



Moffat County, Colorado

Agency

Colorado State University connects with communities across the state through the Office of Engagement and Extension. We have convened a Co-Leadership Team of collaborators from CSU Extension, Northwest Colorado Public Health Department, Northwest Colorado Health Communities That Care, Partners for Mentoring Youth, and CSU's Prevention Research Center. Together, these partners at both the state and county levels provide insights and expertise into youth prevention work and community engagement.

Mission, Vision, and Population Served

Our Mission

Our mission is to help reduce the onset and progression of substance misuse and its related problems in Moffat County by supporting the development and delivery of community substance-misuse prevention and mental health promotion services. Ultimately, we anticipate that the results of this project will be foundational for supporting community-sustained youth well-being in Moffat County. Lessons learned from this local project, in conjunction with evidence from similar projects implemented by CSU Extension and CSU's Prevention Research Center, will provide guidelines for other municipalities and counties when implementing evidence-based programs. Counties in the Northwest corner of Colorado are the geographic catchment area, with a focus on Moffat County. This particular region has indicators suggesting high levels of substance misuse among youth and a lack of overall prevention infrastructure to support local government and community organizations to address these concerns.

This project aims to strengthen the capacity and infrastructure at the regional and community levels to support the prevention of alcohol misuse among youth, including capacity and infrastructure to address behavioral health disparities and deliver evidence-based programs and promising practices that bolster emotional health and thereby prevent the onset of symptoms and complications from alcohol use and promote mental health. This project also aims to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors that may contribute to or limit the progression for alcohol misuse through evidence-based prevention programs and practices.

A Good Fit to Oversee this Project

We are a dynamic combination of colleagues who are familiar with supporting evidence-based resources that focus on Colorado youths' and families' needs. In addition, several members of our team have extensive experience completing comprehensive community needs assessments at the county and city levels. These endeavors always have involved strong partnerships between CSU campus staff and staff in the local community, as is the case in this project.

Catchment Area and Community Served

Important Demographic Details

It has been our experience in previous needs assessments, as well as research on risk and protective factors, that youth substance use is related to the following factors: children in poverty, unemployment, persons without health insurance, post-secondary education, single parenthood, truancy/dropout rates, ATOD use (alcohol/marijuana use)

Rates of relevant demographic factors in Moffat County, compared to statewide rates in Colorado

*children in poverty*¹

Moffat	13.9%
State	10.9 %

*unemployment rate*²

Moffat	3.6%
State	3.0%

*persons without health insurance*³

Moffat	10.3%
State	9.3%

*bachelor's degree*⁴

Moffat	19.4%
State	45.7%

*single parenthood*⁵

Moffat	28%
State	28%

*truancy/dropout rates*⁶

Moffat	3.4%/1.6%
State	3.6%/1.6%

*ATOD use (alcohol/marijuana use in last month)*⁷

Moffat	33.4%/18.9%
State	23.6%/13%

Grantee & Community Profile

Important Demographic Details

More generally, rural counties are seeing critical gaps in civic leadership, driven by shrinking populations and a loss of young people after high school. This finding would emphasize the importance of youth leadership development and involvement of adult mentors, particularly youth-adult partnerships.

Some comorbid adolescent and parent behaviors for which there may be data but are not demographic variables are cultural norms, levels of aggression (e.g., fights at school), depression and suicidal thinking, social norms, family conflict, and child maltreatment 3.9/1000 vs. 9.5/1000 (CO) in 2018.⁸

Unique Community Demographics

As described by Megan Stetson, Moffat County Extension Director, “Moffat County, Colorado, is demographically unique due to its high reliance on the mining/utility industry, a significantly higher White, non-Hispanic population (approx. 78-83%) compared to the state average (~65%), and a distinct, localized economic, cultural, and political identity that differs from Colorado's more urbanized regions.”

ECONOMIC DRIVERS

The county has an exceptionally high concentration of mining jobs compared to the rest of the nation (42.58 times higher), making it one of the key coal-mining hubs in Colorado.

POPULATION TRENDS

Unlike the rapid growth seen in many Colorado regions, Moffat County has experienced periods of decline (between 2000-2014) and, more recently, stagnation, linked to the volatility of the coal and mining industries.

URBAN-RURAL CONNECTIONS

As a large land area with a small population (approx. 13,000 residents), the county is highly rural, with Craig being the central population hub (pop. ~9,000). The low population density “often creates distinct challenges and opportunities for connectedness to social support, acting as both a barrier to accessing services (especially those related to mental health) and a driver of close-knit, self-reliant social networks” and community cohesion.

Other Highlights

- Known as the Elk Hunting Capital of the world
- Rural area that includes frontier and recreational areas
- Four seasons help draw in travelers all year round
- Many local families have lived in the area for many generations
- Influx of people moving from Steamboat and living in Craig for better cost of living
- Strong and growing Hispanic/Latino population, increasing bilingual services and cultural representation.

How can this uniqueness be leveraged as a protective factor?

- Deep cultural traditions can create opportunities for shared celebrations, education, and connection.
- Multigenerational families and strong social networks can reinforce belonging.
- Cultural pride and inclusivity can be leveraged to strengthen youth identity and protective factors.
- Low population density can lead to more focus on youth leadership and individualized development experiences.

Community Type:

RURAL / FRONTIER

Although it is the population center of the county, Craig is a rural community and Moffat County, at 2.8 people per square mile (2020 Census), is one of the least-densely populated frontier counties in Colorado.

Population of Focus:

YOUTH (10-19 year olds)

Youth ages 10-19 make up 13.3% of the Northwest Colorado population and are the focus for this project.

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The Community's Story

Moffat County, Colorado, established in 1911 from Routt County, is a historic ranching and mining region in the northwest corner of the state. Named after railroad tycoon David Moffat, it was opened to development by the "Moffat Road" railroad reaching Craig in 1913. Known for its rugged frontier history, it remains a center for cattle, sheep, and energy production.

Needing Additional Support

The Northwest Colorado region has indicators suggesting high levels of substance misuse among youth and a lack of overall prevention infrastructure support for local government and community organizations to address these concerns. Youth in rural areas such as Moffat County often have limited access to structured, safe, and enriching activities outside of school. Working with Northwest Colorado partners, CSU Extension aims to support local efforts to achieve two primary goals of strengthening local capacity and delivering evidence-based prevention programming for youth. Overall, self-reported use of substances by youth is higher in Northwest Colorado than state-level estimates, but the data on drinking any alcohol (34.4% vs. 23.6% statewide) and binge drinking (20% vs. 12.5% statewide) in the last 30 days are particularly striking for the Northwest region. Community partners have needed additional support to strengthen youth prevention, engagement, and behavioral health programming across Moffat County and the surrounding communities.

Historical Prevention Efforts

Grand Futures Prevention Coalition received the Drug Free Communities grant from 2003-2005, which supported their prevention work in Moffat, Routt, and Grand Counties. Grand Futures Prevention Coalition was active in Moffat County for nearly 30 years before being acquired by Partners for Youth in Routt County in 2021 (and now operating as Partners for Youth). Programming has shifted over the years, but the emphasis has always been supporting youth through mentorship, empowerment, and trusted adult engagement so that they can face life's challenges and thrive. Communities that Care (CTC) has also been active for 10 years in Moffat County.

Environmental Challenges

Wildfires in 2025 (also in nearby Rio Blanco County) affected many families firsthand, and saw the community come together to provide tremendous support to those affected. Environmental challenges affect Moffat County to a high degree, with wildfires becoming more frequent and devastating, water shortages affecting agriculture, and extreme snow precipitation (low or high) has ripple effects to wildlife that impact hunting, which is a big draw for tourism and the economy.

Energy Production and Transition

The county is historically rooted in energy production, with coal mining operations and a major coal-fired power plant nearby. However, the impending closure of coal mines and power plants has been a major topic in the past 5-10 years, as this will fundamentally alter the economy of Moffat County and reduce the number of high-paying jobs that many have been accustomed to. With them all closing, it is causing major issues with job losses and an oversupply of housing on the market.

Behavioral Health Challenges

The county has faced significant challenges, including elevated suicide rates (particularly among youth) and serious traffic-related tragedies. In one analysis of suicide rates, Moffat County was cited at 68.2 per 100,000 people, compared to the state average of approximately 20 per 100,000.

Rural Roots and Open Spaces

Craig serves as the commercial and industrial hub of Northwest Colorado, while the community is generally considered a big agriculture/farming community. Being surrounded by Routt and White River National Forests and nearly 2 million acres of BLM land, there is a strong and supportive outdoor recreation culture.

Community Support

In times of crisis, the community consistently rallies together to support impacted families. Ongoing volunteer-led efforts supporting families during crises (meal trains, household support, fundraising).

Educational Progress

Recently, Moffat County High School's four-year graduation rate increased from 76% (2022-23) to 89.9% (2024-25), a 13%+ gain.

Commuting Workforce

Many parents have to commute outside of Craig for work each day, commuting 2 hours per day, which takes away from family time and makes scheduling appointments during the week difficult.

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Popular Public Sector and Grassroots Initiatives in the Community

- The community fears the closure of coal mines and power plants in Moffat County. There's also significant energy towards identifying what the future of Moffat County could look like after this happens.
- Plans to build a Craig Sports Center
- Yampa River Corridor Project
- The Craig Skatepark Alliance
- Grassroots efforts for suicide prevention
- NW Colorado Alliance – Regional collaboration focused on prevention and community wellbeing.
- Northwest Colorado Survivor Services
- Collaboration of youth-serving organizations to support prevention efforts, including Northwest Colorado Health's CTC, Youth Resiliency, Safe Care, and NFP along with Partners for Youth, Diversion, Boys and Girls Club of Northwest Colorado.
- Initiatives are heavily focused on economic diversification, energy transition, and enhancing outdoor recreation as the region shifts away from a coal-dependent economy.
- Key efforts for 2025–2026 include developing the Multi-Use Events and Resiliency Center, upgrading public infrastructure, and expanding tourism.

Environmental Challenges and Economic Impact

The Jack Springs fire burned about 120 acres in August 2025; the Twelve Fire in the same month burned over 1,000 acres and the Big Gulch fire burned over 1,160 acres in 2024. There have not been any recent tornadoes. As far as factory layoffs, the imminent closure of the Colowyo Coal Company and the Craig Station coal-burning power plant in Moffat County is a significant event for the region. The Colowyo Mine, which has been operational since 1978 planned layoffs beginning in January 1, 2026, leading to the loss of over 130 jobs. An initial closure date of the first of three coal-burning power plants in Moffat County was extended by the Department of Energy to address emergency needs. The two other Craig Station coal-burning power plants are set to close by 2028. These closures linger as substantial impacts on the local economy, with the loss of jobs and a reduction in property tax revenues.⁹

Strengths and Challenges of the Community

A 2023 Yampa Valley Behavioral Health Landscape Scan that collected data from 69 youth “highlighted a general lack of mental health support in the community at large and within school settings. Young people described barriers and challenges to achieving mental wellness” such as stigma, limited confidentiality, exposure to bullying, unsupportive parents and caregivers, and limited availability of safe, fun and free/affordable activities.

STRENGTHS

- Many Moffat County families have lived in the area for generations and have both love and pride for their community.
- A caring community is seen as nonprofits work well together and people are always trying to find ways to better our community.
- There is a strong culture of mutual aid; community members have a deep sense of personal responsibility to show up for neighbors in times of need.
- The rural setting fosters close relationships and strong social connectedness—everyone knows everyone.
- High community engagement during crises and major initiatives shows connection and commitment to neighbors.

CHALLENGES

- Finances
- Childcare
- Transportation
- Housing
- High cost of living
- Overall opportunities
- Limited infrastructure and recreational opportunities as population grows
- Continued difficulty passing funding measures (e.g., recreation center)
- Long, harsh winters limit youth activities and safe indoor spaces
- Youth consistently report needing more structured activities and places to gather
- Geographic isolation limits access to services and specialized resources
- Everyone knows everyone, so drama can often affect people's ability to participate in things or cause spreading of misinformation

SPF - PFS Project Overview

The SPF-PFS Northwest project aims to uphold existing efforts while supporting the growth of new efforts for youth substance abuse prevention in Moffat County. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to develop sustainable community efforts and strengthen coalition work. A key component of ensuring the sustainability of this project is to consistently collaborate with the local Communities that Care (CTC) Coalition members and youth voices to ensure support for existing efforts and development of new efforts are reflective of the community's needs.

Beyond strengthening the ongoing work of the CTC, this project supports local youth-serving organizations through mini-grants and technical assistance in order to strengthen the protective factors seen through youth building coping skills, practicing healthy decision making, and developing supportive peer connections. These mini-grants are aimed at supporting temporary capacity-building efforts while promoting existing efforts. Local nonprofits often face challenges in funding, staffing, and general program capacity. By partnering with these organizations with "easy wins" in supporting mini-grant projects, we hope to encourage those staff and community members who are involved in the frontline work of reducing risk factors for youth in Moffat County and Northwest Colorado.

In addition to collaboration and technical support for ongoing work, this project aims to strengthen a framework for evidence-based training and programming for prevention of youths' risk-taking and problem behaviors. A key to supporting this outcome is upholding partnerships across Northwest Colorado while catalyzing the expertise of prevention specialists. This project will help to connect practitioners and community members to resources in prevention science while assisting in the training and capacity building necessary to educate and inform key influencers of youth flourishing—educators, parents, caretakers, and mentors. This equipping will include trainings in assessing risk and protective factors, training in facilitating challenging conversations around youth substance misuse, engagement with trusted adults to address root cause issues, and developing skills for Family, School, and Community Partnerships.

What the Community Wants to See in Moffat County 5 Years from Now

The following points are common themes of insights gathered from community members and staff of local health agencies.

- Youth in Moffat County are making healthier choices, with significantly reduced rates of alcohol and drug use and greater access to safe, supportive spaces that keep them engaged and connected.
- Families experience stability and opportunity, with strong local employment, affordable housing, and reduced food insecurity, fostering a deep sense of belonging and connection within the community.
- Young people choose to stay in or return to Moffat County because it offers a thriving, welcoming environment with meaningful opportunities to build their lives and raise families.
- A strong network of schools, programs, and community organizations works seamlessly together to support youth and families, ensuring no one falls through the cracks.
- Expanded youth programs and new community assets (like a new recreation center) provide year-round opportunities for connection, wellness, and growth.
- A diversified and growing local economy includes small businesses and expanded amenities—making Moffat County an attractive place to live, work, and invest.
- Schools demonstrate improved academic outcomes and graduation rates, reflecting a community-wide commitment to student success.
- Community life is vibrant and inclusive. Diverse cultural events and shared spaces strengthen belonging for all residents.
- Mental health is openly supported and prioritized. As a result, there is dramatic reduction in suicide rates and overall improved well-being for both youth and adults.
- The natural environment remains a source of pride and vitality, with healthy ecosystems, abundant wildlife, and strong seasonal recreation opportunities enhancing quality of life.

With Gratitude to Our Partners

NORTHWEST COLORADO
HEALTH



PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment



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MOFFAT COUNTY EXTENSION

Endnotes:

1,2,3,4,5 - From National Census Bureau data, 2020. https://data.census.gov/profile/Moffat_County,_Colorado?g=050XX00US08081

6 - See Healthy Kids Colorado Survey data, 2023. <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/hkcs>. Data supplied by Healthy Kids Colorado is descriptive of the Northwest Region, not the constituent counties. Regional averages were used for alcohol and marijuana use (e.g., Percentage of students who had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days). Research by the Prevention Research Center has demonstrated similarities in counties included in regional rates. Attendance statistics were from the Colorado Department of Education. <https://ed.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/attendancestatistics>

7 - See Healthy Kids Colorado Survey data, 2023. <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/hkcs>. State-level rates were cross-checked with the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics. <https://drugabusestatistics.org/teen-drug-use/#colorado>

8 - From HDFS 610 Risk and Resilience graduate course that MacPhee teaches; opioid abatement funds for needs assessments in multiple regions conducted by CSU's Prevention Research Center; multiple online sources such as Census Bureau and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

9 - The ongoing environmental policy changes and the closure/retirement of the ColoWyo Mine and Craig Station are reported by local news sources and the Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association. See press releases and news stories from Tri-State, the Steamboat Pilot, and Colorado Politics. <https://tristate.coop/tri-state-makes-craig-generating-station-unit-1-available-operate-compliance-doe-emergency-order>; <https://www.steamboatpilot.com/news/trump-administration-orders-coal-plant-in-northwest-colorado-to-remain-open-one-day-before-scheduled-closure/>; <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2025/11/28/colowyo-coal-mine-near-craig-lays-off-133-workers-as-mine-closes/>