

# Editors' Preface

## THE 2008 COLORADO COLLEGE STATE OF THE ROCKIES REPORT CARD

By David Havlick and Chris Jackson

### Connecting to the Rockies

When most of Americans think of “the Rockies,” they likely think of the mountains that stretch from New Mexico to Montana. To many, the Rockies region is best known for its environmental amenities – not just mountains, but rivers, redrock canyons, forests, open lands, scenic vistas. The *2008 Report Card* attends to a number of these features, yet also pushes into social dimensions that seem increasingly to capture the spotlight in the eight states included in this report: the role of immigrants, the challenge of affordable housing, the need to restore degraded landscapes, the continuing controversies over wildland protection, and the prospect of creating a long-term regional renewable energy boom.

It is sometimes tempting to view the Rockies as an area dominated by nature, but even the most natural events are also often deeply integrated with social processes. The steady winds that push across Wyoming occur naturally, of course, but they become an energy resource when we apply human structures and desires to them. Each of the principal chapters in this year's *Report Card* highlights, whether implicitly or explicitly, the interplay of natural and social processes. Encouraging new insights and making new connections are, in fact, very much at the heart of this report and the broader State of the Rockies Project.

This fifth annual *State of the Rockies Report Card* comes only as a result of a number of important connections made by the student researchers and writers who produced the chapters that follow. As with previous years, the ten-week summer research period was rigorous and fruitful. Integral to our research process is an extensive field trip that immerses the student research team in their topics and brings them face-to-face with regional experts. This year, the State of the Rockies researchers traveled 2,500 miles over eight days for meetings in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Once the academic year starts again, our researchers juggle full-time student life with part-time State of the Rockies work to edit their section, respond to external reviews, give presentations, and help plan guest speakers and the annual State of the Rockies Conference. The State of the Rockies research process is demanding, and the resulting components of the *State of the Rockies Report Card* demonstrate the capability of the Colorado College State of the Rockies Research Team.

As you read through this year's *Report Card*, we encourage you not only to appreciate the fine student research and writing that these chapters feature, but also to challenge yourself to think through the connections between places and people that we may too often and too easily overlook. After all, even the Rocky Mountains, the bedrock range that serves as our unifying regional axis, starts well south of the border and continues north to the arctic. Imagine that.



Wasatch-Cache National Forest, Utah

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*About the authors: David Havlick is assistant professor of geography and environmental studies at the University of Colorado – Colorado Springs and editor of the 2008 State of the Rockies Report Card; Chris Jackson (Colorado College, '06) is the program coordinator for the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project.*