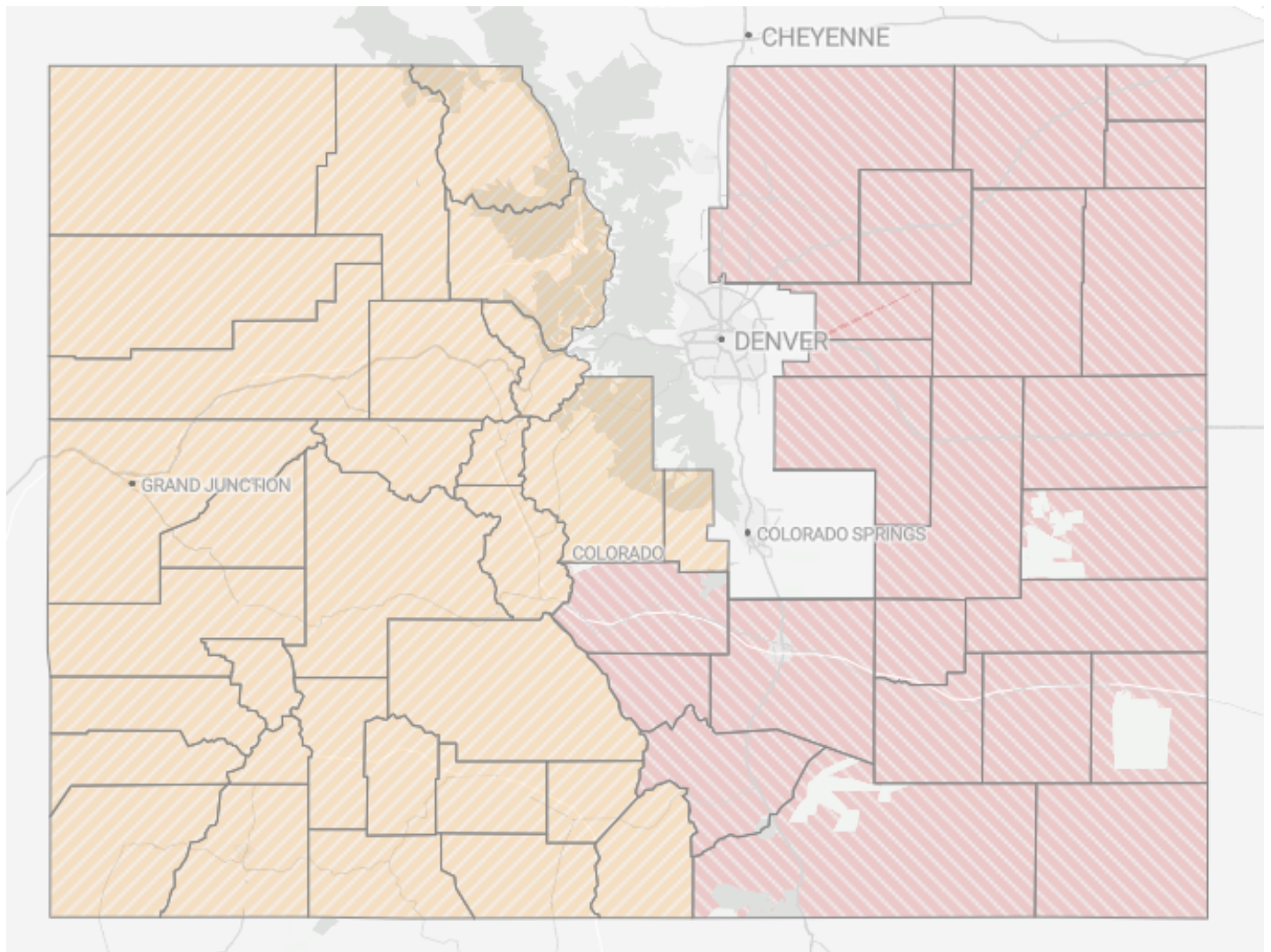


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TOP STORY

Colorado's rural counties call for congressional district shakeup

By EVAN WYLOGE evan.wyloge@gazette.com
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Datawrapper map by Evan Wyloge, The Gazette

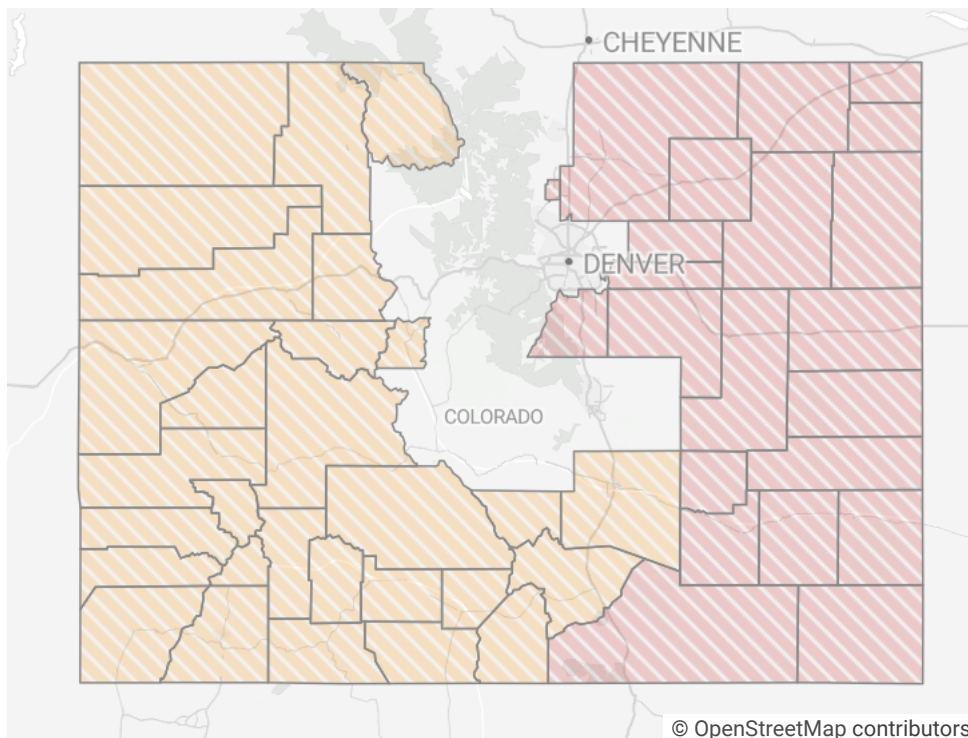
Colorado's rural counties are among the first organized coalitions beginning to make their mapping interests known, as the state heads into the once-in-a-decade redistricting process.

They want the two primarily rural congressional districts changed to include some counties that have been grouped with urban areas during the past 10 years, to squeeze out metro-area residents.

The changes could improve representation for the rural counties, as they say they want, as well as shift some of the partisan leanings of the districts.

Colorado's current rural congressional districts

 Congressional District 3  Congressional District 4



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Representatives from Action 22, an organization of southern and southwestern counties; Club 20, representing the state's western counties and Pro 15, representing the northeastern part of the state, all said they want congressional representation that reflects the rural areas, without having small slices of densely populated metro areas diluting the rural areas' interests.

“We make our living off the land and our resources,” Pro 15’s executive director Cathy Shull said of rural Colorado’s prime interests: Agriculture, energy and tourism.

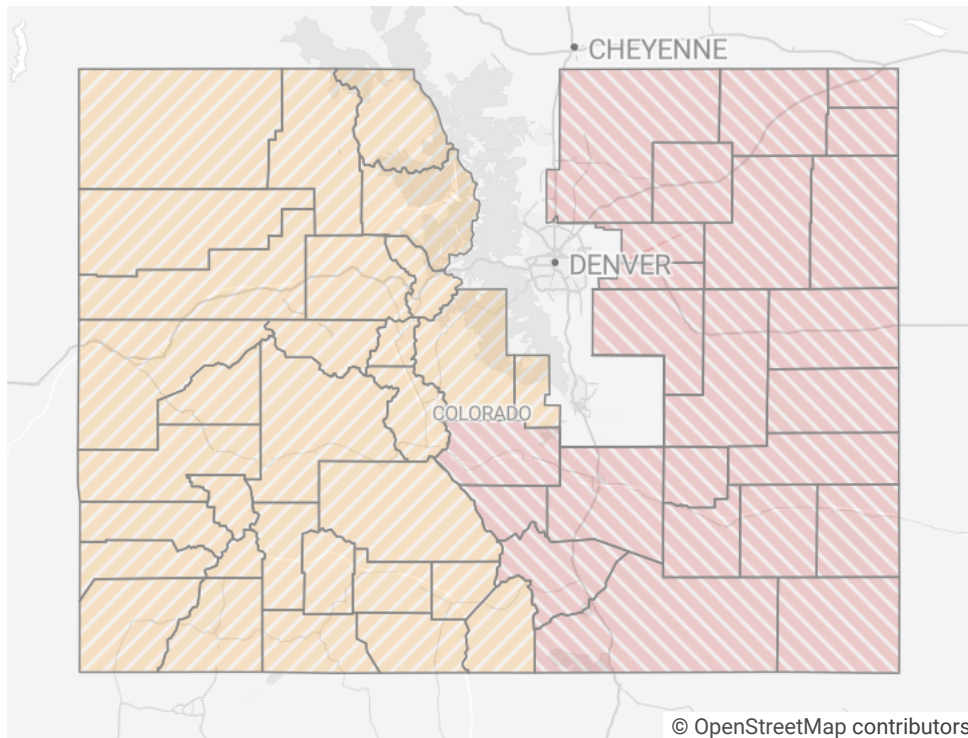
Sara Blackhurst, Action 22’s chief executive officer, said the current maps are not optimized for getting congressional representatives who pay attention to rural counties’ issues and interests, but that by including only rural areas, without metropolitan populations, she and her constituent counties would be better served.

They proposed moving several counties into a western congressional district that resembles the current Congressional District 3, but includes Grand, Summit, Chaffee, Park, Teller, Fremont and all of Eagle, saying those counties are more closely aligned on issues with the rest of western Colorado. To balance the populations, they proposed moving Pueblo, Custer and Huerfano counties into a district that is very similar to the current Congressional District 4, but which would also lose Douglas County and Longmont.

The remaining corridor of counties, from El Paso County north to the Wyoming border, would then need to be split into six congressional districts, according to their plan.

Rural counties' proposed congressional districts

Proposed western rural district
 Proposed eastern rural district



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The partisan shifts of such a map could put one of the two safe Republican rural districts just inside what is often called "competitive."

The western district would be less tilted toward Republicans. In the proposed western district, county-level election results from 2016 and 2020 show that Hillary Clinton and candidate Joe Biden would have performed about two to three percentage points better than in the current western congressional district. Former President Donald Trump's 2020 margin of victory would have decreased from about 5.5 percentage points to about 4.7 percentage points.

The eastern rural district, even adding Pueblo County which swung toward Biden in 2020, would remain a safe Republican district, with recent statewide election results showing a more than 20-percentage-point favor for Republican candidates.

The proposed map would also leave nearly an entire congressional district just to El Paso County.

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