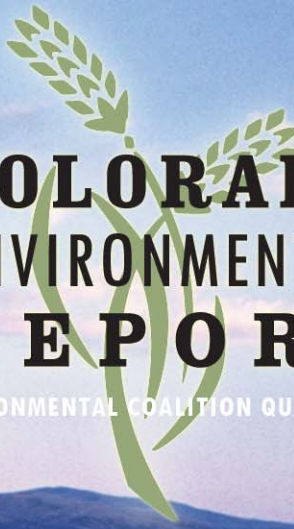


Summer 2010



**COLORADO
ENVIRONMENTAL
REPORT**

COLORADO ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Victory for Vermillion

What Kind of Colorado Do You Want?

Moving Away from Coal

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www.ourcolorado.org

The Colorado Environmental Coalition works to protect Colorado's environment by educating and mobilizing citizens, providing technical and organizing assistance to environmental organizations and other allies, and uniting and supporting them in coalitions that defend and preserve Colorado's natural heritage and quality of life.

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We Have Come a Long Way

Elise Jones, Executive Director - elise@cecenviro.org



There is no shortage of beautiful scenery in our great state of Colorado. But one of the prettiest sights I've seen this year was actually inside a building – looking out

at the crowd from the podium at CEC's "Rebel with a Cause" gala in June. From that vantage point, I was able to witness firsthand the growing size and power of the Colorado conservation community. And let me tell you, it was a beautiful sight to behold.

We have come a long way.

In 1965 a handful of avid hikers came together to create the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, in recognition of the fact that if the people who recreated in Colorado's great outdoors didn't do something, the wild places and open spaces they loved so much would soon be gone. Forty-five years later, this volunteer-led effort has become the Colorado Environmental Coalition we know today – with 18 paid staff, 3,000 individual members and more than 100 different partner organizations.

And when CEC first started its "Rebel with a Cause" event nine years ago, 75 conservation activists gathered at the Wynkoop Brewery to informally quaff beers, eat chips and cheese dip, and listen to some words of inspiration through an iffy P.A. system. This year, nearly 500 of you gussied up and joined with local and state lawmakers and agency officials to over-fill the Seawall Ballroom of the Denver Center for Performing Arts, where you celebrated recent conservation successes and were wowed by Terry Tempest William's eloquent call to action. What a thrill to hear the buzz of amazement and watch people's eyes widen in disbelief as they walked through the

doors and saw the big ballroom packed to the gills with such a large and enthusiastic crowd. I could tell people were thinking what I was thinking: The Colorado conservation community has really become a force to be reckoned with.

I'll say it has.

Certainly looking back over the past decade, our upward trajectory of progress is unequivocal. As few as seven years ago, the conservation community struggled to pass even one significant conservation bill at the state legislature. Most of our time was spent playing defense against anti-environmental proposals and vainly trying to get the environment on lawmakers' radars. This year, in contrast, we helped enact more than 30 conservation bills – just as we have for each of the past three sessions.

A decade ago, Colorado's Governor – Bill Owens – wouldn't give the conservation community or environmental issues the time of day. This year at CEC's Gala, we lauded current Governor Bill Ritter for his leadership in pursuing a New Energy Economy for Colorado and the nation. In partnership with conservationists, Ritter penned into law more than 120 different measures benefiting Colorado's air, water, wildlife and lands during his tenure.

We really have come a long way.

And this progress hasn't just been under the Gold Dome. Looking around the state there are a number of examples of the community's growing effectiveness. Up in northwest Colorado, for example, back in 2001 CEC and our conservation partners were just establishing a beachhead in this sparsely populated but wildland-rich corner of the state, while Moffat County was pushing to take over management of the region's federal public lands and increase resource extraction there. This summer, after years of hard work, we celebrated a remarkable victory when the Bureau of Land Management announced that the 77,000-acre Vermillion Basin – home to

stunning badlands and ancient petroglyphs – would be placed off-limits to oil and gas drilling!

Of course we still have a long, long way to go. Climate legislation has just been declared dead in Congress and forward-thinking energy legislation has only a slightly better prognosis in the Senate – despite the Gulf oil spill's grim reminder of the price of our fossil fuel addiction. What's more, our recent conservation gains are threatened by the impending tempest of the November elections, which could erode the progress we've made in translating Coloradans' conservation values into policy wins for our state's environment. Now is no time to sit on our laurels and relax.

But before we put our noses back to the grindstone to redouble our efforts to educate and engage Coloradans on the need to better safeguard what we love so much about our state, let's raise our glasses in a toast. Here's to the impressive progress the conservation community has made and the victories we've enjoyed. And may the next 45 years at Colorado Environmental Coalition be as fruitful as the last 45!

Elise Jones
Executive Director

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER..... 1

SPOTLIGHT STORIES:

Victory for Vermillion..... 2

What Kind of Colorado Do You Want 4

HB1365: Moving Away from Coal..... 5

NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE

Rebel 2010 Recap 7

Victory for Vermillion

Luke Schafer, Northwest Organizer - luke@ceceviro.org

On June 29th the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced that it would be closing the stunning Vermillion Basin in northwest Colorado to future oil and gas leasing and development in its upcoming Resource Management Plan. This great victory was the culmination of over a decade of work by CEC and the conservation community to preserve one of the West's last remaining wild places.

Lying roughly 80 miles northwest of Craig in Moffat County, Vermillion Basin has been the focal point in the effort to preserve over 300,000 acres of remaining wildlands in the northwest corner of Colorado. Spanning more than 4,700 square miles, Moffat County covers an area nearly twice the size of Delaware, with a population under 15,000. However, amongst all that rural country, the 80,000 acres of Vermillion Basin has remained a hot spot of controversy, pitting sides into the stereotypical and erroneous argument of "economic development versus preservation."

Despite Craig's remote nature and tough reputation, CEC has had an office in this rural county seat of Moffat County since 2004 and a presence there for far longer. During that time the fight to protect Vermillion Basin, and the other remarkable resources and values of the area, took more twists than a mountain pass. First, the BLM found Vermillion Basin to contain over 77,000 acres of wilderness character, which was contrary to the local government's hopes of facilitating development. The BLM decision drew several responses from Moffat County, including an attempt

by the county to assert control of federal lands within the county through the "Northwest Colorado Working Landscape Trust." Then the Moffat

as a potential management alternative during their Resource Management Plan revision.

Unfortunately, despite over two and a half years and hundreds of hours of meetings, no agreement could be reached, much due to the unwillingness by Moffat County officials and industry representatives to consider designating any place, let alone Vermillion Basin, off limits to leasing and drilling.

Luckily, in 2007 Colorado gained a conservation leader in Gov. Bill Ritter,

who along with then Sen. Ken Salazar and others, went and viewed Vermillion Basin first hand. The group of Colorado leaders took a helicopter and landed upon Lookout Mountain, a prominent observation point above the basin, and like so many before him, the Governor looked over the precipice and saw something special, describing the visit as a "spiritual experience" and stating in no uncertain terms that Vermillion Basin was a place that deserved protection and should be placed off-limits to drilling.

Needless to say, this drew the ire of the Moffat County Commission, but it also highlighted the awe-inspiring nature that this remote and stark landscape has upon visitors and how crucial it is to preserve this window into the past. Hope arose

Sam Cox



By preserving Vermillion Basin, we will have the opportunity to not just tell our grandchildren about the wild places of our youth, we'll be able to show them.

County Commission utilized R.S. 2477, an obscure, Civil War-era law, to assert that 2,000 miles of alleged "roads" existed as a way to stave off potential wilderness designations and promote oil and gas development.

The growing contention around natural resource politics led the BLM to work with local government and stakeholders such as the conservation community, agricultural interests, the oil and gas industry, citizens and other interested parties to create the Northwest Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS). The purpose of this community and consensus-based collaborative group was to ostensibly reach consensus and deliver BLM with a community-generated alternative for BLM to analyze



even further following the nomination of Sen. Salazar to Secretary of the Interior, through the belief that he would bring with him not just a greater priority on bringing balance back to BLM policy, but also a personal understanding of the importance of conserving treasured landscapes like Vermillion Basin.

Meanwhile, working with partners like The Wilderness Society, Center for Native Ecosystems and Colorado Mountain Club, as well as the local Friends of Northwest Colorado, CEC staff fostered and expanded the diverse coalition of local voices calling for protection of the region's unique wildland, wildlife and cultural values. This summer all of these efforts paid off.

In the end, one single irrefutable fact has always remained: Vermillion Basin is too wild to drill. At some point in the not-so-distant future, places untrammelled by humans will be the resource with currency, not hydrocarbons sucked from the earth. By preserving Vermillion Basin, we will have the opportunity to not just tell our grandchildren about the wild places of our youth, we'll be able to show them. This June, the BLM agreed with the notion of conserving a little piece of history and stated that it will be closing Vermillion Basin to mineral leasing and development in their upcoming RMP.

Unfortunately, the Moffat County Commission has continued to rail against any plan that does not open Vermillion Basin to leasing and development. Also, Rep. John Salazar recently jumped into the fray stating that he "has always been adamant" about opening a portion of Vermillion Basin to development and will be joining the Commissioners in writing a letter to his brother, Sec. Salazar. While it is disappointing that

some still believe that ruining the unique nature of Vermillion Basin is a worthwhile trade-off for some potential modest natural gas resources and minor tax revenue, happily it seems that BLM is resolute in its decision, for which the agency deserves to be applauded.

On a personal note, Vermillion Basin isn't just a "treasured landscape" on a list of conservation targets for environmental groups. It is in the truest sense a refuge for the self, a place seemingly constructed for reflection while promoting the understanding that it was one of the few remaining vestiges of a time lost to our own insatiable progress. For many years I have taken solace in its intimidating and indomitable nature, as it has always provided the perspective that I have sought out. Knowing that others will have the same opportunity to search for peace within its crimson bluffs and riparian oases gives me a sense



Sam Cox

From sweeping sagebrush basins to rainbow-colored badlands, the Little Snake Resource Area's public lands boast some of Colorado's most rugged and wild landscapes.

of satisfaction that we can still do right, even if sometimes despite ourselves.

For that and so many other reasons, I hope you all will raise a glass with me and celebrate a conservation victory that future generations will thank us for.

The Little Snake Field Office Final Resource Management Plan is scheduled to be released on August 13th. For more information on the plan and what you can do to help, please visit ourcolorado.org and savevermillion.org.

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF NW COLORADO

The mission of the members of the Friends of Northwest Colorado is to protect, preserve and conserve our unique local natural resources so that all generations will be able to experience their splendor. Additionally, our mission is to educate and to be a voice for people who believe in the inherent value of wildlife, water, air, wilderness, and the natural landscape. Friends of Northwest Colorado activities have included: raising funds for an annual scholarship given to a Moffat County High School graduate, stewardship initiatives including clean-up days on public lands, and river and forest restoration, as well as engaging in regional planning processes.

Contact Sasha to get involved! 970-824-5241
or at sasha@cecenviro.org

What kind of Colorado do you want?

Becky Long, Water Caucus Coordinator - becky@cecenviro.org

Voters in Colorado’s November election will be asked to decide on three measures that – if passed – would have a devastating effect on Colorado communities. Amendment 60, Amendment 61 and Proposition 101 are statewide initiatives that would dramatically change Colorado’s future by causing massive job losses, impoverishing school districts, halting the development and improvement of state infrastructure, and pushing the state to cut 20-60% of funds for environmental programs. Just as our economy is beginning to grow, these three measures are poised to stamp out any further recovery and worsen Colorado’s precarious fiscal situation.

As much as these three proposals stir concern and controversy, they also call for a larger conversation about what kind of Colorado we want to live in. Multiple tax reductions contained in the proposals will mean fewer resources for public activities of all types. If these three proposals pass, we will see large cuts to schools, local governments, health care and other services, as well as significant reductions to funds which support water delivery and treatment, environmental monitoring, transit and

natural resource management efforts. To cope with these initiatives, we will endure a host of increased fees and the elimination of publicly supported infrastructure and loan bonding programs. Not only will we be unable to expand programs which protect our natural resources, but we will also see a systematic reversal of efforts which have successfully protected our environment for years. The combined impact of these measures is estimated to be more than \$6 billion per year to state and local governments; Colorado simply cannot afford to see these measures pass.

These three measures threaten our way of life and our vital services, but as citizens of Colorado we are empowered to make a better decision for our future. By voting NO on these initiatives, we can take the next steps to prepare for our future, not undermine it. Citizens have the choice this election year: we can choose to grind our government to a halt, leave our water and air unprotected, close trails and access to public lands, and threaten the health



Young Coloradans enjoying Eldorado Canyon State Park.

Colorado State Parks

of our wildlife populations; or we can decide that pragmatic investments in our state that protect our quality of life and natural resources are a sound investment in our future.

The encouraging news is that a bi-partisan host of interests from agricultural and business interests to the health care and environmental communities have joined together to oppose these initiatives. Statewide editorial boards are speaking out against the measures and elected leaders like Governor Bill Ritter and State Senator Josh Penry have called these three “bad policy”. CEC is working with our coalition partners to engage our collective members to help defeat these

Amendment 60 cuts school funding over \$1 billion each year by reducing property taxes that fund education and requires enterprise zones and other authorities to pay property taxes.

Environmental impacts:

Amendment 60 forces massive cuts in education and would require state legislators to decide how to backfill K-12 dollars despite the lack of revenue to meet this requirement. As a result, environmental programs such as efforts to ensure healthy rivers, promote clean energy, mitigate bark beetle impacts and ensure

water quality would see cuts of between 20%-60% of current funding levels. The requirement that enterprises pay property tax will also mean that the state Division of Wildlife, wastewater treatment facilities and other enterprises and authorities will have to pay property tax likely resulting in increased fees on customers to offset the costs.



three measures. In the coming months you can find more information on what you can do to help: visit our website (ourcolorado.org), check our blog (ourcolorado.org/blog), and look for us

on Facebook to find out the latest news. Please join us in opposing these three initiatives – don't let these ill-advised policies undermine the future we all want for our state.

For more information and to get involved on this issue, check out ourcolorado.org/election-2010.

Amendment 61 prohibits the state from borrowing or issuing bonds and places severe limitations on local government borrowing, making it nearly impossible to invest in the future.

Environmental impacts:

Amendment 61 prohibits most investments at the state and local level impacting the state's ability to build critical water and clean energy infrastructure and preventing RTD from finishing FasTracks.

Proposition 101 significantly reduces the state income tax and other fees that fund vital services

Environmental impacts:

Proposition 101 forces the state to undertake massive budget cuts to vital services that would likely impact funding for transportation, parks & outdoor recreation, water quality and clean energy. It would also reverse the conservation community's hard work to invest in critical transportation & transit infrastructure through the passage of FASTER in 2009.

HB 1365: Moving Away from Coal

Charlie Montgomery, Energy Organizer - charlie@cecenviro.org

The passage earlier this year of House Bill 1365, the Clean Air, Clean Jobs Act, was an important step forward for two of the conservation community's most challenging campaigns: cleaning up the air on Colorado's Front Range and curbing our global warming pollution. At the center of both efforts is the problem of coal, which has always been both blessing and curse. For years it has offered us a potent, plentiful, and relatively cheap source of power. Today, it meets two-thirds of our electricity needs. But coal is also incredibly dirty; even with technologies to clean up the combustion process, burning coal to generate electricity pollutes our skies with high levels of sulfur dioxide, a big source of Denver's infamous Brown Cloud. Burning coal also emits nitrogen dioxides, key constituents in health-harming ozone, and mercury, a potent neurotoxin.

The costs to public health are enormous – over 65,000 children in the Denver metro area alone suffer from asthma. With its harmful effects on cardiovascular health, metro-area coal plant pollution has been directly linked to adult mortality rates. And if that weren't enough, coal-powered generation is also our nation's primary source of global warming pollution. Any serious effort to curb global warming over the next three decades must begin today with phasing out coal.

HB 1365 makes critical progress towards reducing these impacts by creating a national model for coal-plant retirements. It requires Colorado's investor-owned utilities, including Xcel Energy, to propose plans for phasing out or modifying at least 900 megawatts or half of their coal-fired generation (whichever is smaller). After the plans gain state approval in late



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Coal-powered generation is our nation's primary source of global warming pollution.

2010, implementation will proceed in steps, with the final stages occurring no later than 2017. What makes this landmark process possible is the convergence of several factors. First, the coal plants in question are surprisingly old, with generating units dating back as far as the Eisenhower era. In calling

cont. on page 8



2010 Rebel with a Cause Recap

This year's Rebel with a Cause Gala was a smashing success! A record 475 attendees, volunteers and staff gathered in Denver's Seawell Ballroom on June 9th to meet our "Rebel," Terry Tempest Williams, along with Governor Bill Ritter, Jr., Mayor John Hickenlooper and Conservation Hero Awardees New Belgium Brewing Company and John Ely, on behalf of the Healthy Rivers and Streams Vision of the Roaring Fork

Valley. Guests at the event bid on world-class getaways and top-of-the-line outdoor gear in the silent and live auctions and enjoyed a delicious dinner from Epicurean Catering and complimentary beverages from New Belgium Brewing Company throughout the evening.



Todd Patrick

Elise presents the 2010 rebel with a Cause award to author Terry Tempest Williams.

“In 45 years of dynamic leadership, CEC is not only showing us what is possible, but what is necessary”

(Terry Tempest Williams, 6/9/2010)

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- RedShift Framing
- Rich Rodgers
- Tattered Cover
- Wines off Wynkoop

Interested in sponsoring or donating an item to 2011's 'Rebel with a Cause'?
Contact: Beka Wilson, 303-405-6703, beka@ourcolorado.org



The beautiful Seawell Grand Ballroom, decorated in anticipation for the evening's festivities



The wildly successful silent auction included over 100 items donated by local businesses.



Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper chats with Elise and Kim Jordan at the VIP reception.



The exciting live auction included travel and dining experiences along with this New Belgium cruiser bike.



2010 Rebel with a Cause Terry Tempest Williams, inspired by Colorado activism.



Elise Jones and Governor Bill Ritter look on as New Belgium CEO Kim Jordan receives a Conservation Hero Award.



Amidst applause, Governor Ritter signed House Bill 1538, which promotes water smart homes.



John Ely, accepting a Conservation Hero award on behalf of the Healthy Rivers and Streams Vision of the Roaring Fork Valley.



A few of the over 25 volunteers that made this event possible.

...tons of photos, video of event speakers, and more at ourcolorado.org/rebel2010.



HB 1365 (continued)

for retirements or modifications, HB 1365 is merely accelerating a process that is already demanded by the old, dirty, and inefficient technology now in place. The Denver metro areas is already out of compliance with Clean Air Act standards and, fueled by an increased understanding of the real public health consequences of polluted air, the Environmental Protection Agency plans to further tighten ozone standards this summer. This gives Colorado little choice but to seek bolder air pollution reductions such as those enabled by HB 1365. Second, Colorado is fortunate to have cleaner replacement resources ready to go, a situation further aided by this year's expansion of the state's renewable

energy standard to 30% by 2020, the second highest in the nation. As the old coal units are retired, renewable resources – primarily wind and solar power, energy efficiency programs and natural gas will be deployed to ensure that electricity is delivered reliably and cost-effectively to Colorado's consumers.

The shift towards a clean energy economy is underway, but it will not happen overnight. It will take us through several intermediate steps, not all of them ideal. Burning natural gas, for example, contributes roughly half as much global warming pollution as coal generation, but gas can only be a temporary transition fuel if we

are to reach a zero-emission energy future. Moreover, the consequences of natural gas development cannot be ignored. Keeping landscapes intact and the air and water clean in gas patch communities is no less important than cleaning up the air on the Front Range. That is why, as CEC pushes for full implementation of HB 1365, we are also working hard to reduce any collateral impacts. This includes defending the recently updated rules governing how oil and gas development takes place in Colorado, as well as pursuing other opportunities to reduce natural gas drilling effects on public health and the environment.

CEC is working with a diverse coalition to ensure that we fully implement HB 1365. That means:

- **Maximizing the retirement of Xcel Energy's coal-fired generating capacity;**
- **Maximizing the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency when replacing dirty coal generation;**
- **Minimizing the environmental impacts of any increased use of natural gas; and**
- **Ensuring cost-effectiveness for all Colorado ratepayers.**

To do this CEC is:

- **Building a large, diverse coalition of conservation, business, health, civic and other groups who can advocate for hitting the targets of HB 1365 (primarily retiring or converting at least 900 megawatts of coal-fired generating capacity on the Front Range)**
- **Spreading the word through letters to the editor and op-eds about this unprecedented opportunity to clean up Front Range air**
- **Working with affected neighborhood and citizen groups who are especially concerned about the health of their communities**
- **Ensuring that the voices of such interests, as well as groups potentially affected by increased gas production, are heard by elected officials and at upcoming public hearings**
- **Continuing to advocate for the use of strong protections, best management practices and new technologies where natural gas drilling occurs**



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GoodShop.com is a new online shopping mall which donates up to 30 percent of each purchase to your favorite cause! Hundreds of great stores including Amazon, Target, Gap, Best Buy, eBay, Macy's and Barnes & Noble have teamed up with GoodShop and every time you place an order, you'll be supporting your

favorite cause.

Instructions at: ourcolorado.org/join-donate/supporters

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- I would like to sign up to receive email action alerts
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