

Alliance for Sustainable Colorado
Southwestern Region Sustainability Roundtable Meeting
Durango
April 18, 2009

Report

Description of the Region

The Southwestern Region of Colorado includes Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, Montrose, Ouray, San Juan, and San Miguel counties. This region is a recreational paradise, offering five national forests, seven state and national parks, and five major hot springs locations, often enjoyed after indulging some world class mountain biking or champion skiing at Purgatory Mountain. The casual tourist can easily tour any of the seven Scenic and Historic Byways or take in ancient Anasazi cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park.

The mountains of Southwest Colorado have created ‘Victorian jewels’, small towns that were developed when massive amounts of precious metals were being mined. Most notably is Ouray, carved into a steep-walled canyon and now an entire town listed on the National Register of Historic Districts. Telluride, Silverton, and Lake City retain much of their historical character, while still offering stellar skiing and a Narrow Gauge Railroad. Durango, with a population of almost 16,000, serves as the population center for Southwest Colorado and offers again almost any outdoor pursuit with canyons to the west, mountains to the north and east, and the Anima River flowing right through the center.

Two Native American tribes, the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute, contribute significantly to the region referred to as the Four Corners Area. Southern Ute Tribal land contains coal, timber and agriculture and has one of the richest deposits of methane in the world. The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe maintains oil and gas resources and runs an extremely successful construction company, making them one of the largest employers in Montezuma County.

Participants

The **Southwestern Region Sustainability Roundtable** was co-hosted by Sustainability Alliance of Southwest Colorado and facilitated by the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado. The meeting was held at an afternoon session during the first day of the [4Corners Green Living Expo 2009](#).

Twelve local community leaders participated in the 2.5hour workshop on April 18 and included representatives from nonprofit, business, government and academic sectors.

Information for this report was also obtained from a regional networking meeting on April 19th, bringing together 12 local sustainability leaders.

Nonprofit organizations were well-represented by the Sustainability Alliance of Southwest Colorado, New Community Coalition, Four Corners Office of Resource Efficiency (4CORE), Mancos Valley Sustainability Initiative, Durango Nature Studies, Bicycle Co-op, Sustainable San Juan (San Juan County, NM), La Plata Skills Trade Collective, and the Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy (based in Virginia).

Local government was represented by a La Plata County Commissioner. Business representatives from Stone Age Inc., Durango Fine Homes, LLC, and Sylvain/Dubois LLC participated. An education representative from the Fort Lewis College Environmental Center and a representative for the Southern Ute Tribal Council contributed.

Sustainability Discussion by Participants

Question 1: *What local sustainability efforts are in place and working?*

- **Local Food:** Many groups and individuals in this region are collaborating to help build a healthy local food system. For a comprehensive list of these initiatives, visit this SASCO [webpage](#).
 - (1) [Healthy Lifestyle La Plata](#) collaborated with SASCO's Farm to School Committee to receive a Community Food Projects grant that will create a food security collaborative in La Plata County over the next three years. A **Community Food Assessment** is also underway for San Miguel County and the west end of Montrose, Montezuma and Dolores Counties. This collaborative effort will identify infrastructure and training that may be needed to increase food security and enhance quantity and quality of local food available for local and regional markets.
 - (2) [Community Garden Co-op](#): This is a partnership between the [Fort Lewis College Environmental Center](#), the [Garden Project of Southwest Colorado](#) and [Backyard Harvest](#). Members in the co-op have access to labor, supplies and information to support gardening in La Plata County. The collaborative is also sharing efforts to collect organic matter and waste to begin sheet-mulched gardens each fall. Local nonprofits are also supporting existing and new community gardens and greenhouses in Telluride, Ophir, Norwood and Ridgeway.
 - (3) [Beginning Farmer Program](#): This ongoing program helps new farmers and ranchers to produce local food and other agricultural products. It includes a [Land-Link initiative](#); CSU Extension Courses on production and business planning basics; provides community support for new local producers; and has a list of online resources to learn about financing, implementation, expanding operations and programs across the country.
 - (4) The New Community Coalition is involved in the new [Slow Food USA](#) chapter in Telluride and supports a local parent group working collaboratively with the

Telluride schools to enhance local, fresh and organic school lunch offerings to the students.

- **Energy and Resources**

- (1) [Four Corners Office for Resource Efficiency](#): 4CORE has been integral in promoting resource conservation, energy efficiency, and the use of clean, renewable sources of energy in order to decrease the emission of pollutants, protect public health, and strengthen the economy in La Plata County. It has brought in more than \$2M in energy-related grants to this region. After signing the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement, La Plata County and the City of Durango tasked 4CORE with developing a [Climate Energy Action Plan](#). This effort engages citizens, government, industries and business owners to create and deliver a regional plan that will be widespread and implemented in phases.
- (2) The [La Plata Electric Association](#) continues to offer 'green power' purchases and rebates that guarantee some or all electricity for participating customers is generated from clean, renewable resources.
- (3) The [San Miguel Power Association](#) has just switched their 'green cents' program to a 'round-up program', where the money required to round up to an even dollar amount on their bills will go to energy efficiency and renewable projects. The Green Tags and Green Blocks programs are still available, which allows people to purchase green power in 100 kWh blocks on their regular power bill.
- (4) The City of Durango and La Plata County both have internal energy efficiency programs and have incorporated some renewable energy features in public buildings.
- (5) The County and the towns of Ophir, Telluride, Mountain Village and Norwood have all signed on for the 20% reduction in GHG emissions by 2020. Telluride and Mountain Village mayors have challenged their communities with [Telluride Renewed](#). This challenge is to have the two towns get 100% of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. Another challenge in this region is the [Greening Gondola](#) campaign, which hopes to power 20% of the gondola linking the sister towns with on-site solar panels. To reach this goal, individuals can participate through tax-deductible contributions that will fund a community-based carbon offsets exchange.
- (6) [The Water Information Program](#): This program was created in cooperation with Southwestern Water Conservation District and several SW Colorado water agencies and entities to provide a common forum for communicating shared information and goals for water conservation and management.
- (7) The New Community Coalition is working with funding partners San Miguel Power Association and the Governor's Energy Office to administer rebates and provide ENERGY STAR for New Homes training throughout the region.

- **Education**

- (1) *Fort Lewis College* (FLC)
 - (a) Developed a draft of a [Sustainability Action Plan](#) for the next 5 years and a Climate Action Plan for the next 50 years.
 - (b) [Pathways to Sustainability](#) is the culmination of over two years of work by students, staff and faculty to create a carbon-neutral campus by implementing initiatives on water, waste, energy, and procurement operations on campus.

- (c) FLC is applying for LEED-Gold certification on the new 38,000 sqft Student Union addition and LEED-EB for renovation of the existing College Union building.
- (2) *[Durango Nature Studies](#)*: This nonprofit founded in 1994 is dedicated to providing hands-on nature, science, and environmental education to the students and communities of Southwest Colorado. The organization owns and operates a 140-acre Nature Center, serves over 6,000 people annually, and is a member of the Durango School District 9-R Science Curriculum Review Committee.
- **Nonprofit Sustainability Efforts**
 - (1) *[The New Community Coalition](#)*: TNCC is a nonprofit organization formed in 2007 to coordinate and manage efforts that direct regional sustainability projects. The annual work plan emphasizes energy conservation (including enhanced green building standards), renewable energy, food security, waste reduction, environmentally responsible waste disposal and recycling programs, and re-localization efforts. Five working groups have been developed to address these issues and are comprised of TNCC staff and community members.
 - (2) *Nonprofit Organization Resource Guide*: [Sustainability Alliance for Southwest Colorado](#) (SASCO) is defining the process of setting up a nonprofit resource guide, outlining the systems architecture of the community, and laying the foundation for a larger community mapping effort.
 - (3) *SASCO Committees*: The Outreach Committee is organizing local events and sustainability related presentations, collaborating with five other community organizations on “Appleseed events”, where each organization is presenting their specific interests to the larger community. The Smart Energy Committee holds monthly meetings that are open to the public and focuses on energy related topics, including federal legislations like carbon tax. They are also acting as watchdog of La Plata Electric Association, the local electricity Co-op. The Policy Committee is paying attention to local governmental activities and holding bi-monthly ‘Dialogue’ meetings focusing on popular local issues.
 - (4) *[Mancos Valley Sustainability Initiative](#)*: Mancos is facing rapid growth and development and formed the MVSII to understand and create healthy ecosystems, and strengthen biodiversity and human conditions. A major project involves protecting, managing and enhancing the 800 square mile Mancos River Watershed.
 - (5) *[Montezuma Climate Action Network](#)*: Formed in 2007 in Montezuma County, the Network’s goal is to reduce the county’s carbon footprint. The organization has ‘Green Teams’ that focus efforts and education on renewable energy, recycling, local food, technology, and global warming science.
 - (6) *[The La Plata Skills Trade Collective](#)*: The collective is a group of individuals with skills, time, goods and equipment that wish to share and trade with others in the community to promote resilience and self-sufficiency. Members access an online ‘Skillbank’, ranging in services from business and administration to transportation to either post or request a given service.
 - **Business**
 - (1) *[Local First](#)* was initiated by the Sustainable Local Economic Development Committee of SASCO in cooperation with academic, business and community

groups to help locally-owned, independent businesses thrive in La Plata County. The Be Local Coupon Book offers coupons for products and services at over 100 local businesses for \$2,500 in savings.

- (2) [*Green Business Roundtable*](#): The San Juan Citizen Alliance conducts monthly networking meetings involving local businesses and interested groups to focus on topics related to sustainability.
- **Green Building**
 - (1) The 4CORE-funded [*Sustainable Building Education Program*](#) is organized and conducted by the Homebuilders Association of Southwest Colorado and involves bimonthly brown bag lunches and dinner seminars on educational topics, ranging from Insulation to LEED Certification for Homes. The program to date has resulted in 17 newly built ENERGY STAR rated homes.
 - (2) The Durango Public Library has recently been LEED-Gold certified. Its energy and cost-saving features includes a raised-floor heating, cooling and ventilating air delivery system. San Miguel County completed a bus garage facility to LEED-Silver standards.

Question 2: *What local sustainability opportunities are ripe for development? and What is needed to get them going?*

- **Academia**
 - (1) *Fort Lewis College* is currently seeking a master lease on the Old Fort Lewis 6300 acre property south of Hesperus. The college hopes to develop the site as a demonstration campus for sustainability projects. One proposal is a 2MW solar array that would significantly boost the region's renewable energy generation and help FLC offset its carbon footprint.
 - (2) FLC is seeking funding to pay a project manager that can lead an energy performance contracting process for the college.
 - (3) Other capital projects on campus that need development are acquiring a new in-vessel composting system and installing a truck scale to measure the amount of waste generated by the college.
- **Business**
 - (1) Develop a *Green Business Recognition Program* that involves businesses in sustainability practices. 4CORE is in discussions with [*Local First*](#) and many other partners to initiate this program in 2010. However, if adequate seed money is not available, the project will have a hard time getting off the ground.
 - (2) Establish sustainable business and nonprofit databases listing organizational mission statements and available products/services to generate a directory and to determine where redundant services exist. Wherever redundancy or excessive overlaps are apparent, organizations can consider sharing limited resources (funds, volunteers, expertise), so they are used efficiently and effectively. Funding is needed to develop this database.
- **Energy and Resources**
 - (1) Develop *Carbon Clubs*, an initiative by the Montezuma Climate Action Network, which gathers small groups of people together who challenge each other to reduce emissions. Participants create goals to decrease their carbon footprint, and follow

up each month to see how everyone is progressing on set goals. Staff or an intern is needed to organize and maintain the Club.

- (2) Establish a Revolving Loan Fund program, which provides low to no-interest loans and grants for energy efficient residential and commercial projects. The program is lacking seed money and an institution to qualify loan applicants, grant loans, and track funds.
- **Recycling:** Durango's existing recycle center is 14 years old and has become insufficient to handle the amount and type of materials the community recycles. The City of Durango is working to install a regional recycling and composting facility with increased capacity that would be a tremendous boost to waste reduction efforts in the region.
 - **Local Food:** Having a storage and distribution center and/or community kitchen would be a real boost to small producers and help the local food economy.

Question 3: *What are the next steps to improve collaboration locally and statewide?*

- Collaboration is challenging in this region as people and organizations tend to operate independently. To coordinate efforts requires the time of a coordinator and setting up a structure for regular meetings/conference calls and quarterly face to face meetings. SASCO might be the organization that could coordinate activities throughout southwest Colorado.
- Develop a common web portal that will allow interested people to quickly and easily connect to the groups and organizations that match their interests, and make that information available and updatable by participants in order to prevent program overlap.
- Support 4CORE as the Energy Hub for Southwest Colorado.
- Suggestions for collaborative funding:
 - a. Research GEO stimulus grants for Clean Cities hybrid plug in-readiness.
 - b. Research CDOT stimulus grants for transportation projects.
 - c. Research "Clean Energy Options Local Improvement District" for low interest/ no interest clean energy loans following Boulder's model.
 - d. Follow up with stimulus grant proposal to buy and set up virtual meeting equipment / space / coordination efforts statewide.