

Alliance for Sustainable Colorado
Northern Mountain Region Sustainability Roundtable Meeting
Steamboat Springs
August 26, 2009

Report

Description of the Region

The 2009 Sustainability Roundtable in the northern mountain region of Colorado included participants from Rio Blanco, Moffat, Routt and Eagle counties. This geographic region offers a diversity of landscape: from wide-open spaces to the volcanic plateau of the Black Mountain's, to the rocky canyons in Brown's Park, and to rolling high plains that are home to some of the largest deer and elk herds in North America. The Yampa and Snake River valleys, mountains, and high plains desert to the borders of Wyoming and Utah cover an area 93 miles long and 52 miles wide. In Routt County, 50% of its 1.5 million acres are public lands and along with the abundant waters of the Yampa River, provide opportunities for hiking, picnicking, boating, hunting and fishing. However, much of this region has experienced a significant amount of mountain pine beetle infestation and forest devastation. With coordinated efforts, projects could be developed that would support economic growth, job creation, and future sustainability for communities that are adversely affected by beetle infestations.

Mining and agriculture formed the economic base for much of this region in the early 20th century and has declined relative to other economic sectors, but is still important to the region's culture. Cattle and sheep ranches and fields of hay, wheat, barley and oats still define the landscape, but 35-acre "ranchettes" that host a single house are replacing traditional working ranches. Forestry, mining and power generation also provide a year-round economy. Over the last 40 years, however, tourism has emerged as a central part of the local economy, with Steamboat Springs hosting the thriving Mt. Werner ski area and resort.

As of the 2000 census, these four counties totaled a population density of around 85,000, with Eagle County making up approximately 50% of that total. Routt County falls within 2% of the least dense counties in the United States, but sees that changing quickly as more and more visitors arrive and never leave. Household income across the region has not risen substantially and the Northwest region of Colorado faces the challenge of providing affordable housing, particularly in new home construction.

Participants

The **Northern Mountain Region Sustainability Roundtable** was co-sponsored by *Yampa Valley Sustainability Council* and facilitated by the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado. The meeting was held at the Bear River Bar & Grill at the scenic base of the mountain at

Steamboat Ski & Resort Corporation (SSRC). Delicious local eats were catered by Liz Wahl, Food and Beverage Director for SSRC.

Forty-six local community leaders participated in the 3.5 hour workshop on August 26 and included representatives from business, nonprofit, government and academic sectors.

State and local government officials included representatives from the Governor's Energy Office, Colorado and Department of Local Affairs (DOLA); Routt County, Steamboat and Craig City Council, the City of Steamboat, and the towns of Eagle and Avon.

Prominent local nonprofit organizations focused on services to persons with developmental disabilities, sustainable business promotion and practices, local agricultural preservation, recycling and re-using construction materials, wilderness conservation and protection, economic growth and diversification, leadership for environmental, economic and social sustainability, providing community information and regional summits, recycling capability and education, and affordable housing contributed.

Local business offering banking, insurance, restaurant, and realtor services; floor-heating systems, outdoor gear, small business management consulting, composting products, sustainable construction, water conservation and wastewater services, solar design and installation, management and communication facilitation, skiing packages and resort accommodations, transportation services, and business futures consulting were well-represented.

The education sector was represented by the Colorado State University Routt County Extension Director.

Sustainability Discussion by Participants

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

- **Community Collaborations**

- (1) [*Yampatika*](#): A nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire environmental stewardship through education, delivering environmental education programs to nearly 20,000 residents and visitors per year. Collaborative efforts have grown to include partners in the private sector and the school systems in both Routt and Moffat Counties.
- (2) [*Yampa Valley Sustainability Council*](#): YVSC partners with several local entities in efforts such as a yearly Education Sustainability Summit; the monthly speaker event series, *Talking Green*; the ENERGY STAR component of the newly adopted green building program for Steamboat Springs and Routt County; and the Yampa Valley Recycles and Zero-Waste Initiative.
- (3) [*NorthWest Colorado Products*](#): A collaborative effort of Colorado State University Routt County Extension and Steamboat Ski and Resort Corp, NWCP strives to establish and maintain a market for products and services that originate in NW Colorado.

- (4) [*Vision 2030*](#): Released April 2009, Vision 2030 is a collaborative report of citizens' efforts to define the values that matter most to the people of Routt County in order to ensure the future of the Yampa River Valley. Pressing issues identified in need of action include affordable housing, agriculture and open space, government, heritage, sustainability and transportation (see the report for the complete list).
 - (5) [*Community Indicators Project*](#): This project, initiated by [*Yampa Valley Partners*](#), is to document the regional quality of life in the Yampa Valley through social, economic, environmental, and civic measurements. It is a result of the collaboration between the communities, organizations, and counties in the Yampa Valley, and national and state organizations such as National Civic League, and the Women's Foundation of Colorado.
 - (6) [*Livability Index*](#): A document based on extensive data and analysis that provides a fact-based guide for the constituents and public decision makers of Routt County to make more informed choices about policies that affect their area. Its mission is to "recognize significant drivers of the health and wealth of our citizens that reach beyond the dollars and cents that drive the economy; the facets that make up our united fabric."
 - (7) The formation of **Green Teams** within businesses (Alpine Bank) and schools (Strawberry Park Elementary).
- **Recycling**
 - (1) [*Yampa Valley Recycles*](#): Provides curbside and/or drop-off recycling for hazardous household waste, electronics, and standard recyclable materials. YVR also supplies 'Green Machines', which are free, large event recycling containers that are easily transportable and for residential use only.
 - (2) [*City of Craig*](#): Collaborative partnership with the City of Steamboat Springs that involves a brand new recycling program using Green Machines. The success of this recycling program will provide an opportunity to go to City Council and establish a more comprehensive program.
 - (3) [*Home ReSource*](#): Nonprofit arm of Milner landfill facilities that provides construction material recycling and used material sales for reuse of building materials. They will help with the deconstruction of a building, donations of material for resale, avoiding disposal expense, green credits, computer recycling drop-off or pickup, bio-solids composting, use of wood chips and sawdust, and sale of screened TwinGro Compost.
 - (4) [*Twin Enviro Services Composting Program*](#): This commercial program is already composting beetle-killed wood and bio-solids from the wastewater treatment plant using 10 acres under static aeration. It is engaged in a pilot program with Steamboat Ski Resort to compost food waste and offer compost materials to residents.
 - (5) [*Zero Waste Initiative*](#): Launched in June 2009 by the Yampa Valley Sustainability Council, this initiative incorporates zero waste practices into ski resort operations and throughout public events in Steamboat Springs. It aims to educate and involve The City of Steamboat Springs, Routt County, businesses and schools.
 - **Business**
 - (1) [*Sustainable Steamboat Business Program*](#): This program includes +65 businesses and is available through the Steamboat Chamber Resort Association. Participating businesses are provided a consultant to learn how to reduce energy use and waste in

their operations, quarterly networking luncheons, a Green-link e-letter, and annual awards. At a higher level of certification, businesses can participate in ‘Cents for Steamboat’, which donates 1% from business sales to local sustainability efforts.

- (2) [*Northwest Colorado Cultural Heritage Tourism Program*](#): This project is currently in its initial objectives of heritage site inventory and marketing product development. The project intends to expand current tourism industries in this area to include local cultural and agri-tourism to directly benefit local economies throughout the region.
- (3) [*Buy Local Campaign*](#): This program was created through a partnership between the Steamboat Springs Chamber Resort Association and a dedicated group of local business owners in hopes of bringing attention to the importance of supporting local commerce, especially in a tough economic environment.

- **Energy**

- (1) [*Confluence Energy Wood Pellet Plant, Kremmling*](#): This plant is converting available biomass from trees killed by the mountain pine beetle to produce wood pellets fuel to produce heat energy. Heating with wood pellets can reduce heating bills by up to 70% and the pellet appliances are so clean burning they can be burned during areas on “no burn days”.
- (2) *Wind Power*: Xcel has added another 1000MW of wind power to the grid in the last year, which now allows wind credits to be purchased across the state. The Town of Avon is voluntarily paying a 28% surcharge to have 100% wind-generated power.
- (3) [*Insulate Colorado*](#): The Governor’s Energy Office (GEO), in partnership with a local Colorado organization, offers rebates directly to qualifying homeowners wishing to make energy efficiency improvements such as insulation installation and air sealing measures to their existing homes. Yampa Valley Sustainability Council (YVSC) partnered with Columbine Insulation to bring forth the 2009 pilot program to this area.
- (4) *Academia*: Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) is developing an 82-well, closed loop, ground-source heat pump utility to be shared by the academic and residential buildings on a newly-constructed campus.
<http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/geothermal/projects/projects.cfm/ProjectID=92>
Colorado Mountain College (CMC), Alpine campus, has a proposed 40,000sqft facility that will use a geexchange system to heat and cool the building. The campus will serve as a leader in geexchange technology and education.
http://www.steamboathomefinder.com/articles_story.php?id=102
- (5) *Local Utilities* are providing CFL bulbs, energy audits and an information center.

- **Transportation:**

- (1) Regional bus system that now goes between Craig and Steamboat has reduced 17,000 trips per year. The Steamboat Springs Transit (SST) provides a fixed route and daily transit service around town and between downtown and the Ski Resort Mountain Base area.
- (2) [*Go Alpine*](#): A ground transportation service has instituted a **Colorado Carbon Offset Fund** (<http://www.coloradocarbonfund.org/>) request for every passenger that calls in or places reservations online. Contributions of \$.50 to the Hayden Regional Airport and \$1.00 donations to DIA are calculated into the total fare. Efforts started in May 2009 and contributions are expected to go up exponentially

when the ski season hits as Go Alpine transports 140,000 to 170,000 passengers during the season.

- **Open-space Preservation**

- (1) [*Routt County Purchase of Development Rights Program*](#): This voluntary program allows a landowner to sell the development rights of a property to a qualified conservation entity, such as a non-profit land trust, public agency, or historic preservation organization, which places a conservation easement on the parcel. The landowner retains full ownership and use of the property for purposes other than real-estate development. Most recently, the DRP was responsible for holding a conservation easement on a 617 acre ranch north of Hayden, CO.
- (2) [*Yampa Valley Land Trust*](#): YVLT is Northwest Colorado's nonprofit land conservation organization and focuses its preservation work on the Yampa River Basin in Routt County and the White River Valley in Rio Blanco County. To date, 65 conservation transactions have permanently protected 44,811 acres in Northwest Colorado.

- **Sustainable Food**

- (1) [*Deep Roots Local Food Trust*](#): A local food trust working towards developing more local and sustainable food production, e.g., having local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects, even with a climate with a short growing season. The Trust's blog is [*The Beet List*](#).
- (2) [*Community Agricultural Alliance*](#): Mission is to preserve the agricultural heritage and landscapes of the Yampa Valley.

- **Town of Eagle**. Through many initiatives and the recent hire of a sustainability coordinator in 2008, the Town of Eagle boasts the following sustainability efforts: establishing a free curbside recycling program; enjoying a community bike sharing program; adopting the 2006 International Energy Conservation Code with code-exceeding standards for roof and wall insulation; integrating sustainability concepts in the Eagle Area Community Plan; creating a [*webpage*](#) devoted to sustainability outreach and education; creating three informative brochures on energy conservation, water conservation, and recycling; enacting a mandatory 3 day per week max watering schedule and providing residents with an online water schedule; and tracking its energy use for town buildings and town fleet after installing programmable thermostats and motion sensors in several facilities.

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

- [*Mount Werner - Steamboat Community Water Conservation Plan*](#): The Mt Werner Water District, City of Steamboat Springs, and Steamboat II Metro District have developed a Community Water Conservation Plan to meet Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) standards. The goal is to slow the growth of base water demand and peak demand by raising the water conservation awareness of visitors, residents and businesses. Maintaining water in the Yampa River and source tributaries improves riparian health and defers the investment in expensive treatment infrastructure required to meet peak-day demand. The conservation plan outlines programs to engage residents and businesses in this effort. The project requires additional funding and board approval.

- **Recycling**
 - (1) Establish more recycling programs in businesses, hotels, and construction companies. Increase opportunities for CFL bulb, steel and aluminum recycling and drop-off sites for electronics and cell phones.
 - (2) *Zero Waste Initiative*: This initiative, while currently showing success, needs increased composting capability, a means to transport/recycle waste, a standard of measuring effectiveness, and expanded public education. Also need to work on developing policies that incentivize all vendors and venues to be zero-waste.
- **Renewable Energy**: Need more wind turbines, solar panel PV grids, thermal PV, geothermal, biomass, and pellet stoves to replace gas. It would be helpful to prepare a list of products and installers, and to complete large-scale, high profile projects to show leadership (schools, local government).
 - (1) *Solar*: “Solar panels should be on every building and house”. Expand access to information about local suppliers, installers and installation requirements.
 - (2) *Geothermal*: Formed a Geothermal Task Force Group that is trying to come up with a project to serve as a demonstration and as an organized advocacy group for that kind of industry and technology.
 - (3) *Biomass*: A lot of different entities working with beetle-killed wood for biomass generation, but each off doing their own thing. Need to develop collaboration and funding to focus these efforts. In order to establish biomass production at the landfill, need to tackle issues of land use and getting commissioners to loosen regulations on industrial sites and creating a new zoning classification for sustainable business.
 - (4) *Energy efficiency (EE) projects*: Need to develop a revolving loan program to fund EE projects like the one that exists in [Boulder](#). (Or establish a statewide revolving fund that local entities can tap into.)
- **Transportation**: Build a Light Rail for Yampa-Steamboat-Craig. Obtain more city hybrid busses and develop better mass transit. Educate the public to reduce vehicle miles by riding bicycles to work and/or car-pooling.
- **Green Building Codes**: Require mandatory commercial and residential green building codes that should also include historical preservation projects and retrofits. This will take the political will from commissioners and city council.
- **GEO-Funded Regional Energy Coordinator**: Suggested that Yampa Valley Economic Development Council (YVEDC) could take lead.

Question 3: *What steps will you take to foster these sustainability opportunities? and How will you utilize your sustainability network?*

- Prioritize sustainable opportunities ripe for development by region. Then prioritize top 3 projects that can work and be funded.
- Encourage collaboration between seats of local governments and strengthen political will for sustainable initiatives and policies.
- Establish a “Gatekeeper” (organization or group) that can facilitate information and disseminate it. Create a “virtual” statewide collaborative meeting to involve more people across the state.



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- Establish education about the problem and urgency of climate change and not being sustainable – quit preaching to the choir and convince the public that sustainability is a priority.
- Create a shared sustainability vision statewide so that we all have the same target no matter what project is being worked on. Stress holistically and financially why sustainability practices and policies are a good thing. Explain to people who don't buy into Climate Change, for example, *Okay, but do you know you can run a more profitable business if you do these things, implement these practices*. Important to emphasize the economic advantages of sustainability – help elected officials understand benefits of the triple bottom line approach.
- Tap into things already in place demonstrating success and knowledge for other collaborations - don't reinvent the wheel.
- Join existing networks that focus on sustainable issues and projects; for example, [Creative Citizen](#), which is a whole model around critical and radical collaboration of sustainable efforts at the individual level. They have a news arm called *EcoMatters* and the entire site is open source, which is “*good for you, good for me, and good for the environment*”.