

# **Lea County Comprehensive Plan**

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# SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A. INTRODUCTION

The Lea County Comprehensive Plan is a compilation of public input, socioeconomic data, current conditions analysis, and recommended strategies for implementation of Plan goals and objectives. The Plan is intended to address significant issues facing the County in the categories of land use, housing, economic development, transportation, infrastructure, and water. Each of these planning categories contain goals, objectives, and implementation strategies that the County can work to achieve in the next 20 years.



*Pump Jacks symbolize the importance of the oil and gas industry in Lea County*

This Comprehensive Plan is a long range document that is intended to set policies for each of the planning areas. It is intended to be a "living document" that is flexible according to the County's needs. As conditions in Lea County change, so should certain aspects of the Plan. In the past year for example, the County has seen significant change in economic development opportunities given the fact that the National Uranium Enrichment Plant (NEF plant) has chosen to locate in the County, which will diversify the economy. In order to achieve flexibility, the Plan is passed as resolution rather than an ordinance. However, by approving the Plan as a resolution, the policies contained in this document become County policy. Future decisions related to the planning areas should be consistent with the Plan. In order to gain maximum benefit from the Plan, regular updates need to occur. The Plan should be reviewed and revised on a five year basis or as significant changes occur, such as the NEF plant.

This Comprehensive Plan has given consideration to areas where the incorporated municipalities could work together so solve common issues. Each incorporated community in Lea County (Tatum, Lovington, Hobbs, Eunice, and Jal) has comprehensive plans in place. This Lea County Comprehensive Plan integrates areas of regional concern and issues identified in these plans wherever appropriate.

## **B. KEY FINDINGS**

Several issues have been identified throughout the course of the planning process. These issues represent critical factors that the Comprehensive Plan has addressed. Findings include:

- Housing is a critical need in Lea County in order to accommodate economic development initiatives; It is projected that thousands of new housing units are will be needed in Lea County in the next 20 years. A diversity of housing is needed in Lea County including low-income, rentals, multi-family, and higher-end homes;
- The County's economy is driven by the oil and gas industry, which has experienced cycles of boom and bust. Economic diversification is needed in Lea County to absorb periods of bust;
- The recent decision to locate the NEF facility and opening of the Black Gold Casino and Zia Racetrack has brought hope that Lea County can begin the diversification of the economy. Additional efforts at diversification should be pursued;
- Job training programs are needed to prepare the Lea County workforce for economic diversification;
- The State of New Mexico has been in a drought for quite some time, which has impacted all of the State, including Lea County. Planning for water quality and quantity needs to be undertaken and the recommendations of the Lea County Regional Water Plan provides a good guide;

## **C. IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY**

In addition to the goals, objectives, and policies, other principal components of this plan are the implementation strategies found in each section. These strategies function as an "action agenda," which provides a summary of specific acts that Lea County needs to initiate. Establishing these implementation strategies also involves assigning responsibilities and a time frame for accomplishment. Since this is the County's plan, most of the responsibility falls on the County government to implement these strategies throughout this document.

### **1. Guiding Principles for Implementation**

When implementing the Lea County Comprehensive Plan, there are several guiding principles that outline how and when this should be done. These principles include:

- The Plan should be reviewed every five years, or as needed, as conditions in the community change. The County should establish a schedule for reviewing the Plan so that it happens consistently;
- The County should base future grant applications and funding requests upon the recommendations made in the Plan;
- The Plan should be linked to the County's ICIP and other budgetary decision making;
- The County should set benchmarks to determine whether or not implementation strategies are being met;
- The County Manager should prepare implementation progress reports, which can be presented to the County Commission on a regular basis. These reports should detail how implementation is taking place and identify milestones in implementation;
- The County should monitor funding sources and programs that could be utilized for implementation purposes; and
- The County should initiate and/or take part in regional planning events.

## **2. Summary of Goals and Objectives**

This section contains a summary of the goals and objectives designed to implement the Plan, followed by a set of implementation actions within a defined timeframe. The summary is organized by planning elements. The implementation actions are described in greater detail in each specific section for each element.

### **LAND USE**

**Goal One: Land use in Lea County shall be characterized by a harmonious pattern of growth and development in the County and areas of County/municipality interface.**

Objective 1.1: Work with incorporated municipalities in Lea County on planning land use in their extraterritorial areas and planning/platting jurisdiction through providing regular communication, regular input, and comment on development plans, subdivisions, and annexations.

Objective 1.2: Monitor the land use decisions made by federal and state agencies regarding public lands in Lea County to ensure that these decisions are compatible with the County's goals, private property rights, and economic stability.



Objective 1.3: Work cooperatively with each municipality to enhance and beautify gateways into each community including the removal of nuisances.

Objective 1.4: Support efforts by the incorporated municipalities in Lea County to revitalize and redevelop their downtown areas as economic engines within the County.

Objective 1.5: Revise and streamline the County Subdivision regulations to make them more user friendly.

Objective 1.6: Continue to devote resources to the clean up of blighted dilapidated properties in Lea County.

Objective 1.7: Encourage the use of buffering through landscaping and berming between industrial, commercial, and residential land uses.

	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2025
<b>Land Use Implementation Actions</b>					
Joint Powers Agreements with Municipalities for Beautification	X				
County-Municipality Land Use Coordination	X	X	X	X	X
Support for Downtown Redevelopment	X	X	X	X	X
Subdivision Review and Revision	X		X		X

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Goal One: The economy of Lea County will become more diversified while retaining and growing existing businesses, industries, and jobs.**

Objective 1.1: Continue to encourage economic development in Lea County through collaborating with other organizations to implement economic development strategies identified in previous planning efforts including but not limited to incubator development, retention meetings, and infrastructure improvements.

Objective 1.2: Promote the existing amenities in Lea County, such as the Lea County Event Center, Racetrack/Casino, museums, National Soaring Society, and proximity to Carlsbad Caverns National Park, on a statewide and regional basis in order to increase tourism.

Objective 1.3: Cooperate with other entities and organizations such as NMJC, College of the Southwest, local chambers of commerce, Lea County Housing Inc., the public school districts, and the New Mexico Economic Development Department in increasing job training programs in Lea County.

Objective 1.4: Attract businesses to Lea County that support existing and new industries such as the oil/gas industry, Uranium Enrichment Plant, Racetrack/Casino, and the Dairies/Agriculture.

## **HOUSING**

**Goal One: Increase the availability and diversity of safe, decent, and affordable housing for purchase as well as rental housing for all Lea County residents.**

	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2015	2016-2025	2021-2025
<b>Economic Development Implementation Actions</b>					
Economic Development Partnering	X	X	X	X	X
Infrastructure Improvements and Enhancements	X	X	X	X	X
Designation of Lea County Entertainment Complex		X			

Objective 1.1: Assist persons with low incomes, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens with home repairs by applying for weatherization programs and by supporting revolving loan funds.

Objective 1.2: Periodically review the supply of housing against the forecasted demand for housing with emphasis on the needs of lower- and middle-income workers.

Objective 1.3: On a regular basis provide land developers with information on County growth and vacant land within Lea County to promote more housing development.

Objective 1.4: As part of the job training programs outlined in the Economic Development section, encourage home building, carpentry skills, and other construction skills.

**Goal Two: Increase the rate of home ownership in Lea County.**

Objectives 2.1: Provide financial literacy and homebuyer counseling programs to prepare Lea County's residents for home ownership.

Objective 2.2: Partner with local banks along with State and Federal programs to provide down payment and closing cost assistance for potential homebuyers.

**Goal Three: Develop and sustain the viability of the Lea County Housing Corporation.**

Objective 3.1: Assist in leveraging Federal, State and Local funds to accomplish housing goals.

Objective 3.2: Partner with regional and state-wide housing agencies (government agencies and non-government agencies).

**WATER RESOURCES**

**Goal One: Lea County shall have enough water resources to sustain present and future residents for generations to come.**

	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2015	2016-2025	2021-2025
<b>Housing Implementation Actions</b>					
Lea County Housing Coordination	X	X	X	X	X
Job Training for Construction Trades		X			
Housing Incentives Program		X			
Housing Demand Data Base	X				

Objective 1.1: Continue to implement water alternatives discussed in the Lea County Regional Water Plan.

Objective 1.2: Work with the Interstate Stream Commission and State Engineers Office to implement recommendations of the State Water Plan (as it pertains to Southeast NM and Lea County) and the Lea County Regional Water Plan.

Objective 1.3: Encourage water conservation methods like low flow fixtures, xeriscaping, and other measures designed for reducing the water use in new subdivisions developed in the County and the extraterritorial zones of the municipalities.

Objective 1.4: Work with farmers and ranchers in Lea County to identify ways to conserve water quantity and quality in agricultural practices.

Objective 1.5: Follow through on implementation actions found in the Drought Management Plan (part of the Lea County Regional Water Plan) and review the plan on a regular basis and update the plan as necessary.

Objective 1.6: Strategize with the incorporated municipalities and domestic water providers on ways to protect and conserve the area's ground water.

	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2015	2016-2025	2021-2025
<b>Water Resources Implementation Actions</b>					
Lea County Regional Water Plan Updates		X		X	
Cloud Seeding Program			X		
Agricultural Conservation Initiative and Plan		X			
State Engineers/Interstate Stream Commission Coordination	X	X	X	X	X
Xeriscaping encouragement in Subdivision Regulations	X				
Grant Application Support	X	X	X	X	X
Additional Aquifer Initiative			X		

## **INFRASTRUCTURE/TRANSPORTATION**

**Goal One: Support the development of communication networks, energy facilities, and transportation facilities throughout Lea County to meet the needs of economic development and residential growth.**

Objective 1.1: Coordinate infrastructure improvements in the extraterritorial areas around Hobbs and Lovington with appropriate agencies in these cities (e.g., City of Hobbs major street plan).

Objective 1.2: Encourage private sector agencies to co-develop and expand T1 and fiber optic cables.

Objective 1.3: Work with other entities to plan for the construction of communication, energy, and transportation facilities concurrently by sharing information and through regular communication.



Objective 1.4: Support the regular improvement and expansion of the US and State highways through Lea County in order to provide for greater accessibility and economic growth.

Objective 1.5: Continue to plan for the improvement and maintenance of Lea County roadways through chip sealing, mowing, patching potholes, and improving caliche roads throughout Lea County.

Objective 1.6: Make improvements to Lea County Regional Airport as needed in order to attract commercial air service to Lea County.

**Goal Two: Support the improvement of the physical infrastructure and aesthetics of Hobbs Industrial Air Park (HIAP) and other business parks within the County to attract tenants that positively contribute to Lea County's economic development.**

Objectives 2.1: Remove developable land within HIAP from flood plain designation by constructing diversion channels and berms to drain floodwaters to the west and south of HIAP.

Objective 2.2: Phase roadway, drainage, and utility improvements in a manner consistent with the Hobbs Industrial Air Park (HIAP) Master Plan to encourage business and manufacturers to locate there.

	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011-2015	2016-2025	2021-2025
Transportation and Infrastructure Implementation Actions					
ICIP Prioritization	X	X	X	X	X
Road Maintenance Initiative	X				
Airport Initiative		X	X		
Municipal Transportation Coordination	X	X	X	X	X
Flood Plain Mapping			X		
High Speed Data Initiative	X	X	X		

## D. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

A comprehensive plan is generally defined as a document prepared by the local government that provides guidance on how the County should grow and develop, and helps to ensure adequate provision of community services. It provides the community with a strategy to address change and challenges such as where new development will take place and how the community will generate jobs. A comprehensive plan is a long-range document that functions within a planning horizon of 20 years into the future. A good plan helps the community maximize its strengths and minimize its weaknesses.

The State of New Mexico provides municipalities and counties the authority to Plan through its State Statutes, sections 3-19-5, 3-19-10, and 3-19-11 NMSA 1978. These sections grant the governing body of counties the authority to plan for lands within the county's planning and platting jurisdiction, adopt master plans (comprehensive plans), and give legal authority to master plans.

Comprehensive planning documents are typically passed by resolution, which helps to maintain the plan's flexibility and allows the plan to be easily updated over time as existing conditions and priorities change. County decision making should be consistent with the policies found within a comprehensive plan.

## E. RESEARCH and PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

### 1. Research and Issue Identification

The research and issue identification phase for the Comprehensive Plan included the analysis of demographic and so-

cioeconomic data and interviews with County and municipal officials to identify issues relevant to the planning process. This step involved gathering and analyzing data from a variety of sources, including the US Census Bureau, the University of New Mexico Bureau of Business and Economic Research, the State Economic Development Department, the State Department of Labor, as well as other sources of information. This data was initially used to identify preliminary issues used for the public participation process, and provided a large part of the assessment of existing conditions and needs outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.

## **2. Public Participation**

Public input is essential for creating a dynamic and useful comprehensive plan that accurately reflects the values and history of Lea County. Several public meetings were held throughout the process and public participation was strongly encouraged. Public meetings were advertised through the local newspaper, public service announcements on radio, posting of flyers, and direct mailings. Three public meetings were held during the development of the Comprehensive Plan. One took place in Lovington, another in Hobbs, and another in Eunice.

## **F. PLAN UPDATES and REVISIONS**

This section provides an overview of what types of items to review and/or revise in the Comprehensive Plan.

- The Plan should be reviewed and/or updated every 5 years over the life of the Plan.
- Goals, objectives, and policies shall not be revised without a public hearing process.
- Changes and revisions should be made by passing addenda to the Plan document. The addenda can be collated into the Plan at the beginning of the document.

There are several items to review and update in the Comprehensive Plan. These items include:

### **1. Changes to Demographics/Existing Conditions**

The County Profile section is one of the areas where change always occurs. New census figures come out every ten years and estimates are prepared regularly. The community may want to consult the Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) for estimates of demographics and use those

in Plan updates. For a rapidly changing area, the 2000 data may be outdated.

## **2. Implementation Review**

Implementation strategies should also be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. A recurring report detailing actions completed, those in progress, and those to be implemented next, is a good way to keep track of progress on implementation of the Plan. The review should also focus on those items that have not been implemented according to the Comprehensive Plan's time frame, and it should re-evaluate those implementation steps and time lines.

## **3. Review of What is Working/What is Not Working**

It is also important to review what is or is not working in the Plan. When implemented, if the goals, objectives, and policies are having the opposite effect from what is intended, they should be reviewed and modified. Another aspect to consider during review of the Plan is whether the goals, objectives, and policies need to be revised or rewritten in order to make them stronger.



## SECTION 2: COMMUNITY PROFILE

### A. DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding community demographics is the first step in community planning since it tells the story of the County and identifies trends related to population and socioeconomic factors. The demographic and socioeconomic analysis found in the following sections help to determine how to plan for Lea County and its communities. Demographic and socioeconomic conditions within Lea County have been examined at several levels:



*Lea County Courthouse and Administrative Offices in Lovington*

- Regional - Southeast New Mexico and West Texas;
- County Wide - Overall demographics and socioeconomics for Lea County; and
- Individual Community Wide - Demographics and socioeconomics for and the incorporated communities.

The most recent demographic and socioeconomic data has been used in this Plan wherever possible, with the majority of the data taken from the 2000 US Census. In some cases, data for certain characteristics has been updated since the Census. Updated data is used as available.

#### 1. Population Demographics in Lea County

Key points related to population demographics in Lea County include:

- Lea County's population exploded between 1950 and 1960, in which the population grew by 74% as the result of an oil boom.
- After 1970, the population declined slightly but rose again in 1980. Since 1980, the population has seen two straight decades of slight decline.
- The City of Hobbs is the largest community in Lea County and accounts for approximately 52% of the County's population.

- Population projections for the County prepared by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research shows the possibility of continued long-term decline, however, their figures do not take into account the impact of the National Enrichment Facility (NEF) plant or other types of business growth in the County. Recent estimates that have been released show small gains in population since the 2000 Census figures were released.

#### **a. Historic Population**

The following table shows the population of the County and its incorporated communities from 1950 to 2000.

**Community Profile Table 1: Historic Population**

<b>Entity</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2004 Estimate</b>
New Mexico	1,017,055	1,303,303	1,515,069	1,819,046	1,903,289
Lea County	49,554	55,993	55,765	55,511	56,231
Eunice	2,641	2,970	2,700	2,562	2,588
Hobbs	26,025	29,153	29,445	28,657	28,708
Jal	2,602	2,675	2,153	1,996	2,010
Lovington	8,915	9,727	9,495	9,471	9,553
Tatum	982	896	708	683	690

*Source: US Census Figures for Years 1970 - 2000. The source for the 2004 Estimate is the BBER*

The table shows that the population for Lea County peaked in 1980 after rebounding from a slight decline. Since then, the County has gradually lost population. The same trends hold true for the incorporated municipalities. Much of the population decline can be attributed to realignment in the oil/gas industry. Hobbs and Lea County used to be a base for oil company headquarters. As technology developed, the need to have headquarters in Lea County diminished and most of the corporate jobs moved to the Gulf Coast, leaving primarily blue collar, oil field jobs, which, although important, decreased the diversification of skills and incomes.

Recently released 2004 Estimates for the County and its communities however show a slight population increase. Population growth can be attributed to natural increase and some in-migration as a result of the strength of the oil/gas market over the past few years.

#### **b. Current Population - Lea County Within the Region**

Hobbs is the largest community in Lea County and is a retail and service base for several small communities in both

West Texas and Southeast New Mexico, including Andrews, Kermit, and Seminole. Hobbs has proven to be more of a shopping destination for certain services than larger regional communities like Lubbock and Midland/Odessa (although those two metropolitan areas do offer services not available in Lea County). The following table shows Lea County communities in relation to other West Texas and Southeastern New Mexico communities.

**Community Profile Table 2: Regional Population**

Community	2000 Population
<b>West Texas</b>	
Lubbock	199,564
Midland	94,966
Odessa	90,943
Andrews	9,652
Pecos	9,501
Seminole	5,910
Kermit	5,714
<b>Southeast New Mexico</b>	
Hobbs	28,657
Lovington	9,471
Roswell	45,293
Carlsbad	25,625
Clovis	32,667

*Source: 2000 US Census*

The challenge for Lea County is to remain a retail base for the smaller communities in the region since Lubbock and Midland/Odessa are larger communities that can offer more services. Recently, Hobbs has seen an influx of national retailers and restaurants that can help it continue its appeal for the smaller communities in the area and make it more competitive with the larger communities in the area (see Economic Development Section).

### **c. Population Projections**

Prior to preparing the 2004 population estimates, the BBER prepared population projections for Counties within New Mexico. The BBER estimates show a decline in population over the next 25 years; however, those projections do not take into account economic diversification initiatives currently underway in the County. As a result, the following population projection takes into account three different growth scenarios.

**Community Profile Table 3: Population Projection for Lea County**

<b>Growth Rate</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
Declining	54,401	53,313	52,247	51,202	50,178	49,174
Slow (2%)	56,621	57,754	58,909	60,087	61,289	62,514
Medium (5%)	58,287	61,201	64,261	67,474	70,848	74,390
Fast (10%)	61,062	67,168	73,885	81,274	89,401	98,341

*Declining Growth Rate Source: BBER. Slow, Medium, and Fast growth rate scenarios calculated by Consensus Planning*

The population estimate for Lea County prepared by BBER in 2004 shows a 2% growth rate has already taken place. Realistic growth for Lea County most likely falls between the slow and medium growth rate, although growth is dependant on many factors. Some of these factors include:

- The amount of developable land available in the County and its communities;
- The County's ability to diversify its economy and add/retain jobs;
- The number of homes available in the area to purchase or rent;
- The amount of water available for development;
- Transportation improvements in the area resulting in greater access to the area such as air service; and
- The ability of an area to retain its young families.

## **2. Age Demographics**

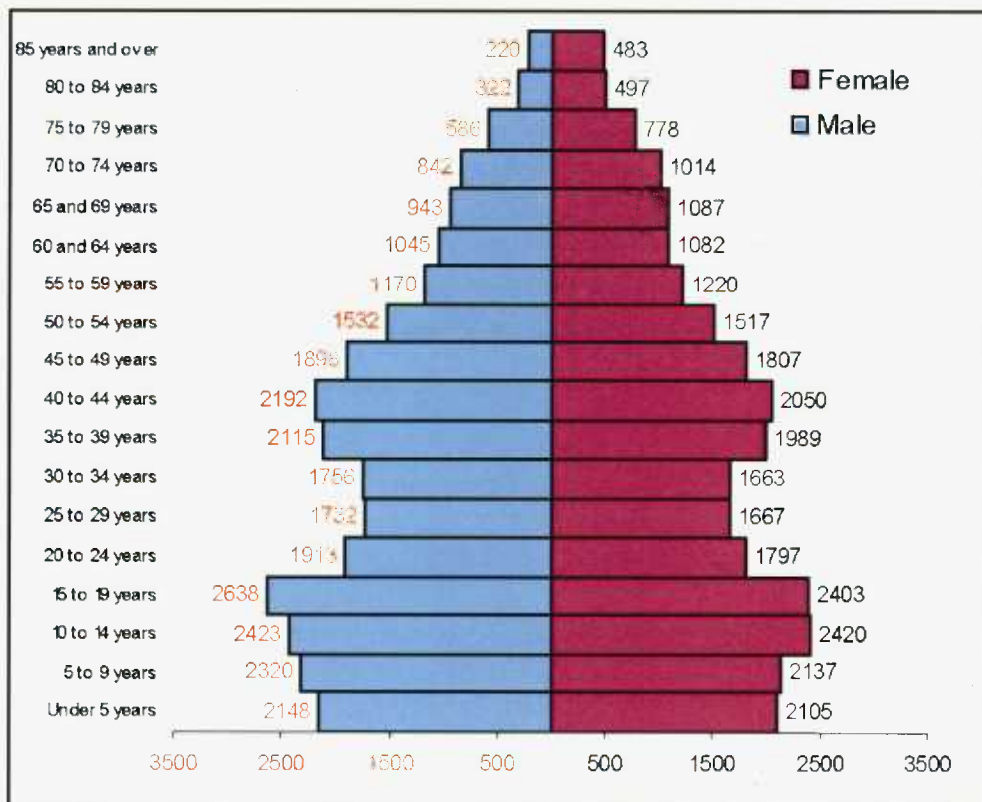
Key points related to age demographics in Lea County include:

- Lea County's median age is 33.1, which is slightly younger than the State of New Mexico's median age of 34.6 years;
- Approximately 20.3% of Lea County's population is over age 55, generally considered to be the age of retirement. This number is relatively lower than other Counties in New Mexico;
- People under the age of 19 comprise 33.5% of the County's population; and



- Lea County's population is relatively young and retention of the County's younger families is vital to economic growth. The age of Lea County residents is relevant to comprehensive planning since it impacts development potential and the level of service the County and its incorporated municipalities must provide. Items such as land use patterns, activity patterns, public infrastructure, recreation, schools, housing, transportation, and other factors are influenced by age. For example, as the population ages, demand for senior housing and services will increase. Similarly, retention of younger families will increase the need for schools but it also makes the County more attractive for company relocation. The graphic below shows the age breakdown for Lea County, based on the 2000 US Census. While the numbers have adjusted slightly in five years, the overall shape of the population pyramid remains.

**Community Profile Figure 1: Lea County Population Pyramid**



Source: 2000 US Census

### **3. Income and Poverty Levels**

Key points related to income in Lea County include:

- The median household income in Lea County is \$29,799, which is lower than the State's median household income of \$34,133. Lea County's median income is higher than that of Chaves, Curry, and Roosevelt Counties. It is slightly lower than Eddy County;
- Approximately 25.1% of the Lea County population make less than \$15,000. Approximately 25.2% of the population make over \$50,000 in Lea County;
- Approximately 13.4% of the Lea County population receives retirement income. Approximately 6.1% receive public assistance. Approximately 35.8% receive social security or investment income;
- The 2000 US Census reported that 21.1% of Lea County residents lived below the poverty line. This figure is slightly higher than the State percentage of 18.4%; and
- Income data serves a variety of roles in comprehensive planning. It is useful in analyzing the housing needs and spending power of the County. Companies seeking to locate in an area or open franchise businesses in an area use this information.

### **4. Employment**

Key points related to employment in Lea County include:

- The largest Industrial Sector employing Lea County residents is the Agricultural/Forestry/Fishing/Hunting/Mining Sector. Most of these jobs are associated with the oil/gas industry in Lea County;
- Another large industrial sector employing Lea County residents is the Educational/Health/Social Services Sector. Most of these jobs are found in the public schools or medical facilities located in Lea County;
- Retail trade is the 3rd largest industrial sector employing Lea County residents; and
- Table 4 provides an overview of the industrial sectors that employ Lea County residents. It is based on 2000 US Census figures, however, these numbers have remained constant.

**Community Profile Table 4: Industrial Sector Employment**

<b>Industrial Sector</b>	<b>Number Employed in Lea County</b>	<b>Percent Employed in Lea County</b>
Agricultural, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining	4,188	20.7
Construction	1,268	6.3
Manufacturing	715	3.5
Wholesale Trade	658	3.2
Retail Trade	2,418	11.9
Transportation, warehousing, and utilities	1,347	6.7
Information Services	227	1.1
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental/leasing	642	3.2
Professional, scientific, management, administration, and waste management	918	4.5
Education, health, and social services	4,173	20.6
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	1,327	6.6
Other services	1,343	6.6
Public Administration	1,030	5.1

Source: 2000 US Census

According to the 2000 US Census, the labor force totaled 22,286 persons. This number is probably slightly higher now given the growth of the oil/gas industry and the opening of the Zia Park Racing Track and Black Gold Casino. The Track/Casino have more than likely increased the amount of persons employed in the arts/entertainment/food service sector.

Another indicator related to employment is the unemployment level. Lea County's unemployment level as of June 2005 stood at 5.7%, which was lower than the State of New Mexico rate of 6.4% (the seasonally adjusted rate for NM was 5.7%). The rate for the United States in June 2005 was 5.0%. With the exception of Roosevelt County, Lea County's unemployment rate was lower than other counties in Southeast New Mexico including Eddy County, Chaves County, and Curry County.

Over the past 10 years, Lea County's unemployment rate has remained steady, ranging between a high of 9.3% in 1999 to a low of 4.3% in 2001. Table 5 shows the County's unemployment rate over the past 10 years.

**Community Profile Table 5: Lea County's  
Historic Unemployment Rate**

Year	Unemployment Rate
2005	5.7
2004	5.1
2003	5.4
2002	5.2
2001	4.3
2000	5.3
1999	9.3
1998	5.9
1997	5.0
1996	6.2
1995	5.8

*New Mexico Department of Labor*

The unemployment rate for Lea County has risen slightly from 2004 when it was recorded at 5.1%. The overall unemployment rate has not fluctuated greatly except for 1999, the last time the oil/gas industry went through a downturn period.

## **5. Household Characteristics**

Key points related to household characteristics:

- The average household size in Lea County has been recorded at 2.73;
- Approximately 43.1% of Lea County households had individuals under the age of 18 living in them;
- Approximately 24.5% of Lea County households had individuals over the age of 65 living in them;
- 12.2% of households in Lea County were headed by a female with children and no husband present; and
- Households are the basic unit of analysis used in comprehensive planning. There were a total of 19,699 households in Lea County. The household size provides information used to estimate future housing demand and land use needs analysis.



## **B. LEA COUNTY AND ITS COMMUNITIES**

### **1. Incorporated Communities and Planning Areas**

Most of Lea County's population is centered in the County's five incorporated communities, which are located along the New Mexico 206/New Mexico 18 state highway corridor. Tatum is the northernmost incorporated community in Lea County, while Jal is the southernmost community, located approximately 10 miles from the Texas state line. An understanding of each community is essential in order to address regional issues in Lea County and southeastern New Mexico. A brief description of the incorporated communities and other areas within the County follows:

#### **a. Town of Tatum**

Incorporated in 1948, the Town of Tatum is Lea County's smallest community, with a population of 683 people as recorded by the 2000 US Census. Despite its small size, the Town's importance to the rest of the County cannot be underscored. The Town sits at the intersection of US 380 and New Mexico 206, both of which provide significant linkages between southeastern New Mexico, southwest Texas, and the rest of the State of New Mexico. These roadways are important since they are utilized by tourists from Texas accessing many of New Mexico's recreational areas as well as being the primary business route for traffic entering the State from the Midland/Odessa area. Upon entering the State or crossing the state line into Texas, the Town represents the first and last opportunity for traveler's services as well. Many of Tatum's significant issues deal with infrastructure improvements.



*Town of Tatum*

#### **b. City of Lovington**

The City of Lovington is the Lea County seat. The City is located at the intersection of NM 260/US18 and US 82, which leads to Plains, Texas. Since it is the center of Lea County government, the City attracts many people needing to access County services on a daily basis. Lovington is home to the Lea County Museum and the Lea County Fair and Ro-

deo, which is considered to be the largest county fair in the State of New Mexico (not to be confused with the overall State Fair, which occurs in Albuquerque) . The City completed a comprehensive plan in 2003, which



*Downtown Lovington, the Lea County Seat*

identified the community's primary issues as the need for economic development and growth. Providing community amenities such as a swimming pool was one way the community hoped to retain its young population and attract new residents. Lovington's primary issues are economic development, community beautification, and stimulating housing construction. Lovington's population, per the 2000 US Census, was recorded at 9,471.

#### **c. City of Hobbs**

The City of Hobbs is the largest community in Lea County and functions as the County's business center. The 2000 US Census recorded a population of 28,657 in Hobbs, which has recently attracted national restaurant and retail franchises. Like Lovington, Hobbs recently adopted its own comprehensive plan in 2004, which established a vision for the community's future growth and development.



*Hobbs, New Mexico*

With respect to urban development and County/Hobbs interface, the plan contains a goal for urbanizing portions of its extraterritorial jurisdiction. Hobbs has several significant issues. The City is considering instituting zoning to deal with significant growth issues. Much of the growth taking place in Hobbs is occurring on the north side, which has led to concerns that the older parts of the community, particularly downtown may become neglected. The City is studying initiating a downtown revitalization effort. Economic development and housing remain important issues.

**d. City of Eunice**

Eunice is a community located in the heart of the Lea County oil/gas production. Home to 2,562 people, Eunice has been proactively pursuing community cleanup and beautification as primary efforts. The City has recently adopted a zoning ordinance, coming off of adoption of a Comprehensive Plan. One of the most significant issues the City must now deal with is the anticipated economic impacts resulting from location of the NEF plant three miles east of the City. The NEF plant has opened an office in Eunice and the City is hoping to attract the influx of employees and services that could be spurred by the opening of the plant. In order to capture the benefits of the plant, Eunice needs new housing constructed in the City. Eunice would also like to revitalize its downtown area as well.



*Eunice, New Mexico*

**e. City of Jal**

The City of Jal is the southernmost community in Lea County and in New Mexico. Situated just miles from the Texas state line, the City is home to 1,996 people per the 2000 US Census. The City features some of the most recognized features in its "cowboy" sculpture and its lake, which spells the name of the community. Jal High School has always been one of the top rated high schools by the New Mexico Department of Education. Like the other Lea County communities, Jal's issues revolve around economic development such as small business development. The City boasts a large daytime population given the amount of people working in the nearby oil fields, however, the exact amount of people have not been quantified. City officials believe that if the number of people working in the com-



*Jal, New Mexico*



munity during the day could be captured, this information could be used to attract service related businesses to the community. Downtown revitalization is another key issue for the community.

**f. Unincorporated Communities**

There are several small unincorporated communities in Lea County, which are located throughout the County. Most of these communities contain homes, post offices (in some cases), and limited services.

1. Oil Center - Small community containing homes.
2. Monument - Small community containing limited commercial and a post office. Several homes are also located in Monument.
3. Humble City - Humble City can be considered a suburb of Hobbs since it is located just before the Hobbs municipal boundaries.
4. McDonald - Rural community containing a post office and homes. It is located between Tatum and Lovington.
5. Caprock - Rural community located on US 380. It is the first small settlement that one comes to driving east on US 380. Caprock has homes and a small cafe/country store.
6. Maljamar - Small rural settlement containing homes and a post office.

**2. Comprehensive Plans for Lea County Communities**

All of Lea County's incorporated communities have adopted comprehensive plans, which almost all have been adopted in the past two years. The Lea County Comprehensive Plan seeks to tie the plans together, particularly where regional goals and objectives are discussed. A summary of significant goals/objectives/issues that form each plan is included in Table 6.



**Community Profile Table 6: Community Comprehensive Plan Summary**

<b>Town of Tatum Comprehensive Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire additional water rights;</li> <li>• Develop plan to utilize water rights;</li> <li>• Remove abandoned and condemned structures;</li> <li>• Implement anti-litter campaign; and</li> <li>• Plan for remediation of old treatment plant.</li> </ul>
<b>City of Lovington Comprehensive Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote infill development</li> <li>• Redevelopment of Lovington's downtown;</li> <li>• Develop an extraterritorial ordinance to ensure compatibility between municipal and County land uses;</li> <li>• Master plan the industrial park;</li> <li>• Pursue regional economic development;</li> <li>• Initiate workforce training;</li> <li>• Increase housing starts;</li> <li>• Enhance transportation safety; and</li> <li>• Plan for water on a regional basis.</li> </ul>
<b>City of Hobbs Comprehensive Community Development Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of local air transportation;</li> <li>• Increased capabilities and capacity of the potable water system;</li> <li>• Ensure adequate water supply;</li> <li>• Ensure a safe and efficient roadway network to serve existing needs;</li> <li>• Diversify and ensure quality development; and</li> <li>• Encourage appealing developments, which contribute to a positive community image.</li> </ul>
<b>City of Eunice Comprehensive Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redevelop downtown and Main Street;</li> <li>• Pursue annexation carefully if new land is needed;</li> <li>• Seek regional economic development; and</li> <li>• Market Eunice for senior housing.</li> </ul>
<b>City of Jal Comprehensive Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revitalization of Downtown Jal;</li> <li>• Quantify the daytime population;</li> <li>• Utilize the large amount of vacant land;</li> <li>• Pursue regional economic development with other Lea County and West Texas communities;</li> <li>• Conduct infrastructure improvements;</li> <li>• Market Jal and the area;</li> <li>• Promote housing opportunities in Jal; and</li> <li>• Seek improvements on NM 128.</li> </ul>

*Source: Consensus Planning analysis of regional goals, objectives, and policies of Comprehensive Plans. The list represents only a partial list of goals, objectives, and policies. Those listed have relevance for the Lea County Comprehensive Plan.*

Many of the issues listed in the table above are those which have regional relevance or they represent issues that were identified during the public input phase of the Lea County Comprehensive Plan. Intergovernmental cooperation between all Lea County entities and other stakeholders could be instrumental in working on some of these issues for the betterment of all Lea County.

## SECTION 3: LAND USE

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Land Use element of the Lea County Comprehensive Plan helps tie the comprehensive plan together. Decisions made regarding the location, type, scale, and density of land uses will also drive decisions made on economic development, housing, water, and infrastructure. The Land Use section of the Lea County Comprehensive Plan is intended to guide future decision making on growth/development issues, public lands issues, and municipality/county interface issues. For the



*Vacant Land near the Future NEF site*

most part, development of land has occurred in the incorporated municipalities, although there are nodes of commercial uses and subdivisions located outside the incorporated communities. Land use outside the incorporated communities in Lea County is largely comprised of land dedicated to the oil/gas industry, agriculture/ranching, and/or owned by public agencies. More urban type of uses are located closer to the municipalities, however, there are areas of commercial nodes located in the smaller rural unincorporated areas such as Monument and Caprock.

### B. LAND USE ISSUES IN LEA COUNTY

The following land use issues have been identified as the most important issues that need to be addressed in this Comprehensive Plan. It is important to note that other issues like housing and economic development are also relevant, however, those issues are addressed under their own element.

- Lea County's subdivision regulations are modeled after the State of New Mexico and have proven adequate for the most part. The most significant issue is that the process for getting a subdivision approved is slow. Streamlining the process is one key step to encouraging housing development in the County. It is important to note that the County is restricted by State of New Mexico regulations and review but there are areas of flexibility where the regulations can be revised;

- Lea County does not have zoning at this time and a discussion of whether to implement it in the County may need to happen at some future time. Lovington and Eunice have zoning in place;
- Lea County has done a good job in improving dilapidated properties and removing nuisances such as weeds, junk, and trash. Momentum in this effort should continue in order to ensure an attractive County;
- Lea County possesses an abundance of land suitable for development both within the incorporated and unincorporated municipalities. While new development should be encouraged, attention should also be given to the upkeep and maintenance of existing development;
- All of Lea County would benefit tremendously if redevelopment and revitalization of the downtown and older areas of the incorporated communities occurred; and
- Rural-urban interface is becoming an issue, especially in the Hobbs area as the City grows north.

## **C. LEA COUNTY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **LAND USE**

**Goal One: Land use in Lea County shall be characterized by a harmonious pattern of growth and development in the County and areas of County/municipality interface.**

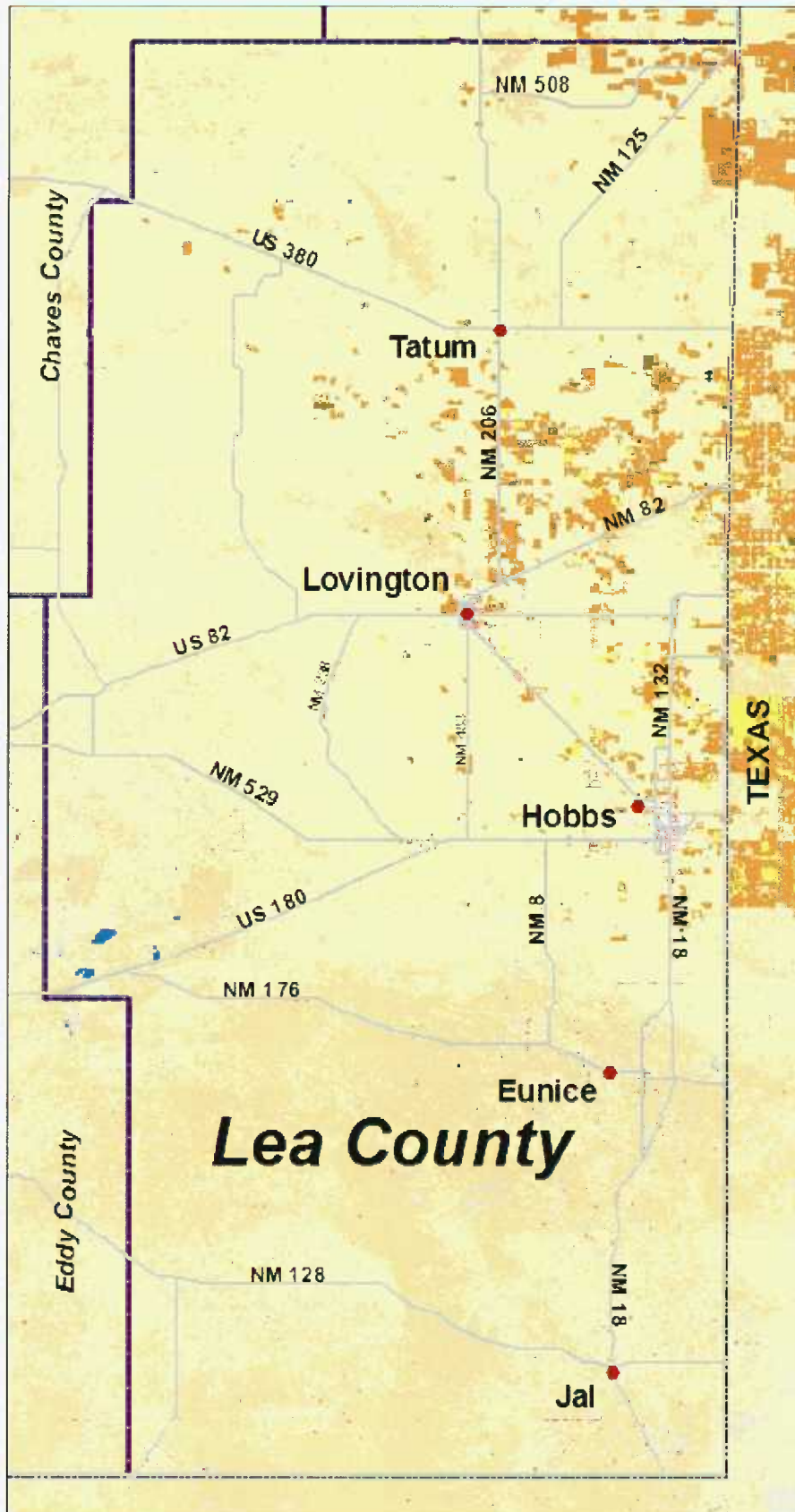
Objective 1.1: Work with incorporated municipalities in Lea County on planning land use in their extraterritorial areas and planning/platting jurisdiction through providing regular communication, input, and comment on development plans, subdivisions, and annexations.

Objective 1.2: Monitor the land use decisions made by federal and state agencies regarding public lands in Lea County to ensure that these decisions are compatible with the County's goals, private property rights, and economic stability.

Objective 1.3: Work cooperatively with each municipality to enhance and beautify gateways into each community (including the removal of nuisances).



# Land Cover Map



## Land Cover

- Open Water
- Low Intensity Residential
- High Intensity Residential
- Commercial/Industrial/Trans
- Bare Rock/Sand/Clay
- Quarries/Strip Mines/Grav Pits
- Deciduous Forest
- Evergreen Forest
- Shrubland
- Orchards/Vinards/Other
- Grasslands/Herbaceous
- Pasture/Hay
- Row Crops
- Small Crops
- Fallow
- Urban/Recreational Grasses
- Woody Wetlands
- Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands

## Lea County Comprehensive Plan

0 2.5 5 10 Miles





Objective 1.4: Support efforts by the incorporated municipalities in Lea County to revitalize and redevelop their downtown areas as economic engines within the County.

Objective 1.5: Revise and streamline the County Subdivision regulations to make them more user friendly.

Objective 1.6: Continue to devote resources to the clean up of blighted dilapidated properties in Lea County.

Objective 1.7: Encourage the use of buffering through landscaping and berming between industrial, commercial, and residential land uses.

## **D. LAND USE ANALYSIS IN LEA COUNTY**

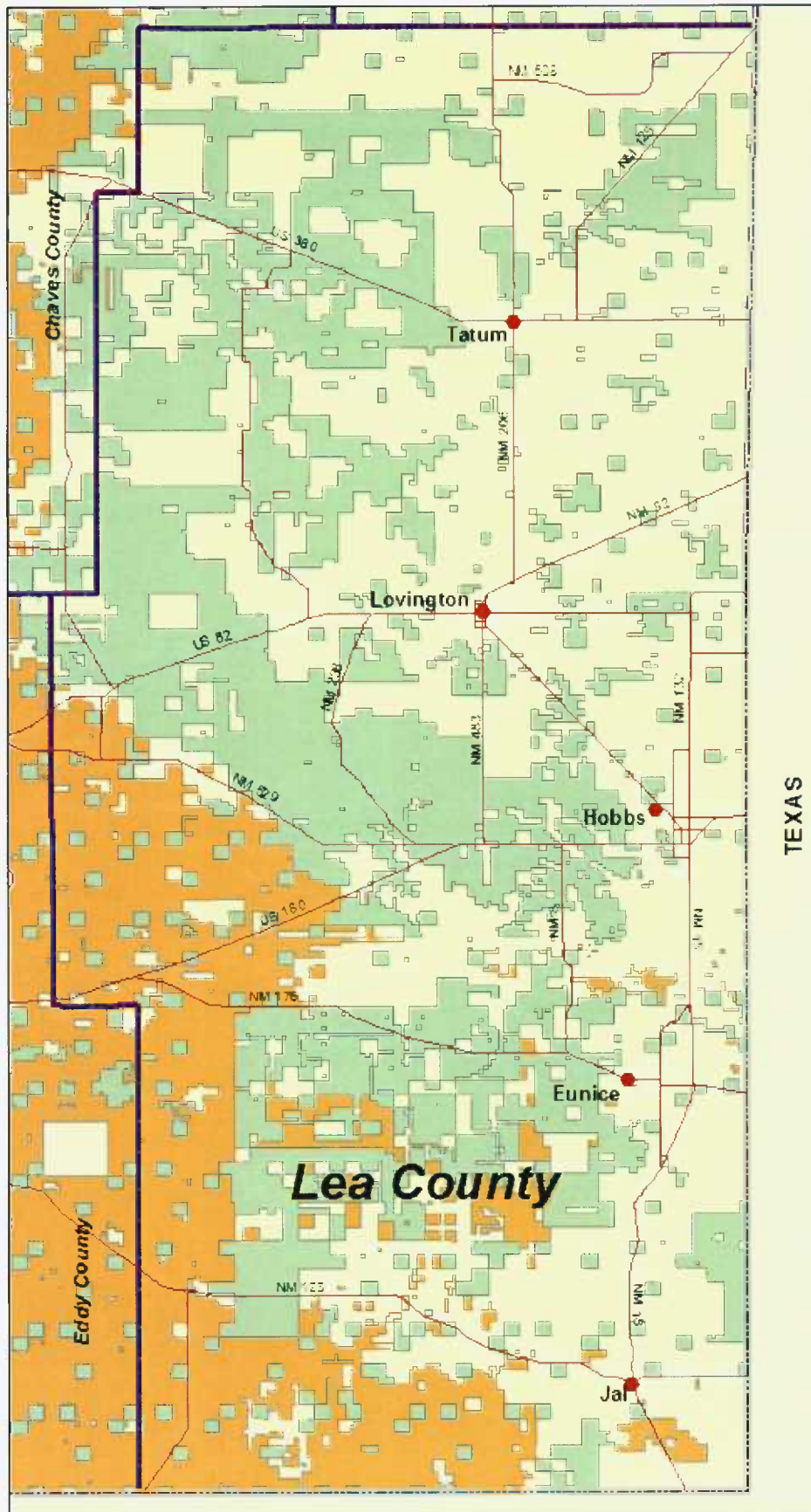
### **1. Land Ownership in Lea County**

The Land Ownership Map shows the breakdown of land ownership in the County. It essentially identifies whether land in the County is owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the State of New Mexico, or whether it's held in private ownership. As the map shows, privately owned land is located throughout the County, with large contiguous areas located on the eastern side of the County (east of NM 206 and NM 18). The BLM land is primarily concentrated in the southwestern portion of the County adjacent to the Eddy County line. State owned land is located primarily on the west side of the County to the west of NM 206.

The State Land Office is the primary overseer of the State land in Lea County. The State land in the County is held in trust for as many as 23 beneficiaries (beneficiaries include the Public School Systems, State universities, State penitentiary system, and other large state institutions). The oil/gas industry, business leases and grazing are among the more prominent uses. The State Land Office Hobbs District Office estimates that it oversees nearly one million acres of land in Lea County, which accounts for approximately 36% of Lea County. The Bureau of Land Management is the Federal agency with land holdings in Lea County. The agency uses its lands for similar activities but primarily for oil and gas leases.

Given the large amount of State and Federal land in Lea County, it is important to address issues related to land ownership in the Lea County Comprehensive Plan. It is the County's right to maintain an active involvement in decisions made by State and Federal agencies regarding how land is used, especially since the County's economy is tied closely to activities on these

# Land Ownership Map



## Ownership

- BLM
- Private
- State

## Lea County Comprehensive Plan





lands. Federal statutes require federal and state governments to consider impacts of actions authorized by public agencies on the County and communities located in the County. Each significant piece of Federal legislation such as The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act, and Public Rangelands Improvement Act all contain key provisions that allow for full participation of elected officials and stakeholders of the County and municipalities that could be impacted by these laws.

## **2. Land Coverage in Lea County**

The Land Coverage Map essentially serves as a generalized existing land use map for Lea County. The map, whose data is primarily derived from satellite imaging, identifies the ways that land is being used in the County. The map illustrates that Lea County is primarily a rural county with the vast majority of its land comprised of grass and shrub land. Most of the County's agricultural land is located in the eastern portion, east of the NM 206 Corridor. What the map does not show are the large amount of pump jacks, oil wells, refineries, and oil/gas related uses, which are generally scattered throughout the County.

## **3. Agriculture and Ranching**

The 2002 Census of Agriculture, which is prepared by the US Census Bureau every five years, provides agricultural statistics for counties throughout the United States. The Census of Agriculture indicated that while the number of farms in Lea County decreased, the land in farms actually increased (meaning that farms expanded). The increase in land in farms resulted in an increase in irrigated land, harvested crops, and the overall market value in produced goods. Table 1 provides an overview of key agricultural statistics for the County.



*Ranch Land in Central Lea County*

**Land Use Table 1: Agriculture Statistics For Lea County**

Category	2002	1997
Number of Farms	554	682
Land in Farms (Acreage)	2,258,353	2,008,431
Harvested Cropland (Acreage)	50,456	40,534
Irrigated Land (Acreage)	60,590	42,529
Market Value (of produced goods)	\$98,298,000	

Source: 2002 US Census of Agriculture

The agriculture/ranching industry in Lea County is also impacted by the large influx of dairies that are opening in the State of New Mexico. Most of the dairies have located in Doña Ana and Chaves Counties; however, dairies have been opening in Lea County as well.

The need for land devoted to pasture is expected to increase dramatically in Lea County due to the opening of the Race-track/Casino. Lea County officials have seen an increased demand for more stable space as more racehorse owners locate in the County to be close to the track for training purposes.

#### 4. County/Municipality Interface

Lea County's incorporated municipalities are located along one primary corridor stretching from Tatum on NM 206 to Jal on NM 18. The communities are generally arranged in 20-mile increments in the corridor, which is roughly 98 miles in length. Virtually all of the urban land uses (commercial, industrial, and higher-density residential) occurs on the fringes of these communities or within their municipal limits. As each community grows and develops, urban-scale development comes into contact with that of a more



*Area of County-Municipal Interface, Outside Lovington*

rural character. This is especially true in Hobbs, where the City has witnessed a significant amount of growth on the north side. Much of this development on the north side of Hobbs is characterized by more intensive commercial uses such as



big box retailers, motels, and high volume restaurants. As the North Hobbs area grows and/or as the other communities experience growth, planning these areas becomes more important as several issues come to the forefront. These issues include:

- Ensuring compatibility between rural and urban land uses;
- Careful planning of the municipal planning and platting jurisdictions in order to coordinate appropriate land use design, densities, and infrastructure improvements;
- Cooperation in removing nuisances and trash from community gateways; and
- Involving the County and County residents in all planning and platting action occurring in these areas.

While most of these issues are more appropriately addressed by the municipalities, there is a role for the County as well, particularly in helping improve community gateways. It is also very important for the County to stay involved in all planning discussions and decisions made by the municipalities.

## **5. Revitalization of Downtown Areas in the Incorporated Municipalities**

Each incorporated community in Lea County has a strong desire to redevelop and revitalize their downtown areas. Directing new development to the infill and downtown areas within each community would help relieve development pressures at the municipal limits boundaries. In turn, instances of incompatibility between land uses in the County and the municipalities would be reduced.



*Downtown Jal*

The City of Hobbs is already preparing for a downtown revitalization effort, while revitalization remains a key goal for Lovington, Eunice, and Jal. Downtown revitalization and redevelopment involves the following:

- Establishment of redevelopment/revitalization boundaries in order to focus improvements on a defined area;
- Ensuring that vacant and underutilized properties are re-

- paired and reused by new tenants;
- Initiating streetscape and facade improvements to create an inviting atmosphere;
- Evaluating the mix of land uses to create a mix of residential, entertainment, and commercial uses to ensure that more people stay or visit downtown on a regular basis; and
- Creation of a pedestrian friendly environment.

The City of Artesia's own redevelopment of its downtown, which was a collaborative effort on the part of many diverse stakeholders, could be a good model for Lea County communities.

## **6. Land Use Regulations in Lea County**

Land use in Lea County is regulated by the County's Subdivision Regulations, which are largely based on the requirements found in the State's Subdivision Act. As a result Lea County is bound by certain State requirements. The Lea County Subdivision Regulations have worked for the most part in regulating subdivision development in the County: however, one complaint is that the process for subdivision approval is slow. Some housing professionals fear that the slow process involved in obtaining subdivision approval could be a detriment to housing development in the County.

Lea County, like most of the rural counties in the State, must rely on outside agencies for review of subdivision applications, most notably the Office of the State Engineer (OSE), which reviews water supply plans for each subdivision. This review often takes some time and typically holds up subdivision applications. State agencies have 30 days to review a subdivision application but given their work load, this timeframe may or may not always be met. State agency review is a primary reason that application approval is delayed. The County does have some flexibility in attempting to speed up the process. Users would like to see a more streamlined process in order to allow developers better predictability in development schedules.

Lea County does not have zoning regulations in place at this time, however, implementing zoning regulations may be something that future Lea County leadership may want to consider. As it stands now, industrial land can be located next to residential land uses, thus impacting property values of both uses. Should zoning be considered in the future, it should be done in a manner that contains public input and respects the private property rights of all residents.

## **7. Nuisance Abatement and Beautification**

Another aspect of the regulation issue is nuisance abatement and removal of dilapidated properties. Lea County's Solid Waste Ordinance contains provisions prohibiting accumulations of hazardous material including junk cars, trash, and other material. The general consensus is that Lea County has done a good job in enforcing the removal of junk, weeds, and removal of dilapidated properties. The Lea County Environmental Services Department enforces the Solid Waste Ordinance and handles nuisance abatements in the County and has had success in encouraging residents to remove nuisances and junk from property. In addition, the Department oversaw a successful marketing campaign, which featured billboards located throughout the County encouraging residents to clean up dilapidated properties.

One area where leaders of the incorporated communities have expressed the need for greater cooperation with the County is in the beautification of the community entry ways. While most of this responsibility for beautification lies with the local communities, within their platting and planning jurisdictions, the incorporated communities would like the County's assistance in nuisance removal and abatement in this area. In turn, removal of abatements will help define the community gateways and provide a good first impression as drivers enter the communities. This cooperation could be accomplished through drafting of joint power agreements with each community in order to ensure a win-win solution.

## **E. FUTURE LAND USE CONSIDERATIONS**

### **1. Land Availability in Lea County**

Lea County and the incorporated communities have an abundance of land suitable for growth and development. This land is comprised of both vacant land and developed land that is dilapidated or underutilized. As previously discussed, the incorporated communities would like to ensure that their downtown areas and other developed areas of the communities are not neglected as new development is directed toward vacant areas on the fringe of the communities. For example, Hobbs has witnessed a great deal of new construction of commercial businesses on the north part of town and some Hobbs residents fear that older parts of town may be neglected.



## **2. Compatibility Between Land Uses**

Another issue related to future development in Lea County and its communities is the location of certain land uses in relation to others. Currently, different types of land uses have the ability to be located anywhere as long as they meet the subdivision regulations. This ability, however, could result in two incompatible uses being located next to one another. For example, a heavy industrial use has the ability to locate adjacent to a single-family residential development, resulting in a decrease of property values for both properties. Ensuring compatibility between uses can be accompanied through zoning ordinances. Lovington and Eunice have zoning in place and Hobbs is studying the feasibility of zoning for that community.

Any future considerations of zoning for the entities that do not have this mechanism in place must be based on the following guidelines:

- It must be community driven and have the support of the community;
- It must be fair and take into consideration people's property rights;
- The pros and cons of zoning must be presented to the community;
- A strong public process must be followed and residents need to be notified at every step of the process; and
- Maps need to be created that illustrate the zoning categories being proposed.

## **3. Annexations**

Annexation is the process by which an incorporated municipality takes in land from outside its boundaries for inclusion as part of the incorporated municipality. It is typically done in response to the need for additional land for development. Lea County should be proactive in annexation decisions made by the incorporated municipalities by being involved in annexation discussions and reviewing petitions for annexation either by the municipality or those that are driven by private citizens. By being involved in annexation decisions, the County could be able to provide needed information on the request to its residents and the incorporated jurisdiction.

## **4. Future Land Use Pattern In Lea County**

For the most part, the land use pattern in Lea County is already set. Most of the urban scale development (commercial and industrial) is locating within the boundaries of the incorporated communities or within the platting and planning jurisdiction of



the communities. The majority of development that occurs in Lea County will more than likely consist of single-family residential on larger rural lots on either individual wells, shared wells, or community water systems. Larger scale subdivision development could occur on larger lots with individual septic systems. Development of subdivisions with lots smaller than an acre will be required to provide a community wastewater disposal system and will be more appropriate within the incorporated municipalities.

In terms of commercial development, businesses are more than likely to be located in or near the incorporated municipalities. A few small nodes of commercial businesses are located outside of the incorporated boundaries along some of the more highly traveled highways in the County and in the smaller unincorporated communities such as Monument. These small commercial nodes are rural in character - small shops and restaurants that serve both the traveling public and oil field employees. These commercial areas are important since they bring in gross receipts taxes into the County. They should be promoted as long as they do not pose conflicts with the rural land uses.

It is anticipated that the demand for more oil wells and pump jacks will increase in the County as the cost of oil and gas stays high. This means an increase in the amount of land in Lea County that will be devoted to drilling and pumping. Pump jacks are located throughout the County and are generally accepted in the County and have only caused land use conflicts when they are located within the incorporated municipalities (which is an issue for the municipality not the County).

Like commercial development, it is anticipated that industrial development will also be located closer to the incorporated communities where infrastructure already exists to support their activities. The most likely location for new industry to locate in Lea County is the Hobbs Industrial Air Park (HIAP), the Lovington Industrial Park, or some of the other industrial areas located in the incorporated communities. The land around the National Enrichment Facility (NEF) plant, which is in the unincorporated area of the County could also be expected to develop with industrial uses as supporting industries and businesses seek to be located in close proximity.

Finally, the increase of wells and septic systems is an issue for any rural area that is facing development pressure. While ground water quality is addressed in the Water Element, the County should seek to decrease the number of wells and septic tanks by encouraging community water and wastewater systems.

The advantage to these systems is that they help preserve water quantity and quality but they are expensive for the developers.

## **F. LAND USE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS**

Thus far, several land use issues and conditions have been discussed. The land use goals and objectives have been formulated to address these issues and actually represent future land use policies on which future land use decisions should be based. The implementation actions listed below further help the County to achieve the goals since they represent specific and measurable activities for the County to follow.

### **1. Joint Powers Agreement with Municipalities**

Development of a joint powers agreement with the municipalities to address beautification efforts at municipal gateways.

*Lead Party: Lea County Commission/Municipal leadership*

*Potential Funding Sources: General Fund, staff time, and municipal expenditures*

### **2. County/Municipal Land Use Coordination**

On an ongoing basis, Lea County should designate a staff member to coordinate land use decisions in the platting and planning jurisdiction with staff from the incorporated municipalities. Discussion and coordination should include: development character, location of new development, land use policies adopted by the municipality, annexations, and zoning (if adopted).

*Lead Party: Lea County designated staff member*

*Potential Funding Sources: Staff time*

### **3. Support for Downtown Revitalization and Redevelopment of Older Areas Within Incorporated Municipalities**

While downtown revitalization and redevelopment of older areas within municipal boundaries is the primary responsibility of the municipality, the County could provide support to these efforts through the passage of resolutions, data sharing, and other in-kind support.

*Lead Party: Lea County Commission*

*Potential Funding: Staff Time*

#### **4. Subdivision Regulations Review and Revision**

With cooperation from developers and other stakeholders, Lea County shall review the subdivision regulations in order to identify ways to streamline the process to make it quicker and more predictable. The County should designate an existing staff member who can act as a local liaison between the County and state agencies reviewing subdivision applications. This liaison role could be expanded later to a County planner position if warranted.

*Lead Party: Lea County Commission/Lea County Manager*

*Potential Funding: County General Fund*

## **SECTION 4: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **A. OVERVIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The goal of the economic development element of the Comprehensive Plan is to offer recommendations for engaging in a focused economic strategy. Successful economic development requires a coordinated approach from the public and private sectors through partnerships, private investment, and through building upon strengths. For Lea County, this also involves cooperation between the County and its incorporated municipalities, which have all



*Oil Field in Southern Lea County*

been linked by the oil and gas industry as the primary economic engine. An effective economic development strategy will consist of action-oriented steps that are designed to retain existing jobs, create new jobs through small business growth, achieve economic diversification, and increase the tax base in order to maintain a strong quality of life. The ultimate aim of economic development is to increase the portion of local residents' investments and retail purchases within Lea County, keep more money in the County and its incorporated communities while attracting new spending and increasing wealth of all residents.

Economic studies that have clear strategies promoting economic growth have already been conducted for Lea County. These recommendations are still viable for Lea County to undertake, since the plans are relatively new (prepared or updated less than five years ago). It is not the intent of this Economic Development chapter to reinvent any of the previous work. Instead, it seeks to integrate these recommendations into this document to reinforce the conclusions of previous studies. Where appropriate, new recommendations have been made to supplement the previous work.

### **B. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, THREATS, AND OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS**

Current issues impacting economic development can be synthesized into a Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats, and Opportunities Analysis (SWOT Analysis). The SWOT analysis organizes the community assets, identifies challenges, and determines which opportunities and



threats exist that could impact economic development. The County's SWOT analysis has been derived from: 1. Public input; 2. Input from Lea County Staff and the County Commission; 3. Strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats that were identified during the comprehensive planning processes for Hobbs, Lovington, Eunice, and Jal; 4. The New Mexico Rural Development Response Council, which undertook a SWOT analysis for Hobbs, Jal, and Tatum.

### **1. Strengths**

Strengths are internal assets or conditions currently in place that are favorable to generating economic growth. Table 1 illustrates these community strengths and assets.

**Economic Development Table 1: Lea County Strengths & Assets**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>How Strengths can be used in Economic and Growth Strategies</b>
Excellent public school systems in Hobbs, Lovington, Jal, and Eunice, and Tatum	Quality schools attract new residents and help to retain young families.
Business-friendly attitudes and policies	Helps in the recruitment of new businesses and retention/expansion of existing businesses
Climate	County can market itself as an area for "snow birds", retirees, and soaring.
Strength of the oil and gas industry	When the oil and gas industry is strong, it is the primary source of wealth and jobs.
Hobbs Industrial Air Park/Lovington Industrial Park	Provides area for industrial and business development. The Lovington Industrial Park is located south of the City and needs more infrastructure development.
Available land	Vacant land in each community can facilitate the development of housing and commercial establishments.
Good ground transportation system (US 380, US 62/180, US 82, and NM 18)	Provides access to each of the County's communities.
Presence of New Mexico Junior College and College of the Southwest	Educational facilities offer opportunities for higher education and increasing workforce training and availability.
Economic Development Corporation of Lea County/Lea County Community Improvement Corporation	Groups that are committed to economic development in Lea County - provides the County leadership.
Addition of race track/casino	New race track and casino will attract people from outside of Lea County (Could also considered to be a threat, if it eats up disposable income)
Lea County Events Center	Outstanding facility that hosts concerts, entertainment, and sporting events. Together with the Zia Park and Black Gold Casino, it forms an entertainment complex.

## 2. Weaknesses/Challenges

Weaknesses can be defined as internal challenges that Lea County and its communities need to overcome in order to facilitate economic growth.

**Economic Development Table 2: Lea County Weaknesses/Challenges**

Weaknesses	Implications for Lea County and its Communities
Lack of housing	Lack of housing makes it difficult to retain residents or attract new residents.
Skilled labor force	Local businesses have difficulty filling positions and often cite a lack of people with the skill sets to meet their needs.
Need for community beautification	Each community must take steps to beautify their communities.
Inability to retain youth	Young people leaving the County affects spending and the availability of labor.
Lack of entertainment	Lack of entertainment is a quality of life issue.
Lack of air transportation/service	Regular air service to the County could open the County up to an increase in business.

## 3. Opportunities/Threats

Opportunities include external or internal forces that Lea County can take advantage of to promote economic growth such as resources, programs, or new industries. Conversely, issues that can be identified as threats include external or internal forces that could have a negative impact on economic growth. The following table identifies opportunities and threats affecting economic development in Lea County.

**Economic Development Table 3: Opportunities and Constraints**

Lea County Economic Development Opportunities	Lea County Economic Development Threats
Growth of Agricultural/Agricultural Manufacturing Industries such as dairies promotes growth and job opportunities	Downturns in the oil/gas industry - could lead to fluctuations in employment.
Job training programs through NMJC to help in work force training and development	Decreasing water supply - could lead to development constraints in the future
Location of the NEF Uranium Enrichment Plant can help to diversify the economy and add jobs	Western Prairie Chicken - inclusion on Endangered Species List could be detrimental for farming, ranching, and mineral extraction in Lea County.
Strength of oil and gas industry keeps money flowing into the County	Continued population decline - Continued population decline impacts spending and influence.

## **C. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

**Goal One: The economy of Lea County will become more diversified while retaining and growing existing businesses, industries, and jobs.**

Objective 1.1: Continue to encourage economic development efforts in Lea County and collaborate with other organizations to implement economic development strategies identified in previous planning efforts including but not limited to incubator development, retention meetings, and infrastructure improvements.

Objective 1.2: Promote the existing amenities in Lea County such as the Lea County Event Center, Racetrack/Casino, museums, National Soaring Society, and proximity to Carlsbad Caverns National Park on a statewide and regional basis in order to increase tourism.

Objective 1.3: Cooperate with other entities and organizations such as New Mexico Junior College, College of the Southwest, local chambers of commerce, Lea County Housing Inc., the public school districts, and the New Mexico Economic Development Department to increase job training programs in Lea County.

Objective 1.4: Attract new businesses to Lea County that support existing and new industries such as the oil/gas industry, Uranium Enrichment Plant, Racetrack/Casino, and the Dairies/Agriculture.

## **D. LEA COUNTY ECONOMIC OVERVIEW**

### **1. Previous and/or Current Economic Development Studies**

Economic development stakeholders have been very pro-active in initiating several economic development projects and/or studies. Many of these studies are relevant for the Lea County Comprehensive Plan process. The purpose of this economic development element of the Lea County economic development plan is to build upon previous work while providing additional insight or ideas that have not yet been captured. This section provides an overview of some of the work that has already occurred.



**a. Market and Economic Analysis and Economic Development Strategy for Lea County and Hobbs and Lovington**

This report was commissioned by the Lea County Improvement Corporation. The report consisted of a market and economic research and analysis of conditions in Lea County, Hobbs, and Lovington that impact economic development. A significant portion of the report identified competitive advantages and disadvantages in Lea County. In response to these advantages and disadvantages, the Report identified target industries that could locate in Lea County. In addition, the report contained several actions and policies that would facilitate the growth of business. These recommendations included:

- Enhance workforce training programs;
- Concentrate on serving existing businesses in the Lea County Market area;
- Make improvements;
- Facilitate the development of available lots and building space;
- Communicate the advantages of Hobbs and Lovington as a business location (based upon a survey that was included in the report);
- Encourage consumer responsive retail development;
- Support the expansion of medical and educational uses
- Establish a Research Center for Extending the Economic Life of Oil and Gas;
- Encourage Expansion of Waste-Related Management Research and Operation Activities;
- Test and implement commercial wind power facilities and/or research programs;
- Make quality of life improvements (including the development of housing); and
- Monitor progress and results.

Many of these recommendations will form specific implementation actions found later in this Economic Development Section.

**b. Lea County Retail Trade Zone Report**

The Lea County Retail Trade Zone Report provides demographic analysis for a 100-mile radius around Hobbs that demonstrates that a strong retail market exists in the area. The targeted audience of the report includes both business people wishing to relocate their business to the Hobbs area and potential consumers who may be unaware of the services available in Lea County.

## **2. Industrial and Business Profile of Lea County**

The three dominant industrial sectors that provide employment in Lea County include:

- **Agricultural, Forestry, Hunting, and Mining Sector** - Primarily includes the oil and gas industry but also includes agricultural production and dairies. According to the US Census bureau, 20.7% of the labor force in Lea County are employed in this sector;
- **Health, Social Services, and Education** - Primarily includes the public education system but also includes employment at the County's medical facilities; and
- **Retail Trade sector** - Primarily includes the selling of goods and services. Hobbs is considered to be the retail center of Lea County and also draws consumers from the outlying towns in West Texas such as Denver City and Seminole.

An overview of each primary industrial sector follows.

### **a. Oil and Gas Industry**

Industry and business in Lea County has always been driven by the oil and gas industries, which are responsible for most of the job creation and wealth of the County. Although the oil and gas industry has seen cycles of "boom" and "bust" throughout the Permian Basin communities, the oil and gas industry has remained the dominant industry, employing as many as 9,300 people state-wide, with the majority of those living in the Lea County communities. According to the New Mexico Department of Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources, as of 2002, there were approximately 700 oil and gas companies operating in the State with several other smaller support businesses that provide oil well maintenance/repair and distribution services. The NM Department of Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources also reports that Lea County ranks #1 in oil production and #4 in natural gas production.

The importance of the oil and gas industry for New Mexico's overall economy cannot be underscored. In 2000, the State derived more than 25% of its general fund revenues from taxes and royalties on oil, natural gas, and carbon dioxide production. Revenues collected from these sources played a major role in education spending in the State. In addition to supplying jobs and income, the oil and gas industry has also played a major role in helping to improve the quality of life in many of the communities where they are located. Several parks, playing fields, museums, and

school facilities have been built with assistance from oil and gas related companies.

**b. Agriculture and Ranching**

The US Census of Agriculture, which was conducted in 2002 and is generally taken every five years, reported that the number of farms decreased 19% from 1997 but that farms actually increased in size, resulting in more acreage being farmed. Another agricultural area that has witnessed tremendous growth in Lea County is the Dairy Industry. While many states across the United States have actually lost dairies, New Mexico has been one of the only states to gain dairies, with several locating in Doña Ana County and Chaves County. Dairies are now starting to locate in other counties as well. Curry, Roosevelt, Eddy, and Lea Counties have all seen the growth of the dairy industry in the past five years. The US Census of Agriculture reported that the market value of dairy products in Lea County totaled \$25,576 in 1997. The 2002 Census indicated that this number virtually doubled to \$54,302.

**c. Health/Social Services/Education**

The Health/Social Services/Education sector is the second largest employer in Lea County behind the Oil/Gas industry. Most of the employment generated by this sector is found in the employment of teachers, administrators, and support staff in the four public school districts in Lea County. The public school districts are the single largest employers in the smaller communities. The sector also includes employment at New Mexico Junior College, College of the Southwest, and the various medical facilities in the County.



*New Mexico Junior College*

**d. Retail**

Hobbs contains a variety of goods and services such as medical care, groceries, clothing, durable goods, and restaurants. Since most of these items can be obtained in Hobbs, the City is a destination for people from the smaller communities in Lea County and West Texas. The Lea County Economic Development Corporation estimates that the retail trade zone, the area that businesses in Hobbs im-



pact, is a 55-mile radius around the City, attracting people from Seminole and Andrews Texas as well as Lovington, Tatum, Jal, and Eunice. In addition to the 55,511 residents living in Lea County, the Hobbs Retail Trade Zone also captures most of Gaines County, Andrews County, and Yoakum County, all of which border Lea County on the Texas Line. Taken together, the entire area is home to nearly 100,000 residents.

While Hobbs remains the retail center of the County, each of Lea County's incorporated communities also contain strong small businesses that contribute to the economic vitality of their respective communities. Lovington has several businesses located along Main Street as well as a small shopping center along Avenue D. Eunice, Jal, and Tatum also have a variety of small businesses ranging from gas/convenience marts to small shops. Tatum, for example has a successful iron manufacturing company that ships its goods worldwide through the internet.

The strength of the Hobbs Retail Trade Zone and the commercial businesses in the communities is challenged by larger retail markets in Midland-Odessa, Roswell, and to some extent Clovis (for those living in the northern part of the County). These markets contain certain goods and services not present in Lea County yet. These markets have attracted national franchise businesses such as big box retailers and franchise restaurants. However, these businesses and franchises are now starting to notice the Hobbs Retail Trade Zone. More businesses are interested in locating in the community of Hobbs and Lea County.

### **3. Economic Development Organizations**

Each local government, as well as the Lea County government, are significant stakeholders in economic development and they ensure that infrastructure and policies are in place to support job and wealth creation. The primary economic development agent in Lea County, however, is the Economic Development Corporation of Lea County (EDC). EDC is a private organization that is supported by most of the Lea County communities and County through budgetary outlays and other types of in-kind support. In turn, EDC is charged with seeking out new economic development opportunities for the County and ensuring the vitality of existing business. Over the years, EDC has been instrumental in taking steps necessary to foster community growth in Lea County.



Another organization that often collaborates with the EDC of Lea County is the Lea County Community Improvement Corporation.

In addition to the EDC of Lea County, each of the incorporated communities in Lea County have Chambers of Commerce or a volunteer driven economic development committee, which also play a role in economic development. Lovington has an Economic Development Corporation that is active in promoting economic opportunities in Lovington. There is also an economic development committee in Jal that oversees economic development efforts in Lea County's southernmost communities.

The other communities of Tatum, Eunice, and Jal all have chambers of commerce that also oversee the economic interests of those communities.

#### **4. Lea County Economic Development Resources and Assets**

There are several critical elements that are necessary in to supporting economic development activities (growth and retention of jobs). These elements are shown in Table 4.

**Economic Development Table 4: Resources and Assets**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Relevance to Lea County</b>
Available land to accommodate growth;	Each community has vacant or under-utilized land available for development or redevelopment. Each community also has areas for infill or redevelopment.
Industrial/business parks with basic utilities, roads, high speed data and telecommunications;	Hobbs and Lovington have existing industrial parks. HIAP in Hobbs has been master planned and is generally ready for development. Jal and Eunice have industrial areas that could function as industrial parks but need infrastructure improvements.
Transportation access to the County and communities via roadway, air, and rail services;	Lea County has excellent access via the highway system and is located within an hour and a half from a major interstate. The potential for increased air service exists. The County has good rail service.
Sustainable water resources for existing businesses, residential development, and new businesses being recruited to the County;	Water is a critical issue for all of New Mexico. Lea County has prepared a Regional Water Plan to help guide the use of water in the County.
Established chambers of commerce or established economic development corporation;	Lea County has both; good chambers of commerce in each community and a strong EDC.
Economic development incentives package;	The State of New Mexico allows a package of incentives to be provided to businesses interested in locating to New Mexico or expanding an existing business.
Labor force; and	The quality of the labor force is a key component of economic development. A labor force that is available and possesses certain technical skills or training is important for attracting new business and industry. Ensuring enough people who are trained is a primary concern for economic development stakeholders in Lea County.
A friendly business environment.	Lea County communities are known for having very friendly business environments with local government seen as helping rather than hindering local business development.

Source: Consensus Planning Analysis

As Table 4 indicates, virtually all of these elements are found in Lea County or its communities to some extent. In addition, Lea County also has several additional assets that contribute to economic development. A brief summary of additional assets follows:

**a. Industrial Parks, Available Sites, and Buildings in Lea County**

The two primary industrial park sites in Lea County are the Hobbs Industrial Air Park and the Lovington Industrial Park.

*HIAP* - The Hobbs Industrial Air Park encompasses approximately 2,800 acres on the growing north side of Hobbs. Approximately 1,400 acres still function as an airport and includes four runways (two are closed to public use), hangars, and other related structures. The remaining 1,400 acres are available for development. In 2002, the City of Hobbs had HIAP master planned. The master plan



*HIAP*

showed a 60-lot layout with lots ranging in size from two acres to sixty acres. The master plan also showed an internal roadway network and areas of open space. The southern portion of HIAP is located adjacent to several existing industrial type of businesses, while the area located north of the golf course is mostly vacant.

The HIAP Master Plan also contained cost estimates for infrastructure such as streets, sanitary sewer, and water mains. The City of Hobbs is in the process of constructing this infrastructure as EDC has been approached by companies interested in locating on the build-to-suit sites in the park. In terms of high-speed data communication lines, users adjacent to HIAP on the south have it available. It is not certain where the lines stop and whether they are available on HIAP itself. Other important notes about HIAP include:

HIAP has several recreational functions such as the golf course, motor speedway, shooting ranges, and soaring activities. The Soaring Society of America maintains its headquarters at HIAP and soaring/hang gliding represents an impor-



*Vacant Land at HIAP*

tant activity, attracting people to the area world wide. The recreational uses will remain at the park.

A primary recommendation from the HIAP Master Plan is that the property be cleaned up of debris, old foundations, and weeds, which all impede the marketing of the park.

In addition to the recreational and business activities located at HIAP, other uses include a State Police station and National Guard facility.

HIAP is located adjacent to the railroad. Spurs could be developed to some of the sites if desired by users.

*Lovington Industrial Park* - The City of Lovington Industrial Park is located approximately five miles outside the City to the south on the Hobbs highway. The Park is comprised of approximately 2,700 acres making it one of the largest industrial parks in New Mexico. The City of Lovington has leased sites within the Park for as little as \$1/year in order to spur development.

*City of Jal Industrial Sites* - The former El Paso Gas company site in Jal and the General Camp area represent two significant areas for industrial park development in southern Lea County. For these areas to be viable for industrial or business uses, infrastructure improvements would be needed.

#### **b. Proximity to Institutes of Higher Education**

Two higher education institutes exist in Lea County, the New Mexico Junior College (NMJC) and the College of the Southwest, both of which are located on the north side of Hobbs. These institutions provide a wide range of classes and opportunities for workforce development such as sem-



inars aimed at existing business owners, entrepreneurs, and employees. Two NMJC programs in particular are specifically geared toward continued education and training. These include:

- Interactive Television (NMJC) - This program provides the opportunity for distance education so people can take classes from public schools in Lea County.
- Small Business Development Center (NMJC) - The Small Business Development Center provides the business community in Lea County with technical assistance, counseling, and resources. The primary focus of the Center is to provide small businesses with the tools needed to run a successful enterprise. Assistance includes information on marketing, accounting, computer systems, and business start-ups.
- State-wide, programs at the Small Business Center are not fully utilized largely because people do not know they are available. Economic development stakeholders in Lea County should ensure that business people or prospective entrepreneurs in the community learn of the Small Business Center and the services it provides.

## **5. Economic Impact of Zia Park "Racino" and the National Enrichment Facility**

The Department of Economics and International Business from New Mexico State University has recently completed a study entitled *Impact of New Economic Activity on Lea County New Mexico: Zia Park Racino and the National Enrichment Facility*. The report stated that there will be a significant positive economic impact on the economy of Lea County from the operation of the Zia Park Race Track/Black Gold Casino (Zia Park Casino) and the National Enrichment Facility (NEF Plant). Employment at the Casino is estimated to be 180 permanent employees and 350 additional employees during racing season. Under the best estimate scenario, the Casino will generate \$54,298,148 in gross receipts taxes and household income will increase by \$20,222,258.



NEF Office in Eunice

The Enrichment Facility's impact is divided into a construction phase (8 year phase) and an operations phase. During construction, it is projected that 400 construction jobs will be created with an annual expenditure of \$48.6 million. Gross receipts generated by construction are expected to increase by \$74,940,023. For the operations phase, there will be a total of 210 persons employed with an annual expenditure of \$20.1 million dollars.

Population growth generated by both operations is expected to vary between 2,594 and 3,384 people. This population rise is expected to increase the demand for housing within Lea County (see Housing Element) substantially.

## **E. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY and PRIORITIES**

When devising an economic development strategy for Lea County, there are two ways to address the issue. One way is to focus on "micro-economics" or how economic development is occurring in Lea County and its communities. The other way is to look at the "macro-economics", which includes examining the Southeast New Mexico/ West Texas region as a whole. A sound strategy must also recognize the importance of the oil/gas industry, maximize the opportunities of "boom" periods and seek economic diversification during times of downturn. Finally, a balance of trying to attract new businesses and industries to the County while maintaining the vitality of existing small businesses needs to be achieved. The following economic strategy presents a multi-pronged approach to achieving economic development in the County. In order to implement this strategy, a coordinated effort among the County, the incorporated municipalities, the business community, and other relevant boards and stakeholders must be initiated. Economic development priorities should be established that provide Lea County, the incorporated municipalities, and economic development stakeholders with a balanced strategy based upon building up existing business, attracting new opportunities, tapping into existing resources, and making the County more competitive. This section identifies such priorities.

### **1. Cultivate Strong Leadership**

Lea County should continue to encourage economic development organizations to strengthen their roles as an economic development leaders by increasing their outreach to the incorporated municipalities who cannot afford their own economic development professionals. Lea County should also be an active participant in discussions initiated by economic development boards active in the County.

## **2. Lea County Economic Visioning**

Lea County should be involved in any attempt for the County to define its vision for economic growth and development. The County should be active in decisions regarding the type, nature, and location of economic growth. Each governmental entity should work with stakeholders in the County to arrive at one unified economic vision so that policies and future implementation can be focused.

## **3. Improving Existing Businesses and Growing New Small Businesses**

It is vital for existing businesses throughout Lea County to retain existing businesses, while growing new small businesses. A large number of sustainable and stable jobs are created by small businesses. Lea County can help facilitate the retention of small business and the growing of new small businesses through its continued support economic development efforts and by encouraging residents to take advantage of existing programs aimed at cultivating small business development. Such programs exist at the Hobbs One Stop Career and Workforce Development Center, New Mexico Junior College, and College of the Southwest.

## **4. Continued Workforce Development Training**

Workforce development training is essential for all of Lea County's communities. One of the biggest issues regarding business retention and attraction is the lack of training for people entering the workplace. This issue is especially important given the fact that Lea County is home to some of the most specialized jobs in the State such as those in the oil fields and in the proposed NEF plant. Workforce training and development ensures that the existing labor force adapts to the changing work environment and technology. There are several programs that have been established by the State that focus on workforce development. Lea County business owners and residents need to be made aware of these opportunities.

## **5. New Mexico State Incentive Programs**

The State of New Mexico has several incentive programs that it can offer businesses relocating or growing in the State. Lea County should partner with the State of New Mexico Economic Development Department to steer potential businesses in the County toward these incentive packages, many of which go untapped by small businesses in the State. Incentive programs include:



**a. Property Tax Abatement**

Gives incorporated municipalities and counties the opportunity to abate property taxes on plant location or expansion, depending on community desires. It gives Lea County communities an advantage in that it could help attract businesses that are in line with community values.

**b. Compensating Tax Abatement**

This provides a company the opportunity to abate gross receipts taxes on purchases made within the State and on equipment brought in from outside the State that will be used in the plant.

**c. New Mexico Investment Credit**

The State offers a tax credit for manufacturers that is applied to the value of equipment purchased for use in their operations. In order to qualify for this credit, the manufacturer must create local jobs.

**d. New Mexico In-Plant Training Program**

One popular program among small business owners is the in-plant training program, which pays half of the salary of employees during their training period, up to 1,040 hours, as well as training costs incurred by the employer. For communities outside one of the State's four metropolitan areas (Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, Farmington), the employer will be reimbursed at a rate not to exceed 65% of the trainee's hourly wage.

**e. Workforce Investment Act**

This Federal program provides classroom and on-the-job training to economically disadvantaged individuals, seniors, and dislocated workers.

**6. Economic Diversification Through Targeting Specific Industries**

While it is important that Lea County and its communities retain existing businesses, a balanced economic development strategy is needed in which economic development stakeholders attract appropriate businesses to the area. The *Market and Economic Analysis and Economic Development Strategy for Lea County and the Cities of Hobbs and Lovington* Report identified several industries, which could benefit from the locational advantages present in the County. The industry targets are summarized in Table 5.



**Economic Development Table 5: Target Industries**

Industry	Why Target is Appropriate for Lea County
Dairy Industry and Supporting Services	Climate and proximity to agriculture. This industry could spur additional jobs in the farming/ranching sector, veterinary services sector, maintenance sector.
Value Added Agricultural Production	There are already food producers operating in Eastern New Mexico and benefit from available low cost unskilled labor, favorable climate, abundance of available cheap land, and availability of locally grown crops.
Retail/Hospitality Industry	Hobbs is already a regional center for goods and services.
Manufacturing	Low land costs, abundant land, and low energy costs. Manufacturing businesses would have to initiate job training programs to be success
Oil and Gas Industry	Given that the oil and gas industry remains the most dominant industry in Lea County, businesses associated with these activities could still be recruited to the County, especially those with management positions.
Nuclear Energy	The decision of NEF to locate in Lea County can expect to generate businesses who provide services to the plant.
Wind Power	Recently completed studies have suggested that the Tatum area has sufficient wind capacity to support the location of wind farms which generate jobs during construction.

*Source: Market and Economic Analysis and An Economic Development Strategy for Lea County and the Cities of Hobbs and Lovington - Gruen Gruen + Associates, March 2003 with supplemental information and analysis from Consensus Planning.*

## **7. Implementing Previous Studies**

Several economic development studies have already been completed in Lea County that are relatively new. These studies should be implemented since there is no need to start from scratch.

## **8. Regional Economic Development**

Finally, a comprehensive economic development strategy for Lea County should focus in part on regionalism, which defines how the County's economy fits in with each incorporated municipality and with the larger Southeast New Mexico/West Texas region. It is reasonable to assume that significant economic growth in the overall region could trickle down to each

community. Advantages to regional economic development include:

- Economic diversification of the entire Lea County area;
  - Regional infrastructure coordination as needed;
  - Data sharing between each intergovernmental entity regarding demographics, infrastructure, and projects that could be used in joint marketing;
  - Regional marketing of all Lea County communities;
  - Collective problem solving and issue identification; and
  - Reduction of barriers that inhibit regional cooperation.
- In approaching regional economic development, it is important to identify the specific players who would need to be involved in the crafting of any regional economic development strategy. Some of the players include:

- Lea County;
- City of Hobbs;
- City of Lovington;
- City of Eunice;
- City of Jal;
- Town of Tatum;
- Economic Development Corporation of Lea County;
- Lea County Community Improvement Corporation;
- New Mexico Junior College;
- College of the Southwest;
- Lovington Economic Development Corporation;
- City of Jal Economic Development Committee; and
- State of New Mexico Economic Development Department.

## **F. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS**

Lea County supports the efforts of other organizations in promoting economic development in the County and its communities. The County does not have economic development staff or an economic development department and partnering with other 3rd-party organizations for economic development has been a suitable arrangement for the County. All implementation actions for the economic development element revolve around the County maintaining these relationships.

## **1. Economic Development Partnering**

Lea County will continue to partner with economic development organizations and stakeholders in their efforts to support the retention/growth of existing business, economic diversification, and programs designed to support economic development (such as joint marketing, job training programs, and infrastructure improvements). This partnership should include the following specific actions:

- Ensuring that the interests of the smaller incorporated communities are addressed in any current and future economic development planning;
- Assistance in implementation of previous economic development studies and plans as appropriate;
- Support efforts to market the County to both private sector companies or service providers (such as air service providers) and to people who may want to visit the County. Identify assets that could be marketed to visitors and tourists. Provide information to travel associations;
- Passage of resolutions of support for economic development projects and initiatives being proposed by the communities and 3rd-party economic development organizations;
- Regular communication between County government and economic development stakeholders in order to identify obstacles to economic development and identify areas of support;
- Co-sponsor applications for economic development programs, grants, and funding; and
- Support the initiation of job training programs in Lea County and partner with New Mexico Junior College and College of the Southwest in providing job training opportunities.

*Lead Party: Lea County Commission*

*Funding Sources: Staff Time*

## **2. Economic Development Infrastructure Improvements and Enhancement**

In conjunction with the incorporated communities and 3rd-party economic development stakeholders, Lea County should enhance and improve infrastructure that will help promote economic development. Potential improvements include:

- Identification of key roadways and other infrastructure that are vital to the overall economic health of the County and its communities;
- Prioritization of improvements to County roadways that lead to industrial parks, growth areas, or businesses;
- Improvement and enhancement of the Lea County Regional Airport on a regular basis;
- Work with 3rd-party economic development stakeholders to market Lea County to air service providers; and
- Work with high speed Internet, cell phone companies, and data providers to improve services within the County.

*Lead Party: Lea County Commission and Department Heads  
Funding Sources: New Mexico Infrastructure Bank, County Arterial Program, Cooperative Agreements Program, Transportation Enhancement Activities, Community Development Revolving Loan Fund*

### **3. Designate the Lea County Entertainment Complex**

Lea County already has a developing entertainment complex located south of HIAP. The Zia Park Racetrack and Black Gold Casino now anchor the entertainment complex. The Lea County Events Center (owned by Lea County) is also located within this complex and hosts concerts, trade shows, live sporting events, and other entertainment oriented events. In addition to the track, casino, and event center, an Oil/Gas museum is under development within the area that could be identified with this complex. The County would work with Casino/Racetrack/Museum management to cross promote the events held at the Event Center with these other establishments. Expansion of the casino shuttle service, for example, could be undertaken to bring concert goers to the Casino after shows and vice versa. Cross promotion of all four establishments could help bring more entertainment acts to the area and increase the number of visitors to Lea County. The County should designate the area around the casino/track/Event Center as an entertainment complex on maps and in future marketing.

*Lead Parties: County Manager  
Funding: Cooperative Advertising Program for Advertising*



## SECTION 5: HOUSING

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Housing element of the Lea County Comprehensive Plan helps tie the plan together. Decisions made regarding the location, type, scale, and density of housing will also drive decisions made on economic development, housing, water, and infrastructure.

This section addresses issues such as housing affordability, home repair programs, and municipality/county interface issues. For the most part, new homes have been built in the incorporated municipalities, although there



*Home Under Construction in Lovington in 2003*

are nodes of subdivisions located at various places within unincorporated areas. Housing outside the incorporated municipalities in Lea County is largely comprised of single-family homes on larger lots. Housing types more associated with urban settings – multifamily units, manufactured homes, and smaller lots – are located within or on the edges of municipalities.

The goals, objectives, and recommended actions in this element are intended to address the housing issues and opportunities identified during public meetings and through analysis of current conditions and projected needs. Ensuring that all residents have access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is a primary concern of the County and municipalities within the County. All entities should work together and strategically formulate housing goals that promote a strong community and enhance economic development opportunities. Providing a diversity of new housing opportunities in the County will be important in order to promote economic development goals and population growth. This housing element focuses on all types of housing, including the provision of higher end homes, entry-level housing, senior housing, and low-income housing.

### B. HOUSING ISSUES IN LEA COUNTY

The following issues have been identified in public involvement meetings as the most important regarding the housing element in this Comprehensive Plan:

- One of the main concerns is the availability of housing for employees – including modestly-priced housing for persons with

middle-class incomes. There is currently a lack of housing for current employees within Lea County.

- One of the problems facing housing development in Lea County is the lack of skilled construction labor. Housing contractors must bring in help from out of town.
- There are several housing programs available that provide assistance to people who have difficulty affording housing or in repairing their homes.
- The housing shortage will be even greater as temporary housing will be needed for construction workers and permanent housing will be needed for new employees at the LES Uranium Enrichment Facility.
- A private consultant firm has recently completed a study for the Lea County Comprehensive Plan entitled "An Assessment of Lea County Housing Needs; A Report to the Lea County Housing Authority".
- The housing study revealed that currently, there is a heavy need for new single-family home construction and an extremely high demand for new multi-family rentals. However, Lea County lacks the number of construction laborers required to meet the growing demand for single-family and rental housing.
- The Study suggests that Lea County will need a total of 5,200 new housing units by the year 2025.
- These new units will need to be comprised of a diversity of housing products ranging from affordable housing, rental housing, multi-family housing, senior housing, special needs housing, and high-end/higher priced housing.
- The inability to meet the housing demand could weaken the County's ability to diversify its economy.
- There are more people commuting to jobs within Lea County from outside the county boundaries than people commuting to jobs located outside the County.
- Like economic development, Lea County government is not directly involved in providing any type of housing. Instead, housing issues are handled by third party organizations. Lea County typically partners with these organizations to address housing issues in Lea County.

## **C. LEA COUNTY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Goal One: Increase the availability and diversity of safe and decent housing for purchase as well as rental housing for all Lea County residents.**

Objective 1.1: Assist persons with low incomes, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens with home repairs by applying for weatherization programs and supporting revolving loan funds.

Objective 1.2: Periodically review the supply of housing against the forecasted demand for housing with emphasis on the needs of lower- and middle-income workers.

Objective 1.3: On a regular basis provide land developers with information on County growth and vacant land within Lea County to promote more housing development.

Objective 1.4: As part of the job training programs outlined in the Economic Development section, encourage home building, carpentry skills, and other construction skills.

### **Goal Two: Increase the rate of home ownership in Lea County.**

Objectives 2.1: Partner with third party organizations, Small Business Development Center, and other agencies (e.g., WESSTCorp) to provide financial literacy and home buyer counseling programs to prepare Lea County's residents for home ownership.

Objective 2.2: Partner with local banks along with State and Federal programs to provide down payment and closing cost assistance for potential homebuyers.

### **Goal Three: Develop and sustain the viability of Lea County Housing, Inc.**

Objectives 3.1: Assist in the creation of a self-sustaining income stream for Lea County Housing Inc.

Objective 3.2: Assist in leveraging Federal, State and local funds to accomplish housing goals.

Objective 3.3: Partner with regional and state-wide housing agencies (government agencies and non-government agencies).



## D. HOUSING ANALYSIS IN LEA COUNTY

### 1. Housing Statistics

In 2000 there were 23,405 total housing units in Lea County, according to the US Census Bureau. The most common type of housing is single-family detached homes, and the majority of these residents own their own homes. Housing Table 1, which follows, shows that 72% of Lea County residents reside in single-family detached homes. This is a much higher proportion than the New Mexico county average, which was 61% single-family detached homes. The next most common type of housing is manufactured housing, which is 17.1% of the total housing units. Multifamily housing comprises only 6.8% of the total housing units, and duplexes, single-family attached homes, and RV's all make up less than 4.2% of housing units in Lea County.

**Housing Table 1: Housing Types of Lea County**

Housing Type	Number of Units	Percentage of Units (%)
Single-Family Detached	16,844	72.0
Single-Family Attached	535	2.3
Duplex	369	1.6
Multi-Family	1,589	6.8
Manufactured Home	3,991	17.1
Boat, RV, Vehicle	77	.3

*Source: 2000 US Census*

#### a. Age of Housing in Lea County

Lea County housing has a fairly older supply of housing stock, as compared to the New Mexico average. According to the 2000 Census, 54.8% of housing was built before 1970. Housing Table 2, below, shows the breakdown of the age of housing structures for Lea County.

**Housing Table 2: Age of Housing Structures in Lea County or Placed on Lot**

Year Built	Number of Units	Percentage of Units (%)
1990 - 2000	1,527	6.6
1980 - 1989	3,882	16.6
1970 - 1979	5,166	22.1
1960 - 1969	5,004	21.4
1940 - 1959	6,936	29.6
1939 Or Earlier	890	3.8

*Source: 2000 US Census*



### **b. Home Occupancy and Ownership**

Approximately 84.2% of homes, or 19,699 total, were occupied in Lea County. Vacant housing units were 15.8% of the total, or 3,706 total. Of the occupied housing units, 72.6% were owner-occupied and 27.4% were renter-occupied.

The US Census indicated that 86 housing units in Lea County were lacking complete plumbing facilities, and 131 housing units were lacking complete kitchen facilities. In addition, 1,129 homes had no telephone service. The lack of home telephone service may reflect the growing use of cellular phone use as a home's primary home service.

### **c. Housing Value in Lea County**

Housing Table 3 shows that median home values have dropped between 1990 and 2000. The median value of owner-occupied housing in Lea County was \$50,100, which reflects an average decrease in value of \$1,619 (adjusted for 2000 dollars), from the 1990 median housing value. Median gross rent, which is the average contract rent plus the average amount of utilities, was \$388 for Lea County in 2000, an average decrease from the 1990 adjusted value of \$23.

**Housing Table 3: Housing Value in Lea County**

	<b>1990 Value (Adjusted to 2000 Dollars)</b>	<b>2000 Value</b>
Median Value of Specified Owner Occupied Housing	\$39,300 (\$51,719)	\$50,100
Median Gross Rent	\$312 (\$488)	\$388

*Source: 2000 US Census*

## **2. An Assessment of Lea County Housing Needs**

In August of 2005, a private consultant presented a housing needs assessment to the Lea County Housing Authority, entitled "An Assessment of Lea County Housing Needs; A Report to the Lea County Housing Authority". The stated purpose of this Study was to determine the unmet need for housing in Lea County and to project the number of housing units needed in the future, especially in light of the economic development initiatives that have taken place. The Study concluded:

- A total of 5,200 new housing units will be needed by 2020, which means 350 units on an annual basis.

- In the short term, an estimated 600 units are needed almost immediately (between 2005 and 2010) to accommodate the demand. This demand is intensified by the activity generated by the Black Gold/Zia Park Race Track and the LES plant construction. Between 2010 and 2020, 3,900 of the 5,200 units will need to be constructed.
- Employment is expected to grow from 23,024 to 26,730 employees in Lea County over the next 15 years for an increase of 3,706 employees. Lea County's ability to retain these employees within the County is dependant on them being able to find a diversity of housing within the County.
- Lea County lacks a supply of higher-quality, higher priced homes, which are needed for economic diversification.
- Housing costs in Lea County are relatively low, however, there are many households that pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines this situation as unaffordable.
- Special needs and seniors currently have difficulty finding housing in Lea County. Future housing considerations will need to address this issue.

### **3. Housing Affordability**

Another issue is housing affordability, because conventional financing is hard to obtain for many of Lea County's residents. One possibility is to work with the Small Business Development Center in Hobbs to provide and/or expand homebuyer consulting seminars for clients that have had difficulty obtaining conventional mortgages. State-wide and regional agencies such as WESSTCorp (Las Cruces office), the Southern New Mexico Community Support Agency (Regional office of United Way located in Las Cruces and serving Lea County), as well as the New Mexico Project for Financial Literacy all provide varying types of homebuyer training programs.

### **4. Housing Development**

The time and cost to develop new residential and commercial projects, because of the County's subdivision process, is another housing issue that participants identified. Part of the expense in new homes are the hidden costs to the consumer – one of these hidden costs is the cost to navigate through and successfully develop residential projects. Streamlining the county and state subdivision regulations could both increase the amount of housing units available on an annual basis, and lower the final cost of the house to the consumer

by reducing the costs associated with the county subdivision approval process. In addition, efforts should be made on the part of economic development stakeholders and those associated with job training to ensure that training programs related to the construction trade are available.

## **5. Regional Issues**

With regards to housing, the last major issue identified was the relationship with nearby Texas counties. The Texas cities of Andrews, Seminole, and Kermit all compete and cooperate with Lea County for providing housing to residents in the greater area of southeast New Mexico and West Texas. The Assessment of Lea County Housing discussed above indicated that there are several people living outside of Lea County who commute to jobs located in the County. While people may commute for a variety of reasons, the lack of quality housing plays a critical role. While the housing opportunities in nearby Texas communities provide a short-term solution to the lack of worker housing in Lea County, they also drain construction and retail dollars from Lea County that would otherwise contribute to its gross receipts revenues.

## **6. Housing Organizations and Programs**

The Lea County Housing Corporation, Incorporated (LCHCI) is the primary housing organization in Lea County. Its mission is to improve the quantity, quality, and availability of affordable housing in Lea County. Its goals include the following:

- To increase the availability of safe, decent, and affordable housing.
- To assist the very low income, disabled, and elderly with home repairs.
- To increase the rate of home ownership in Lea County.
- To efficiently sell or manage the rental of housing units created.
- To create a self-propagating income stream for continued operation.
- To leverage Federal, State, and Local funds to accomplish these goals.

The first project the LCHCI undertook was the "An Assessment of Lea County Housing Needs; A Report to the Lea County Housing Authority". There are several other projects that the LCHCI would like to undertake. These projects include:

### **a. Affordable Homeownership Project**

LCHI would like to work towards the new construction of 22 single family homes on various sites in Eunice and



Jal, New Mexico to be sold at affordable rates and terms to low-income households, as defined by the 50% and 80% HUD income limits. These homes would benefit Lea County residents who could not otherwise purchase a home.

**b. Workforce Housing Project**

LCHI has been in communication with the MFA and New Mexico Junior College and College of the Southwest to work toward the development of a major Campus housing development that would provide work force housing for educators, medical personnel, police, and fire workers.

**c. Work with Governmental and Quasi-Governmental Agencies to Construct Housing on Their Land**

Local governments and the Region 6 Housing Authority have vacant land adjacent to the very popular Woodleaf Apartment Complex that could possibly be used for new housing units. The Lea County Housing Corporation would like to partner with these agencies to develop additional housing units that could take the form of a large apartment complex or a number of individual units depending on the size of the land and need.

**d. Tatum and Lovington Four-Plex Development**

LCHI has been in contact with representatives of Tatum and Lovington regarding the potential construction of several four-plex units to be constructed with USDA Rural Development Funds for rental to special populations such as elderly or low income.

**e. Homebuyer Counseling and Homeowner Development**

This objective is proposed to assist persons of moderate means who wish to buy a home. Activities are proposed to include homeowner education, training, and counseling to help consumers make informed decisions to facilitate purchasing a home and later to help consumers with the financial, maintenance, and home improvement aspects of home ownership. Other activities are proposed to include post-purchase counseling and counseling services related to mortgage delinquency and foreclosure prevention.

**f. Homebuyer Down Payment/Closing Cost Assistance**

Financial related assistance is also proposed to assist persons of moderate means who wish to buy a home. This is a partnering effort with local banks along with State and Federal programs. These efforts would in-



clude such activities as down payment assistance, closing cost assistance, and providing below market interest rate financing. This program is already available through participating MFA Banks and no budget item is needed to pursue this objective.

**g. Low Income Owner Occupied Housing Rehabilitation**

The proposed project is to provide financing and the coordination of rehabilitation of homes on scattered sites in Lea County that are owned by very low-income households, as defined by the HUD low-income limits, who could not otherwise afford the rehabilitation in order to make necessary repairs related to the health and safety of the occupants, to correct code violations, and to protect the structural integrity of the homes. The project is proposed to begin and continue on a one home at a time basis.

**h. Non-Profit Assistance for Housing Development**

There are several non-profit organizations or communities in Lea County who may need additional housing for their homeless, elderly, disabled, or mentally ill clients, or who may desire to pursue larger housing projects for the benefit of their community as a whole. The Lea County Housing Corporation would propose to partner with these organizations and provide administrative support to help obtain funding, oversee the implementation of the projects, and finalize the proper sale of the units or transference of management to the appropriate agency for long term operation.

**i. CDBG Neighborhood Improvement Project**

The Lea County Housing Corporation would like to partner with a local community to apply for and obtain \$500,000 in CDBG funds to create a Neighborhood Improvement Project that would result in the completion of water, sewer, and/or roadway infrastructure work along with the acquisition and rehabilitation or new construction of housing units in a low-income neighborhood.

**j. Encouragement of Private Builder Housing Development**

Tax credits are available at various areas in Lea County that would allow private developers to obtain tax credits when they develop new rental housing projects in those areas. The Broadway and Scharbauer Apartments in Hobbs are two examples of this type of development. It also has been found that construction financing and permanent financing for housing projects is hard to ob-

tain. The Lea County Housing Corporation would like to recruit and work with private developers to encourage them to construct new housing developments using tax credits, to help obtain 50% construction financing guarantees, and to help obtain infrastructure financing on major affordable housing projects.

## **7. Homebuilder Issues**

It is important that this Housing Element also address the development of higher-end homes and subdivisions as well as affordable housing. In discussions with developers and home builders, The following elements are important to home builders when considering a new market for housing construction.

### **a. Depth of Market**

One of the key indicators a home builder considers is the depth of market, which examines the size of the market, with a focus on the potential for the market to generate new homeowners. As the Housing Study indicates, Lea County is expected to see moderate growth over the next 25 years, creating a housing demand. This information should be summarized and provided to the local homebuilders association, along with County contact information for builders interested in doing business in Lea County.

### **b. Accessibility to Building Materials**

The opening of the new home improvement store in Hobbs, coupled with other hardware and lumber stores in the area, has improved the accessibility to building materials. Rural areas have always faced increased production costs of housing development due to lack of building materials in the area. Retention of home improvement and building supply stores will help in promoting the area to home builders.

### **c. Incentives and Business Climate**

Lea County already has a strong reputation for being a business friendly community. Homebuilders have indicated that the County should be open to working with them on providing infrastructure, creating a predictable development approval process, removing unnecessary barriers to development (such as long review processes), and providing incentives to builders to lure them into the market. Incentives include:

- Streamlining of the development process so that projects move quickly;

- Research on property tax rate reductions;
- Waiving of development fees and utility hook-up fees where possible (municipality action not the County); and
- Collaboration between community and developers to extend and/or improve infrastructure, such as water lines, sewer lines, and roads to subdivisions.

**d. Flexible Land Use Regulations and Enforcement**

Zoning is a major component in maintaining and enhancing home values. As indicated in the Land Use Element, the County may want to consider zoning in the future. Enforcement of zoning regulations is critical for homebuilders and homeowners. Secondly, home builders want the ability to develop smaller lots or receive density increases in exchange for providing open space, residential amenities, and/or lower income or affordable housing within a subdivision.

**e. Need for Experienced Labor Force**

Based on interviews with local homebuilders, one critical need for new housing construction is skilled labor related to the construction industry. Builders need a critical mass of framers, brick masons, carpenters, plumbers, and contractors. As a result, it is in the best interest of Lea County to encourage this type of vocational training at area public schools and New Mexico Junior College.

## **E. HOUSING IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS**

While third-party organizations are committed to developing affordable housing, the development of a diversity of housing is critical for Lea County, including multi-family housing and higher end housing. The following implementation actions are important for diversifying the housing stock in Lea County. It is also important to note that the County's subdivision regulations and the development process have been identified as a barrier to subdivision development. This issue has been addressed in the land use section.

**1. Lea County Housing Coordination Action**

Lea County should continue to support third-party organizations that provide housing and housing support by:

- Assistance in identifying grant programs and funding sources available for non-profit and private housing assistance groups;
- Co-signing grant applications from third-party organizations that are seeking monies for housing programs;
- Taking the lead in applying for grants and funding sources and providing these monies to qualified third party organizations;
- Make information and data available to third-party organizations on Lea County demographics and socioeconomics in order to use this information for grant applications;
- Maintaining partnerships through coordination, agreements, and memorandums of understanding with third party organizations; and
- Continue to support third-party housing organizations.

*Lead Party: Lea County Commission*

*Funding Sources: Staff Time*

## **2. Job Training Programs/Tax Credit for Construction Trades**

Lea County should work cooperatively with economic development stakeholders, the New Mexico Economic Development Department, and area homebuilders to apply for tax credit and job training programs in order to train employees for the construction industry. The feasibility of expanding the high schools' and New Mexico Junior College's role to train Lea County residents in the construction trade should also be explored.

*Lead Party: Lea County Staff*

*Funding Sources: Staff Time*

## **3. Housing Incentives Program**

Lea County should work with developers and home builders to identify all the types of incentives that Lea County could reasonably provide to promote the development of multi-family and higher-end residential development.

*Lead Party: Lea County Staff*

*Funding Sources: General Fund*

## **4. Housing Demand Data Base**

Lea County should work with third-party housing organizations and realtors to develop a data base that tracts the de-



mand for housing in Lea County. The data base could track the following:

- Number of inquiries from outside the County for housing in Lea County;
- Types of homes being sought in Lea County;
- Areas of the County that people desire homes;
- Desired amenities in homes; and
- Price range that people are willing to pay for homes in Lea County.

This information could be shared with developers and home-builders so that they can monitor the type of homes currently in demand in the County.

*Lead Party: Lea County Staff*

*Funding Sources: General Fund*

## **SECTION 6: WATER RESOURCES**

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### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Water element of the Lea County Comprehensive plan addresses one of the most critical topics impacting the County, all of New Mexico, and the Southwestern United States. This element will focus on three aspects of the water issue, including:

- Ensuring that a supply of potable water is available for all Lea County residents for years to come;
- Mitigating the negative impact from current and future drought occurrences; and
- Planning for water use and conservation.

Water planning is critical for all counties, incorporated communities, and water districts in the State of New Mexico. The State's water resources are constantly under threat and pressure from drought, water waste, and the compact agreements ensuring water delivery of water from New Mexico to Texas. Water planning is especially important for Lea County given the ranching and agricultural activities that take place in the County. It is also important for the County and municipalities in generating economic growth.

Many of the water issues and recommendations found in this water section, were generated by the Lea County Regional Water Plan prepared for the Lea County Water Users Association in 2000. The intent of this section is not to recreate the still viable work that was done in 2000, but to supplement that document and reaffirm recommendations made in that planning effort.

### **B. WATER ISSUES**

- Water demand in Lea County has gradually increased over the past several years. Water use is projected to continue to increase over the next 40 years.
- Water use is approximately 180,000 acre-feet per year but is expected to double over the next 40 years to 360,000 acre-feet per year.
- Water demand in Lea County has been increasing steadily on an annual basis. Between 1985 and 1995, water demand increased 33%.
- The increase in demand can be attributed in part to increases needed by irrigated agriculture and the County's growing dairy industry.

- Irrigated agriculture is the largest water user in the County by 78%, followed by 10% for public water supply, 7% for mining operations, and 3% for power.
- The Lea County Regional Water Plan, completed in 2000, recommended that the County take a pro-active approach to implementing a region wide strategy aimed at managing water related issues and increasing the life of its current water supply.
- The Lea County Water Users Association coordinates the development and implementation of water plans and associated programs aimed at increasing water supply and quality in Lea County.

## **C. WATER GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **WATER**

**Goal One: Lea County shall have enough water resources to sustain present and future residents for generations to come.**

Objective 1.1: Continue to implement water alternatives discussed in the Lea County Regional Water Plan.

Objective 1.2: Work with the Interstate Stream Commission and Office of the State Engineer to implement recommendations of the State Water Plan (as it pertains to Southeast NM and Lea County) and the Lea County Regional Water Plan.

Objective 1.3: Encourage water conservation methods like low flow fixtures, xeriscaping, and other measures designed for reducing the water use in new subdivisions developed in the County and the extraterritorial zones of the municipalities.

Objective 1.4: Work with farmers and ranchers in Lea County to identify ways to conserve water quantity and protect quality through agricultural practices.

Objective 1.5: Follow through on implementation actions found in the Drought Management Plan (part of the Lea County Regional Water Plan) and review the plan on a regular basis and update the plan as necessary.

Objective 1.6: Strategize with the incorporated municipalities and domestic water providers on ways to protect and conserve the area's ground water.

## D. EXISTING WATER CONDITIONS

### 1. Sources of Water in Lea County

Lea County's primary source of water is derived from four underground water basins, which have been declared by the office of the New Mexico State Engineer. These underground basins are part of the overall Ogallala Aquifer, which supplies much of the ground water in eastern New Mexico and west Texas. These underground water basins and the primary uses of their water are identified in Table 1.

**Water Resources Table 1: Surface Water Sources Within Lea County**

Underground Water Basin (UWB)	Size (square miles)	Communities Located within Basin	Primary Uses
Lea County UWB	2,180	Hobbs Lovington Tatum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• irrigation</li><li>• public water supply systems</li><li>• Municipal well fields</li></ul>
Capitan UWB	1,100	Eunice Jal (Eunice and Jal are located within the basin but do not derive their water from the Capitan UWB).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• mining</li><li>• oil recovery</li><li>• industry</li><li>• livestock</li><li>• domestic wells</li></ul>
Jal UWB	15	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• City of Jal has drilled wells within the Jal UWB</li><li>• El Paso Natural Gas has drilled wells within the Jal UWB</li></ul>
Carlsbad UWB	477	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mining</li></ul>

Source: Lea County Regional Water Plan

There is very little surface water in Lea County and is generally limited to small streams, lakes, and playas which collect heavy rainfall during the summer months.

A fifth underground water basin, the Roswell UWB, is located in Lea County; however, it is not a significant source of groundwater for County users.



## 2. Uses of Water in Lea County

### a. Irrigated Agriculture

According to the US Census of Agriculture, there was a total of 42,529 irrigated acres in 1997, a figure that increased to 60,590 acres as recorded by the 2002 US Census (The Lea County Water Plan estimates slightly higher irrigated land totals). Typically, cropland is irrigated by using flood, drip, and/or sprinkler methods. Most of the irrigated water used in agricultural activities is drawn from the Lea County UWB.

### b. Municipal Water Systems in Lea County

There are six municipal water systems that operate in Lea County. Hobbs, Lovington, Eunice, Jal, and Tatum all have their own water systems. In addition, the City of Carlsbad in Eddy County owns water rights within the Lea County UWB, which it can use for commercial, domestic, and industrial purposes. The table below summarizes water use for each municipal water system in Lea County.

**Water Resources Table 2: Municipal Water Systems in Lea County**

Water System	Water Rights (acre-feet/ year)	Population Served	Daily Use in Gallons (1998)
Hobbs Municipal Water System	20,066.40	29,860	8,698,629
Lovington Municipal Water System	6,017.58	9,471	2,923,559
Eunice Water System	3,292.00	2,562	1,482,600
Jal Water System	1,586.00	1,996	424,242
Tatum Water System	291.16	786	174,336
City of Carlsbad*	18,288.00	NA	NA

Source: Lea County Regional Water Plan, based on engineering analysis from other firms. \* City of Carlsbad has wells in Lea County.

### c. Water Districts and Co-operatives

The Monument Water Users Co-op and the Mescalero Ridge Water Users Co-op supply water to rural residents in some parts of Lea County.

## **E. WATER ISSUE IDENTIFICATION**

### **1. Water Supply and Demand**

The 2000 Lea County Regional Water Plan findings indicated that the ground water in the Lea UWB, the largest water basin that serves Lea County municipal water systems, is being pumped out at a faster rate than it is being recharged. The other basin serving municipal systems, the Jal UWB, has not witnessed the pump to recharge ratio and recharge is able to replace the water that is pumped out. The Jal UWB, however, serves only one community while the Lea UWB serves several communities in the County. The other Underground Water Basins in the County, which generally serve agriculture, mining, domestic water systems, and the oil and gas industries, have a difficult time meeting the water demanded by all the users.

According to the Plan, the demand for water in Lea County is expected to increase, largely in response to the demands brought on by agriculture and the dairy industry. Water rights appear to be adequate for users in Lea County, however, the amount of physical water (wet water) is low, meaning the it may be difficult to meet future demand. Water demand from all users be they agriculture, municipal, domestic, or industrial users can be expected to increase on an annual basis. Water demand in Lea County has already increased steadily on an annual basis. If demand and usage continues to grow, the Lea County Regional Water Plan estimates that water usage will be 340,000 acre-feet per year in 2040. This number represents a 94% increase over what it was in 1995 when it water usage registered 180,000 acre-feet per year.

### **2. Drought**

For the past few years, the State of New Mexico has been experiencing a prolonged drought that has impacted the entire State. The drought became so severe in New Mexico that in 2003, the Governor issued a drought emergency for the entire State. As part of the drought emergency, a Drought Task Force was established to develop strategies to deal with the drought. The winter and summer of 2005 were wetter with increased snow falls in the higher elevations and rain throughout the rest of the State. While it is too early to tell if the State is out of the drought entirely, the Drought Status Map as of September 16, 2005 shows normal drought conditions for parts of the State and advisory conditions for Lea County. This is a vast improvement from previous conditions when Lea County was on drought alert and warnings. Advisory conditions indicate that public notifications on drought potential should be issued and voluntary water conservation measures encouraged.

### **3. Regional Issues**

Since the communities of Lea County and West Texas share the same aquifer and water basins, water planning on a regional level should be implemented rather than each community planning independent of the other communities. Efforts should be made to coordinate efforts among communities and plans. Lovington, for example, has its own long range water plan. Future county-wide water planning efforts should take into account recommendations in existing water plans.

### **4. Lea County Drought Management Plan**

A Drought Management Plan is included as part of the Lea County Regional Water Plan that is intended to compliment the State of New Mexico Drought Management Plan, which is updated yearly. The Drought Management Plan in the Lea County Regional Water Plan recommends a four-tier action plan that contains different recommendations based on the severity of the drought. The four-tiers correspond to the level of drought the County experiences. For each level, different actions are recommended ranging from encouraging water conservation for Level 1- Advisory to mandatory reductions of water use for Level 4 - Emergency.

### **5. State Water Plan**

The Interstate Stream Commission recently completed a State Water Plan and Regional Water Plan for different areas in New Mexico. The State of New Mexico has made it a policy to integrate its water goals through coordination with all levels of government. Section C.10. of the 2003 New Mexico State Water Plan states:

*"Promote strategies and mechanisms for achieving coordination with all levels of government." (page 46)*

As part of its implementation strategies for this goal statement, the Office of the State Engineer and Interstate Stream Commission will promote cooperation and communication in order to ensure that state and county policies are consistent in achieving the aim of ensuring an adequate water supply for all New Mexicans. In order to promote this cooperation, the Office of the State Engineer/Interstate Stream Commission offers counties and municipalities technical assistance in implementing water conservation measures and funding resources for carrying out these programs. One program particularly relevant to Lea County is the Agricultural Conservation Fund, which provides farmers and ranchers low-interest loans to convert current irrigation systems to water-efficient systems.



## **6. Support for Water Associations and Cooperatives**

Lea County partners with Water Associations and Cooperatives located in Lea County by supporting grant applications for improvements to their systems. Many of these associations and cooperatives have pressing needs. For example, the Monument Mutual Domestic Water Association is in need of a new water storage tank. The existing tank is out of service due to leakage that cannot be repaired. The Monument Mutual Domestic Water Association is in need of specifications and plans for a new storage tank. The improvements include:

- Bottom pump station;
- Additional water storage capacity;
- The replacement and extension of water distribution lines; and
- Provisions for fire protection.

By repairing antiquated infrastructure, like the Monument Storage Tank Lea County can help conserve water. Lea County acts as the fiscal agency or sponsor of grant applications in these projects and should continue to support efforts by these associations to improve and upgrade their systems.

## **F. WATER IMPLEMENTATION**

Much of the recommendations (or alternatives) of the Lea County Regional Water Plan are still relevant to future water planning in the County. There are additional programs that are also included in the State Water Plan that are also applicable and included to supplement previous recommendations.

### **1. Lea County Regional Water Plan Updates**

Lea County should encourage the Lea County Water Users Association to update the Lea County Regional Water Plan and Drought Management Plan as needed to address changing demographics and essential data.

*Lead Party: Lea County Manager in Conjunction with the Lea County Water Users Association*

*Potential Funding: Community Development Block Grant*

### **2. Cloud Seeding Program**

Work with the High Plains Underground Water Conservation District No. 1, in West Texas to explore the possibility of expanding its successful cloud seeding project to Lea County (several other NM counties participate in this program such as Curry and Roosevelt County).



*Lead Party: Lea County Manager in Conjunction with Lea County Water Users Association*  
*Potential Funding: Community Development Block Grant*

### **3. Agricultural Conservation Initiative and Plan**

Lea County should work with the State Engineer and the State Agriculture Work Group (part of the Drought Management Team) to provide low interest loans to County farmers in order to install efficient irrigation systems through the Agricultural Conservation Low-Interest Loan Program.

*Lead Party: Lea County Manager in Conjunction with the Lea County Water Users Association*  
*Potential Funding: Staff Time; Agricultural Conservation Low-Interest Loan Program*

### **4. Coordination with Office of State Engineer/ Interstate Stream Commission**

Lea County should coordinate with the Office of the State Engineer and Interstate Stream Commission to obtain technical assistance in implementing the State Water Plan and the Lea County Regional Water Plan and in developing water conservation techniques.

*Lead Party: Lea County Water Users Association*  
*Potential Funding: Staff Time*

### **5. Encouragement of Xeriscaping in County Subdivision Regulations**

Within the revisions to the subdivision regulations, Lea County should encourage xeriscaping in County subdivisions and the installation of low flow fixtures.

*Lead Party: Lea County Commission*  
*Potential Funding: Staff Time*

### **6. Grant Application Support Initiative**

Lea County will continue to partner with community water systems , rural water cooperatives, and water associations by supporting grant applications for improvements to their water systems and storage capabilities. The County should follow through with supporting the grant application for the Monument Water Storage tank, which would assist the Monument Mutual Domestic Water Association.

*Lead Party: Lea County Manager and Designated Staff*  
*Potential Funding: CDBG program*

## **7. Identification of Additional Aquifers and Development**

The Lea County Regional Water Plan identifies additional aquifers that could be developed to provide water to Lea County users. These include the Santa Rosa, Dockum Group, Rustler, and Capitan Reef. Water rights issues should be resolved and the feasibility of using these aquifers should be explored.

*Lead Parties: Lea County Water Users Association*  
*Potential Funding: Staff Time, General Fund*

# **SECTION 7: INFRASTRUCTURE/ TRANSPORTATION**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the Infrastructure and Transportation Section of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide guidance for the County's capital infrastructure projects. In terms of infrastructure, the County does not maintain water or sewer lines. The primary infrastructure project related to the County is the road system. As a result, the focus of this section is on the County's transportation system. This section does touch upon other types of infrastructure such as "smart" infrastructure (infrastructure such as high speed data lines and fiber optics) that are necessary for economic development.



*County Roadway*

Transportation in Lea County includes roads, railroads, and air transportation. The roadway system is comprised of US Highways, State Highways, County roads, and municipal streets.

## **B. INFRASTRUCTURE/TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**

The following issues have been identified as the most important regarding the infrastructure/transportation element in this Comprehensive Plan:

- One of the challenges the County faces is maintenance of County roads. Chip sealing needs to be a top priority and the County needs to establish a regular schedule;
- In addition to chip sealing the road, mowing is another problem because of the miles of County roads that need to be maintained;
- Lea County should also undertake grading of the caliche roads as much as possible;
- Lea County is served by the Lea County Regional Airport and to a lesser extent by the runways at HIAP. Air service should be improved to the area;

- There are Governor Richardson Improvement Projects (GRIP) that are scheduled for State roads within Lea County. These projects will greatly improve the transportation system in Lea County and are necessary to promote economic development;
- Some of development within Lea County and its communities were mapped in the flood zones. The accuracy of these maps is now in question and Lea County and the communities should work with FEMA to revise the maps (this could open Lea County up to additional developable land and improve insurance rates; and
- Each incorporated municipality has several infrastructure issues as well that need to be addressed over time. Some of these issues could potentially present opportunities for partnering with the County, such as ensuring the same road standards in the extraterritorial areas and platting/planning jurisdictions.

## **C. INFRASTRUCTURE/TRANSPORTATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **INFRASTRUCTURE/TRANSPORTATION**

**Goal One: Support the development, improvement, and maintenance of communication networks, energy facilities, and transportation facilities throughout Lea County to meet the needs of economic development and residential growth.**

Objective 1.1: Coordinate infrastructure improvements in the extraterritorial areas around Hobbs and Lovington with appropriate agencies in these cities (e.g., City of Hobbs major street plan).

Objective 1.2: Encourage and private sector agencies to co-develop and expand T1 and fiber optic cables.

Objective 1.3: Work with other entities to plan for the construction of communication, energy, and transportation facilities concurrently with planned residential and business developments in Lea County by sharing information and through regular communication.

Objective 1.4: Support the regular improvement and expansion of the US and State highways through Lea County in order to provide for greater accessibility and economic growth.



Objective 1.5: Continue to plan for the improvement and maintenance of Lea County roadways through chip sealing, mowing, patching pot holes, and improving caliche roads throughout Lea County.

Objective 1.6: Make improvements to Lea County Hobbs Regional Airport as needed in order to attract commercial air service to Lea County.

**Goal Two: Support the improvement of the physical infrastructure and aesthetics of Hobbs Industrial Air Park (HIAP) and other business parks within the County to attract tenants that positively contribute to Lea County's economic development.**

Objectives 2.1: Remove developable land within HIAP from flood plain designation by constructing diversion channels and berms to drain flood waters to the west and south of HIAP.

Objective 2.2: Phase roadway, drainage, and utility improvements in a manner consistent with the Hobbs Industrial Air Park (HIAP) Master Plan to encourage business and manufacturers to locate there.

## **D. TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS**

The Lea County Roads Department is the department responsible for overseeing maintenance and improvements of the County's road system. Most of this responsibility is aimed at improvements to County roadways. However, the Roads Department coordinates with each municipality in Lea County in order to identify issues that each entity faces. In addition, given the significant amount of State and US highway miles in the County, this coordination also involves working with the New Mexico State Department of Transportation.

There are several classifications of roadways in Lea County. These classifications are described in the following sections:

### **1. Roadway System in Lea County**

The roadway system in Lea County is comprised of a combination of Federal, State, County, and municipal roadways and is defined in greater detail in the paragraphs that follow:

#### **a. Highways – Federal and State**

There are three US highways that run through the County. US 380 runs east and west through the County and links southeast New Mexico to west Texas. It is a two-lane highway in most places, although it does have passing lanes. It intersects New Mexico 206 at Tatum, which links Lea County

to the Clovis/Portales area. US 62/180, originating in Texas, runs from the northeast to the southwest and connects Hobbs to Carlsbad and to the Lubbock area. Finally, US 82 also runs from the northeast to the southwest and links Lovington to Artesia. It also provides another access to the Lubbock area and other destinations in Texas. The US highway system running through Lea County has taken on more importance in

recent months, especially with the opening of the Casino/Race Track and the location of the LES plant near Eunice. It is anticipated that activity generated by these establishments will increase the



*US 82 Outside Lovington*

traffic running through the County from Texas. Therefore the improvement and expansion to these roadways is increasingly important issue for the County.

There are several State highways running through Lea County. State Highway 18 is the main thoroughfare in Lea County, linking all of Lea County's incorporated communities along a 90-mile corridor. Other state highways include State Highway 176, 238, 8, and 206. These highways are maintained by the New Mexico Department of Transportation. Regular maintenance of these highways is critical especially given the fact that they are highly utilized by the oil/gas and dairy/farming industries.

There are several Governor Richardson Investment Partnership (GRIP) projects planned for Lea County. The GRIP is a \$1.6 billion statewide transportation expansion and infrastructure improvement project that was supported by nearly 100 cities, counties, business groups and chambers of commerce across New Mexico. The New Mexico Legislature approved GRIP during the Special Session in October 2003 and Governor Bill Richardson signed it into law. GRIP includes 42 expansion and critical infrastructure improve-

# County Transportation System



## Legend

- Place
- County Roads
- US and State Highways
- State Line
- County Line

## Lea County Comprehensive Plan

0 2.5 5 10 Miles





ment projects with over 100 construction contracts across New Mexico, including the following projects in Lea County:

*US 62 - Eddy/Lea County Line to Texas S/L Enhanced two-lane facility*

Reconstruction and improvement of existing two lanes with the addition of 8-ft widened shoulders. Improvements include replacement of pavement structure, drainage structures, guardrail, permanent signing and striping. The existing roadway is severely deteriorated and is a main corridor for oil field truck traffic.

*NM 83 - Lovington East to NM 132*

The deteriorated existing two lanes requires reconstruction, rehabilitation and the addition of 8-ft widened shoulders. Improvements include replacement of pavement structure, drainage structures, guardrail, permanent signing and striping. This facility is a main corridor for oil field traffic and is vital to the local economy.

*NM 8 - Eunice to Jct US 62 W of Hobbs*

The existing two lanes requires reconstruction and rehabilitation with the addition of 8 ft. shoulders. Improvements include replacement of drainage and pavement structures. This facility is a main corridor for oil field traffic and is vital to the local economy.

*US 380 - Tatum to Texas State Line*

The existing two lanes requires reconstruction to include shoulder widening and drainage structure replacement. The existing roadway is severely deteriorated and distressed due to heavy oil field truck traffic. This will improve the mobility of people and goods in the area.

*NM 128 - Jal to Texas State Line*

Realignment and reconstruction of the first ten and one-half miles will relocate the roadway away from existing dry salt lakes, which pose a extremely dangerous situation. Reconstruction and improvement of the remainder of the route to address severely deteriorated surfacing and poor subgrade. Improvements will include widened lanes and shoulders.

*US 62 - Texas State Line to Carlsbad*

The existing two lanes require reconstruction and rehabilitation to include an enhanced two-lane facility with widened shoulders and periodic passing opportunities. This section of roadway is severely deteriorated. This route ac-



commodates tourists going to Carlsbad Caverns National Park, which is the most visited park in New Mexico.

**b. County Roads**

Lea County owns and maintains 1,270 miles of road of which 570 are chipped sealed. The remaining 700 miles are constructed of caliche roads, gravel, or dirt. County roads provide transportation and drainage to most areas of the County and include school bus routes for the rural school districts. The County finances construction and maintenance of these roads with a combination of private, County, and State funds. The County also utilizes its own equipment to chip seal and mow its roadways.

Maintaining the County roads and chip sealing them is one of the most pressing issues facing Lea County in the area of transportation. The Lea County Road Department is responsible for this task and has done a relatively good job despite the large number of miles it needs to maintain. In order to accomplish this task, the Department's goal is to maintain 110 miles of County roadway per year through chip sealing, mowing, shoulder work, sign repair/replacement, and pothole patching. The Department also strives to chip seal at least 15 miles of caliche roadway per year.

**c. Local Streets**

The municipalities of Tatum, Lovington, Hobbs, Jal, and Eunice all own and maintain their own internal road network. In some instances, County roads tie into these local roads, which means that coordination between local government and the County must be maintained to ensure that these roads are kept in good condition. For example, it is important that the County Roads Department continues to work with the City of Hobbs to assure that appropriate right-of-way widths, grid layouts, and proposed road development are coordinated in the extraterritorial areas of the City. Representatives from the County Road Planning and Mapping Department already sits on a subcommittee of City of Hobbs Planning and Zoning Committee. The same outreach should be done with the other incorporated communities.

**2. Railways**

The Burlington Northern & Santa Fe passes throughout most of southeast New Mexico. The railroad is still active and links to other railways throughout New Mexico and Texas. The railroad could potentially play more of a role in the economic development of Lea County since a spur could be installed at

HIAP, providing another important means of accessibility to that industrial park.

### 3. Airports

The potential for increased air traffic is strong in Lea County with several runways located at various airports. Lea County itself owns and operates the Lea County Regional Airport, which is capable of handling commercial flights. The airport has four runways, three of which are active and which have the following dimensions:

- Runway 3/21 – 7,398' x 150'
- Runway 17/35 – 4,998' x 150'
- Runway 8/26 – 3,512' x 150' (closed)
- Runway 12/30 – 6,002' x 150'

Mesa Airlines offers flights to Hobbs from Albuquerque and other New Mexico destinations. Lea County also operates two general aviation facilities; the Lea County-Jal airport and the Zip Franklin Memorial Airport west of Lovington.



*Lea County Regional Airport*

In addition to these airports, the City of Eunice operates a general aviation airport. HIAP also has four runways that could potentially be used for airport operations. There is no tower at HIAP or fueling stations, which preclude it from being used as commercial airport. The runways are still in use primarily by soaring enthusiasts.

With the potential for commercial air service, Lea County's economic development potential and accessibility could be enhanced if a regular and predictable airline would serve the County. In order to attract this air service, the County would have to be more proactive in working with airline companies or aircraft developers, which are developing and manufacturing aircraft in New Mexico. A coordinated approach among other southeastern New Mexico communities should be initiated to attract an air service. In addition, regular maintenance and enhancement of the Lea County Regional Airport will be needed in the future to increase the airport's appeal to commercial providers. In the recent months, some of the runways at Lea County Regional Airport have been re-stripped and seal coated

and automated weather information has been installed. The FAA is also in the process of installing lighting and other safety enhancements at the airport.

## **E. INFRASTRUCTURE ANALYSIS IN LEA COUNTY**

### **1. Water and Wastewater**

As previously stated, as a County government Lea County does not maintain or install water or wastewater lines. Providing these services is the responsibility of each municipality, which operates their own water infrastructure and treatment facilities.

Liquid waste is disposed of through septic tanks in Lea County. It is the responsibility of the County to ensure that development follows a safe and efficient method of liquid waste disposal, which it does through its Subdivision Regulations. Limiting the number of septic tanks, promoting large lot development, and encouraging the use of community liquid waste disposal systems are all ways to protect the ground water from septic tank contamination.

### **2. Flood Zones and Drainage**

Another issue identified at public meetings in Lea County is that the original FEMA maps show much of the County in the flood zones. This data may not be accurate anymore and the maps should be updated in order to accurately reflect development constraints and potential in the County.

### **3. Installation of Fiber Optics**

High-speed data communication is critical for economic development to take place in Lea County. There is a need to increase high-speed Internet and data lines for business development to take place. The County should encourage identifying ways to link up to existing high speed data lines in order to increase the availability of these services in Lea County.

### **4. Infrastructure Coordination**

It is in the best interest of the entire County that each community and the County work together wherever possible to ensure that infrastructure systems are maintained and kept in good condition. The County should work with the municipalities whenever possible to initiate and implement mutually beneficial projects. One example is HIAP, which represents a tremendous community asset for all of Lea County. HIAP is a viable industrial park, however, infrastructure improvements are needed such as water and wastewater line installation and connection.



The County should continue to work with the City of Hobbs to determine what transportation system improvements are needed on County roads serving HIAP to assist in the development of HIAP. Although HIAP is located within the City of Hobbs it is a viable industrial park that has potential to support Lea County for years to come. The County should seek ways to support improvements to the park that do not necessarily represent expenditures.

## **F. TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE IMPLEMENTATION**

The following Transportation/Infrastructure implementation actions are intended to assist the County in achieving the goals of improving its transportation system and in ensuring that infrastructure is developed for economic development and the overall improvement of the quality of life for all Lea County residents.

### **1. Infrastructure Capital Improvements Plan**

On an annual basis, Lea County shall prioritize improvements to existing facilities, purchases of equipment such as trucks and mowing equipment, and other necessary items in order to ensure that the day-to-day operations of the County are maintained.

*Lead Party: Lea County Road Department and Planning and Mapping Department*

*Potential Funding: County Arterial Program, Cooperative Agreements Program, GRIP Monies*

### **2. Road Maintenance Initiative**

The stated goal of the Lea County Road Department is to maintain a minimum of 110 miles of road per year by chip sealing, improvements to the shoulder, patch holes, mow, and improve signage. It also wishes to chip seal a minimum of 15 miles of caliche roadway per year. The Department should monitor its progress on a quarterly basis and also maintain a priority list of roads that need treatment.

*Lead Party: Lea County Road Department and Planning and Mapping Department*

*Potential Funding: County Arterial Program, Cooperative Agreements Program, New Mexico State Infrastructure Bank, Surface Transportation Program, STP (Transportation Enhancement Activities)*



### **3. Lea County Airport Initiative**

Lea County should continue to maintain its airports, with an emphasis on continued infrastructure development and enhancement of the facilities. This is true of all Lea County airports but especially of the Lea County Regional Airport in an effort to make it attractive for commercial air service.

*Lead Party: Lea County Airport Department*

*Potential Funding Sources: General Aviation grants*

### **4. Lea County/Municipal Infrastructure and Transportation Coordination**

The Lea County Road Department Planning Section already coordinates with the municipal governments on identifying issues and ensuring consistency in road design standards. This practice should be continued. Specific actions include:

- Lea County Planning and Mapping Department representative should continue to sit on Planning/Zoning commission subcommittees and provide regular comment on land use and transportation issues impacting each community;
- The Lea County Planning and Mapping Department should continue to share information and mapping with the incorporated communities on research and field work in order to prioritize projects with the communities, especially in the extraterritorial areas of Lovington and Hobbs and the platting and planning jurisdictions of all incorporated communities;
- Work with the New Mexico Department of Transportation and area legislators to ensure that GRIP projects are being completed.
- The Lea County Roads Department should continue to hold regular meetings with regional entities and apply for grants that will assist the County and each community in transportation improvements; and
- The Lea County Roads Department and Lea County Commission should continue to work with the City of Hobbs on infrastructure and transportation improvements in the HIAP area.

*Lead Party: Lea County Planning and Mapping Department*

*Potential Funding: Staff Time*

## **5. Flood Plain Mapping Initiative**

Lea County should initiate discussions with FEMA on remapping the flood plain maps.

*Lead Party: Lea County Manager*

*Potential Funding: Staff Time*

## **6. High Speed Data Communication Initiative**

Lea County should continue to encourage communication companies in the area to install high-speed data in areas that are underserved in the County.

*Lead Party: Lea County Manager*

*Potential Funding: Staff Time*