

## Region 8 Fact Sheet

### Geographic Summary

States: Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming

Tribes: 28 federally recognized tribes, located within the states of Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming

### Logistics

Regional Office Headquarters: Denver, CO 80202

Field Office: EPA Montana Operations Office, Helena, MT 59626

Laboratory: Lakewood, CO 80225

Staff: 600.55 FTE Level (610 On-Boards as of 6/24/24)

### Region 8 Summary and Top Environmental Priorities

Over half of the roughly 13 million people in Region 8 live in two distinct bands of urban development along the Wasatch Front (centered on Salt Lake City, UT) and the Front Range (centered on Denver, CO.) These areas continue to experience rapid population growth and support a diverse set of economic opportunities, as well as environmental challenges.

**Agriculture & Rural Lands** – Our mostly rural and heavily agricultural based areas in Region 8 present unique environmental opportunities and challenges. Agriculture is ranked as the #1 or #2 industry in four of the six states in Region 8, with an annual economic impact ranging from \$1.7 to \$10.9 billion. A little more than 57 percent of the land in Region 8 is in agricultural production, with about 151,500 farms spanning more than 212 million acres. The primary commodities in Region 8 are livestock production (predominately beef cattle), small grains (specifically wheat), and corn (feed and ethanol). However, these states also produce a diverse number of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops. For examples, the three top honey producing states in the U.S. are in Region 8: North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana. About 93 percent of the cities/towns in Region 8 have a population of less than 10,000 people. Region 8 is ranked 2nd out of the 10 EPA regions in terms of having the highest number of “100% rural” counties.

**Air Quality** – Region 8 is home to wonderful, big blue-sky country, but is also challenged with air quality problems related to unique topography, oil & gas development, coal-fired power plants, vehicle emissions in urban areas, and wildfires. The two bands of significant urban development in Colorado and Utah are continually challenged with violating National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone and particulate matter. Oil and gas development contributes to air quality and other challenges in both urban and rural areas, e.g. in Ft. Berthold Indian Country related to the development of the Bakken oil shale play. Due to the mountains and varied topography, we are also home to areas that have winter-time ozone exceedances and stratospheric ozone intrusion, which is unique in the U.S.

**Energy** – The Region contains significant fossil fuel and renewable energy resources—accounting for about 21 percent of the country’s oil production; 15 percent of the country’s gas production; and 52 percent of the nation’s coal production. Since 42 percent of the surface in Region 8 is federal lands or Indian country, Region 8 has a considerable amount of NEPA work for energy production. Region 8 also has about 68 percent of the Office of Natural Resource Revenue’s onshore royalty revenue from royalty’s collected from mineral extraction on federal lands and Indian country.

**Minerals Extraction** – Mineral development is a significant land use within the Region 8 states. In communities across the Region, mining provides jobs, economic activity and commodities. Mineral extraction on private and federal lands within Region 8 occurs in a variety of forms and jurisdictions, each subject to different practices, laws and regulations. Locatable hard rock minerals include gold, silver, copper, uranium, and molybdenum extracted from underground mines or open pits. Leasable minerals, such as coal extracted from strip mines, and oil and gas and in situ uranium extracted from wells, are subject to state and federal mineral leasing regulations. Saleable minerals, such as sand and gravel for construction and roadbuilding, are extracted from surface pits and quarries. This extraction and processing has also left legacy Superfund cleanup sites (often for lead and arsenic) that are massive in size and often in very challenging terrain. We have some of the largest cleanups in the country and some of our work occurs in terrain over 10,000 feet in elevation, which makes cleanup operations difficult and high-stakes.

**State & Tribal Partnership** – Region 8 and its state counterparts work with a large and diverse network of partners to safeguard human health, and to protect and restore the air, water, and land that communities and visitors rely on and enjoy. In addition, Region 8 has a special responsibility to its tribal partners. The Region's land area includes 28 federally recognized tribes and the EPA has a trust responsibility to provide environmental protection on these lands. Over 23 million acres of Indian country are located within Region 8, which is all either mostly or entirely rural.

**Recreation** – Region 8 is an outdoor recreation paradise. Collectively, this recreational economy supports nearly half a million jobs and generates \$3 billion in annual state and local taxes across the six Region 8 states. Activities such as bird watching, hiking, climbing, cycling, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, and an array of snow and water sports generate over \$41 billion in annual consumer spending.

**Water** – Much of the Region is arid or semi-arid, placing a premium on the availability and quality of water resources to meet competing demands from farmers, municipalities, industry, and recreationists, as well as fish and wildlife. Nationally, 31 percent of plant species and 50 percent of bird species are dependent on critical habitat in the semi-arid west. In Colorado, riparian and wetland areas make up less than 3 percent of land area, but 90 percent of the wildlife in the state rely upon these systems. Region 8 is home to the headwaters of the Missouri, Colorado, Rio Grande, Arkansas, Platte and Columbia Rivers, which are vital sources of life for plants, animals and people in 27 downstream states. The Colorado River alone supplies water to nearly 40 million people across seven states and Mexico.

Water infrastructure is an environmental challenge whether it be in urban areas removing lead service lines or in our rural areas struggling to reliably provide clean drinking water. Wyoming is the only State that has not applied for authority to administer the public water supply program. Therefore, Region 8 directly implements the Safe Drinking Water Act in the State of Wyoming. As of April 2020, there are 778 active public water supply systems in Wyoming. Sixteen percent of these systems receive at least some of their water from surface water sources. The remaining 84% receive their water from ground water (wells). Eighty-three percent of active Wyoming systems serve populations of less than 500. Only 1% (9 systems) serve populations of 10,000 or more.

