



LIVING RURAL

Making Clear Creek County Your Home



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WELCOME TO CLEAR CREEK COUNTY

Clear Creek County sits on the eastern slope of the Continental Divide, 30 miles and 3,000 feet above Denver. The Creek (originally known as Vasquez Fork) held the flakes of gold which drew miners to the mountains early in 1859. Gold and silver mining would be the early draw to the area, followed quickly by tourists interested in the high peaks and cool air of the area around the Continental Divide.

Towns soon developed, with Georgetown outgrowing rival Idaho Springs, to claim the county seat. The silver mines of Silver Plume created a booming miner's community, while Empire balanced gold mining with its growing role as gateway to Berthoud Pass and the Middle Park area of Central Colorado. By the mid-1880s the county's population topped 7,800, only to drop to 2,100 by the 1930s as the economics of hard metal mining quieted the hammers and drills. Many of the county's towns were at risk of becoming ghost towns.

The county's resurgence came as tourists began to travel to the mountains, fueled by the growth of state, and later, federal highway systems. While the railroad left the county during the hard years of the depression, automobile travel picked up and kept the county alive. The production of steel during World War II spurred development of the county's large molybdenum reserves.

The growth of the skiing industry after World War II added a new and valued industry. Berthoud Pass and Loveland Ski Areas began to draw skiers and travelers. Many people also visited on their drive through the county on the way to ski areas developing in Summit and Grand counties.

ACCESS AND TRAVEL

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.

LEGAL ACCESS

Many of the roadways in Clear Creek County originated as mine access roads and often traverse through both public and private property. There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, 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.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

Prior to purchasing or developing a property, it is important to know if the road that accesses the property is maintained and if so, who maintains it. All of Clear Creek County's public roads are categorized by the level of maintenance, including snow and ice removal efforts, which will be devoted to them. The various levels of service and the degree of service which will be devoted to snow and ice removal operations on each level are identified below. Clear Creek County public roads and the associated maintenance category can be found on the [Road System List](#).

- **Primary County Maintained Roads:** This classification includes all current county roads that may carry school bus and mail delivery routes. During school days, Primary roads will be plowed and sanded to accommodate school bus schedules. Plowing and sanding operations will normally be carried out between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., during school days. On mail delivery days, Primary roads will be opened in time to accommodate mail delivery schedules. Plowing and sanding operations will normally be carried out between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on mail delivery days that are not school days. On days other than school and mail delivery days, plowing and sanding operations will be completed by 5:00 p.m.
- **Secondary County Maintained Roads:** This classification includes the remaining roads in the County's maintenance system. These roads are typically residential access roads. Secondary roads which are maintained on a year round basis will be plowed and/or sanded after the resource requirements for the Primary roads are met. Which may mean second or third day service and they may not receive snow removal with each snowfall.
- **Secondary County Non-Maintained Roads:** All other County roads that do not receive any County maintenance or snow removal.

Winter maintenance includes snow removal from roadways, ice and water control, sanding icy conditions, and some avalanche control. Summer maintenance involves the grading of roadways; the replacement or addition of road surface materials such as road base, gravel, or asphalt; and some water control.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Limited public transportation is offered in and around Clear Creek County. [The Roundabout](#) bus provides weekday bus service between the municipalities in Clear Creek County and [Bustang](#) provides service from Idaho Springs to points along the I-70 mountain corridor and Denver area.

UTILITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

COLORADO WATER LAW

In Colorado, all water in or tributary to natural surface streams have always been and are declared to be the property of the public, dedicated to the use of the people of the state, subject to appropriation and use. Appropriation is considered to be the application of a specified portion of the waters of the state to a beneficial use pursuant to procedures prescribed by law, and beneficial use is considered to be the use of that amount of water that is reasonable and appropriate under reasonably efficient practices to accomplish without waste the purpose for which the appropriation is lawfully made. Unlike the riparian doctrine, a land owner does not have to have a natural water course running through their property to obtain a right to the water in said water course. In Colorado, the use of water is governed by what is known as the “Prior Appropriation System”. A simplified way to explain this system is often referred to as “first in time, first in right”. In many drainage basins within the state, such as the Arkansas River basin, one must own a water right that is in priority in order to divert water, while in other parts of the state (such as the White River basin) water is typically available for appropriation and thus water may be diverted absent a water right. However, the right to divert water from a stream system can only be secured by applying for and obtaining a decree for a water right from the Division Water Court.

A water right decree establishes the location of diversion points; the source of the water (stream system); the amount of water that can be diverted or stored; the type and place of use; and the priority. The priority is based on when an application is filed with the Water Court (also known as the adjudication date) and the appropriation date, which is the date an intent to divert and use water is formed, accompanied by some open physical demonstration of the intent. The first water right decreed on a stream system has the first right of use of available water, up to the decreed amount. All subsequent water rights are given priorities to establish the order in which water can be diverted; hence the expression, first in time, first in right. During periods of high flow, there is generally sufficient water available for all users. As stream flows drop at the end of the run-off season, junior water rights are curtailed to satisfy the senior rights provided a call is made by a senior water right holder. There may be times however when there is not sufficient water available even for senior water rights.

Types of Water Court Decrees

There are three basic types of Water Court decrees:

1. Surface Water Rights (springs and streams);
2. Water Storage Rights (ponds and reservoirs);
3. Underground Water Rights (wells).

In unincorporated Clear Creek County, most water used for residential and commercial uses utilize underground water rights via individual wells for their source of water.

Water Wells

A permit is required prior to the construction of a new well, replacement of an existing well, change or increase in use of a well, or change in source for the well, for example drilling deeper. Well permits are also required if groundwater is intercepted while constructing an off-channel pond. Application forms and assistance can be obtained from the State of Colorado Division Engineer's Office. There are two basic types of well permit applications: General Purpose (non-exempt) and Residential (exempt). To determine which application should be used, it is recommended that the Division Engineer's Office be contacted. [CDSS Data & Tools](#) The distinction between non-exempt and exempt wells are that exempt wells are exempt from administration while non-exempt wells are not.

It is important to understand that a well permit does not guarantee a reliable clean water supply. Water quality is dependent on the hydrogeology of the specific location your property is located. Water quantity is also affected by the hydrogeology of the site.

Water and Sanitation Districts

Some areas of the County are serviced by a water district, a sanitation district, or both. It is important to check to see if your property is within a special district or if it is not. Each district charges tap fees and monthly fees for service. Please check with the district in which your property is located for their specific fees for service. Here is a list of the special districts in the County:

- St. Mary's Water and Sanitation District
- Chicago Creek Sanitation District
- Central Clear Creek Sanitation District
- Mill Creek Park Water District
- Upper Bear Creek Water and Sanitation District

Sewer

If your property is not located in one of the sanitation districts listed above, it will most likely be serviced, or need to be serviced by an onsite wastewater treatment system (OWTS). OWTS's are permitted by the County Environmental Health Department and are sized based on the number of bedrooms a residence has. For more information on OWTS's and permitting, go to the Environmental Health Department's webpage here: [Environmental Health](#)

GAS AND ELECTRICITY

- Clear Creek County is split up between two electric power service providers; Xcel Energy and the Intermountain Rural Electric Authority (IREA). Each has a specific service area. However there are still some residential areas that do not receive electric power from a provider at all. Therefore if it becomes too expensive to extend power lines to a neighborhood or residence, the residence may remain “off the grid” and individual homeowners must use alternative sources of power such as wind or solar energy or generator power.
- Clear Creek County has streamlined its permitting system for new solar power generation and you may be able to apply for an over-the-counter permit that is issued immediately at the time of application for a new photovoltaic system or other type of solar system. Please see the County’s website for building permit information: [Solar Permit Application Form](#)
- If considering to extend power lines to your residence or business, it may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service (and other utilities) to your property. It is important to make sure that the proper easements are in place to allow lines to be built to your property. If power is available, the cost is usually divided into 1) a fee to hook into the system and 2) a monthly charge for energy consumed. It is important to understand all of the costs of providing power to a specific piece of property before making a decision to purchase it.
- If your residence or business has special power requirements, you should know what level of service can be provided to your property.
- Natural gas is not available in all areas of the County. Many residents use propane for heating their homes, although wood burning stoves and solar energy are also very popular. Propane trucks can only access your home if your driveway is clear and safe for large trucks. Plan ahead and order propane and wood before snow makes roads impassable.

CELL PHONE COVERAGE AND INTERNET SERVICE

- Generally speaking, mobile phone coverage and internet service is best in the communities along I-70 and service diminishes the farther away you get from the highway corridor. Many areas of the County do not have cell phone service at all due to the County’s mountainous topography and remote environment. Check your cell phone service at your property. You may need to change service providers to assure adequate coverage, or you may need to obtain a land line to assure adequate communications.
- Generally, broadband internet speeds are fastest along the I-70 corridor and within the municipalities, and speeds slow down the farther away you get from the highway Corridor.

MAIL DELIVERY

- There are five (5) post offices in Clear Creek County; one in each of the municipalities of Idaho Springs, Georgetown, Empire and Silver Plume, and one in the unincorporated townsite of

Dumont. All post offices have post office (P.O.) boxes for use by residents who do not receive mail delivery at their homes.

- If mail delivery service is not provided to your home, obtaining a post office box is an effective way to achieve mail delivery for your household. If you don't know the status of mail delivery service in your neighborhood, ask the local postmaster what type of delivery you may expect.
- Living in a rural area can also affect delivery times for USPS, FedEx, Amazon, and newspaper delivery.

TRASH AND RECYCLING

- The Clear Creek County Transfer Station accepts various sorts of materials and offers an extensive recycling program. The Transfer Station handles household trash, construction debris, furniture, appliances and other materials for a fee. Refer to the County's website for details and location: [Transfer Station and Recycling Center](#)
- Private curbside trash removal services are offered in many areas of the County but not everywhere. Please check with a private collection service for availability. If curbside service is not available in your neighborhood, property owners are responsible for hauling trash to the Transfer Station.
- **Keeping trash removed from your property is important for health reasons, but also prevents unwanted visits from dogs, bears and other critters. Clear Creek County enforces junk and rubbish regulations.**

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Emergency response times (sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) cannot be guaranteed. In remote portions of Clear Creek County and under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow and expensive. Please find non-emergency contact information and links to common emergency service providers below. **In the event of an emergency, call 911.**

Emergency services provided by Clear Creek County include:

- Law Enforcement

[Clear Creek County Sheriff's Office](#)

Non-emergency phone: (303) 679-2376

Physical Address: 405 Argentine Street
Georgetown, CO 80444

- Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

[Clear Creek EMS](#)

Non-emergency phone: (303) 679-4215

Physical Address: 3400 Stanley Road
Dumont, CO 80436

- Animal Control

[Clear Creek County Animal Shelter](#)

Non-emergency phone: (303) 679-2477

Physical Address: 500 W Dumont Road
Georgetown, CO 80436

Emergency service providers not under the authority of Clear Creek County include:

- Fire Protection

[Clear Creek Fire Authority](#)

Non-emergency phone: (303) 567-4342

Physical Address: 681 County Road 308
Dumont, CO 80436

[Evergreen Fire Protection District](#)

Non-emergency phone: (303) 674-3145

Physical Address: 1802 Bergen Parkway
Evergreen, CO 80439

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Part of what makes Clear Creek County so desirable to call home is its beautiful mountain landscape, however this landscape can also present issues when it's time to develop a site. Steep slopes and/or geologic hazards can exist either on a site or along the access pathway to a site that may present challenges in meeting driveway or building codes and regulations. Additionally, developing in an area with challenging geologic or topographical features can lead to additional costs in development that may have not been anticipated at the time of acquisition of the subject property. If you are concerned with a property's topographical or geologic challenges it may be in your best interest to reach out to a professional in this field so that they can give you advice on potential development challenges.

FLOODPLAIN

There are a number of waterways within Clear Creek County and a percentage of County property resides in the 1% annual chance floodplain area (100-year floodplain). It is important to understand if a property of interest is within this 100-year floodplain, because residing in or development within this floodplain area can affect your insurance rate and your ability to develop. Development within this floodplain area may be prohibited or require additional costs and time due to potential floodplain permitting and mitigation. Regulatory floodplain boundaries can be viewed at the Federal Emergency Management Agency's [Map Service Center](#) and development within 100-year floodplain is administered by the Clear Creek County [Site Development Department](#).

WETLAND

A Wetland is determined by 3 markers; 1) the right type of vegetation, 2) the right type of soil, and 3) evidence of standing water. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers may require additional permitting for certain types of development within wetland areas. The County utilizes mapping software from the Army Corp of Engineers during some permitting and land use processes to determine if the Army Corp should be consulted to determine if a permit is necessary. Additionally, there may be required setbacks from wetland areas to Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS), as well as building envelopes placement. If you feel that wetlands may exist on your property you can contact the Army Corps of Engineers at:

U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers
Tri-Lakes Project
9307 South Wadsworth Blvd
Littleton, Colorado 80128
(303) 979-4120

RADON

If you want to breathe easy in your mountain home, check for the presence of radon gas. Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that can enter the home through cracks in the floor or spaces around

utility pipes. This invisible killer is considered the second leading cause of lung cancer (following smoking), according to the Surgeon General.

All homes in Colorado should be tested for radon because every house is different. It is possible for one home in a neighborhood to have low radon levels while their neighbor has extremely high levels. The risk of radon in a home can be influenced by several factors: soil type, “tightness” of the home, air pressure, type of heating and ventilation system, and lifestyle of the occupant. Testing is the only way to know if you and your family are at risk from radon gas.

The easiest way to test for radon is with a short-term test kit. This small detector can be placed in the lowest livable space in your home for two to seven days. Test kits include complete instructions and return postage for mailing the kit back to the lab for analysis. Most importantly, look for kits that are approved by the EPA. Contact the Clear Creek County Public Health Office for free, short-term test kits.

Surveys conducted by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment indicate that 4 out of 10 Colorado homes have the potential for having radon concentrations in excess of the EPA guideline of 4.0 pCi/L. In Routt County recent radon test results have shown radon levels as high as 20.9 pCi/L, so it is imperative that every home be tested.

The good news is that there are a variety of methods to lower radon levels in a home. These can include venting crawl spaces, sealing cracks and other openings in the foundation, and covering sump pump holes. The right solution depends on the design of the home and other factors, so a qualified radon mitigation specialist is recommended.

MOTHER NATURE

WEATHER EVENTS

Being in the mountains along the Continental Divide, Clear Creek County experiences severe weather in the form of extremely high winds, flash flooding and blizzards. High winds in the wintertime are typical. They are so typical, in fact, that all new construction must be constructed to withstand a 100-mile wind event!

Extreme weather conditions can destroy roads. It is advisable to know if your private road was properly engineered and constructed. Even if you have direct access onto a County-maintained road, snow removal and repairs due to extreme weather may be delayed and may not occur within 24 hours of the weather event.

Some weather conditions in Clear Creek County will require the use of four-wheel drive, chains, and other forms of aids for mobility and safety. It is advisable for you to be familiar with how to use tire chains, socks, or another form of traction aid.



WILDFIRE EVENTS

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is defined as the area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped lands or vegetative fuels. Therefore, development that occurs anywhere in unincorporated Clear Creek County is considered to be within the WUI.

Wildfires in the WUI are very real and pose a potentially disastrous situation. No area is immune from the threat of wildfire and this is particularly true within the WUI.

To reduce the risk of wildfire the following measures are recommended:

- Thin out continuous tree and brush cover within 30 feet of your home to create “defensible space” around the home site. Ensure tree crowns are spaced at least 10-12 feet apart.
- Homes located on a slope need to have an enlarged defensible space on the downhill side.
- Prune branches from trees within the defensible space to a height of 10 feet above the ground. Remove shrubs, small trees, or other potential “ladder” fuels from beneath trees.
- Remove dead limbs, leaves, and other ground litter within the defensible space. Dispose of all slash and debris left from thinning by removal from site, lop and scatter, or chipping.
- Mow or graze dry grasses and weeds and irrigate the area during periods of high fire danger.
- Clean roof and gutters of pine needles and leaves to eliminate a potential ignition source.
- Stack firewood uphill and at least 15 feet away from your home.

Wildfire Quick Facts

- Wildfires occur in ALL seasons of the year.
- Wildfires occur in grass, brush, and trees.
- Wildfires occur in all sizes and locations.
- Wildfires move with incredible speed!



The action taken now to implement a defensible space project can help to protect your home in the future. Contact the County's Planning and Site Development office, or Colorado State Forest Service office for help.

Additional resources available:

[Wildfire Mitigation](#)

Forest Home Fire Safety. CSU Ext. Factsheet 6.304: <https://csfs.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Forest-Home-Fire-Safety-Fact-Sheet-6.304.pdf>

The Home Ignition Zone: A Guide to Preparing Your Home for Wildfire and Creating Defensible Space. CSFS: https://csfs.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021_CSFS_HIZGuide_Web.pdf

For additional information or for help, contact:

Colorado State Forest Service, Golden Office

**1504 Quaker Street
Golden, CO 80401-2956
(303) 279-9757, (303) 279-2011
FAX (303) 278-3899**

In order to reduce wildfire hazard in unincorporated Clear Creek County, construction of new building square footage of more than 400 square feet requires a Defensible Space Permit. Please contact the Site Development Office for more information about defensible space:

Clear Creek County Site Development Office

1111 Rose St.

Georgetown, CO 80444

303-679-2370

[Site Development Permits](#)

WILDLIFE

As Clear Creek County continues to grow and develop its vacant parcels of land, new or expanding development impacts wildlife habitat. Wild animals are often displaced by development. Some species are able to live in nearby open spaces, parks, undeveloped parcels of land, river bottoms, and on or near bodies of water. Others have adapted well to living alongside humans; skunks and raccoons, in particular, seem to thrive in and near cities.

In most situations, people and wildlife can coexist. The key is to respect the wildness of wildlife. "Wildlife" is just that—wild. Most dangerous and potentially harmful encounters occur because people fail to leave the animals alone. Wildlife should not be harassed, captured, domesticated or fed. Intentional or inadvertent feeding is the major cause of most wildlife problems, and it is illegal to feed deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, pronghorn, and elk in Colorado. Colorado Parks and Wildlife have a wealth of information and guides on how to live with wildlife and how to keep your family and pets safe from harm; [Colorado Parks & Wildlife - Living with Wildlife](#)



RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS

LIVING NEXT TO PUBLIC LANDS

For many people, having a piece of property next to public lands such as U.S. Forest or County Open Space is the fulfillment of a dream. Living next to public lands allows homeowners to enjoy the beauty of the forest, abundant wildlife, recreational opportunity, spectacular scenery, and a sense of solitude.

At the same time, it's important for property owners to understand what it means to live adjacent to public lands. Public lands are open to everyone, some lands such as US Forest lands allow for dispersed camping, dispersed shooting, hunting, and hiking. This means you could have the occasional hiker or hunters mistakenly stumble out onto your property, or you might see campers camped out just on the other side of your property line.

Other uses on forest lands can have an affect even if those lands are not immediately adjacent to yours. Dispersed shooting and Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use have been increasing on forest lands over the past several years as the Denver Front Range population has increased. Sound from these activities can carry great distances, depending on the terrain.

Some areas of forest or public lands may be closed to certain types of uses and it's best to check with the land manager to understand what is and is not permitted.

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Clear Creek County is made up of more than 75% public lands offering an unparalleled amount of outdoor recreational opportunities. Activities include back country hiking, bike trails, fishing, horseback riding, white water rafting, zip lining, adventure parks, snowshoeing, Rocky Mountain Colorado ski and snowboarding vacations, beautiful scenic drives along two Colorado Scenic Byways, and more! Visit <https://www.visitclearcreek.com/> to find out more.

MINING CLAIMS AND LAND USE RIGHTS

MINERAL VS. SURFACE RIGHTS

For some properties in Clear Creek County (mainly mining claims or tracts) an owner's rights are severed, or split into two distinct zones. This means you may own what's on the surface of the land, but not what's beneath the topsoil, or vice versa.

Surface rights specifically refer to the ownership of the surface of the land. This includes buildings, and the ability to excavate the land for certain surface improvements, such as driveways, landscaping, and the ability to dig into the land to bury underground storage tanks, such as wells or septic systems.

Land that is owned under a surface rights contract may be sold, transferred or manipulated by the owner, within the guidelines of Federal, State, and local regulations.

Dig below the surface of a property and you'll reach the zone where mineral rights take effect. Those with mineral rights ownership of land have the legal ability to explore, extract and sell naturally occurring deposits found beneath the land surface.

Both mineral and surface rights can also have co-ownership. The best way to verify what rights come with the land is to contact the Assessor's Office.

PROPERTY LINES AND PRECEDENCE

It is common for mining claims to overlap each other. The mining claim that was patented first has precedence over a preceding claim and therefore owns that overlapping portion. It should be noted that a property that has been effectively severed by a senior mining claim and contains 2 or more non-contiguous property areas has not been legally subdivided; the claim is one non-contiguous property.

USES FOR MINING PROPERTY

Most mining claims in the County are either zoned M-1 or M-2. In a nutshell M-1 zoned property allows for either residential uses or mining uses, and M-2 zoned property allows for mining uses only. All mining uses must have a state approved permit from the Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety (DRMS) and all residential uses shall be in conformance of our MR-1 (Mountain Residential – Single Family Units) zoning district.

MODERN CONVENIENCES

RIDESHARE APPS – LYFT/UBER

- Lyft & Uber can be limited in a rural county, however, Clear Creek County has its local Prospector Bus Service within the County which offers connections to Bustang in Idaho Springs and into Denver. Future expansion may include connection from Silver Plume to the RTD system in Evergreen.
- Friends and Neighbors also present an opportunity to rideshare, rural locals can get to know one another at a favorite restaurant, or getting to know one another through social media apps such as NextDoor.
- The Prospector is always looking to expand operations as ridership increases. Future possibilities include connecting service into Evergreen and the vast RTD network.

RESTAURANTS AND MICROBREW

- Say goodbye to restaurant chains scattered throughout Clear Creek County
- Clear Creek County is home to dozens of independent/family-owned restaurants, most conveniently located along the I-70 corridor.
- The County also has several microbreweries that offer a rotating selection of over a hundred varieties.
- If you're staying in, you can always order ahead for pickup at most restaurants, but home delivery, as you may imagine is very limited outside rural communities.

INTERNET/BROADBAND

- Tired of living and working in the high-rent, high-traffic east of the foothills?
- Increasingly the Clear Creek County population lives within an area that supports telecommuting.
- Obviously coverage may vary, so it's best to identify local internet service providers and contact them for coverage maps if this is an important consideration for you.

LODGING

- Clear Creek County offers several hotels, and over one hundred licensed short-term rental properties in the form of B&Bs, VRBOs and Airbnb for vacationing or getting your foot wet to experience mountain living.
- Camping is available in a number of commercial locations and available on your private property up to 30 days a year if you're looking for a mountain retreat with your own rig or tent.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS

- Currently Idaho Springs is the only known electric vehicle fueling station within Clear Creek County, so plan ahead.

