

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### County Profile

Converse County was established in 1888 from portions of Albany and Laramie Counties. The county is named after Wyoming pioneer, Amasa R. Converse. The county is approximately 170 miles east-west and 92 miles north-south and encompasses 4,253 square miles. Converse County is located in east central Wyoming. Open range is the dominant land use with timbered mountain slopes located along the southwest boundary. Land ownership in the county is private, state, and federal. Neighboring counties include; Albany, Campbell, Johnson, Natrona, Niobrara, Platte, and Weston.

The estimated population for the County in 2009 was 13,578, which is a 12.7% increase from the 2000 census population of 12,052. The population is 96.7 % white. Population growth in the county has been faster than the state and faster than the nation. The population density based on the 2000 census was 2.8 people per square mile. (Source: <http://quickfacts.census.gov>) County residents live in one of the incorporated communities, Douglas, Glenrock, Lost Springs, or Rolling Hills, or one of the unincorporated communities of Bill, Esterbrook, Orpha, Orin, and Shawnee, or in unincorporated areas of the county. The highest concentration of population is in the city of Douglas, population 6,212 which serves as the County seat. The town of Glenrock has a population of 2,466, Rolling Hills, 512, and Lost Springs, 1, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. (Source: <http://factfinder.census.gov>)

In 2005, retail trade represented the largest number of firms in the county's economic profile. This was followed by construction; other services; mining; accommodation and food services; health care and social assistance; and professional, scientific and technical services. Mining, utilities, construction, and healthcare represented the largest employers with each of these industries having at least one firm that employed 100 or more individuals. Mining is the only industry in the county that has a firm employing 250 or more people. The government share of total employment (local, state, and federal) in 2006 was 18%. Job growth over the past 36 years has outpaced both state and national rates. (Source: Socioeconomic Profile of Converse County, Headwaters Economics, February 2009)

The median family income for 2010 as estimated by Housing and Urban Development was \$66,400, slightly higher than the statewide figure of \$66,100. The unemployment rate in the county was 5.8% in 2009. The total number of housing units in the county increased from 5,669 to 6,134 for the period 2000 to 2010. (Source: Wyoming Housing Database Partnership, Final Report, August 31, 2010) The home ownership rate in 2009 was 74%. (Source: <http://quickfacts.census.gov>)

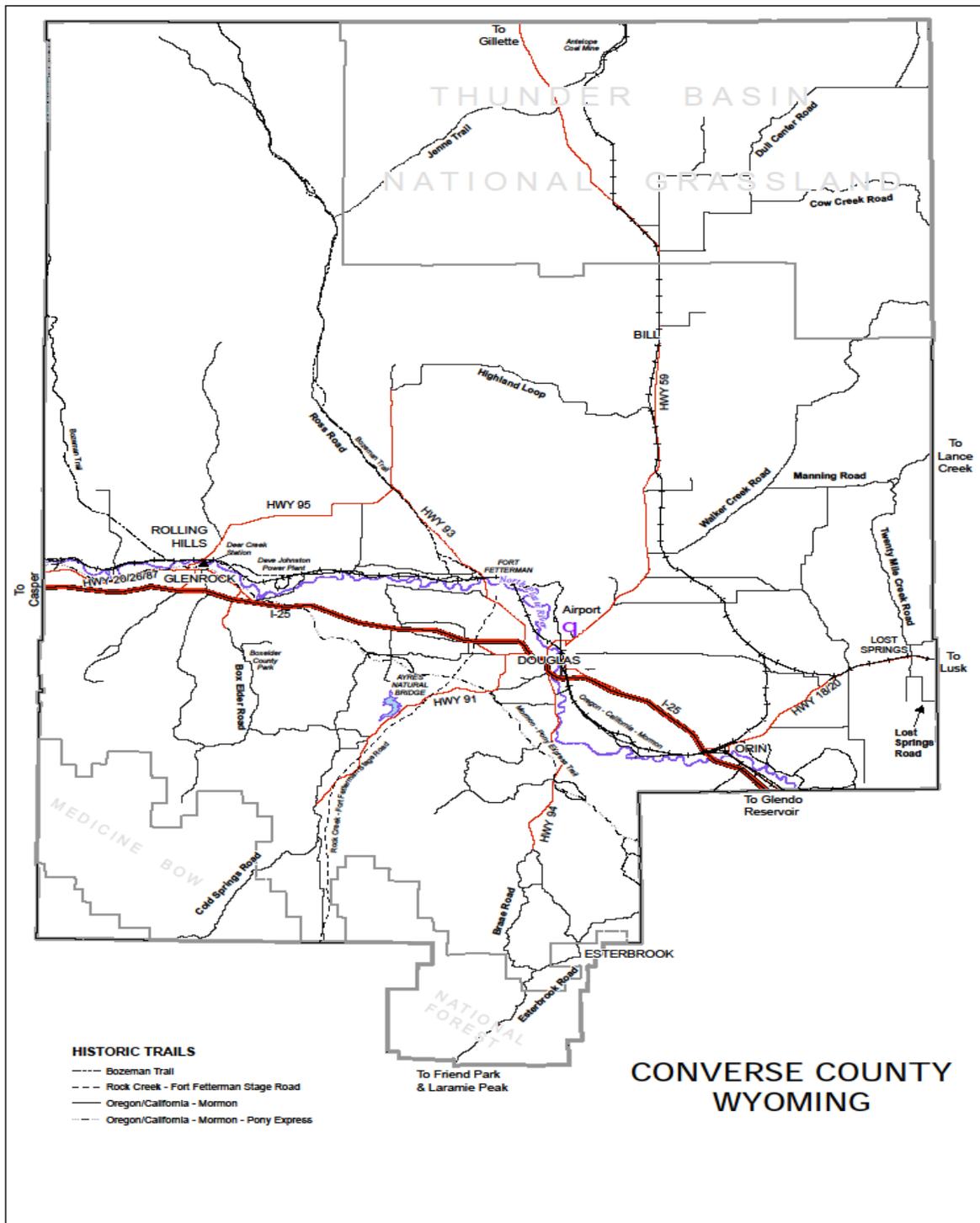


Figure 1.1 Converse County Map

The two dominant natural features in the county are the Laramie Mountain Range and North Platte River. The Laramie Mountains cut across the southwest corner of the county. The North Platte flows across the county from northwest to southeast and through the center of Douglas, the county seat.



North Platte River at Douglas

Elevations range from just over 4400 feet above sea level in the northeastern corner of the county to 9165 feet at Twin Peaks in the southwestern, forested area of the county. Lands drain into both the Cheyenne and North Platte Rivers.

The surface is characterized by rolling hills, canyons, and breaks in the north half of the county and steeper, timbered mountain slopes in the southwest. Precipitation at Douglas is 12.6 inches annually with most of the precipitation coming between April and September. Underlying the surface are oil and gas producing basins. Air and water quality in the county are good.

Interstate 25 bisects the county running east-west to the west of Douglas and at Douglas turning north-south. U.S. Highways 18 and 20 exit the southeast corner of the county in an easterly direction serving Lost Springs and Shawnee. State highway 59 runs north south connecting Douglas to Gillette in neighboring Campbell County. Highway 93/95 forms a loop from I-25 that largely parallels the North Platte and accesses Glenrock, Rolling Hills, and Orpha.

The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) enters the county from the north and runs roughly parallel to State Highway 59. The BNSF carries coal mined in

the Powder River Basin to the north, to all parts of the country. These tracks intersect with the east-west Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) at Douglas. The UPRR closely follows the North Platte west of Douglas and State Highways 18 and 20 east of Douglas. Douglas has a general aviation airport south of town, but does not have commercial air service. Commercial air service is available in Casper, 50 miles west of Douglas.

## Development Trends

The following county profile information (available as of October 2010) was compiled by Headwaters Economics based upon data from the U.S. Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics and is contained in the Converse County, Wyoming Socio Economic Profile. ([www.headwaterseconomics.org](http://www.headwaterseconomics.org)) Compared to other U.S. counties, Converse County has the following characteristics:

- Population growth (annualized rate, 1970-2006) was fast.
- Employment growth (annualized rate, 1970-2006) was somewhat fast.
- Personal Income growth (adjusted for inflation, annualized rate, 1970-2006) was fast.
- Non-labor income share of total in 2006 was low.
- Median age based on the 2000 census was roughly average.
- Per capita income (2006) was high.
- Average earnings per job (2006) was high.
- Education rate (% of population 25 and over with a college degree) was roughly average.
- Education rate was somewhat low (looking at the percent of the population 25 and over who have less than a high school diploma.)
- Rich-poor ratio (for each household that made over \$100K, how many households made less than \$30K) was roughly average.
- Housing affordability was roughly average.
- Government share of total employment was somewhat high.
- Unemployment rate in 2007 was somewhat low.

Land use in Converse County is relatively stable with little conversion of uses.

According to the Douglas City Planning Office residential development all but stopped in 2009 with 12-15 new single family homes under construction that year. The city has approximately 600 city lots platted and available for construction west of I-25, and in the northwest and southeast areas of the city. There is a need for additional higher density housing to provide for underserved elderly and lower income populations. In 2010, there has been virtually no new single family residential construction. Commercial construction has primarily been remodeling of existing facilities with little new construction. The City of Douglas has building codes and code enforcement. (Source: Interview with Shan Gorden, City Building Inspector and Shari Molney, Planning Technician, October 28, 2010)



Laramie Range south of Glenrock

The county does have subdivision regulations and permit septic systems. The number of septic permit applications helps provide a gauge for new development. The county does not have a county planner, zoning regulations, building codes, or code enforcement. According to County Special Projects Director, Holly Richardson, there has been very little subdivision activity for the past two years. Development in floodplains has not been an issue. There has been considerable interest in development of energy, specifically wind energy, in the county in recent years. Duke and Rocky Mountain Power have developed a total of four projects. One additional wind energy project, Wasatch Winds, is in the application process. (Source: Phone interview with Holly Richardson, November 5, 2010)

Overall, interviews with city and county planning staff do not indicate any significant development in the near term. Even the county's economic engine of energy development has slowed with the current recession. In 2011 however, there is activity related to obtaining permits for uranium extraction. And, in April 2011, the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission held a meeting in Douglas to discuss interest in exploring the Niobrara Shale formation for oil. (Casper Star-Tribune, April 27, 2011)