

**Alliance for Sustainable Colorado**  
**South Central Region Sustainability Roundtable Meeting**  
**Salida**  
**October 15, 2009**

**Report**

**Description of the Region**

The South Central region of Colorado (as defined by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs) includes Alamosa, Chaffee, Conejos, Costilla, Custer, Fremont, Lake, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache counties. This widespread region boasts an amazing variety of unique features in the state, just a few of which are: 19 of the state's "14ers," including Mount Elbert, the highest peak in Colorado; the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, which is recognized as one of the nation's most popular locations for whitewater rafting and kayaking on the Arkansas River; the highest toll road and suspension bridge (Royal Gorge) in the world; and best yet, several natural hot springs in the area both for recreation and potential geothermal energy development.

Much of this region is referred to as the 'Banana Belt' with regard to warmer winters and a semi-arid climate due to buffering mountains on all sides. This mild climate lets locals bike (on pavement and off), hike, fish, and paddle nearly year-round. Vast rolling valleys support this uniquely rural area through ranching and agricultural production, with most notably melons and vegetables being grown successfully in the San Luis and Arkansas Valleys.

**Participants**

The **South Central Region Sustainability Roundtable** was co-hosted by the *Chaffee County Renewable Energy Planning Initiative*. The meeting was generously hosted by The Salida Steamplant Theatre and snacks were catered by Kalamatapit Catering, Michelle Gapp.

Fifty-seven local community leaders participated in the 3.5-hour workshop on October 15 and included representatives from business, non-profit, government and academic sectors.

State and local government officials included Gail Schwartz, Colorado State Senator; County Commissioners for Gunnison and Chaffee County; representatives from both the Southern and Western regions of the Governor's Energy Office (GEO); USDA, Colorado Geologic Survey, Chaffee County, City of Salida, and the Towns of Buena Vista and Poncha Springs.

Education representatives included Salida School District, CSU Chaffee County Extension, Western State College Small Business Center and Colorado Mountain College, Lake and Chaffee County Campuses.

Prominent local nonprofit organizations focused on food co-ops and local food production, fundraising consulting, the Transition Movement, safeguarding resources in local watersheds, cultural heritage preservation, conservation training and community projects, citizen advocacy, natural ecosystem protection and business finance assistance contributed.

Local business representatives from Xcel Energy, Atmos Gas, Mount Princeton Geothermal and Sangre de Cristo Electric Association participated. Other businesses offering management and communication facilitation, project financing for green technologies, solar/wind products and installations, green events, algae growth systems, cartography services, web design and consulting, outdoor gear, energy consulting and custom-design construction were well-represented.

Individuals representing the local publications *The Mountain Mail* and *Colorado Central* also participated.

### **Sustainability Discussion by Participants**

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

- **Energy**
  - (1) *Solar*: Design and installation industry growing because of 30% tax credit and Xcel rebates. Several local businesses such as [EcoDepot USA](#), [Peak Solar Designs](#) and [Colorado Solar Energy](#) offer solar products and services.
  - (2) *Wind*: The [Sangre de Cristo Electric Association Wind Program](#) provides customers with 100kWh blocks of wind power for a small monthly surcharge. Xcel's [Windsource](#) Program offers customers a chance to purchase 100kWh blocks or 100% Windsource, which assures that all power needs comes from wind-generated sources.
  - (3) *Natural Gas*: A large part of Colorado's natural resources and economic development. Natural gas appliances can be highly efficient (e.g., top-of-the line furnace >90%, tankless heaters that only heat water as needed).
  - (4) *Energy efficiency programs and retrofits*: The [Chaffee County Energy Star Program](#) offers federal tax credits and state rebates for new homebuilders. Through this program, certified homes within the Sangre de Cristo service territory may qualify for a \$300 rebate. If your home is within Xcel's gas territory, there are rebates for ENERGY STAR homes that vary between \$400-\$800 per home.
  - (5) *Gunnison Valley Office of Resource Efficiency and [Energy Action Planning](#)*: Energy plans are being adopted by the City of Gunnison, Gunnison County and the Town of Crested Butte that create an inventory of all emissions coming from buildings, transportation, etc.; reduce emissions from these

sectors and produce jobs; implement programs focused on energy audits and weatherization for residential and commercial buildings; adopting more efficient building codes; and pursuing renewable energy pilot projects.

- **Local Food and Community-supported Agriculture**

- (1) [\*Salida and Buena Vista Farmer's Markets\*](#): Salida's market at Alpine Park has been in operation for 3 years and is well attended. The Buena Vista market is hosted at the historic Turner Farm against the backdrop of the old homestead and apple trees and provides afternoons full of entertainment, local history and a diverse selection of products.
- (2) [\*Central Colorado Food Shed Alliance\*](#): Formed in 2007 to unite local producers with consumers and educate consumers about the value of getting food from their own foodshed (raw milk; goat cheese, dairy and meat; local beef; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects).
- (3) [\*Guidestone\*](#): A nonprofit organization that grows farmers through educational programs, connects people to the land, and brings buyers and producers of local goods together by supporting, promoting and/or offering opportunities such as CSAs, product distribution centers, farmers markets, and events.
- (4) [\*Backyard CSA\*](#): A group of gardeners who formed a CSA project to use homeowner's yards and other unused spaces in Salida to produce vegetables, flowers, and other value-added projects. Produce is marketed through CSA shares, the Salida and Buena Vista farmers markets, local natural food stores, and restaurants.
- (5) [\*Jumping Good Goat Dairy\*](#): Family-owned goat dairy providing quality cheeses dedicated to sustainable agriculture and community development and education.

- **Green Building**

- (1) [\*Salida Early Childhood Center\*](#): Silver LEED certification pending for new construction. Green features include passive solar and natural lighting, occupancy sensors, high-efficiency water heater with separate-temperature water shuttled to kitchen, all no-to-low VOC materials including linoleum, glues and paints.
- (2) [\*Historic Building Restoration\*](#): Inventory of Downtown Salida historic buildings is being conducted that includes evaluating adaptive new-use possibilities and making buildings energy-efficient.
- (3) [\*Salida-Chaffee County Community Services Complex\*](#): The old hospital in Salida is being remodeled to serve as a complex that will house all local community service entities. By using a performance contract to put in more energy efficient heating, air and electrical systems, the installation will reduce the annual costs for electric and gas use from approximately \$250,000 per year to an annual usage cost of \$50,000.

- **Open-Space and Historical Preservation**

- (1) [\*Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas\*](#): Advances the conservation and stewardship of agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, open space, scenic beauty and other diminishing natural and historical resources in Chaffee, Fremont

and Lake counties. Established voluntary 1% tax program for conservation easements.

- (2) [\*Chaffee County Heritage Area Program\*](#): Seeks to preserve the heritage area of Chaffee County with a focus on natural landscapes, historic structures, and resource stewardship. Under this program, more than 2 acres of the working open space *Hutchinson Homestead* was donated to the Town of Poncha Springs for preservation as a Museum and Cultural Center.
- (3) [\*Buena Vista Heritage\*](#): Nonprofit organization created to preserve and share the history of BV and Chaffee County. Projects include restoration and operation of The Turner Farm, St. Elmo Schoolhouse and an ongoing restoration of the Denver-Leadville-Gunnison Depot.
- (4) [\*Collegiate Peaks Scenic Byway\*](#): This byway stretches 57 miles through the heart of three historic communities in Chaffee County: Buena Vista, Salida and Poncha Springs. Some of the unique natural and cultural heritage characteristics found in this area are high altitude ranching, commercially developed hot springs and the most commercially rafted Arkansas River.

- **Education**

- (1) [\*Colorado Mountain College\*](#): Looking at all campus facilities and selecting group to perform audits for retrofits in heating, doors and windows. New program that provides 3 Solar Industry certifications. Working with National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) to integrate educational programs with workforce development.
- (2) [\*Western State College \(WSC\)\*](#): Several student environmental groups merged to become the *Sustainability Coalition* in an effort to become a real force in student government. This action led to the WSC President signing the University Climate Commitment Pledge and several green building efforts: three campus buildings (Business, Kelly Hall and the 2010-slated Student Center) have attained or applied for LEED Silver or Gold status.

- **Recycling**: [\*Angel of Shavano Recycling\*](#) has comprehensive recycling capability, including plastics 1-7, with multiple drop-off locations throughout Chaffee County. Provide commercial pick-up since 2007 and volunteer for many community activities and events upon request.

- **Business and Green Jobs**

- (1) [\*Southwest Conservation Corps \(SCC\)\*](#): Veterans Green Jobs (VGJ) has combined efforts with the SCC to create *Veterans Green Corps (VGC)*, which provides training and employment in a variety of green jobs including environmental conservation, habitat restoration and forestry, as well as residential energy conservation and weatherization.
- (2) [\*Project 350\*](#). The largest "Shop Local" campaign in the history of this area. A free card offers shoppers discounts at local participating businesses across Chaffee, Fremont and Custer counties.

- **Transportation**: Salida and Buena Vista are both pedestrian and bike-friendly. A trail along County Road 120 is almost complete linking Poncha Springs and Salida. 300+ miles of biking, hiking and off-road recreational trails in Chaffee County.

- [Chaffee Citizens for Sustainability](#): Created in opposition to Nestle Waters North America Plan to bottle water from Nathrop springs. The organization’s focus is to support programs that ensure the long-term community viability and well-being.

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

- **Education**

- (1) *Sustainability Model School and [BEST Grant](#)*: Colorado Department of Education’s *BEST Grant* supports improvements in quality school facilities throughout the state. Salida School District R-32-J is currently preparing to resubmit the application and has a community-based facility planning committee that is working on the design elements of the revised proposal. The proposal includes the construction of a new high school and a new elementary school, with plans to retrofit the current middle school using geothermal exchange technology. All new structures will meet or exceed LEED requirements. The plan allows for the potential of having at least one net zero campus and the others be as energy efficient as possible.
- (2) *Public School Curriculum*: There is a need to develop and implement strong core sustainability curriculum in K-12 to establish a ‘culture’ of sustainability early on.
- (3) *Citizenry Education*: A handbook/pamphlet for residents could offer guidance on weatherization, energy efficiencies, other conservation practices and local resources.

- **Energy**

- (1) *Geothermal Plant*: The [Mount Princeton Geothermal Energy Project](#) would produce the first geothermal electricity in Colorado utilizing an air-cooled 10MW plant. It would be the first Colorado geothermal plant to provide up to 85% load for Sangre de Cristo Rural Electric Association (REA) in three counties. The co-op can be served through an existing transmission infrastructure. The project is entering its third phase development: deep reservoir drilling to test necessary sustainable flow. This phase requires additional funding to match potential DOE funds. The proposed plant and production infrastructure have low maintenance costs, no storage requirement, and will produce baseline 24/7 renewable energy without damages to water tables, pollution or surface heat. There are also geothermal prospects for city-owned land in Poncha Springs.
- (2) *Algae research, [BioVantage Resources](#)*: Develops flexible growth systems for algae, for use by a broad range of industries serving the production of clean water, food and fuel. Working with local authorities (including Incite Consulting) to establish a “pilot” facility in Salida to validate the functional output of the algae growth system. The pilot facility would produce algae

for local livestock feed use and after a period for validation, would likely be expanded to produce algae for a mix of uses.

- (3) *Micro-hydro Power*: Energy can be harvested from small streams, canals, or irrigation ditches. It only takes a small amount of flow (as little as two gallons per minute) or a drop as low as two feet to generate electricity and can be delivered as far as a mile away to the location where it is being used. Commonly used on local ranches.
  - (4) *Hydroponics/Aquaculture*: This has been sufficiently tested at a local level. Funding is needed to expand its application. Hydroponic greenhouses could be located in backyards to allow easy and year-round food production.
  - (5) *Wind Turbine for Ski Resort and Monarch Pass*: Some studies show that wind conditions at Monarch Pass (~18mph) are optimal for wind-generated power to supply Monarch Ski Resort. Installation would include a community-sized Northwind 100 Turbine and could produce 110kW or 195,000kWh/yr.
  - (6) *Solar*: There is potential and interest to develop a medium to large scale Solar PV system at the local prison.
  - (7) *Woody biomass*: At Western State College in Gunnison, a \$21 million renovation project for Taylor Hall now includes plans to utilize a boiler system that relies on woody biomass for fuel, and grant funding is being pursued to help create the local infrastructure necessary to supply the product. In Chaffee County, 80% is public lands and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) could provide a sustainable supply of wood. The Forest Service would potentially support the cull of standing dead wood to sell for pellets.
- **Sustainable Local Food**: The [Guidestone Land-Link Initiative](#) will potentially serve as a statewide pilot project to connect retiring farmers and non-farming landowners with next generation farmers who desire to work the land, produce food, and otherwise participate in a local food economy. The program will create a database that provides solutions to the challenges of access to farmland, security of tenure, long-term affordability and stewardship of the resources.
  - **Green Building and Development**
    - (1) Encourage and incentivize developers to create “Cluster” development, which keeps open spaces. Rather than mandate solar, education should be used to encourage solar installations at the front end of development.
    - (2) Educate owners about building codes and energy efficient options (but has to be competitive with their price). For new owners and builders, provide a “Homeowner’s Guide” that provides green building technologies, weatherization practices, information on how and what to recycle, list of local solar providers, Energy Star Incentives, and general education like turning off appliances, buy local, etc.
    - (3) For ENERGY STAR-rated houses, provide a refund on building permits and both federal and state tax credits.
    - (4) Conclusions from the final 2008 Buena Vista *Citizen’s Roundtable* resulted in a vision document for updating the Chaffee County Land Use Code. Included were recommendations for mixed-use development and clustered

subdivisions to achieve more open space protection. For transportation projects, particularly redevelopment of the Highway 50 and 24 corridor, a holistic approach needs to be taken that involves plans for bike, pedestrian and transit-friendly options. The plan now needs to be made operational through code changes and policy implementation.

- **Transportation**

- (1) Use abandoned Union Pacific Railroad Track as commuter rail from Leadville to Canon City and/or a proposed “Rail-n-Raft” project that could transport the proposed 380,000 visitors down the canyon during the *Christo Over the River* art installation.

- (2) Complete pathway along County Road 120 between water treatment plant and Fairgrounds for commuting.

- **Transition Salida**: Community-driven movement to address the challenges and opportunities of peak oil, climate change and economic stability through strengthening more locally-based and sustainable energy and food systems. Future plans include an inventory of community awareness, determining key areas of quality of life, and developing an Energy Descent Action Plan.

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

- Advance education on energy conservation and renewables not just at schools, but to the public. Types of information needed are the costs and benefits of actions, incentives and rebates, and advantages to the individual.
- Create a website that links to all local resources on renewable energy projects and efforts (public, private, municipal, academic...).
- Share resources and experience to avoid duplication of efforts. Create a “Clearinghouse” to share best practices and information.
- Establish common messaging – break out into municipalities to discuss, sort and brainstorm priorities and projects and then come back together to focus as a group.
- Identify leadership – offer a *paid* position at the County level to a person who can focus efforts, create collaborations, inventory projects and disseminate information.
- Be proactive on legislation –develop an energy plan, work with elected officials to move policies forward.
- Meet 2020 goal of getting 10% of energy to come from renewable sources.
- State is conducting a Broadband Connectivity Inventory to determine how more rural areas can stay “Connected” and up to date on information.