Water and Sewer Availability
- Conformance with Goals/Objectives/Vision of Plan
- Fiscal Impact of Projected Growth and Development
- Water/Air Quality Impacts
- Lake Use Impacts
- Wildlife Impacts
- Visual Impacts and Viewsheds
- Change of Neighborhood Character
- Fire Protection/Law Enforcement
- Noise Impacts
- Affordable Housing Impacts

## II. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Vallecito Valley, surrounded by beautiful National Forests and rugged terrain, is a focal point of the Vallecito Planning District. The valley and surrounding area provide a picturesque setting for summer and year-round residents, business owners, tourists and sports enthusiasts. Residents feel it is one of the most beautiful natural areas in Colorado, offering access to the Needle Mountains. Vallecito is a tourist-based economy; tourists are drawn to Vallecito due to its unique combination of rural charm, natural features, recreation, hunting and sport fishing. Appropriate development should reflect these values, to compliment the local economy and way of life.

The Vallecito District “Vallecito” includes the area north of the intersection of County Roads 501 and 240, including the Vallecito Reservoir and a portion of the Pine River below the Vallecito Dam. The narrow valley bottom is confined by rugged, very steep, and moderately steep slopes.

A single two-lane road, (C.R 501) provides the only access to Vallecito. It terminates around the northeast side of the reservoir where the Pine River enters. The main road continues, as C.R. 500, to the north end of the valley. Seasonal US Forest Service roads access the east side of the reservoir and several of the adjoining valleys.

Originally the summer hunting and gathering grounds of the Southern Utes, Vallecito became a farming/ranching area after the Southern Utes were displaced<sup>1</sup>. With the creation of the reservoir in 1941 Vallecito quickly became an attractive location for summer homes and lake-oriented recreation activities. The number of year-round residents in 2005 is around 500 and continues to increase.

The most frequent description of the character of Vallecito is “rural” and of eclectic, variable architectural design. At a community meeting (1996) a variety of definitions was offered as to what constitutes the ‘rural character’ of Vallecito. Some felt that the area *above the dam* was rural, characterized by the following:

“low density”	“no restaurant next to home”	“slow life style”
“no street lights”	“low levels of service”	“lack of through traffic”
“not many regulations”	“know your neighbors and friends”	“can walk to campground”
“low crime rate”	“lots of trees”	“views of mountains & wilderness”

Others typified the area *below the dam* as rural, such as:

“agricultural”	“away from the city”	“laid back farming community”
“not urban”	“from Bayfield to Pine River Lodge”	“lower part of district”

The four primary sub-areas of Vallecito are:

### **Below the Dam**

Below the dam are two single-family subdivisions, several individual home sites, Camp Kanakuk, and the Vallecito Resort RV Park with a small convenience/gas store. Cool Water Ranch is the large private landholding below the dam. It is currently in agricultural use.

### **West Shore**

The shoreline of the reservoir is controlled by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and includes parking areas, boat docks, commercial development in the Sawmill Point area, and steep slopes which burned in 2002 and were highly impacted by mud and rock slides, and flooding for several years after the fire.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Southern Utes still own 1/6 of the reservoir resources.

### **North of Reservoir**

At the north end of the reservoir are large areas of seasonal wetland flats that are inundated as the lake level rises and falls. The Colorado Division of Wildlife designated the reservoir and the lands along the shoreline as bald eagle winter range and the northern portion of the reservoir near Vallecito Creek as a bald eagle winter concentration area (1994).

Immediately adjacent to C.R. 501/500 (the main road) are several pockets of development that are separated by previously forested buffers, since burned in the 2002 Missionary Ridge Fire, that are either too steep for development or controlled by the BOR. In the development areas are found a mix of uses including single-family homes, restaurants, lodges, tourist-oriented shops, offices, bed & breakfasts, convenience commercial/gas (such as Country Market), horse pack trip and outfitting businesses, and guest cabin/lodge establishments, the largest of which is Wit's End Ranch. There are several single-family subdivisions on spur roads from C.R. 501. The overriding character of the area around the lake and immediately adjacent to C.R. 501 is an informal mix of all of these uses. The fact that they are generally of a natural wood finish and low in height adds an overall cohesiveness — a desirable “village” character.

The area north of the lake is generally residential in pockets of varying lot sizes and home types. There is a mobile home park and single-family home subdivisions, including the Mushroom subdivisions just north of the reservoir. Along the east side of the valley are two larger undeveloped tracts — used for a church camp and a camping area. Development has encroached to varying degrees on Vallecito Creek and its tributaries that thread their way through the residential areas to the reservoir. The streamside adjoining Vallecito Creek is a valuable scenic and natural resource to all the residents and visitors to the valley. Some of this land is designated floodway or floodplain by FEMA.

### **East of the Reservoir**

On the east side of the reservoir are two pockets of development: Elk Point Resort, the 5 Branches resort (with associated commercial uses) and Wilderness Trails dude ranch located on the Pine (Los Pinos) River that feeds the reservoir. There are also two sizeable ranch properties, Granite Peaks and Teelawuket.

The majority of homes in the District are served by individual well and septic systems. There are two small central sewer systems north of the reservoir (Upper Valley Sanitation, Inc., and 5 Branches' sanitation).

The population of Vallecito is estimated at 2,000 to 3,000 residents during the summer, with a growing number of year-round residents. The specific rate of growth is estimated to be approximately 15 new homes each year based on building permits issued.

Annual visitation has been projected by the BOR to increase from 86,000 in 1994 to 140,000 by the year 2010 (a 63% increase). This would likely be accompanied by increased development in the valley, on existing subdivided lots as well as several tracts of private land that could be further subdivided in the future. This level of development could have significant impacts to Vallecito as follows:

- **Water/Sewer** - Historically, most homes in the vicinity of the reservoir are on septic systems. Water quality tests in conjunction with the Vallecito Reservoir Management Plan, and additional water tests done by the San Juan Basin Health Dept. in September 2003, did not detect any general water pollution, either in wells or in surface water of the lake<sup>2</sup>. It was hypothesized that the free flow of the groundwater quickly dissipates most septic effluent. Neither current discharges from properly operated wastewater treatment plants nor effluent from properly designed and maintained septic tank leach-field systems

---

<sup>2</sup> In the past, water sampling and testing in several specific areas detected presence of coliform organisms (Root Creek, Five Branches Marina, Graham Creek campground and Gut Canyon). It is not known whether these samples were surface water or well water. It should be noted that coliform bacteria are emitted by all warm-blooded animals and their presence in low numbers in surface waters is not at all unusual. Coliform organisms detected in well water (rare) would more likely be the result of surface water contamination due to a poorly sealed well casing; actual coliform occurrence in ground water would be extremely rare. The coliform test is intended to be a screening test to warn of possible contamination of drinking water; it is not usually used as an indicator of emerging pollution problems in a body of water such as Vallecito Reservoir.

appeared to pose a significant threat to water quality in Vallecito Reservoir, due to the extremely large dilution factor involved. Increasing development will mean increased non-point source pollution from runoff from roads, driveways, lawns, etc., containing fertilizers, pesticides, and possibly other chemicals. The effect on Vallecito Reservoir is unknown; however, there may be an adverse effect in the smaller side streams and ponds immediately north of the reservoir where the water flow rate is particularly slow.

The Pine River Watershed Group published in early 2005 the results of a multi-year water quality study of Vallecito Reservoir. This will set a baseline quality for the lake against which future tests will determine if any significant changes take place. All future development in Vallecito needs to consider this established baseline.

- **Compatibility** – Structures might be built without regard to preserving and enhancing the contextual setting of the valley and without regard to preserving views of public lands from adjacent properties, public roadways, and recreational trails and points of public access.
  
- **Ingress and Egress:** – Vallecito is constrained by a single route of ingress and egress. The ability to evacuate all residents and tourists in event of an emergency, such as flood or wildfire, poses a significant safety threat. It is strongly recommended that an emergency evacuation plan be developed. Designation of helicopter landing zones and medical aid and planning for an emergency shelter should be part of emergency plans for the area. The plan should recognize that evacuation may not be possible in some situations.
  
- **Wildlife Impacts** – The abundance of wildlife is one of Vallecito’s key natural and economic resources. Significant loss of habitat and wildlife corridors for eagles, osprey, elk, deer and other birds and animals will negatively impact Vallecito. All new development should design with wildlife in mind.
  
- **Visual Impact and Viewsheds** – Many of the scenic views are important to Vallecito residents and visitors: lakes, meadows, forests, streams, ridgelines, etc. Visual degradation of such views should be avoided. Important views should be designated and protected while allowing for reasonable development.
  
- **Change of Neighborhood Character**– Vallecito achieved and has maintained an appropriate balance of commercial and residential uses that support the rural character of the area. The occupational diversity and heterogeneous social interaction within the community results in a social camaraderie not necessarily related to occupational status; this was characteristic of many Colorado communities before the influx of new residents. Sudden or large-scale development projects or other abrupt changes would challenge or destroy the existing community balance. Measured, thoughtful growth blending a mix of uses, while preserving the natural resources and rural character of the valley, are key to Vallecito’s healthy and sustainable future.
  
- **Air Quality** – In the current context, more development and more people usually means more cars and more fireplaces, thus leading to deteriorating air quality.
  
- **Commercial Uses** – Commercial uses might proliferate through the community (“splatter”), undermining the rural, residential, serene qualities that are part of the property value and attraction of the Vallecito Planning District. Commercial uses should be limited to the areas designated on the map and not encroach on residential areas except for appropriate home businesses.

A survey in conjunction with the Vallecito Reservoir Management Plan (1994, Bureau of Reclamation) documented the high value visitors place on the scenery at Vallecito. Scenery was by far the most frequently listed reason for visiting Vallecito, followed by enjoyment of the lake, fishing and the peace and quiet. When asked what they would like to see changed at Vallecito, the most popular response was change nothing, followed by more fish and decrease development. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) concluded from their

Management Plan evaluation that “carrying capacity should be based on maintaining a low development, more natural setting.”

There are existing development pressures and major development and use proposals anticipated in the immediate future that need to be addressed. The purpose of this revised plan is to establish a community vision and planning context that will protect the existing desirable characteristics and land use pattern of the area and act as a guide as growth and development continue in Vallecito.

### **Vision**

Maintaining and preserving the natural beauty, rural character, wildlife resources, low density of population, family life, neighborly atmosphere, sense of community, broad range of socioeconomic diversity, and clean air and water is the vision residents share for the Vallecito Planning District. Through communicating and working together in a spirit of cooperation and self-reliance, the residents of the Vallecito area will seek to achieve the goals and objectives set forth in this District Land Use Plan.

### **III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **A. Goal: Preserve the Rural Residential Character of the Valley, with Compatible Resort, Commercial and Recreational Uses.**

**Objective 1:** Protect and maintain the rural character and current low density of Vallecito and its natural resources by providing a plan to steward and guide land use<sup>3</sup>.

**Objective 2:** Confine compatible commercial development to areas designated on the Vallecito District Map.

**Objective 3:** Allow for home-based businesses provided they do not adversely affect neighboring property use and peaceful enjoyment.

**Objective 4:** Preserve the right to board and use horses or other domestic animals for trail rides and other dude-ranch operations, as allowed by appropriate land use classifications. The number of animals kept on parcels smaller than 5 acres should be consistent with County regulations; the intent is to preserve the rural aspects and peaceful enjoyment of the community for all residents.

**Objective 5:** Access to trailheads and public lands for recreational use including hiking, fishing, and horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and ATV/snowmobiling should be preserved. Additional local trails and public access to public lands should be developed and encouraged consistent with the current La Plata County Trails Plan, while limiting impact on wildlife and single-family homes.

**Policy 1.** The character of new development will be similar to the character of the sub-area in which it is located, as designated on the *Vallecito Land Use Classification Map*. To this end, for new or redeveloping projects, the applicant shall demonstrate that the proposed development meets the following criteria. Criteria b through g are intended to apply to commercial, lodging, mixed use projects, and residential structures.

- a. For new subdivisions, if the proposed lots are substantially different in size from the majority of subdivided parcels along the subdivision boundaries, the transition of lot sizes will be created within the new project, not along the property line. To implement this concept, the proposed lot sizes along property lines will be no less than ½ the lot size of the average of adjacent subdivided property, but not less than ½ acre. An alternative means of transition will be the creation of a buffer zone (enlarged setback from the property line, with trees

---

<sup>3</sup> This goal would include discouraging accumulation of junk on property in adherence to County Codes.

preserved or planted). Lot sizes within the subdivision may be adjusted to compensate for the transition, with project density no greater than permitted by the applicable land use classification.

- b. Proposed buildings should be consistent in appearance, height, building form and exterior materials with surrounding buildings (e.g., do not introduce a flat-roof, concrete block building in an area that has predominantly pitched roofs and natural wood finishes).
- c. The height and placement of proposed buildings will preserve views of the lake and mountains from surrounding public and private properties - to the extent practicable, consistent with reasonable uses permitted on the property (i.e., if moving the building slightly, or lowering a portion of it, will better avoid blocking a neighbor's views, do so).<sup>4</sup>
- d. Light fixtures should not cast light on adjacent properties (i.e., use fixtures that have full cut-off casings/shades that keep the light on your property). Every effort will be made to minimize light pollution.
- e. For commercial, lodging or mixed-use projects, signage should be compatible with the District's rural setting (i.e. wood or stone are appropriate – urban signs such as neon or internally lighted signs should be avoided. Lighting of signs should be the minimal necessary to accomplish the task and should be down cast. Full cut-off fixtures are strongly encouraged. Signage is further regulated by the La Plata County Sign Code. New commercial off-premise signs are strictly regulated by the County Code; Chamber member businesses may use the directory below the dam.
- f. In order that parked cars do not pose a risk to human health and safety, adequate parking spaces shall be provided (i.e., all the patrons of the proposed use must be able to park on the premises). The parking spaces shall be located so as to minimize impacts on adjacent properties, such as placed behind the building [not very visible] or, if in front, set back from the property line with a band of grass, trees or natural landscape [not paved or graveled] at least 10' wide around the outside of the parking lot.
- g. The use will not attract activity or increase noise and/or traffic beyond the normal operating hours of the neighboring uses and shall not detract from the peaceful, rural character of the area. Amplified outdoor noise should be discouraged and at a minimum shall comply with the standards of C.R.S. 25-12-103.

**Policy 2.** La Plata County, including Vallecito is a right-to-farm area. That is, existing farming and other existing agricultural practices and husbandry of farm animals shall not be restricted beyond compliance with existing County regulations.

**Policy 3.** Written notice of a proposed project (such as any platting) will be given to property owners within 500' of such project via certified mail and to the Vallecito Land Use Association. For major projects it is recommended that notices be posted at major areas of public use such as stores, community mailbox kiosks, etc., to provide information for all residents.

**B. Goal: Improve and Maintain Existing Roads.**

**Objective 1:** Ensure that new development pays its fair share of additional road impacts.

**Objective 2:** Ensure that new development minimizes adverse traffic conditions.

---

<sup>4</sup> This policy is not intended to create a right of view of someone else's private property.

**Objective 3:** Lessen congestion in streets and roads and reduce impact of excessive amounts of roads. [Per C.R.S. 30-28-115 (1), public welfare]

**Objective 4:** Recognize that C.R. 501 is the sole access to the Vallecito District. Encourage widening and alternative access where feasible.

**C. Goal: Seek a Balance of Regulations, Policies, Property Rights and Planning to Protect the Rural Character of Vallecito.**

**Objective 1:** Solicit input from property owners, residents and other concerned citizens as to the compatibility, risk and benefit.

**D. Goal: Maintain the Visual and Environmental Qualities upon Which the Economy of the Valley Depends.**

**Objective 1:** The County will continue to support the monitoring of water quality, and modify regulations as necessary to protect surface and ground water from contamination.

**Objective 2:** Support development that protects views of ridgelines, meadows, wetlands and other scenic natural resources.

**Objective 3:** Study the feasibility and cost of providing **public** central water and sewer for the north end the valley.

**Objective 4:** Encourage placement of structures so as to maximize open space.

**Objective 5:** Monitor air quality to document a baseline and ensure against degradation of quality due to increased development. Encourage new development to use gas stoves where available and EPA approved wood burning devices where gas is unavailable.

**E. Goal: Encourage All Hazards Emergency Planning and Firewise Development.**

**Objective 1:** Guide new and existing development with defensible space policies and firewise subdivision design to minimize fire risk and help prevent wildfire tragedies.

**Objective 2:** Minimize exposure to wildfire hazards and difficulties in emergency evacuations by implementing appropriate restrictions.

**Policy 1.** Since CR 501 is the only road in and out of the valley with almost no prospects of any change in this situation, additional development in the District should be thoughtfully considered with serious attention paid to emergency evacuation, alternative access and the ability to safely shelter isolated populations for an extended period of time in the event of a road blockage. New development which increases the potential for disaster, or otherwise adds risk or fails to provide all hazards emergency planning should be denied.

**Objective 3:** Work with the local fire district, district residents, the La Plata County Office of Emergency Management and federal and state agencies to develop and implement an All Hazards Emergency Plan for the District.

**IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAN**

The proposed land use plan is based on a vision for Vallecito that continues to evolve. The following section discusses the classifications included in the Land Use Classification Map that accompanies the text of this plan. The Land Use Classifications/ Descriptions Table contained in Section V of the plan also discusses the various

classifications. The recommended land uses, their locations and the approximate densities are based upon the goals and objectives set forth in Section III, and are guided further by a desire to maintain compatibility with adjacent and neighboring existing uses. Development proposals must be reviewed for consistency with the plan's goals, objectives, and Land Use Classification Map.

## **COMMERCIAL**

Commercial uses are designated uses in several land use classifications. These Classifications include *Local Commercial* and *Mixed Use*. Some incidental commercial uses are also allowed in the *Dude Ranch* Classification.

### **Local Commercial**

Several commercial sub-areas are designated according to the uses that primarily occur there: the commercial areas are in the vicinity of the Shoreline Inn, Sawmill Point, Buffalo Gap/Rocky Mountain General Store, Country Market/Virginia's, and Wit's End Ranch. It is envisioned that commercial uses established in these areas will be oriented towards serving the needs of local residents and visitors.

### **Mixed Use**

Several areas where a mixture of small-scale commercial uses is interspersed with single-family residential development exist in the District. These areas are on the Southwestern end of the lake near Sawmill Point, and near the Northwestern end of the lake near the Buffalo Gap. These areas are classified as *Mixed Use*. It is envisioned that new commercial uses might be established in these areas. However, care must be taken to blend new uses in with existing uses with a minimum of impact. (See compatibility criteria, Goal A, Policy 1, [a.-g.]

## **OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS**

Overnight accommodations are designated uses in several land use classifications. These classifications include: *Mixed Residential / Accommodation*, *Campground / Accommodation*, and *Country Tourist / Dude Ranch*.

### **Mixed Residential / Accommodation**

Along significant portions of the main road (CR501) through the village, small tourist-oriented accommodations such as bed & breakfasts are able to coexist comfortably with residential uses. The general category of *Mixed Residential / Accommodation* has been applied to these areas on the *Land Use Classification Map*. Additional, similar or compatible lodging (bed and breakfast) development is acceptable in these areas as long as care has been taken to blend them in with the residential uses with a minimum of impact. Conformance with compatibility criteria contained in Goal A, Policy 1, (a.-g.) of this plan must be ensured when projects are approved in this land use classification.

### **Campground / Accommodation**

Several properties throughout the District are operated as campgrounds and lodges. These properties include Blue Spruce RV Park and the 10-acre LDS parcel, located north of the lake; and the Vallecito Resort, Coolwater Resort and Camp Kanakuk south of the lake. It is envisioned that campground uses or lodging that maintains a rustic setting might occur on these properties. Development densities for campground and accommodation uses will be compatible with adjacent developed properties and in conformance with Compatibility Policy 1 in Section III of this Plan. Properties within this classification may be converted to residential uses at a density equal to or lower than the predominant surrounding residential land use classifications without plan amendment.

### **Country Tourist / Dude Ranch**

Above the dam there are several dude ranch operations that include horseback rides, short-term lodging and small commercial uses incidental to the dude ranching (meals, souvenirs, accessories, etc.). Because these uses also entail certain impacts associated with overnight accommodations and the boarding of animals (flies, odors, noise, and traffic) it is important to specifically identify and delineate them, to preserve the rights of existing users. The majority of the 185-acre ACE property located in the Northeast end of the valley has been included in this classification. If dude ranching uses are established on this property, care must be taken to buffer adjacent residential properties from the portions of the property used for the boarding of animals. Development densities for dude ranching uses will be compatible with adjacent developed properties and in conformance with Compatibility Policy 1 in Section III of this Plan. Properties within this classification may be converted to residential uses at a density equal to or lower than the predominant surrounding residential land use classifications without plan amendment.

## **RESIDENTIAL**

The predominant land use on private lands within the District is residential. Existing and proposed residential development densities vary considerably throughout the District. A variety of residential land use classifications are included in the Plan. It must be noted that the residential densities contained within land use classifications are intended to be used for the purpose of calculating overall density on a parcel or within a project. Minimum lot sizes are determined via the land use code and the subdivision requirements contained within.

Home-based businesses are acceptable in all residential classifications, provided the use appears to be residential in nature and the impacts are minimal, such as: no outside storage, minimal signage and lighting, and minimal traffic generation. Code requirements for Home Occupations must be followed.

### **Suburban Residential**

This category includes existing subdivided lands and adjacent or proximate properties of similar character. Lands in this category are classified with a maximum density of 2 units per acre, contingent upon the ability to meet subdivision standards contained in the land use code (including water, sewer, and access requirements). Lands within this classification include: the areas north of the lake in the Vallecito Creek Drainage, the subdivisions in the Sawmill Point area, including Lake View and Lakeshore Homes, the Coolwater Estates, Coolwater Village, and the portion of Coolwater Ranch that houses mobile homes. Properties such as those south of C.R. 501 just past the intersection with C.R. 500, portions of the ACE property, as well as portions of the properties adjacent to existing subdivisions below the dam are identified as properties that would be suitable for future *Suburban Density* residential development.

### **Large Lot Residential**

This category is intended to act as a transition zone between *Suburban* and *Rural Residential* land use classifications. The density range envisioned under this classification is one unit per 3 to 10 acres. Development densities within this range are determined through utilization of the Plan's public benefit criteria. Some properties South of the dam and a small amount of land just Northwest of the lake has received this classification due to their proximity to major roadways and established residential areas, and the suitability of the terrain for development.

### **Agricultural / Rural Residential**

The remaining un-subdivided private lands in the District are included in the *Agricultural / Rural Residential* land use classification. The density range of this classification is one unit per 10 to 20 acres. Development densities within this range are determined through utilization of the Plan's public benefit criteria. Lands within this category are generally in the outlying, rural and less developed areas of the District.

Because of the difficult economics of agriculture in this area, it is anticipated that some form of economic relief will be important to allow properties such as Cool Water Ranch to continue to be used for agriculture. For this reason, much of the private agricultural land has been given an *Agricultural / Rural Residential* designation. These designations allow the land to be developed at a density of 1 unit per 10 to 20 acres, with clustering, a density that preserves rural character and is consistent with State well permit requirements. It could also be developed under the County's proposed, simplified Agricultural Preservation subdivision process at a density of 2 units per 35 acres, also clustered to preserve the most productive agricultural land in continued agricultural use. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that no incentive will be sufficient to offset the cost of agricultural use. In this case, the community needs to anticipate that a change in land use may be proposed eventually. The Coolwater Ranch is an assimilation of parcels totaling nearly 3000 acres. It is located downstream of the Vallecito Dam along C.R. 501. This ranch has been family-owned and operated since the mid-1930s. The Ranch encompasses a majority of the unsubdivided lands in the District. Past and present land uses on the Ranch have included: a gas station, mobile home park, bar and dance hall, riding stable, sawmill, hunting and fishing lodge, gravel mining and extensive agricultural operations. The majority of the Coolwater Ranch has been designated *Agricultural / Rural Residential* and *Large Lot Residential* on the land use classification map. The area occupied by trailer homes has been designated *Suburban Residential* (1/2 acre Minimum) and the rental cabins have been designated *Accommodations*. It is envisioned in this plan that the *Suburban Residential* and *Accommodation* uses will expand in the future. Additionally it is envisioned that some commercial uses may be established on the Ranch. The land use map identifies a future mixed use area but it is difficult to predict the precise location on the Ranch where such uses would be established. The location of the mixed use area on the map may need to be moved in the future. Such a change should be viewed as consistent with this plan. Commercial development on the Coolwater Ranch is considered an allowable use under this plan providing such uses are compatible in scale, type, and intensity with other commercial developments in the District. A portion of the Ranch is identified as *Large Lot Residential*. This classification is intended as a transition between the Suburban, Mixed-Use and Rural Residential uses.

## **CRITICAL LANDS**

This classification is an overlay category, which identifies areas that possess significant constraints to development and public safety hazards. This category encompasses lands with slopes over 30%, lands possessing landslides, avalanche hazard, lands subject to geologic hazard, lands within 100-year flood plains, and wetlands. The base density for lands in this category is 1 unit per 35 acres. If *Critical Lands* within a proposed development are protected and permanent development exclusions or dedicated open space such as conservation easements are established, a density bonus may be granted to transfer development to more suitable portions of a project. Such density bonuses should not exceed 1 unit per 17.5 acres of critical lands, i.e., if *Critical Lands* are protected, allowable densities are 1 unit per 17.5 acres versus 1 unit per 35 acres if *Critical Lands* are developed.

The *Land Use Classification Map* identifies the general location of some of the District's *Critical Lands*. In most cases, however, site-specific studies must be conducted to determine the location and extent of these lands. The *Land Use Classification Map* identifies the general location of slopes over 30%, and lands classified as *Landslides* and *Unstable Slopes*. Flood plains and wetlands are not currently designated on the *Land Use Classification Map*.

## **AGRICULTURAL / TIMBER / RECREATIONAL**

The majority of lands within the District are publicly owned and managed by agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. These lands are primarily used for agricultural, recreational, and timber harvesting purposes. This land use designation recognizes these uses. A public lands overlay has been assigned to properties in this classification that are under public ownership. Public lands, whether currently being used for agriculture/timbering/public recreation or having no specific

designated use, are assigned an underlying residential density of one unit per 35 acres. That is not to say that this designation is in any way a permanent open space designation. However, this will give the community, and the County, maximum flexibility if a land exchange or another land use is proposed for this public land in the future. Conversion of public lands to private ownership should be discouraged.

## BUREAU OF RECLAMATION FLOOD EASEMENT

Some properties along the northern end of the lake are overlain by flooding easements held by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The Bureau has purchased these easements because these lands may periodically be inundated by Vallecito Reservoir.

## PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

This land use designation identifies public and community facilities. Currently, two fire stations are located in the Vallecito District.

## V. LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS/DESCRIPTIONS

Land Use	Max. Residential Density	Description
<b>Agricultural/Timber/ Public Recreation</b>	1 unit per 35 acres	Public land that is used primarily for agricultural, forestry or land/water recreation uses. Public lands transferred to private ownership will retain a 1 unit per 35 acre density designation.
<b>Agricultural / Rural Residential</b>	1 unit per 10-20 acres <sup>5</sup> .	Private land that can be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per 10 to 20 acres
<b>Large Lot Residential</b>	1 unit per 3-10 acres <sup>7</sup>	Private land that can be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per 3 to 10 acres.
<b>Suburban Residential</b>	1 unit per ½ -3 acres <sup>6</sup>	Private land that can be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per ½ to 3 acres.
<b>Local Commercial</b>	1 unit per ½ acre. (Lodging = 5 rooms / residential unit.)	Small-scale commercial development (not malls or large establishments) providing goods and services primarily oriented to the needs of the local and tourist community ( <i>e.g.</i> , convenience stores, hair salons, video stores, liquor stores, restaurants and gas stations). May include 2nd floor residential units (over the shops), or bed-and-breakfast type lodging.
<b>Mixed Use</b>	1 unit per ½ acre. (Lodging = 5 rooms / residential unit.)	A transition area that contains a mix of residential and commercial development, including overnight accommodations <sup>7</sup> .
<b>Mixed Residential/ Accommodation</b>	1 unit per ½ acre. (Lodging = 5 rooms / residential unit.)	A mixture of single-family residential and small-scale bed and breakfast establishments that is consistent in scale and appearance with adjacent residential dwellings.
<b>Campground / Accommodations</b>	Assessed via compatibility criteria Goal A, Policies 1.a. - g	Day-use and overnight accommodations in a campground or lodge setting. Properties within this classification may be converted to residential uses at a density equal to or lower than the predominant surrounding residential land use classifications without plan amendment.
<b>Country Tourist / Dude Ranch</b>	Assessed via compatibility criteria Goal A, Policies 1.a. - g	Day use, Overnight accommodations, recreational uses and incidental commercial uses. Incidental commercial use shall allow for the development of a public golf course and densities approved in a clustered planned unit development under future regulations. Uses may entail the boarding and use of horses and other pack animals for-hire public rides. Properties within this classification may be converted to residential uses at a density equal to or lower than the predominant surrounding residential land use classifications without plan amendment.
<b>Critical Lands<sup>8</sup></b>	1 unit per 35 acres	Land with steep slopes (over 30%), landslides, unstable slopes, wetlands and flood plains. If density is transferred to non-critical lands, a density bonus of 1 unit per 35 acres will be granted (Maximum Bonus = a total of 2 units for each 35 acres of critical land that is left permanently undeveloped).
<b>Public &amp; Community Facilities</b>	Per Code	Public and quasi-public uses, such as schools, fire stations, government facilities, cemeteries, hospitals and churches, trail heads, recreation facilities.

<sup>5</sup> Overall project density within given range is determined by Public Benefit Criteria. Proponent is encouraged to cluster density on smaller lots, creating permanent open space. Minimum lot size is determined by the land use code and subdivision requirements contained therein.

<sup>6</sup> Lot size contingent upon compliance with County Subdivision regulations and the land use code criteria including water, sewer and access requirements.

<sup>7</sup> In Vallecito District commercial development will have residential scale and character.

<sup>8</sup> Critical Lands designation only applies to unsubdivided land. Environmental conditions on subdivided land are regulated through the approved subdivision plan and land use code. Critical Lands designation on Land Use Classification Map only partially or generally portrays the Critical Lands. Site Specific analysis may be required to refine location of Critical Lands boundary.

**VI. PUBLIC BENEFIT CRITERIA**

In order to determine the allowable density for a project within the *Rural Residential* and *Large Lot Residential* Classification, the County will allocate densities above the lower end of the density ranges upon demonstration that there is a public benefit in doing so. To make this determination as objective as possible the density range shall be granted based upon the following criteria and percentages:

- 40% Place structures so as to preserve the maximum portion of the land in contiguous open space, which could be owned by a single entity or multiple entities with undivided interests, or overlain by an open space or agricultural easement. (50% open space = full 50% of density range).
  - 20% Structures not located on ridgelines or within view corridors as seen from public roads.
  - 20% Structures located so as to preserve open meadows, designated wildlife corridors or habitats, and located in or against trees if present and not within floodplains.
  - 20% Granting of easements for trails for public use and/or public lands access.
- 100% Total

Full compliance with all of the above would result in granting of 100% of the density range. For example, if the range is 1 unit per 3-10 acres, and all of the criteria were fully met, the proponent would qualify for a density of 1 unit per 3 acres. If only the first two criteria were met (40% + 20% = 60%) the owner would qualify for only 60% of the range, or 1 unit per 5.8 acres.

If site conditions do not permit compliance with any specific criteria, credit for compliance will be granted, e.g., if a site does not possess any ridgelines then the applicant would receive the full 20% density bonus for avoiding ridgelines.

\* \* \* \* \*