

List of Calculated Risks and Challenges for Rural Life in El Paso County

We commend you for thinking about moving to unincorporated El Paso County, Colorado! Please review the following potential risks and challenges with rural living before purchasing land in rural El Paso County. We know that your choice to join our culture and our community will not be a mistake.

Access

The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency service vehicles can achieve that same level of access at all times. Please consider:

- Emergency response times (sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) cannot be guaranteed in far-flung rural areas. Under extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response can be slow and expensive.
- There can be problems with the legal aspects of accessing your property, especially if you gain access across property belonging to others. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand the easements that may be necessary when these types of questions arise.
- You can experience problems with the maintenance and cost of maintenance of your road. El Paso County maintains nearly 2,000 miles of roads, but many rural properties are served by private roads which are maintained by private road associations. There are even some county roads that are not maintained by the county – no grading or snow plowing. Make sure you know what type of maintenance to expect and who will provide that maintenance.
- Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access.
- School buses travel only on maintained county roads that have been designated as school bus routes by the school district. You may need to drive your children to the nearest county road so they can get to school.

- In extreme weather, even county-maintained roads can become impassable. You may need a four-wheel drive vehicle with chains for all four wheels to travel during those episodes, which can last for several days.

- Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. El Paso County will repair and maintain county roads; however, subdivision roads are the responsibility of the landowners who use those roads. In the case of a flash flood (which our region is prone to, particularly in areas with recent wildfire clearing), a dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges, and culverts. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges have been hit with large bills for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods.

- Unpaved roads generate dust. When traffic levels reach specific levels, El Paso County treats county system roads to suppress the dust, but dust is still a fact of life for most rural residents.

- If your road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely that El Paso County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check carefully with the County Department of Public Works when any statement is made by the seller that indicates any unpaved roads will be paved.

- Mail delivery is not available to all areas of the county. Ask the postmaster to describe the system for your area. Similarly, parcel delivery services may be limited in some areas. It is wise to check with service providers (Amazon, UPS, FedEx, local newspapers) to see if the service the area before purchasing land.

- Because access to your property may be blocked by weather and other factors for extended periods, you should always have on hand adequate food, medicine, and other supplies and be prepared for road closures or other access blockages. Keep in mind the distance from the property to the nearest essential services to determine the likelihood of being cut off in a significant weather event.

Utility Services

Water, sewer, electric, telephone and other services may be unavailable or may not operate at urban standards. Repairs can often take much longer than in towns and cities. Please review your options from the non-exhaustive list below.

- Telephone communications can be a problem, especially in the mountain areas of El Paso County. From time to time, the only phone service available has been a party line. If you have a private line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem uses. Cellular phones will not work in all areas.

- If sewer service is available to your property, it may be expensive to hook into the system. It also may be expensive to maintain the system you use. It is important to understand the costs and risks of maintaining your own septic system if the property you seek is not connected to a community sewer. If sewer service is not available, you will need to use an approved septic system or other treatment process. The type of soil you have available for a leach field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your system. Have the system checked by a reliable sanitation firm and ask for assistance from the El Paso County Department of Health and Environment.
- If you do not have access to a supply of treated domestic water, you will have to locate an alternative supply. The most common method is use of a well. Permits for wells are granted by the state engineer and the cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable. The quality and quantity of well water can vary considerably from location to location and from season to season. The water level in a well may change over time, necessitating drilling a deeper or replacement well. It is strongly advised that you research this issue very carefully.
- Electric service is not available to every area of El Paso County. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power. It can be very expensive to extend power lines to remote areas.
- Electric power may not be available in two phase and three phase service configurations. If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.
- Power outages can occur in outlying areas with more frequency than in more developed areas. A loss of electric power can also interrupt your supply of water from a well. You may also lose food in freezers or refrigerators and power outages can cause problems with computers as well. It is important to be able to survive for up to a week in severe cold with no utilities if you live in the country.
- Trash removal can be much more expensive in a rural area than in a city. In some cases, your trash dumpster may be several miles from your home. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own land. It is good to know the cost for trash removal as you make the decision to move into the country. In some cases, your only option may be to haul your trash to the landfill yourself. Recycling is more difficult because pick-up is not available in most rural areas.

The Property

There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land.

- Not all lots are buildable. The El Paso County Assessor has many parcels that are separate for the purpose of taxation that are not legal lots in the sense that a building permit will not be issued. You must check with the El Paso County Planning & Community Development Department to know that a piece of land can be built on.
- Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. There may be easements that are not of record. Check these issues carefully.
- Many property owners do not own the mineral rights under their property. Owners of mineral rights have the ability to change the surface characteristics in order to extract their minerals. It is very important to know what minerals may be located under the land and who owns them. Much of the rural land in El Paso County can be used for mining; however a special review by the county commissioners is usually required. Be aware that adjacent mining uses can expand and cause negative impacts.
- The surrounding properties will probably not remain as they are indefinitely. You can check with the El Paso County Planning Department to find out how the properties are zoned and to see what future developments may be in the planning stages. The view from your property may change.
- If you have a ditch running across your property there is a good possibility that the owners of the ditch have the right to come onto your property with heavy equipment to maintain the ditch.
- Water rights that are sold with the property may not give you the right to use the water from any ditches crossing your land without coordinating with a neighbor who also uses the water. Other users may have senior rights to the water that can limit your use or require you to pay for the over-sizing or other improving of the ditch. It is important to make sure that any water rights you purchase with the land will provide enough water to maintain fruit trees, pastures, gardens or livestock.

Mother Nature

Residents of the country usually experience more problems when the elements and earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts for you to consider.

- The physical characteristics of your property can be positive and negative. Trees are a wonderful environmental amenity but can also involve your home in a forest fire. Building at the top of a forested draw should be considered as dangerous as building in a flash flood area. Defensible perimeters are very helpful in protecting buildings from forest fire and inversely can protect the forest from igniting if your house catches on

fire. If you start a forest fire, you are responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing that fire. For further information, you can contact the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management.

- Expansive soils, such as Bentonite Clay (which is common in the foothills) can buckle concrete foundations and twist steel I-beams. You can know the soil conditions on your property if you have a soil test performed.

- The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. When property owners fill in ravines, they have found that the water that drained through that ravine now drains through their house. A flash flood can occur, especially during the summer months, and turn a dry gully into a river. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building. Spring run-off can cause a very small creek to become a major river. Many residents use sand bags to protect their homes. The county does not provide sand bags, equipment or people to protect private property from flooding.

- Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as deer and eagles are positive additions to the environment. However, even "harmless" animals like deer can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, bears, mosquitoes and other animals that can be dangerous, and you need to know how to deal with them. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance and know that if you do not handle your pets and trash properly, it could cause problems for you and the wildlife. The Colorado Department of Wildlife and the El Paso County Department of Public Health are two good resources for information. They have many free publications to help educate you about living in the wild.

Agriculture

The people who tamed this wild land brought water to the barren, arid east slope of the Rockies through an ingenious system of water diversion. This water has allowed agriculture to become an important part of our environment. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. There are a few things you need to know:

- Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Dairy operators sometimes milk without stopping and hay is often swathed or baled at night. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet.

- Not all wells can be used for watering of landscaping and/or livestock. Permits from the state engineer may restrict water to use to that which is used inside of a home. If

you have other needs, make certain that you have the proper approvals before you invest. It may also be difficult to find enough water to provide for your needs even if you can secure the proper permit.

- Chemicals (mainly fertilizers and herbicides) are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people have severe allergic reactions. Many of these chemicals are applied by airplanes that fly early in the morning.
- Agriculture is an important business in El Paso County. If you choose to live among the farms and ranches of our rural countryside, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors. In fact, Colorado has "Right to Farm" legislation that protects farmers and ranchers from nuisance and liability lawsuits. It enables them to continue producing food and fiber.
- Colorado has an open range law. This means if you do not want cattle, sheep or other livestock on your property, it is your responsibility to fence them out. It is not the responsibility of the rancher to keep his/her livestock off your property.
- Before buying land you should know if it has noxious weeds that may be expensive to control and you may be required to control. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock.
- Much of El Paso County receives less than 15 inches (38 cm) of precipitation per year. As a result, we have a problem with overgrazing, and fugitive dust. Without irrigation, grass does not grow very well. There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. The Colorado State University Cooperative Extension can help you with these issues.

Resources for all County Departments and Offices can be found by navigating El Paso County's website at ElPasoCo.com.