

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *The 2004 Colorado College State of the Rockies Report Card*



#### **Challenge Essay: “Home and Hope in the Rockies” – Ed Marston, Senior Journalist and Former Editor: *High Country News***

Efforts to “grade” the Rockies are audacious and others have tried, including *High Country News*. The essence of the region is captured not just by letter grades, but more so the “teacher’s” scribbled notes at the bottom of the report cards. The essence of the region differs among observers, from aridity to a preponderance of public lands that are collectively owned amidst mistrust and perceived loss of sovereignty over many issues. Are we the “road kill” of national politics and economics? Do we want to gain control over our lives and region or remain a colony subsidized by the federal treasury and cut up by conflicting interest groups? Marston’s report card for the West assigns C’s and D’s to ranching and logging and farming, and F’s to oil and gas development, but only a D- to environmentalists. Exceptions to these grades stand out as individual ranchers, land trusts, and experiments in communities seeking to bridge the extractive industries with the environmental movement.

#### **Rockies Perspectives: Sonoran Institute – Ray Rasker, SocioEconomics Program, Bozeman, Montana**

The defining characteristic of the Rockies is the preponderance of public lands, over which perpetual controversy exists. The economic role of these public lands has evolved from resource extraction to provision of recreational opportunities, with few truly resource-dependent counties left in the region. Now the largest source of new personal income is non-labor, such as investments and retirement

income, followed by service-based employment. These changes call for reconsideration of the traditional multiple-use philosophy over public lands. Modifications must include “standing” for scenery and recreational amenities as drivers of entrepreneurial growth and livable communities.

#### **Rockies Perspectives: Center for the Rocky Mountain West – Dan Kemmis, Director, Missoula, Montana**

The Rocky Mountain West can be viewed as a region “settled last and settled least.” Rapid growth has far-reaching and sometimes wrenching economic, social, political, and cultural impacts. The center in Missoula exists to help interpret the West and help decision makers cope with change. Regional scholars, area leaders, and others interested in the West are brought together through summer institutes, and via Headwaters News service on the Web to serve as a database, archive, and source of information for a scattered and often disconnected citizenry in the Rockies and beyond.

#### **Rockies Perspectives: Mountain Studies Institute – Ellen Stein, Executive Director, Silverton, Colorado**

Silverton has a rich history in mining despite its isolation amidst the spectacular San Juan Mountains. Today this mountain region has 15 incorporated towns, but what unites these communities in today’s economy? How can such a region remain “relevant?” The institute serves as a place for students, researchers, educators, and the general public to meet and share views, work on problems, conceive of “relevant” solutions. Annual conferences highlight problems and challenges while an active research program asks probing questions like what might be the impacts of climate change and modified hydrologic cycles on the San Juans?

#### **Rockies Perspectives: Gunnison Headwaters Conference – George Sibley, Coordinator, Western State College, Gunnison, Colorado**

For much of the 20th century most of the towns and small cities in the mountain valleys of the Southern Rockies – the “Headwaters Re-



Indian paintbrush - Rocky Mountain National Park

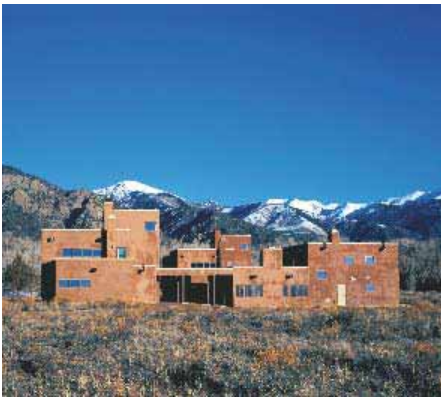
gion” of the Southwest – served the nation as “supply regions” for the rest of the nation, extracting resources and fouling their nests in the process. Chronic boom-bust cycles stressed communities in the upswing and created poverty and a flight of the young in the downswings. These mountain valleys today reflect political and economic tension between “pre-urbanites” and “post-urbanites.” Quality of life often is the single common denominator among warring factions, as all seek to maintain the region’s natural amenities. Headwaters Conferences serve as an open public forums where experts and average citizens alike butt heads and hammer out shared values and workable solutions.

#### **The Rocky Mountain Region: An Overview – Walter Hecox and F. Patrick Holmes, The Rockies Project, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

The Continental Divide literally forms the spine of an eight state Rockies region of 280 counties containing 24% of the U.S. landmass and 6.5% of the 2000 population. This region of spectacular natural beauty, harsh climate and soil conditions, as well as vast open spaces, is easier to grasp visually by flying over the region than it is to characterize what lies below in socio-economic terms. This overview looks at the Rockies’ residents and their counties in demographic terms, as well as employment and income trends to characterize its “homogeneity,” and makes comparisons with neighboring

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census regions to the west and east as well as to national averages. One result is to sort out myth vs. reality for the Rockies being rural, agricultural and natural resource-based, under educated, largely Caucasian, and dominated by government jobs.



Colorado College's Baca campus

### **The Rockies Divided: Three Sub-Regions That Make Sense -- Walter Hecox and F. Patrick Holmes, The Rockies Project, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

Despite shared topography and stunning natural beauty, as well as characteristics that set it apart from the rest of the nation, the Rockies region is NOT homogeneous! Rather, analysis of regional socio-economic and demographic data, alongside differing characteristics of the land base, identify three distinct sub-regions: The Continental Divide Spine, The Eastern Plains Agricultural Heritage Zone, and The West and Southern Mountain Amenity Zone. Each of these sub-regions shares many distinguishing characteristics that bind adjacent counties together and highlight substantial differences when compared to the other zones. Land characteristics are easiest to grasp, as the zones vary dramatically across the Rockies in topography, hydrology, land cover and use, government ownership, and human habitation patterns. People and their communities also differ among sub-regions, by nativity, age, race, education, degree of poverty, and vibrancy of communities. Employment patterns are driven by land and people: natural resource-based employment is small but variable among

the regions as services and government jobs better reflect occupations and employment sectors. Income largely is driven by employment, but increasingly non-work income from investments and transfer payments moderates the boom-bust cycles endemic to the historic West. For the Rockies the most interesting challenges and problems, as well as innovative solutions, exist within these zones as residents seek to maintain their valued quality of life in the face of powerful forces of change.

### **Grading the Rockies: F. Patrick Holmes and Walter Hecox, The Rockies Project, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

How do individual counties around the Rockies stack up against each other? Where are the leading examples of innovation vs. the lagging communities struggling to overcome adversity? The "heart" of this Rockies Report Card lies in grades assigned to counties for a set of 15 individual indicators, plus a final overall "GPA" that picks out valedictorians and runners-up for the Rockies. The structure of this massive "grading" exercise provides a window into the types of performance variables we consider important in judging Rockies' counties. Full details on the methodology, as well as lists of "top 10" counties, reside in the relevant sections of the *2004 Colorado College Rockies Report Card*.

#### **Land and Environment –**

1. The Rockies Playground
2. Subdivisions and "Ranchettes" in the New Rockies
3. Jewels of the Rockies

#### **Social and Cultural Capital –**

1. Native Born or Cappuccino-Cowboy?
2. Managing Immigration
3. Civic Engagement
4. Healthy Places to Live and Work
5. Education Attainment
6. Arts, Culture, and Employment in the "Creative Classes"
7. The Graying of the Rockies
8. A Good Place to Raise Kids



#### **Income, Employment, and Equity**

1. Balanced Employment Composition
2. Small Business Vitality
3. Balanced Income Distribution
4. Distressed Counties

#### **Grading the Rockies: Vibrancy and Vitality** Grading the Most "Livable" Counties in the Rockies:

##### **Metropolitan Counties**

(61 metro counties)

##### **Micropolitan Counties**

(138 non-metro counties with aggregate urban populations of greater than 2,500 people)

##### **Rural Counties**

(81 non-metro counties with an aggregate urban population of less than 2,500)

