

The 2021 Colorado Legislature

Many victories — and more work ahead!



by **Daniel Haas**
Legislative Intern

Due to the pandemic, this year has been unlike any other for Western Colorado Alliance’s Legislative Committee. Usually, we would take a trip to the legislature and visit the Capitol during the session. However, we were unable to do so this year.

What we were able to do instead was to spend our efforts creating a series of webinars called **We Are the Change**, which highlighted different bills as they moved through the legislature. As part of that effort, we invited special guests to speak on the behalf of the various bills we have followed.

Additionally, we have been conducting asynchronous interviews with special guests to provide quick informational videos about some of the most pressing legislative actions. Our Alliance has been able to take actions on countless bills, helping move them along in the legislative process, and helping provide the changes that our state needs going into the future.

Despite having numerous bills to focus on this session, we narrowed our interests down to three top priorities with varying issues being represented. The first was **SB21-079: Deregulate Meat Sales Direct to Consumers**. This bill

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UVA led Montrose to come together, work together



by **Rachael Balerio**
Alliance Member

The Uncompahgre Valley Alliance (UVA) Childcare Caucus continues to build bridges all across Montrose County surrounding the issue of childcare.

After securing funding for a Childcare Needs Assessment in Montrose County, the Childcare Caucus set out to host an event to launch the assessment and survey, recognize funding and survey distribution partners, and most importantly, bring Montrose Community members together to work on a unifying issue.

The UVA Survey Launch

event, held on April 8 via Zoom, caught the attention of many in Montrose County.

The Childcare Caucus welcomed parents, grandparents, child care providers, elected officials, organizations, and community members from Montrose, Olathe, and the West End. Attendees listened to the presentation in English and/or Spanish through live interpretation.

Montrose City Council member Barbara Bynum said of the event, “The kickoff included some compelling personal stories and I was impressed UVA offered live language interpretation. I’ve attended a lot of zoom meetings this year and I haven’t

seen anyone else attempt that!”

Prior to the opening of the survey window, the Childcare Caucus set a goal of 250 responses and began reaching out to potential survey distribution partners.

Through partnerships with the Hispanic Affairs Project, Montrose County School District, Hilltop Family Resource Center, Montrose County Health and Human Services, local child care providers, and other partners throughout the City and County of Montrose, over 600 responses have now been returned!

Through the organizing process, the UVA Childcare Caucus continues to build meaningful

relationships and bring community members together in a time when we are often divided. Council Member Bynum also said, “Partnering with UVA on the important topic of early childhood education was a pleasure. I was impressed with the organization’s professionalism and preparation. It was as if their members were following a playbook on how to engage with elected officials and advocate for needs in our community.”

Over the summer, data will be gathered and analyzed by Root Policy Research. The UVA Childcare Caucus is planning a conference in the fall of 2021 to present the findings to the community.

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Looking inward, moving forward



by **Andreya Krieves**
Alliance Chair

In our Alliance and in our communities across the Western Slope, we've passed some momentous milestones in the past few months:

More than a year of COVID distancing and shutdown, election cycles at all levels that mobilized a new generation of voters and activists, revelations on local impacts of the global climate crisis, the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder and a national reckoning with race and inequality, just to name a few.

In a time that has challenged us in so many ways, we embrace the opportunity to reflect on what's happened, what we've learned, and how we've reoriented our thinking and modes of operating in a COVID-impacted landscape.

With all the changes in our world, each of us have had the opportunity to readjust, recalibrate, and refocus our energies. We don't take for granted the awesome power that we can feel and build when we're together in person, and each of us feels a deep excitement for the possibility to do just that as things begin to reopen.

However, the new digital world thrust upon us all allowed our Alliance to cast a broader net and build new relationships when we couldn't be physically close and offered options for people to attend events on their own terms. The audio/video issues of our Zoom year (you're on mute!) have refined our listening and boosted our patience and sense of humor through shared moments of learning. In seeing snapshots of each other's homelife in the background, we've gained

fresh perspective and a deeper appreciation of the humans on the other side of the screen.

We emerge from this challenge with more tools and flexibility to work together to increase our impact on important issues in ways that work best for our members.

We will continue to examine the impact of events in the last year on individuals and communities across the Western Slope.

We have sharpened our focus on how we can connect, build power, and maximize our collective influence on the issues that are most important to our members.



Western Colorado Alliance
Chair Andreya Krieves

In this issue of the Clarion, you'll see what we're working on with members and leaders in communities across the Western Slope, in our state capitol, and nationwide. We look optimistically forward to engaging with you in the critical work that lies ahead.

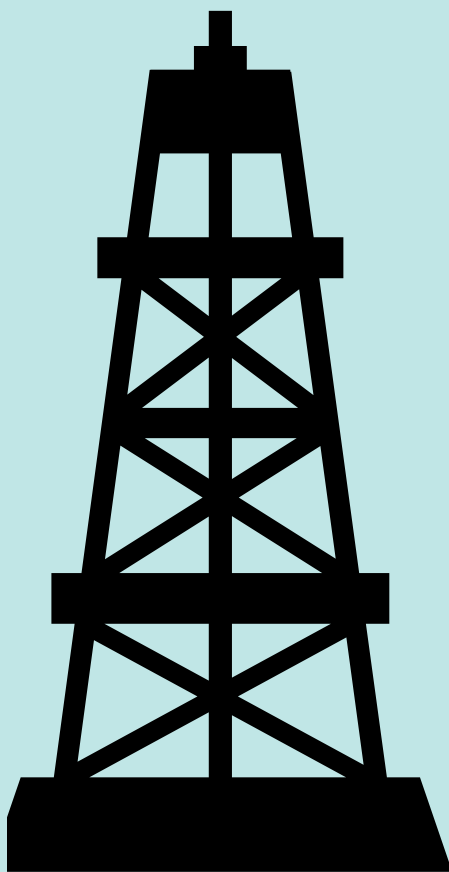
Will Colorado be left holding the bag for oil and gas operators?



by **Brian Williams**
Community
Organizer

The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) is poised to begin the process of creating new financial assurance standards for oil and gas wells drilled in the state. The commission, which is tasked with protecting "public health, safety, welfare, the environment and wildlife resources" as mandated by Senate Bill 19-181, is seeking to revise its existing bonding requirements to fall in line with its new mission statement.

Before the enactment of this legislation, the COGCC was directed to "foster the responsible, balanced,



development and production and utilization" of oil and natural gas. This shift in priorities has resulted in profound improvements in Colorado's oil and gas regulatory framework, including robust protections for vulnerable wildlife populations, ending the practice of burning or venting excess methane during production, and ensuring that most new oil and gas wells will be drilled at least 2,000 feet away from schools and homes.

Now, the COGCC is turning its attention to how it ensures that operators — and not taxpayers — will pay to clean up wells once they reach the end of their productive lives. In Colorado, when an operator chooses to drill a well, they must first post a bond with the state that acts

as a financial assurance that they will plug the well after production and restore the land on which they operated. If the operator fails to do so, the state will collect the money posted through the bond, and use it to plug and reclaim the well site.

At least, that's how it's supposed to work.

In practice, the financial assurance requirements Colorado currently implements are wholly inadequate. Despite the average price of plugging and reclaiming a well in our state being well over \$80,000, present rules only provide for a fraction of that amount to be held in bonds before production

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brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development.

Our Alliance's vision for the future is one where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just and self-reliant.

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An update on West Slope Youth Vote



by Lili Flanigan
& Carlee Allen
WSYV Interns

As we look back at the 2020-2021 school year, we have seen ourselves and our community through many milestones.

We are a year older, a grade higher, and some of us have graduated on to the next chapter.

Our community has weathered a public health crisis, a presidential election, and a summer of intense wildfires and protests demanding equity and progress.

After some rest and reflection, we are so excited to continue our work with West Slope Youth Vote this summer and next school year.

There are so many students across the Western Slope who do not come across opportunities like our program, and as students ourselves, we understand how difficult it can be to find activities and opportunities which fit our interests and can help us reach our goals. After this last year,

young people are more engaged than ever, and are looking for ways to make change in their own communities.

We want to reach those young people who would benefit most from this program, and provide support and guidance for them to lead the way toward progress and continued change across Western Colorado.

Typically our interns, who come from all over the Western Slope, are introduced to the program by word of mouth, and simple invitations from students and peers.

This year, we are working towards more inclusivity and plan to achieve that through building relationships with educators in the Grand Valley. Teachers and counselors are the ones who most strongly understand students' passions and interests, so as we strive towards reaching out to a wider range of students, we hope to gather help from

these leaders in our community.

This year, we also saw the most important election of our lifetimes play out. Of course, every young person in America had their eyes on the presidential race, but we also saw congressional, state, and local races across the nation be won or lost within a few points.

Last year we registered over 400 students to vote in their very first primaries as the power of voter mobilization and activation was more prevalent than ever. As a program centered around helping young people make positive change, we want to continue our effort to help as

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OUR 2021 WEST SLOPE YOUTH VOTE INTERNS

Western Colorado Alliance is happy to announce **Liliana Flanigan** and **Carlee Allen** are the West Slope Youth Vote Interns for 2021.

Carlee Allen is a writer and community organizer. She recently graduated high school and plans to attend Whitman College to major in Writing and Public Discourse, as well as Studio Art. Following her college journey, she hopes to continue her activism through pursuing journalism and creating art.

Liliana Flanigan is a community organizer based in Grand Junction, Colorado. A current student at New York University, she plans to earn a Bachelor's degree in Politics. She hopes to follow her college years with a long career of public service, and have a constant impact on her community.



LILIANA FLANIGAN



CARLEE ALLEN

Many victories — and more work ahead!

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enables ranchers to sell portions of their livestock in local markets rather than having to vend the entire animal. This would allow smaller local ranchers to easily be able to sell their meat to consumers without needing to get approval by a licensed public health

This bill allows local ranchers to do so, helping combat the environmentally unstable practices of agribusiness both on the seller and consumer ends.

The next bill was **HB21-1131: Cooperative Electric Associations Governance Requirements**. (What a mouthful!) This bill, simplified,

the broader corporation rather than that of their constituents. Thanks to this bill, members of electric cooperatives will receive the representation needed to ensure fair pricing and local control for energy.

The last priority bill is **HB21-1119: Suicide Prevention, Intervention, & Postvention**. This bill hits particularly close to home for me, a young member of Grand Junction society who has seen the devastating effects of suicide firsthand. This bill aims to lower the suicide rate by enhancing care for those affected by suicide, as well as adding the concept of "postvention" to the state's goals. Postvention looks at caring for those who have attempted and learning from them, giving us a better understanding of how to prevent future attempts while also caring for a person in need.

The great news is that all three of these bills not only have passed the legislature, but have been signed into law by the governor! It is clear that this has been a successful year for

positive legislature, which is my personal takeaway so far.

As for immediate next steps, there are quite a few. (Don't worry, they're fun!):

First, the session might still be extended by the governor, or there might be a special session. This is so that we can finish the hard work we have all started (such as SB21-200).

And the Legislative Committee is excited to announce that we will be releasing a legislative scorecard, so look forward to seeing that by the end of the summer.

We also will be having a legislative celebration at some point in the near future, and we would love for anyone to come join us in the fun.

Finally, there are in-district meetings with legislators coming up, so we would love to have you meet and discuss with your representatives about the issues.

Thank you all for a great session!

Despite this year being hectic for everyone — legislators, the governor, lobbyists, and interest groups — we have, as a state, pulled together to still accomplish meaningful legislation. Such should be celebrated, even if there is still room to grow and things to do.

agency, thereby helping smaller ranchers to more easily sell their livestock. The meat would have a disclaimer stating this.

Without this, it was becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to secure a public health agency inspector, making it impossible to sell their meat in portions at smaller prices.

would put basic democratic checks on the electrical companies such as Tri-State which distribute power to local cooperatives. The law will ensure that consumers have fair and appropriate representation.

Without these democratic checks, the cooperative boards were acting in the interest of



by Nick Allan
Community Organizer

When it comes to battling climate change, all solutions are on the table. In the case of the Western Colorado Alliance local food and agriculture team, we are pursuing the advantages of soil health.

The USDA defines “soil health” as, “the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans.” In practice, we see this as Dawn Trujillo, a local farmer in Grand Junction, said, “I do not grow food, I grow soil.” This focus away from the plants themselves and into what is actually growing the food has a multitude of advantages.

With regards to the climate crisis, soil health has two leading functions:

One, healthier soils have the ability to sequester more carbon. Just as a healthy tree soaks in carbon dioxide and releases oxygen, soil microbes produce the same function. Soil that is able to sequester carbon dioxide is then able to use that storage

to grow the plants. This is why unhealthy soil needs so much fertilizer to grow a food — and fertilizers are a major user of fossil fuels.

Second, healthy soil needs less water. The Western Slope is running dry. Currently, we are in one of the worst droughts we have seen in a generation. Alliance member and rancher Tony Prendergast stated, “The dry conditions really started about July 2019 and then, last year was bad, and this year is making to be quite a bit worse.”

When we have soils that have more organic matter within them, those nutrients absorb water and release it slowly back into the soil. It is the difference between trying to drink out of a fire hose and a water fountain. The destruction of soil is detrimental to our water supply.

Aside from the benefits of climate change, healthy soil is beneficial to our food production. Farms and ranches that invest in taking care of their soil see higher yields and healthier produce. This factor is key when we seek to have local farms feed local people. Currently, only 2%

The importance of

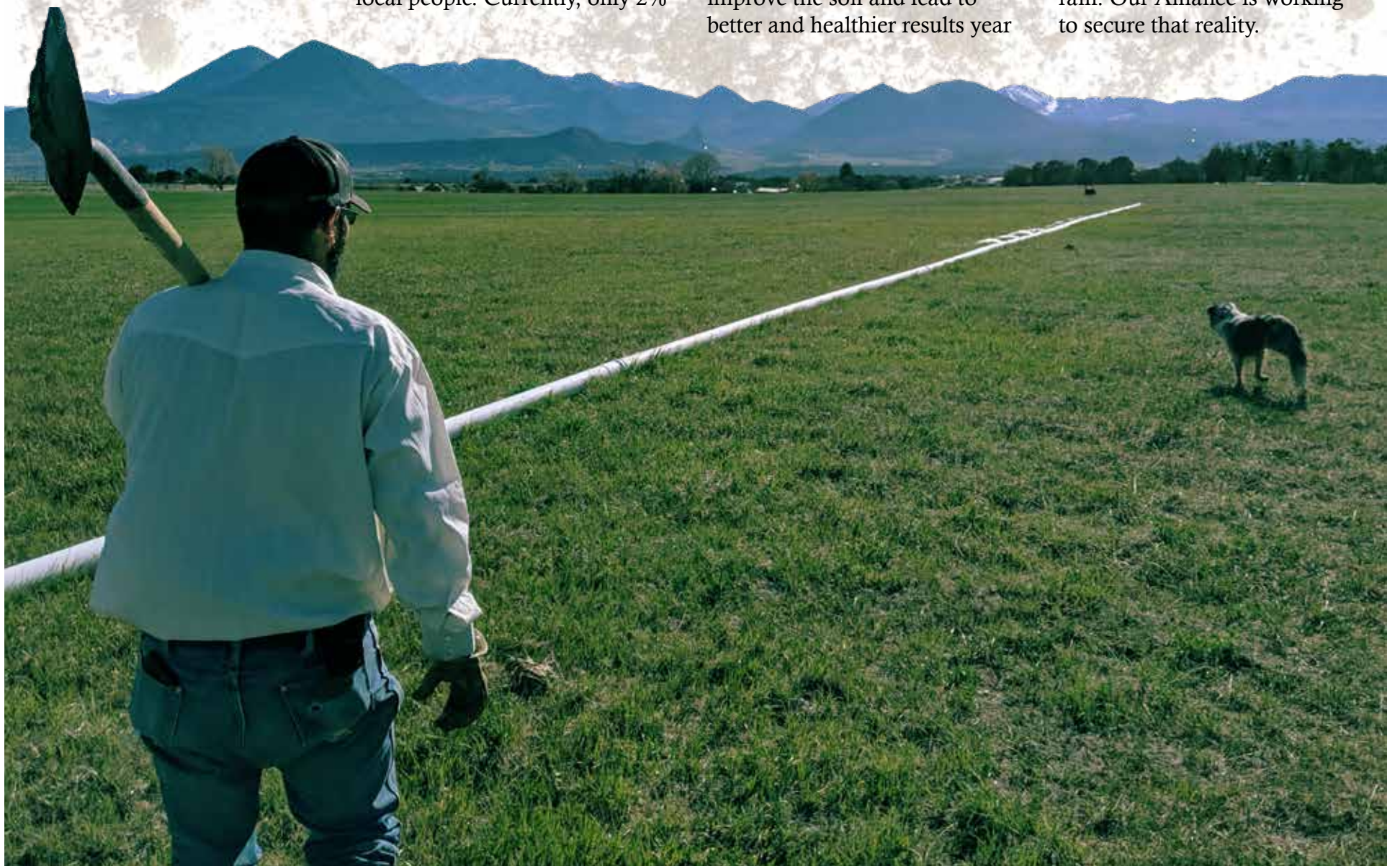
SOIL HEALTH

How paying attention to the dirt itself can help us battle climate change.

of the food we eat in this area comes from the Western Slope. There are many reasons for this, but one is supply. Western Slope farm land is typically split up into multiple smaller plots, unlike the farms of the plains. Instead of having vast acres, our producers must look to make the most out of their land. This makes soil health crucial. Soil health has a compounding value. If done correctly, the act of farming will continuously improve the soil and lead to better and healthier results year

after year, allowing more food to be produced on smaller plots.

To spread the word about the benefits of soil health, members are visiting with local producers to learn more about their practices and what they need in support. If you know a local producer, let us know. We’d love to speak with them. At the end of the day, it’s worth remembering one simple fact: Life is dependent on six inches of topsoil and rain. Our Alliance is working to secure that reality.



Jason Wrich of Wrich Ranches, seen here irrigating his fields in Crawford, Colorado, on May 12, 2021. Wrich Ranches is a first generation cattle ranch specializing in grass-fed registered Black Angus cattle, naturally raised on sprinkler-irrigated grass-alfalfa hay.

Celebrating Public Lands Day with a Hike!

 by **Karen Rose**
Alliance Member

What better way to celebrate Public Lands Day than to hike through one of Colorado’s beautiful red-rock canyons with a group of new and old friends?

On May 15, several of us, led by Western Colorado Alliance members Lisa Eckert and

the Dominguez Escalante National Conservation Area, comprising over 200,000 acres.

Our group included hikers from the Grand Junction area, Ridgway, and Telluride.

We met at Bridgeport Road off Highway 50, and drove the three-mile dirt road to the trailhead on the Gunnison



Jim Riddel, hiked into Big Dominguez Canyon, a fairly new addition to our public lands located south of Grand Junction.

Along the way we saw towering red canyon walls, spring flowers, the full-flowing Big Dominguez Creek, waterfalls, Native pictographs, and even a bighorn sheep who watched us from a rock high above us. And we heard some good stories about the canyon’s

River. From there, we took the trail south along working railroad tracks to a footbridge, bypassing a questionable-looking ranch bridge with big “Do Not Enter” signs on it.

Crossing the river, we followed the Gunnison to the Dominguez Creek confluence. Turning into the canyon, we came across a group of young people happily enjoying a swimming hole at the bottom of a waterfall carved deeply into hard black rock that a member of our group said was an example of the oldest rock formation on earth.

It was working up to being a hot day, and the water looked cool and refreshing; by the end of our hike, several of us were dipping our hats into it.



history from fellow hikers.

Big Dominguez Canyon is part of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness managed by the BLM. Its 66,000+ acres, which also include Little Dominguez Canyon, were added to the National Wilderness Preservation System in 2009 after many years of hard work by people who wanted to preserve it.

The Wilderness is part of

About a mile up, the trail splits; to the left, Little Dominguez Canyon follows a creek to an old cabin built by Billy Rambo for his family over a hundred years ago. We turned right into Big Dominguez canyon, following the trail slightly uphill. Pretty soon we could look down onto Big Dominguez Creek from the rocky edge of a canyon-within-the-canyon; just above where we stood were a series of small falls with pools, and these were typical of the formations

we saw all along the creek.

We stopped for lunch at a waterfall upstream, where we were glad for the shade and cool water and the sweet music coming from a nearby trekker playing his flute.

While we ate, another of our group told us stories about the canyon, like the two Franciscan missionaries named Dominguez and Escalante who passed through the canyons in 1776 and gave the area its name.

Just beyond our picnic spot, we came to a huge boulder covered with pictographs —pictures chipped into the stone by Ute Indians a few hundred years ago, or by the Fremont people over a thousand years ago, or maybe by some of both.

Some of the images are easy to identify — a bighorn sheep, or a bear paw. Others are mysterious. Rock faces like this, with so many images, are often called “Newspaper” rocks.



We’re fortunate here in Colorado to have access to over 22 million acres of public lands. Hiking in one of our spectacular canyons was a great way to celebrate Colorado’s fifth Public Lands Day.



Karen Rose is a Mesa County Master Gardener, a member of the Western Colorado Alliance Soil Health committee, and an avid hiker. She lives in Fruita.

The 30 by 30 vision for our public lands



by **Nick Allan**
Community Organizer

The Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act continues. Western Colorado Alliance has a long history working on CORE. We would like to highlight that CORE should be receiving a hearing by the time of this printing, or in the near future. (Fingers crossed!) The CORE Act, and its commitment to conserving 400,000 acres of public lands, has become even more relevant with the recent release of the Biden administration's plan to combat climate change.

The plan, known as Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful, is a 24-page report outlining how America plans to conserve

30% of our land and water by 2030. This conservation will remove the ability to extract resources from these lands.

This plan is based on scientific research that claims this conservation effort is a requirement to combat climate change. Our

Alliance is committed to these protections and has been pursuing this goal since our founding. To help in your discussions with friends and colleagues, we offer the eight principles of the plan. We recommend reading them in full. Here are the highlights:

Principle 1: Pursue a Collaborative and Inclusive Approach to Conservation

Americans have already shown their willingness to work together on conservation projects, for this to work, the "spirit of collaboration" must lead this work.



Principle 2: Conserve America's Lands and Waters for the Benefit of All People

Conservation is more than just protecting lands. Conservation brings benefits to peoples lives. This plan needs to have a

human center focus and make sure it benefits all communities.

Principle 3: Support Locally Led and Locally Designed Conservation Efforts

The federal government needs to work in partnership with local groups. Those that are closest to the lands with the most experience need to lead the way in conservation efforts.

Principle 4: Honor Tribal Sovereignty and Support the Priorities of Tribal Nations

Federal agencies must support Indigenous priorities in conservation. Tribal sovereignty must be respected in particular with their land, water, hunting and fishing rights, and sacred sites that must be protected.

Principle 5: Pursue Conservation and Restoration Approaches that Create Jobs and Support Healthy Communities

In order to reach this plan's conservation goals, there will be a massive investment. This investment will create jobs, and bolster industries, such as outdoor recreation, stimulating our economy.

Principle 6: Honor Private Property Rights and Support the Voluntary Stewardship Efforts of Private Landowners and Fishers

This plan does not intend to remove lands from the hands of landowners. Instead, the goal is to use financial incentives to assist private landowners in converting more of their land into conservation lands.

Principle 7: Use Science as a Guide

Science has proven the need for this conservation effort. The ability to reverse the climate crisis is available and being guided by science will be key to its success.

Principle 8: Build on Existing Tools and Strategies with an Emphasis on Flexibility and Adaptive Approaches

We have seen successes in conservation already and it is important to provide more resources to those. We must also continue to pursue new approaches to solving this crisis. With much of this plan being dependent on local voices leading the effort, our Alliance is committed to making sure the western slope is a part of the conversation.

Colorado Builds the Plan for a "Just Transition" for coal communities



by **Emily Hornback**
Executive Director

As coal communities grapple with existing economic decline and public health risks made significantly worse by the COVID-19 crisis, the Revitalizing the Economy of Coal Communities by Leveraging Local Activities and Investing More Act (RECLAIM) Act as well as legislation to reauthorize the Abandoned Mine Lands fund have been re-introduced in the House and Senate with bipartisan support to spur immediate job creation and help ensure coal country is a part of the economic recovery. And it is moving! The RECLAIM Act and AML reauthorization were heard in the House Natural Resource Committee on May 27 (ad more after hearing).

Roger Carver (who worked in coal mining in the Nucla area for 24 years and served as

president of the United Mine Workers local union) says, "As a former coal miner and resident of a coal community dealing with the closing of both a plant and a mine, I am glad to see Congress move forward with mine reclamation funding. The RECLAIM Act and the Abandoned Mine Lands Fund have long had bipartisan support and will help communities like Nucla move forward into the future. RECLAIM alone will bring \$27 million in investment back to Colorado's coal communities to put miners back to work cleaning up old mines and diversifying our rural economies. It's time to move forward, not backwards, and invest in the better future for our kids."

The introduction of this legislation provides Congress with a bipartisan step forward to turn that potential into reality. Along with investing in the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund, reauthorizing the

Abandoned Mine Land Fund and passing the RECLAIM Act would be a start to the important work to ensure an equitable and sustainable economic future in coal communities and a bipartisan victory for the people and places that powered our country for generations.

Communities across the United States that have historically depended on the coal industry have been hit doubly hard in the last year, with more mines and coal plants expected to close as the coal economy's decline is accelerated by COVID-19. By investing \$1 billion in projects to clean up abandoned coal mines and the waters they pollute in 20 states, the bipartisan RECLAIM Act is a vital step toward strengthening our infrastructure, creating thousands of new jobs, and sparking economic development and recovery in coal communities across the country.

It is estimated that over \$60

million would be distributed to Colorado communities alone and help make our own Colorado Just Transition Action plan a reality.

As the urgent need to act grows, so has momentum for reclamation opportunities. In the Executive Order signed in January, President Biden recognized the economic development and job creation possibilities created by reclamation. Now, with the American Jobs Act introduced in Congress and a historic infrastructure package in the works, RECLAIM is closer to passage than it has been in decades. With bills like RECLAIM, we are taking real steps to "build back better" and create a healthy, just and self-reliant economy for Western Colorado and all of rural America.

Stay tuned for ways to support this major federal legislation throughout the summer!

Recent big local wins in clean energy!



by Joel Dyar
Community Organizer

In recent *Clarion* issues, we've discussed some of the groundbreaking state policy wins happening right here in Colorado for the clean energy economy. This month, we're going to celebrate some of the local level transformations taking place – and what they mean for climate pollution reduction, jobs, and new opportunities. None of these would be possible without the local leadership of Alliance members and the staff capacity our members and funders make possible. Congrats on the harvest of all your years of hard work and kind support!

DELTA-MONTROSE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION



This week, rural electric co-op DMEA announced that it saved members \$2.7M in 2020 after successfully exiting its long term contract with supplier Tri-State, whose costly rates and coal-heavy portfolio weren't changing fast enough for DMEA's liking. The shift to new supplier Guzman energy allowed DMEA to secure its strongest financial position in seven years despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, DMEA is working with Guzman energy to bring a massive solar installation - one large enough to supply 18,000 homes - to a site just south of Delta. The Garnet Mesa Solar Project is expected to create 350 to 400 installation jobs and millions in property taxes for local communities.

DMEA's trailblazing cost-savings, local generation and jobs, and increased supply resiliency may soon inspire solar-skeptical neighboring cooperatives to follow suit.

HOLY CROSS ENERGY



Like Delta-Montrose Electric, Holy Cross Energy is a rural electric cooperative. Holy Cross serves the most diverse geography of any Colorado electric co-op, stretching from Battlement Mesa in the far West through Parachute and Rifle to the mountain communities of Vail, Carbondale, and Aspen. Holy Cross has adopted a region-leading plan to reach 100% renewables supply by 2030 - a pledge made all the more remarkable given the broad mix of deeply conservative and deeply liberal communities it serves.

Recently, Holy Cross announced that it had crossed 50% renewables supply for the first time and is set to reach 70% within two or so years. What's more, Holy Cross has saved over \$16M so far in this switch to advanced technologies, allowing it to return \$4.5M directly to ratepayer pockets, invest over \$3M in wildfire and grid resiliency, and plan new investments in electric vehicles infrastructure and battery storage.

MESA COUNTY CPACE



After years of local organizing from Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County and a broad coalition including the local Cleantech Business Roundtable, the Mesa County Board of Commissioners recently approved a CPACE financing program for Mesa County residents.

CPACE — or Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy — will now provide local commercial property owners with a powerful financing mechanism for new clean energy, energy efficiency, and agricultural energy and water efficiency investments. CPACE financing allows building and property owners to access the cost savings of new clean technologies — including rooftop solar at cheaper rates than the grid — without paying the large upfront costs all at once. Loans are made by local lenders like Alpine Bank and processed by the county.

With this ruling, Mesa County joins neighboring counties like Garfield and Delta, where large building owners have already taken advantage of Colorado's CPACE program.

What Biden's "pause" means for us



by **Brian Williams**
Community Organizer

Since the last publication of *The Clarion*, our Alliance has carefully monitored the evolution of the Biden Administration's policy toward oil and gas development on federal lands. President Biden has signalled that he intends to take major steps toward reducing the United States' carbon footprint, which is largely encapsulated in his goal of conserving 30% of America's lands and waters by the end of 2030 (the 30x30 plan). To that end, the administration has issued a temporary pause on leasing to oil and gas operators until an evaluation of the federal government's approach to managing fossil fuel production on public lands is completed.

This evaluation comes at a crucial point for the United States both domestically and abroad. America is second only to China in terms of producing carbon emissions — a dubious position from which to reclaim moral authority to lead global cooperation to address climate change. Meanwhile, the Biden administration must tend to the economic needs of a nation that

is both still struggling to recover from the impact of COVID and spooked by a cyber attack in May that temporarily shut down a major fuel pipeline on the East Coast.

The oil and gas industry has seized both the pandemic and the fuel disruption as talking points to push back against the federal pause on leasing, claiming that the move increases U.S. dependence on foreign energy production and is costing the nation jobs and economic development opportunities. Curiously, they don't tend to mention the large number of leases that have already been stockpiled by operators throughout the United States which are projected to keep production at current levels for years to come.

Last year, Senator Michael Bennet introduced two key pieces of legislation that would tie federal dollars for plugging and reclamation of wells throughout the U.S. to more robust bonding standards, and would improve both transparency and local involvement in leasing decisions overseen by the Bureau of Land Management. In the House, Representative Fernández has introduced legislation that also



On January 27, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to begin halting oil and gas leasing on federal lands and waters.

seeks to address orphaned wells, which includes an annual fee for idle wells on public lands.

For those of us living in Western Colorado, these changes cannot come soon enough. Last year, *The Washington Post* reported that the average temperature along the Colorado/Utah border had risen over 2 degrees centigrade — over double that of the rest of the nation. This is particularly troubling for a region that has been gripped by historic drought for the last 20 years. That the snowpack generating southwest Colorado's headwaters has measured at less than 40% of its typical capacity

this year does not bode well for residents in the region.

With the stakes so high and the overwhelming majority of federal land in Colorado located in the western side of the continental divide, it is imperative that residents have a say in how the federal government proceeds with its management of fossil fuel production, and limits future greenhouse gas emissions. Our Alliance will continue to be at the forefront of this effort, pressing for stronger protections and transparency in the process.

Our way of life depends on it.

An update on West Slope Youth Vote!

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many students understand their ballots, how to vote, and why issues are important.

When registering students to vote, students filled out surveys to tell us which issues are most important to them.

These questions ranged from "What do you like about living in Western CO?" to "Rate how important these issues are to you."

We found that 51% of all students surveyed thought that the best part of living here was access to the outdoors, and that some key issues for many students were mental health support, affordable higher education, and better job opportunities. We have taken these responses from real students to legislators, and advocated for legislative

and community solutions to these important issues.

Getting HB21-1119 to pass is one of the organization's greatest victories and is an example of the work that can be done when we listen to the voices of our youth.

One of our most important values is making student's voices heard, and we intend to continue doing so by ensuring we hear from students and communicate with them about their needs. Our past interns have been able to learn about legislation and tracking bills as they have prompted many legislative solutions to help young people, and we plan to continue this work to make progress for our peers on the Western Slope.

To keep up with our progress, please give us a like on Facebook or a follow on Instagram @ WestSlopeYouthVote.

Will Colorado be left holding the bag for oil and gas operators?

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can begin. Operators in Colorado can bond up to 99 wells for just \$60,000, and for \$100,000, there is no limit at all. As a result, there are wells throughout the state that have less than \$1,000 in bonds as assurance that operators will clean up after themselves.

There are some 60,000 documented wells throughout Colorado; of those, over half produce less than 15 barrels of oil or 90,000 cubic feet of natural gas per day.

These low producing wells (colloquially referred to as "stripper wells") are approaching the end of their useful production life. Without adequate financial assurances, these wells will frequently be

transferred to smaller operators, who will pump the last dredges, declare bankruptcy, and leave the mess for the state (that is, taxpayers) to clean up.

Unfortunately, bonding rates are so low that Colorado only has about 2% of the funds needed to cover the liability all wells represent.

If Colorado fails to take action, unplugged wells will continue to vent dangerous fumes and climate change inducing methane into the air, and pollute our groundwater as aging infrastructure corrodes due to lack of maintenance. As such, our Alliance will continue to fight for policy solutions that promote public health and economic justice, and will be at the table to remind the COGCC of their new mission throughout the financial assurance rulemaking.