

# **The Code of the West...** **the Realities of Rural Living**

## **A Primer for Living in LUNA COUNTY NEW MEXICO**

2013 Edition

Luna County Manager  
700 South Silver Avenue  
P.O. Box 551  
Deming New Mexico 88031-0551  
575-546-0494

[www.lunacountynm.us](http://www.lunacountynm.us)

Text and Photographs Copyright © 2013 HRR  
All Rights Reserved

**IMPORTANT:** This Primer is not guaranteed to be 100% accurate. If you spot any errors, please notify the Luna County Manager.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	Page 5
EXPECTATIONS.....	Page 5
INTRODUCTION TO PARADISE.....	Page 6
LOCALE.....	Page 6
TERRAIN.....	Page 7
CLIMATE.....	Page 7
HIGH DESERT REALITIES.....	Page 8
THE RIGHT TO BE RURAL.....	Page 8
TRESPASSING.....	Page 8
FIREARMS.....	Page 8
OPEN RANGE LAW.....	Page 9
FARM/RANCH LIFE...COWS & OTHER CRITTERS.....	Page 9
GROWTH.....	Page 9
REAL ESTATE, LAND & JUST PLAIN DIRT.....	Page 9
WATER, THE REAL GOLD.....	Page 10
SANITATION.....	Page 10
ACCESS.....	Page 11
PROPERTY BOUNDARIES.....	Page 11
MINERAL RIGHTS.....	Page 12
HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATIONS.....	Page 12
LAND USES MAY CHANGE.....	Page 12
BUILDABILITY VS. LIVABILITY.....	Page 12
CONSTRUCTION.....	Page 12
INTERNET USAGE.....	Page 13
UTILITIES.....	Page 13
DELIVERIES.....	Page 14
THE VIEW.....	Page 14
PROPERTY TAXES.....	Page 15
MOTHER/FATHER NATURE.....	Page 15
SNAKE-SCORPION-SPIDER SAFETY.....	Page 15
WILDLIFE...OH, DEER!.....	Page 16
TAME LIFE...HORSES & DOGS.....	Page 16
FIRE DANGER.....	Page 17
AIR POLLUTION.....	Page 17
FLOODING.....	Page 17
DROUGHT.....	Page 18
GETTING AROUND.....	Page 18
EDUCATION.....	Page 18
SCHOOLS.....	Page 18
MIMBRES VALLEY LEARNING CENTER.....	Page 19
SERVICES.....	Page 19
LIBRARY.....	Page 19
EMERGENCY SERVICES.....	Page 19
VOLUNTEERING.....	Page 19

COUNTY FAIR..... Page 20  
TRASH. .... Page 20  
COUNTY GOVERNMENT. .... Page 20

GENERAL TIPS ON PLANTS AND ANIMALS. .... Page 21

GREAT EXPECTATIONS..... Page 22

YES / NO SELF-TEST. .... Page 23

WEB LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION..... Page 24

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The idea for “The Code of the West...the realities of rural living” originated from counties in Colorado and Northern California. Some of the information here is taken directly from those publications with permission and thanks, and some has been adapted to address specific local issues.

*The Code of the West* was first chronicled by the famous western writer Zane Grey. The men and women who came to this part of the country during the westward expansion of the United States were bound by an unwritten code of conduct. The values of integrity and self reliance guided their decisions, actions and interactions. In keeping with that spirit, we offer this information to help present and future citizens of Luna County who wish to follow in the footsteps of those rugged individuals by living outside city limits.

Other counties are free to copy what they find here, if they can use it.

## EXPECTATIONS

Newcomers need to be informed about the “realities of rural life.” Expectations are a key to successful living in the Luna County section of paradise. If a newcomer’s expectations are urban, disappointment may follow. The rural setting is different and requires one to want to live here. It takes effort, tenacity, a sense of humor and some preparation to enjoy living in rural Luna County.

Folks who like it here often consider city conveniences and amenities to be nuisances or worse. Some new residents only see a wonderful, idyllic, rural, mountain or desert setting. So they may be shocked a bit later when a rattlesnake slithers by, cows munch the rose bushes, a coyote feasts on the family pet, and the driveway disappears in a dust storm. Maybe it’s just the sight of some unauthorized border-crossers passing by. It’s easy to become disenchanted and expect someone else to “do something” about it. Thus, the Code of the West is intended to touch on some key notions to help prospective or new residents match Luna County reality with expectations.

Here is a poem about unrealistic expectations, presented to Luna County by the Lewis Flats Haiku Patrol:

House burned to the ground?  
What did you expect, this far  
from a fire hydrant?

# INTRODUCTION TO PARADISE

## LOCALE

Luna County is 2,965 square miles in size (larger than the State of Delaware) and is located in the southwestern “Bootheel” portion of New Mexico. The County is bordered by Old México to the south, Doña Ana County to the east, Sierra and Grant Counties to the north, and Grant and Hidalgo Counties on the west. There are no lakes, nor does it rain much. You might think there is a river, since the Mimbres River appears on most maps. It is a dry river bed most of the time. The Mimbres River seldom flows, except after heavy rains or flooding in the mountains of our watershed located 40 miles to our north.

The City of Deming, located along Interstate Highway 10 near the geographic center of the county, is the county seat. The only other incorporated municipality in the county is the Village of Columbus, which lies three miles north of Palomas, Mexico, and about 30 miles south of Deming on State Highway 11.

The majority of the county is fairly flat, either grassland or desert scrub, but it also contains three mountain ranges: Cooke’s Range in the north, the Florida [flow-REE-dah or “flowered”] Mountains on the southeastern side of Deming near the center of the county, and the Tres Hermanas [Three Sisters] Mountains in the southern part of the county near Columbus. The 2010 Census counted 25,095 persons living on the 590,083 acres of private land in Luna County, for an average density of 0.04 persons per acre, or about 27 people per square mile. Leaving out Deming, the rural area population is about 10,000, or 3.3 people per square mile, which to some old-timers feels crowded.



Florida Mountains At Sunset

## TERRAIN

According to data gathered by the Space Shuttle Radar Topography Mission, the elevation of Luna County ranges from 3,937 feet to 7,709 feet. Most of the land is flat, elevation about 4,335 feet. There are roughly 1,897,600 acres in Luna County. Of that figure, 121,930 acres are farmland (USDA-NASS). Only about 6,000 acres are urban. Much of Luna County is publicly owned and serves an economic purpose as the foundation for the livelihood and rural lifestyle of many year-round residents. These farm and range lands are, in fact, commercial properties, and newcomers should not be appalled when seasonal or cyclical economic activity occurs on them attendant with noise, dust, large vehicles and landscape changes. The fact that they provide recreation, open space, habitat or aesthetic value to the general population is merely a free bonus.

## CLIMATE

The climate of Luna County varies greatly - hot summer days, cool summer nights and mild winters with little snow. For January, the average high is 58°F, record high 79°F (1971); the average low is 27°F, record low is -4°F (1962); average precipitation is 0.53 in. For July, the average high is 95°F, record high 110°F (1951); the average low is 64°F, record low is 49°F (1992); average precipitation is 1.99 in. Thanks to the high desert location, in July it might be 105 degrees in the daytime but only 70 at night. Humidity and precipitation are low. The average annual precipitation is 12 inches, and sometimes it rains much less. You might forget what month the last rain was. What rain does fall often falls all at once in a big storm that may overdose you while leaving your neighbor completely dry.



It Might Rain In The Distance While You Stay Dry

Low humidity has important implications in the areas of plant watering, human hydration, and building design. Non-native plants won't have the waxy coat that spiny cactus plants have, so their leaves will lose a lot of water in a hurry - enough to kill the plant if not looked after with care. For humans, your normal sweating will go on as usual when you get warm, but the sweat will evaporate right away. You won't get "sweaty", and you might be fooled into thinking you are not losing water. This can be a fatal mistake, so always drink lots more water than you think you need.

For buildings, the lack of moisture in the air means the air cannot hold much heat energy. When the sun goes down, the hot daytime temperatures disappear right away, leading to daily 30 or 40 degree air temperature swings. In summer, you can open your windows at night to let in the cool air, then shut the windows soon after sunrise to keep out the hot air, using what Nature offers for cost-free cooling. The opposite strategy works in winter, when warm afternoon air should be allowed into your house to save on the cost of heating.

## **HIGH DESERT REALITIES**

### **THE RIGHT TO BE RURAL**

Fundamental to the theme of “The Code of the West” is this concept: the right to be rural. A horse or two may live next door, and there are many wild animals. Although self-reliance is required, rural neighbors need each other. Clean water, sanitation and access are your responsibility.

### **TRESPASSING**

Bad manners come in many forms. To live at peace and in friendship with your neighbors, some of whom may live miles away, it's best to not make a pest of yourself. Traditional trespass consists of personally entering your neighbor's land or buildings without permission or invitation. Trespass also includes disturbing your neighbor not only in person, but also through anything of yours which crosses his property line. This might include sound (such as from a loud radio or vehicle muffler), light (such as from an unshaded yard or porch light), blowing trash, gunfire, and loose pets. It hurts you in the pocketbook when you pay to light up your neighbor's yard as well as your own, besides it being a violation of the NM Night Sky Protection Act [74-12-1 to 74-12-10 NMSA 1978]. You are entitled to the expectation of undisturbed use of your land, and likewise your neighbor is entitled to his. If you suspect, or are notified, that something you do disturbs your neighbor, you must take steps to correct the situation.

### **FIREARMS**

New Mexico is among the most liberal states with regards to firearms in the home. In this context, “home” includes your motor vehicle and your hotel room when traveling. While a permit is required for “concealed carry”, there are no onerous restrictions on un-concealed carry. You can still strap on a six-shooter and wander around downtown, although hardly anybody does so any more. There are several practical reasons for this liberality, which originates with our still fairly recent Wild West history. The main reason is our low population density. The Sheriff is usually a long ways off when you need him, and you might need to defend yourself! Since most rural homeowners are likely to be armed to the teeth, criminals generally go elsewhere. Violent crime here is rare. Even those few homeowners who choose not to keep firearms benefit from the prickly reputation of those who do. If you hear nearby gunfire, don't get too excited, it's probably only your neighbor enjoying some target practice. Of course, with rights come responsibilities, so watch where you point that thing!



## **OPEN RANGE LAW**

Luna County, along with most of New Mexico, has an open range law. Cows have the right to nibble the shrubbery anywhere they can get to. This means if you do not want cattle or other livestock on your property, it is your responsibility to fence them out. It is not the responsibility of the rancher to keep livestock off your property by fencing his cows in. The exception to this is for property adjacent to federally managed land. An owner must fence his cattle out of federally managed land or face trespass. State highways are always well-fenced - this is the Highway Department's way of keeping your cows off their roads. If you happen to hit somebody's cow while you are out driving, it's probably your fault and at your expense.

## **FARM/RANCH LIFE...COWS & OTHER CRITTERS**

Luna County has a lot of commercial farming and livestock raising. Where it exists, it is there first by right and deserves not to be condemned by urban development. If you buy or build next to a farm or ranch, expect agricultural activity. The "right to be rural" applies. Love it or avoid it.

Farmers often work around the clock, especially during irrigation and harvest time. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses can disturb your peace and quiet. Operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather. Farmers sometimes burn their ditches and fields to keep them clear of debris, weeds and other obstructions. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable. Use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers are normal practice, sometimes delivered by low-flying crop dusters. Animals can cause objectionable odors. What else can we say? Agriculture is an important business in Luna County. If you choose to live among the farms and ranches of our rural countryside, do not expect county government to protect you from the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors.

Don't move next to a dairy and complain about the smell. Don't move next to a hay farmer and complain about dust, tractor noise, chemicals or late night lights.

## **GROWTH**

Population of Luna County is approximately 25,095. It is anticipated this number will increase slightly but at a slower rate than the State. Residents over sixty make up a higher percentage of the population in the County than the state average. Projections are that this trend will continue.

## **REAL ESTATE, LAND & JUST PLAIN DIRT**

Given the reality of the rural setting, "buyer beware" takes on a whole new meaning. Any reputable seller or sales agent will welcome your seeking a second opinion and your checking out the facts yourself. Many "land for sale" offers involve half-acre lots known as Deming Ranchettes. Thousands of tiny Ranchette lots were subdivided from the open range many years ago, and some of them are lovely, but to this day most Ranchette lots are vacant and unusable. Some of this land is too small to build on, because there cannot be enough separation between wells and septic systems. Nearly all Ranchette land is hemmed in by unused and unbuildable power line rights-of-way.

Please see the CONSTRUCTION section below for more warnings about over-clearing your land.

## **WATER, THE REAL GOLD**

Water is the real gold in the West. These facts are critical: First, New Mexico is a Prior Appropriation State and by Constitution the State owns all of the water. State law determines who has the right to use the water based on earliest beneficial use; first in time, first in right. Everyone who wants to use water for any purpose is required to seek and obtain a permit from the New Mexico State Engineer's Office. The local district office is at 301 S. Tin Street in Deming.

Preservation of water quality is paramount, which is why the next section on sanitation is so long. Most potable water in the County is produced from individual wells located on each property. Water conservation is a rural way of life. Low-flow devices and appliances are prudent and sometimes necessary, for it costs to pump water up hundreds of feet, and some wells, particularly in dry years, do not produce more than a few gallons per minute.

Protection of the purity of well water, your drinking water, requires proper installation of wells. Protection from ground water pollution is vital, and most critical is protection of wells from failed septic systems. If your water supply fails you just lost the ability to live comfortably in paradise, for the average home uses about 250 gallons of water per day per household. Prospective owners should make sure the well produces a quantity of water that will support their intended use of the property. A well producing 5 gallons per minute is sufficient to support a couple, small yard and garden, but it will not accommodate the family of six with a horse pasture and a large garden, without a water storage tank.

## **SANITATION**

Nearly all residences outside the two towns have an ISDS (Individual Sewage Disposal System), often called a "septic system." Again, Expectations. The urbanite expects whatever they flush to go away. Rural residents expect the flush to end up underground in the back yard. In the yard will be a 1000-gallon or larger tank in which bacteria digest liquid and solid waste. Undigested solids settle to the bottom of the tank. From the tank the remaining "black" water flows to a leach field where it evaporates or soaks into the ground, where the earth filters out some impurities. Thus, 90% to 95% of the septic water is returned to the earth and sky where it (hopefully) is pure and reusable. Your wastewater will be used again, and you may not be the first in line.

Because of to the importance of clean water, and the growing population that is placing wells and septic systems closer and closer, and also due to some poor soil conditions, Luna County may require an "enhanced/alternative" septic system for many new or replacement systems. Wells must be a minimum of 100 feet from the leach field. The County does not set standards for wells that are more than 100 feet away. Make certain all wells and sewers are separated by a minimum of 100 feet. Your well must be far from your septic system, and from your neighbor's septic system, and vice versa. This restriction is what makes some Deming Ranchette land unbuildable. If located too close, there will undoubtedly be sanitation problems in the future. Your water supply may become undrinkable, and banks will not lend money to you or prospective buyers. When building a new house you will need to obtain the appropriate water and sewer permits to ensure you don't end up with future problems.

ISDS systems work when cared for and fail when: 1) they are not pumped regularly, 2) bacteria-killing chemicals are introduced, 3) non-biodegradables are flushed, 4) overload floods the field, and/or if, 5) the field is compacted. Thus: 1) pumping every 7 to 10 years is recommended, 2) bleach, drain cleaner such as Drano, paint thinner, etc., down the drain is a no-no, 3) flushing plastics, cloth-based paper or diapers is a big mistake, 4) too many people using too much water will flood the leach field, and 5) driving or playing on the leach field will compact it. New ISDS systems are inspected and likely are properly installed. If the system is older than 20

years, expect to replace it sooner rather than later.

## **ACCESS**

Just because there is a road or driveway does not mean a property has right-of-way legal access, especially if the access is across property belonging to others. It is wise to get legal advice and to fully understand and document easements that may exist or are necessary to insure access. Do not accept the word of a seller or agent, especially if they tell you that you can't be kept off your property. Some land has "helicopter access" only, and cannot be walked or driven to. The "right" of access could require thousands of dollars in legal costs plus delay upon delay.

There may be unrecorded power or other easements across your land, and land "behind" yours may require you to permit an easement. Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc., across your land. There may be easements that are not of record. Check these issues carefully. The County does not have deeds for many of our County roads, and some old roads may not be depicted on title searches. Many County roads have a prescriptive right for use. Some neighbors are just plain rotten and some are saintly, but for either, nail down the legal access in writing before your property purchase closes.

There may be road or driveway maintenance issues, so it is wise to see that your driveway was properly engineered and constructed. Property owners are responsible for maintenance of all private roads and driveways. Heavy rains can wash out or severely damage your driveway or private road. You may need to buy a tractor or contract to maintain your driveway. Natural disasters, especially flash floods, can destroy roads. A dry creek bed can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges and culverts. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges have been hit with large bills for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods. Don't assume a neighbor will cooperate or share expenses. And don't wait until dust, rain or snow flies to make these arrangements. Clearing the end of your driveway is your responsibility and one of the joys of rural living. It is easier, too, if the berm is removed before driven over or packed into a wall. Also, residents should take care in the placement of new fences to not build them too close to the traveled way. Road maintenance may damage fences.

Gravel roads generate dust. When traffic levels reach specific levels, Luna County may treat certain County roads to suppress the dust near houses, but dust is still a fact of life for most rural residents. If your road is dirt or gravel it is highly unlikely that Luna County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check carefully with the County Road Department when any statement is made by the seller of any property that indicates any gravel roads will be paved. Unpaved roads will often times become washboarded, and grading will only be done when conditions and resources are available. This is a rural area and many residents like solitude, which includes no glaring street lights on rural corners. Do not expect lighted corners on your subdivision intersections.

## **PROPERTY BOUNDARIES**

You may be provided with a parcel map of your property, and there may be survey pegs, pieces of rebar or water pipe, fences, blazes on trees, or piles of rock marking alleged property boundaries, but unless you get a real survey by a licensed surveyor you risk disappointment and grief. Your home, outbuildings, well and septic must be sited within specific distances of property boundaries and neighboring structures. Fences that separate properties are often not built on the boundaries. A survey of the land is the only way to verify the location of your property lines. This is not a place to save a few dollars.

## **MINERAL RIGHTS**

Property may or may not have the mineral rights included with the land. Owners of mineral rights have the right to mine, which may change the surface on or near your property. Although a use permit and reclamation plan are required to mine, you need to know what minerals could be mined on or near your dream home. Much of the rural land in Luna County can be used for mining, however a special review by the Planning Commission is usually required. Be aware that adjacent mining uses can expand and cause impacts. Impacts can often be mitigated. Check it out.

## **HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATIONS**

Some sub-divisions have Homeowner Associations (HOAs) and most homeowner associations have Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs). You should obtain a copy of applicable CC&Rs (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with those rules. You need to understand the covenants and any specific conditions that may come with living or building there. Some association membership is voluntary, some control architecture, some have dues, and some control or prohibit animals. Know the covenants before you buy. Homeowner Associations usually are required to take care of common elements, roads, open space, etc. Road maintenance costs can be significant. A dysfunctional HOA can cause problems for you and even involve you in expense and litigation. Dues are almost always a requirement for those areas with an HOA. The by-laws of the HOA will tell you how the organization operates and how the dues are set.

## **LAND USES MAY CHANGE**

Zoning for residential, commercial or other uses tends to be stable. However, land use and density may change over time. You can check with the Luna County Planning Department to find out if and how the property you invested in and adjacent parcels are zoned. You can also find out what future developments may be in the planning stages. When you move in, the neighborhood changes for your neighbor, and the same will apply for you when the next new resident builds on the adjacent parcel.

## **BUILDABILITY VS. LIVABILITY**

Not all lots are buildable. Access, slope, septic and well distances may be inadequate. Be cautious before you buy. You must check with the Luna County Planning Department to be certain that a piece of land can be built on. Check with folks living in the area, for even if a site is buildable, many factors affect livability.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

Building your dream home in a rural area is different from building in the city or the suburbs. Your past building experience may not be adequate. The building season, delivery surcharges, worker travel times, local labor and contractor availability and ever-increasing material costs drive up the per-square-foot figure.

Access and utility easements may require time and cost. If you plan to build it is prudent to check out construction access. Can big trucks get to the site? Check the zoning requirements. Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads and bridges.

Get real about costs. For example, in addition to the price of concrete per yard there is a truck time surcharge per minute to and from the origination point which can be an hour or more away. Delays are inevitable. Pick a contractor carefully and write an ironclad contract.

Site design is important. For example, the driveway needs to work both in summer and winter and must be

adequate for emergency vehicle access. An encroachment permit from the Road Department is required if you are adjacent to a County-maintained road. There may be rural interface requirements regarding driveway sizes and water storage; the New Mexico Highway Department can provide information on this. Some housing described as “affordable” may have inferior materials and workmanship and may be inadequate for the area and/or harsh weather. Often “affordable” is an euphemism for what was called a “cracker box” shortly after WW II. Get the facts before you start. Building, special use, excavation, septic and other permits are required for the protection of old- and newcomers. To protect adjacent uses from impingement we have regulations, bureaucracy, inspectors and permits. Demand and verify that your builder gets the proper permits and inspections.

An additional concern is that much of the desert soil is surprisingly fragile. Wagon tracks left a century ago can still be found. Be thoughtful when you disturb the soil, which may never recover if you treat it harshly. Native plants and the native “crust” are best. If you scrape too much, you and your downwind neighbors will be living in a cloud of dust for years to come.

## **INTERNET USAGE**

Some areas of Luna County might only access the Internet over dial-up modems. Depending upon your location, this access may be slow. Broadband access and wireless hot spots are still rare, but both are becoming more frequently available. Most areas of the County are served by regional Internet Service Providers, while some areas are served by nationwide providers. Make sure the provider you choose has local access numbers so you don't have to pay long distance charges for access.

## **UTILITIES**

Two electric companies and several telephone companies serve Luna County. Each has different rules and different levels of service. When you pick a place to live, look into whether the utilities at that spot can provide what you need.

If you want to locate far from a power line, consider making your own solar electricity. This will reduce the scenic impact and expense of having a long line of poles blocking the view. It will also improve the odds that you can enjoy your isolation for a longer time, since a power line might attract other settlers.

Wind storms may knock out power and phones. Usually service is back on within a few minutes. However, it is possible to lose service for several hours or several days, in which case frozen foods are at risk, the well won't pump, the furnace may not heat and the kitchen stove may not cook. Having a Plan B to compensate for the loss of power may require a small generator and alternative water, light and heat sources.

Make sure that your generator is operated safely outside and is properly installed to prevent dangerous feedback on the power lines. It's also a good idea to keep at least 72 hours to a week's supply of non-perishable food and water on hand. Remember, when the lights go out, you are responsible for your safety and comfort.

Part of the County has three-phase power, but not all. Electric lines are not run to every lot or property and doing so can get very expensive. Sometimes easements from private property owners may be needed to bring power to remote areas. Again, check it out. A battery back-up and surge protector is a wise investment to protect computers and other delicate electronic equipment. Be sure your needs can be met.

Natural gas lines run only a little ways outside of Deming, but are not generally available in Luna County. Several LP (propane) gas companies deliver to household LP tanks by truck. Cable TV is not available everywhere and satellite services are not always optimal in canyon areas. Cell phone reception may be

nonexistent on the wild frontier.

## **DELIVERIES**

Most of the County has U.S. mail delivery at roadside mailboxes, but if you live far enough down a lonely road, your mailbox may be up near the main road or highway. Mail delivery may not go into all subdivisions. In addition to those who must, many residents choose to use post office boxes in Deming or Columbus where the local service is personalized and the mail is secure.

Large trucking outfits only deliver to their own freight yards in El Paso Texas, then arrange for local cartage on smaller truck lines. Commercial express carriers such as United Parcel Service (UPS) and FedEx deliver to most parts of Luna County, weather permitting. If this is important to you, check it out. “Next day” and “Overnight” delivery often translates to “Mañana” or “Give it a few days.”

Newspapers are delivered to subscribers at most roadside mailbox locations. Local newspapers are available at various locations, via U.S. mail or delivery. Subscribing to a local newspaper is a good way to help you learn more about community activities.

## **THE VIEW**

One of the top reasons to live in Luna County is to enjoy the spectacular views. Be aware that your view may change as neighbors near and far build their dream homes. Two notions to keep in mind: first, what you do on your property will likely be in someone else’s view, so be aware and be considerate. And second, you do not own your view. If you want to control the view, you need to buy the land. Folks should know that their view or “setting” is often borrowed from their neighbors who may manage the resources on the property as a commercial family business. The gravel may be mined and the pasture populated by cows.



Typical Mountain View

## PROPERTY TAXES

Property taxes you pay to the county are portioned out, much of the money going to the school system. Visit the County Assessor's office to inquire about the value of your property, and the County Treasurer's office to pay your bill. Your annual bill is itemized so you can see where the money goes, and the county budget is available on-line.

## MOTHER/FATHER NATURE

Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. Most are positive additions to the environment. However, there are some others that you need to be concerned about. Some can be dangerous and you need to know how to deal with them. The New Mexico Department of Game & Fish is a good resource for information (<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/>).

## SNAKE-SCORPION-SPIDER SAFETY

Desert critters are risky to live near. Some of them sneak indoors. Once indoors, they generally cannot find their way out. They often find indoor life to be agreeable, and do not wish to depart peacefully. Please shake out all kitchen and bath towels, each and every time you pick one up. Shake out your undergarments, boots and shoes before slipping them on. Scorpions, Black Widow spiders, or other toxic desert dwellers may be resting inside. Don't wipe your face with what you thought was a clean towel, only to find a poisonous creature in it. You and it will both be distressed!



Tarantula Spider -  
Check Before Leaning On A Wall



Scorpion Has A Painful Stinger

Be sure of what the creature is before you apply lethal force. Some garden snakes, for example, closely resemble the rattlesnake in appearance, but are very beneficial to have around. Check for tail rattles and for triangular head shape before getting too upset. If you go outside at night, use a flashlight and outside porch lights to help head off encounters. Most nocturnal creatures will avoid you, sensing by sight, sound or smell. Rattlesnakes sense your body heat, but are indifferent to sounds. Snakes, being cold-blooded, generally relax on a moderately warm surface. If the evening is cool, they might like a warm walkway. If the day is hot, a porch might seem relatively cool, shady and inviting. If they curl up and relax, try using a water hose from a safe distance to chase them off. Or just watch and wait.

When snakes are hunting food, they will follow the outside edge of a building, looking for mouse holes. If a door is left ajar, a snake following along the wall will wind up indoors, by mistake. It's not their fault. You might be lucky enough to come across a snake if you are walking around outdoors. The one you see is not a problem. The one you don't see, and step on, is a problem.



Snake on Mouse Patrol Near Edge of Building-  
A good reason to always look where you are walking!

Snakes, including the rattler, and several diamondback-look-alike serpents, roam during the warmer months. They hibernate all winter, mostly disappearing from October to April. This schedule is not exact nor is it guaranteed!

### **WILDLIFE...OH, DEER!**

Cash and the finance company can facilitate new neighbors, but nature has already provided neighbors that have been here for thousands of years - mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, badgers, skunks, hummingbirds, hawks, ground squirrels et al. The wild animals were here first and we are living/camping in their front yard. Some of our native neighbors eat pets, which is a reason to keep domestic pets confined and protected. The neighborhood critters are attracted to kitchen scraps, bird feeders, pet food etc. Folks shouldn't complain when the rabbits eat their petunias. Be accommodating to the wildlife but DO NOT adopt wildlife.

### **TAME LIFE...HORSES & DOGS**

Part of rural life and the right to be rural is the ability to have pets such as a horse, dog, or llama. There is something wrong with the picture when one neighbor can't have horses, donkeys, ducks, chickens or guinea hens that stay at home in a pen because dogs running at large from next door or over the ridge harass, maim or kill them. Before you allow your dog, and yourself, to get into trouble with livestock, please become familiar with State and County codes that apply to all pet owners that allow their pets to roam throughout the unincorporated areas of the county. A brochure is available from the Luna County Extension Office.

New Mexico and other Western states have many laws that not only protect pets from abuse, neglect, cruelty and mistreatment, but they also strongly protect the rights of ranchers and farmers. Single roaming dogs can join other dogs they meet to form dangerous packs that can harm and damage livestock. In Luna County, State law permits ranchers to protect their livestock from injury and income loss due to attacks by dogs. Note that laws cited here apply to unincorporated areas of the county and that other city laws may apply. Both State and County



law places the responsibility for the dog and its actions squarely on the shoulders of the dog's owner! So please, show your consideration for your neighbors and your love for your dog by keeping it safe at home. Responsible residents will keep corrals clean; dogs will be confined, reasonably quiet and controlled when out for a walk with their people. Be a good neighbor.

## **PLANT LIFE...NATIVE VS. WEEDS**

Luna County is serious about weed control and about protecting our natural indigenous plants. Current and new residents need to educate themselves and act to control noxious weeds that crowd out native plants. Some weeds are so pernicious that they destroy the land use. Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. Before buying land, you should know if it has noxious weeds that may be expensive to control and that you may be required to control. Some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock. By the time most folks become aware, it is too late. Noxious weeds may not be your only problem: indigenous threatened or endangered species may cause your best-laid plans to come to a screeching halt. Plants like African Rue could require you to change your plans to accommodate the natural environmental conditions that allow certain species to prosper. Contact the Luna County Extension Office and USDA for information and assistance. Thanks for getting aboard.

## **FIRE DANGER**

Wildfire is always a threat. Lightning starts fires every summer, as do campers, hikers, smokers and careless residents. Although building codes may require fire related precautions, ultimately you are responsible to take the necessary steps to mitigate the fire danger around your dwellings. "Defensible perimeters" are helpful in protecting buildings from fire and inversely can protect the rangeland from igniting if your house catches on fire. You are responsible for paying for the cost of extinguishing a fire that you started. The United States Forest Service and local fire departments wish to advise you. Please ask.

The "Darn Fool Clause" says it is OK if you burn your own house down by mistake. But if your house sets the neighborhood on fire, and the neighbors are threatened or burned out, you are responsible. The National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, State of New Mexico, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management initiate controlled burns in the spring and fall that create smoke and haze throughout the County. These fires are not under the control of local government except for air quality monitoring.

## **AIR POLLUTION**

The safe use of fire also will impact the clean air we often breathe in Luna County. To manage the smoke impacts of fires, the law requires that all burns be carried out on "Permissive Burn" days. Even if you are only burning a small amount, you need to call the local fire department on their office (non-emergency) phone number to find out if it's a permissive burn day. Please be aware that burning of construction debris, plastics, buildings, tires, tar-paper, etc. is not permitted. Burn permits are required, so that if a distant neighbor spots a plume of smoke and calls the fire department, the fire department will know that you are burning on purpose. Before starting a fire, please know the regulations.

## **FLOODING**

You wouldn't think that an area this dry would flood, but once in a while it does. If you build in an arroyo, you might get flooded when rain falls on distant mountains, gathers together into a sudden stream, and heads your way. Don't ignore rainstorms you can only see from a distance.

You can learn a lot about how water flows near your property by looking at the many freely available full color satellite photographs you will find on the Internet. Mapping programs often offer a satellite view, which can be

very instructive in showing which way water will flow.

The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. When property owners fill in ravines, they have found that the water that formerly drained through that ravine now drains through their house. A flash flood can occur and turn a dry gully into a river. It is wise to take this possibility into consideration when building. New home construction requires a surveyor or engineer to determine a safe building site. The County Planning Department and/or your property insurance carrier may be able to provide historical information as to whether or not a parcel of land is located in a flood plain. This may have an affect on the rate of your property insurance.

## **DROUGHT**

Luna County experiences drought from time to time. You will struggle to keep a lawn alive, but most people find gravel and native plants to be a sensible alternative. If your well runs dry, you will need to make provisions. The County cannot be responsible for those circumstances.

## **GETTING AROUND**

Depending on the location, a four-wheel drive or all-wheel-drive vehicle may be advised. You may get along without one, but that insures there may be times you won't get out and won't get back for a few days. Those ready for prime time have an adequate 4 x 4 vehicle equipped with emergency clothing kit and supplies, winter tires, tow chain, jumper cables and tire chains.

The NM State Highway Department maintains the main roads in Luna County, especially Interstate 10, US 180 and state highways NM 9, 11 and 26. County roads are looked after by the Luna County Road Department.

If you are driving on a dusty road, slow down so as not to create a "rooster tail". A cloud of dust creates road maintenance problems, and does nobody any good. This is especially true if you happen upon a cow, or upon some pedestrians out for a stroll. It is bad manners, to say the least, to throw a cloud of dust in your neighbor's face when they are out for a walk.

It rarely snows, so the biggest road surface hazard is likely to be ruts and mud from traffic and from the infrequent rains. A more common risky state of affairs arises from dust storms, which sometimes reduce visibility to zero, invariably causing accidents among those who think they have X-Ray Vision.

School bus routes are also given high priority while recreation-only routes are given lower priority. Uninhabited roads are not graded as often.

The government subsidized "Corre Caminos" provides scheduled fixed route transit/bus service between the major population centers of the County, and locally in the towns.

## **EDUCATION**

### **SCHOOLS**

There is only one school system in Luna County. The primary mission of the Deming Public Schools is to deliver quality education in Deming and Columbus.

Many students are U.S. citizens, but happen to make their home in Palomas Mexico, across the international border. A small fleet of school buses makes the sixty mile round trip from the U.S. border to Deming each

school day to accommodate their transportation needs.

There are few private school opportunities, so many students are home-schooled.

## **MIMBRES VALLEY LEARNING CENTER**

This county-owned building (formerly a K-Mart) has at various times been home to a branch of Western New Mexico University (Silver City) and Doña Ana Community College (Las Cruces). Stop by to see the course offerings. MVLC is at 2300 East Pine Street in Deming.

## **SERVICES**

### **LIBRARY**

There are two separately managed municipal public libraries in Luna County, one in Deming and one in Columbus. Stop by either or both public libraries with identification, proof of your current mailing address and the name and phone number of a local reference and we can issue you a card immediately.

### **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Volunteer groups staffed by unpaid professionals respond to community emergencies, including your emergency. The service groups include many fire departments, search and rescue, ambulance services and community-based organizations, such as Red Cross, Neighborhood Watch, etc.

Again, this is rural living. Response times vary with the season and are much longer than in a city. The folks who show up at your emergency may have had to close their business, drop off a kid or whatever to respond to your emergency call. They will be professional and know what they are doing. Please be aware that it is extremely important to post your address in large reflective numbers where it can be clearly seen both coming and going. Many rural homes are located down dirt roads or out-of-the-way country roads, sometimes miles from the main highway. Emergency response teams can not help you if they can not find your home.

Keep in mind that you chose to live where the hospital is an hour or more away by road, and 20 minutes or more by chopper after the troops find you, stabilize you and load you. Local residents have one hospital in Luna County to choose from within driving distance, namely Mimbres Memorial Hospital at 900 W Ash in Deming (575-546-5803). They are a privately owned Acute Care facility. If you have a medical emergency, the ambulance will take you there. Occasionally, a patient may need to be transported to Las Cruces NM or El Paso TX to handle complex issues. There are also several rural health care clinics, partly government funded, and with sliding scales for fees.

### **VOLUNTEERING**

If volunteering is not something you would ever consider, it could be rural living is not for you. Although country folks tend to be independent and like their privacy, we depend on each other. The neighbor you didn't bother to wave at all summer is more likely to help pull your car out of a ditch with his tractor than the folks from your auto club. This County is the sum of the many volunteers who participate in emergency, school, library and other social activities. Join in!

## **COUNTY FAIR**

A truly rural event is the annual Southwestern New Mexico State Fair, held at the fairgrounds in Deming. Folks get to show off their pets, livestock, wares, skills, artistry and achievements. It's pure Americana. The fair is dedicated to showcasing the customs and cultures of Luna County while sustaining and developing family entertainment and enriching economic vitality.

## **TRASH**

Trash removal is a regular chore (we hope). Luna County owns and operates a sanitary landfill west of Deming. You can take your trash there yourself. Or, you can carry your trash to one of several strategically located transfer stations, and the County will haul it the rest of the way to the landfill. Or you can hire a private hauler to collect your trash at your home. There are several urban-like trash removal companies, but most people haul their own trash and recyclables to a County transfer station or dump.

It helps if you sort your trash, to separate out recyclables. Luna County is so far distant from major recycling centers that it usually doesn't pay to have recycled items carried to a larger population center, but attempts are made.

Containment of trash is important. Loose kitchen trash is ugly and will attract unwanted visitors, namely, skunks, dogs, badgers and maybe the code enforcement officer. Cover your load when driving trash, or anything loose, in your pickup truck. If an animal or wind scatters your trash, it is up to you to clean it up. Please don't trash paradise.

## **COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

County and urban services are very different, partly due to available revenue and partly because cities and counties are constitutionally different. Cities are independent and can do anything not prohibited by the State, whereas counties are an arm of the State and can only do what is specifically permitted by the State. Indicative of making the transition from urban to rural living would be to change the statement, "Why don't they..." to "Why don't I..."

Call the Courthouse to get a listing and location of County departments and services. Come to the Courthouse and County offices where you will always be welcome. The County web site at [www.lunacountynm.us](http://www.lunacountynm.us) has a variety of topics. If you do not have a personal computer, you can view the web site while you visit a library.

Your County Commissioners can be contacted through the County Manager's office or at their home offices, for Luna is a small rural county where your elected officials are available to you. Generally, the second Thursday of every month the Commissioners hold their regular meeting. You can get on the agenda, you can speak during the "public comment" segment of every meeting, or you can observe. Also, the agenda and minutes of County Commissioners meetings are available on the County web site. We welcome your presence as we go about the work entrusted to us by the citizens of Luna County.

## GENERAL TIPS ON PLANTS AND ANIMALS

### 1. Native Plants

- a. The most common plant is the mesquite. It has thorns an inch or two long, small green leaves most of the year, and it grows long edible bean pods in late spring. Mesquite bushes tend to slow down the wind-borne sand, so the sand falls where the bush is, and a mound is gradually raised up. That's how we get the hummocks under each bush. The thorny cover is ideal for quail nests. Other creatures like to hide in there too, away from hawk attacks.
- b. The tallest plants are yucca, honored as the New Mexico State Flower. They have spectacular tall white blossoms, but not every plant blooms every year.
- c. One colorful wild flower is the California poppy. It has a bright yellow-orange bloom, and a long growing season.

### 2. Walking Around Outdoors

- a. Nearly every plant has sharp thorns, some of which can easily penetrate ordinary shoes, if you happen to step on a fallen branch. The larger thorns can penetrate wheelbarrow and truck tires.
- b. The whole county is undermined by burrowing creatures, eager to avoid the hot sun and predatory animals. It's easy to step on what looks like solid ground, and instead find yourself up to your (broken) ankle in a collapsed burrow. Stay on the beaten path, and wear sensible shoes.
- c. Holes in the ground are sized according to who dug them. Smallest are spider holes, then mouse, rat, rabbit, badger and coyote. These latter holes may be large enough to roll a bowling-ball into. Snakes can't dig, so they slither into existing holes.
- d. You can't believe how many rats and mice you have until you do away with their predators, the snakes and large mammals.
- e. All the fences are barbed wire, some of it very rusty after more than fifty years outdoors. Some fences might be electrified, so look for clues.

### 3. Mountain and Sky Views

- a. Light and shadow change each day, as the sun moves north and south with the seasons. This highlights different outcrops and canyons in the nearby hills.
- b. The mountains may be snow-covered in winter. In spring, they are often flower-covered.
- c. Stray light beams from distant yard "insecurity" lights refract in the dusty air, making starry skies nearly invisible at times. Don't contribute to this form of pollution.

### 4. Climate and Weather

- a. Most days are warm, and most nights are cool, all year round.
- b. In the spring we have some strong winds that may raise some dust.

- c. Most July and August afternoons feature isolated thunderstorms, usually with lightning. A storm cell may dump heavy rain across the road, and not a drop where you are. That doesn't mean you won't see a wall of water heading your way soon!
- d. Dust devils are junior tornadoes that whirl past. They are relatively harmless, but can toss a lot of dust and debris around. Larger dust storms pass through on rare occasions. You can see them coming for miles. They look like a wall of dirt a mile high and a mile wide. Close your windows and wait for them to pass, which just takes a few minutes. Don't leave lightweight stuff laying in your yard, or it will blow away.
- e. It hardly ever rains. Annual rainfall here is under ten inches, with an inch of snow. You can often see virga rain, which consists of fingers of water coming down from clouds but not ever reaching the surface. Virga rain evaporates before it finishes falling.
- f. East winds often precede cloudy weather. Our prevailing wind is from the southwest.
- g. Humidity is often 10% or less. This means the air is very thirsty.
  - i. You don't notice how much you are perspiring on a warm day. Make a conscious effort to drink lots of fluids in summer, to avoid the discomforts of dehydration.
  - ii. It's hard to clean your eyeglasses by breathing fog on them, then wiping. By the time you can get your cloth wiper in position, the fog has evaporated from the glass!
  - iii. You don't have to towel yourself off much after a shower. Just stand still a minute.
  - iv. If you take a walk in very hot weather, carry a water bottle, and soak your clothes from a hose before you go.

## **GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

This information summarizes some of the issues and notions residents have faced as they grew up in, or moved to, Luna County. It is by no means exhaustive. There are other issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked and we encourage you to be vigilant in your duties to explore and examine those things that could cause your move to be less than you expect. We hope this Primer helps you make informed and successful decisions about living in Luna County. Is the "right to be rural" right for you? For some, it's a nice place to visit during the spring or fall. For others it is a paradise for year-round living. But for both, living in rural Luna County requires one to learn, prepare and, above all, be ready for the realities of desert living. It is not our intent to dissuade you, only inform you.

Here is a poem about moving to a rural area, presented to Luna County by the Waterloo Limerick Volunteers:

Two urbanites moved to the country,  
 To escape overcrowding's affrontery.  
 They had what it takes,  
 To love lizards and snakes,  
 Those urbanites out in the country.

## **YES / NO SELF-TEST**

**Directions:** Do you agree with any of the following statements? If you can answer “YES” to any one of them, maybe you won’t really be happy here.

1. I don’t wave at people I don’t know.
2. My neighbors will appreciate hearing my car radio sub-woofer as I drive along.
3. I like my yard lights bright enough so I can read a newspaper outside at night.
4. My neighbors will appreciate hearing my motorcycle roaring as I drive along.
5. If my neighbors are out for a stroll, it is OK to speed past them in my truck.
6. When driving down a dirt road, it is OK to toss beer cans from my vehicle.
7. My neighbors are sure to enjoy my taste in music.
8. It’s always open season on rattlesnakes and coyotes, so let’s kill them all.

## WEB LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

While these links all worked in the past, they may get moved or renamed. You can often track them down by searching on-line for the sponsoring agency.

Each of the following web sites offers dozens or hundreds of onward links to many sources of information, too many to list here. Explore these sources, and follow their many onward links according to your interests.

Luna County Government Official Site

<http://www.lunacountynm.us/>

Luna County Long Term Plan (Includes Plenty More History And Statistics)

[http://lunacountynm.us/News%20Flyers/LunaCo-CompPlan\\_finaldraft12-12.pdf](http://lunacountynm.us/News%20Flyers/LunaCo-CompPlan_finaldraft12-12.pdf)

Luna County Weather - National Weather Service Forecast & Historical Data

<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/epz/>

Luna County Weather - National Weather Service Radar From El Paso

<http://radar.weather.gov/ridge/radar.php?rid=epz>

Luna County Rainfall From CoCoRaHS Volunteer Rain Gauge Network (Your Neighbors)

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Maps/ViewMap.aspx?state=NM&county=LU>

Luna County Statistics From U.S. Census

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/35/35029.html>

Deming Local Radio Stations (KOTS-AM 1230 & KDEM-FM 94.3)

<http://www.demingradio.com/>

Deming/Luna County News and Commentary

<http://www.topix.net/city/deming-nm>

Local Arts, Politics And Entertainment Monthly Newspaper

<http://www.desertexposure.com/>

Regional Good Times Monthly Newspaper

<http://www.glenwoodgazette.com/>

New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service (4-H, Farm & Ranch, Gardening & More)

<http://extension.nmsu.edu/>

Office of the State Engineer (Information on Water Rights)

<http://www.ose.state.nm.us/>

County Fair (Parade, Livestock, Rodeo, Flower Show & More)

<http://www.swnmsf.com/>