

Alliance for Sustainable Colorado
Northern Central Region Sustainability Roundtable Meeting
Fort Collins
October 1, 2009

Report

Description of the Region

The Northern Central Region of Colorado includes Adams, Boulder, Broomfield, Gilpin, Larimer and Weld counties. This area includes some of the best irrigated and Class 1 soil farmland in the state, as well as large stretches of scenic ranch lands. Most of Larimer County's publicly owned land falls within Roosevelt National Forest and Rocky Mountain National Park, 416 square miles of wildlife, crystal-clear lakes, and over 60 peaks exceeding 12,000 feet. This region also holds Colorado's last wild river, the Cache La Poudre, where visitors can spend the day hiking or horseback riding through the open spaces trails, or rafting, kayaking and fishing the cool, clean water.

Many high-tech companies have relocated to this region of the state because of the resources of Colorado State University and its research facilities. More than 40 clean or renewable energy businesses have set up shop in Northern Colorado in the last 5-7 years: the Danish company, Vestas, opened its first blade manufacturing facility in the United States in Windsor, CO in March 2008. The Rocky Mountain Innovation Initiative has been instrumental in helping northern Coloradan entrepreneurs turn great ideas into successful enterprises, like ZeroHero, a zero waste company that provides recycling to events across the country. This area alone can boast three of the best microbreweries in the state.

Participants

The **Northern Central Region Sustainability Roundtable** was co-hosted by *Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Association* and *New Belgium Brewing Company*. The meeting space was generously donated by New Belgium Brewing Company and breakfast was catered by Fly By Diner, sarahsprout@msn.com.

Sixty-seven local community leaders participated in the 3.5-hour workshop on October 1 and included representatives from government, business, nonprofit, and academic sectors.

Local government officials represented the Governor's Energy Office (GEO), Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Cities of Fort Collins and Loveland, Town of Windsor, Larimer County and Poudre River Public Library District.

Education representatives from Poudre School District, Aims Community College, University of Northern Colorado, Colorado State University, and CSU Institute for the Built Environment were well-represented.

Prominent local nonprofit organizations represented a range of interests: food co-ops and local food production; Rocky Mountain bird and habitat conservation; sustainable technology and business solutions; energy policy and resource issues; an annual green-living event; local business management and networks; craft preservation and education; a community vision and opportunity think tank; sustainability education programs and workshops; scenic and agricultural land conservation.

Representatives from Fort Collins Utilities and Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association also participated.

Local businesses offered a range of perspectives: engineering consulting services; EcoBroker-certified real estate; renewable energy research, products, installation and financing; development project management services; architectural design and land planning; sustainable building and construction; marketing and graphic design; corporate retail products; environmental services; dude ranch vacations and lodging; faith-valued finance and insurance services; recycling services; heating and cooling products; and business coaching.

Sustainability Discussion by Participants

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

- **Educational Collaborations**

- (1) [*Poudre School District*](#): PSD is strongly committed to sustainable design and minimizing energy use in their school buildings and has developed a *Sustainability Management System* which applies energy conservation policies to all new construction and renovation of existing schools. One successful example of that system is the collaboration with [*Rocky Mountain Institute Built Environment Team*](#) that led to a LEED-New Construction Silver rating for Fossil Ridge High School, which has realized a savings of over \$270,000 since its completion 3 years ago. Poudre School District also strives to create a sustainability culture in K-12 education through a curriculum that involves worm-composting programs and a recent effort to connect students with farmers for local gardens on school grounds.
- (2) [*Colorado State University*](#): Through a myriad of collaborative efforts, CSU is proving itself as a “green university”. Efforts include:
 - (a) [*The Engines and Energy Conservation Lab*](#) (EECL), with Director Bryan Wilson, has been finding solutions to global energy challenges for over 17 years. Two current research projects are developing mass

- algae production for biofuels, and high-performance cook stoves for developing countries.
- (b) [InteGrid Laboratory](#), part of EECL, which ranks among the world's most advanced centers for testing and development of renewable energy, distributed generation, and power system management. (Partners include Colorado Clean Energy Cluster and Colorado Renewable Energy Collaboratory).
 - (c) The [Institute for the Built Environment](#) "fosters stewardship and sustainability of the built environment through a research-based, interdisciplinary educational forum". To see a full description of current projects and collaborations, visit <http://www.ibe.colostate.edu/projects/>.
 - (d) The [Global Social and Sustainable Enterprise](#) program produces global social entrepreneurs, whose focus and ethic is the triple bottom line: people, planet, profit.
 - (e) [Sustainability in Facilities Management](#) is a department committed to projects that conserve resources in order to create a more sustainable campus and community. Its website provides 24/7 real-time data on resource consumption and emissions on the CSU campus and the impact of efficiency retrofits on those measurements.
- (3) *Front Range Community College*: The [Clean Energy Technology Program](#) was developed in partnership with over 25 local organizations and businesses to respond to the need for a job-ready workforce with the technical skills business and industry required in Colorado's New Energy Economy.
 - (4) Weld County and the City of Greeley are working with [Aims Community College](#) and [University of Northern Colorado](#) to do performance-based contracts with energy companies that retro-fit buildings. The resulting utility savings will go into a revolving loan fund instead of going to repay the company so that savings can be used to retro-fit more buildings.
 - (5) [Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Fair](#): For the 10th successful year, this sustainable living fair features keynote speakers, exhibitors, youth workshops, live music and hands-on sessions. This year, [RMSLA paired with Poudre School District](#) to conduct a "green field day" for PSD High School students that connected over 500 local youth with national and regional sustainability expertise.
- **Strong leadership:** Across all sectors and entities, including government, city utilities, Poudre School District, business, grassroots initiatives, social programs, and Colorado State University.
 - (1) *Political will* - alignment of federal, state and local leadership, guidance from City Council.
 - (2) *Community ethic* - this area wants it and is making it happen.
 - (3) *Colorado State University* - a major research university that receives 3million/yr for research. This environment creates the social capacity to *think* about the issues and propose solutions.

- (4) *Innovation infrastructure* – for example, [Be Local Northern Colorado](#), an organization dedicated to building a local and globally-fair economy, reaches out to over 300 local businesses.
- (5) *Access to capital* – The Colorado Innovation Investment Tax Credit, which was passed in a struggling economy, provides a tax break for investing in start-up companies in Colorado. Venture capitalists are proving to be highly attracted to this region.
- **Energy and Resources**
 - (1) [FortZED](#): This net-zero energy project in Old Town, Fort Collins, involves public, private and university collaboration that uses Smart Grid and renewable energy technologies to achieve local power generation and energy demand management. It will also utilize thermal energy and transportation linkages, while developing key industries and new business opportunities.
 - (2) [Vestas Turbine Blade Plant](#): Opened in Windsor, CO in March 2008, this serves as the first blade manufacturing facility in the U.S. Over 600 local, green jobs were created, sending a clear message that renewable energies are a significant driver for sustainable economic development.
 - (3) [Northern Colorado Clean Energy Cluster](#): A nonprofit economic development organization that includes groups such as ICE Energy, Spirae, CSU, New Belgium Brewing, and Platte River Power and is aimed at growing clean energy primary jobs in the region through start-ups, existing businesses, and companies relocating to the area.
 - (4) [Fort Collins Utilities](#): FCU has implemented progressive energy policy through customer incentives and [rebates](#), the business environmental program series, extensive outreach and education, and a partnership with FortZED to create a net-zero community.
 - (5) [Climate-wise Program](#): A voluntary business outreach program that through the City of Fort Collins that encourages greenhouse gas reductions by promoting energy efficiency, pollution prevention, solid waste reduction, and travel reduction among Fort Collins businesses. The program reached over 100k tons carbon avoided and won an award from Harvard School of Government for being a top innovative government program. Up to 130 businesses have saved \$7 million.
 - (6) [Methane Power](#): Larimer County Landfill partnered with Timberline Energy, LLC, Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association (PVREA), Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF), and the Colorado Carbon Fund (CCF) to construct a methane recovery and processing system. This resulted in a 1.4-megawatt project that is expected to produce enough electricity to power about 900 local homes.
 - (7) *Natural Gas*: Leading research at CSU's Engines and Energy Conversion Laboratory is looking at improving the efficiency and reducing the emissions from the burning of natural gas (which is an abundant resource in this region) in stationary and industrial engines. Weld County has purchased clean and efficient Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) vehicles for County use.

- (8) [*Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association*](#): PVREA is currently installing an advanced metering infrastructure (AMI), a major part of smart grid technology, to accommodate rural energy needs.
- **Local Food and Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)**: Small scale local agriculture is in place and working with more farmers on the landscape every year and the ability for them to sell products.
 - (1) [*Happy Heart Farms CSA*](#): Members benefit from scheduled pick-ups of fresh veggies, fruits and herbs from a 20-week growing season, a monthly newsletter, gourmet food tastings, recipes, and member-appreciation festivals. [*Friends of Happy Heart*](#) is a newly formed nonprofit to support the educational efforts of HHF.
 - (2) [*Agricorps Colorado*](#): A program started by the owners of Happy Heart Farms that incorporates service-learning, where youth exchange time on the farm for learning about sustainable agriculture and training in greenhouse management, plant propagation, biodynamic farming, etc.
 - (3) [*Fort Collins Food Co-op*](#): Originating in the 1970's from a CSU student buying club, FCFC offers a good selection of locally grown and produced goods. Local growers include Colona Community Farms, Grant Family Farms, Wolf Moon Farms, Windsor Dairy and other co-ops like Lakota Buffalo Caretaker's Co-operative and Organic Valley Family of Farms.
 - (4) [*Home Grown Food*](#): HGF's mission is to inspire people to develop organic food-producing gardens on donated public or private land or in their own backyards through public talks and workshops, a Google Discussion Group, and local mentors.
 - (5) *Farmers Markets*: Every morning from June through October, you can find fresh fruits, veggies, and local products at a farmer's market somewhere in Northern Colorado – Windsor, Loveland, Greeley, Longmont, Fort Collins. For a full listing of available times and produce available, visit [here](#).
 - **Business**
 - (1) [*New Belgium Brewing Company*](#): NBB is a leader in business sustainability efforts, achieved through many local collaborations, initiatives and extensive onsite sustainability practices. Highlights include wind-powered electricity since 1999; a culture of high employee involvement; and increased efficiencies in the brewing process. To see a comprehensive list of current and future sustainability features and initiatives at NBB, visit [here](#).
 - (2) [*Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch*](#): This historic working horse and cattle ranch incorporates sustainability practices into their business model and daily operations through open land conservation; a wildlife restoration project with the Department of Wildlife; efficiency retrofits planned for existing buildings; sustaining the history and legacy of dude-ranching; building a community of neighbors that share values; and switching to natural beef production.

- (3) [Walmart](#): Working to become a profitable and efficient business through programs that promote fleet efficiency, locally-grown food initiatives and community-led projects.
- **Green Building**
 - (1) The City of Fort Collins requires Gold or Silver LEED Certification for all new city-owned buildings of 5,000 sqft or more. Existing buildings use the LEED standard as a guide for sustainable operation and maintenance. For comprehensive information on “green building” for the City of Fort Collins, residential homes, businesses and existing city codes, visit [here](#).
 - (2) Starting in 2009, [Fort Collin’s Housing Authority](#) began a focused effort to incorporate green building practices into its properties. This commitment includes participating in an Energy Outreach project, after receiving a \$220,000 grant from Xcel Energy to install energy-saving water heaters in all public housing properties; energy audits on all public housing units to identify specific opportunities for green building improvements; recycling all possible building materials and upgraded appliances including participation in the City of Fort Collins energy efficient appliance rebate program; and purchasing low VOC cabinetry, countertops and interior paint.
 - (3) Using federal and state grants, the Town of Windsor is completing a [Town Hall Renovation Project](#) that is restoring a historic landmark while integrating sustainable technologies to increase energy efficiency and maximize indoor environmental quality and function.
- **Open Space and Heritage Tourism Preservation**
 - (1) [Larimer County Green Legacy](#): Larimer County has become a national leader in land preservation by using tax-based acquisition, transfer of development rights and a user friendly form of conservation development.
 - (2) [Rural Land Use Center](#): The RLUC assists property owners who wish to develop their property while maintaining their land in agriculture or other open space.
 - (3) [Northern Colorado Cultural Tourism Alliance](#): This group focuses on how to help farmers and ranchers stay viable through innovation, e.g., building water wheels to generate electricity. It is currently working on a survey to identify sites for cultural and historical tourism and to develop a plan for Northern Colorado.
- **Recycling**
 - (1) [Deconstruction Program, National Center for Craftsmanship](#): The nonprofit works with industry, institutional and government partners to provide education, training, community service and research to support the retention and extension of craft skills at all levels. The DeConstruct Training Program teaches youth and adults emerging deconstruction technology and LEED certification protocols. Efforts have resulted in the deconstruction of 9 buildings in the last 2 years, keeping 75-80% of materials out of the landfill.
 - (2) [Waste-Not Recycling](#): Provides comprehensive recycling services to commercial, institutional and government accounts. The company is

developing a recycling curriculum for state schools, as well as a voluntary Environmental Stewardship Program for businesses.

- (3) [City of Fort Collins](#): Residential trash haulers apply a variable ‘pay-as-you-throw’ (PAYT) rate to trash pick-up and must provide curbside recycling services at no extra charge. A recent amendment to the PAYT ordinance further requires haulers to provide a larger, lidded recycling cart upon customer request that will reduce collection schedules. This encourages customers to throw away less and thus pay less.
 - (4) [Glass recycling](#): Loveland now provides six drop-off centers for glass only to ensure that 100% of the glass will be recycled back into new bottles and jars.
- **Transportation**
 - (1) *Biking*: The bike community is strong and road construction requires the incorporation of bike trails. Through collaboration between The City of Fort Collins Transportation Planning Dept., New Belgium Brewing Company and local businesses, five large bike racks were fabricated and installed in downtown Fort Collins. Many parking garages provide bike lockers.
 - (2) The [Colorado Front Range Trail](#), which is envisioned as eventually connecting Wyoming to New Mexico, has much of its trails completed through dense population areas like Fort Collins, Loveland, Greeley and Denver and offers recreation and bicycle commuting opportunities throughout.

Question 2: *Which opportunities are ripe for development? Of all the opportunities presented, which ones are the most important?*

- **Community Agriculture**: Develop a regional comprehensive culture and system of sustainable agriculture by supporting collaboration, policy, financing and resources (*see Question 3 for expansion on these issues*):
 - (1) future farmer training
 - (2) open-land and water protection
 - (3) year-round food production
 - (4) the use of urban and suburban lands for sustainable agricultural use
 - (5) local markets and competitive opportunities for local growers
 - (6) public and youth education
- **Workforce Development**: It was stated that there is a flawed assumption that there is a core workforce available to move all the sustainable technologies and projects forward.
 - (1) For example, solar technology is a well-developed and established industry. What is needed are skilled and certified installers - solar companies are bottlenecked with work because there not enough trained employers. Same situation with efficiency auditors – weatherization programs starting up, but industry is not hiring and therefore training is not available.

- (2) *Northern Colorado Workforce Initiative*. SmartGrid technology training RFP is pending, but a coordinator and a statewide collaboratory are needed to create a training curriculum.
- **Long-term visioning process:** *What do we want this area to look like in 50 years?*
 - (1) Exponential population and economic growth – how sustainable is that model? How do we limit growth so it is sustainable, viable for businesses, and without threatening our resources? Need to make it politically “safe” to hold conversations on population at the local, state and national level.
 - (2) Use [*LENSES*](#) to help this visioning process, a research effort of CSU’s Institute for the Built Environment. This project resulted in a process and metrics tool that “guides decision-makers towards valuing and developing a healthy and regenerative world that fosters living environments in natural, social and economic systems”.
- **Energy**
 - (1) *FortZED*: The project would benefit by increasing public education about the program and securing funding for Smart Grid technology, because this and other local projects are based on this technology.
 - (2) The [*CSU Green Power Project*](#) is a collaborative effort between CSU-Fort Collins and Wind Holding LLC to develop a wind farm on Maxwell Ranch north of CSU. It ran into funding difficulties mid-2009. This installation could produce more power than CSU consumes. Current negotiations and an alternative funding source are needed to move this project to the development phase.
- **Transportation**
 - (1) [*Mason Corridor*](#) is an envisioned five-mile north-south byway within the city of Fort Collins. It includes a new bicycle and pedestrian trail as well as a planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) that will link major destinations and activity centers along the corridor including the downtown commercial, cultural, and business centers, CSU, Foothills Mall, and South College retail areas. The next steps for this project require continued funding to be secured from federal and state sources for transit system improvements.
 - (2) Develop regional transportation service from here to Denver and Colorado Springs and recreational points west.
 - (3) Bussing with alternative fuel. Support compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles and stations.

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

- **Community Agriculture**
 - (1) Determine a more comprehensive vision for a “re-localization” plan (grow local).
 - (2) Realize the problem is *cost and convenience*: industrial, subsidized food systems are cheaper. (Public might support and buy local food if health issues such as food contaminations, hormones, and toxins become a

primary concern for them). Establish a revolving loan fund for small farms, with financing sources coming from both private (to buy land) and public (to buy seed, e.g.) groups. Move forward with collaboration with state and county open-lands programs for long-term leases (5-10 years) so that it is worth the effort and cost of farming.

- (3) Create a centralized storage, processing and distribution center that includes cooling and packing capabilities. Change state policies to establish a small production level exemption that allows home and small farm production.
- (4) Increase protection for agricultural land and water rights, create more permanent easements. Open-space farms will allow for down-the-road renewable energy expansion.
- (5) Establish more resources to train new farmers and other people going into food related businesses (processors, ranching, cheesemakers, food preservation).
- (6) Create a Farm Incubator, which will expand markets and opportunities for local farmers, raise awareness for protection of agricultural lands, promote new policies to be written, and determine land distribution to farmers within Larimer County.
- (7) Create a centralized organization responsible for collecting and disseminating all of the available funding and land use opportunities for future farmers. Establish a hub for agricultural outreach and education within school systems (Greeley has a strong program developed).
- (8) Bring agriculture into suburban and urban (front yard farm/backyard CSA) areas, which will affect land use policy for urban sprawl. Expand education and awareness for edible schoolyards, SPIN (Small Plot Intensive Farming or 'front-yard gardening'), and community-wide bartering where neighbors exchange tomatoes for fresh eggs. Increase funding and community outreach for Agricorp Program.
- (9) Make change at the state level –water and land is so expensive because laws encourage commercial development. The Town of Timnath and Loveland's Centerra project get tax breaks for converting the "blight of agricultural landscape". Growth should have to pay for its own way at a premium, e.g., financing the new schools and transportation infrastructure that is required for all the children in those new houses being built.
Which local organization could take the lead in this effort? CSU (Soil and Sciences), Rural Land Use Center.

- Create a "Congress" of voices/representatives from each regional roundtable and bring them together for regular meetings.