



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update



Background & Current Conditions Technical Report

Final Draft





Town of Thatcher General Plan Update
Background and Current Conditions

Background & Current Conditions Technical Report

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This Technical Report is prepared based on best available data





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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Town of Thatcher sits in the high desert of southeast Arizona between Mount Graham and the Gila River in the Gila River Valley. Settled in 1881 and incorporated as a municipality in 1899, Thatcher was built around an agriculturally driven economy and a community focused on education. New opportunities and challenges influenced by mining operations, retail and tourism are now further diversifying Thatcher's economy. Residential and commercial development, capitalizing on the region's growth, is beginning to reshape the Town.

Local History

Human activity in the Gila Valley region can be traced back over 15,000 years to the Hohokam, Mogollon and Anasazi Indian tribes. From this time on, the area experienced culturally diverse people from Spanish explorers, Franciscan missionaries and early European traders and trappers who traversed the valley until U.S territorial claims were established in the 1850's. Early inhabitants left the land rich with archeological burial grounds, villages and sacred sites.

An expedition to view the "Valley of the Gila" in the late 1800's brought pioneers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the area. Satisfied by the fertile soil and water rich lands, homesteads were soon established south of the Gila River. In 1883, a Mormon pioneer and businessman named Christopher Layton was appointed as head of the Gila Valley settlers. President Layton was instructed to see that the settlers in the area did not sprawl throughout the land, that surveys existed for townsites and that these localities had adequate facilities and protection against brigands and other hostile intruders.

The Thatcher townsite received its name in commemoration of a visit by apostle Moses Thatcher in December of 1882. Along with Thatcher's settlement, Layton established the St. Joseph Stake Academy, eventually becoming the first two-year community college in Arizona, now known as Eastern Arizona College.

In the early years of Thatcher's establishment, Layton and his family worked to develop the Town as shade trees were set out for a mile along Main Street and the sidewalks cleared and leveled, which added much to Thatcher's beauty as well as the convenience of walking. The Valley settled rapidly. By 1895 homes marked the region and the completion of the railroad named the Gila Valley, Globe and Northern brought life to Thatcher.



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A major economic force in the Gila Valley became its downfall for a few years around 1910. Farms throughout the area were on the brink of abandonment due to impacts of mining mills. Finely pulverized rock (tailings) flowed into the Gila River and spread over the farmland during irrigation, making agriculture nearly impossible. Valley settlers joined together, taking the matter to the courts. The United States Supreme Court confronted the mining companies, forcing their operations to change.

While development of the community has continued to evolve in important ways, present day Thatcher is reminiscent of earlier times. Area population has remained dedicated to agriculture and diversifying the local economy.



Thatcher General Plan

The Thatcher General Plan (General Plan) serves as the road map managing growth within the Town's corporate boundary in a manner consistent with the community's vision. It guides future decisions about growth, land utilization and annexation balancing economic development, preservation of agriculture, and conservation of resources. The General Plan provides the basis for development while supporting the quality of life desired. This General Plan is a vital document to the decision makers in Thatcher as the Town moves forward. It supplies the outline needed to plan for healthy economic development, orderly growth and support of Thatcher's desired community character.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Thatcher General Plan Update

The Thatcher General Plan Update represents a statement of what the community expects their Town to become over the next twenty years. It is driven by citizen input, as it is a tool to help guide and shape the physical development of the Town.

The Arizona Revised Statutes requires municipalities to update as needed and re-adopt their general plans at least once every 10 years. The first Thatcher General Plan was created and adopted in 1997. The 1997 general plan previous update was adopted in 2008. The 2020 Thatcher General Plan Update conforms to the letter and spirit of the Arizona Revised Statutes legislation guiding municipal planning and growth management with enhanced public involvement.

The previous general plan update included four elements: Land Use; Circulation; Public Services and Facilities; and Economic Development. Imagine Thatcher: The 2020 Thatcher General Plan Update includes the following elements or chapters:

- Growth Areas/Planning Areas
- Land Use/Character Areas
- Circulation/Transportation (including goals and policy related to Highway 70 Beautification Project)
- Open Space, Recreation, Parks and Trails
- Environmental Planning
- Water Resources
- Cost of Development
- Economic Development
- Public Services and Facilities
- Housing and Community Design
- Implementation and Administration

2020 General Plan Organization

The 2020 Thatcher General Plan Update is intended as a guide. All General Plan Elements are interrelated and intended to be considered collectively. Users are strongly urged not to rely on select, excerpted statements; but, rather, are encouraged to consider all the subject matter of the Thatcher General Plan Update as a whole. It is important that the Plan Elements do not stand alone. To support a user-friendly experience, the General Plan Includes the following volumes:



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The General Plan includes the following volumes:

1. **Executive Summary** summarizes the General Plan planning process and serves as a marketing tool.
2. **The Public Participation Plan** adopted by Mayor and Council at early stages of the planning process, this plan defines the community engagement and outreach program that will guide the planning process in compliance with the State of Arizona Revised Statutes.
3. **The Background and Current Conditions Technical Report (this volume)** contains all pertinent analyses supporting the Policy Plan. In compliance with all applicable Revised Arizona Statutes, this document assesses background and conditions and identifies the physical, regulatory, demographic, socioeconomic and fiscal opportunities and challenges impacting growth, use of land, infrastructure, economic development and resource management. This technical report and the public input gathered during the community engagement process serve as the foundation supporting the goals and policy framework included in the Policy Volume of the General Plan.
4. **The Policy Plan** is the road map or regulatory document guiding development, redevelopment, infrastructure, economic development and resource conservation efforts within Thatcher. The Policy Plan includes the community vision and plan elements in compliance with Arizona Revised Statutes requirements. Each element includes goals, policies and implementation measures by topic. The Policy Plan also includes the administrative tools to manage, monitor, amend and implement the General Plan.

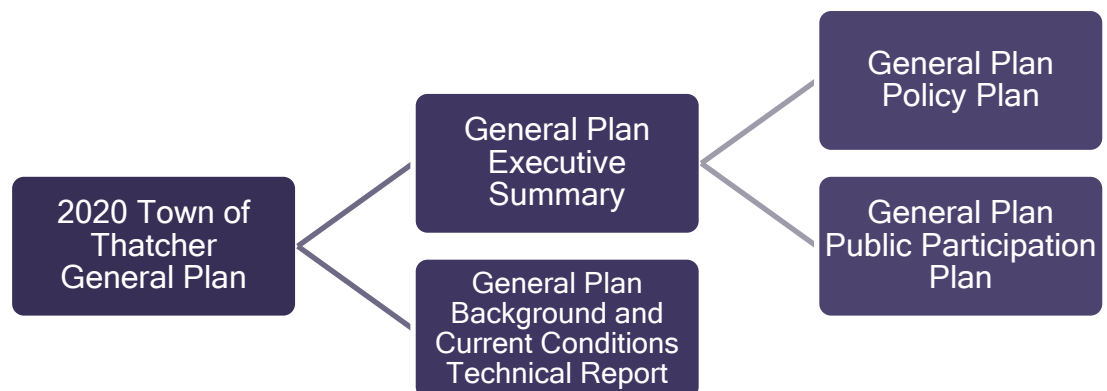


Figure 1: General Plan Organization



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

The Thatcher Designated Planning Area

The Thatcher Designated Planning Area expands the geographic base of Thatcher's influence beyond the present Town limits. Coordination with jurisdictions abutting the planning area, including Graham County, the Town of Pima and City of Safford, plays a fundamental role in ensuring compatible and efficient development needed to provide for orderly growth and adequate provision of essential infrastructure and public services.

The Thatcher Designated Planning Area includes approximately 14 square miles currently in unincorporated Graham County. The Town hopes to exert a positive influence on growth and development in partnership with Graham County and the City of Safford. A strong, cooperative relationship between the Town and the County and the City are crucial in implementing necessary growth management practices.





Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

DEMOGRAPHIC

Population Trends and Projections

In terms of population, the U.S. Census Bureau reported an increase in population from 4,022 in 2000 to 5,021 in 2017. At the time of the 2010 Census, Thatcher had a population of 4,865 people, or 13.07% of the total population of Graham County. This makes Thatcher the county's 2nd most populous community in the region.

With a 2010 count of 4,865 people, the population of Thatcher increased 20.96% from the 2000 Census (which had a count of 4,022 people). According to the 2017 Census Estimates, Thatcher had a population of 5,021 people in that year. This is an increase of 3.21% since the 2010 Census, or an increase of 24.84% since the 2000 Census. Table 1 shows US Census Bureau 2000 and 2010 population counts and 2017 population estimates. Table 2 shows population projections 2020-2050. Table 3 shows 2017 estimates by sex and Table 4 shows 2017 estimates by age.

TABLE 1: POPULATION

Place	2000	2010	2017 (estimates)
Thatcher	4,022	4,865	4,982
Graham	33,489	37,299	38,275
Arizona	5,130,632	6,401,569	6,965,897

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000 and 2010 population counts and 2017 estimates.

TABLE 2: POPULATION PROJECTIONS 2020-2050

Place	2020	2030	2040	2050
Thatcher	5,371	5,892	6,382	6,831
Safford	9,953	10,783	11,557	12,254
Pima	2,686	2,951	3,201	3,430
Unincorporated Balance of County	22,589	25,765	28,808	31,654

Source: 2016-2050 Population Projections, Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity.



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TABLE3: THATCHER 2017 POPULATION ESTIMATES BY SEX

Category	2017 Estimates	Percent
Total Population	4,982	100.00%
Male	2,437	48.90%
Female	2,545	51.10%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2017 Population Estimates by Sex.

TABLE 4: THATCHER 2017 POPULATION ESTIMATES BY AGE

Category	2017 Estimates	Percent
Total Population	4,982	100.00%
Under 5 years	255	5.10%
5 to 9 years	470	9.40%
10 to 14 years	341	6.80%
15 to 19 years	631	12.70%
20 to 24 years	668	13.40%
25 to 34 years	454	9.10%
35 to 44 years	579	11.60%
45 to 54 years	475	9.50%
55 to 59 years	198	4.00%
60 to 64 years	247	5.00%
65 to 74 years	382	7.70%
75 to 84 years	201	4.00%
85 years and over	81	1.60%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2017 Population Estimates by Age.

According to U.S. Census Bureau 2017 population estimates the median age in Thatcher for that year was 29.2, the population under 18 years was 1,308, or 26.30 percent of the total 2017 population, and the population 65 years and older was 664, or 13.30 percent of the total 2017 population.



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Ethnicity and Race

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2017 population estimates, of the total 4,982 people, 4,587, or 92.10 percent, were white and 1,122, or 22.50 percent, were Hispanic or Latino (of any race). Tables 5 and 6 show Thatcher 2017 population estimates by race and Hispanic or Latino origin.

TABLE 5: THATCHER 2017 POPULATION ESTIMATES BY RACE

Category	2017 Estimates	Percent
Total Population	4,982	100.00%
White	4,587	92.10%
Black or African American	73	1.50%
American Indian and Alaska Native	177	3.60%
Asian	57	1.10%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	11	0.20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2017 Population Estimates by Race.

TABLE 6: THATCHER 2017 POPULATION HISPANIC OR LATINO

Category	2017 Estimates	Percent
Total Population	4,982	100.00%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	1,122	22.50%
Mexican	1,051	21.10%
Puerto Rican	0	0.00%
Cuban	0	0.00%
Other Hispanic or Latino	71	1.40%
Not Hispanic or Latino	3,860	77.50%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2017 Population Estimates by Hispanic/Latino Origin.



SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS

Economic development is a critical aspect of maintaining Thatcher as a sustainable and balanced community and is therefore included in the General Plan Update as a separate Element. Jobs, revenue and financial stability contribute to the Town's economic health and as such, one of the Town's goals are to ensure Thatcher has a sound economic base built on quality and desirable employment. Thatcher's economy has grown from strong agricultural roots, and is now in a transition with service sector, government and education, employment dominating.

This section includes economic indicators such as employment status, work force education attainment, Median earnings by education, household income, industry ranked by employment, worker classification, and civilian employed population by occupation describing socio-economic conditions within the Town of Thatcher.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017 estimates database, the Thatcher population 16 years and older for that year was 3,850 people. Of that total, approximately 2,100, or 54.5 percent comprised the civilian labor force. Of the total number of females 16 years and over, approximately 971 were in the labor force in 2017.

According to the same source, the total civilian noninstitutionalized population was 4,978 people according to 2017 estimates. Of that population, approximately 4,467, or 89.7 percent, had health insurance coverage; of this total, approximately 3,332, or 66.9 percent, had had private health insurance coverage and approximately, 1,693, or 34 percent, had public insurance coverage. Approximately 511 people, or 10.3 percent, had no health insurance coverage. The same source did not identify any families or people below the poverty level.



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Employment Status

Table 7 shows employment status based of the civilian labor force based on U.S. Census Bureau 2000 and 2010 counts and 2017 estimates. While the civilian labor force remained steady during the 2010 recession, unemployment rate doubled in 2010. The 2017 estimated unemployment rate is lower than the 2000 rate, which is a healthy socio-economic indicator.

TABLE 7: Employment Status			
Category	2000	2010	2017 (estimates)
Civilian Labor Force	1,774	2,101	2,100
Unemployed	64	199	97
Unemployment Rate	3.6%	9.5%	2.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017 estimates.

Work Force Education Attainment

Table 8 shows work force education attainment based on U.S. Census Bureau 2017 estimates. Based on figures provided on Table 8, the percent of the population with a high school degree or higher totaled 93.7 percent of which 25 percent or higher earned a bachelor's degree or advanced degree.

TABLE 8: Work Force Education Attainment		
Category	Count	Share
Less than high school	177	7.0%
High school or equivalent, no college	612	24.2%
Some college or associate degree	1,106	43.8%
Bachelor's degree or advanced degree	632	25.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017 estimates.



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Median Earnings by Education

Table 9 shows median earnings by education and sex based on American Community Survey 2017 estimates. As shown in Table 9, the total median earnings estimate in 2017 was \$40,151 per year; the total median earnings estimate for males in the same year was \$49,083 per year; and the total median earnings estimates for females \$28,112 per year.

Category	Median Earning Estimate	Median Earning Estimate (Males)	Median Earning Estimate (Females)
Less than high school	2,500-	-	2,500-
High school or equivalent, no college	26,917	46,532	17,057
Some college or associate degree	41,382	46,689	36,071
Bachelor's degree	37,344	51,008	-
Graduate or professional degree	49,886	70,388	40,972
Total Median Earnings	40,151	49,083	28,112

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017 estimates.



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Household Income

The median household income for Thatcher for 2017, based on 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates was \$51,694 for a 12-month period. According to the same source, the mean household income was \$58,188. Table 10 shows income and Table 11 shows benefits in 2017 (inflation-adjusted dollars).

TABLE 10: Income		
Category	2017 Estimate	Percent
Total Households	1,722	100
Less than \$10,000	235	13.6
\$10,000 to \$14,999	74	4.3
\$15,000 to \$24,999	144	8.4
\$25,000 to \$34,999	198	11.5
\$35,000 to \$49,999	147	8.5
\$50,000 to \$74,999	453	26.3
\$75,000 to \$99,999	147	8.5
\$100,000 to \$149,999	281	16.3
\$150,000 to \$199,999	21	1.2
\$200,000 or More	22	1.3
Median Household Income	\$51,694	
Mean Household Income	\$58,188	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017 estimates.

TABLE 11: Benefits			
Benefits Source	2017 Estimate	Percent	Mean Earnings/Income
Earnings	1,253	72.8	\$62,942
Social Security	452	26.2	\$18,270
Retirement Income	400	23.2	\$16,733
Supplemental Security Income	47	2.7	\$13,228
Food Stamps/SNAP Benefits	177	10.3	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017 estimates.



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Industry Ranked by Employment

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census American Community Survey 2017 estimates database, the total civilian employed population 16 years and older in the Town of Thatcher was 2,003 employees in that year. Industry sectors ranking at the top were: education, health care and social assistance employing 31.5 percent of the total civilian employed population; retail trade, employing 13.8 percent of the total civilian employed population; and arts entertainment, food and recreation services, employing 12.1 percent of the total civilian employed population. Table 12 shows industry ranked by employment counts.

Industry Sectors	2017 Employed Population Estimates	Percent
Education, health care & social assistance	630	31.5%
Retail trade	277	13.8%
Arts, entertainment, food & recreation services	257	12.1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, & mining	236	11.8%
Public administration	170	8.5%
Construction	139	6.9%
Professional, scientific, & administrative services	113	5.6%
Other services, except public administration	43	2.3%
Finance, insurance & real estate	42	2.1%
Information	42	2.1%
Transportation, warehousing, & utilities	37	1.8%
Manufacturing	11	0.5%
Wholesale trade	3	0.1%
Total civilian employed population 16 years and over	2,003	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017.



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Worker Classification

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census American Community Survey 2017 estimates database, 64.1 percent of the total civilian employed population 16 years and older in the Town of Thatcher were private wage and salary workers, 28.6 percent were government workers, 6.8 percent were self-employed workers, and 0.5 percent were unpaid family workers. Table 13 shows worker classification.

Worker Classification	2017 Employed Population Estimates	Percent
Private wage and salary workers	1,283	64.1
Government workers	572	28.6
Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	137	6.8
Unpaid family workers	11	0.5
Total civilian employed population 16 years and over	2,003	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Civilian Employed Population by Occupation

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census American Community Survey 2017 estimates database, approximately 30.1 percent of the total civilian employed population 16 years and over in the Town of Thatcher held management, business, science, and arts occupations, approximately 23.4 held service occupations, approximately 23.5 percent held sales and office occupations, approximately 16 percent held natural resources, construction and maintenance occupations and approximately 7.0 percent held production, transportation, and material moving occupations. Table 14 shows civilian employed population by occupation.



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TABLE 14: Civilian Employed Population by Occupation

Occupation	2017 Employed Population Estimates	Percent
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	603	30.1
Service occupations	468	23.4
Sales and office occupations	471	23.5
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	321	16.0
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	140	7.0
Total civilian employed population 16 years and over	2,003	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Principal Economic Activities

Agriculture, once a mainstay of the Thatcher economy, is being eclipsed by higher education and the retail sector as the community's economic drivers. Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc. operates two major facilities in the region, Safford and Morenci, contributing more than \$435 million annually to the regional economy. Freeport's Safford open-pit copper mining complex, located less than 12 miles from Thatcher Town Hall, is a zero-discharge facility, and one of the most environmentally advanced copper mines ever built. With its hub location, Thatcher is seeing retail trade and the service sector emerging as major players in its economic outlook. Some former agricultural lands are now being converted to residential and retail uses.

The general plan update includes major stakeholders from the Eastern Arizona College and Freeport McMoRan. In addition, it includes representatives from the agricultural community to ensure that the General Plan includes policy direction that support the agricultural industry sector within the Town and its designated planning area and to support sustainable agricultural conversion based on best practices were conversion of agricultural land is desired.



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Thatcher's Assets and Advantages

Understanding assets is essential to identifying local advantages and developing a productive economic development program. In the list below, Thatcher's assets are tied to specific areas of comparative advantage.

Location Advantages

- Isolated from large urban areas
- Offers opportunity for small-town lifestyle without threat of urbanization

Climatic Advantages

- Desert climate; mild winters
- Strong attraction/incentive for many prospective employers

Natural Environment Advantages

- Wide-open spaces, scenic views, night-sky viewing
- Maintains high-level of environmental quality, clean air

Network Advantages

- Situated on US Highway 70
- Arizona Eastern Railroad (connects to transcontinental Union Pacific Railroad)
- Proximity to Freeport McMoRan mining activity
- Access to interstate highway network (I-10)

Residential Advantages

- Low to moderate housing costs, attainable housing
- Small-town ambiance, safety, desirable living quality
- Access to metropolitan goods, services and amenities

Commercial Advantages

- Easy access to Southeastern Arizona labor market
- Good access to goods and services regionally and nationally
- Low to moderate site and operating costs
- Vibrant, clean commercial and civic areas
- Land available/zoned for commercial and industrial use



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Thatcher's Economic Challenges

All communities and regions have economic challenges to overcome and Thatcher is no exception. Some of these impediments are more correctable than others.

Under-Served Population

Some of Thatcher's biggest needs are for expanded retail services and quality jobs. Presently, a significant portion of resident demands for consumer goods are met outside Thatcher, thereby economically 'leaking' revenues to other communities.

Proximity to Metropolitan Areas

The fact that Thatcher is over 120 miles from either the Tucson or Phoenix metropolitan area limits market credibility. While Thatcher does not have to compete with greater metropolitan commercial sectors, larger market goods and services will remain distant.

Under-Utilized Commercial Properties

Thatcher has significant capacity to expand commercial properties and uses in key locations in the Town. Substantial new commercial retail development is anticipated for the area near the intersection of 20th Avenue and Highway 70. Currently, Highway 70's potential as a major commercial corridor is not fully explored. It is the intention of this General Plan Update to address Highway's 70 potential.

Employment Centers

Employment Center were identified in the previous General Plan update on lands suitable for employment-based uses. Selected sites have necessary industrial or commercial zoning to support retail, manufacturing, office, research and development and similar activities. Existing and planned employment centers are found along Highway 70, at the eastern edge of Town, and along Raey Lane and 8th Street.



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Scenic Attractions



Thatcher is centered in the Upper Gila River Valley with one of Arizona's famous Madrean Sky Islands towering to the south and the Gila River to the north. The Coronado National Forest provides many recreational opportunities. Southwest of the town are the Pinaleno Mountains and the 10,720-foot Mount Graham. Swift Trail provides a route to the summit featuring picnic and camping sites. At alpine elevations above Thatcher lies Riggs Lake, an excellent camping and fishing destination. Scenic U.S. 70 connects Thatcher with recreation areas at San Carlos Lake and Coolidge Dam.

To the west are Klondyke and Aravaipa Canyon, a designated primitive area. To the south, Roper Lake State Park features natural mineral water hot springs along with developed camping sites and excellent fishing. Other recreational opportunities include Hot Wells Dunes, Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area and Black Hills Back Country Byway. Thatcher is traverse by the famous "Salsa Trail."

Scenic attractions offer a variety of economic development opportunities including, but not limited to, hiking, horseback riding, nature study, bird watching, rock climbing, hunting, skiing up in Mount Graham during winter months, fishing, camping and numerous outdoor activities. These opportunities should continue to be prioritized as part of the economic development strategy of the Town during the 2020 General Plan 10-year horizon.



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Coordinating efforts with SEAGO's economic development team, Graham County and the City of Safford Eastern Arizona College, Freeport McMoRan, and other major stakeholders will increase opportunities to attract visitors and prologue visitors' stay increasing revenue generation from retail, lodging, restaurants and other visitor-oriented services.

Major Regional Partners

Eastern Arizona College



In addition of being Thatcher's major employer, the Eastern Arizona College (EAC) Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is part of a national and statewide network of small business assistance providers. The SBDC equips small businesses with the tools and training needed to succeed. The Center is funded by Eastern Arizona College with assistance from a grant provided by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

The SBDC provides free counseling to assist entrepreneurs with finding answers to the numerous questions that arise when starting or operating a business. The SBDC works in cooperation with the SBA, local Chambers of Commerce, and other community partnerships. The SBDC assists in the following areas:

- Business Start-ups
- Business Plan Development
- QuickBooks Training & Advising
- Sources of Financing
- Accounting & Record-keeping
- Marketing Strategies





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- Technology Solutions
- Cash Flow Analysis
- Human Resources
- Government Procurement Opportunities
- Business Expansion & Growth Assistance
- Customer Service

Bachelor's and master's degree programs are offered through Northern Arizona University, located on the EAC campus.

Southeastern Arizona Governments Organization

The Southeastern Arizona Governments Organization (SEAGO) is a regional planning agency which performs and coordinates a variety of functions. Established in 1972, SEAGO is a 501(c)3, nonprofit organization whose core function is to assist local governments in seeking cooperative solutions to area wide problems; to provide a forum for regional policy development; and to serve as a coordinating link between municipal, county, tribal, state, and federal agencies. SEAGO serves the four counties of Cochise, Graham, Greenlee, and Santa Cruz. SEAGO's programs focus on issues that often cross jurisdictional boundaries, such as water quality, community and economic development initiatives, transportation, aging, and social service issues. Originally a planning entity, SEAGO's operational scope has expanded considerably since its inception to include project programming and implementation activities in the areas of housing, economic development, social services, transportation, the environment, and public transit.

Mount Graham International Observatory

Located in Safford, Arizona, Mount Graham International Observatory (MGIO) is a division of Steward Observatory, the research arm for the Department of Astronomy at the University of Arizona. Scientific researchers from around the world make use of MGIO facilities. MGIO operates and maintains facilities at the remote observing site located in the Pinaleño Mountains in southeast Arizona. This area is part of the Coronado National Forest administered by the Safford Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service. The MGIO Base Camp is located at the eastern base of Mount Graham, six miles south of Safford, Arizona. This major regional asset presents opportunities for economic development partnerships throughout the Gila Valley.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Safford Agricultural Center

The University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Science Safford Agricultural Center provides research and service to farmers in a wide area that includes Graham, Greenlee and Cochise counties. Located just outside Safford in Graham County, this 63-acre agricultural center has been a performance testing site in the long staple cotton breeding program for more than 30 years. Solving problems in cotton is a particular focus; variety testing for a number of field crops is another. The Agricultural Center also provides the infrastructure for Cooperative Extension agricultural research throughout the southeastern part of the state.





PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

This section summarizes the physical conditions impacting the Thatcher General Plan Study Area. **Exhibit 1** shows regional context and delineates the Town of Thatcher General Plan Study Area.

Hydrology, Stormwater Management & Regional Flood Control

The Town of Thatcher has floodplain areas shown on the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) floodplain maps. These areas are generally associated with Fry Creek Wash, the Fry Creek Retarding Dam and the Gila River. Other major drainage courses and canals impacting the planning area include the Freeman Wash (Freeman Wash Retarding Dam), Highline Canal, Union Canal and Smithville Canal. Stormwater management requirements can be found in the Town's drainage policy and ordinance. Regional flood control management is through the Graham County Flood Control District. **Exhibit 2** shows rivers, drainage, canals, and FEMA 100 Year Floodplain impacting the General Plan study Area.

Topography

The Town of Thatcher sits in the high desert of southeast Arizona between Mount Graham and the Gila River in the Gila River Valley. The terrain features the relatively flat topography typical of a valley floor and increases elevation southwardly as it approaches Mount Graham's foothills. Towering over 10,000 feet in elevation, Mt. Graham it's one of Arizona's finest sky-islands. **Exhibit 3** shows 50' contour topography.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Land Ownership

Exhibit 4 shows owners of large tracts of land. Table 15 shows amount of land owned in acres by major land owner identified in Exhibit 4.

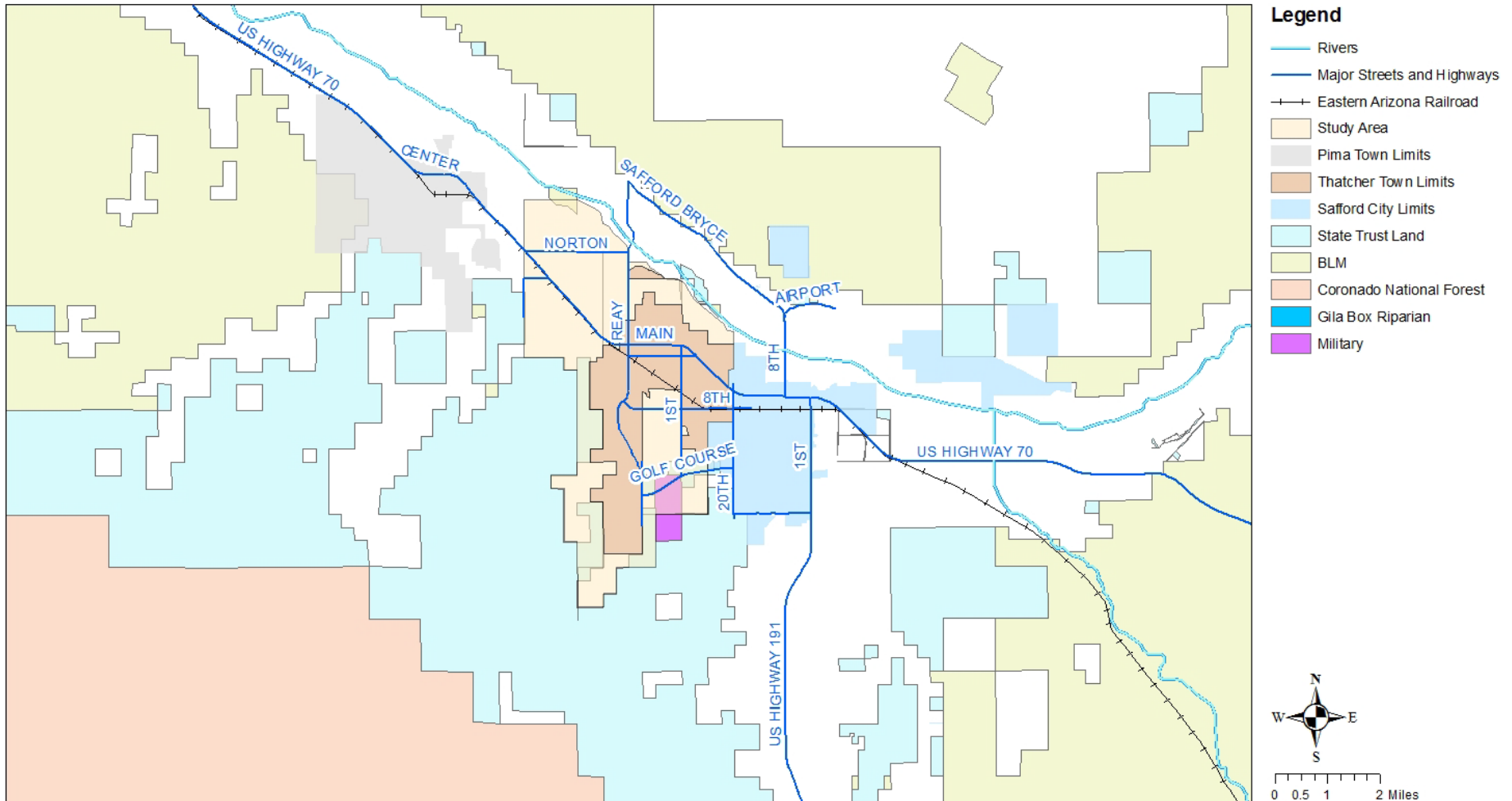
TABLE 15: Land Ownership by Major Land Owner	
Worker Classification	Acres
Steve Daley	1018
City of Safford	968
N Daley/Platt	745
Layton & Sons	569
Claridge	488
One AZ Credit Union	429
Householder	326
Lines	306
Langley	263
Jay Layton	234
Town of Thatcher	215
LDS	192
FMI	199
VIP	182
Eastern Arizona College	120
Arden Palmer	117
Thatcher Schools	101
Fergusson Farms	85
Glade Smith	72

Source: Town of Thatcher, 2019



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Condition

Exhibit 1: Regional Context and General Plan Study Area





Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Condition

Exhibit 2: Hydrology

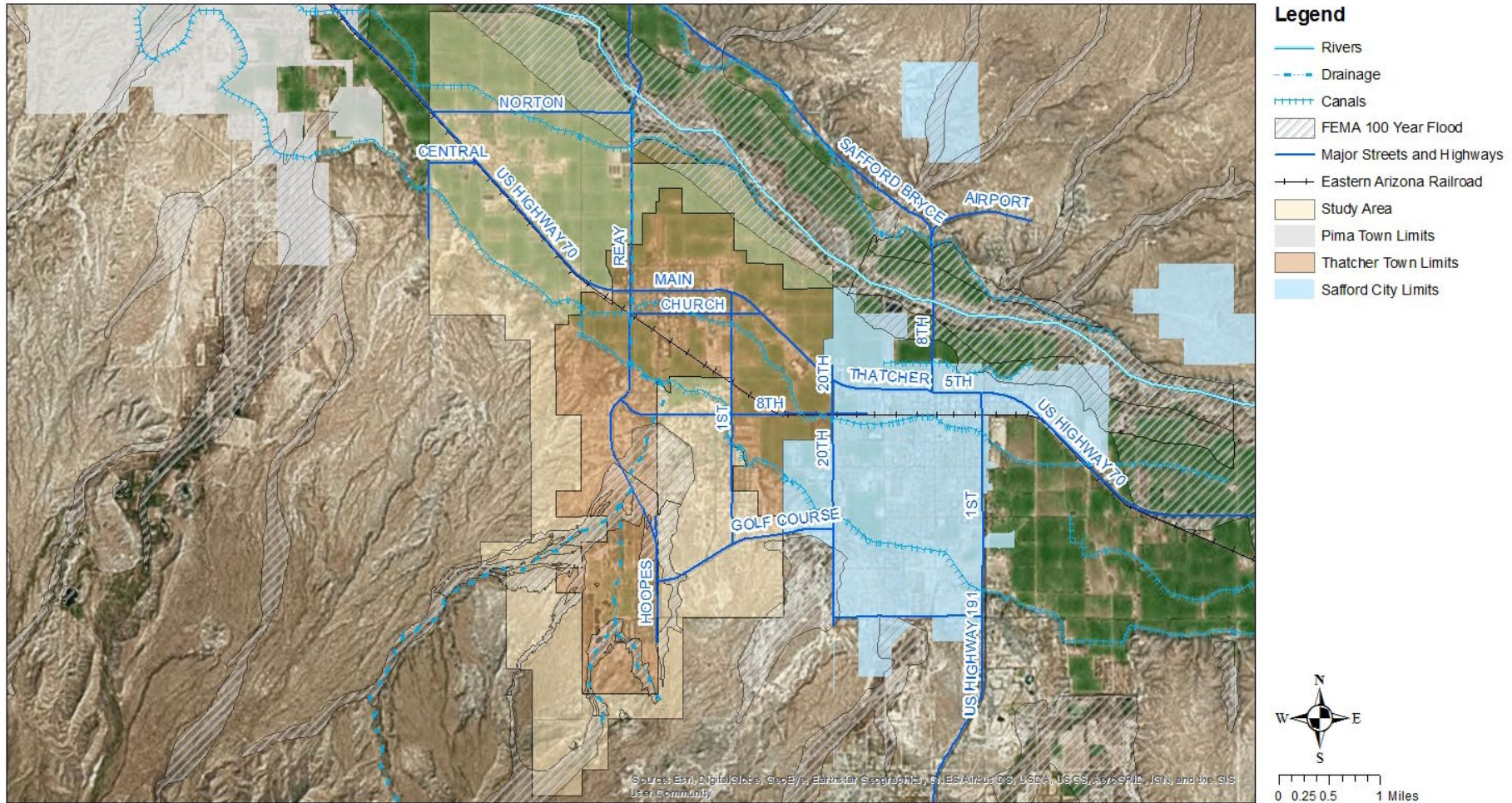


Exhibit 3: Topography

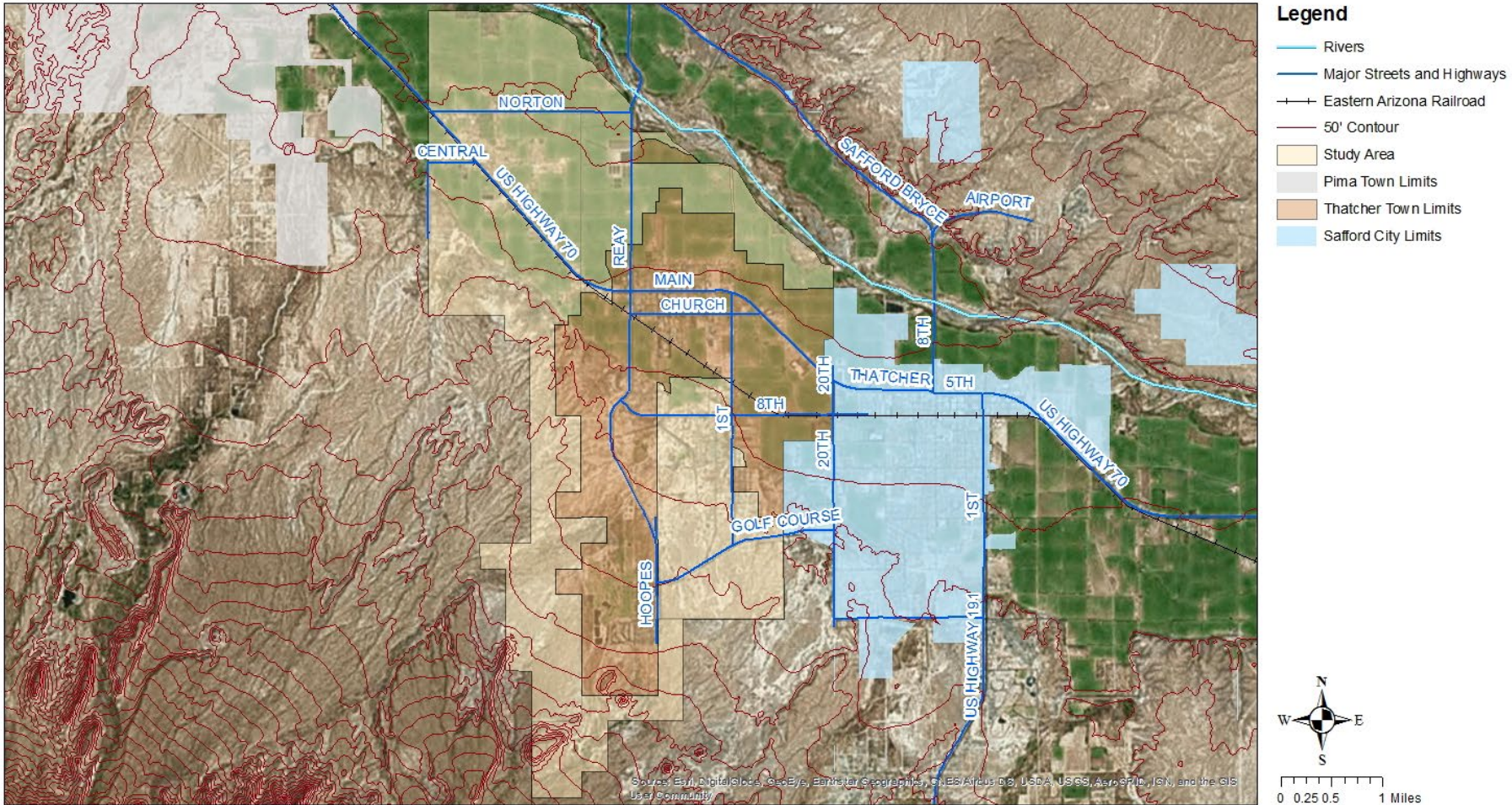


Exhibit 4: Major Land Owners

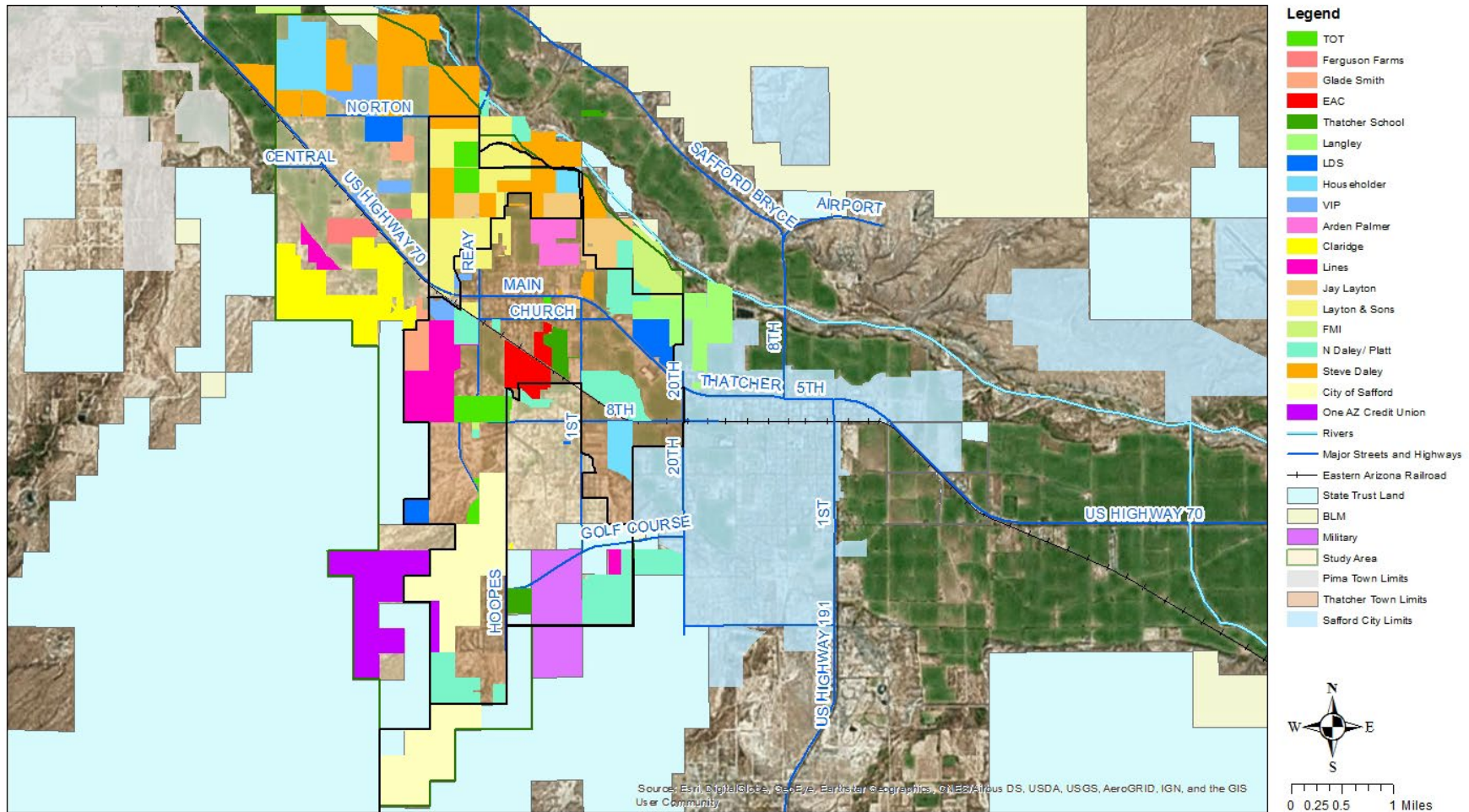
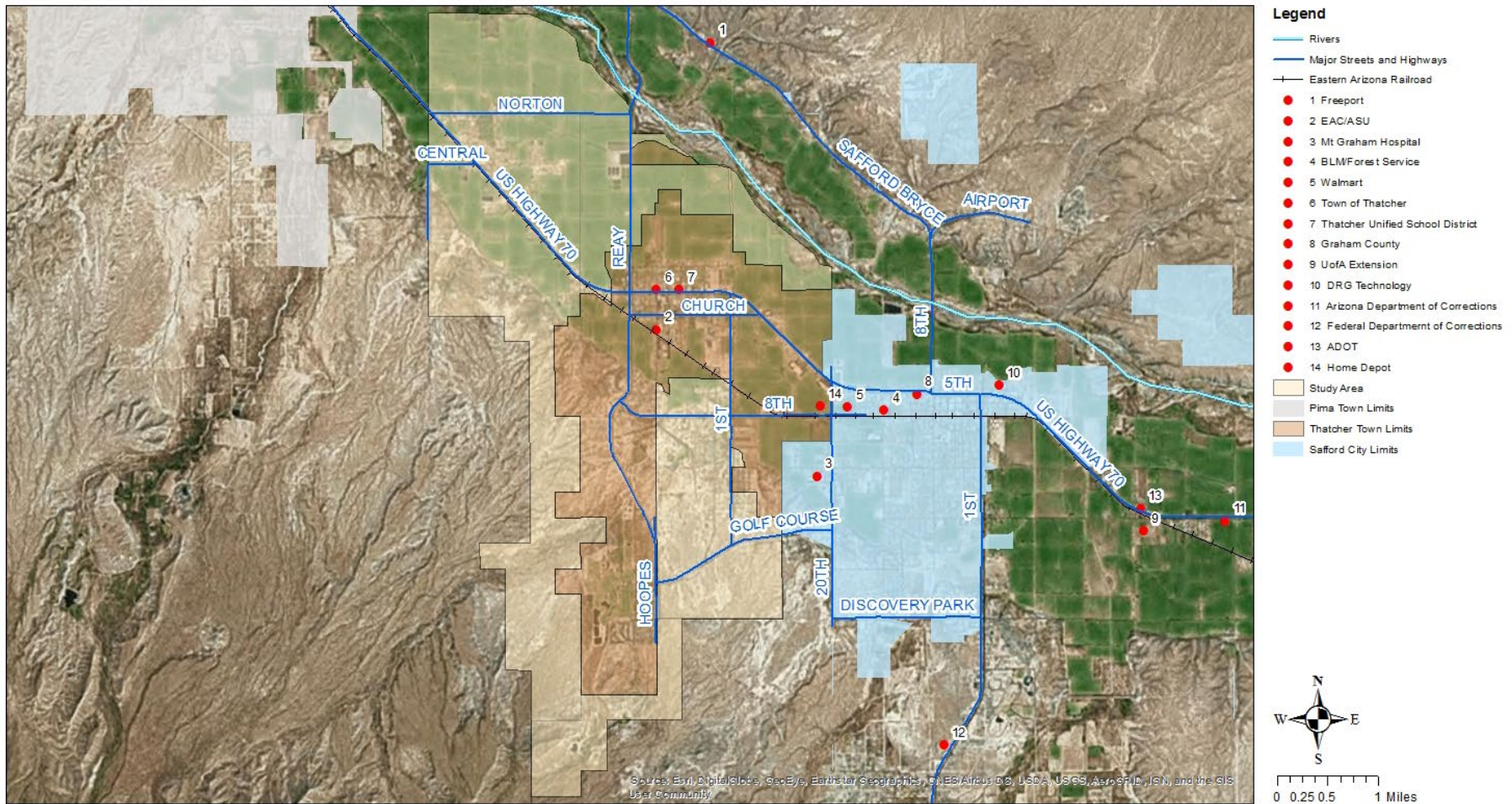


Exhibit 5: Major Streets and Highways and Economic Development Assets





PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Ensuring high quality services for residents, local businesses and visitors enhances the identity of the Town and reinforces Thatcher's commitment to the community. Addressing the needs of the community through carefully planned and implemented policies and programs supporting quality libraries, adequate recreation, first-rate police and fire services and well-maintained infrastructure are essential to meet community needs and expectations.

Thatcher's population is anticipated to increase and strong demand for public services will require continued investment by the Town and other service providers in new facilities. As future development occurs, a focus on developer provided infrastructure, coordinated with the Town's efforts will allow Thatcher to better serve community needs while directing growth in desired areas.

The Town's Public Works department manages, maintains, and improves the Town's streets, wastewater treatment and collection system, vehicle fleet, and cemetery as per the Town Council's direction and policies. Most neighborhoods in Thatcher are served by the Thatcher sewer system and basic street systems designed for their level of need.

Existing Conditions

The Town of Thatcher strives to offer high quality services to its residents. Public safety functions, such as police and fire protection, rank among the highest in the State. The Town recognizes the importance of providing recreational opportunities to meet the demands of a growing population and has completed plans with neighboring communities to incorporate interconnecting trail systems, parks, and open space areas throughout the region. Parks, recreation, trails system and open space are further addressed in the Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space section of this report.

Thatcher currently relies on neighboring communities to help meet certain service needs of its residents. Potable water and solid waste services are provided through the City of Safford. Most neighborhoods in Thatcher are served by the Thatcher sewer system and basic street systems designed for their level of need.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

The preservation and maintenance of these neighborhoods will require infrastructure improvements. Continued expansion of Thatcher's land area through annexation, coupled with population increases and requests for various types of services, will require the Town to consider the strategic location of facilities throughout the planning area to maximize limited resources.

Community Facilities

Town of Thatcher offices including Administration, Engineering, Planning and Zoning, Building and Utilities as well as the Thatcher Police Department and Thatcher Municipal Court are located in the Town Hall facility located at 3700 W. Main Street between Stadium and College Avenues.

Emergency Services

Fire Prevention/Suppression

The Thatcher Fire Department provides emergency rescue services and fire protection for all areas within Thatcher town limits, north of the Gila River and the Central/Jackson Heights Fire District including the Safford Mine. The Department consists of 28 trained volunteer firefighters qualified to do extrication and HAZMAT First Response. In addition, mutual aid agreements exist with Safford, Pima and Graham County, which enable all jurisdictions to share resources.

Thatcher Fire Department is a Class 3-3Y, classification issued by ISO. The Thatcher Fire Department average response time is four (4) minutes in Town and seven (7) minutes to Daley Estates, the furthest portion of Thatcher Town limits. In addition to providing fire and emergency services, the Thatcher Fire Department provides quality public educational programs for people of all ages. These include:

- Fire Extinguisher Demonstrations
- Juvenile Fire-Setter Prevention Program
- Smoke Detector Program.

The Thatcher Fire Department participates in Disaster Preparation Programs including:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- Office of Homeland Security
- American Red Cross Emergency Preparedness



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Thatcher Police Department

The Thatcher Police Department, located at 3700 W. Main Street, employs 12 full time officers, two reserve officers and 10 volunteers in neighborhood watch to serve the community on a 24-hour basis (9-5 dispatch and on-call). Officers are trained to assist in search warrants, entry and crime scene management, investigations and D.U.I. enforcement. If needed, the Thatcher Police Department has additional support through mutual aid plans between Safford, Pima and Graham County.

Current staffing of 12 full-time officers equates to a ratio of nearly 2.5 officers per 1000 population, surpassing National Standards of 2.0 patrol officers per 1,000 population. Average response time for the Thatcher Police Department is 3 to 5 minutes. The Department is working to maintain and improve response times by increasing staff as needed.

Additional advanced training in entry techniques is planned by the Department to be applied to threats in Thatcher schools should they occur. The Thatcher Police Department serves the community by protecting citizens and property, preventing crime, enforcing laws, and maintaining order. The Department's main goal is to contribute to the quality of life in Thatcher by creating and maintaining a safe, secure environment for all Thatcher citizens. Thatcher Police Department accomplishes this goal through proactive community programs designed to prevent crime as well as efficient, thorough investigations of crimes committed.

Medical Services

Thatcher residents utilize complete medical facilities located in the City of Safford. Mount Graham Regional Medical Center located at 1600 S. 20th Avenue, provides 24-hour emergency services. The Center offers 59 beds and 21 physicians staffed to perform a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services.

Courts

The Thatcher Municipal Court is located at 3700 W. Main Street in the Thatcher Town Hall facility. The facility houses the Thatcher Police Court and the Magistrate's Court with one clerk and one magistrate judge serving the Thatcher jurisdiction.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Library

The Town of Thatcher does not maintain a public library. Residents utilize facilities at Eastern Arizona College (EAC) and in Safford. EAC maintains a 50,000-volume library for its students and Graham County citizens.

The Safford Public Library is considered the central facility for all of Graham County. It is maintained and funded (96%) by the City of Safford, with the remainder of support from Graham County and state taxes, federal grants, and local donations.

Educational Facilities

Within Thatcher's incorporated area, the Thatcher Unified School District (TUSD) operates four public schools. The Jack Daley Primary School serves kindergarten through third grade students; Thatcher Elementary School serves fourth grade through sixth grade; Thatcher Middle School serves seventh and eighth grades; and Thatcher High School serves ninth through twelfth grade students. Also located in Thatcher is one public elementary charter school- Discovery Plus Academy-and one private school-Safford Seventh Day Adventist School (SDA), each serving various elementary grades. A regional vocational district, Gila Institute For Technology (GIFT), is also located in Thatcher and serves students from the area high schools.

The Thatcher District participates in a regional consortium serving students with special needs. Graham County Special Services located in the neighboring community of Pima currently enrolls 95 area students, including 39 from TUSD.

The Thatcher USD Office is located at 3490 W. Main St. The district has a teaching staff of 68, a support staff of 82. The Arizona School Report Cards reports 1,637 students currently enrolled. Forecasts prepared by the District and the Arizona School Facilities Board project enrollment will increase by 27% during the next five years at the primary, elementary and middle schools; and by 16% at Thatcher High School, bringing District.

TUSD's service area overlaps with surrounding jurisdictions. Consistent with Arizona's Open Enrollment law, the District accepts out-of-district students within capacity limitations. Approximately 15 percent of Thatcher's enrollment is made up of students who reside outside of District boundaries. Other districts serving Thatcher's Planning Area include Bonita Elementary District, Fort Thomas Unified District, Klondyke Elementary District, Pima Unified District, Safford



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Unified District, Solomon Elementary District, Triumphant Learning Center and Discovery Plus Academy located throughout Graham County.

The District has begun to plan for facility expansion, beginning with additional classrooms at the primary and elementary schools. At this time, Thatcher Middle School and Thatcher High School have adequate facilities to accommodate increasing enrollment. Capacity limits, whether in space or staffing, have caused the District to occasionally limit out-of-district enrollment at various grades in recent years.

Eastern Arizona College (EAC) provides local higher educational opportunities for residents throughout Graham County and Arizona. EAC, Thatcher campus is a two-year college with a current student population of 2,850. While most students are 18-19 years old, enrollment age at EAC ranges from under 18 to over 65.

EAC is working to expand campus capacity and increase technological capabilities for its students. EAC developed a partnership with Northern Arizona University to create opportunities for four-year degrees in multiple study areas. In 2005, EAC built the Wayne M. McGrath High Technology Center installing some of the most advanced computer technology in the Southwest.

Domestic Water Supply

Thatcher's domestic water supply is provided by the City of Safford. Water is drawn from a variety of ground water sources for a service area of approximately 135 square miles. A storage capacity of 12.5 million gallons is expected to meet future development demands. As distribution extensions occur, plans will proceed for additional storage. The City of Safford Community Development Department, (928) 348-3100, provides information on availability of water service and required improvements.

Wastewater Treatment

The Town of Thatcher maintains its commitment to the environment with its state-of-the-art wastewater facility, which has become a major attraction among bird watchers nationwide. Due to its proximity to the Sky Island of Mt. Graham, the facility is on the annual migratory route of hundreds of different species. The Town of Thatcher Wastewater Treatment Plant services Thatcher residents. Approximately 90 percent of all buildings within Town limits are connected to



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

the sanitary sewer system. Fees collected for sewer use and new connections currently fund the operation of the lagoon system treatment plant.

Originally designed in 1999 with a capacity of 800,000 gallons per day to meet Town needs for a 20 or more-year horizon, projected wastewater demand indicates current plant capacity will cover projected population growth into the year 2020 based on a 72 gallon per person per day use.

In addition, the City of Safford has a plant capable of receiving wastewater from the Town of Thatcher and has expressed their willingness to accept wastewater from Thatcher.

A study of the sewer collection system was conducted by the Town to determine the capacity remaining in the critical sewer collection mains and to study the possibility of increasing the size of those mains and/or building an additional treatment plant.

Solid Waste Collection and Disposal

The Town provides solid waste collection for Thatcher residents. Unincorporated areas within the Thatcher planning area are served by Vista Recycling or a self-service method. Currently, fees collected for garbage collection do not cover all expenses associated with Thatcher's solid waste removal and the Town funds the remainder.

Graham County collectively shares the landfill, owned and operated by the City of Safford, located north of the Gila River. The landfill, at 2.05 million cubic yards, utilizes 80 acres of a 440-acre site.

Without further expansion, the landfill is believed to have a life span of 25 or more years. The additional 240-acres located at the northern end of the site can be developed by Safford through capital improvement funds supported by user fees as necessary.

Flood Control

As provided in the Physical Conditions section, the Town of Thatcher has floodplain areas shown on the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) floodplain maps. These areas are generally associated with Fry Creek Wash, the Fry Creek Retarding Dam and the Gila River. Other major drainage courses and canals impacting the planning area include the Freeman Wash (Freeman Wash Retarding Dam), Highline Canal, Union Canal and Smithville Canal. Stormwater management requirements can be found in the Town's drainage policy and ordinance. Regional flood control management is through the Graham County Flood Control District.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Electric Service

Thatcher provides electric service within town limits through Graham County Electric Cooperative. Adequate electrical capacity exists for expected.

Subdivisions, apartments, large-scale developments, etc. are required by the Town to provide underground electric. All electric infrastructure required for new development is at the expense of the developer and Thatcher design standards must be followed.

Natural Gas

Graham County Utilities services the entire Thatcher area with natural gas and maintains gas lines within Town.

Telephone and Communications

Both U.S. West Communications and AT&T provide basic telephone and cable services to the Town. High-speed data links are available through Cable One and Qwest.

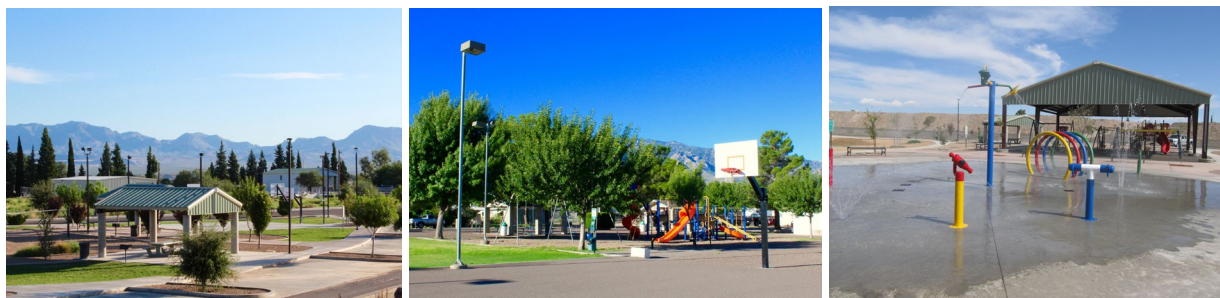
Parks, Recreation and Trails





Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

The Thatcher Parks and Recreation Department manages and maintains all public parks and recreation areas within the Town. These facilities include five community parks, a splash pad water feature, a skate park, tennis courts, basketball court, sand volleyball and a pickle ball court. Additionally, the Town offers Summer Baseball, Softball, Women's Volleyball, Jr. League Volleyball, Men's Basketball, Children's Choir, Swim Team, Children's Orchestra, Community Choir, and Basketball & Tennis Camps. Thatcher residents currently utilize Eastern Arizona College, City of Safford or the Town of Pima for swimming pool facility needs.



Mt. Graham Municipal Golf Course

The Mt. Graham Golf Course is a walker-friendly, traditional 18-hole par 72 course. For men, the course plays 6,354 yards, par 72 with a rating of 69.5 and a slope of 116. For women, it's 5,691 yards, par 73 with a rating of 70.6 and a slope of 119. The course's water and sand provide a great challenge for the average golfer. The course also features a grass driving range and short game practice areas.





Functional Plans

To understand the magnitude and timing of needed services and facilities, Thatcher prepares functional plans that relate to specific public services and facilities. Such plans include Master Plans for Emergency Services (police, fire, EMS), Wastewater, Floodplain, Transportation, Libraries, Park, Trail and Open Space Systems. Each of these plans provide detailed information on existing facilities, assess current and projected needs based on desired levels of service, and make recommendations for future public and private actions.

Cost of Development

The ability to sustain facilities and services for the community is affected by the rate of growth and the balance between residential and non-residential uses. The Town of Thatcher does not collect property tax to pay for ongoing facilities maintenance and operation. Maintaining a strong retail sales tax base is important to the community to help fund the operating expenses of the Town.

Costs need to be equitably apportioned and assessed to new growth with appropriate exceptions when in the public interest. Identifying guidelines by which development pays for itself will assure preparedness for increasing costs of additional public service needs. Three basic steps include:

1. Establish service and facility standards, such as 2.5 police officers per 1,000 population, to help identify needed future capacities and facilities based on growth projections from new development.
2. Recognize and quantify impacts resulting from new development on public services and facilities as more residents create more demand for services, such as parks and roads.
3. Where applicable and to the extent possible, require growth to pay for itself. Developers contribute the fair share to costs of police, parks, roads, sidewalks, etc.

Other mechanisms available to the Town for funding expansion of services include but are not limited to:

- Primary and secondary property taxes
- Specialty Industry Tax
- Improvement Districts
- Community Facilities Districts (CFDs)
- User Fees
- Voter approved bonds
- Municipal Property Corporation Bonds
- Payback Agreements



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Transportation & Circulation

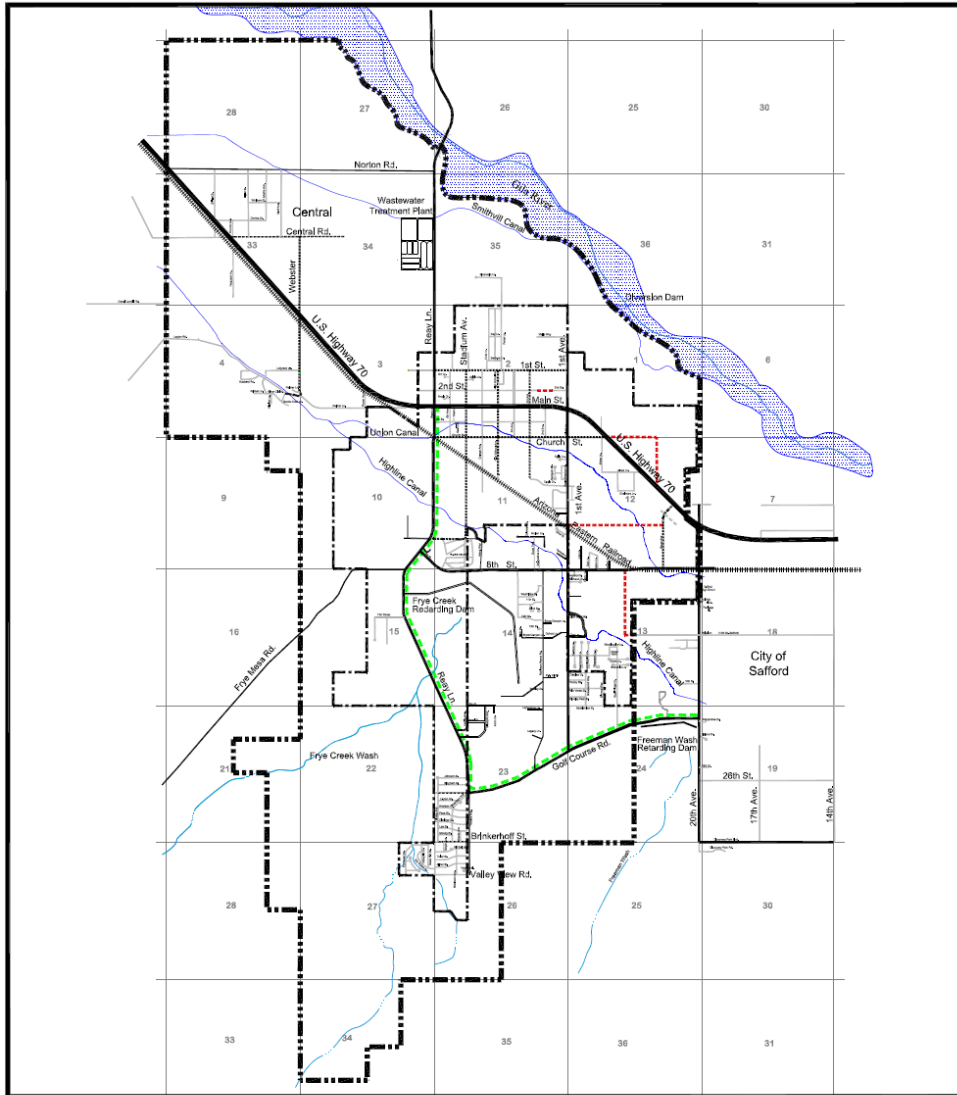
Thatcher's transportation system includes air, rail, and highway. Key sites provide direct rail access to the mainline of the Arizona Eastern Railroad. This shortline ties the copper-rich mining regions of Arizona to the Union Pacific transcontinental line just 38 miles to the south.

Excellent truck service is also available linking Thatcher with the major markets of Southern California and Dallas/Ft. Worth—all with 24-hour delivery. Phoenix is 2.5 hours to the west via U.S. 70. Well paved U.S. 191 links the region with I-10 a short 40 minutes to the south. Via I-10, Thatcher is linked to both the east and west coasts.

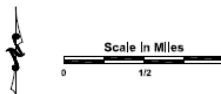
Only 10 miles from town hall is the jet-capable Safford Regional Airport. Services include fuel, avionics installation and service, airframe and power-plant maintenance, as well as aircraft rental and charter. The airport is 74 nautical miles northeast of Tucson International Airport and 124 nautical miles southeast of Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix.

Exhibit 6 shows street designations and circulation within the Thatcher study area.

Exhibit 6: Thatcher Street Designation and Circulation



- | | | | |
|--|--------------------|--|------------------------|
| | Principal Arterial | | Town of Thatcher |
| | Minor Arterial | | Planning Area Boundary |
| | Collector Streets | | Future Streets |
| | Local Streets | | Railroad |
| | Multi-use Path | | |





Thatcher Transportation Network Existing Conditions

In Thatcher, transportation is mostly dependent on the automobile. Travel occurs mainly on one highway and a series of arterial and collector roadways. Congestion is low and current levels of service are generally excellent. Constraints to expansion of the circulation system include Arizona Eastern Railroad with limitations on new rail crossings as well as the topography of the Pinaleno Mountains to the south and the floodway of the Gila River to the north. The Town of Thatcher Public Works Department oversees the construction and maintenance of the Town's infrastructure and road network.

Regional Connections

U.S. Highway 70 is the principal roadway serving the planning area. US 70 (Main Street) provides access to central Arizona including Globe and the Phoenix metropolitan area, 160 miles to the northwest. US 70 connects to US 191 in Safford to the east and provides a link to Interstate 10, located about 35 miles to the south. Interstate 10 provides direct connections to Tucson, about 120 miles southwest and to New Mexico and Texas to the east.

Roadway Network

The Town of Thatcher, Graham County and ADOT all own and maintain roadways in Thatcher and its planning area. The primary roadway through Thatcher is US 70 (Main Street), bisecting the north end of Thatcher's town core. As the principal arterial serving regional and local traffic, Main Street is a five-lane roadway, converging to two lanes outside incorporated areas. Main Street is an ADOT maintained facility entering Thatcher's planning area on the west from the Pima area and on the east from Safford.

Circulation through central Thatcher and through Daley Estates at the most southern end of the Town primarily runs on a grid system with local streets providing direct residential access. Reay Lane, First Avenue and 20th Avenue serve as the main north-south connections between these two main areas. Reay Lane located on the west side of Town is the only roadway providing access north across the Gila River. First Avenue provides important access to many of Thatcher's residential areas and maintains connections to Safford with intersections at Main Street, 8th Street and Golf Course Road. Each of the three intersecting roads connects with 20th Avenue, providing an important link to Town services.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Traffic Volumes

Limited information is available for traffic volumes on roadways through Thatcher. However, traffic counts included in the 2018 Arizona Department of Transportation, ADDT Report (Traffic Counts) indicated approximately 13,574 average daily trips along the road segment of Main Street between College Road and 1st Avenue. As Thatcher's main thoroughfare, potential congestion on Main Street is inevitable with continued growth. Traffic volume data for other streets in Thatcher that have an estimated average daily trip is shown in Table 16.

Street Name	Average Daily Trips (ADT)
Main Street (US 70) – From Palmer Lane to College Road	11,865
Main Street (US 70) – From College Road to 1 st Avenue	13,574
Main Street (US 70) – From 1 st Avenue to 20 th Avenue	17,391
First Street	500-2,000
Stadium Avenue	500-2,000
Reay Lane	1,000-2,000
First Avenue	2,000-4,000
Church Street	3,000-4,000
Golf Course Road	1,500-2,000
20 th Avenue	12,000-15,000

Source: Arizona Department of Transportation, 2018 AADT Report for US Routes and Town of Thatcher Estimates, 2018.

Roadway Functional Classification

Roadways in the Thatcher planning area are classified according to their primary function. The Town has designated classifications for four types of roadways. The designations of Arterial/Minor Arterial, Collector, Major and Local are described in the Town's Subdivision Ordinance. These designations are unchanged by this General Plan Update. Table 17 shows functional classifications for major roadways in the Thatcher planning area.

Arterials are described as four to six lanes, moderate speed facilities, generally located on a one-mile grid, serving major traffic within Thatcher. Two levels are identified, the first, Arterials, have a high level of access control to support large traffic volumes and connections to the regional system, and the second, Minor Arterials, have more access points and provide local service.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Collector streets are two to four lanes in width, lower-speed facilities often located midway between arterials. Collectors provide internal circulation within neighborhoods and connections to the arterial roadway system.

Major and Local Streets refer to one-lane or two-lane streets serving local facilities and residential neighborhoods.

TABLE 17: Roadway Functional Classifications

Street Name	Functional Classification
Main Street (US 70)	Arterial
First Street	Collector
Stadium Avenue	Collector
Reay Lane	Minor Arterial
First Avenue	Major Street
Church Street	Major Street
Golf Course Road	Major Street
20 th Avenue	Arterial

Source: Town of Thatcher, 2018.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation

Three major multi-use pedestrian/bike pathways exist in the Thatcher planning area: 1) along Golf Course Road, from 20th Avenue to Reay Lane, provides regional connectivity between Safford and Thatcher; 2) Along Reay Lane from Golf Course Road up to Main Street with a connection path from Reay Lane to Stadium Avenue along the Highline Canal; 3) A long 20th Avenue from Relation Street to US Hwy 70 built jointly between Thatcher and the City of Safford, establishing important pedestrian routes connecting Thatcher and Safford. **Exhibit 6** shows existing multi-use paths.

Transit

Public transit service in Thatcher is limited. SouthEastern Arizona Community Action Program, Inc. (SEACAP), located in Safford, provides senior citizens and disabled residents throughout the Thatcher area free shuttle service for shopping and medical needs.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

The Graham County Transit Feasibility Report completed in May of 2007 and updated in 2016 by SEAGO found citizen concerns regarding the lack of transit service in Thatcher and the surrounding area. The report identifies needs for increased transit service for the growing senior population, students attending Eastern Arizona College and the growing number of Freeport McMoRan workers. Additionally, the study recognizes alternatives to single occupant vehicles will likely be important to mitigating congestion, pollution and accessibility issues as the Town's population increases. The following section identifies percent of single occupant vehicles in Thatcher.

Work Commute

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, of the total workers 16 years and over commuting to work, approximately 77.8 drove alone via car, truck or van, approximately 12.9 percent carpooled, and 2.7 percent walked to work. Table 15 shows workers commuting to work patterns by mode of transportation based on 2017 estimates. The mean travel time to work in Thatcher is 17.9 minutes.

Community Pattern by Mode of Transportation	2017 Estimates	Percent
Car, truck, or van – drove alone	1,516	77.8
Car, truck, or van - carpooled	252	12.9
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	12	0.6
Walked	53	2.7
Other means	52	2.7
Worked at home	64	3.3
Total worker population 16 years and over commuting to work	1,949	100

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Rail Service

In August 2011, AZER was purchased by Genesee & Wyoming Inc. (G&W). AZER has trackage rights over UP between Bowie, Arizona, and Lordsburg, New Mexico (48 miles), and includes freight service from Bowie to Miami, Arizona, (135 miles) and Lordsburg, New Mexico, to Clifton, Arizona, (67 miles). All traffic is interchanged at Lordsburg, New Mexico. The railroad serves the copper mining region of southeastern Arizona and the agricultural Gila River Valley primarily transporting copper products, chemicals, building supplies and grain.

Currently, two freight trains pass through Thatcher daily; once in the evening and once in the early morning. Major track improvements were completed by the end of 2008 that allow trains to run at 20 to 25 miles per hour through the Thatcher area.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

Construction of a new 12-mile spur line from Safford to the Freeport McMoRan mine northeast of Thatcher began in 2006. The mine will develop the San Juan and Dos Pobres copper ore bodies. Once in operation, an additional train is expected to run through Thatcher daily and the current Class I designation will increase to a Class II.

Air Service

There are two international airports providing service for Thatcher residents and visitors. The Tucson International Airport (TIA) is located in Tucson about 120 miles southwest of Thatcher and the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX) is located in Phoenix about 160 miles northwest of Thatcher.

The Safford Regional Airport serves the Thatcher area for business and private use seven days a week. The airport was originally constructed as a training facility for the U.S. Air Force in 1941 and has since become a full-service facility with two (6,800-foot and 4,800-foot) paved, lighted runways with UNICOM radio. Owned and operated by the City of Safford, the airport can accommodate charter planes and large aircraft. Shuttles to area restaurants and motels and both courtesy car and car rental services are provided.

Circulation/Connectivity Considerations

During the planning process of the previous general plan the community identified circulation related issues including:

□ Traffic Growth

As growth continues in the Thatcher area, planning for new east/west and north/south corridors should be addressed.

□ Highway – Rail Crossings

Development of new rail crossings should be planned ahead of growth needs, as the approval process is slow and uncertain. Approval must be coordinated with the Federal Railroad Association (FRA), the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC) as well as the Arizona Eastern Railway.

□ Safety Concerns

With the growing number of residents in Thatcher, traffic speeding through neighborhoods is a concern for pedestrian safety. Limited sidewalk availability was identified as a concern as well.

□ Control and Lighting

Traffic control and street lighting improvements need to be identified and installed to help traffic flow and improve safety.



Town of Thatcher General Plan Update Background and Current Conditions

□ **Retail and Job-Related Transit**

Transit is needed to improve accessibility to retail areas and jobs for residents with limited mobility, including students and seniors and to reduce traffic volumes.



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEP

One of the primary functions of planning is to manage growth in a manner that supports healthy people, healthy infrastructure, a healthy economy and a healthy environment. As growth occurs, land absorption is guided consistent with the vision, goals and policies included in the General Plan Policy volume.

Although residential development will remain the largest user of land, the Future Land Use will be updated during the General Plan Update planning process to reflect the established development pattern of Thatcher. This technical report was prepared to allow decision makers, residents and stakeholders to make informed decisions during the Visioning Process phase of the General Plan Update.

It is anticipated that the Town will continue to grow and that the planning area has the existing or planned capacity to sustain such growth in a sustainable manner. Distribution and location of future land uses in Thatcher will build on existing land use patterns. To strengthen its long-term viability, the Town must continue to support its employment and service sector with an emphasis on job creation, take advantage of Highway 70 as an opportunity corridor to enhance its retail base, and support the agricultural heritage of the Town in a feasible manner.

Next Step

The next step in the General Plan Update planning process is to engage the community in the Visioning Process to solicit public input. The findings of the Visioning Process, integrated with the findings summarized in this report, will lead the preparation of the General Plan Update Policy Volume containing the Vision, goals, policies and implementation strategies that will support the vision desired by the community through the next planning horizon.