

## Colorado Front Range

At the foot of the Rockies, where the mountains meet the plains in Colorado, lies an urban swath anchored by Pueblo on the south and Fort Collins on the north. The urban corridor is paralleled by an exurban zone in the foothills, a place made famous in recent years by several large wildfires. Our view of the region includes most or all of Denver, Boulder, Gilpin, Jefferson, Douglas, and Teller counties; the western portions of Weld, Adams, Arapahoe, Elbert, and El Paso counties; and the eastern portions of Larimer, Fremont, Park, and Clear Creek counties. The population of the area in 2000 was roughly 3.4 million. The larger cities include Denver, Colorado Springs, and Fort Collins, with populations of 554,636, 360,890, and 118,652 respectively.

The corridor is aligned along the north-south axis of I-25, and the spreading footprint of suburban cities around Denver is shaped by a new ring-road (470). We do not try to project road construction, but surely there will be more highways by 2040, the location of which could enhance the spread of development.

The 2000 map shows rural areas still separating some of the cities, between, for example, Denver and Colorado Springs, and Greeley and Loveland-Fort Collins. By 2040 some rural (green) areas still pinch in the corridor north of Colorado Springs, but the triangle formed by Greeley, Fort Collins, and Loveland fills in completely at exurban and suburban densities. Indeed, growth is so strong in the northern part of this metropolitan corridor that it spills out into less desirable, but cheaper, Great Plains localities east of the corridor.

Given a limited amount of private land for development in the foothills to the west, the model bumps several foothill areas to at least low-density suburban development, especially west and southwest of Denver, along I-70 and U.S. 285 (which recently has been expanded). We certainly cannot predict whether the exurban neighborhoods in this area will actually in-fill to suburban density, and in many cases we think they won't. But unless more people are repelled by the wild-fire hazard, foothills living (within sight of, and easy access to, a major city) would seem likely to remain attractive to home buyers and builders.

This close-up view also reveals some of the weaknesses of the model. We know, because we live there, that Boulder city and county have purchased an open space buffer around the town of Boulder. The model does not know this and wants to fill in those land units with development. It happens that Boulder's open space program is one of the few local land acquisition efforts in the entire West large enough to actually affect the patterns we project. Another interesting feature of the Colorado Front Range maps is the persistence of rural areas between Pueblo and Colorado Springs. Much of this land has been in the hands of a few large ranches for decades, and Pueblo's population has grown much more slowly than the other Front Range cities, so the model has empirical reasons to allocate less density to that rural swath. The biggest development action over the next few decades looks to be between Denver and Fort Collins. Whether the northern edge of this might creep up the highlands that slope up to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and the Laramie Range is anyone's guess.



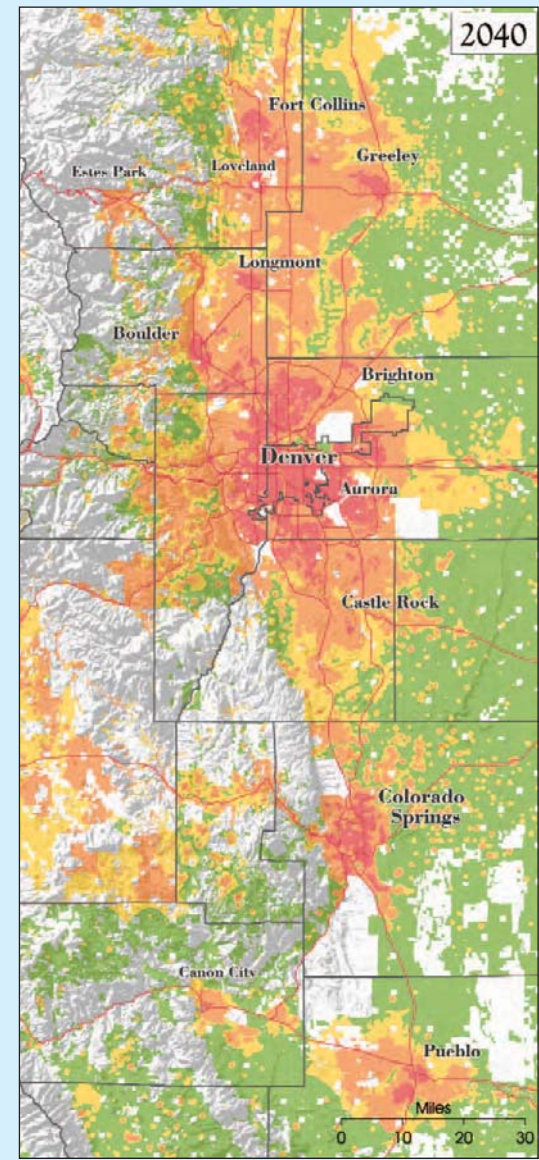
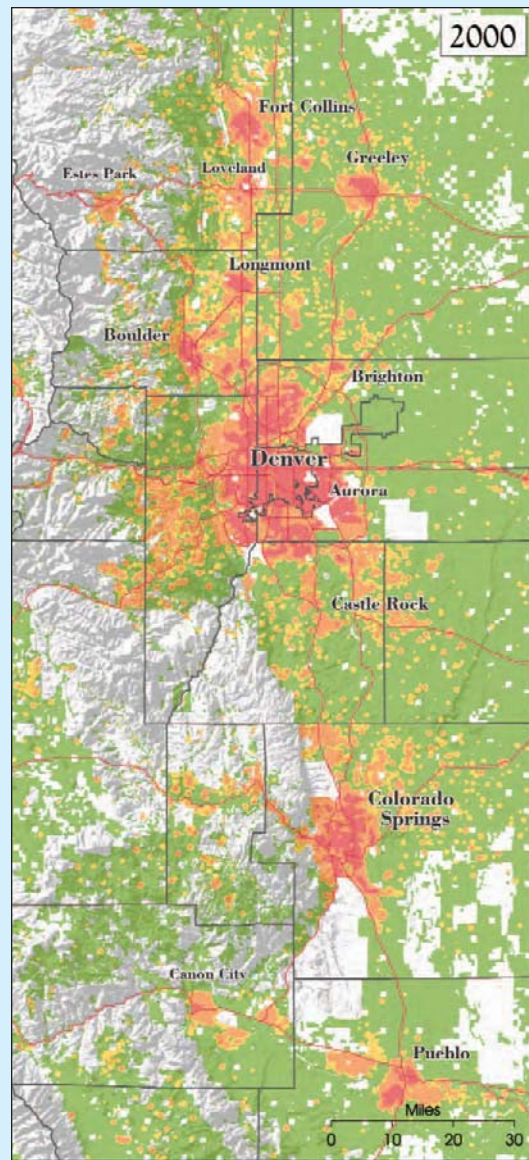
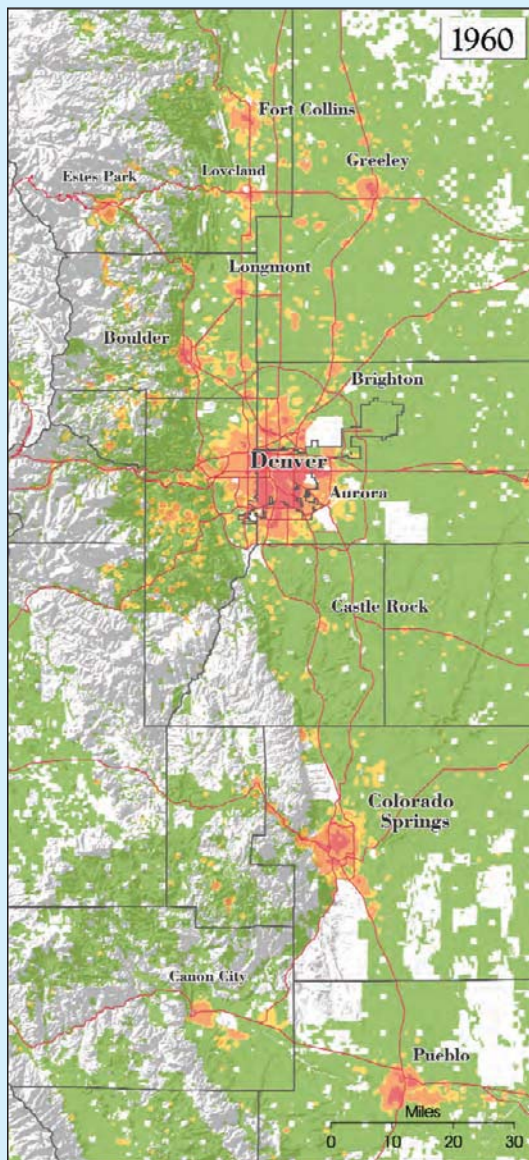


FIGURE 2. Actual and projected housing densities for the Colorado Front Range.

