

BOX BUTTE COUNTY

Comprehensive Plan 2025 Update



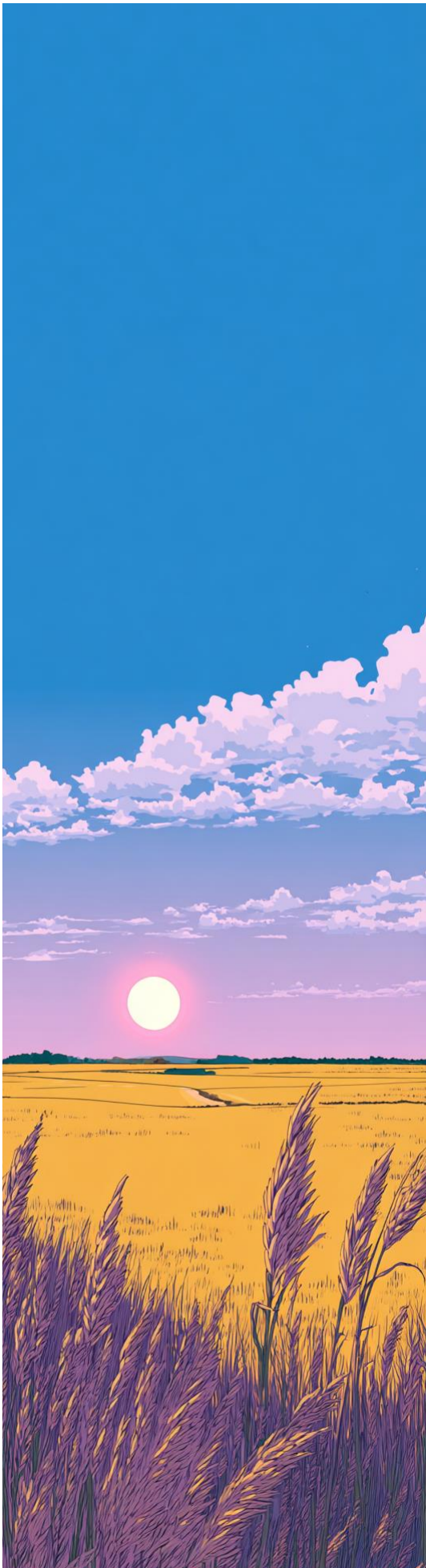


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BOX BUTTE COUNTY REDEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

June 2025

THANK YOU!

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The primary purpose for the development of a comprehensive plan is to provide basic guidelines and policies for use by public officials and the private sector whose decisions may affect existing and/or future uses of the land and resources within the planning area. This document is intended to promote orderly growth and development within Box Butte County, as well as to provide guidelines for directing physical growth and change.

SCOPE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The intended scope of the plan is to provide a general analysis of the needs of Box Butte County and its residents, particularly as they relate to existing and future uses of the land. In doing so, the plan evaluates past trends in several subject areas and attempts to project in what manner changes will occur several years into the future. Primary emphasis is placed upon how these trends might impact physical growth and development within the county and the identification of policies needed to direct that change.

Although this study is a comprehensive plan dealing primarily with issues in the unincorporated areas of Box Butte County, it recognizes that both existing and future activities within the Village of Hemingford and City of Alliance will directly, or indirectly, cause change to occur within rural areas of the County. The conclusions drawn in this study attempt to incorporate these potential impacts and reflect the need for intergovernmental cooperation.



THE LEGAL ROLE

Nebraska counties are required to adopt a comprehensive plan if they intend to utilize zoning or subdivision regulations to control physical development within the county. This requirement is based upon the premise that land use decisions should not be arbitrary but follow a planned land development concept.

At a minimum this land development concept, according to state statutes, must include:

- A land use element which designates the proposed general distributions and location for uses of land for agriculture, housing commerce, industry, recreation, education, and public buildings and land.
- The general location, character and extent of existing and proposed major roads, streets, highways, and air and other transportation facilities.
- The general location, type, capacity and area of present and projected or needed community facilities include recreation facilities, schools, libraries, other public buildings, and public utilities and services.
- The future land development concept must be based upon documented population and economic projections.

GOVERNMENTAL AND JURISDICTIONAL ORGANIZATION

This plan was prepared under the direction of the Box Butte County Planning Commission and the zoning department, with the assistance and participation of the Box Butte County Board of Commissioners and the citizens of Box Butte County.

The Box Butte County Board of Commissioners is a board of elected officials and performs the governmental functions for the County. Each incorporated Box Butte County community has elected officials and officers that oversee how their community develops and maintain compliance with local and state regulations.



The planning and zoning jurisdiction of Box Butte County, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. section 23-114 includes all the unincorporated portions of the County, excluding the established extraterritorial jurisdiction of each incorporated city or village.

There are two incorporated communities in Box Butte County – Alliance and Hemingford. Both communities have adopted comprehensive planning and zoning ordinances. Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. section 17-1002, Hemingford has planning and zoning jurisdiction over one mile of their corporate limits. Alliance has planning and zoning jurisdiction up to two miles of their corporate limits. As these communities grow and annex land into their corporate limits, their extraterritorial jurisdiction may extend further into the County.

PLANNING APPROACH

The Box Butte County Comprehensive Planning process actively engages the community through public workshops, surveys for both children and adults, and website comments to gather input and build consensus. Transparency is essential to keep the community informed and involved throughout the process.

A crucial component of this process is information gathering, which involves collecting and analyzing data on current conditions, including the community profile, economic development, environment, housing, land use, infrastructure, transportation, and energy. Additionally, trends and projections are analyzed to forecast future needs and challenges. This data, combined with community feedback, informs a clear vision statement. Specific goals and supporting strategies are then established to guide policy and decision-making.

Ensuring that zoning regulations and other ordinances align with the comprehensive plan and remain compliant with state and federal laws is vital. The outcome of the comprehensive planning process is the creation of a tool that effectively guides the County's growth and development while reflecting the community's values and needs.

To make this plan an easily usable tool each section has been synthesized into a development plan that contains an overall summary, a brief review of existing conditions and future projections, followed by goals and strategies that were informed by the existing conditions and future projections.

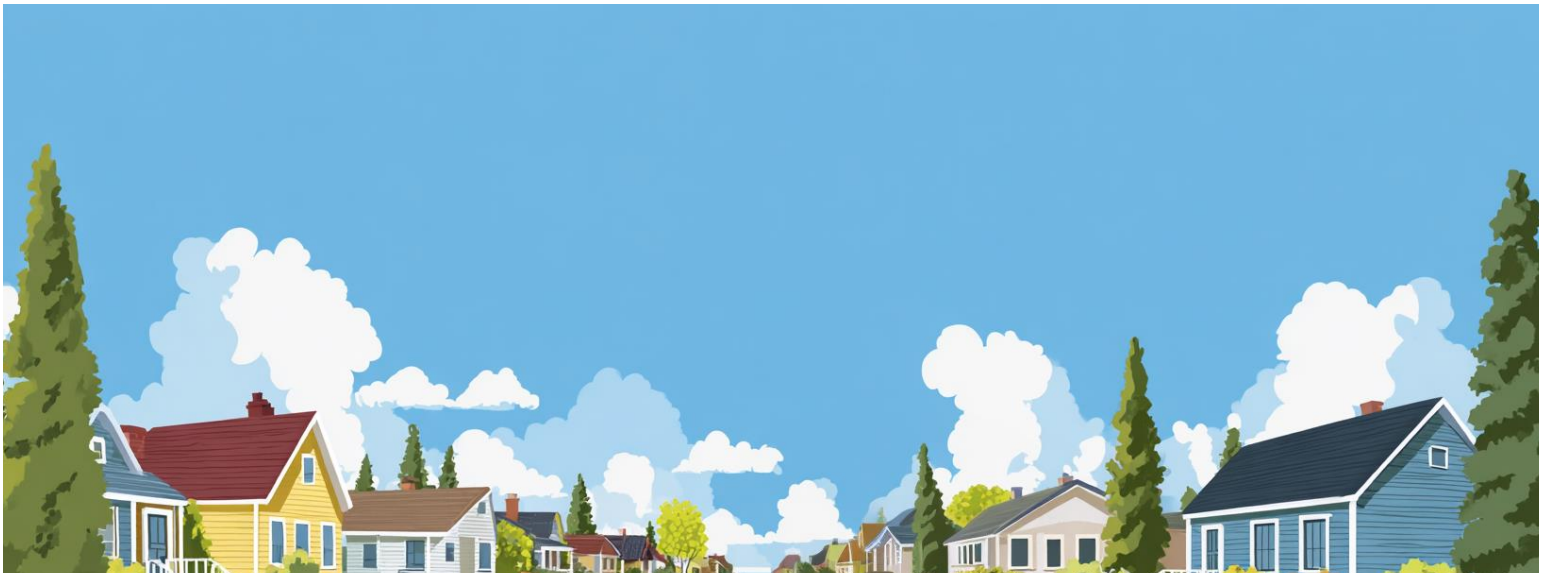


DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This section of the plan contains a series of recommended goals and supporting strategies that are based upon the information gathered and evaluated during the preparation of this report. The goals and strategies are intended to provide guidance to the County in the preparation and implementation of land use controls and development projects.

The section begins with a presentation of overall development goals which are, by necessity, broad and general in nature. The goals reflect the desires and aspirations of the County by describing basic concepts which should be used to guide future development. Objectives are provided that coincide with each section of the Comprehensive Plan. The objectives recommend specific actions and development programs addressing each topic. Policy statements are then provided which offer specific guidance and direction for the formulation of future land use and development controls.

While an update was needed to align the County's goals with the current economic and social landscape, many of the County's previous goals from the 2001 Comprehensive Plan remain just as important today as when they were initially identified. These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.



KEY PLANNING GOALS

The list below represents the key goals derived from the 2025 Community Survey, workshops, and previous County policies. These goals informed the goals and strategies presented in the Development Plan.

- **Economic Growth:** Diversify the economy and create jobs that enhance and support agriculture and the railroad.
- **Infrastructure & Housing:** Enhance roads, utilities, and housing to support growth.
- **Education & Youth:** Improve educational resources and opportunities for youth.
- **Tax Relief:** Continue to use public funds efficiently.
- **Community Amenities:** Enhance public spaces and family-friendly activities.
- **Efficient Growth:** Ensure orderly and efficient growth of residential, commercial, industrial and public land uses to maintain, improve and protect the general welfare of the residents of Box Butte County (★).
- **Protect Natural Resources:** Protect and conserve the unique natural and physical resource base of the County (★).
- **County Improvements:** Maintain and improve the County by undertaking improvements that will provide a high-quality living and working environment (★).
- **Balanced Economy:** Foster a strong balanced economy capable of ensuring the economic future of all residents (★).
- **Distribution of Land Use Activities:** Achieve safety, convenience and economic efficiency through the wise distribution of land use activities (★).
- **Encourage Cooperation:** Encourage cooperation, communication and coordinated efforts between the County, other local governments, and the public to improve the manner in which the County's natural, human, and economic resources are managed and developed (★).

LAND USE

SUMMARY

Land use refers to the kind of activity for which any given parcel of land is being utilized. Since existing land use conditions and activities exert a strong influence on the location of future development it is necessary that a detailed land use survey be completed. Analysis including location, size, and characteristics is vital to understanding patterns of development, both past, present, and future. This analysis is the first step in determining the need for future land use and transportation needs. It also assists in the formulation of workable zoning regulations to protect existing land uses and promote desired future land uses.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Evaluation of the existing land uses in Box Butte County required a land use survey to be undertaken. The evaluation included a visual overview using recent color aerial photography, Box Butte County GIS, and review of stakeholders during the planning process. The Existing Land Use Map Figure 1 shows the existing land uses. The majority of the land uses in Box Butte County is Agricultural with concentrations of residential and commercial in Hemingford and Alliance.

Agricultural

The predominant use of land in Box Butte County, is agricultural as noted on Figure 1 with significant land masses identified as grassland and cropland. Agricultural land includes land used for dryland crop production, irrigated crop production, grassland, and other related uses. It also includes uses that might be deemed as heavy commercial agricultural uses such as confined feeding operations.



Rural Residential

As shown in Figure 3, you can see a small percent of the land in the County is residential in nature. Much of the residential uses are on farms or acreages. These include rural subdivisions, rural farm homes and non-farm rural residences not located within the rural residential subdivisions.

Commercial

Commercial land uses include locations and buildings where products or services are sold and exchanged including traveler services such as motels and gas, as well as all other forms of retail establishments. There is a limited number of commercial uses outside the municipalities.

Industrial

Industrial uses include land and buildings where uses involve the application of labor or materials to produce a product that is normally not sold to the ultimate consumer on the premises. This includes types of businesses that may create offensive odor, noise, visually unappealing aesthetics, etc. Such as rail car repair facilities, junk yards, salvage yards, appliance waste dumps, grain elevators, etc.

The existing land use pattern in the rural portions of the County should have implications with the development of land uses in the future. There should be a place for each type of development within the rural portions of Box Butte County. But locating these uses should be extensively evaluated. If Box Butte County encourages development within the rural areas of the County, it will be imperative to formulate a Future Land Use Plan and Zoning Regulations that effectively balance development and minimize conflicting land uses.

LAND USE CONFLICTS

Land use conflicts occur when mixed land use classifications are allowed to develop without adequate consideration being given to the potential impacts that may take place. These conflicts arise due to the location of particular types of land use in relationship to both the natural and human environments.



Potential negative impacts can include health & safety hazards, noise, loss of economic potential, unpleasant odors, excess traffic and potential decreases in property value. Although few land use conflicts are readily apparent in Box Butte County, they do exist as described below:

Farmland Conflicts

The primary land use conflicts occurring in rural areas of the County consist of more intense urban land uses such as residential, commercial and industrial facilities occupying farmland. Farmland, and particularly those soil types that qualify as prime farmland, are an important economic resource for the County and should be preserved as much as possible.

A second potential conflict related to farmland conversion to urban uses is the practice of selling pivot corners for residential development. Although selling unproductive farm ground can be desirable for the landowner and the buyer who wants a more rural lifestyle, some undesirable results can follow. These include potential weed management issues, agricultural over-spraying onto residential properties and safety issues resulting from traffic increases on gravel and dirt roads.

A third land use conflict relating to farm ground is the practice of cultivating and planting crops in county road right-of-way. Two hazards can arise from this practice. One is the planting of taller crops that restrict vision at road intersections. The second is eliminating or reducing the capacity of ditches to drain the roadbed. This results in freeze-thaw cycles that reduce the carrying capacity of the road base, restricts the ability of the road surface to shed water, and in some cases results in runoff from adjacent land cutting streams across the roadbed.

Residential Subdivision Conflicts

Two conflicts arise in rural areas if residential subdivisions are not carefully planned and located. The first conflict can be the addition of substantial traffic on roads not constructed to accommodate this type of traffic volume. Subdivisions constructed in rural areas often create a situation where the road providing access to the development must be improved by the County to ensure adequate maintenance levels or to avoid liability issues.

The second conflict is environmental in nature, especially where residential lots may not have been designed with enough land to accommodate both septic systems and water wells.

Intensive Agriculture Conflicts

Land use conflicts also arise from the location of intensive agricultural uses, such as feedlots, when located in close proximity to residential and urban areas, or vice-versa.

Heavy Commercial or Industrial Conflicts

The primary conflicts in Box Butte County that are of a heavy commercial or industrial nature include salvage yard and junk yard locations in relationship to residential developments and primary transportation corridors. Conflicts arise from these land uses due to physical aesthetics. Salvage/junk

yards, located adjacent to primary thoroughfares in the County can present a negative image in terms of marketing the area to prospective new businesses and residents. These same uses located too close to residential subdivisions, or vice-versa, can create nuisance issues related to appearance. Property value decreases and legal issues may also result from the improper location of these land uses.

FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Agricultural uses will continue to be a primary land use in Box Butte County. Prime farmland should be protected because of its economic and resource generating properties. Whenever possible, commercial and residential development should be encouraged in the incorporated areas to preserve agricultural land and maximize the use of existing utilities.

Figure 4 shows Box Butte County's Future Land Use Map. As such, the following Goals and Strategies should be considered for future development.

LAND USE GOALS & STRATEGIES

These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.

LU1: Update Zoning Regulations to Align with the Future Land Use Map

- Conduct a comprehensive review of current zoning regulations to identify discrepancies with the comprehensive plan.
- Establish a periodic review cycle for zoning regulations to ensure alignment with updated land use maps.

LU2: Eliminate Nonconforming Uses and Enforce Conformity with Zoning Regulations

- Develop a process to monitor and address nonconforming uses as changes occur.

LU3: Ensure Rural Residential Subdivisions Meet Environmental Standards

- Establish clear environmental benchmarks for lot size and land use in rural residential areas.
- Conduct routine inspections and environmental impact reviews for new rural subdivisions.

LU4: Encourage Development Within Incorporated Communities

- Offer incentives to developers focusing on commercial and residential projects in these areas.
- Collaborate with community planners to identify and promote prime development locations.

LU5: Preserve Farmland, Especially Prime Farmland, for Agricultural Use (★)

- Implement policies restricting farmland conversion to non-farm uses unless necessary.
- Promote initiatives that highlight the economic value of maintaining agricultural land for the county.

LU6: Develop Policies to Address and Prevent Land Use Conflicts (★)

- Establish comprehensive development policies that address rural residences, transportation corridors, feedlots, salvage yards, and junk yards.

- Conduct impact assessments for new developments to anticipate and mitigate conflicts before approval.

LU7: Protect Flood Hazard Areas from Development Impacts (★)

- Enforce regulations prohibiting development that alters flood elevations or impacts flood hazard zones.
- Educate developers and property owners about the importance of maintaining floodplain integrity.

LU8: Address Environmental and Health Concerns in Rural Residential Areas (★)

- Require environmental reviews to identify areas with potential septic system and water well conflicts, such as Berea and Rainbow Acres.
- Develop remediation plans for existing concerns and enforce stricter standards for new developments.

LU9: Support Growth Within Incorporated Communities While Providing Rural Development Opportunities (★)

- Allocate adequate land within community zoning jurisdictions for future growth needs.
- Identify appropriate rural locations for development to diversify opportunities and avoid overconcentration.

LU10: Minimize Safety Hazards and Maintenance Costs from Agricultural Use of County Road Right-Of-Way (★)

- Enforce regulations to restrict agricultural activities within road right-of-way areas.
- Promote alternative practices that balance agricultural needs with road safety and maintenance.

LU11: Address Weed Management and other Nuisance Concerns in Rural Residential Areas (★)

- Develop weed control policies and monitor systems for rural residential areas.
- Collaborate with agricultural producers to create joint weed management programs.
- Consider prairie dog remediation planning.

LU12: Balance Pivot Corner Sales with Agricultural Practices (★)

- Assess the impact of residential development on pivot corners to ensure it does not hinder farming practices like aerial spraying.
- Encourage collaborative solutions that benefit both farmers and developers economically.

LU13: Improve Aesthetics and Setbacks for Developments on Primary Thoroughfares (★)

- Require screening and proper setbacks for feedlots, salvage yards, and other developments along major roads.
- Integrate design guidelines that align with the county's goals of attracting new businesses and residents.

LU14: Address Safety Concerns Created by Shelter Belts Near Roadways (★)

- Regulate the distance of shelterbelt planting from roadways to prevent moisture-related hazards.
- Educate property owners on safe shelterbelt planting practices to enhance roadway safety.

POPULATION / DEMOGRAPHICS

Box Butte County's population dynamics are influenced by natural change and net migration, with significant shifts observed over the decades. The 1960s saw high out-migration, while the 1970s experienced economic-driven in-migration, particularly among young adults, leading to increased births in subsequent years.

Box Butte County's population has been moderately stable but trending toward decline over the past 30 years, with a peak in 1980 at 13,696 and a decrease to 10,842 in 2020. Alliance and Hemingford account for 82% of the County's population. The decline is less severe compared to other counties in Western Nebraska, partly due to the presence of BNSF Railway's Powder River Basin Hub.

The median age in the County is 40.9, higher than Nebraska's median age of 37.4, with more men (5,486) than women (5,292). The largest age cohort in 2022 was the 60-65-year group, representing 22% of the population. Significant outmigration has occurred in the 20-24 and 35-39 age cohorts, while there is a promising return rate in the 25-29 and 30-34 age cohorts.

To reverse the population decline, the County needs to focus on offering diverse housing options and creating job opportunities, addressing issues such as declining birth rates, an aging population, and youth out-migration. By doing so, Box Butte County can foster a thriving community and attract new residents.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS:

- Historically, Box Butte County's population has been susceptible to dramatic fluctuations due to its dependence upon a limited number of base industries. Box Butte County's population dynamics are continuing to change as a result of growth in the railroad industry.
- Factors such as declining birth rates, an aging population structure and youth out-migration are, and will continue to, impact the County's population.



- As the County's Baby Boom, Generation X, and the Millennial generations grow older the structure of the County's population will change dramatically. Decreases in the number of school age residents will occur. Significant reductions in young adult age groups (20-39) will occur while large increases in the number of more established residents (40-64 years of age) will occur.
- The number of retirement age individuals will begin to increase rapidly during the next two decades. New and different demands for housing and services will result from this increase in elderly residents.
- High out-migration rates for young adults are expected to continue as they move away for college and more diverse employment opportunities.
- Based upon the distribution of the population by age slight decreases in household size can be expected.
- The burden upon the primary education system should decrease, in terms of space requirements, as the number of youth declines.

Additional Demographic information can be found in the Appendix: Population Change Components



ENVIRONMENT

SUMMARY

The relationship of the natural environment to land use and future development is an important factor to consider while making decisions concerning potential uses of the land. As an understanding has grown about the complexity of relationships between human settlement and the natural environment, conflicts between social and economic forces and the capability of the environment to support development have become more apparent. As a preliminary step in addressing these conflicts and providing guidance for future decision making, this Comprehensive Plan provides a brief overview of the County's natural environment In Appendix: Environmental Attributes.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Climate: Box Butte County has a semi-arid climate influenced by the Rocky Mountains and the Black Hills, with extreme temperature variations and relatively low humidity. The mean annual temperature is around 47°F, with average temperatures ranging from 17°F in winter to 83°F in summer. The county receives approximately 17 inches of annual precipitation, mostly between April and September, and averages 41 inches of seasonal snowfall. Future projections indicate rising temperatures, more days above 100°F, shifts in precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events.

Groundwater: The County relies heavily on the Ogallala Aquifer for water supply, with significant groundwater resources in various geological formations. Sustainable management practices are crucial to ensure long-term availability, including monitoring, conservation, recharge projects, and public education.

Endangered Species: Box Butte County is home to several endangered species, including the Whooping Crane, Interior Least Tern, Piping Plover, and American Burying Beetle. Conservation efforts focus on habitat preservation, reintroduction programs, and public education, supported by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project.



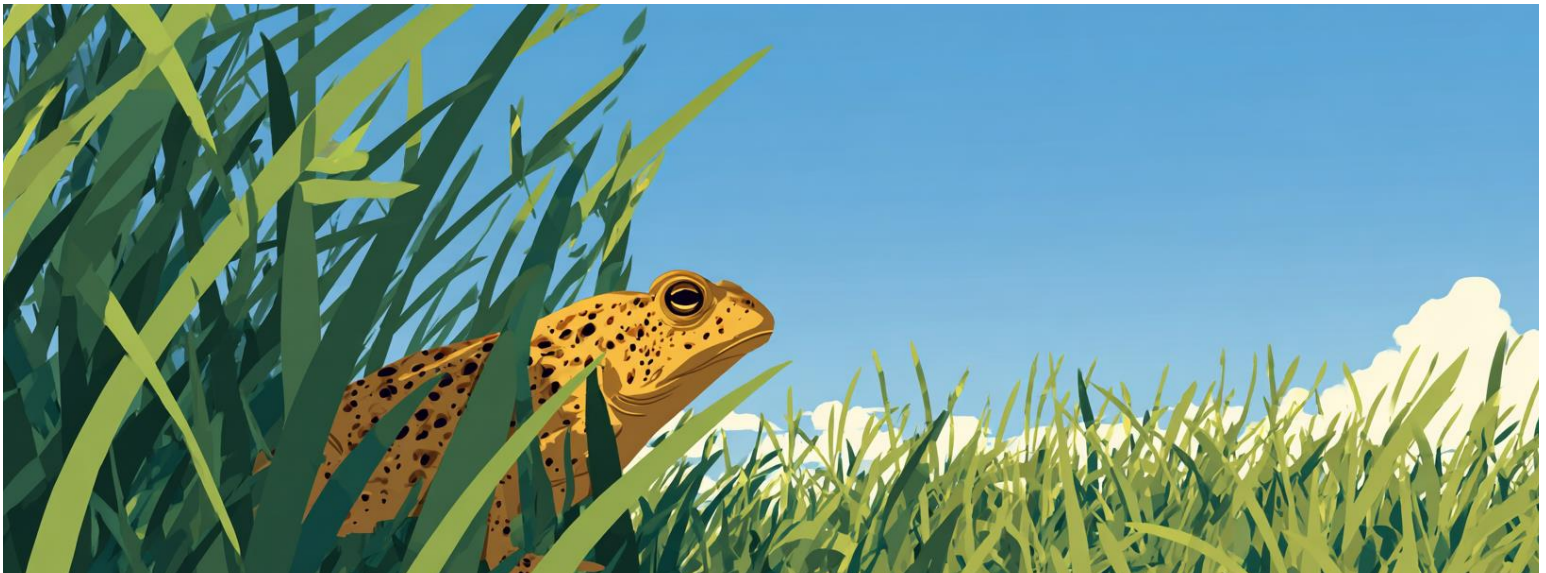
Floodplains: Floodplains are primarily located in southeast Box Butte County. Although large flood events are rare, significant floods have occurred, prompting active floodplain management and collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources to mitigate risks and protect the community.

Soils: The county's soils, derived from the Ogallala Formation, are fertile and well-drained, supporting diverse crops. Sustainable farming practices are essential to maintain soil health and prevent erosion. Future considerations include addressing groundwater depletion, soil erosion, and adapting to climate changes.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Key issues for citizens include drought, wildfire, high winds, extreme heat, hazardous materials incidents, and power outages. Residents also worry about poor air and water quality due to industrial activities, dust, and drought, which impact respiratory health. There are calls for better emergency preparedness, including effective shelter notifications, community outreach, and real-time alert systems.

Youth perspectives emphasize water conservation, improved water treatment, and protecting natural water sources. They suggest community action, education campaigns, and creating clean recreational spaces.



ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS & STRATEGIES

These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.

EV1: Enhance Disaster Preparedness and Response

- Improve plans and resources for drought, wildfire, high winds, extreme heat, and hazardous materials incidents.

EV2: Strengthen Infrastructure and Community Resilience

- Upgrade infrastructure to withstand environmental hazards and ensure reliable water pressure and power supply.

EV3: Promote Environmental Resiliency

- Consider water conservation and efficient irrigation measures to address drought and water scarcity.

EV4: Improve Public Safety and Health

- Support measures for hazardous materials, railroad incidents, and wildlife hazards; address rising crime and homelessness.

EV5: Develop Comprehensive Community Support Programs

- Aid support programs for food security, housing, and emergency response, ensuring community well-being.

EV6: Discourage Development in Flood-Prone Areas (★)

- Implement zoning regulations to restrict construction in flood-prone zones.
- Promote the use of floodplain maps and risk assessments in planning decisions. (Reference NEDNR floodplain map)

EV7: Promote Sustainable Land Use and Development (★)

- Encourage in-fill development within existing subdivisions and communities to protect prime farmland.
- Preserve high-quality natural and scenic areas through conservation policies.
- Monitor and regulate developments to protect groundwater quality.

EV8: Address Soil and Erosion Challenges (★)

- Require special design considerations for foundations and septic systems in problematic soil areas.
- Encourage the establishment of windbreaks, shelter belts, and ground cover techniques to combat erosion.

EV9: Ensure Adequate Water Resources and Quality (★)

- Maintain and protect existing water resources to support future growth.
- Develop policies to minimize runoff of contaminants into drainageways and surface water.

EV10: Enhance Wildlife Habitat and Recreation Areas (★)

- Establish additional wildlife habitats and public outdoor recreation areas.
- Implement distance separation buffers to minimize conflicts between land uses.

ECONOMY

SUMMARY

The county's economic health is tied to its primary industries, with data collected to understand market changes, employment needs, and opportunities. Nebraska has recovered well from recent economic downturns, but rural counties like Box Butte struggle to maintain a younger workforce. This comprehensive plan highlights the need for continued economic diversification and development to ensure a balanced and stable economy, leveraging its agricultural strengths and strategic transportation initiatives.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Household Income

Box Butte County's median household income increased from \$51,691 in 2015 to \$67,893 in 2022, though it remains lower than the state average of \$74,590. The county has the highest median household income in the Panhandle region.

Poverty

The poverty rate in Box Butte County has declined from 17% in 2015 to 12% in 2022, though it is still higher than the state average of 10.5%.

Education

Only 18% of Box Butte County residents have a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the Nebraska average of 35%. School enrollment has remained relatively stable.

Employment by Industry

The county's labor force is diverse, with significant employment in educational services, health care, transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing. The presence of Burlington Northern Santa Fe's railyard in Alliance contributes to the local economy.



Labor Force and Unemployment

The civilian labor force has decreased by about 6% from 2015 to 2022, mirroring population loss. The number of employed individuals has remained relatively stable.

Commuter Analysis

Most residents work within the county, with an average commute time of around 10 minutes. Approximately 77% of workers travel alone, and 9% work from home.

Agricultural Profile

Agriculture is a significant part of the county's economy, with 437 farms covering 685,555 acres.

One key opportunity to economic diversification and growth in Box Butte County is the construction of the Heartland Expressway Corridor. Future land use and transportation planning should nurture the development of the corridor. Box Butte County should consider mechanisms to help fund and plan for the development of the Expressway.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The community indicated a desire for economic diversification, improved infrastructure, agricultural support, and better housing in Box Butte County.

ECONOMIC GOALS & STRATEGIES

These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.

EC1: Enhance Consumer Satisfaction

- Conduct surveys to identify community preferences for businesses.
- Incentivize the development of quality retail stores, entertainment venues, and restaurants.
- Foster collaboration between local and national businesses to adapt offerings.

EC2: Strengthen Agricultural Support

- Upgrade and maintain county roads and transportation infrastructure.
- Support water management, generational farming, education, and broadband programs.
- Support programs that raise public awareness of agricultural products and their importance.

EC3: Promote Economic Diversification

- Attract diverse industries like manufacturing and small businesses.
- Support programs that create higher-paying jobs in varied sectors.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to explore economic opportunities beyond agriculture and railroads.

EC4: Address Housing Needs

- Support for incentivizing maintenance and improvement of existing properties.
- Encourage initiatives for developing affordable housing.

EC5: Attract Higher-Paying Employment Opportunities (★)

- Develop targeted initiatives and incentives to attract industries offering competitive wages.
- Market the county's resources and strengths to potential employers.

EC6: Retain Local Talent (★)

- Partner with educational institutions to create local internship and apprenticeship programs.
- Foster connections between local businesses and schools to create in-county job opportunities.

EC7: Strengthen the Local Labor Pool (★)

- Support training and retraining programs aligned with current and emerging industry needs.
- Collaborate with businesses to ensure workforce skills meet demand.

EC8: Diversify the Economic Base (★)

- Actively recruit businesses in industries outside agriculture and transportation.
- Provide incentives for startups and small businesses in diverse sectors.

EC9: Sustain Employment Growth (★)

- Attract industries with potential for steady job creation.
- Explore regional partnerships to support ongoing employment initiatives.

EC10: Support Agriculture (★)

- Create secondary employment opportunities for aging farm operators.
- Invest in marketing strategies for agricultural products and explore niche markets.

EC11: Address Retail Leakage (★)

- Identify and address gaps in retail offerings to encourage local spending.
- Support local businesses with marketing and development initiatives.

EC12: Secure Funding Resources for Economic Growth (★)

- Utilize grant-writing initiatives to access state and federal funding.



HOUSING

SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Plan 2025 for Box Butte County focuses on housing, analyzing existing characteristics and projected needs. The analysis aims to ensure safe, decent, sanitary, and affordable housing for all residents. The housing profile uses data from the American Community Survey (2019-2023) to assess owner-occupied, renter-occupied, and vacant units, and examines housing costs to identify financial burdens.

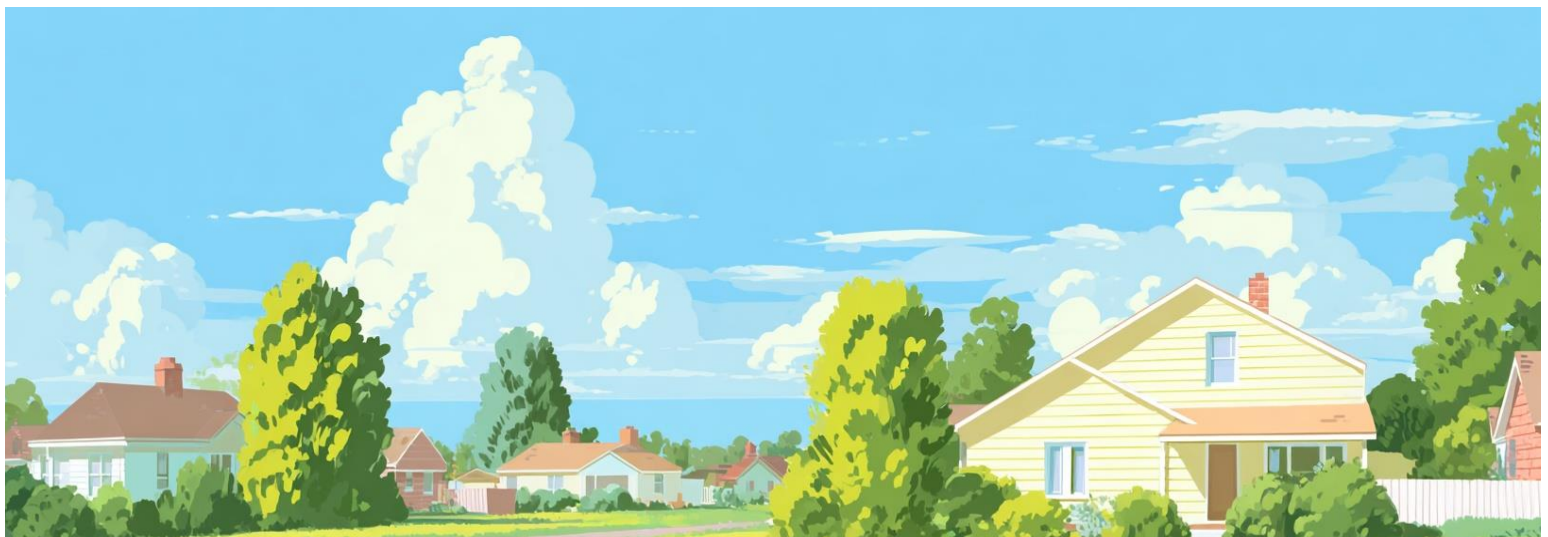
EXISTING CONDITIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

The county has 5,222 housing units, with 4,537 occupied. A significant portion of the housing stock is old, with 25.3% built before 1940, indicating potential needs for rehabilitation. There has been a decline in new construction since 2010, despite low mortgage rates, likely due to a shortage of contractors among other factors.

Housing trends show a decrease in population and occupied units, with a notable decline in rental opportunities. Median contract rent and gross rent have increased, outpacing inflation, while median renter income has risen significantly. Additional housing statistics can be found in the Appendix: Housing Profile Report.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Feedback from the community indicated the need for more options for renters, young families, and seniors. Communities should offer a mix of housing types, including small homes, apartments, and affordable rentals, to suit various family sizes, income levels, and life stages. Expanding the city, developing unused land, and renovating old homes can provide more housing for new and existing residents. Community involvement, such as fundraisers, donations, zoning changes, and incentives for builders, can help create affordable housing while maintaining unique and welcoming neighborhoods. It's crucial to keep housing affordable and diverse, avoiding cookie-cutter designs, to support growth and meet residents' needs. Addressing housing needs comprehensively is essential for the county's growth and quality of life.



HOUSING GOALS & STRATEGIES

These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.

H1: Enhance Rehabilitation Programs

- Partner with other organizations and agencies to implement rehabilitation programs targeting housing units constructed before 1980 to address dilapidation, deterioration, and hazardous materials like lead and asbestos.
- Partner with other organizations and agencies to launch weatherization programs to improve insulation and energy efficiency.
- Encourage upgrading of heating and cooling systems in older homes to enhance living conditions.

H2: Stimulate New Housing Construction

- Provide support and incentives to local contractors and firms to boost the housing labor market.
- Streamline permitting processes to reduce barriers for new construction.

H3: Increase Affordable Housing Availability

- Partner with developers to create affordable and diverse rental units.

H4: Address Substandard Housing

- Conduct comprehensive surveys to identify housing units needing major repairs or upgrades and target those areas for improvements and incentives.

By prioritizing these goals and strategies, Box Butte County can enhance housing quality and accessibility, continue to strengthen and build vibrant communities where residents enjoy a higher quality of life.



PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

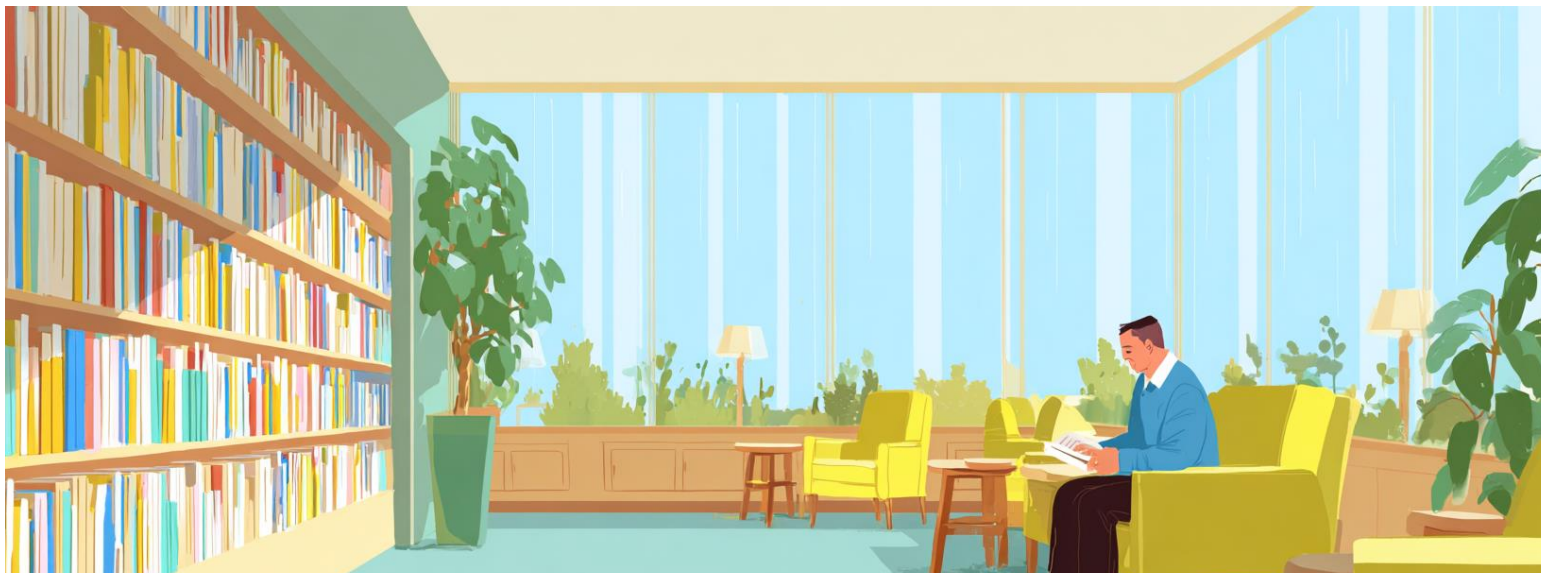
INTRODUCTION

State and local governments provide goods and services for their residents. The buildings, equipment, and land used by the County are referred to as “Public Facilities.” State statutes require the County to inventory Public Facilities during the comprehensive planning process. The inventory for this update can be found in the Appendix: Community Facilities.

Public Facilities represent a wide range of buildings, utilities, and services that are built and maintained by many government agencies. These facilities are necessary to ensure the safety, well-being, and enjoyment of Box Butte County’s residents. They provide residents with social, cultural, educational, law enforcement, fire protection, and recreational opportunities. Public Facilities include both governmental and privately held facilities that are available to the public. As the County considers its future growth, it must also anticipate future demand on these Public Facilities.

Education

A community’s educational systems play an invaluable role in creating the potential for future growth and development. A high-quality primary education system is essential, as is access to a secondary education system. An educational system’s contributions to the future of a community include not only the provision of a well-educated labor force, but also a marketing tool for the attraction of new residents and businesses. In addition, the public infrastructure provided through the school system can be an asset to the community in terms of the provision of recreation, meeting, and community event space.





COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Citizens overall are satisfied with most community facilities in Box Butte County. However, there is some dissatisfaction with community centers, and respondents are neutral about cultural centers. Specific concerns include limited access to libraries for county residents, restrictive hours, and inadequate collections. There are calls for more indoor facilities, particularly a year-round pool, as current options are seasonal. Other issues include poorly maintained park restrooms, lack of storm shelters, and insufficient resources for the homeless. Residents also suggest expanding recreational options, extending pool hours, and creating spaces for cultural events to enhance community facilities and services.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Box Butte County's public facilities generally meet the needs of both present and future residents. It is important to maintain high-quality facilities and preserve the integrity of structures under public ownership. The county should continue to focus on ensuring these facilities remain vital to the community and identify funds to maintain and enhance them.



PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES GOALS AND STRATEGIES

These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.

PF1: Maintain High-Quality Public Facilities

- Regularly assess the condition of public facilities to ensure they meet current and future needs.

PF2: Support Local Schools

- Improve and maintain critical infrastructure, such as roads, sidewalks, and public transportation routes, ensuring safe and accessible paths for students traveling to and from school.
- Explore partnering with local schools to offer vocational training, internships, and career exploration programs.

PF3: Preserve the Integrity of Structures Under Public Ownership

- Implement a maintenance schedule to preserve the quality and integrity of public structures.
- Explore various funding sources, including grants, partnerships, and budget allocations, to support the maintenance and enhancement of facilities.

PF4: Ensure Facilities Remain Vital to the Community

- Engage with the community to understand their needs and expectations regarding public facilities.
- Promote the importance of high-quality public facilities to stakeholders and the community to garner support and investment.

PF5: Ensure Proper Waste Management and Adequate Lot Sizes in Rural Developments (★)

- Create sanitary improvement districts to properly handle waste.
- Ensure that lot sizes are adequately sized to support proper waste management.

PF6: Enhance Coordination and Resource Sharing Among Public Entities (★)

- Continue efforts to coordinate and share services and equipment among public entities.
- Avoid unnecessary duplication of services and equipment through effective collaboration.

PF7: Improve Infrastructure for the County Road Department (★)

- Improve the road department shop facilities.
- Allow for indoor storage of equipment to protect and maintain it.

PF8: Provide Outdoor Recreational Facilities and Spaces (★)

- Consider providing facilities or space for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting and horseback riding.
- Explore opportunities to establish public recreational lands outside the corporate boundaries of the cities.

PF9: Assess The Need for Additional Space at the Law Enforcement Center (★)

- Investigate the current and future space requirements at the Law Enforcement Center.
- Develop a plan to address any identified needs for additional space.

TRANSPORTATION

SUMMARY

The movement of people and goods to, from, or within a given area has a tremendous impact upon the way an area will develop, both physically and economically. In a physical sense the local transportation system influences the location of different types of development and surrounding land use activity. Similarly, the way the community is connected to the surrounding regional transportation networks significantly impacts the kinds of economic activity it can support. Transportation systems have played a major role in the development of Box Butte County and will continue to impact physical growth and change in the future. Additional information on transportation in Box Butte County can be found in the Appendix: Transportation Infrastructure.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

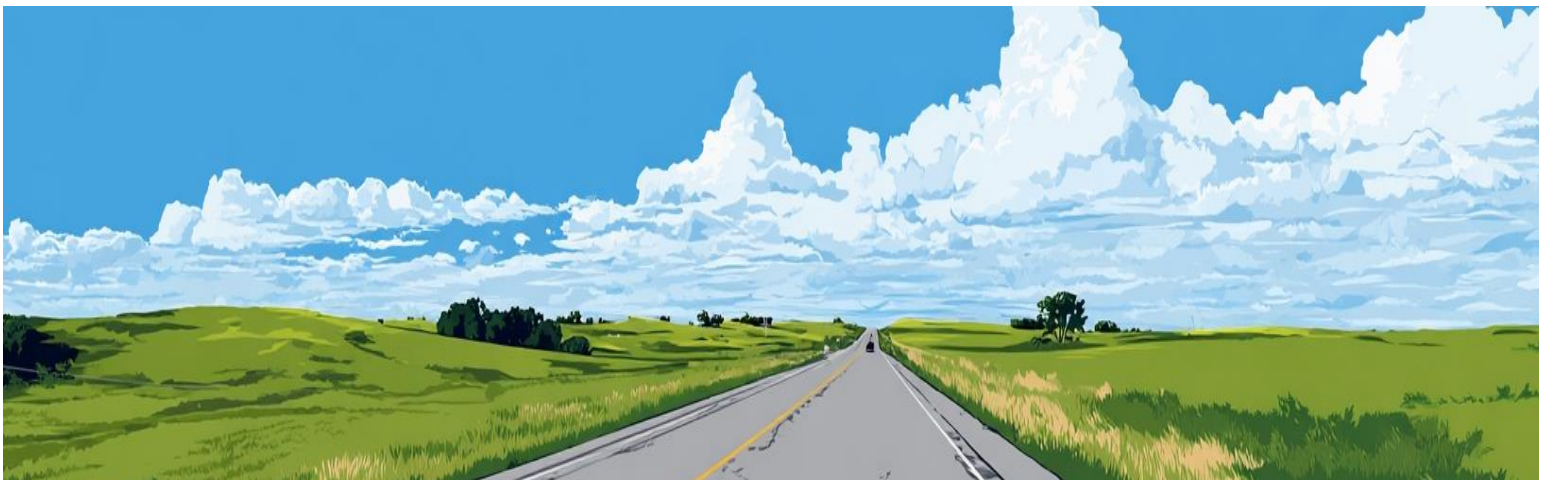
Most of the roads maintained by the County are composed of gravel or native soil surfaces, with only a small portion consisting of other types of surfacing. At present, these roads are generally adequate to meet existing transportation needs.

Highways play a crucial role in the county's transportation infrastructure. There are four major highways that facilitate transportation and connectivity in the County: U.S. Highway #385 and Nebraska State Highways #2, #71, and #87.

U.S. Highway #385 and Nebraska State Highway #2 in Box Butte County have been designated by the State of Nebraska as Scenic Byways. These byways encourage additional tourism related to travel throughout the County.

FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Apart from the construction of the Heartland Expressway, the current county road system is sufficient to meet future needs. As with the majority of rural counties in Nebraska, the major concern for the future of county road systems is maintenance and upgrading.



The backbone for future economic growth in the county is the construction of the Heartland Expressway from Alliance to Rapid City South Dakota. If constructed, the Expressway would support future travel demand, enhance safety, and promote economic growth in the region.

The Heartland Expressway // Corridor Development Plan and Management Plan, Final Report is adopted as a supplement to the 2025 Box Butte County Comprehensive Plan.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Improving highways, rail, and rural roads is a priority for most residents, along with expanding public transit and bike trails to boost safety, tourism, and regional connections. The youth survey highlights the desire for expanded public transportation, better transit options, improved walking and biking infrastructure, airport expansion, and more private and rideshare services.



TRANSPORTATION GOALS & STRATEGIES

These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.

T1: Facilitate the Construction of the Heartland Expressway

- Collaborate with state transportation departments and neighboring counties to align local plans with the Heartland Expressway project.
- Participate in planning meetings and provide input on local needs and priorities.
- Explore public-private partnerships to leverage additional funding sources.
- Facilitate the acquisition of land and right-of-way necessary for the expressway construction.
- Invest in local infrastructure improvements that complement the expressway, such as connecting roads, bridges, and intersections.
- Ensure local roads are upgraded to handle increased traffic flow from the expressway.
- Keep the public informed about the progress and benefits of the Heartland Expressway project.
- Promote economic development opportunities that arise from the expressway, such as attracting new businesses and industries.

T2: Maintain and Upgrade Road Systems (★)

- Regularly assess road conditions to identify maintenance needs.
- Prioritize upgrades for major routes like U.S. Highway 385 and Nebraska Highway 2.
- Secure funding for road maintenance and improvement projects.

T3: Ensure Adequate Airport Services (★)

- Monitor the capacity and service quality of Alliance Municipal Airport.
- Coordinate with Denver International Airport and work with other locations for support and collaboration.
- Plan for future expansions based on projected demand.

T4: Adapt to Changes in the Railroad Industry (★)

- Stay informed about industry trends and potential impacts on local rail services.
- Develop plans for infrastructure changes to accommodate future rail developments.
- Engage with Burlington-Northern-Santa Fe Railroad to ensure continued service.

T5: Improve Public Transit and On-Demand Services (★)

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Box Butte County Handi Bus Program and Open Plains Transit.
- Identify areas for improvement, especially for an aging population.
- Enhance on-demand transportation services to better meet community needs.

T6: Support Economic and Physical Development (★)

- Integrate transportation planning with economic development initiatives.
- Promote the Heartland Expressway project to boost trade and growth.
- Align strategic planning with long-term growth goals for the county.



ENERGY

SUMMARY

Box Butte County is strategically positioned to navigate the evolving energy landscape by modernizing infrastructure, promoting diverse energy sources, and implementing robust energy conservation measures. By addressing these key areas, the county aims to ensure sustainable energy development while meeting the needs of its growing population and economy.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Infrastructure

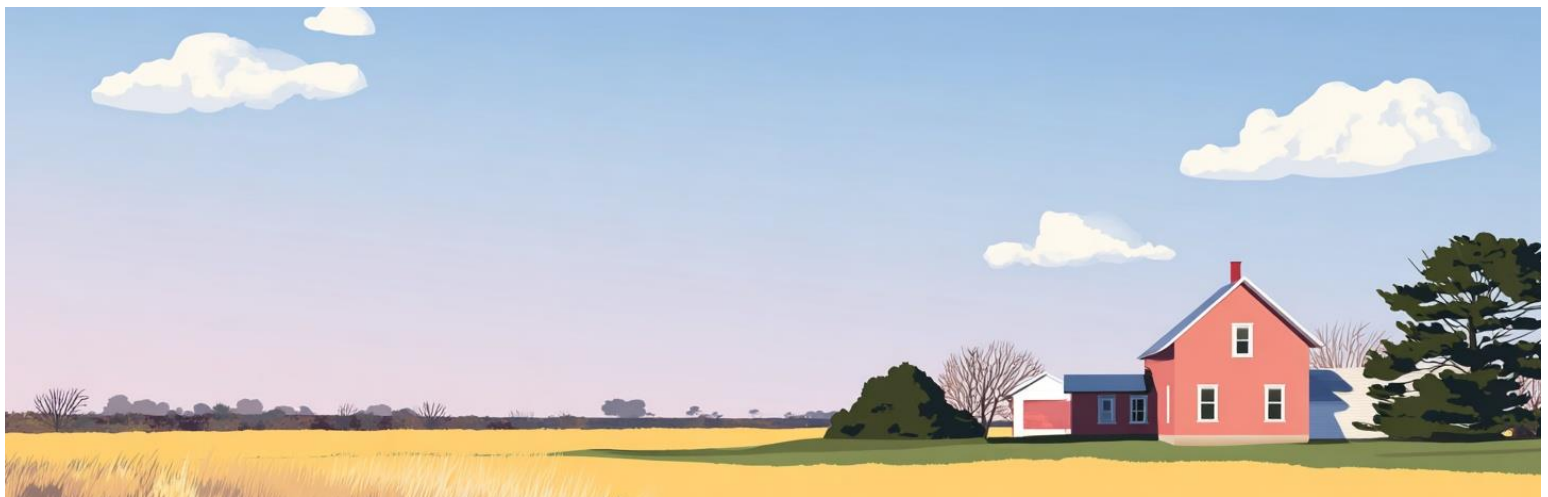
Box Butte County currently relies primarily on traditional energy sources such as coal, natural gas, and some renewable sources. The county is connected to the regional power grid, ensuring a stable energy supply to its residents and industries.

Energy By Sector

- Residential energy use in Box Butte County is characterized by a mix of electricity and natural gas consumption. Heating and cooling systems are significant contributors to energy consumption, particularly during extreme weather conditions.
- Commercial establishments in the county consume energy primarily for lighting, heating, and cooling purposes. Energy efficiency varies among different businesses, with larger enterprises typically having more advanced energy management systems.
- The industrial sector in Box Butte County includes manufacturing and agriculture, both of which require substantial energy inputs. Industrial energy use is dominated by machinery operation, process heating, and refrigeration.

Evaluation of Renewable Energy Resources

Box Butte County has abundant renewable energy resources.



Energy Conservation

Energy conservation measures in Box Butte County include public awareness campaigns, energy efficiency incentives, and building codes that promote energy-efficient construction practices. Efforts are also underway to retrofit existing infrastructure for improved energy performance.

FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Infrastructure

Looking ahead, there is a trend towards modernizing energy infrastructure in Box Butte County. Investments in smart grid technologies and upgrades to transmission and distribution networks are anticipated to enhance reliability and efficiency. The integration of more energy sources into the grid is also expected to increase, driven by state and national energy targets.

Energy By Sector

- Future residential energy use is expected to increase moderately with population growth. Efforts towards energy efficiency through home insulation, smart appliances, and energy-efficient lighting are projected to mitigate overall energy demand growth.
- Commercial energy use is anticipated to grow in line with economic development. Adoption of energy-saving technologies and practices, such as energy management systems and LED lighting, will likely reduce per unit energy consumption over time.
- Industrial energy demand is forecasted to rise with expanding production capacities. However, improvements in energy efficiency driven by technological advancements and regulatory pressures are expected to offset some of the growth in energy consumption.

Evaluation of Renewable Energy Resources

Renewable energy capacity is expected to expand in the coming years. Advances in technologies, coupled with thoughtful siting policies, will allow alternative energy sources to be a positive economic driver for the county.

Energy Conservation

Future energy conservation efforts will focus on stricter energy efficiency standards for new construction, and promotion of energy-saving behaviors among residents and businesses.

Rural Character

Box Butte County is a mostly rural county with deep agricultural roots. Although the county supports private, small scale alternative energy systems utility or large-scale systems should not replace agricultural uses.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Based on the survey and community workshops, Box Butte County citizens hold varied perspectives on energy. While most are supportive of various energy sources, opinions on wind and nuclear energy are divided. Concerns about the resilience of the energy system are common, with issues like frequent outages, aging infrastructure, and reliance on external sources are highlighted. Many believe that upgrades and diversification are necessary for long-term stability. Views on transitioning from fossil fuels are mixed; some advocate for a balanced approach that includes fossil fuels, while others question the efficiency, cost, and environmental impact of wind and solar energy. Overall, there is cautious interest in renewable energy, coupled with an emphasis on resilience, balanced energy sources, and careful planning by the county.



ENERGY GOALS & STRATEGIES

These legacy goals (★) have been given a star for easy reference, and have been included alongside the new goals to guide the County moving forward.

EN1: Adopt Energy Regulations

- Add energy regulations to the zoning ordinance to address the siting of high energy uses such as data centers as well as siting for energy generation projects such as wind, solar, nuclear and battery storage.

EN2: Enhance Energy Efficiency

- Promote energy efficiency across all sectors thereby reducing overall energy consumption, which lowers costs for residents and businesses.

EN3: Expand Energy Resources

- Support a diverse mix of energy resources to ensure a reliable and resilient energy supply. Proper siting of these resources can optimize their efficiency and minimize environmental impacts, promoting both energy security and environmental stewardship.

EN4: Strengthen Energy Infrastructure

- Modernize and maintain energy infrastructure to ensure the reliability and resilience of the energy grid. This strategy supports the integration of new technologies, such as smart grids which enhance the overall efficiency and reliability of the energy system.

EN5: Promote Energy Equity

- Ensure that all communities have access to affordable and clean energy solutions.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

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APPENDIX

Comprehensive Plan 2025 Update



APPENDIX

MAPS

Context

County Base

Land Use

Future Land Use

Cemetery

CISJ Sites

Corners & Development

County & Corporate Zoning Boundaries

Flood Hazard Areas

Historic Sites

Irrigation Wells

Livestock

Road Classification

Rural Electric Association

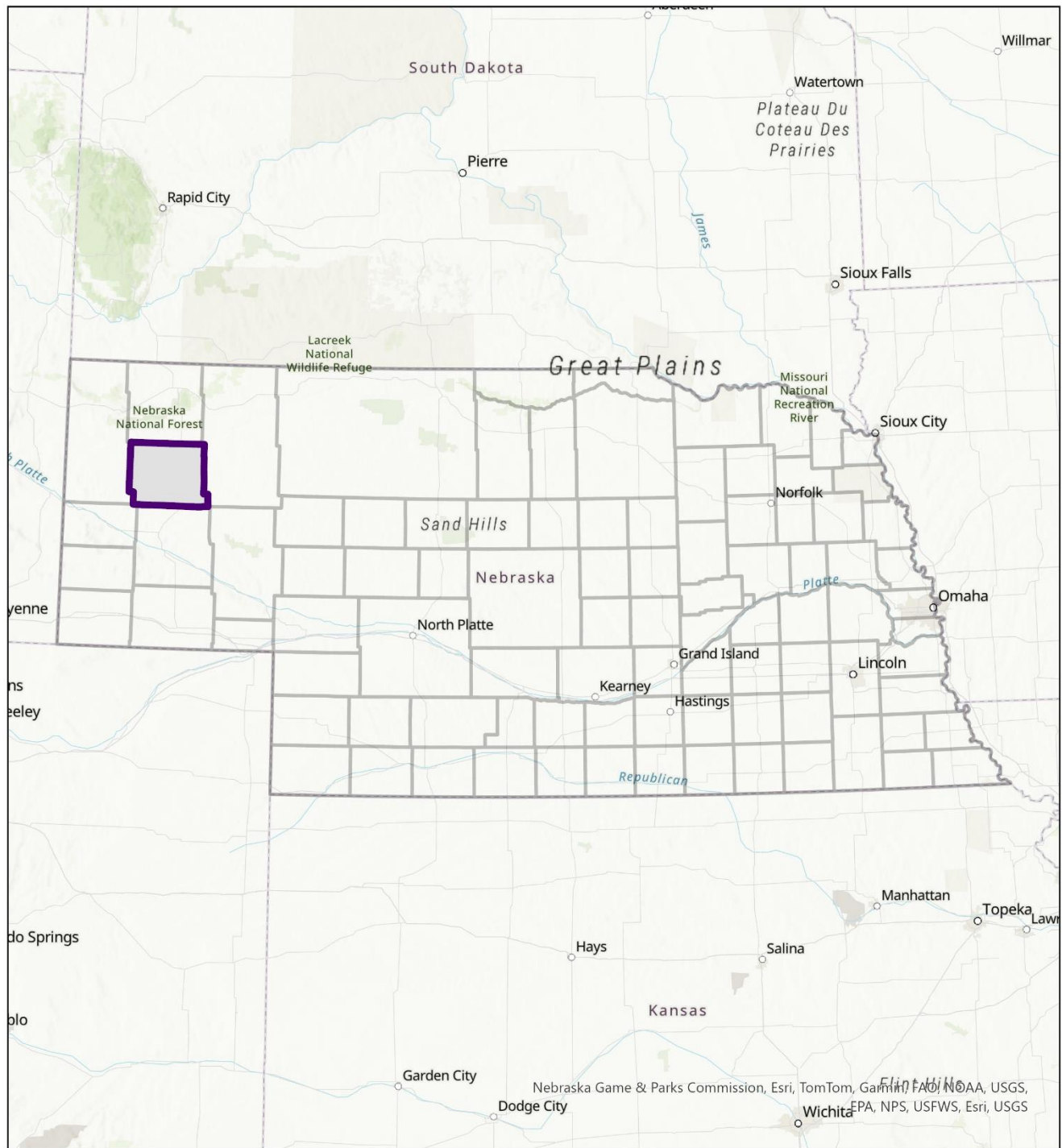
Rural Residential

Schools

Soils

BOX BUTTE COUNTY: CONTEXT

Figure 1- Box Butte County: Context



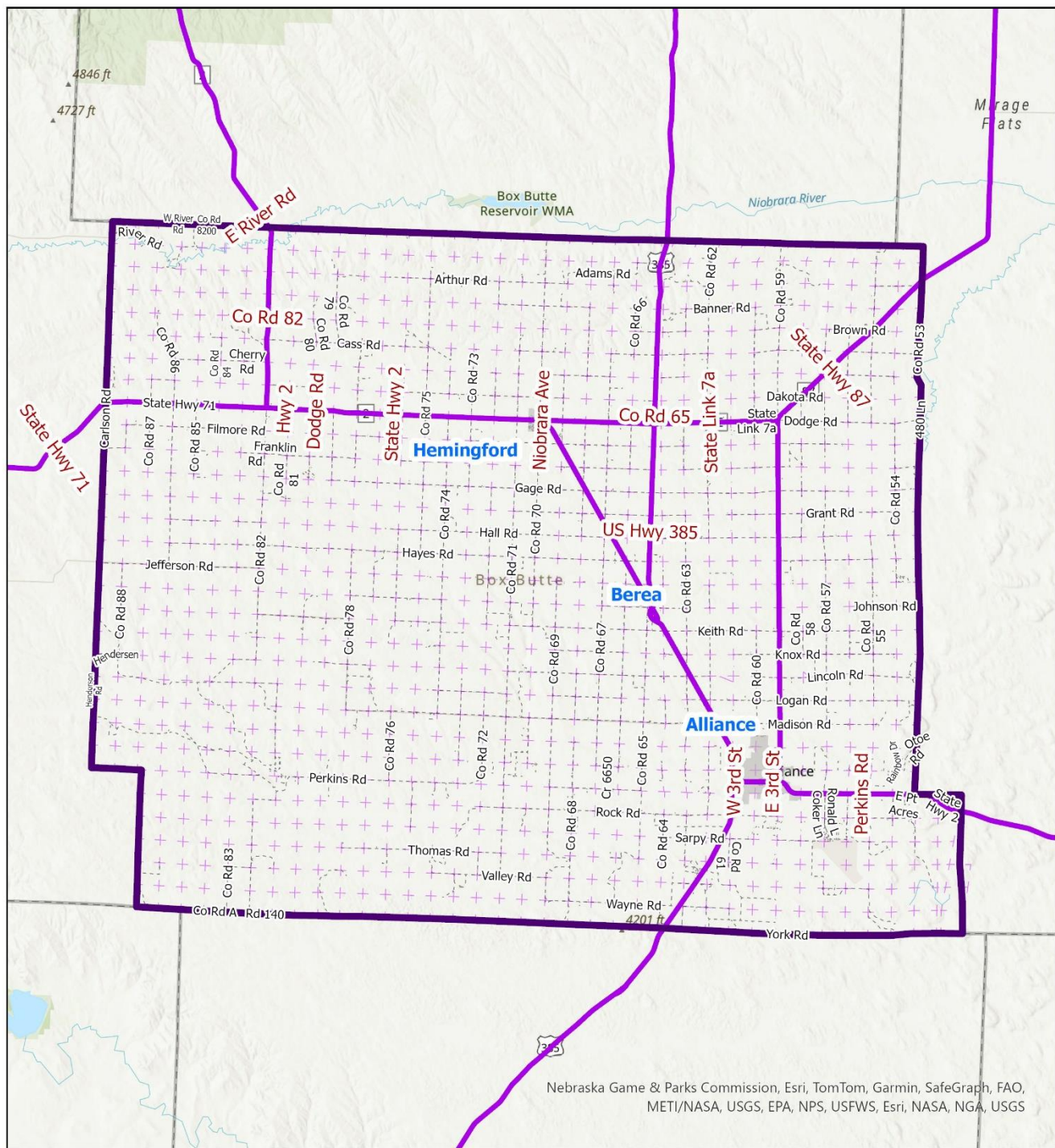
 Box Butte County

0 20 40 80 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: COUNTY BASE MAP

Figure 2- Box Butte County: County Base Map



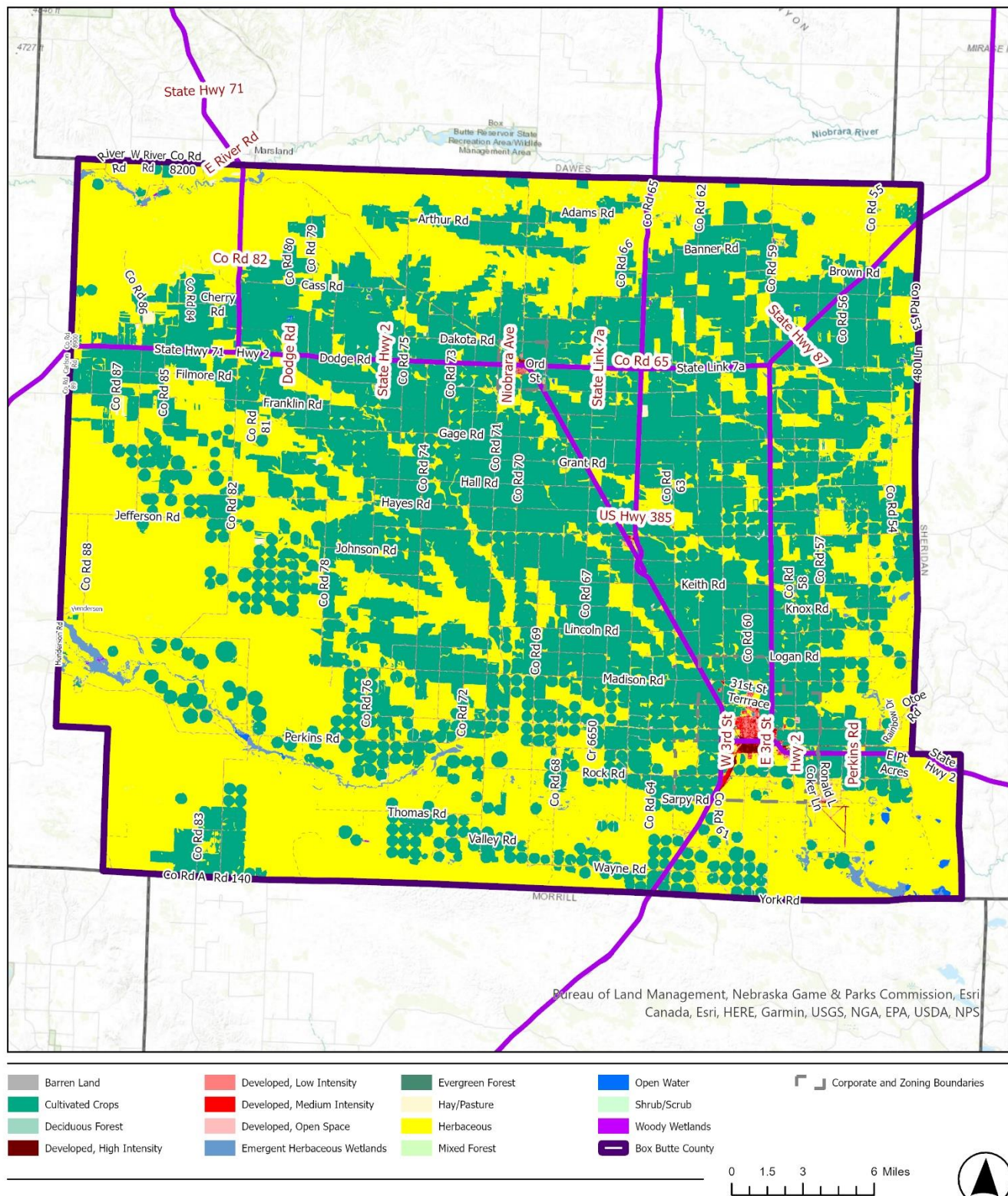
 Box Butte County
 Primary Roads
 Census Places
 Box Butte Sections
 County Roads

0 1.75 3.5 7 Miles



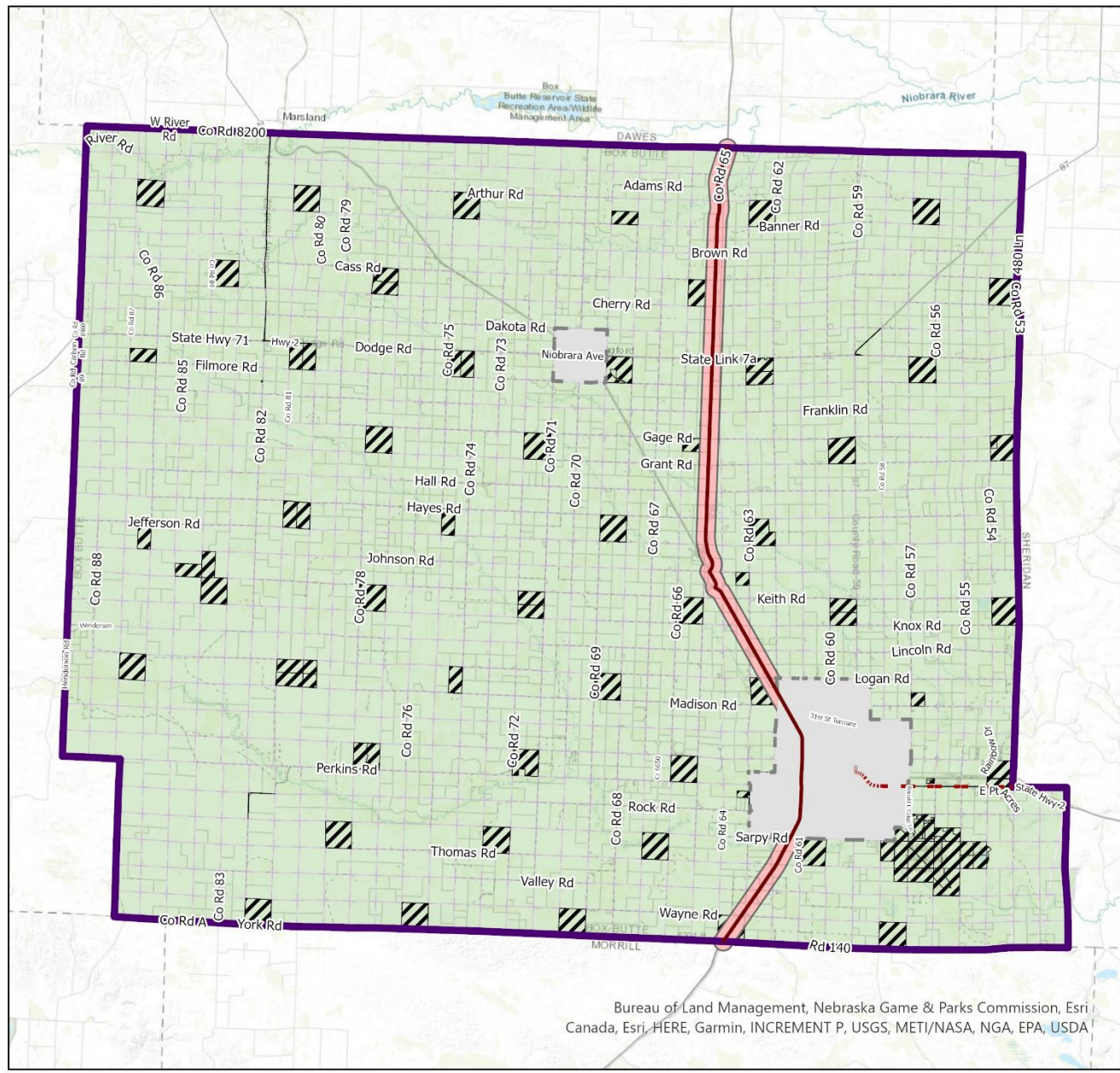
BOX BUTTE COUNTY: LAND USE

Figure 3- Box Butte County: Land Use



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: FUTURE LAND USE

Figure 4- Box Butte County: Future Land Use



- Heartland Expressway
- - - HWY 2
- Corporate and Zoning Boundaries
- Heartland Expressway Commercial Area
- Agriculture Land Use
- Public Entity Land

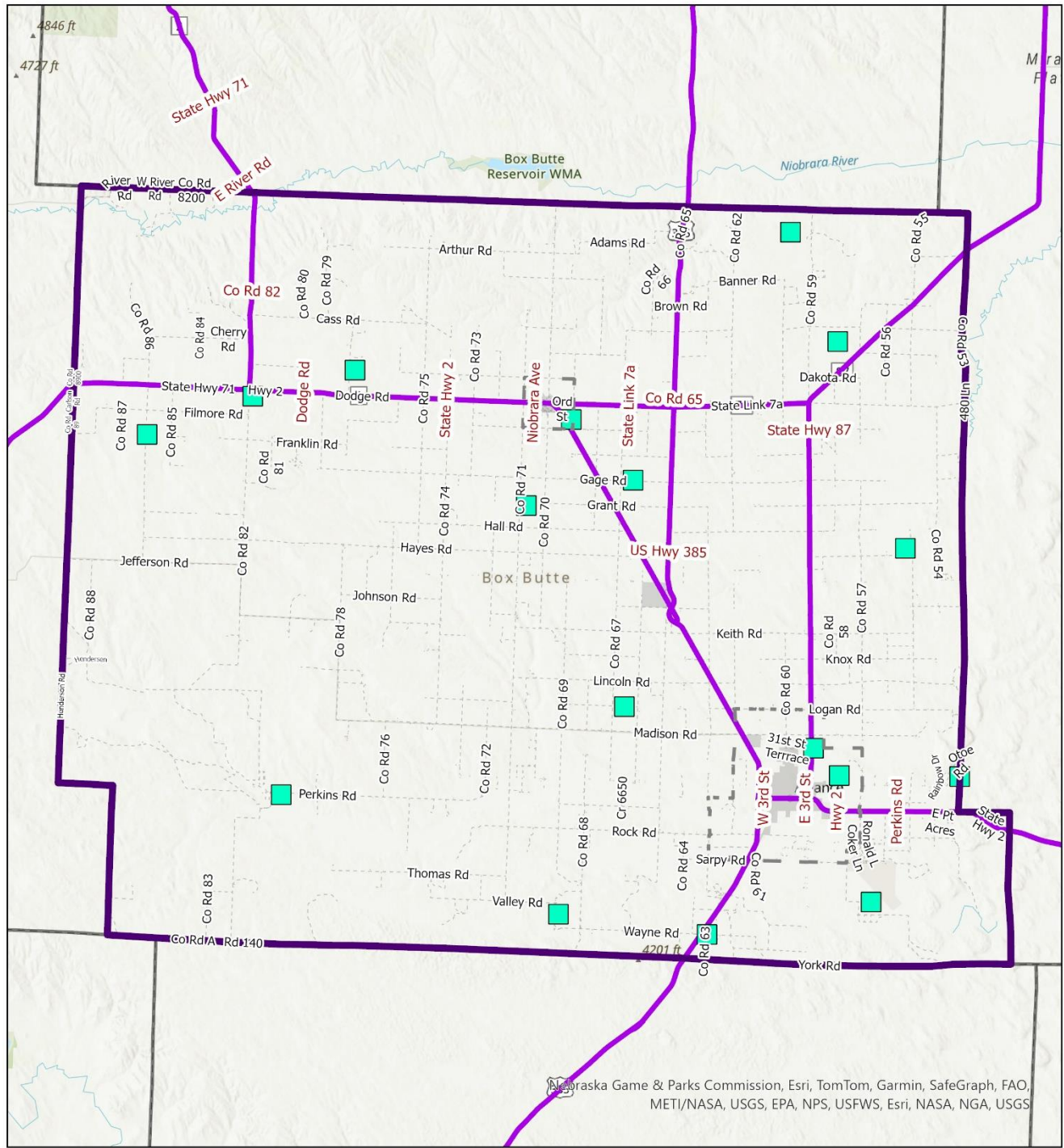
The area in 2,500 feet of the Heartland expressway is denoted as commercial area only if the expressway is approved, permitted or built; else it will be agriculture.

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: CEMETERY

Figure 5- Box Butte County: Cemetery



Cemetery Locations

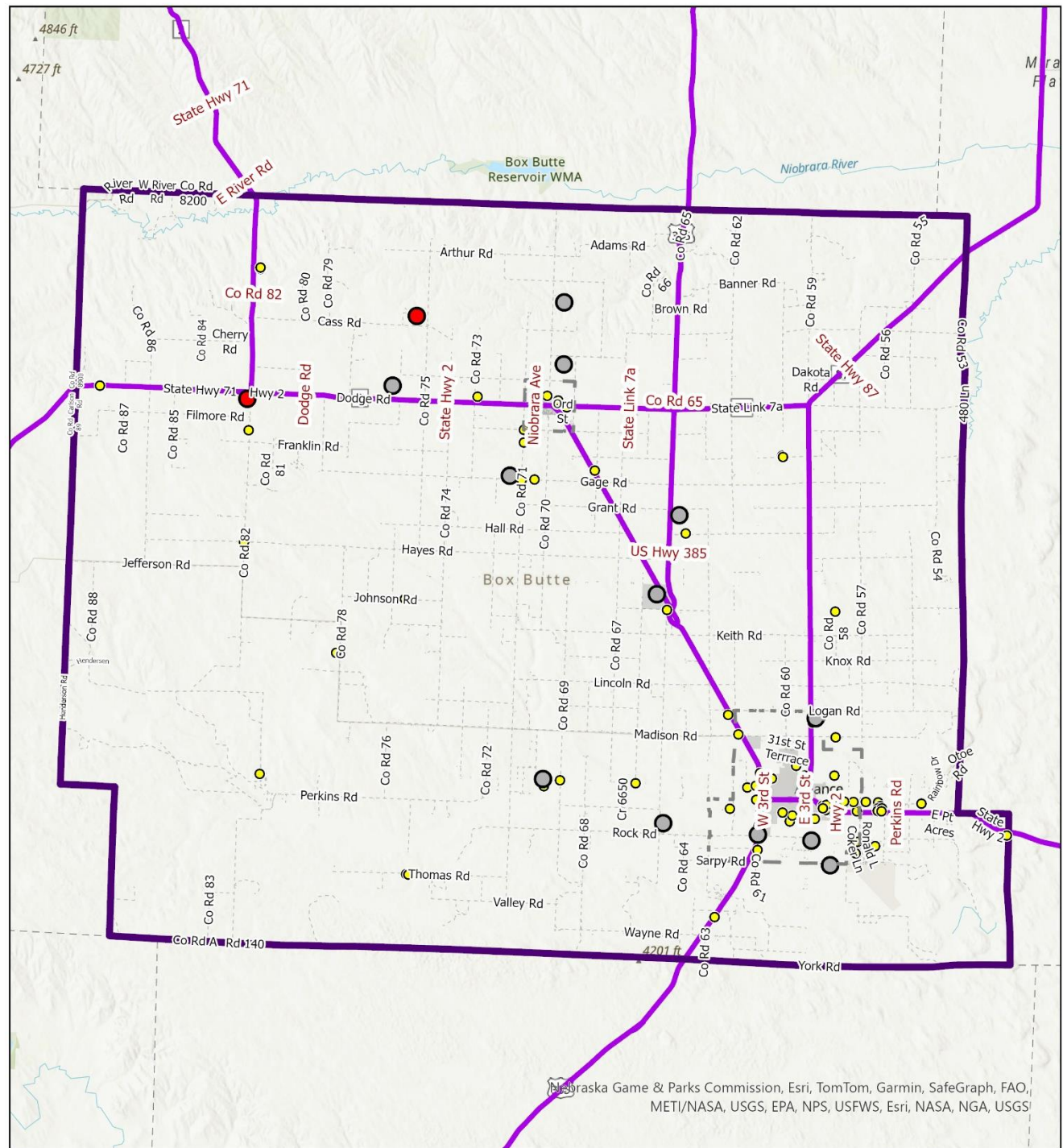
Corporate and Zoning Boundaries

0 1.5 3 6 Miles

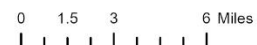


BOX BUTTE COUNTY: CISJ SITES- COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL AND SALVAGE OR JUNK YARDS

Figure 6- Box Butte County: CISJ Sites- Commercial/Industrial and Salvage or Junk Yards

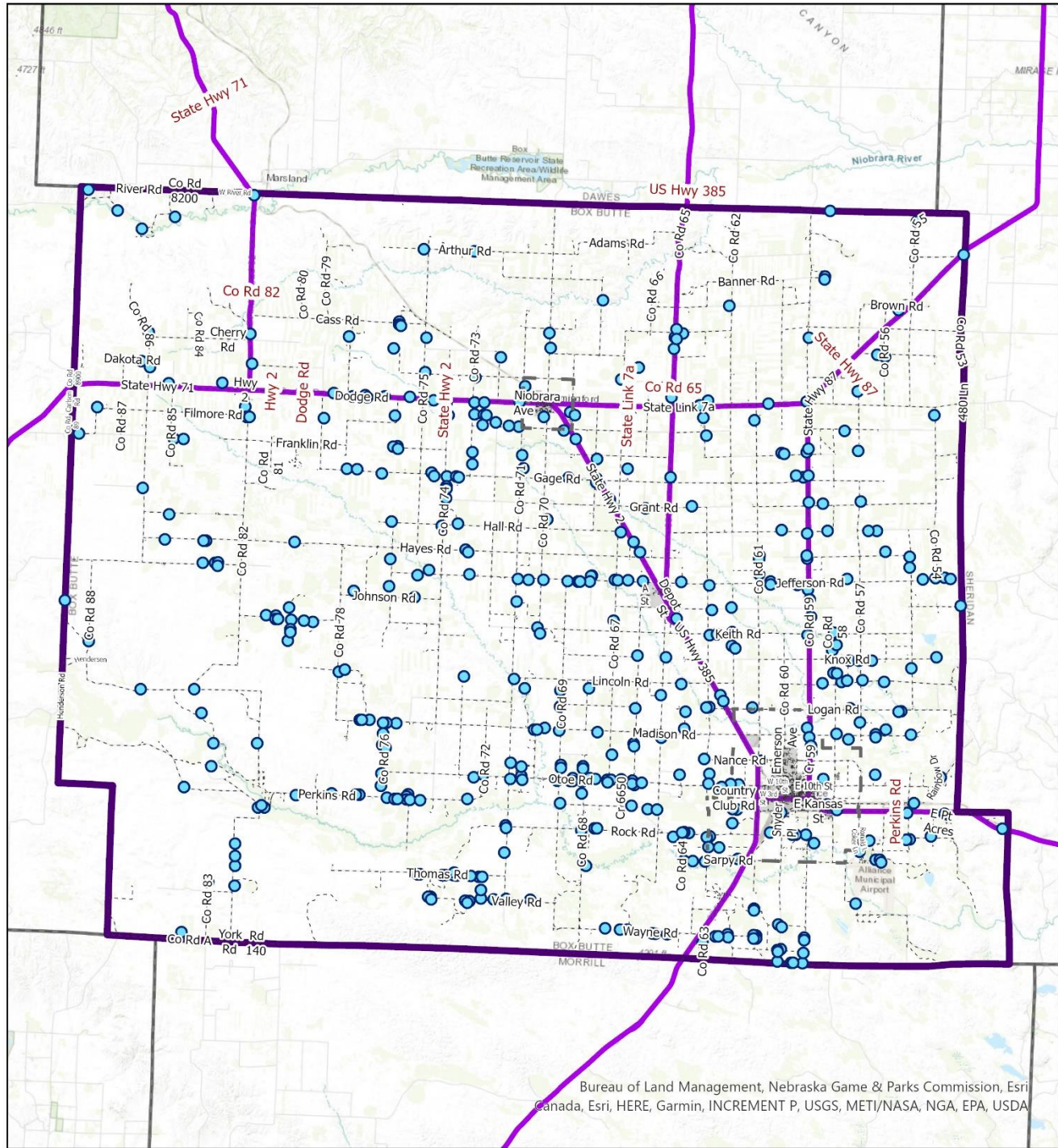


- Commercial Parcels via the Assessor Salvage and/or Junk Yard
 Commercial and/or Industrial Sites  Corporate and Zoning Boundaries



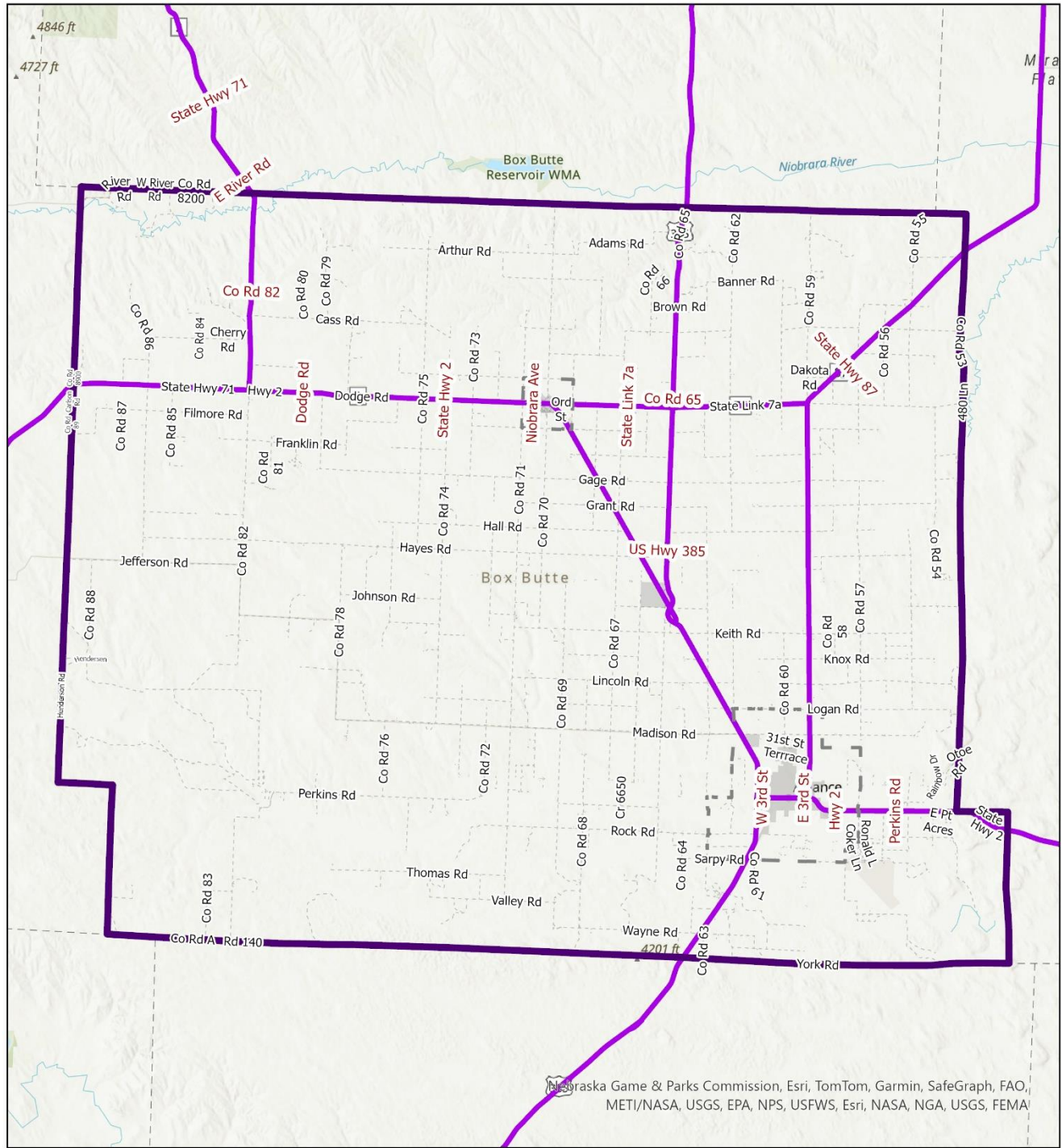
BOX BUTTE COUNTY: SELECT PIVOT CORNERS & DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS BETWEEN 5-10 ACRES

Figure 7- Box Butte County: Select Pivot Corners & Development Options Between 5-10 Acres



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: COUNTY & CORPORATE ZONING BOUNDARIES

Figure 8- Box Butte County: County & Corporate Zoning Boundaries



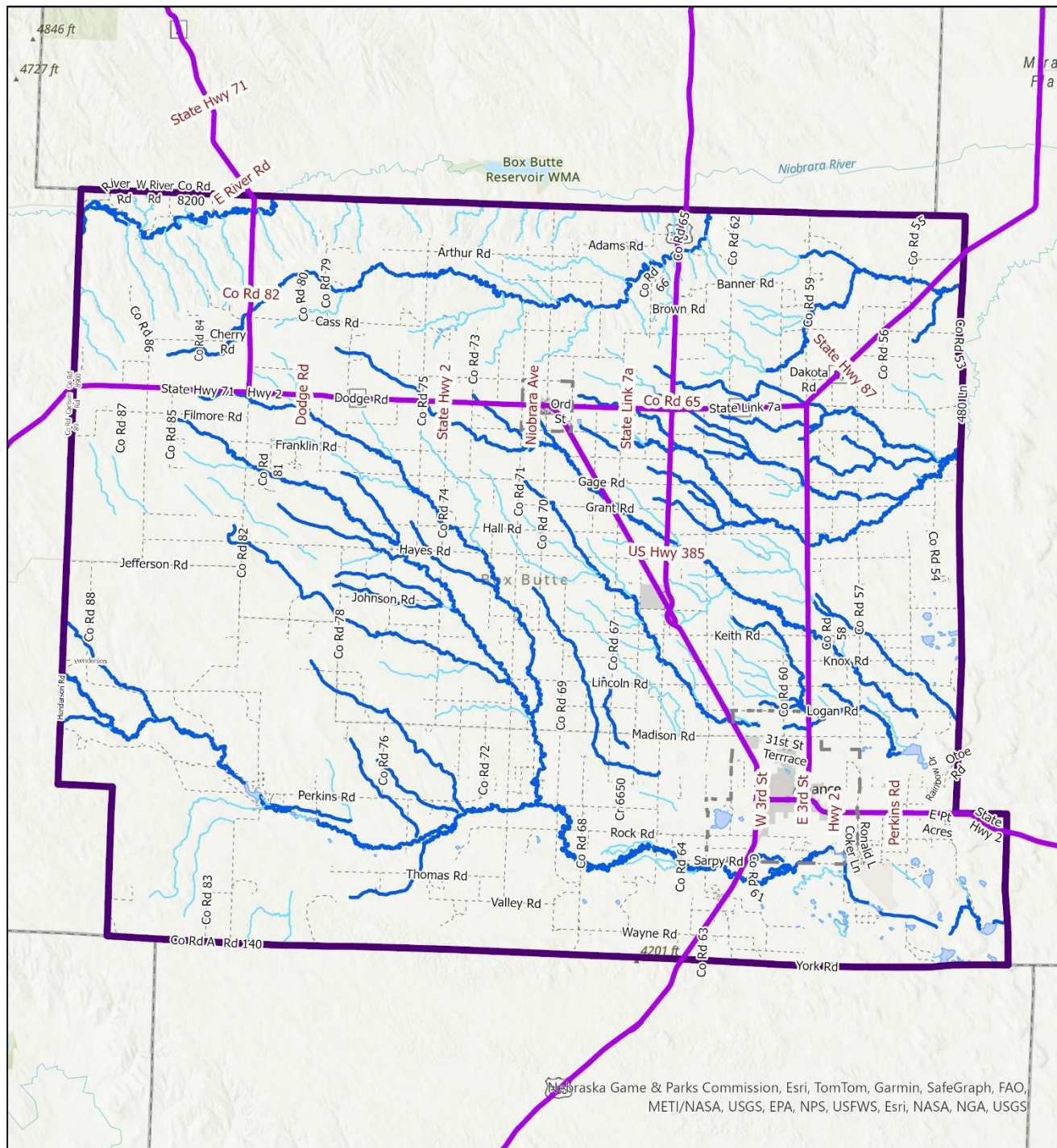
Corporate and Zoning Boundaries

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: FLOOD HAZARD AREAS

Figure 9- Box Butte County: Flood Hazard Areas



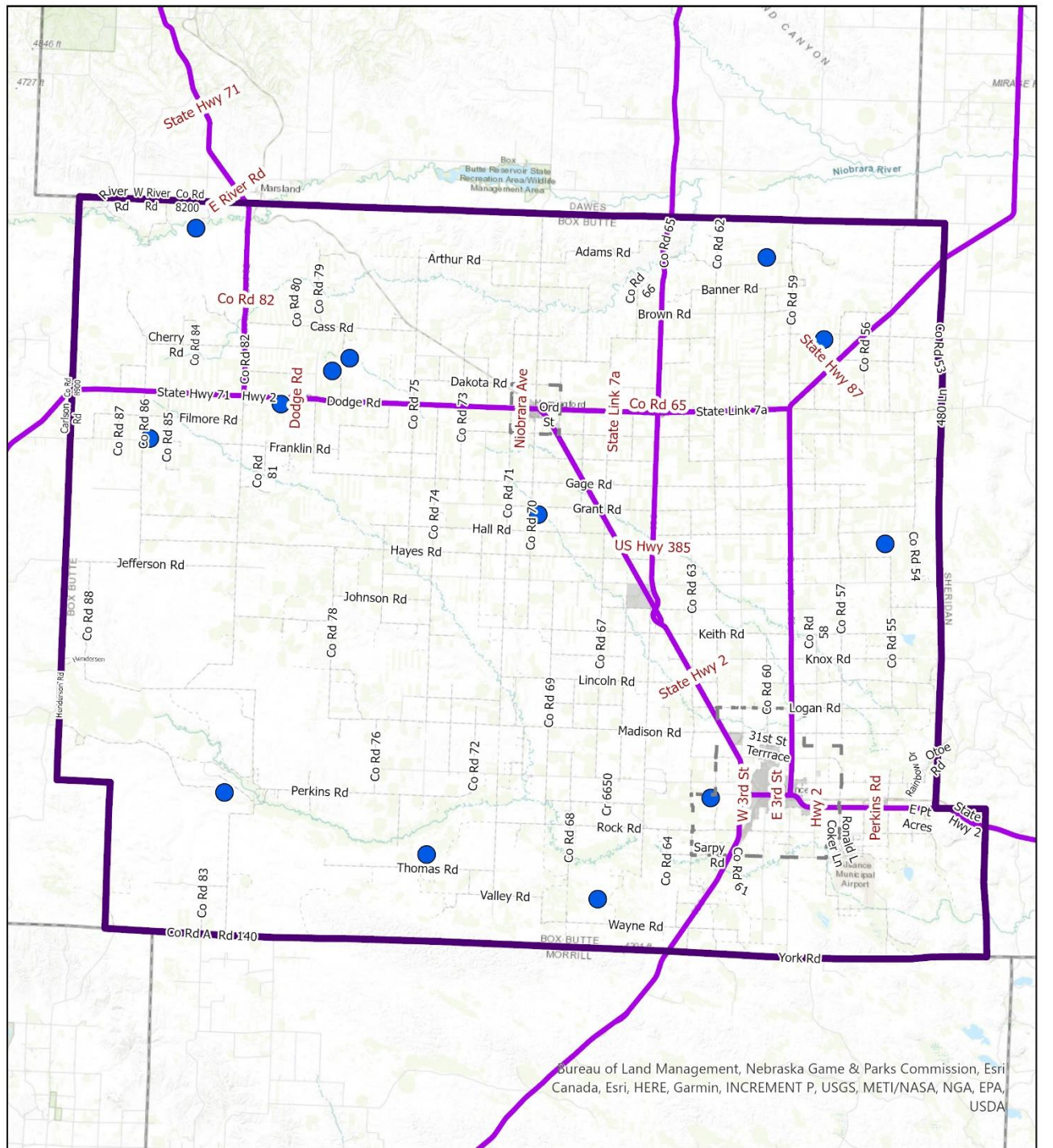
— Historic Flood Hazard Areas — Other Water Features

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: HISTORIC SITES

Figure 10- Box Butte County: Historic Sites



● Historic Sites

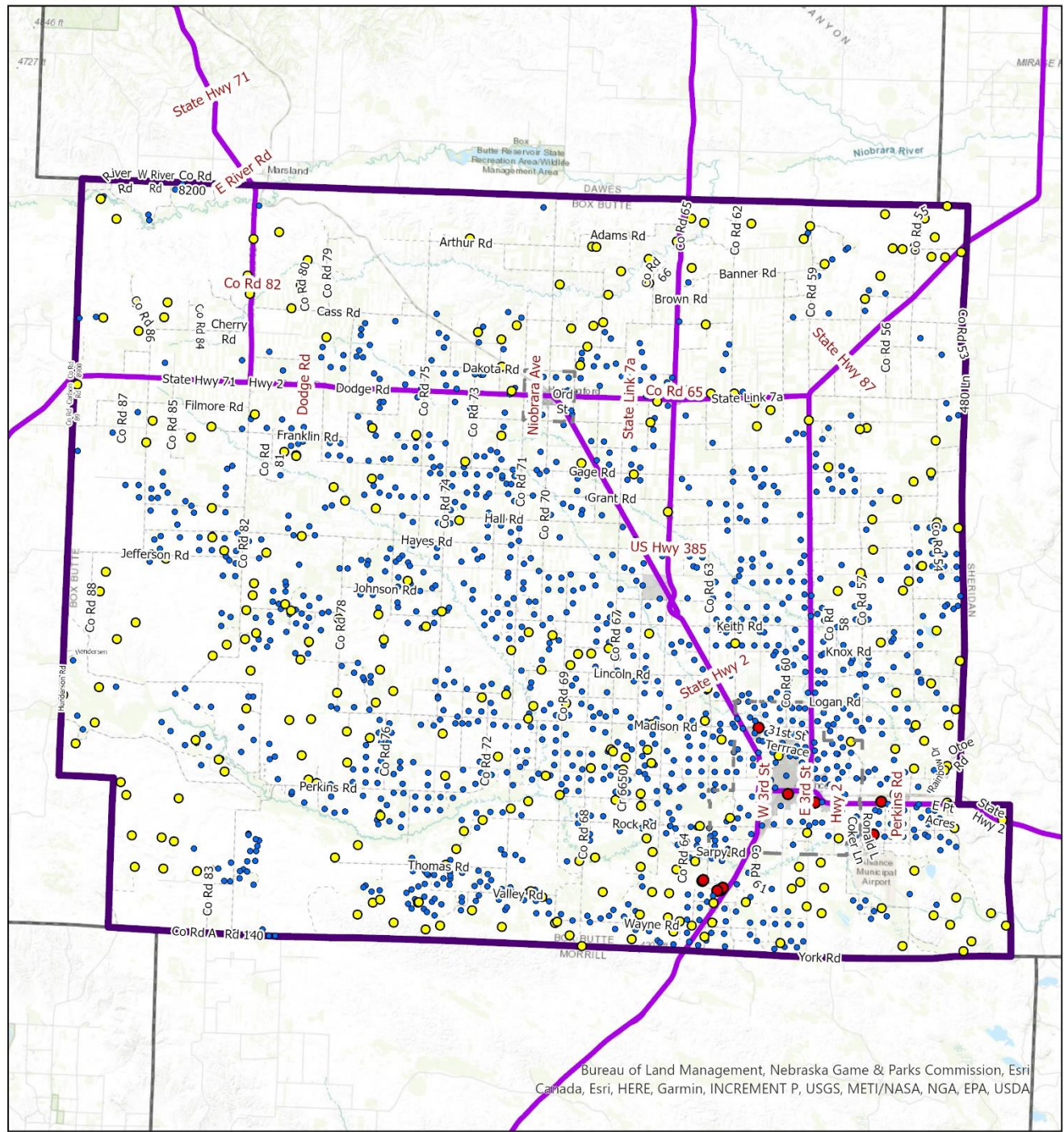
0 1.75 3.5 7 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: IRRIGATION WELLS

Domestic wells not shown. Well counts follow the label.

Figure 11- Box Butte County: Irrigation Wells



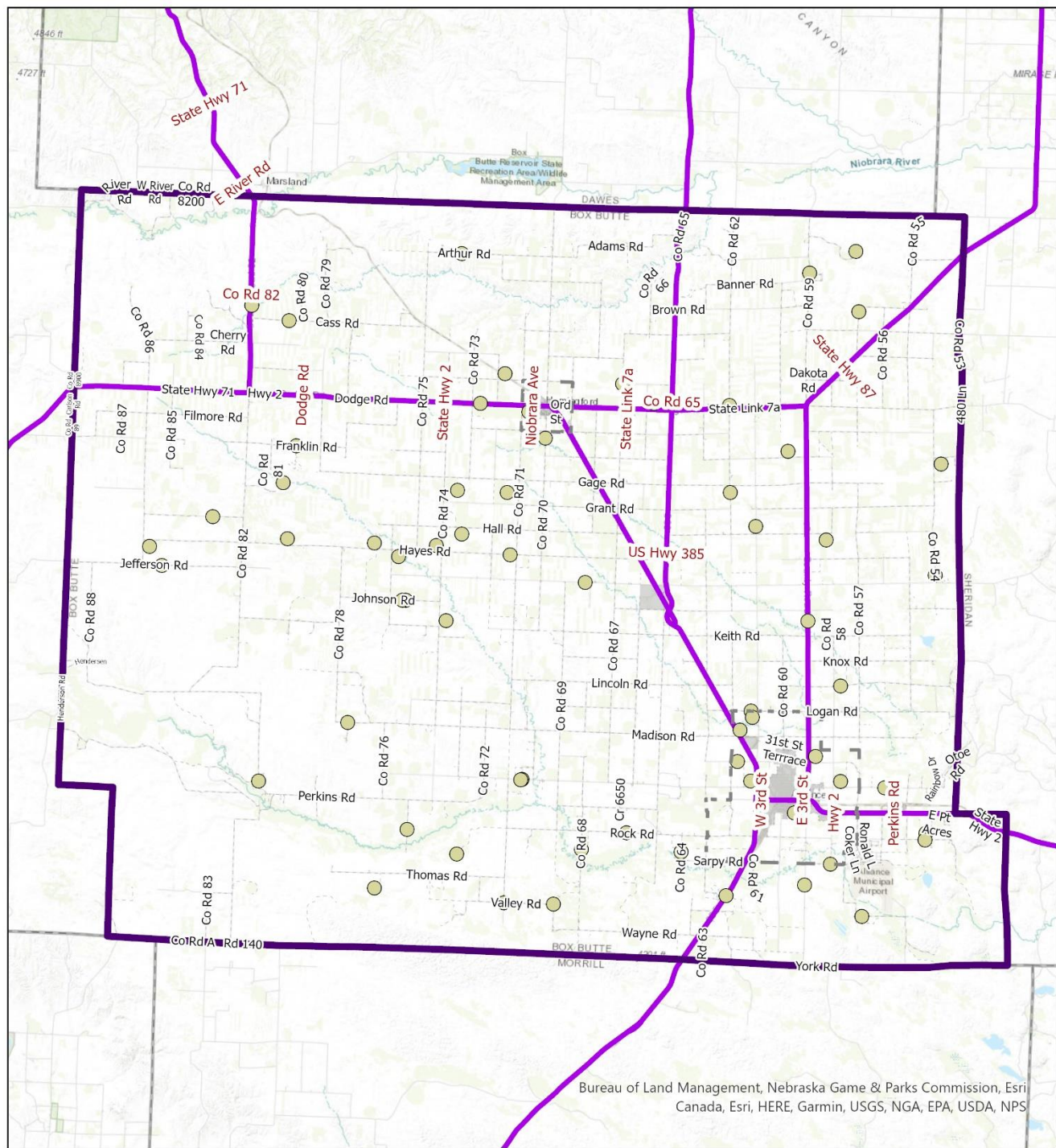
- Commercial/Industrial (11)
- Livestock (285)
- Irrigation (1242)

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: LIVESTOCK WASTE CONTROL

Figure 12- Box Butte County: Livestock Waste Control



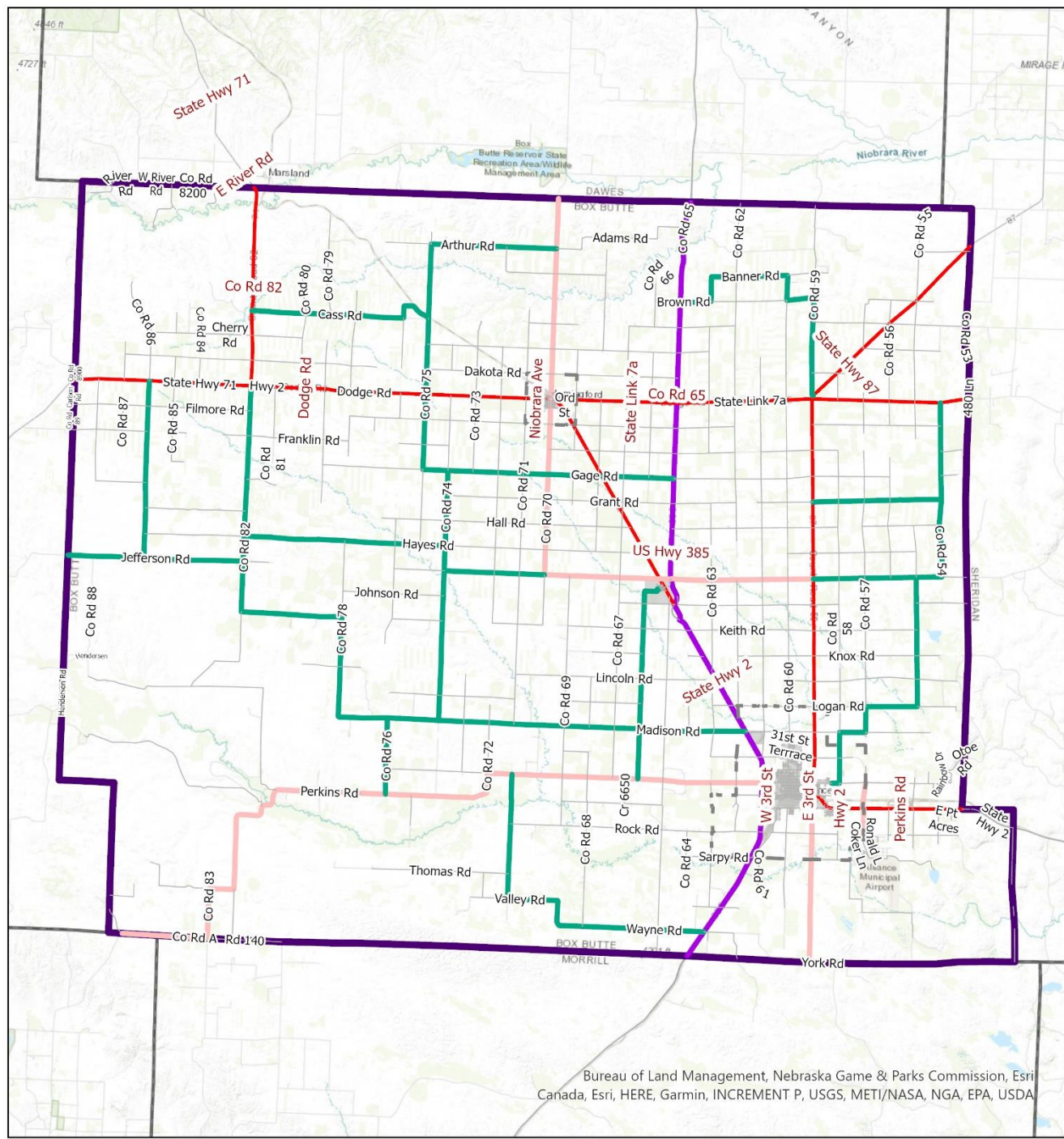
● Livestock Waste Control Permitt

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Figure 13- Box Butte County: Road Classification



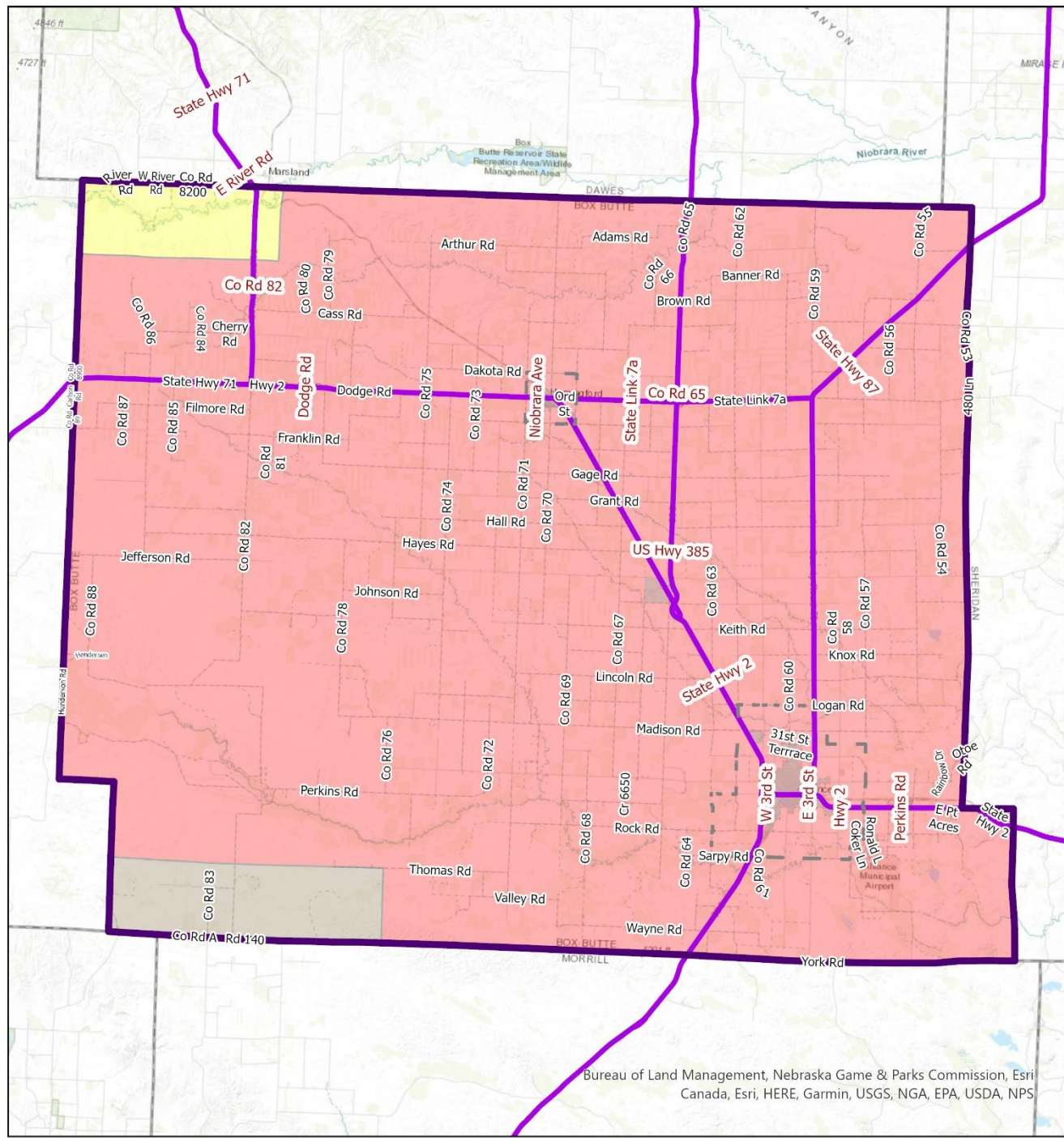
- Expressway
- Major Arterial
- Other Arterial
- Collector
- Local Roads

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: RURAL ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

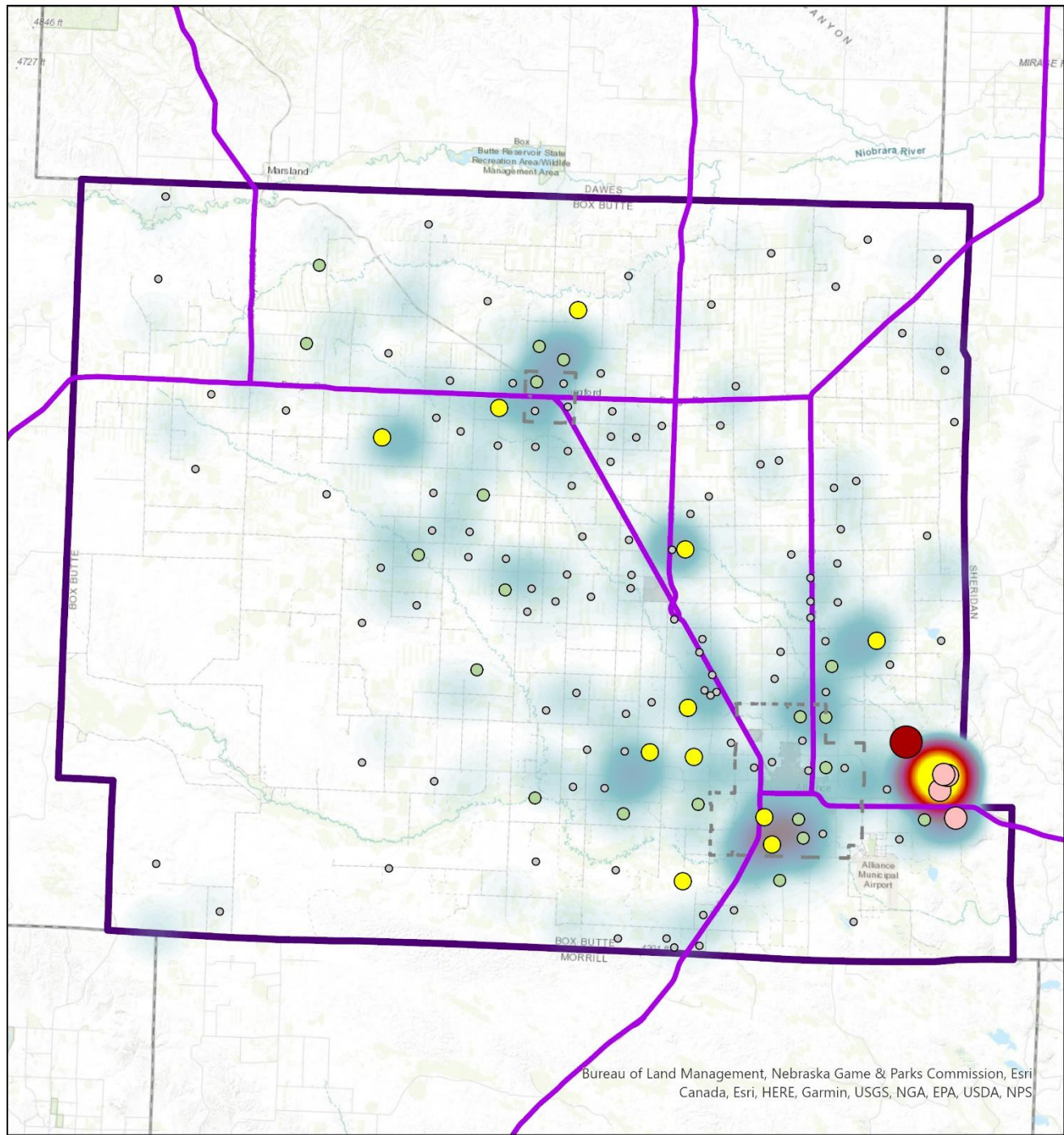
Figure 14- Box Butte County: Rural Electric Association



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: RURAL RESIDENTIAL

Residential Parcels per 2020 Census Block Area & Heat Map

Figure 15- Box Butte County: Rural Residential



- 1 - 2 ● 6 - 10 ● 31 - 70
● 3 - 5 ● 11 - 30

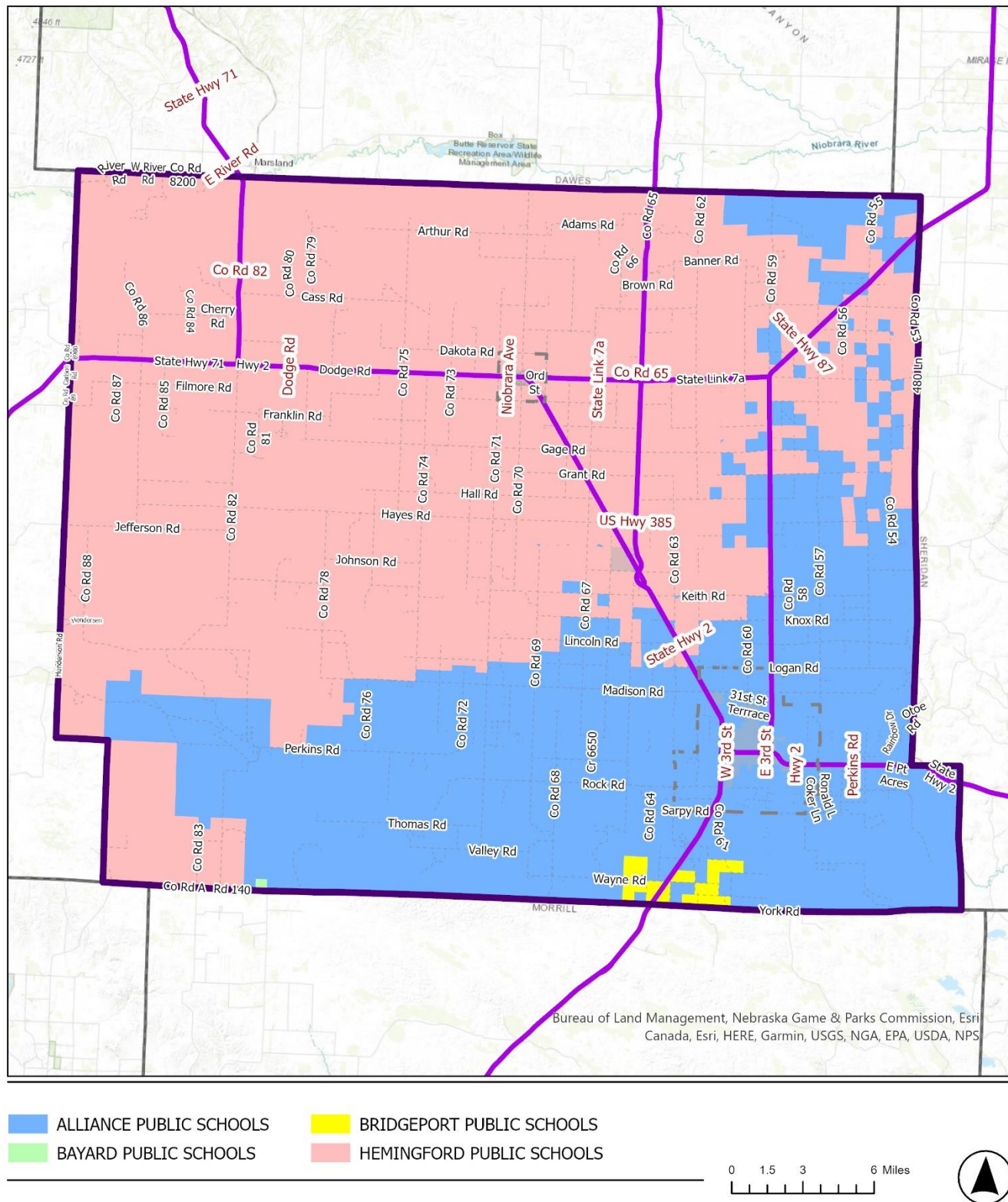
Sparse
Dense

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



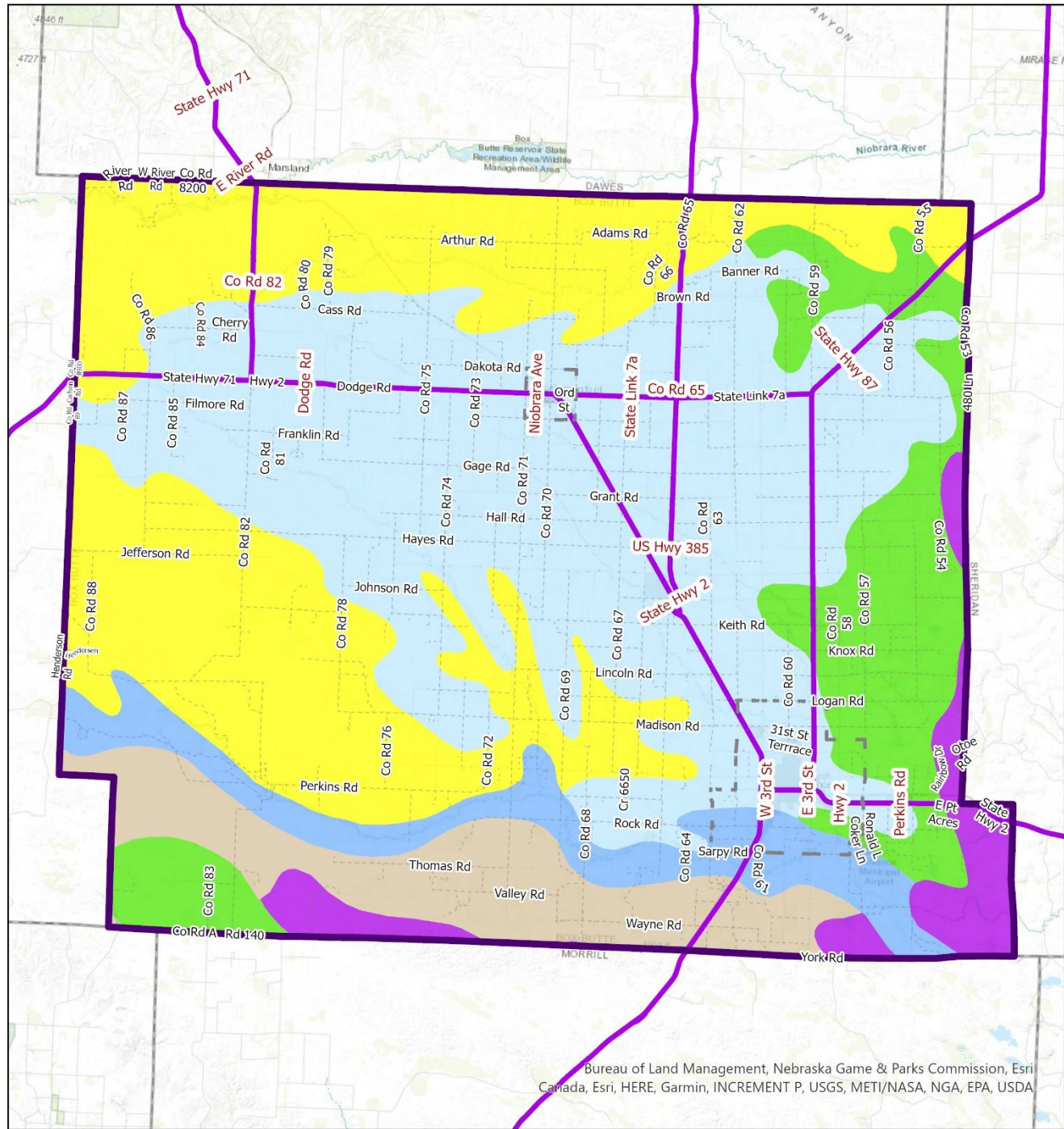
BOX BUTTE COUNTY: SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Figure 16- Box Butte County: School Districts



BOX BUTTE COUNTY: SOILS

Figure 17- Box Butte County: Soils



Busher-Sarben-Tassel	Keith-Alliance-Rosebud	Valentine
Jayem-Sarben-Valent	Valent	Valentine-Els-Wildhorse

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The westward expansion of the United States by homesteaders, the railroads and free land were key factors contributing to the development of Box Butte County and its' communities. The 1862 Homestead Act allocated 160 acres of land to settlers who were required to work the land for a specified period of time. The 1873 Timber Culture Act granted 160 acres of land to settlers who would plant and nurture tree seedlings on barren land. These acts prompted the county's first settler, A.H. McLaughlin, to file a homestead and a tree claim in 1881. However, settlement did not begin in earnest until the mid-1880's. The Kincaid Act, approved by Congress in 1904, allowed a claim of 640 acres of land which further encouraged settlers to locate in the arid Sandhills.

The land occupied by Box Butte County was originally a portion of Dawes County. By 1886, solid growth in the area led residents of the southern half of Dawes County to petition for the creation of a new county. By the summer of 1886 three petitions were circulating to divide Box Butte County away from Dawes County. The dividing line chosen by the Dawes County Commissioners favored the north line of township 28 which resulted in the Niobrara River valley remaining in Dawes County and placed Nonpareil at the center of Box Butte County.

On February 8, 1887, Governor John M. Thayer signed a proclamation organizing Box Butte County. Future growth and development in Box Butte County were heavily influenced by the development of the Burlington Railroad. The Lincoln Land Company, a Burlington auxiliary, had previously purchased from the state a school section in the extreme southeast corner of the county. The City of Alliance was platted in March of 1888 on this section and adjacent to the small town of Grand Lake, which consisted of tents and a few small frame buildings. Nonpareil, the first county seat community, was bypassed by the railroad and ceased to exist.

Hemingford, the second county seat community, lost its preeminence as more and more railroad activities were directed to Alliance. Following a long legal battle and several elections, the Box Butte County Courthouse was transported by rail from Hemingford to Alliance during June & July of 1899. The engineering skills of E.W. Bell, a bridge foreman with the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad made this feat possible.

Descriptions of the event were published in Harper's Magazine and Scientific America. Alliance became a center for homesteaders and ranchers needing materials and a distribution hub for shipping grain and cattle to Omaha and other markets.

Several of Box Butte County's old settlements and places of historic interest are described below using excerpts from the 1975 Box Butte County Comprehensive Plan.

Berea. This village was named after Berea, Ohio, by some of the early settlers. The name derives from the ancient city in Macedonia.

Birdsell. The place in Boyd precinct was named for an official of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, J.C. Birdsell.

Bronco Lake. Bronco Lake was two miles southwest of Alliance. Now dry, Bronco Lake was camp site used by Native Americans and in later years a recreation area used for swimming, boating, hunting and ice skating depending upon the season. In 1953, the lake began to lose its water and was dry by 1955.

Burbank. This inland place was located in Snake Creek precinct. It was named after the local postmaster.

Bums. Also located in Snake Creek precinct and after the local postmaster.

Carpenter. Located near the southern boundary of Box Butte County in Wright precinct and named after the local postmaster.

Girard. A station on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad in Dorsey precinct. This is also the site of Nonpareil.

Hashman. Named after C.L. Hashman, the postmaster.

Hemingford. Named by Joseph Hare after his former home in Hemingford, Canada, spelling the name however with only one "m".

Letan. A station on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad near the southern boundary of Box Butte County in Wright precinct and named by the railroad.

Marple. This post office was originally located in Box Butte County where a skinning station had been established. The head of this enterprise was a man by the name of Marple, in whose honor the post office was named. Later the station was discontinued, and the office moved to Sheridan County.

Nonpareil. The first county seat in Box Butte County was reportedly given its name by Eugene Heath who started the newspaper called The Grip and selected the name Nonpareil from the name of a very small or six-point size of type.

Nye. A station on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad near the northern boundary of Box Butte County in Lawn precinct and named by the railroad.

Sidney-Deadwood Trail. A major thoroughfare crossing Box Butte County in the 1870's and 1880's. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 prompted establishment of the trail. Private and commercial freight haulers moved an estimated twenty-five million pounds of freight over the trail in five years. The southern end of the trail in Box Butte County is about six miles East of the southwest corner of the county. It extended northerly across the county to the Niobrara River. The southern station on Snake Creek was near the old Hart Ranch headquarters. About halfway to the Niobrara River another station was established. Old records identify two station names as Apple Orchard and Halfway Hollow. At the Halfway Hollow site an Indian attack took place and on another occasion two bandits were hanged from upended wagon tongues following a failed stage robbery attempt. The northernmost station was called Running Water.

Yale. A name given by railroad officials to the next station north of Alliance on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

WiUey. A former inland post office in Snake Creek precinct named after the local postmaster.

Global politics has also influenced the development of Box Butte County. The First World War created a demand for potash. Exploitation of deposits near Antioch, twelve miles east of Alliance, resulted in additional growth. This boom, however, was short lived. The Alliance Air Base was established in 1942 at the location of the present municipal airport. Population increased dramatically during this time as construction workers and troops were located in the county.

Several significant historic and archaeological sites are located in Box Butte County. Ever increasing awareness of the need to protect historic and archaeological sites from development prompts the inclusion of the following rural sites in this plan. These include: **Robert Ball Anderson**

Homestead. Located eight miles east and two miles north of Hemingford this homestead of a prominent early black settler includes a log cabin, which may have been built by Anderson.

Carpenter Sod House. Located in southwest of Alliance in Section 28, T24N,R40W this sod house was purportedly built in the 1890's and served as both a dwelling and post office. **Running Water Stage Station.** A stage station site along the Sidney-Deadwood Trail located on the north side of the Niobrara River in Section 1, T28N, R52W near Marsland. No buildings survive. •

Box Butte County also contains several old cemeteries and graveyards. These include:

Box Butte Graveyard. Located in the northwest corner of the SW1/4, Sec. 32, T28, R47, Running Water Graveyard. Located in the southwest corner of Sec.12, T28, R48.

Bohemian Cemetery. Located in the southwest corner of the SW1/4, Sec.22, T27, R52. **St. Wenceslaus (Lawn) Cemetery,** located in the NW1/4 of Sec.17, T27, R51.

Ball Cemetery. Located in the SW1/4 of Sec.2; T27, R51.

Fairview Cemetery. Located in the southeast corner of Sec.10, T26, R47. The cemetery contains the grave of John Sylvester, a nearby Sheridan County homesteader who was shot to death in range war. Ron Coker, Medal of Honor winner in Vietnam is also buried here.

Additional significant sites and geographic features were mentioned during issue and visioning discussions attended by the Planning Commission and members of the general public. These sites included the Alliance Army Air Base, sod houses and old homesteads in various areas of the county, Kilpatrick Dam, Wild Horse Butte, Box Butte, rural schoolhouses, the Berea store and church, Westside Hall, Point of Rocks, and an old bottling plant/creamery.

PREVIOUS PLANNING PROCESS

COMPREHENSIVE PLANS 1942 TO 1995

Box Butte County prepared its first comprehensive plan and zoning regulations in 1942. These zoning regulations impacted only areas around the Alliance Army Air Base. A second comprehensive plan and zoning regulations were developed in 1975. These regulations were never adopted. In 1983, the county again completed a comprehensive plan and zoning resolution update. However, no signed resolution has been found and the regulations were not enforced. The 1975 document was prepared by the State of Nebraska Office of Planning and Programming. Reminiscent of planning projects conducted during this time period using U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant funds, the plan provides a detailed inventory and base of information on topics such as environmental features, public facilities and public infrastructure located in both the small communities and rural areas of the county. The 1983 plan was a much-simplified version of the 1975 plan. Several development goals, policies and concepts were included in both of these documents that remain valid today. Both the 1975 and 1983 plans base their assumptions for development upon population and economic projections that reflect the early 1970's growth by manufacturing industries and the railroad. Consequently, population projections estimated a 1995 population of approximately 16,500 people. The 1995 Box Butte County population was, in reality, around 13,000 people.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2001

During the 2000 legislative session the Nebraska State Legislature approved a new law allowed unzoned Nebraska counties to adopt the zoning resolution of an adjacent county, or a county within a specified distance: In an effort to implement some form of land use control in Box Butte County the Box Butte County Commissioners adopted the Sioux County Zoning Resolution. As a result of this process, and for land use regulations to remain in existence in Box Butte County it became necessary for the county to prepare and adopt both a comprehensive plan and zoning resolution of its own prior to July 1, 2001.

Following this development the Panhandle Area Development District (PADD) was contracted in September 2000 to prepare a comprehensive plan and zoning resolution for Box Butte County. Although this sequence of events provided only a seven-month time frame for completion of the documents prior to public hearings and their eventual adoption, PADD's familiarity with the county and their commitment to a robust community outreach campaign led to the development of a Comprehensive Plan that has served the County well over the last two decades.

Several methods were employed during the planning process to generate public involvement. These included:

- The Box Butte County Planning Commission public advertised every regularly scheduled monthly meeting as required by law.
- Several bi-monthly meetings were held on different days and at different times to ensure as much public access as possible.
- Local media were invited to all Planning Commission meetings and regularly attended to cover progress on the comprehensive plan and zoning resolution.
- Planning Commission members conducted radio talk shows to inform the public and encourage their participation in the process.
- Several committees were formed to provide input and to comment on each section of the plan as it was prepared.
- Residents attending Planning Commission meetings were directly involved in the process with brainstorming sessions and small group discussions.

Data on statistical and physical characteristics were gathered for inclusion in the plan using a comprehensive process that included the following steps:

- Reviewing data from the U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, and the Regional Economic Information System.
- Analyzing digital orthophoto quads to assess primary land uses, and conducting field verification by driving all county roads.
- Examining previous planning documents relevant to Box Butte County.
- Reviewing the Box Butte County Soil Survey.
- Consulting with county department heads and incorporating the information they provided.
- Sharing each section of the plan as it was drafted, with committee members, county department heads, and the Planning Commission for review and feedback before proceeding to public hearings as required.

ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Box Butte County is located in western Nebraska in a region generally referred to as the Panhandle. It is bordered by Dawes County to the north, Sheridan County to the East, Morrill County to the south and Sioux County to the west. The county is rectangular in shape extending approximately 36 miles east to west and 30 miles north to south. The county encompasses approximately 681,600 acres or 1,077 square miles.

Denver, the nearest large metropolitan area, is located approximately 291 miles to the southwest. Lincoln and Omaha are 366 and 397 miles to the east, respectively. Rapid City, South Dakota is located approximately 152 miles to the north.

CLIMATE

Box Butte County has a semiarid climate as a result of its location near the center of a large continent and effects caused several features of relief. The Rocky Mountains and the Black Hills significantly affect climatic conditions experienced in the county by blocking and redirecting wind patterns and/or precipitation.

Temperature variations during the year are extreme. Mean temperatures range from a low of approximately 26 degrees during the winter months to an average high of approximately 69 degrees during the summer. In winter, periods of cold temperatures alternate with milder intervals that often occur as a result of tepid downslope winds. The mean annual temperature is approximately 47 degrees Fahrenheit. In common with the remainder of the Panhandle, Box Butte County is one of the coldest parts of the State of Nebraska. The relatively low humidity, however, makes the periods of hot, and cold, weather more comfortable than in the eastern sections of the state. The sun shines 75% of the time during the summer months and 60% during the winter months. Being sheltered by the Rocky Mountains, total annual precipitation averages approximately 15 inches. Most of the precipitation, approximately 12 inches, is represented by rainfall between the months of April and September. The average seasonal snowfall is 35 inches.

TOPOGRAPHY

Box Butte County is located in the High Plains section of the Great Plains and is comprised of five general types of landforms. These include a high plains table, a rolling plain, an area of steep hills and escarpments, sandhills and stream valleys.

The Box Butte Table dominates the north-central portion of the county and slopes generally to the east and southeast. Rolling plains are located to the west, south and east of this table. The northern part of the county contains rugged escarpments, hills and steep side slopes formed by the Niobrara River

and its tributaries. The southern and eastern portions of the county are composed of rolling hills and sand dunes.

Approximately nine percent of the county is in stream valleys. The principal valleys include the Niobrara River and Snake Creek areas. The Niobrara River valley ranges from 1/8 to 1/2 mile in width while the Snake Creek valley ranges from 1/8 mile to 3 miles in width.

The county is drained by four major systems. The Niobrara River and tributaries, Dry Creek and Sand Canyon Creek located in the northern areas of the county drain about 12 percent of the county. The northeastern 15% of the county is drained by Box Butte Creek. A portion of eastern Box Butte County is drained by two intermittent streams, Berea Creek and Hemingford Creek. These two streams also drain about 15% of the county. Approximately 54% of the county is drained by Snake Creek and its tributaries. The remaining four percent of the county is comprised of sand hills. Due to the permeability of these hills, there is no surface drainage.

Box Butte County has an average elevation of 4,200 feet above sea level with a range of 4,580 to 3,850 feet above sea level.

GEOLOGY & GROUNDWATER

Box Butte County's soils are formed from the weathering of Tertiary age rock and from unconsolidated younger deposits of the Quaternary age. The Arikaree group, the oldest exposed geologic formations in the county, consists of the upper part known as the Upper Harrison Formation found in much of the west-central part of the county and the lower part which is exposed in the Niobrara River valley and in the south-western part of the county. Four formations of the Ogallala Group are found in the county. These include the Running Water, Box Butte, Sheep Creek and Ogallala Formations.

Four main hydrologic units (subdivisions of geologic groups) are presently used for water supply in the county. These include the Arikaree and Upper Harrison units and the Running Water and Ogallala units. The Arikaree, which underlies most of the county, has a maximum thickness of 500 feet and is over 400 feet below the surface in the eastern part of the county. This formation is a major water resource for the county and contains approximately 115 million acre-feet of saturated rock, of which 23 million acre-feet is water. The Upper Harrison unit, which has a maximum thickness of 200 feet, is exposed in the west-central part of the county is about 250 feet below the surface in the eastern part of the county. The Running Water unit has a thickness of over 200 feet and contains about 1.2 million acre-feet of water. The Ogallala unit is under most of the southern and south-eastern parts of the county. The maximum thickness is 200 feet, and it contains about 3.7 million acre-feet of water.

From 1938 to 1975 approximately 700,000 to 800,000 acre-feet of water was removed from groundwater storage, representing just 2% of the total storage volume. Water levels north of Alliance

have gone down approximately 40 feet since 1938. At the present time no area of the county has severely depleted its groundwater supply.

SOILS

Soils in Box Butte County are grouped into eleven general soil associations depicted on Map #2 and include the following:

Alliance-Rosebud-Keith Association: This association is found on upland landscapes consisting of broad flats and ridge tops and side slopes along drainageways. This association covers about 38% of the county, or 258,000 acres. Farming on these soils includes both cash-grain crops and livestock grazing. Wheat is the principal dryland crop while several irrigated crops such as corn and sugar beets are also grown. Blowing soil and water erosion are the primary hazards in these areas. A declining groundwater level is a concern where crops are irrigated.

Alliance-Hemingford-Satanta Association: This association consists of deep, nearly level to strongly sloping, well drained loamy soils on uplands. It covers about 5%, or 32,000 acres, of the county. This association is used for dryland wheat and irrigated crops in level areas and for grazing on steeper slopes. Blowing soil and water erosion are the primary hazards. A declining groundwater level is a concern where crops are irrigated.

Norrest-Canyon-Creighton Association: These soils are found on uplands in the Dry Creek Watershed. These are primarily strongly sloping to steep soils that cover about 16, 000 acres or 2.3 percent of the county. These lands are primarily used for grazing. Water erosion is the principal hazard

Creighton-Oglala-Canyon Association: This association, covering about 82,000 acres or 12 percent of the county, is found on uplands consisting of narrow ridge tops, tablelands and smooth side slopes. Dryland and irrigated cash-grain crops and cattle grazing are the primary farm operations in these areas. Blowing soil and water erosion are the primary hazards in these areas.

Busher-Valent-Tassel Association: This is an upland association consisting of breaks, hummocks, ridges and side slopes adjacent to drainageways. Most of this association borders the Niobrara River and its tributaries. It represents approximately 8% of the county or about 57,000 acres. This association is mostly native grassland used for grazing. Water erosion is the principal hazard in rangeland areas with blowing soil the primary hazard in tilled areas.

Sarben-Busher Association: This association consists of long, smooth side slopes, low ridges and short side slopes near drainageways. It covers about 7% of the county, or 48,000 acres. Most of this land is used for cattle grazing. Soil blowing is the primary hazard.

Sataota-Jayem-Busher Association: This association, consisting of broad flats, low ridges and smooth side slopes, covers about 58,000 acres, or 8.5% of the county. Fanning operations on these soils include cash-grain crops and livestock. Soil blowing is the hazard. Water erosion is also a hazard on the steeper slopes. A declining groundwater level is a concern where crops are irrigated.

Valent-Dailey Association: This association is in sandhills and occupies about 61,000 acres, or 8.8% of the county. Most of these areas are used for cow-calf operations, although some of the less sloping soils are irrigated and cultivated. Soil blowing is the primary hazard. Wells provide sufficient water for livestock and domestic use.

Valentine Association: The landscape in this association consists primarily of hummocks and dunelike hills. This association covers about 3.7%, or 26,000 acres, of the county. Ranches in these areas are primarily cow-calf operations with limited alfalfa production. Soil blowing is the primary hazard. Wells provide sufficient water for livestock and domestic use. However, most ranchers live outside this association.

Las Animas-Lisco Association: This association covers about 1,728 acres of the county and is found in the Niobrara River Valley. These soils are somewhat poorly drained and wetness is the primary limitation. The association is used mainly for ranching.

Janise-Lisco Association: This association is found primarily on bottom lands in the Snake Creek Valley. It covers about 42,000 acres, or 6.2% of the county. Most of this land is in native grass and is used for grazing or mowed for hay. However, some areas are cultivated. Production is limited by alkalinity. Soil blowing is a hazard in unprotected areas. Wells provide sufficient water for livestock and domestic use.

PRIME FARMLANDS

Prime farmlands in Box Butte County exist only on certain soil types that are irrigated. Thirty-three soil types can be considered prime farmland in Box Butte County if they are irrigated. Soils that could potentially be considered prime farmland represent about 33%, or 224,000 acres, of the county's total land acreage. Soils meeting these criteria are listed on page 152 of the 1980 issue of the Soil Survey of Box Butte County.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Three endangered species can be found in Box Butte County. These include the Swift Fox, and the American Peregrine Falcon.

FLOODPLAINS

Flood Insurance Rate Maps are not currently available for rural Box Butte County. At the present time a Flood Hazard Boundary Map has been issued identifying areas of the county that will be listed as 100-year flood plains in the event Box Butte County participates in the Flood Insurance program.

BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Box Butte County Soil Survey contains several pages of information beginning on page 185 that describe restrictive soil features that could necessitate alternative construction methods for building placement on specific soil types. Parties interested in developing structures in Box Butte County are encouraged to consult this information.

HOUSING ANALYSIS REPORT

The Housing Profile in this plan identifies existing housing characteristics and projected housing needs for residents of Box Butte County. The primary goal of the housing profile is to allow the county to examine past and present conditions while identifying potential needs including provisions for safe, decent, sanitary and affordable housing for every family and individual residing within county.

The housing profile is an analysis that aids in determining the composition of owner-occupied and renter-occupied units, as well as the existence of vacant units. It is important to evaluate information on the value of owner-occupied housing units, and monthly rents for renter-occupied housing units, to determine if housing costs are a financial burden to Box Butte County residents.

The 2020 housing plan partially relied upon the 2014-2018 American Community Survey. In the tables and charts below, we utilize 2019-2023 American Community Survey data. Data values have changed, but most trends and strategies within the housing study are still valid. That plan is incorporated by reference into this comprehensive plan. The following furthers the communities' understanding of their housing profile. The initial sections will be broader, but this section will focus on rural Box Butte County (i.e., Box Butte County excluding Alliance or Hemingford data as they have their own comprehensive plans) when possible.

HOUSING TRENDS

Box Butte County's housing data reveals a stable but aging housing stock, limited new construction, and a subtle shift in household dynamics that could have implications for housing policy and economic development.

Aging Housing Stock and Need for Rehabilitation

A significant portion of Box Butte County's homes—nearly 60% overall and over half in rural areas—were built before 1980. One-quarter of all homes were constructed before 1940, and these older homes are particularly common in rural areas. This raises concerns about deteriorating structures and potential hazards like lead and asbestos. The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) Lead Testing and Reduction Grant Program has grant funds available for public and private

schools, local educational agencies, and licensed childcare programs across the state to remediate lead in drinking water and reduce children's exposure.¹

Limited New Construction and Labor Constraints

While the decade between 2000 and 2009 saw a surge in rural housing development, construction has slowed dramatically since 2010—only 5.6% of rural housing units have been built since then. Despite favorable mortgage conditions in the early 2020s, local construction has not kept pace with potential demand. A shortage of qualified contractors—both for new builds and renovations—was identified by community members as a key barrier. This workforce gap likely contributes to higher vacancy rates among units in disrepair and may limit the region's ability to address housing shortages or improve existing stock.

Household Stability but Fewer Total Units

The rural population has remained virtually flat between 2017 and 2023, increasing by just five people. However, the number of occupied housing units declined by nearly 9%, and the total number of housing units (including vacant ones) dropped by 11%. This suggests a shrinking housing supply, likely driven by aging and under-maintained units becoming uninhabitable. While overall vacancies dropped, the share of homes classified as “other vacant”—which often signals abandonment or poor condition—increased. This supports concerns about a diminishing and deteriorating housing inventory, particularly in rural areas.

Shifting Household Sizes and Composition

The average number of people per household has slightly decreased overall, with a more pronounced drop in owner-occupied units. Meanwhile, rental households saw a small increase in household size, possibly indicating a trend toward shared living arrangements due to affordability pressures or shifting

¹ <https://dee.nebraska.gov/news-events/press-releases/lead-testing-reduction-grants-available-schools-licensed-child-care-programs#:~:text=The%20Nebraska%20Department%20of%20Environment,water%20and%20reduce%20children's%20exposure.>

demographics. Box Butte County's household size is also smaller than the state average, suggesting a greater prevalence of single-person or smaller households compared to other parts of Nebraska.

Box Butte County faces a mix of opportunities and challenges in its housing sector. While the population remains stable, the housing stock is aging, construction is lagging, and contractor shortages are straining the system. Proactive strategies will be needed to address deferred maintenance, support rehabilitation of older homes, and ensure that future housing supply meets the needs of a changing population—particularly in rural areas where owner-occupancy is high but homes are increasingly at risk of falling out of the usable market.

Rent Trends and Affordability

Between 2017 and 2023, Box Butte County experienced moderate increases in housing costs, with both rent and home values rising more slowly than the statewide average—but still being outpaced by inflation. While this suggests a relatively more stable housing market compared to the rest of Nebraska, the rising cost of housing still presents affordability challenges for local renters. Inflation between 2017 and 2023 increased at a rate of 24.3%, indicating Box Butte County rents increased at a rate over 1.4 times faster than the rate of inflation. Thus, Box Butte County tenants were paying considerably higher monthly rents in 2023, in terms of real dollars, than they were in 2017, on average.

Median contract rent in Box Butte County rose 17.6% over the six-year period, significantly lower than the statewide increase of 37.1%. However, median gross rent, which includes utilities and fees, rose by 34.1%, pointing to a growing burden from non-rent costs. The sharp increase in the difference between contract rent and gross rent—up over 100%—suggests that utility and service costs have become a larger component of renters' monthly expenses.

When adjusted for inflation, which rose by 24.3% during the same period, Box Butte County's overall rent increases still surpassed national inflation rates. This means renters are paying more in real terms than they were in 2017.

Renter Incomes and Economic Context

Despite rising rents, median renter incomes increased by nearly 60%, from about \$28,000 to nearly \$45,000. This income growth outpaced rent increases and inflation, which generally signals improved affordability for the average renter household—particularly if costs are shared across multiple earners. However, for single earners or individuals living alone, affordability remains tight. For instance, a single income could support only about \$558 in rent—barely covering the median one-bedroom rent of \$567/month.

Minimum Wage Impacts

The phased increase of Nebraska's minimum wage currently at \$13.50/hour in 2025 and tied to inflation thereafter—offers future support for low-income renters. In 2023, a full-time minimum wage

worker could afford roughly \$550/month in rent, which aligns with local contract rent data. While this helps maintain affordability at the lower end of the wage spectrum, continued rent increases could undermine these gains unless incomes keep pace.

Homeownership Trends

Owner-occupied housing values in Box Butte County rose 52.8%, slightly below the state average of 57.2%, but still doubling the rate of inflation. This suggests that homeowners have seen significant appreciation in property values, gaining real wealth over the six years. However, higher home values may also limit entry to homeownership for first-time buyers.

Box Butte County's housing market has grown more expensive but remains relatively more affordable than statewide averages. Rent increases, while real and impactful, have generally been matched or exceeded by income growth, especially for multi-earner households. The challenge going forward will be ensuring that housing options remain accessible for a range of living situations—particularly for single earners—as the market adjusts to changing demands and economic conditions.

The figures and tables provided at the end of this chapter offer deeper insight into Box Butte County housing. This information is valuable because it helps identify where housing needs may be greatest. By understanding these patterns, Box Butte County can make more informed decisions about where to focus new housing development or rehabilitation efforts. Targeting resources to specific communities or population groups—such as families with children, seniors, or single-person households—can ensure housing investments meet actual needs. This approach would support both quality of life and long-term stability in the county's housing market.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Between 2017 and 2023, rural Box Butte County experienced notable shifts in household composition, age demographics, and housing tenure patterns—particularly in the rental market.

Household Size and Tenure Trends

Two-person households have consistently made up the largest share of owner-occupied homes, though their share slightly declined over the period. While these smaller households still dominate, the most significant growth occurred among larger households. The number of homes with five or more occupants more than doubled, signaling either a growing need for larger family housing or increased multi-generational living arrangements. Most of this growth occurred within owner-occupied units, highlighting the continued strength and stability of homeownership in the area.

The rental market, however, tells a different story. Overall rental occupancy dropped, continuing a long-term trend of declining rental opportunities in rural Box Butte County. The composition of rental households also shifted—from being dominated by younger individuals (ages 15–24) in 2017 to a greater share of adults aged 25–34 in 2023. This change may reflect a generational shift or suggest

that younger renters are being priced out or discouraged from entering the rural housing market due to limited availability or affordability constraints.

Aging Homeowners and Changing Renter Demographics

The aging of the homeowner population is evident, with the 65–74 age group growing to represent nearly one-third of all owner-occupied households by 2023. This trend suggests increasing housing stability among older residents, but it also raises questions about long-term turnover, housing availability, and the potential for future downsizing or aging-in-place needs.

Meanwhile, the renter population is becoming more concentrated in specific age groups, with a steep drop in renters under 25 and a corresponding rise in those aged 25–34. This shift could point to delayed household formation or economic barriers for younger adults trying to access housing in the county.

The data suggest a housing environment in rural Box Butte County that is increasingly weighted toward older, owner-occupied households and larger families. The shrinking rental sector and decline in younger renters could signal a lack of affordable or suitable rental options, potentially limiting the county's ability to attract or retain younger residents and workforce-aged households. Strategic planning may be needed to address these imbalances—particularly through housing rehabilitation, diversification of unit types, and efforts to expand rental opportunities for younger or lower-income individuals.

Substandard Housing Conditions

Between 2017 and 2023, rural Box Butte County experienced a concerning rise in substandard housing conditions, alongside a modest improvement in addressing the most severe rental affordability challenges.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines, housing is considered substandard if it lacks complete plumbing (including hot and cold-piped water, bathtub/shower, and a flush toilet), lacks a complete kitchen (including a sink, stove/range, refrigerator, and place for food prep/storage) or are overcrowded (more than one person per room).

The share of housing units classified as substandard—those lacking essential plumbing or kitchen facilities or considered overcrowded—increased significantly from 0.8% in 2017 to 3.1% in 2023. While this may seem like a small percentage, it reflects a more than threefold increase over six years. The most common deficiencies were missing kitchen facilities and overcrowding, which not only compromise living standards but may also indicate deeper issues, such as aging infrastructure and lack of housing maintenance.

Importantly, this data likely understates the full scope of substandard housing. The methodology aggregates multiple deficiencies within single units, meaning homes with more than one issue could be counted only once or, in some cases, multiple times. Moreover, the figures do not capture units

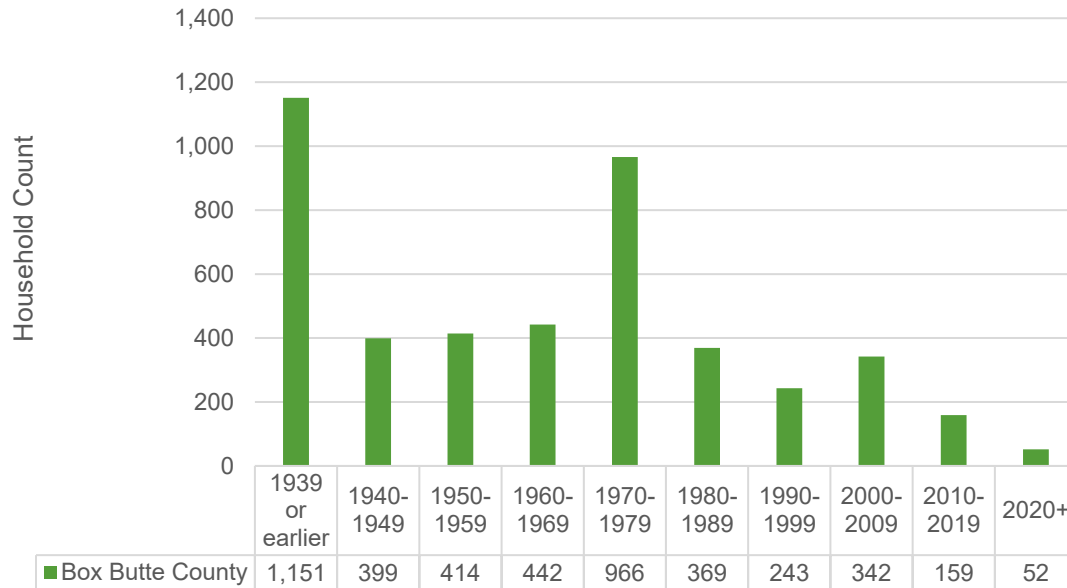
that meet basic criteria but still require significant rehabilitation to comply with safety codes or ensure long-term habitability. As a result, the actual number of homes in need of repair or modernization is likely higher.

To address this, local officials are encouraged to conduct a full housing condition survey every five years. Doing so would help prioritize rehabilitation funding and maintain the long-term quality and safety of the housing stock. Box Butte County completed such a plan in 2020, and continuing this effort on a regular basis is essential for identifying and responding to housing deterioration before it becomes more widespread.

DRAFT

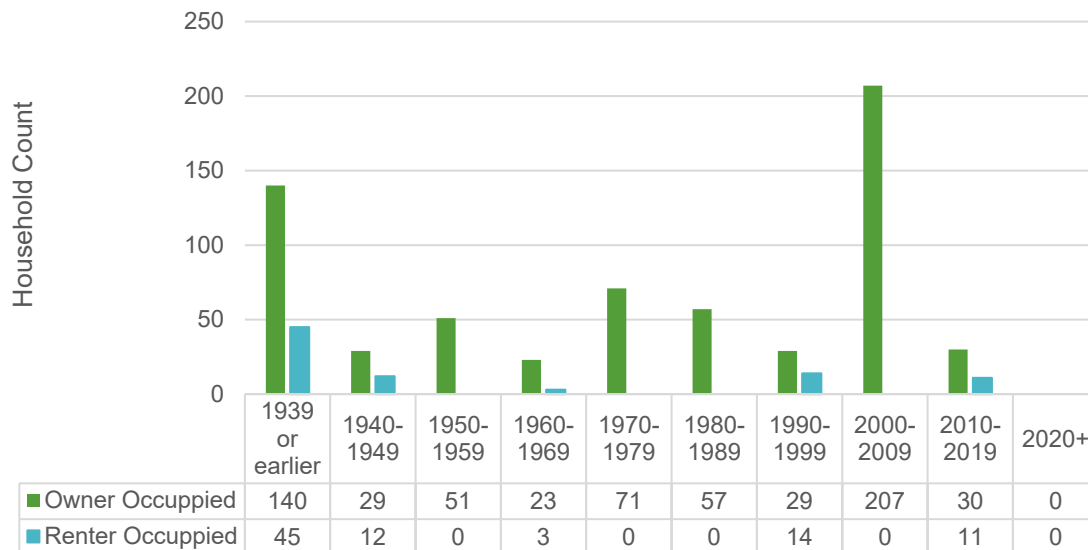
HOUSING TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 2: Age of Existing Occupied Housing Stock, Box Butte County, 2023



Source: American Community Survey 2019-2023. Table: B25036

Table 3: Age of Existing Occupied Housing Stock by Cohort, Box Butte County, 2023



Source: American Community Survey 2019-2023. Table: B25036

Table 4: Community Housing Trends, Rural Box Butte County, 2010, 2017 and 2023

Selected Characteristic	2010	2017	2023	% Change 2017-2023
Population (Table: B01003)				
County	11,372	11,200	10,754	-4.0%
Rural Box Butte	2,132	1,916	1,921	0.3%
Persons in Occupied Household Units by Tenure- Total (Table: B25008)				
County	11,211	10,996	10,568	-3.9%
Rural Box Butte	2,132	1,916	1,921	0.3%
Persons in Group Quarters (Table: B26001)				
County	161	204	186	-8.8%
Rural Box Butte	1	0	0	0.0%
Average Household Size of Occupied Housing Units by Tenure (Table: B25010)				
County- Total	2.34	2.39	2.33	-2.5%
County- Owner	2.40	2.60	2.41	-7.3%
County- Renter	2.22	1.84	2.09	13.6%
Total Housing Units (Table: B25001 & Calculated with B25004)				
County- Total (Occupied + Vacant)	5,484	5,459	5,222	-4.3%
Rural Box Butte- Total (Occupied + Vacant)	1,053	953	848	-11.0%
County- Total (Occupied)	4,793	4,610	4,537	-1.6%
Rural Box Butte- Total (Occupied)	867	792	722	-8.8%
Tenure of Occupied Housing Units (Table: B25003)				
Owner- County	3,231	3,305	3,424	3.6%
Owner- Rural Box Butte	678	695	637	-8.3%
Renter- County	1,562	1,305	1,113	-14.7%
Renter- Rural Box Butte	189	97	85	-12.4%
Percentage Renter Occupied (Table: Calculated)				
County	32.6%	28.3%	24.5%	-13.3%
Rural Box Butte	21.8%	12.2%	11.8%	-3.9%
Vacant Units (Table: B25004)				
County	691	849	685	-19.3%
Rural Box Butte	186	161	126	-21.7%
For rent	36	12	0	
Other vacant	137	104	120	
Tenure by Units in Structure (Table: B25032)				
Rural Box Butte Only				
All-occupied housing units:	867	792	722	-8.8%
1, detached	716	738	670	-9.2%
1, attached	19	0	4	
Mobile home	130	43	42	

(Source: American Community Survey. Tables are listed above. Select rows from ACS tables B25004 & B25032 were hidden.)

Table 5: Persons Per Household by County, 2023

	Box Butte	Buffalo	Dawson	Hall	Keith	Madison	Platte	Scotts Bluff	Sheridan
Total:	2.33	2.45	2.64	2.52	2.07	2.44	2.53	2.33	2.31
Owner occupied	2.41	2.62	2.80	2.75	2.21	2.61	2.66	2.44	2.33
Renter occupied	2.09	2.13	2.36	2.12	1.71	2.07	2.18	2.08	2.24

Source: American Community Survey.

Table 6: Community Housing Costs, Rural Box Butte County, 2010, 2017 and 2023

Selected Characteristic	2010	2017	2023	% Change 2017-2023
Median Contract Rent (Table: B25058) (The amount of money a tenant agrees to pay each month for rent.)				
Nebraska	\$521	\$624	\$856	37.2%
Box Butte County	\$372	\$470	\$553	17.7%
Alliance	\$370	\$474	\$549	15.8%
Hemingford	\$343	\$376	\$588	56.4%
Median Gross Rent by Bedrooms (Table: B25031) (The total amount a tenant pays, including utilities and other fees.)				
Total:	\$543	\$575	\$771	34.1%
No bedroom				
1 bedroom	\$452	\$468	\$567	21.2%
2 bedrooms	\$550	\$625	\$777	24.3%
3 bedrooms	\$678	\$747	\$1,013	35.6%
4 bedrooms	\$591	\$789		
5 or more bedrooms				
Median Household Income by Tenure (Table: B25119)				
Total:	\$44,404	\$56,3284	\$68,778	22.1%
Owner occupied (dollars)	\$55,838	\$71,632	\$74,069	3.4%
Renter occupied (dollars)	\$26,262	\$28,027	\$44,682	59.4%
Median Value (Dollars) (Table: B25077)				
Nebraska	\$123,900	\$142,400	\$223,800	57.2%
Box Butte County	\$90,600	\$105,400	\$161,100	52.8%
Alliance	\$88,500	\$98,800	\$156,300	58.2%
Hemingford	\$56,100	\$83,700	\$86,400	3.2%
Inflation Change: Base Value (\$100,000 in 2010)	\$100,000	\$112,411	\$144,735	28.8%

Source: American Community Survey. Tables are listed below

Table 7: Tenure by Household Size for Rural Box Butte County, 2010, 2017 and 2023

	2010				2017				2023				% Change 2017-2023	
	OO	%OO	RO	%RO	OO	%OO	RO	%RO	OO	%OO	RO	%RO	%OO Change	%RO Change
Total Person/ Household	678		189		695		97		637		85			
1-person	72	10.6%	76	40.2%	114	16.4%	19	19.6%	129	20.3%	9	10.6%	23.5%	-45.9%
2-person	333	49.1%	64	33.9%	358	51.5%	36	37.1%	319	50.1%	42	49.4%	-2.8%	33.1%
3-person	120	17.7%	13	6.9%	76	10.9%	42	43.3%	22	3.5%	14	16.5%	-68.4%	-62.0%
4-person	128	18.9%	17	9.0%	99	14.2%	0	0.0%	56	8.8%	6	7.1%	-38.3%	
5-person	19	2.8%	17	9.0%	40	5.8%	0	0.0%	84	13.2%	6	7.1%	129.1%	
6-person	6	0.9%	0	0.0%	8	1.2%	0	0.0%	14	2.2%	8	9.4%	90.9%	
7+	0	0.0%	2	1.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	13	2.0%	0	0.0%		

(OO = Owner Occupied, RO = Renter Occupied)

Source: American Community Survey. Table: B25009

Table 8: Tenure by Household Age for Rural Box Butte County, 2010, 2017 and 2023

	2010				2017				2023				% Change 2017-2023	
	OO	%OO	RO	%RO	OO	%OO	RO	%RO	OO	%OO	RO	%RO	%OO Change	%RO Change
Total: Household Age	678		189		695		97		637		85			
15 to 24 years	5	0.7%	16	8.5%	0	0.0%	41	42.3%	0	0.0%	15	17.6%		-58.2%
25 to 34 years	74	10.9%	27	14.3%	48	6.9%	6	6.2%	27	4.2%	33	38.8%	-38.6%	527.6%
35 to 44 years	125	18.4%	37	19.6%	117	16.8%	0	0.0%	93	14.6%	24	28.2%	-13.3%	
45 to 54 years	203	29.9%	41	21.7%	93	13.4%	4	4.1%	82	12.9%	0	0.0%	-3.8%	-100.0%
55 to 59 years	74	10.9%	10	5.3%	88	12.7%	12	12.4%	45	7.1%	4	4.7%	-44.2%	-62.0%
60 to 64 years	77	11.4%	27	14.3%	101	14.5%	17	17.5%	103	16.2%	6	7.1%	11.3%	-59.7%
65 to 74 years	63	9.3%	17	9.0%	163	23.5%	8	8.2%	206	32.3%	3	3.5%	37.9%	-57.2%
75 to 84 years	47	6.9%	14	7.4%	63	9.1%	9	9.3%	61	9.6%	0	0.0%	5.6%	-100.0%
85 years and over	10	1.5%	0	0.0%	22	3.2%	0	0.0%	20	3.1%	0	0.0%	-0.8%	

(OO = Owner Occupied, RO = Renter Occupied)

Source: American Community Survey. Table: B25009

Table 9: Substandard & Worst-Case Needs Housing Needs, Rural Box Butte County, 2010, 2017 and 2023

Tenure by Plumbing Facilities	2010		2017		2023		% Change (2017-2023)	
ASC Table: B25049	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count Change	% Change
Total:	867		792		722		-70	
Owner occupied:	678		695		637		-58	
Complete plumbing facilities	661	97.5%	687	98.8%	617	96.9%	-70	-10.2%
Lacking plumbing facilities	17	2.5%	8	1.2%	20	3.1%	12	172.8%
Renter occupied:	189		97		85		-12	
Complete plumbing facilities	189	100.0%	97	100.0%	85	100.0%	-12	-12.4%
Lacking plumbing facilities	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Tenure by Kitchen Facilities	2010		2017		2023		% Change (2017-2023)	
ASC Table: B25049	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count Change	% Change
Total:	867		792		722		-70	
Owner occupied:	678		695		637		-58	
Complete kitchen facilities	663	97.8%	681	98.0%	608	95.4%	-73	-10.7%
Lacking kitchen facilities	15	2.3%	14	2.1%	29	4.8%	15	132.0%
Renter occupied:	189		97		85		-12	
Complete kitchen facilities	189	100.0%	97	100.0%	85	100.0%	-12	-12.4%
Lacking kitchen facilities	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Tenure by Occupants per Room	2010		2017		2023		% Change (2017-2023)	
ASC Table: B25014	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count Change	% Change
Total:	867		792		722		-70	-8.8%
Owner occupied:	678	78.2%	695	87.8%	637	88.2%	-58	-8.3%
1.01 + occupants per room	7	1.0%	0	0.0%	12	1.9%	12	
Renter occupied:	189	21.8%	97	12.2%	85	11.8%	-12	-12.4%
1.01 + occupants per room	12	6.3%	0	0.0%	8	9.4%	8	

Worst Case Needs	2010		2017		2021		% Change (2017-2023)	
CHAS Data	Count		Count		Count		Count Change	% Change
Box Butte County- Renters <50% AMI	640		600		530		-70	-11.7%
Alliance- Renters <50% AMI	595		510		460		-50	-9.8%
Hemingford <50% AMI	24		30		50		20	66.7%
Rural Box Butte <50% AMI	21		60		20		-40	-66.7%
Rural Box Butte- Substandard Avg	17		7		23		16	213.6%
Rural Box Butte- Housing Voucher	0		0		0		0	0.0%
Rural Box Butte- Worst Case Need	38		67		43		-24	-36.1%

Source: American Community Survey. Table: B25049, B25053, CHAS 2021

COMMUNITY FACILITIES INVENTORY

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Parks and Recreation Facilities

State Parks and Recreational Areas

Box Butte Reservoir encompasses 2,212 acres nine miles north of Hemingford. It includes a 1,600-acre lake. Amenities include fishing, camping, and picnicking locations as well as birdwatching.

County Parks and Recreational Areas

There are no County Parks or Recreational areas as of 2025.

Alliance Parks and Recreational Areas

Alliance has two large parks – Central Park and Laing Lake Park – as well as six neighborhood parks – Lions Park, Burlington Northern Park, Jaycees Park, Bower Park, Knight Park, and downtown mini-parks. The Snake Creek Trail is a two-mile paved trail connecting Central Park to Laing Park.

Alliance also has the Big Blue Bay Outdoor Pool, four ball field areas, eight fields, and two tennis courts.

Hemingford Parks and Recreational Areas

Hemingford has a park that covers two square blocks. Facilities include modern playground equipment, picnic tables, a shelter house, rest rooms, a swimming pool, and a sand volleyball and basketball court. Hemingford's baseball complex has two fields.

Golf Courses

Sky View Golf Course is an 18-hole championship course located in Alliance. The course measures 6,845 yards from the championship tees and 5,500 yards from the forward tees.

Historic Buildings and Sites

Alliance Army Air Field – In the spring of 1942, the U.S. Army selected this site for a new airfield because of its dry climate and open landscape as well as its proximity to Alliance. The airfield's primary mission was to train aircrews on C-47 and C-53 transports and CG-4 gliders. The field was declared surplus in 1945. Alliance now uses part of the field as an airport.

Burlington Locomotive 719 – The expansion of the Burlington and Missouri Railroad westward through the Sandhills between 1877 and 1878 made ranching more profitable in Box Butte County. Locomotive Number 719 was built in Havelock, Nebraska around 1903 and was used for the majority of its half century of service on the Burlington's Alliance Division. Representative of the steam-power

era of railroading, it was one of the K-4 locomotives, mainline passenger types. The 86-ton engine was donated to the City of Alliance by CB&O in 1962 and refurbished by Burlington Northern volunteers.

The Sidney-Black Hills Trail – Beginning in 1874, thousands of freight wagons and stage-coaches passed through Box Butte County along the Sidney-Black Hills Trail. The Sidney-Black Hills Trail first supplied the Sioux Tribe at the Red Cloud Agency on the White River and the troops at Camp Robinson. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 gave the trail new importance as miners expanded the trail to Deadwood.

Museums and Cultural Centers

Sallow's Military Museum – The Sallow's Military Museum is a local museum that serves as a tribute to the brave men and women from Box Butte County who served their country. The Museum is located in what was the original bath house for the Alliance Swimming Pool in the 1930s.

Carnegie Arts Center – The Carnegie Arts Center provides residents in the County opportunities for cultural expression and exposure to the visual, performing, and literary arts. It is housed in the County's original Carnegie Library. In approximately 1898, the Alliance Women's Club applied for a \$10,000 grant from the Carnegie Fund to build a library. The library was completed in 1912. Eventually, the public library would move in 1980. The Carnegie Arts Center purchased the space in 1993.

Knight Museum and Sandhills Center – This museum features five areas of local history: life in the Sandhills, Native American Life, Life in the Country, Life in the Town, and the Railroad. Visitors to the museum can get a glimpse of the life lived by the people who settled in the Nebraska Sandhills.

Carhenge – This roadside attraction has a full-scale replica of England's famous Stonehenge made entirely from 38 old cars.

Education

Educational resources available in Box Butte County include one preschool service in Alliance, the public primary education system consisting of three elementary schools (one in Hemingford and two in Alliance), one middle school in Alliance, one high school in Alliance, and one combined junior/senior high school in Hemingford. Private Schools include Alliance St. Agnes Academy (PS-8th) and Immanuel Lutheran School (PS-5th).

Public Primary Schools

Alliance Public Schools is pre-kindergarten through 12 grade school system. The school system is broken into five campuses – Early Childhood/Kiddie Kampus, Emerson Elementary, Grandview Elementary, Middle School, and High School. Enrollment has decreased over the past five years from a high of 1,429 in the 2019/2020 academic year to a low of 1,345 in the 2022/2023 academic year, as

shown in Table 10. Alliance Public Schools has an 88 percent graduation rate and 63 percent college-going rate. The school gets \$2.55 million in state aid through the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act (“TEEOSA”). It has a per pupil expenditure of \$15,016 per academic year.

Hemingford Public School is also a pre-kindergarten through 12 grade school system housed in one campus. Enrollment has been increasing over the past five years with 449 students in the 2022/2023 academic year as shown in Table 10. Hemingford Public Schools has a 100 percent graduation rate and an 88 percent college-going rate. The school gets \$739,720 in state aid through TEEOSA. It has a per pupil expenditure of \$19,503 per academic year.

Table 10: School Enrollment

School Enrollment					
	2022/2023	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018/2019
Alliance Public School	1345	1358	1363	1429	1385
Hemingford Public School	449	433	396	394	395

Private Primary Schools

Saint Agnes Academy is a kindergarten through eighth grade coeducational school operated by the local Catholic Parish. The curriculum is approved by the State of Nebraska.

Public Secondary Schools

Western Nebraska Community College (“WNCC”) has a campus in Alliance, as well as Scottsbluff and Sidney. The Alliance campus offers a wide curriculum that culminates in an Associate’s degree. Classes are held both in person and virtually. Specialized programs include nursing and powerline and construction maintenance technology.

Chadron State College is the closest four-year college.

Libraries

There is one public library in the County, the Alliance Public Library, which is housed in the Alliance Learning Center. The library has a collection of 50,000 items including audio, video, print, historical, and multi-media materials. The library also offers a large children’s area, technology room, reading and study areas, outdoor reading patio, and a multipurpose community room. Multiple cultural and leisure programs are offered as well.

Fire and Police Protection

Fire and rescue services are provided by the Alliance and Hemingford Fire departments. The Alliance Fire Department has limited full-time staff that is supplemented with volunteer fire department personnel. The Hemingford Fire Department is fully staffed with volunteer fire department staff.

In 1976, a new law enforcement center was added to the east side of the courthouse. This facility houses the County Sheriff's Department, emergency response and communications system, the County jail, and the Alliance Police Department.

Emergency management services are coordinated through Region 23 Emergency Management Agency.

County Courthouse and Administrative Offices

The Box Butte County Courthouse was constructed in 1914. The facility is a three-story stone structure reportedly in good condition. The facility is handicap accessible and provides an interior elevator. The original structure houses the following public offices: District Court, County Assessor, County Clerk, County Treasurer, County Commissioners, Register of Deeds, the safety coordinator, and zoning administrator.

Road Department Facilities

In 1999, the County purchased and remodeled the Slagle Building located to the west of the courthouse. This facility houses the Roads Department offices, County Attorney, Veteran's Administration, Driver's License Examiner, and a Wellness Center.

Health Services

Box Butte County has a variety of health care systems composed of a variety of services provided through hospital care, physicians clinics, gerontology centers, home health services, dental and eye care services, chiropractic services, and pharmaceutical services. Major institutions include:

Box Butte General Hospital (BBGH) serves the people of Box Butte County. BBGH is a critical access hospital with 25 beds for all patient types. BBGH provides specialty care through various clinics within the hospital, including surgery, ear, nose and throat, ophthalmology, oncology, orthopedics, cardiology, podiatry, and more. BBGH also has three Greater Nebraska Medical & Surgical Services clinics, one in Alliance, Hemingford, and Hyannis.

There are three gerontology centers, two located in Alliance – Good Samaritan Village and Highland Park and one located in Hemingford – Hemmington Care Center. Those in Alliance are skilled nursing centers and all three provide long term care for aging and special needs individuals.

Cemeteries

There are eight cemeteries in the County: Katen, Hemingford, Hagaman, Bohemian Pioneer, Lawn, Calvary, Snake Creek, and Nebraska Veterans.

Communication Services

Multiple cellular service companies and internet companies service Box Butte County.

Television and Radio Stations

Three television stations out of Scottsbluff service Box Butte County – KDUH Channel 4, KSTF Channel 10, and NBC Nebraska.

Table 11: Radio Stations

Radio Stations	
KCOW (1400)	KAAQ (105.9)
KTNE-FM (91.1)	K223CY (92.5)
K296DS (107.1)	KROA (95.7)

Newspapers

Various newspapers circulate in Box Butte County including the Alliance Times-Herald, Hemingford Leger, the Scottsbluff Star-Herald, and the Omaha World-Herald

Public Utilities

Electrical

The City of Alliance operates both an urban and rural distribution system. The service area covers portions rural Box Butte and Morrill Counties. Electrical power is currently purchased from the Western Power Administration (WAPA) and the Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska (MEAN).

The Village of Hemingford electrical system is managed and power is supplied by Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD).

Rural electrical service is provided to the majority of the County by the Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Association (PREMA) and by the City of Alliance. Small areas located in the northwest and southwest are served by the Northwest Regional Public Power District and the Chimney Rock Public Power District, respectively.

Natural Gas

Natural gas is provided to Alliance and Hemingford by Black Hills Energy. Natural gas service is not available in the unincorporated areas of the County.

Water

Municipal water systems are operated by both Alliance and Hemingford. The Alliance system includes eight wells, the most recent one built in 2022, as well as a 1.5-million-gallon storage tank. The Hemingford system includes five wells and a 210,000-gallon storage tank. Both systems have the capacity to accommodate future community growth.

Waste Treatment

Waste water treatment facilities are operated by both Alliance and Hemingford. The City of Alliance operates an irrigation reuse system and the Village of Hemingford operates an outfall lagoon system. Both systems have the capacity to accommodate future community growth.

Small but densely developed pockets of residential structures exist in Box Butte County that currently rely upon individual septic tank systems.

Solid Waste

The Alliance Municipal Landfill serves Box Butte County residents. The landfill is located adjacent to Kansas Street on the southeast quadrant of Alliance. The landfill was constructed in 1992 and has three cells, divided into modules by interior berms. Cells are opened as needed. The Solid Waste Agency of Northwest Nebraska (SWANN) serves a small portion of the County.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE INVENTORY

Roads

County roads and State or U.S. Highways are classified according to function in Box Butte County. These classifications are shown on Figure 13 and include:

- Expressways – provide higher speed limited access service for long distance travelers. The Heartland Expressway (Highway #385 corridor) is the only expressway designation in Box Butte County.
- Major Arterials – provide continuous service though the County for long distance travelers. These include State Highways #2, #71, #87, and #S7a.
- Other Arterials – provide a higher level of access to other geographic areas of the County not serviced by Major Arterials.
- Collectors – distribute traffic to the arterial system from local roads.
- Local Roads – provide access to abutting properties not served by other roads.

Existing Conditions

The majority of roads the County maintains are graveled and native soils surfaced roads. A small portion are surfaced in some capacity. They are currently sufficient to meet the needs of current demand.

Highways play a crucial role in the county's transportation infrastructure. The following highways facilitate transportation and connectivity.

- **U.S. Highway 385:** Runs north-south through the county, providing a major route for travel and commerce.
- **Nebraska Highway 2:** Runs east-west, intersecting with U.S. Highway 385 in Alliance, the county seat.
- **Nebraska Highway 87:** Connects with U.S. Highway 385 and provides access to surrounding areas.

U.S. Highways #2 and #385 in Box Butte County have been designated by the State of Nebraska as Scenic Byways. These byways encourage additional tourism related to travel throughout the County.

A key component is the proposed Heartland Expressway Corridor

“The vision for the Heartland Expressway Corridor consists of a highspeed highway that will promote and enhance domestic and international trade as it connects Denver, Colorado Springs, and the PTP Alliance Corridor to Rapid City and the Theodore Roosevelt Expressway. The Heartland Expressway also provides an essential economic development tool for rural areas in Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming and improves Homeland Security in the nation’s Heartland.”

The Heartland Expressway / Corridor Development Plan was last updated in 2015 with the final Environmental Assessment. Although US-385 L62A to Alliance 4-Lane Divided Highway to Alliance has been constructed none of the Heartland Expressway north of Alliance has been funded.

The Heartland Expressway // Corridor Development Plan and Management Plan, Final Report is adopted as a supplement to the 2025 Box Butte County Comprehensive plan.

Future Projections

Apart from the construction of the Heartland Expressway, the current county road system is sufficient to meet future needs. As with the majority of rural counties in Nebraska, the major concern for the future of county road systems is maintenance and upgrading. These actions place a large financial burden on the County’s budget. This is further exasperated by unfunded mandates, property tax concerns, and local opposition to tax increases.

The backbone for future economic growth in the county is the construction of the Heartland Expressway from Alliance to Rapid City South Dakota. If constructed, the Expressway would support future travel demand, enhance safety, and promote economic growth in the region.

Overall travel demand in the four-state region in and around the Nebraska Panhandle is expected to increase by approximately 90 percent between now and the year 2035. Currently the Heartland Expressway Corridor’s share of the north/south travel demand is approximately 22 percent. However, forecasts indicate that without Corridor improvements, this share will fall to about 18 percent. Specifically, Heartland Expressway Corridor improvements are needed to maintain Nebraska’s existing percentage share of travel demand. When these improvements are linked with the other Ports to Plains (PTP) Alliance Corridor improvements located north and south of the Heartland Expressway Corridor, the proportion of trucks on the Heartland Expressway is expected to rise significantly and the overall travel demand share will increase to 24 percent of the total. In addition, along with this growth in travel demand will be a corresponding increase in economic output in the Panhandle and growth in population, reversing historic trends.

(1 Travel demand statistics are based on the travel demand model, which can be found in Appendix B of the Development plan).

Summary

The transportation system in Box Butte County plays a crucial role in its physical and economic development. Local roads and highways influence land use and economic activities, with key routes like U.S. Highway 385 and Nebraska Highway 2 facilitating connectivity and commerce. The proposed Heartland Expressway aims to enhance trade and economic growth by connecting major cities and supporting regional development. While current road systems are adequate, ongoing maintenance and upgrades are necessary.

Airports

Existing Conditions

Airport service in Box Butte County is provided by the Alliance Municipal Airport (AIA) and provides connection to Denver.

The closest international airport is Denver International Airport (DIA) approximately 250 miles away.

Future Projections

Airport service in Box Butte County is sufficient for future needs.

Summary

Airport services in Box Butte County provide sufficient service to the community.

Railroads

Existing Conditions

Though rail transportation has heavily influenced development in the County and its communities, the only rail service in Box Butte County is provided by the Burlington-Northern-Santa Fe Railroad. There is no passenger rail available to Box Butte County.

Future Projections

The railroad industry is rapidly transforming. As rail companies look to reduce the amount of human labor and increase electronic engineering, this will have an impact on land use development in communities because of the closing of railroad crossings. Though this is not an immediate concern, the County should start considering how such closing may impact their communities and plan for strategies to create overpasses to support connectivity throughout the County as these changes in railroad practices continue to develop.

Summary

Box Butte County should monitor changing railroad industry practices and prepare for the impact those changes could have.

Other Transportation Options

Existing Conditions

Public Transit is available on an as-needed basis and provides transportation services to the Alliance Municipal Airport.

Box Butte County Handi Bus Program provides transportation on an as needed basis.

Open Plains Transit (formerly known as Panhandle Trails Intercity Public Transit) provides intercity bus services and local demand response services in the Nebraska Panhandle area.

Future Projections

The available on demand transportation services meet the current need but as the population of Box Butte County continues to age it is advantageous to consider how the county can support population bases like Alliance and Hemingford in sustaining and improving on demand transportation options.

Summary

Public transportation services in Box Butte County currently provide sufficient service to the community but the county should consider opportunities, developments and programs that continue to improve upon the existing on demand transportation services.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The future of any county is directly related to the economic well-being of the primary, or base, industries that employ its residents. Economic data is collected in order to understand area markets, changes in economic activity, and employment needs and opportunities within Box Butte County. In this section, employment by industry, household economic statistics, commuter analysis, agricultural statistics were reviewed for Box Butte County and Nebraska. Nebraska overall has recovered well from the 2008 economic recession as well as the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. However, the State's more rural counties, including Box Butte struggle to maintain a younger workforce.

A detailed analysis of the County's base industries is beyond the scope of this plan. However, a general understanding of the health of the County's economy can be obtained by evaluating trends in income, poverty, employment, unemployment, and other factors. This type of analysis can provide useful background information to guide future decisions concerning both public and private investment in local development activities.

Household Income

Income trends show the purchasing power of a community. Box Butte County's population is strongly tied to housing and economics. The median household income for Box Butte County is \$67,893 according to the 2022 ACS. This is a significant increase over 2015, when the median income was \$51,691. Table 12 and

Table 13 show the comparison of the median household income from 2015 to 2022.

Table 12: 2015 ACS Income

2015 ACS Income				
Income	Percent	Families %	Married Couple Families %	Nonfamily Households %
Less than \$10,000	6.5%	2.7%	1.7%	14.0%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	5.3%	2.5%	2.2%	10.9%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	11.4%	9.5%	6.4%	16.2%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	11.7%	11.4%	9.2%	11.8%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	13.4%	11.5%	10.0%	19.1%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	22.2%	24.2%	25.6%	16.4%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	12.4%	15.8%	18.6%	7.4%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	12.6%	16.8%	19.9%	2.3%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.1%	2.2%	2.1%	1.9%
\$200,000 or more	2.4%	3.6%	4.3%	0.1%

Table 13: 2022 ACS Income

2022 ACS Income				
Income	Percent	Families %	Married Couple Families %	Nonfamily Households %
Less than \$10,000	6.9%	2.7%	3.0%	14.4%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	2.8%	2.9%	0.2%	5.2%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	9.5%	6.7%	6.3%	13.6%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	7.0%	3.6%	1.8%	14.5%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	10.4%	9.2%	4.3%	16.4%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	21.5%	26.1%	25.1%	17.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	15.3%	13.9%	16.9%	10.3%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	20.2%	25.3%	31.1%	7.6%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	5.1%	8.1%	9.1%	0.0%
\$200,000 or more	1.2%	1.6%	2.1%	0.2%

Overall, the majority of the increase came from people making between \$100,000 and \$149,999 with a smaller increase for people making between \$75,000 and \$99,999. Importantly, Box Butte County has also seen a decrease in people making \$10,000 to \$14,999 and \$15,000 to \$24,999, which are typically poverty wages.

However, Box Butte County's median household income is still lower than Nebraska's, which is \$74,590 and the Panhandle region, which is \$56,285 according to the 2022 ACS. Table 14 shows Box Butte County's median household income as compared to the other counties in the Panhandle region. Box Butte County has the highest median household income in the Panhandle region, exceeding Garden County by more than \$20,000.

Table 14: Median Household Income

Median Household Income (2022 ACS Data)	
Box Butte	67,893
Sheridan	53,609
Garden	47,139
Deuel	58,875
Cheyenne	54,038
Morrill	57,325
Dawes	53,760
Sioux	50,833
Scotts Bluff	60,137
Banner	62,375
Kimball	53,151
Panhandle	56,285
Nebraska	74,590

Poverty

Changes in poverty rates over time provide insight into the health of the local economy and standard of living of area residents. Box Butte County's poverty rate is 12 percent according to the 2022 ACS. Table 15 shows Box Butte County's poverty rate over the last seven years, which has declined since 2015 and has held steady since 2020.

Table 15: Poverty Rate by Year

Poverty Rate by Year 2022 ACS	
2022	12.0%
2021	12.4%
2020	12.8%
2019	14.1%
2018	11.9%
2017	10.9%
2016	14.0%
2015	17.0%

The County's poverty rate is higher than the State's, which is 10.5 percent according to the 2022 ACS. Table 16 lists Box Butte County's poverty rate as compared to the other counties in the Panhandle region.

Table 16: Poverty Rate by County

Poverty Rate by County (2022 ACS Data)	
Box Butte	12.0%
Sheridan	10.8%
Garden	12.2%
Deuel	7.1%
Cheyenne	11.7%
Morrill	9.5%
Dawes	13.0%
Sioux	15.3%
Scotts Bluff	12.5%
Banner	7.4%
Kimball	10.0%
Nebraska	10.5%

Education

The nation's economy is expected to continue a general shift which places an emphasis on trade industries and technology. The County has a high percentage of people over the age of 25 with a high school degree or higher. Only 18 percent of Box Butte County residents have obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher. This is significantly lower than the Nebraska average of 35 percent. Table 10 shows the educational attainment levels for Box Butte County.

Increased potential earning is still tied to higher levels of education and that shows in Box Butte County as well.

Employment by Industry

The size and composition of the area labor force is an important factor to consider relative to the County's ability to foster new economic growth. The labor force is defined as all persons age 16 and above who are either employed, unemployed, or available for employment. For purposes of this plan, civilian labor force figures were used which excludes area residents who are on active military duty. This section indicates the type of industries that make up the local economy. These statistics relate to Box Butte County residents, but not necessarily Box Butte County jobs. Table 17 shows the Industry by Occupation for Box Butte County.

Table 17: Industry by Occupation

Industry by Occupation		
	Count	Percentage
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	5,409	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	306	6%
Construction	224	4%
Manufacturing	639	12%
Wholesale trade	59	1%
Retail trade	553	10%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	954	18%
Information	124	2%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	315	6%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	289	5%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	1,094	20%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	457	8%
Other services, except public administration	226	4%
Public administration	169	3%

Almost half of the County's population works in some form of educational services and health care and social assistance, transportation and warehousing, and utilities and manufacturing. This is unsurprising given Burlington Northern Santa Fe's (BNSF) large railyard in Alliance. The remaining half of the County's labor force is evenly spread among other industries. Overall, the distribution is a good indication of a moderately stable economy. The direct production, transportation, and material moving industry could be increased with continued economic development along state and federal roadways that connect Box Butte County to the regional economies in Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Labor Force and Unemployment

The size and composition of the area labor force is an important factor to consider relative to the County's ability to foster new economic growth. The size of Box Butte County's civilian labor force remained relatively stable, decreasing by only about 6 percent from 2015 to 2022 as shown in Table 18. This mirrors the County's population loss.

Table 18: Number of People Employed in the County

Number of People Employed in the County			
	Total	Employed	Unemployed
2022	8,324	5,463	2,861
2021	8,336	5,523	2,813
2020	8,433	5,547	2,886
2019	8,493	5,363	3,130
2018	8,596	5,662	2,934
2017	8,705	5,804	2,901
2016	8,626	5,969	2,657
2015	8,651	5,832	2,819

Commuter Analysis

Alliance, Box Butte County's largest city, is one of the major employment areas in Nebraska's Panhandle and is located equidistance from the other two major employment areas, Scottsbluff and Chadron. However, commuting times for Box Butte residents have remained relatively consistent at around 10 minutes for the last 15 years according to the American Community Survey, meaning that the majority of the workforce lives and works in Box Butte County.

According to Table 19, the vast majority, approximately 77 percent, travel alone. Approximately 9 percent of the working population works from home. The mean travel time to work for people commuting was 10.7 minutes in 2022.

Table 19: Commute to Work 2022

Commute to Work 2022		
	Count	Percentage
Workers 16 years and over	5,148	
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	3,955	77%
Car, truck, or van -- carpooled	639	12%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	5	0%
Walked	68	1%
Other means	9	0%
Worked from home	472	9%

Agricultural Profile

Box Butte County is a rural, agricultural county. It is important to understand the influence of agriculture on the County's economy. The U.S. Census Bureau's Census of Agriculture tracked statistics every five years in the period between each decennial census and provided much of the data to perform the following analysis. Copies of the 2022, 2017, and 2012 reports will be added as appendices to this comprehensive plan.

Box Butte County has an agricultural presence in both Nebraska, ranking 45th in the State for agricultural production, and nationally, ranking in the top 25 percent of producers. As the County faces development pressure, it will be vital for leadership to acknowledge the importance of Box Butte County's natural resources and agricultural advantages. Leadership should promote countywide cluster development to ensure a balanced economy of residential, commercial, and agricultural uses.

There are approximately 437 farms in the County according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, which is a decline from 466 in 2012. In 2022, farms encompass approximately 685,555 acres. The average farm size is 1,569 acres. Which is an increase from 2012, when farms encompassed approximately 675,405 acres and the average farm size was 1,449 acres. The 2022 market value of the total products (crops and livestock) sold from Box Butte County equals around \$239,118,000.

The growth of the ethanol industry and international demand for commodities like soybeans and corn, has helped bring about a resurgence of the Nebraska agricultural economy. The primary crops produced in the County are corn for grain, wheat for grain, and dry edible beans.

FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Box Butte County has a relatively stable economy. This is due in large part to the two major employers in the area, Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad and Box Butte General Hospital (BBGH). Continuing to diversify economic opportunities within the County will be key to continuing to grow the economy.

One key opportunity to economic diversification and growth in Box Butte County is the construction of the Heartland Expressway Corridor. Future land use and transportation planning should nurture the development of the corridor. Box Butte County should consider mechanisms to help fund and plan for the development of the Expressway.

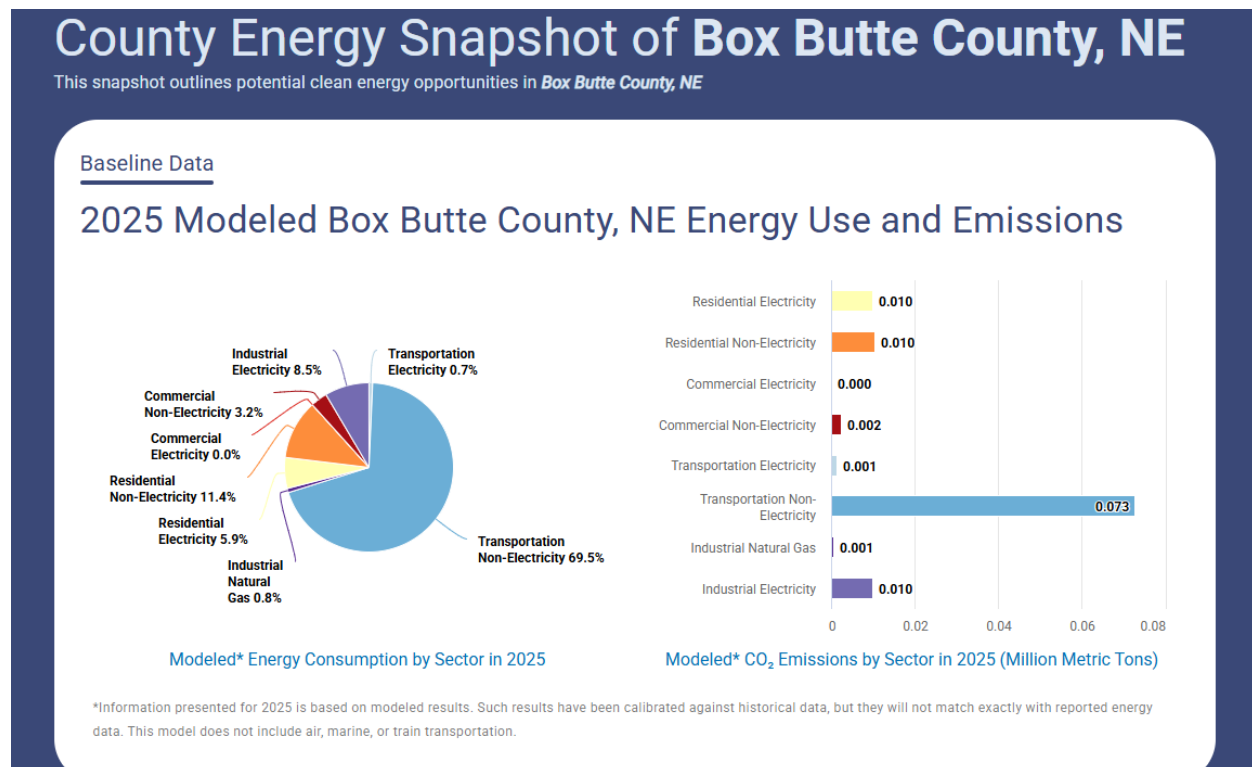
ENERGY

Box Butte County is dedicated to fostering resilient energy practices and enhancing its energy infrastructure to support long-term growth. The Energy Element outlines the county's current energy landscape, conservation goals, and opportunities for renewable energy development, ensuring compliance with Nebraska Legislative Bill 997.

1. **Current Energy Infrastructure:** The county's infrastructure includes substations and transmission lines that connect it to broader energy networks. Most of the substations and transmission lines are located in the central and eastern part of the county. Box Butte County benefits from access to electrical grids managed by 3 providers including:
 - **Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Association (PREMA)** a consumer-owned electric utility cooperative.
 - **Northwest Rural Public Power District** a not-for-profit utility
 - **City of Alliance Municipal Utilities** which provides services to residents in the City of Alliance and surrounding areas.
2. **Renewable Energy Potential:** The county has opportunities for renewable energy development, particularly in wind and solar energy. It is likely that energy developers will be looking at areas around the substations for future energy projects. Box Butte County can explore partnerships and incentives to diversify its energy portfolio and enhance its tax base by supporting energy projects in close proximity to substations and understanding the community benefits on a case-by-case basis for such development. As Box Butte County is an agricultural community the county will carefully consider and weigh the benefits and drawbacks of energy development projects on Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance and Farmland of Local Importance.
3. **Bioenergy:** Leveraging agricultural byproducts could provide innovative solutions for energy diversification.

4. **Energy Conservation Goals:** Promoting energy efficiency is a priority for the county. Initiatives such as improving building insulation, adopting energy-efficient technologies, and encouraging sustainable agricultural practices can reduce overall energy consumption.

Figure 18- County Energy Snapshot of Box Butte County, NE



3. Energy Use by Sector

- **Residential:** Energy consumption is primarily driven by heating, cooling, and household electricity use.
- **Commercial and Industrial:** Businesses and agricultural operations, including irrigation and crop production, contribute significantly to the county's energy needs.
- **Transportation:** Energy for transportation includes traditional fuel use, with potential opportunities to adopt more efficient systems in the future.

4. Renewable Energy Opportunities

Box Butte County has substantial potential for renewable energy development:

- **Wind Energy:** Favorable conditions make wind power a promising avenue for clean energy.
- **Solar Energy:** The county can explore partnerships and incentives to support small-scale and community solar projects.

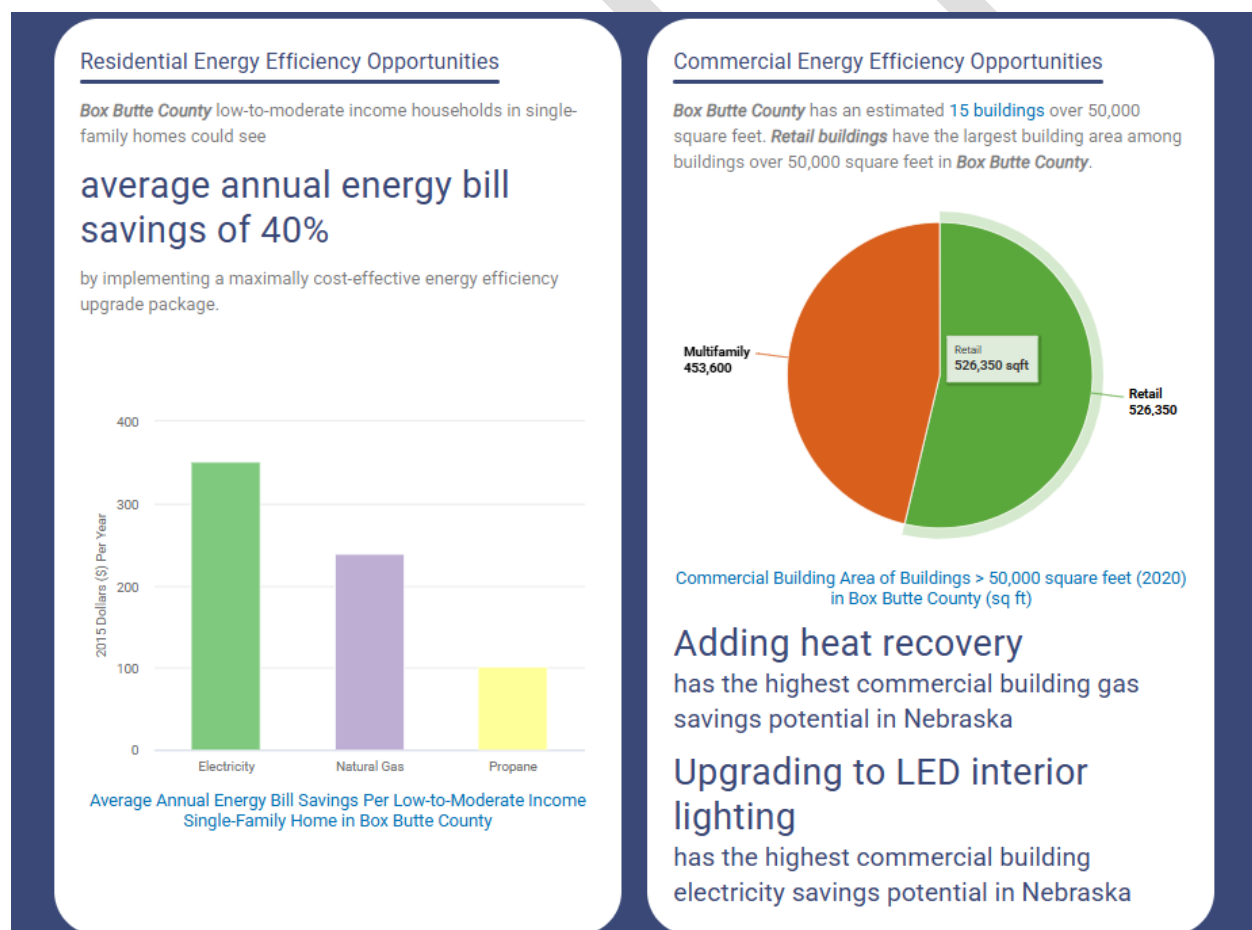
- **Bioenergy:** Leveraging agricultural byproducts could provide innovative solutions for energy diversification.

5. Energy Conservation Strategies

Promoting energy efficiency is vital for Box Butte County's sustainable development. Strategies include:

- Improving building insulation and adopting energy-efficient technologies for homes and businesses.
- Encouraging sustainable farming practices to reduce energy use.
- Advocating for efficient transportation systems to minimize fuel consumption.

Figure 19- Residential & Commercial Energy Efficiency Opportunities



Future Outlook: Box Butte County aims to balance economic development with environmental stewardship by supporting energy projects, modernizing infrastructure, and supporting policies that enhance energy resilience.

2001 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

Environmental:

- To identify and develop a public environmental/recreation resource in the county.
- To discourage development from locating on productive agricultural soils and in other agricultural areas where conflicts may arise with farming and efficient farm practices.
- To implement development standards and regulations to ensure that high quality scenic and historically significant sites are aesthetically protected.
- To carefully monitor the design of residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural waste systems to ensure a clean, high quality physical and natural environment.
- To preserve the county's unique historical features and landmarks for the benefit of future generations.
- To encourage the planting of windbreaks and shelterbelts to minimize soils erosion.

Population:

- To create an economic environment that will encourage the retention of young adults and the relocation of new residents to the county.
- To ensure that facility and infrastructure improvements are developed with an awareness of the growing percentage of elderly residents.
- To expand economic efforts to reverse previous out-migration trends.
- To further diversify the county's economic base to lessen the impact of economic decline of individual employment sectors on the population base.

Economic:

- To support and/or initiate efforts to supply the county's agricultural economy with an adequate pool of farm laborers and operators.
- To assist existing business and industry with their efforts to expand, diversify and achieve higher growth rates.
- To encourage and facilitate efforts to expand existing or attract new industries that will diversify the local economy.
- To provide a broad range of employment opportunities to meet the needs of a diverse population.
- To encourage and facilitate the creation and or location of businesses and industries that will provide wages resulting in higher per capita and median family incomes.
- To encourage and facilitate efforts to retrain and provide continuing education opportunities to the local labor force.
- To encourage and facilitate efforts to expand and/or attract industries that employ higher percentages of professional, managerial and technical occupations.

- To ensure adequate public facilities, infrastructure and housing opportunities are available to accommodate potential new residents and businesses.
- To provide for the use of "Greenbelting" to ensure that agricultural land remains in production as long as economically feasible for the landowner.
- To facilitate and support the establishment of home businesses in rural areas as a means of generating supplemental income for rural residents, particularly farm operators.

Housing:

- To encourage the removal of dilapidated structures and the preservation/rehabilitation of older residential structures in the county.
- To ensure that adequate land is available to meet future demands for new housing construction.
- To provide a broad range of housing opportunities needed to accommodate the present and future population.

Transportation:

- To provide efficient circulation routes connecting all areas of the county with important social, economic and educational functions.
- To provide for the safe flow of vehicular traffic throughout the county.
- To carefully monitor the location of rural residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural developments to ensure roadways are designed to safely carry potential traffic volumes.
- To preserve and enhance the county's designated scenic byway corridors.
- To monitor the future of Essential Air Service subsidies and investigate potential alternative air transportation services.
- To monitor future road track expansions and train lengths to ensure that impacts do not create problems affecting traffic flow and emergency services

Public Facilities:

- To encourage cooperative efforts with other units of local government and/or the private sector in the development of new public facilities or provision of public services.
- To maintain, upgrade and develop public facilities in a manner that will enhance the quality of life in all areas of the county.
- To carefully assess the need for improvements to existing, or the development of new public facilities.

Land Use:

- To encourage the efficient use of existing public facilities and infrastructure by future development.
- To ensure that adequate amounts of land are available to accommodate future growth.
- To ensure that adequate planning, plan revision and policy development efforts are undertaken to preserve and improve the unique rural character of the county.

- To ensure that prime farmlands are protected, as much as possible, for the future economic benefit of the county.
- To ensure that land use conflicts are minimized as much as possible for the benefit of both existing and future developments.

2001 LAND USE POLICY

General:

New residential, commercial and industrial developments will be encouraged to be located within incorporated communities or in existing subdivisions. However, the county does recognize that some development in rural areas is both necessary and desirable. The following guidelines have been drafted to assist in reviewing proposed new development in unincorporated areas. In as much a possible development should occur:

- On marginal agricultural land in order that quality agricultural land can be preserved and remain available for production.
- Adjacent to adequately paved, or graveled roads and in clusters to promote efficient development patterns where public and/or private facilities are present or planned to include streets, water, sanitary sewer and parks.
- In areas near existing employment centers and commercial areas so as not to encourage sprawl and unplanned scattered development.
- Where it is least disruptive to existing agricultural activities.
- In stable environmental areas.
- Where it can be demonstrated that there is a recognized need for such development.
- In a manner that secures safety from fire, floods and other dangers, and protects the health and general welfare of the public.
- In a manner that avoids undue concentration of the population and prevents overcrowding of land.
- In a manner where the county is not being obligated for direct or indirect services beyond the value of the revenues received through a development.
- Land zoned for specific uses will be protected from the encroachment of conflicting land uses.
- Planned residential, commercial and industrial parks will be encouraged as opposed to scattered or strip development patterns.
- Distance separations, or buffers, may be used to minimize the potential for land use conflicts.
- All future developments, both public and private, will be encouraged to be carefully planned and conducted in a quality manner to create an environment capable of attracting new residents and businesses.

Natural and Rural Environment:

- In-filling and revitalization of existing developed areas will be encouraged to minimize the conversion of prime farmland to more intense urban uses,
- Landscaping and design standards will be incorporated into future commercial, industrial and other high density development projects, particularly when located along major thoroughfares and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Future development in flood hazard areas will be carefully monitored and strongly discouraged.
- Recreational, tourist and historic resources will be protected from conflicting land uses.
- The addition of wildlife habitat land accessible to the public for recreation purposes and the provision of shelterbelts and windbreaks will be encouraged.
- Buffers, or distance separations, should be incorporated around future public wildlife habitat areas.

Residential:

- Residential development will be encouraged to locate existing lots within incorporated communities or in existing platted rural subdivisions.
- The county recognizes the need to provide a broad range of housing development options: Therefore, rural estates and subdivisions may be developed if carefully located so as not to create conflicts with existing rural land uses or place unsafe traffic volumes and conditions on rural roadways.
- Concentrated residential developments in rural areas will be encouraged to create a sanitary sewer and/or water district.
- High density residential projects will be directed toward incorporated communities that have the infrastructure to accommodate development.
- All rural residential lots, not located in a sanitary sewer and water district, shall be of sufficient size to ensure the safe installation and long-term operation of water wells and septic system.

Commercial:

- Home businesses should be allowed to operate out of a residence, or out-building, when incidental to the primary use of the property, when compatible with surrounding land uses and provided the adjacent transportation system can accommodate projected traffic.
- Commercial development in rural areas shall be restricted to those businesses that provide only neighborhood and agricultural business needs, site location specific businesses such as campgrounds or establishments that coincide with historical or recreational sites, or commercial and industrial businesses that by their nature should be located away from urban and residential areas.
- In-filling and revitalization of existing zoned commercial areas will be strongly encouraged.
- Discontinuance of improperly zoned or placed commercial areas will be encouraged.
- Redevelopment of properly zoned or placed commercial areas will be encouraged.

Industrial:

- Industrial land use will be directed toward existing industrial parks and to incorporated communities.
- Redevelopment of existing industrial areas located adjacent to incorporated communities and paved roads will be encouraged.
- Industrial uses will be allowed in rural areas only where the need for such can be demonstrated.

Agricultural:

- High quality agricultural land should be designated for preservation and the establishment of agricultural preservation zones will be encouraged.
- Quality and/or improved pasture and grazing land should be preserved for such uses.
- Large feedlots, farrowing pens, other confinement operations and poultry farms may be considered commercial endeavors. Such businesses have special nuisance problems which require attention. As a means of protecting both the operator (whether commercial or agricultural), the rural resident, public recreational areas and the general aesthetics of the county a distance separation, or buffer area, should be established.

2001 FUTURE LAND USE

The Future Land Use/Development Plan map (Map # 13) identifies both developed and undeveloped areas of the county that should receive special consideration when future development activities are considered. These areas include:

Floodplain, Environmental and Historic Preservation Areas

Land located in flood hazard areas, unique environmental areas and containing historic structures or landmarks should be protected from conflicting forms of development.

Development allowed in these areas should be low impact.

Industrial Commercial Areas

Future industrial or commercial activity should be directed into existing commercial/ industrial areas or directed to incorporated communities.

Agricultural Areas

The county's agricultural lands should be preserved as much as possible to maintain this economic resource.

Scenic Byways

Development along the county's designated scenic byways should be monitored to ensure the county's stature as desirable location for future residents and businesses.

Heartland Expressway Corridor

Development allowed along the Heartland Expressway corridor should be in clusters and with proper setbacks to facilitate potential future development of the expressway.

Residential Areas

Future residential growth should be directed to communities or existing platted subdivisions as much as possible. New residential growth and subdivisions should be encouraged to locate near existing subdivisions to form residential clusters and minimize scattered development and strip development patterns.

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