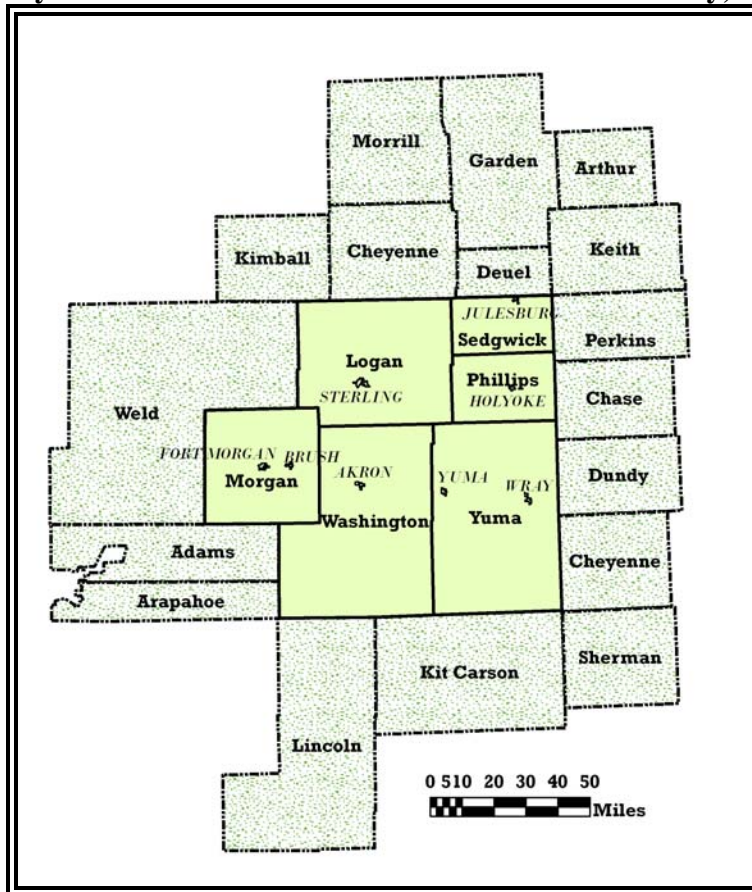


Executive Summary

Northeastern Colorado Labor Force Study¹

This study was commissioned to determine the characteristics of the labor force underpinning the Northeastern Colorado counties of Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington and Yuma. The labor force for the 6-county area is estimated at 39,918 individuals for 2007, but area employers can draw from a much larger pool of workers who reside in adjacent Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas counties (see map below).

Study area: Northeastern Colorado Labor Force Study, 2007



The Northeastern Colorado labor force merits in-depth study based on several factors:

- 1) its potential labor force resides in a geographic area that extends from 9,270 square miles to 21,600 when adjacent counties are included;
- 2) under-employed workers or those willing to change jobs, farming and ranching families, and emerging young workers expand the underlying skill set of the labor force;

¹ This study was commissioned by the Northeastern Colorado Association of Local Governments and conducted by Colorado State University Extension and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. Funding and support were provided by the local governments and Morgan Community College.

- 3) individuals who are currently commuting long distances out of the Northeastern Colorado region for employment might be attracted to new job opportunities closer to home; and
- 4) the diversity of the labor force in terms of education, age and skills.

Based on telephone interviews conducted in January and February 2008 with area residents, the total labor force is estimated at 133,477 individuals who are 18 years of age or older, of whom 129,008 are employed and 4,469 are unemployed. For this study, the northeastern Colorado region was divided into 7 laborsheds which define the areas from which each employment center draws its commuting workers. Each laborshed includes the counties or zip code areas that lie within a 45-mile radius from the center of each major city or town within the 6 Northeastern Colorado counties, as follows: Akron in Washington County; a combined area for Fort Morgan and Brush centered in Morgan County; Holyoke in Phillips County; Julesburg in Sedgwick County; Sterling in Logan County; Wray in eastern Yuma County; and Yuma in western Yuma County.

Population and estimations of potential labor force for Northeastern Colorado, 2007

Laborshed	Total population	Civilian labor force, 18 and older	Employed individuals, 18 years and older	Unemployed, 18 years and older
Akron	11,924	7,111	6,916	195
Fort Morgan/ Brush	150,351	71,912	69,195	2,717
Holyoke	14,666	7,640	7,420	220
Julesburg	14,049	8,329	8,047	283
Sterling	33,399	19,892	19,250	641
Wray	17,341	11,843	11,580	263
Yuma	9,883	6,750	6,600	150
Total	251,613	133,477	129,008	4,469

Source: Derived from estimates from the Colorado State Demography Office, 2007; University of Kansas Institute for Policy and Social Research, 2007; Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, 2007.

1. THE CURRENT LABOR FORCE:

Currently employed individuals in Northeastern Colorado are the older segment of the civilian labor force, with an estimated 58% under the age of 44, 42% aged 45 or older (with 5% who are 65 and older). By comparison, unemployed members of the labor force

are generally younger: 23% are 18 to 24 years of age, 19% are 25 to 34 years old, and 21% are 35 to 44 years old, for a total of 63% under the age of 45.

Fifty-five percent of employed labor force members are men (more than 71,200 in total), and 45% are women (nearly 57,800). Unemployed individuals are predominantly female (60% or over 2,600 persons), with 1,806 men (40%).

The general educational achievement of the employed is significantly higher than for the unemployed. Eighty-nine percent of the employed have at least a high school diploma, compared to 71% of the unemployed. Among the unemployed, 40% have taken some college courses, 21% have an associate's degree (equivalent to two years of college), and 12% have a bachelor's degree (compared to 26% of the employed). This indicates that there are some well-trained individuals within the civilian labor force who would be capable of using targeted job training to build on their previous education.

According to the 2008 study results, 13% of all employed individuals classified themselves as being in management, while nearly 12% stated that they worked in office and administrative support positions. Other important occupational categories cited by Northeastern Colorado area employees include: installation, maintenance and repair (8.3%); sales (8.2%); and production occupations (6.5%). The general occupations with the fewest labor force participants (less than 1% each and fewer than 2,500 employees total) included: jobs in architecture and engineering; the military; and computer and mathematical fields.

In terms of job-related skills, the employed reported a greater number of skills involving more professional responsibility and typically higher compensation levels, such as management (6.9%); computer skills (6.5%); customer service (6.3%); and teaching (6.1%). The unemployed most frequently cited skills in cleaning/janitorial (9.3%); computers (8.8%); agricultural work with animals (5.4%); administrative assistant/office work (4.4%); and graphic design/art (3.6%).

2. THE POTENTIAL LABOR FORCE:

The labor force underpinning the Northeastern Colorado economy has several key groups with availability for additional or new employment:

- a. unemployed workers or those willing to change jobs (job-seekers and job-shifters);
- b. farming and ranching families;
- c. long-distance commuters; and
- d. young individuals moving into the labor force.

Job-shifters and job-seekers—The total number of those currently employed but interested in obtaining a new job (job-shifters), combined with unemployed individuals looking to enter the work force (job-seekers)—is summarized by laborshed as follows:

Job-shifters and job-seekers in each Northeastern Colorado laborshed, 2007

Laborshed	Job-shifters	Job-seekers	Total potential labor force	Potential labor for as percent of shed's civilian labor force
Akron	1,003	67	1,070	9.0%
Fort Morgan/ Brush	13,903	1,164	15,067	10.0%
Holyoke	1,749	78	1,827	12.5%
Julesburg	1,764	103	1,867	13.3%
Sterling	3,225	206	3,431	10.3%
Wray	1,585	72	1,657	9.6%
Yuma	1,374	60	1,434	14.5%
Total	24,604	1,750	26,354	10.5%

Source: Estimations derived from Northeastern Colorado Labor Force Survey data, 2008.

- Among the employed, more than 24,600 individuals would be interested in new employment. An additional 4,488 were unsure. Eighty-six percent have at least a high-school equivalency, and 24% have a 4-year college degree.
- Eighty-seven percent of job-shifters said they would complete job-training to obtain new employment.
- At least 16,500 full-time workers across all Northeastern Colorado laborsheds indicated they would be available for new employment.
- 4,098 individuals are currently employed part-time and would like to either add additional part-time work or change to full-time employment.
- Most workers interested in new employment are 35 to 44 years of age (32% or at least 7,844 individuals). Only 5% were 65 or older.
- An estimated 11,257 women and 15,097 men throughout the region would be interested in new employment, distributed by laborshed as follows:

Job shifters and job-seekers by gender, Northeastern Colorado, 2007

Laborshed	Men	Women	Total
Akron	676	395	1,070
Fort Morgan/Brush	9,256	5,811	15,067
Holyoke	899	929	1,827
Julesburg	1,459	408	1,867
Sterling	1,507	1,924	3,431
Wray	727	931	1,657
Yuma	574	860	1,434
Total	15,097	11,257	26,354

Source: Estimations derived from Northeastern Colorado Labor Force Survey data, 2008.

- More employed men (14,249 individuals) than women (10,354 individuals) would like a new job.
- Among the unemployed, approximately 1,750 individuals would be interested in finding employment. An additional 114 were unsure. Forty-eight percent were men, and 52% were women.
- Thirty-three percent of unemployed job-seekers are between 18 and 24 years old, and 24% are between 25 and 34. One percent is 65 and over.

Farming and ranching households—In agricultural households where at least one member works away from the family farm or ranch, there were approximately 2,379 employed individuals looking for a different job. Although these households also work in agriculture, they do not make a full-time commitment to farming or ranching, and they represent a potential source of workers who are willing to allocate more paid employment time to off-farm or ranch jobs (identified as job-shifters). These workers:

- were primarily older, with nearly 54% between 45 and 64 years old;
- were primarily men (63%);
- were highly educated - 24% hold a bachelor’s degree and nearly 12% have a done post-graduate studies or already hold a graduate or professional degree; and
- had diverse skills such as sales, teaching, heavy equipment operation, electrical work, nursing, accounting, and welding.

Long distance commuters—Of those surveyed who are currently employed, 8% of those living in the six Northeastern Colorado counties reported commuting from their home to an area outside or around the region, including Larimer and Boulder counties in Colorado, the Denver metro area, and traveling around Colorado and into Wyoming. In fact, nearly half

of these commuters were working in the Denver metro area (e.g., Denver, Northglenn, Thornton, Highlands Ranch, or Lakewood) but living in a Northeastern Colorado county. In summary:

- Sixty-eight percent of all long-distance commuters were under the age of 44.
- Sixty-six percent were men.
- Eighteen percent had a bachelor's degree or above.
- They most frequently cited occupations in construction and extraction, transportation and material moving, management, office and administrative support, and sales.
- Respondents reported commuting for average annual incomes ranging from \$13,000 in healthcare support to \$80,000 in architecture and engineering professions.
- Fourteen percent would be interested in finding new employment, and 4% were unsure.

The future labor force—Across the Northeastern Colorado region, there are more than 9,300 households with approximately 11,000 individuals between the ages of 16 and 18. Survey respondents reported that 92% of these youth intend to graduate from high school. Other findings include:

- The highest intended high school graduation rates were in Akron, Julesburg and Yuma (100%), while the lowest was in Holyoke (72%).
- Overall, 66% were planning to go to college, with the Yuma laborshed reporting the highest percentage (82%), and Holyoke reporting the lowest at 44%.
- Holyoke had the highest percentage of 16 to 18 year-olds who would be entering the job market directly after high school.
- On average, another 2.6% planned to go to trade school after completing high school.
- Family members who worked full- or part-time on their farms or ranches reported that their children were all planning to graduate from high school, with the majority attending college after their graduation.

3. LABORSHED SUMMARIES:

Akron Laborshed

- Includes 11,924 people and extends over 9 Colorado counties.
- Labor force estimated at 6,916 employed and 105 unemployed individuals, totaling 7,111.
- Average hourly wages vary from \$7.22 in food preparation and serving, to \$30 in sales.
- 14.5% of all those currently employed—1,003 individuals—are interested in new employment. 91% of those now work full-time; 9% work part-time.
- 65% of job-shifters were men, compared to the unemployed, where 68% of all job-seekers were women. 72% are under the age of 45.
- Job-shifters work primarily in installation, maintenance and repair occupations (43.5%); education (21%); management (8%); and food preparation and construction occupations (7%).

Fort Morgan/Brush Laborshed

- Most heavily populated of the 7 laborsheds in Northeastern Colorado—over 150,000 residents in 8 counties.
- Comprises nearly 54% of the Northeastern Colorado workforce—labor force is estimated at 69,195 employed individuals and 2,717 unemployed, totaling 71,912.
- Average hourly wages range from \$10 per hour for those in agriculture, food preparation and serving occupations, to over \$35 an hour for the legal field.
- 13,903 currently employed and 1,164 unemployed individuals are interested in finding new employment.
- The majority of employed and unemployed job-seekers live in Weld County (70%).
- Has the greatest number and proportion of potential job-shifters currently employed in protective services occupations (primarily corrections and police officers).

Holyoke Laborshed

- Estimated to have 14,666 residents in 5,945 households, comprising 6% of the region's total population.
- 61% of its residents live in neighboring Nebraska counties, 32 % in Colorado, and 7% in Kansas.
- Labor force comprises approximately 7,420 employed individuals (5.8% of the northeastern region's total employment), and 220 who are unemployed.

- An estimated 1,749 employed and 78 unemployed individuals form a potential labor pool from which new employers could recruit workers. Overall, 51% are women and 49% are men, half of whom are younger than 44.
- Average hourly wages range from \$7.38 per hour in food preparation, to over \$36 per hour in agriculture (reported by agricultural equipment operators).
- Most job-shifters have relatively low-paying jobs (with 36% making less than \$10 per hour) in the food preparation, office, production, and construction occupations.

Julesburg Laborshed

- Includes an estimated 14,049 individuals who reside in 9 Nebraska and 5 Colorado counties. 66% live in Nebraska; 34% in Colorado.
- Labor force comprises approximately 8,047 employed individuals and 283 unemployed, totaling 8,329.
- Has more workers and unemployed who are middle-aged: 52% of its labor force is between 35 and 54 years of age.
- An estimated 1,764 employed and 103 unemployed individuals are interested in new employment.
- In the potential labor pool, 78% are men (greater than the regional average of 57%) and 22% are women. Most job-shifters are men, while most job-seekers are women.
- Has the highest proportion of potential job-shifters in sales, followed by those working in installation, maintenance and repair occupations.
- Average wages ranged from \$10 per hour in construction, extraction, maintenance and management occupations to a high of \$18.75 reported for general labor.

Sterling Laborshed

- Includes an estimated 33,399 residents. 62% reside in Logan County and 5 surrounding Colorado counties, and 38% in 3 neighboring Nebraska counties.
- Labor force comprises approximately 19,250 employed and 641 unemployed individuals.
- Employed workers tend to be older—47% are under the age of 45, compared to 58% for the study area as a whole. The unemployed are significantly younger, with 75% under 45 years old of age.
- 3,225 employed and 206 unemployed individuals form the potential labor pool from which new employers could recruit workers.
- 56% of the potential labor pool are women and 44% are men, 60% of whom are under 44 years old. 55% live in Logan County; 38% in adjacent Nebraska counties.
- Job-shifters' average wages ranged from under \$6 per hour for food preparation jobs, to \$36 in computer, mathematical and management positions.

Wray Laborshed

- Has an estimated 17,341 residents who live in Yuma and 10 surrounding counties.
- An estimated civilian labor force of 11,843 individuals, or 8.9% of the labor force for the combined Northeastern Colorado region, of whom 11,580 were employed and 263 were unemployed.
- Employed individuals, ages 65 and older, make up 6.5% of the labor force (compared to 5% for the region).
- Has an estimated 1,585 employed and 72 unemployed individuals interested in finding a new job, 62% of whom are over age 44. Overall, 56% are women and 44% are men.
- 12.5% of job-shifters living outside the 6-county region commuted into Phillips or Yuma for work and 7.7% drove into the Denver metro area.
- 33% of all job-shifters were in sales and management, with average wages of over \$24 per hour. However, more than 58% of all job-shifters made less than \$11 per hour.

Yuma Laborshed

- Contains an estimated 9,883 residents across 8 Colorado counties (82%), 2 neighboring Nebraska counties (6%) and 1 Kansas county (12%).
- A civilian labor of 6,750 has 6,600 employed and 150 unemployed individuals (5% of the region's labor force).
- An estimated 1,374 employed and 60 unemployed individuals are interested in new employment. 60% are women and 40% men; 64% are below the age of 44.
- Has more potential workers under the age of 35 (56%), compared to Wray (20%).
- 93% of the potential labor pool lives in Yuma, Kit Carson, Logan and Phillips counties.
- 36% of those interested in new employment work in agriculture; the largest proportion across all 7 laborsheds.
- At \$13.46, average hourly wages for job-shifters in the Yuma laborshed are the lowest of the 7 laborsheds, where the regional average is \$17.60, and the highest is \$20.62 in the Akron laborshed.