

LAND USE IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Patterns and Changes in Land Use

The unincorporated northeast County is defined by low-density growth, irrigated agriculture, scattered subdivisions, and dispersed homes on wells and septic systems. Public lands support oil and gas activity, while solar farms, trails, and recreation areas are emerging as important new land uses as the San Juan power plant has closed. Future business development is an ongoing effort.

County Regulations

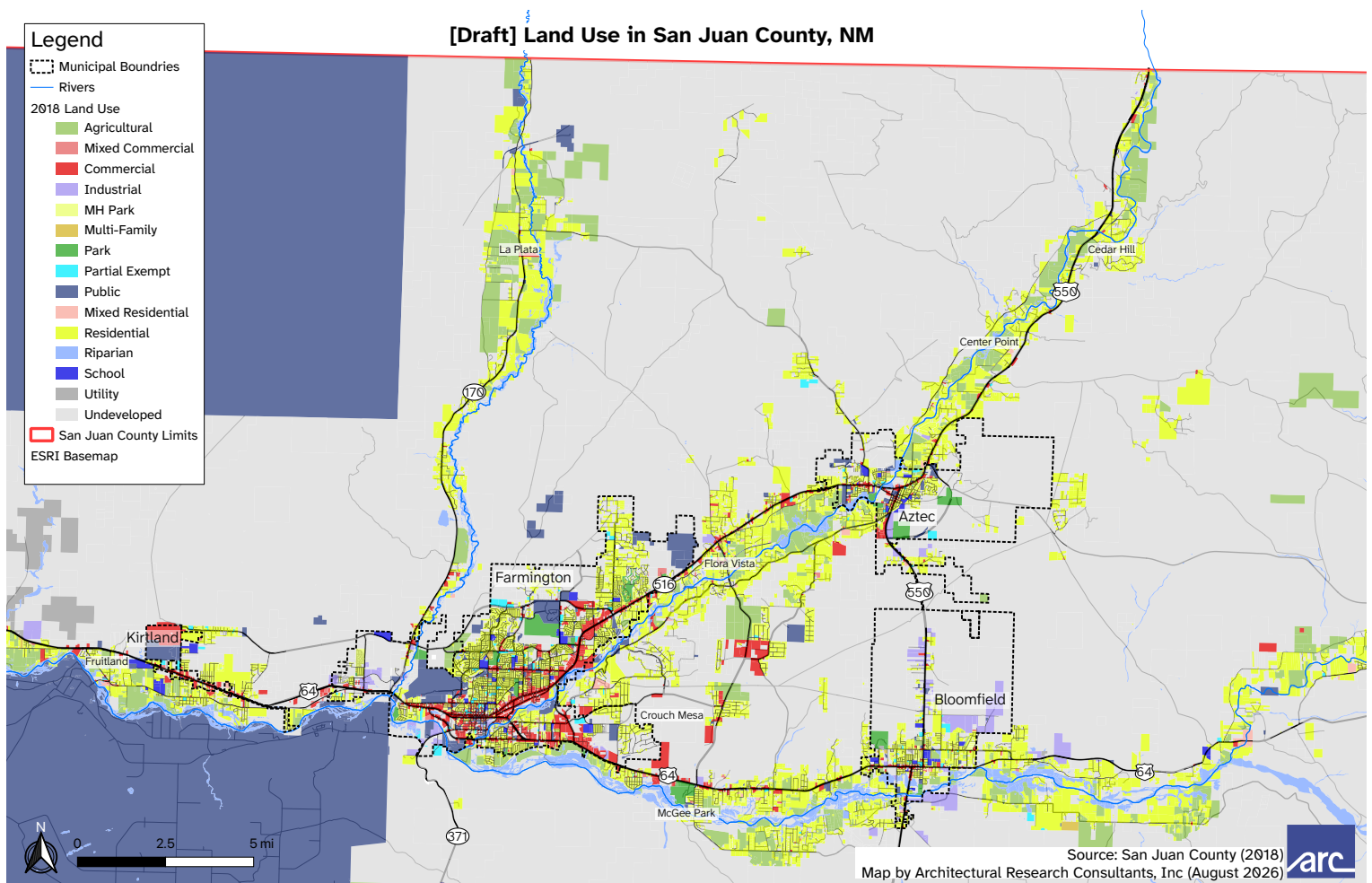
The County regulates specific topics such as floodplains, subdivisions, junkyards, cannabis, and manufactured homes and RV parks. Some ordinances need updates, and broader zoning standards are missing to separate incompatible uses and protect neighborhoods. Examples of ordinance updates include clarifications of subdivision regulations for family transfer exemptions and summary plat provisions.

Wastewater Bottlenecks

Key growth corridors lack centralized sewer service. In places such as Flora Vista, septic absorption has reached environmental limits and threatens the Animas River. Without sewer, smaller-lot subdivisions, affordable multifamily housing, and mixed-use development are difficult or impossible to build. Regional infrastructure will require grant funding, coordination with cities and districts, and land use rules that support efficient growth.

Scattered Growth and Land Use Conflicts

Scattered development makes utility service costly and reinforces automobile dependence. It also increases neighbor conflicts over livestock, noise, junk storage, and incompatible nearby uses.



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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Industrial Park

San Juan County, NM Economic Development Department,
NMGC, FEUS · Recently completed

The county's 2018 plan identified a problem at the San Juan County Industrial Park: no natural gas service and internet by wireless only. Both have since been fixed. A 13-mile natural gas line reached the park in 2025, funded largely by a state grant and the county, and fiber service has been installed through Farmington Electric Utility System. PESCO is currently using the facility for manufacturing.

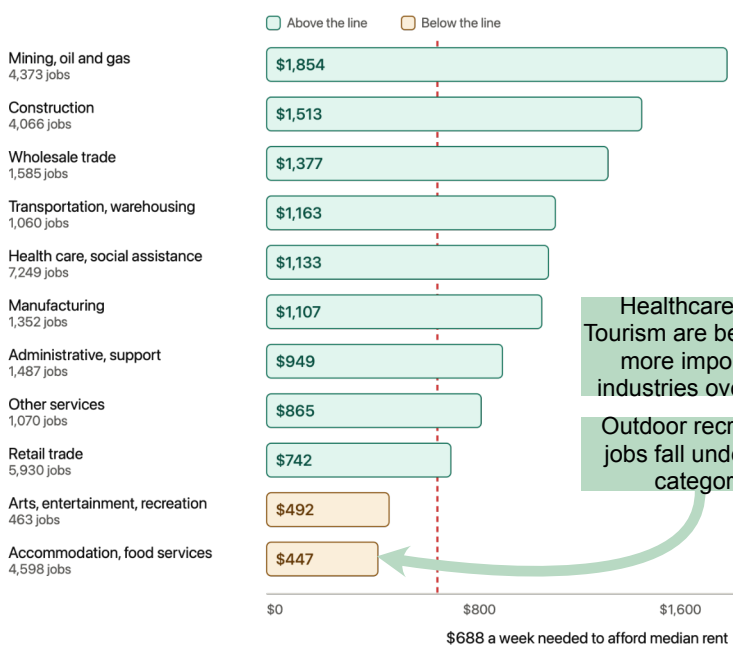
New Power Projects Are Being Built

New power projects are underway. A solar expansion is planned north of Kirtland, reaching onto Ute Mountain Ute land. The Navajo Nation has proposed a natural gas plant on the county's west side. These add tax revenue but need fewer permanent workers than coal did.

A Rail Link Could Reconnect Us

The Four Corners region has had no freight rail for over 50 years. A proposed 100-mile line would connect us to the national network near Gallup. A \$4 million federal grant is paying for route studies and environmental review. Construction is still years away.

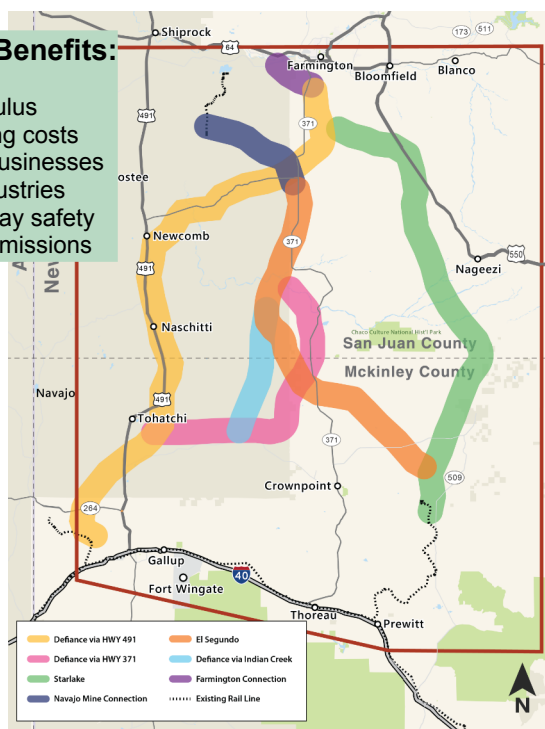
Average weekly wage by sector, private employers, 2025



Source: BLS Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2025 annual averages.

Freight Rail Benefits:

- Job creation
- Economic stimulus
- Reduce shipping costs
- Support local businesses
- Attract new industries
- Increase highway safety
- Reduce truck emissions



4cornersfreightrail.com

Key Facts: Employment and Housing

A full-time job in restaurants or hotels pays about \$447 a week — \$23,244 a year. At that wage, a household can afford about \$580 a month for housing, short of the median rent in San Juan County, which is \$894 (ACS 2019-2023).

Growing Our Own Businesses

San Juan County is building trails and river parks, and recruiting light manufacturing companies in this business-friendly county with start up support. But businesses that grow out of work-with groups like San Juan College Enterprise Center struggle to find small, ready-to-build spaces with flexible leases.



Farmington Metropolitan Planning Organization. (2025). Metropolitan transportation plan 2050.

San Juan County. (2025). Four Corners Freight Rail Project feasibility study: Project summary.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2026). Quarterly census of employment and wages: Private, NAICS sectors, San Juan County, New Mexico, 2025 annual averages. U.S. Department of Labor.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2026). Quarterly census of employment and wages: Private, NAICS sectors, San Juan County, New Mexico, 2025 fourth quarter. U.S. Department of Labor.

Architectural Research Consultants. (2026). San Juan County Growth Management Plan update conditions report.

San Juan County. (2025). San Juan County outdoor recreation master plan.

San Juan County. (2018). San Juan County growth management plan update. San Juan County, New Mexico.

Tri-City Record. (2025, September 23). San Juan County Industrial Park to receive 13-mile natural gas pipeline extension.

Additional information from interviews and meetings with local government staff, community members, and business leaders, 2026



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HOUSING IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Housing cost burden

Housing is considered affordable when it takes 30% or less of a household's income. In Northeastern San Juan County, 9,411 out of 36,377 households (26%) pay more than that.¹

Our county is getting older

University of New Mexico researchers project the 65+ senior population to grow from about 16% in 2020 to 24% by 2050.² Many live on fixed incomes. When older residents can't find housing that fits their needs, they stay in family-sized homes, meaning that larger homes aren't available for younger families.

Our homes are getting older

Much of the county's housing was built in the 1970s and 80s.¹ More than 40% of residents say their home needs work to be energy efficient, and a quarter need roof repairs.³

Home prices up 80% from 2020

Homes listed for sale in San Juan County averaged about \$210,000 in 2020. Today the average listing is about \$380,000⁴. Median household income in the County was \$44,261 in 2020 and \$64,999 in 2024.⁵

What can we do?

The county is looking at practical steps: adopting a housing ordinance that would let it contribute land for affordable homes, expanding weatherization help so older homes cost less to heat and cool, and working to attract new housing development.

Stalled subdivisions

Due to the high cost of utility and wastewater extensions, several subdivisions platted before the 2008 financial crisis remain undeveloped.⁶

Lack of stable housing is hard to track

Official counts miss a lot. People living in motels for two or three weeks at a time, or moving between friends' couches, don't get counted.⁷ Nearly 7% of residents said they had no stable, permanent place to live in the past month.³

Vulnerability of manufactured housing

Mobile and manufactured homes constitute a little over 30% of the county's total housing stock.¹ Older structures face severe structural deficiencies, presenting cleanup challenges and fire hazards.⁷



¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). American Community Survey 2024 5-year estimates. <https://data.census.gov>

² University of New Mexico, Geospatial and Population Studies. (2024). New Mexico county population projections, 2023–2050 [Data set]. <https://gps.unm.edu/pop/population-projections.html>

³ San Juan County Partnership. (2024). San Juan County needs assessment 2024.

⁴ Realtor.com. (2026). Housing inventory: Median listing price in San Juan County, NM [MEDLISPRI35045] [Data set]. FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Retrieved August 14, 2026, from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MEDLISPRI35045>

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2026). Estimate of median household income for San Juan County, NM (MHINM35045A052NCEN) [Data set]. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Retrieved August 12, 2026, from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MHINM35045A052NCEN>

⁶ San Juan County. (2018). San Juan County growth management plan update. San Juan County, New Mexico.

⁷ Additional information from interviews and meetings with local government staff, community members, and business leaders, 2026



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TRANSPORTATION IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Road Design and Maintenance

San Juan County maintains about 750 miles of county roads — only around 230 are paved. Many rural properties are reached by private roads. The county does not build, inspect, or maintain these; that falls to the owner. Many aren't built to handle heavy vehicles, including ambulances and fire trucks. Public Works has documented private roads washing out in floods, stranding residents and requiring costly, sometimes dangerous rescues.¹

Key Facts: Who maintains your roads?

Roads in San Juan County are maintained by county, NMDOT, city, tribal, or private parties, depending on the road.

Piñon Hills Boulevard - Phase III

San Juan County, City of Farmington, NMDOT

Community leaders have talked for more than 25 years about the need for another Animas River crossing linking East Main Street to US 64. The City of Farmington is building Phases I and II; the county is responsible for Phase III, which will carry Piñon Hills from County Road 3000 to County Road 390. The state committed \$27 million in the 2026 legislative session and the county is adding \$3 million to finish design, buy right-of-way, and build the road. Plans are 90% complete. County officials expect the connection to reduce congestion and improve emergency response times, with completion by the end of 2029.

Freight Rail

San Juan County, Navajo Nation, USDOT

Since losing its rail connection decades ago, the region has moved goods by truck about 100 miles to Gallup, or nearly 200 miles to Albuquerque. That added cost makes it harder for manufacturers and shippers to do business here. San Juan County and the Navajo Nation partnered in 2020 to bring rail back. A federally funded study of a new line through the Navajo Nation to Gallup was completed in 2025.³

Walking and Biking Trails (Long Range)

City of Farmington, City of Aztec, San Juan County

Regional plans call for new walking and biking trails, including a continuous trail linking Farmington and Aztec along the Animas River.⁵

Transit

City of Farmington

Red Apple Transit is working on a new on-demand service, where riders use an app or call ahead to request a ride in a van instead of waiting for a bus on a fixed route. A separate review of Red Apple's existing bus routes is beginning soon to find ways to improve service.⁴

Key Facts: Transit Needs

About 1 in 7 county adults went without reliable transportation for medical appointments, work, or errands in the past year. Only about 10% of residents use local transit, but 32% said they want more access.⁶

Traffic Safety

New Mexico has the highest rate of pedestrian deaths per person of any state in the country.^{7,8} Locally, crashes involving people on foot make up about 2 out of every 100 crashes — but more than a third of the deadly ones.⁴

Most roads here were designed for cars first. When a driver hits someone walking or biking, that person has no protection, so the injuries are far more severe.

Aztec Arterial

City of Aztec, NMDOT

The bypass road east of Aztec is under construction. It will move heavy truck traffic off Main Ave through historic downtown. That opens the door to downtown improvements and new development — Aztec's redevelopment plan identifies about 132 acres of vacant downtown land that could support new businesses and around 340 homes.^{2,4}

¹ San Juan County. (2018). *San Juan County growth management plan update*. San Juan County, New Mexico.

² City of Aztec. (2024). *Downtown MRA master plan*. City of Aztec, New Mexico.

³ San Juan County. (2025). *Four Corners Freight Rail Project feasibility study: Project summary*. San Juan County, New Mexico.

⁴ Farmington Metropolitan Planning Organization. (2025). *Metropolitan transportation plan 2050*. FMPO.

⁵ San Juan County. (2025). *Outdoor recreation master plan*. San Juan County, New Mexico.

⁶ San Juan County Partnership. (2024). *San Juan County needs assessment 2024*. San Juan County Partnership.

⁷ Smart Growth America. (2024). *Dangerous by design 2024*. Smart Growth America.

⁸ New Mexico Department of Transportation. (2023). *Vulnerable road user safety assessment*. New Mexico Department of Transportation.



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FACILITIES IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Fire Protection in Rural Areas

Rural fire districts · Ongoing need

Many rural areas have no fire hydrants, so crews haul water in by tanker truck. Where hydrants exist, water lines are often too small to deliver enough pressure to fight a fire.¹ Small water associations also carry the cost of testing hydrants each year. Fire departments additionally spend much of their time on medical calls rather than fires, and see a spike in RV and mobile home fires each winter.⁴

Fire Stations and EMS

San Juan County · Ongoing

The county owns 26+ fire department facilities, including stations in Blanco, Cedar Hill, Center Point, Flora Vista, Hart Valley, Huerfano, La Plata, Lee Acres, Navajo Dam, Sullivan Road, Waterflow, and the Kirtland-area Valley district, plus fire operations offices and an EMS facility in Aztec and a training tower in Kirtland.¹ Most stations are staffed by volunteers. Keeping this dispersed network in service is what makes rural response times possible.

Preparing Buildings for Emergencies

San Juan County · In planning

The county's draft 2026 hazard mitigation plan proposes upgrades to protect county buildings during storms, extreme cold, and wildfire: surge protectors on electronic equipment, shatter-resistant window film, defensible space cleared around every county facility, and identifying which buildings could serve as warming shelters. The plan also proposes expanding the countywide warning siren network and building community safe rooms.⁵

County Buildings

San Juan County · Underway

The county owns and maintains about 120 buildings and structures. A long-range plan is now being developed to set priorities for repairs, upgrades, and replacements. Current needs include heating and cooling systems, accessibility improvements, and more space for the Sheriff's Office.^{1,4}

Bridges

San Juan County

Current and recent projects include replacing two aging county bridges: the Road 3000 bridge over Jones Arroyo, built in 1970, which carries about 2,300 vehicles a day, and the Road 3500 bridge over Flora Vista Arroyo, built in 1967. Neither original bridge was rated for today's heavy service trucks and fire tankers. The new ones are built to last at least 80 years.^{2,4}

McGee Park

San Juan County · Public input phase

A master plan is being developed for the 160-acre McGee Park fairgrounds, covering five areas: the east park space, a central gathering area, an RV guest area, the pond area, and the racetrack infield. Options include sports fields, courts, play equipment, walking paths, shade structures, and event space. The county wants residents' input on which improvements matter most.³

¹ San Juan County. (2018). *San Juan County growth management plan update*. San Juan County, New Mexico.

² San Juan County. (n.d.). *Bridge construction (3000 & 3500)*. <https://www.sjcounty.net/government/county-executive-office/special-projects/bridge-construction-3000-3500>

³ San Juan County Department of Parks and Recreation. (2025). *McGee Park master plan*. <https://www.mcgeepark.com/>

⁴ Additional information from interviews and meetings with local government staff, community members, and business leaders, 2026

⁵ San Juan County. (2026). *Draft San Juan County, New Mexico local hazard mitigation plan update*. San Juan County, New Mexico.



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UTILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Key Facts: Who Provides What

San Juan County provides no domestic water, sewer, or wastewater service. Municipalities serve their residents; everyone else relies on independent water systems and private septic⁵.

Water: Many Small Systems

About 16 independent non-municipal systems serve rural residents, from a few dozen people to more than 10,000. Most run on aging pipe, thin reserves, and part-time staff. In 2018, a plurality of survey respondents backed exploring a regional water authority — most first wanted cost details⁵.

Wastewater: The Growth Constraint

Unincorporated areas rely on septic systems. The New Mexico Environment Department's 0.75-acre minimum lot size² is the binding limit on multifamily and affordable housing outside municipalities — county staff call it the primary barrier⁶. High water tables and clay soils compound it; a 2006 study found 14% of Animas corridor systems failing⁷. A proposed \$9 million trunk line (per 2021) would serve roughly 250 Flora Vista homes⁷.

Stormwater and Drainage

Residents ranked stormwater and drainage among their top infrastructure priorities in 2018, and the plan identified drainage planning requirements as a needed step⁵.

Solid Waste and Septage

Crouch Mesa landfill and rural transfer sites handle solid waste. Farmington's treatment plant is the county's only legal septage disposal site, and hauling distance contributes to illegal dumping⁷.

Aging Emergency Connections

The Bloomfield–Aztec emergency inter-tie waterline is deteriorating. Outside funding has been available, but reporting requirements have slowed repairs.⁶

Natural Gas

Many rural residences and businesses lack natural gas line access and propane costs are significantly higher than natural gas.⁵

Key Facts: Electricity

Farmington Electric Utility System, city-owned, serves 1,718 square miles and about 46,000 metered customers — much of the county plus part of Rio Arriba County¹.

Broadband

Internet speeds in the county are decent overall, but service to rural areas remains a challenge and subscription rates fall short not only in remote areas.^{8,9} Roughly 80.5% of Farmington households report a broadband subscription, compared with 71.0% in Aztec and 70.2% in Bloomfield, against a countywide 72.4%⁸. New Mexico as a whole sits at 84.2% and the nation at 89.7%⁴. Availability is a separate constraint: much of the county has access to only one provider. New Mexico has received \$382 million in federal broadband funding¹⁰, which the county may be able to tap through Connect New Mexico.⁴

1 City of Farmington. (n.d.). Farmington Electric Utility System. <https://www.farmingtonnm.gov/181/Farmington-Electric-Utility-System>

2 New Mexico Environment Department. (2014). Liquid waste disposal regulations (20.7.3 NMAC). As cited in San Juan Watershed Group (2021).

3 New Mexico Office of the Governor. (2026, January 27). *Feds approve New Mexico's \$382M broadband plan: Landmark initiative will enable high-speed connectivity statewide*. <https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2026/01/27/feds-approve-new-mexicos-382m-broadband-plan-landmark-initiative-will-enable-high-speed-connectivity-statewide/>

4 Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments. (2025). *Comprehensive economic development strategy*.

5 San Juan County. (2018). *San Juan County growth management plan (Final, December 2018)*.

6 Additional information from interviews and meetings with local government staff, community members, and business leaders, 2026.

7 San Juan Watershed Group. (2021). *2021 updated Lower Animas watershed based plan*.

8 U.S. Census Bureau. (2025b). *Selected social characteristics in the United States (Table DP02) [Data set]. 2020–2024 American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2024.DP02>

9 Four Corners Economic Development. (n.d.). *Infrastructure in San Juan County, New Mexico*. <https://www.4cornersed.com/location-advantages/infrastructure/>

10 New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion. (2026). *Feds approve New Mexico's \$382M broadband plan*. State of New Mexico.



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ENVIRONMENT IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Drought Is Our Normal Condition

Drought is the baseline in San Juan County.¹ Over the past 20 years, some part of the county was dry or in drought about 80% of the time.^{1,2} We get 8 to 10 inches of rain in an average year.¹ Farms and ranches feel it first, then the water our towns deliver.¹ The Animas River, which Aztec relies on, runs low soonest.³

Who Cleans Up When a Project Shuts Down?

Large facilities like solar farms and power plants cover large areas of land.³ If a company walks away, and the project shuts down, the cost to clean up the site falls on the landowner or the public.³ Many places require a reclamation bond, money held until the site is cleaned up. San Juan County currently has no requirement for this.^{3,4}

Rare Plants and Animals Along Our Rivers

Nine species in San Juan County are federally protected, including the southwestern willow flycatcher, Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and Mesa Verde cactus.^{4,5} Their habitat follows the river corridors, the same land most attractive to build on.⁴ Finding out early where those areas are can save landowners time and money.

Nature Is Already Part of Our Economy

Outdoor recreation employs about 4,936 people in San Juan County, roughly 8% of all jobs.⁶ Statewide the sector supported more than 29,000 jobs and \$3.2 billion in 2023.⁶ Rivers, trails, canyons, and open country are not just scenery. They are a working part of our economy, and they depend on water and healthy land.

A Second Life for Oilfield Water

Oil and gas wells bring up large amounts of salty water along with the fuel. It is called produced water, and most of it is pumped back deep underground.³ Because fresh water is scarce here, the county is looking at whether it could be cleaned and put to other appropriate uses.³ Nothing has been decided. The questions are whether treatment is safe and affordable.

Planning Water Region by Region

In 2023 the state restarted regional water planning through the Water Security Planning Act.⁷ The Interstate Stream Commission can now fund it with grants and loans.⁷ The law does not change anyone's water rights, and no community joins without agreeing to it.⁷ Planning groups must include local stakeholders and invite tribes, acequias, and rural communities.⁷ Our last San Juan Basin water plan was finished in 2016.⁸

Arroyos Wash Land Away

When a hard rain hits, arroyo banks can give way and slide.³ That destroys more property here than standing floodwater does.³ A county setback rule keeps new building back from waterways and off unstable ground.³ Many arroyos have never been mapped for flood risk, so owners often don't know what they're buying.^{1,3} The county is not a flood control authority. It clears public roads, not private land.³



Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness Area; photo by John Fowler

1 San Juan County Office of Emergency Management. (2026). *San Juan County, New Mexico local hazard mitigation plan update [Draft]*.

2 U.S. Drought Monitor. (2025). *Weekly drought data, San Juan County, New Mexico, 2006–2025*. National Drought Mitigation Center.

3 Additional information from interviews and meetings with local government staff, community members, and business leaders, 2026

4 San Juan County. (2018). *San Juan County growth management plan (Final, December 2018)*.

5 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (2026). *Species listings by state: New Mexico [Data set]*. Environmental Conservation Online System. <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/species-listings-by-state?stateAbbrev=NM&stateName=New%20Mexico&statusCategory=Listed>

6 San Juan County. (2025). *San Juan County outdoor recreation master plan*.

7 New Mexico Legislature. (2023). *Water Security Planning Act, S.B. 337, 56th Leg., 1st Sess.*

8 New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. (2016). *San Juan Basin regional water plan (Region 2)*.



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HAZARD MITIGATION IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

Flooding

San Juan County OEM, FEMA

Since 2008 the county has taken part in the Community Rating System, a program that rewards communities for going beyond the minimum rules — county residents now get a 10% discount on flood insurance.^{1,5} Large stretches of land along the San Juan River and the arroyos that feed it have never been mapped for flood risk. Without a map, property owners often don't know whether they're in a flood-prone area.

Key Facts: Flood Insurance in Kirtland

Town of Kirtland, FEMA

Kirtland is not yet enrolled in the National Flood Insurance Program, so property owners there can't buy federally backed flood insurance. The town is newly incorporated and hasn't completed enrollment.¹

Drought

San Juan County Office of Emergency Management

Drought is the county's most constant hazard. Looking at the last 20 years, some part of San Juan County was abnormally dry or in drought about 80% of the time. Severe drought or worse covered part of the county in roughly 44% of weeks.² The county gets only 8 to 10 inches of rain in an average year, and much of that comes in late-summer storms.¹

Wildfire

San Juan County OEM, rural fire districts

San Juan County has a higher chance of wildfire than about 42% of counties nationwide.¹ Risk rises sharply during drought, heat, and wind. The 2021 San Juan Basin Community Wildfire Protection Plan sorted areas where homes meet wildland vegetation into high, moderate, and low risk, and named the communities most likely to be affected.^{3,4}

Severe Winter Weather

San Juan County OEM

Snowfall varies widely across the county — from about 5 inches a year in some areas to more than 70 in higher, more exposed ones. Winter storms affect road access, power, and emergency response countywide.¹

What the County and Cities Are Doing

San Juan County, Aztec, Bloomfield, Farmington, Kirtland · Draft plan, 2026

The county and all four municipalities are updating their shared hazard mitigation plan. Under new federal rules, each community must now identify at least one action for every hazard it faces. Planned work includes mapping flash flood areas that aren't currently on any flood map, setting new flood hazard boundaries, obtaining emergency plans and inundation maps for high-hazard dams so 911 can issue evacuation alerts, lining irrigation ditches to reduce water loss, developing a drought water-use policy, and expanding public education on flood insurance, water conservation, and wildfire preparedness.¹

¹ San Juan County. (2026). *San Juan County, New Mexico local hazard mitigation plan update [Draft]*. San Juan County Office of Emergency Management.

² U.S. Drought Monitor. (2025). *Weekly drought data, San Juan County, New Mexico, 2006–2025*. National Drought Mitigation Center.

³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (n.d.). *Wildfire risk to communities*. NOAA.

⁴ San Juan Basin. (2021). *Community wildfire protection plan*.

⁵ Federal Emergency Management Agency. (n.d.). *National Flood Insurance Program community information*. FEMA.



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