

A photograph of several pink flowers, possibly columbines, in a field. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green field under a bright sky.

The Colorado College State of the Rockies Project

Research, Report, Engage!

An Introduction from the President

THE 2011 COLORADO COLLEGE STATE OF THE ROCKIES REPORT CARD

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On behalf of Colorado College, I am especially proud this year to introduce the *2011 State of the Rockies Report Card*. Nine years ago, in my first year as president, the campus undertook a self-examination whose result has been embodied in our “Vision 2010” – a roadmap for building upon our existing strengths and designing new avenues for providing a 21st-century education of distinction. One unique outcome of this introspection is the State of the Rockies Project, now publishing its eighth annual *Report Card*.

Having called the Rockies home for more than 130 years, the college owes an immense debt of gratitude. Indeed our very founding in 1874 came about largely due to General William Palmer, whose vision and foresight established Colorado Springs as a beacon on the eastern plains at the foot of Pikes Peak. The General early on called for an educational institution that has become Colorado College. Over succeeding decades the region has continued both to shape our unique approaches to undergraduate education and to support our liberal arts endeavor. One measure of how important the region remains is the near 30 percent of our students originating from the eight-state Rockies region and near 40 percent of our graduates residing in the region.

In prior years, annual *Report Cards* have examined how specific issues challenge the Rockies region and its natural,

cultural, and historic importance. These 30 prior studies have included regional energy issues, the condition of our national parks and health of our forests, expected impacts of climate change, success stories among our Native American peoples, toxic waste, creative occupations, a host of wildlife topics, agriculture in the Rockies, and civic engagement. Media coverage has supplemented our annual conference and speakers series efforts, bringing regional, national and international attention to the issues studied and the results found by our undergraduate researchers. We are proud to continue Colorado College’s long tradition of contributing to and strengthening our surrounding region’s social, economic, and environmental qualities.

This year’s research and resulting published sections focus on three key dimensions to what makes the Rockies unique: rejuvenation of the eastern plains, infrastructure, and recreation. The Rocky Mountains serve as a spine to the region, spectacular but forbidding and difficult to navigate. Conquering the region always has depended upon transport and communication to connect vast distances. The same mountains, forming the Continental Divide, cater to millions seeking exercise and solace through recreation. To the east of these mountains lie vast open plains, the western part of the Great Plains, once an “ocean of grass” that has gone through settlement and cultivation, only now to move back toward its origi-

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nal “empty quarter” character. All of these foci on the Rockies reflect our students’ research to illuminate the past, describe the present, and suggest options for future conditions.

Our mission statement continues to guide us in our goals and highlights the importance of the mountains so important to our character:

At Colorado College our goal is to provide the finest liberal arts education in the country. Drawing upon the adventurous spirit of the Rocky Mountain West, we challenge students, one course at a time, to develop those habits of intellect and imagination that will prepare them for learning and leadership throughout their lives.

As I move through this last year as president before retirement, I invite you to explore the Rockies through the material in this *Report Card*. I am confident that it will inform, challenge, and stimulate your knowledge and thinking. At the same time I encourage you to reflect back on the 30 other research topics illuminated by our students in prior *Report Cards*. We welcome you to a growing number of people who care to learn more about and contribute to protecting the unique features and character that make the Rockies region everyone’s special “backyard.”



Richard F. Celeste

Richard F. Celeste
President of Colorado College



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