

Editors' Preface & Executive Summary

THE 2009 COLORADO COLLEGE STATE OF THE ROCKIES REPORT CARD

By Walter E. Hecox, Elizabeth L. Kolbe, and Matthew K. Reuer

In our sixth year carrying out the State of the Rockies Project, we strive to better understand an incredibly diverse and complicated eight-state region facing a variety of challenges. Always learning from past years' efforts, we refine our research methods, focus on new issues and problems, and involve another group of undergraduate research students. We seek to bring fresh perspectives to major issues through credible research and written materials in the *Report Cards* as well as through our monthly speaker series and annual symposia.

Thanks to continued generous funding, we selected a team of five student researchers to engage in summer 2008 research and field exploration, resulting in research reports that have been peer-reviewed, revised, and published in this annual *Report Card*. We focus on three related but distinct dimensions of wildlife in the Rockies, as well as additional topics on wild and scenic rivers and major demographic changes altering the urban and rural fabric of the American West.

Two mid-summer field trips connected our research students with local experts and specific issues. A northern Rockies field trip explored wildlife and its conflicts with energy development (Pinedale, Wyoming), bison management in Yellowstone National Park, elk management strategies at the National Elk Refuge (Jackson, Wyoming), and human interference

in wildlife range and migration throughout the northern Rockies. A southern Rockies field trip to New Mexico added to our knowledge, looking at issues of threatened and endangered species and reintroduction efforts on the Ted Turner Vermejo Park ranch, viability of traditional ranching on the historic Fort Union ranch, and the unique management experiment by the Forest Service and others at the Valles Caldera Preserve in central New Mexico.

Following past *Report Cards*, we begin the 2009 *Report Card* with the "Rockies Baseline," which examines key, annually updated demographic indicators for the U.S., the Rockies region, and each of the eight Rockies states. The Baseline presents basic facts and trends in this rapidly changing region.

The first section focuses on megapolitan areas and rural economic clusters resulting from the population dynamics in the Rockies. The influx of new residents and internal migration in the Rockies are spurring development of once open lands in some areas, but resulting in stagnation and decay in others. Vast new urban complexes are becoming a new frontier of opportunities and challenges, supported by employment opportunities, real estate development, transportation corridors, and natural amenities. At the same time, however, rural "hinterland" towns with limited services and opportunities are literally withering up as they lose their commerce and young people.



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About the co-editors: Walter E. Hecox is professor of economics in the Colorado College Environmental Program and project director for the State of the Rockies Project; Matthew K. Reuer serves as technical director of the Environmental Program and staff contributor to the Rockies Project; and Elizabeth L. Kolbe is the 2008-09 Rockies Project program coordinator.

A section on wild and scenic rivers continues our tradition of exploring Western water and its use by a growing population. Based on the concept of “sustainable water resources,” as articulated by the U.S. Geological Survey, we examine the surface water resources of the Rockies which are protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and catalogued by the National Rivers Inventory. The resulting federal and state protections of specific reaches are discussed, such as for the Gunnison River in south central Colorado. Finally, we present case studies examining the frequently heated debates between local advocacy groups and government water managers are presented, such as the ongoing conflict with the Cache La Poudre River.

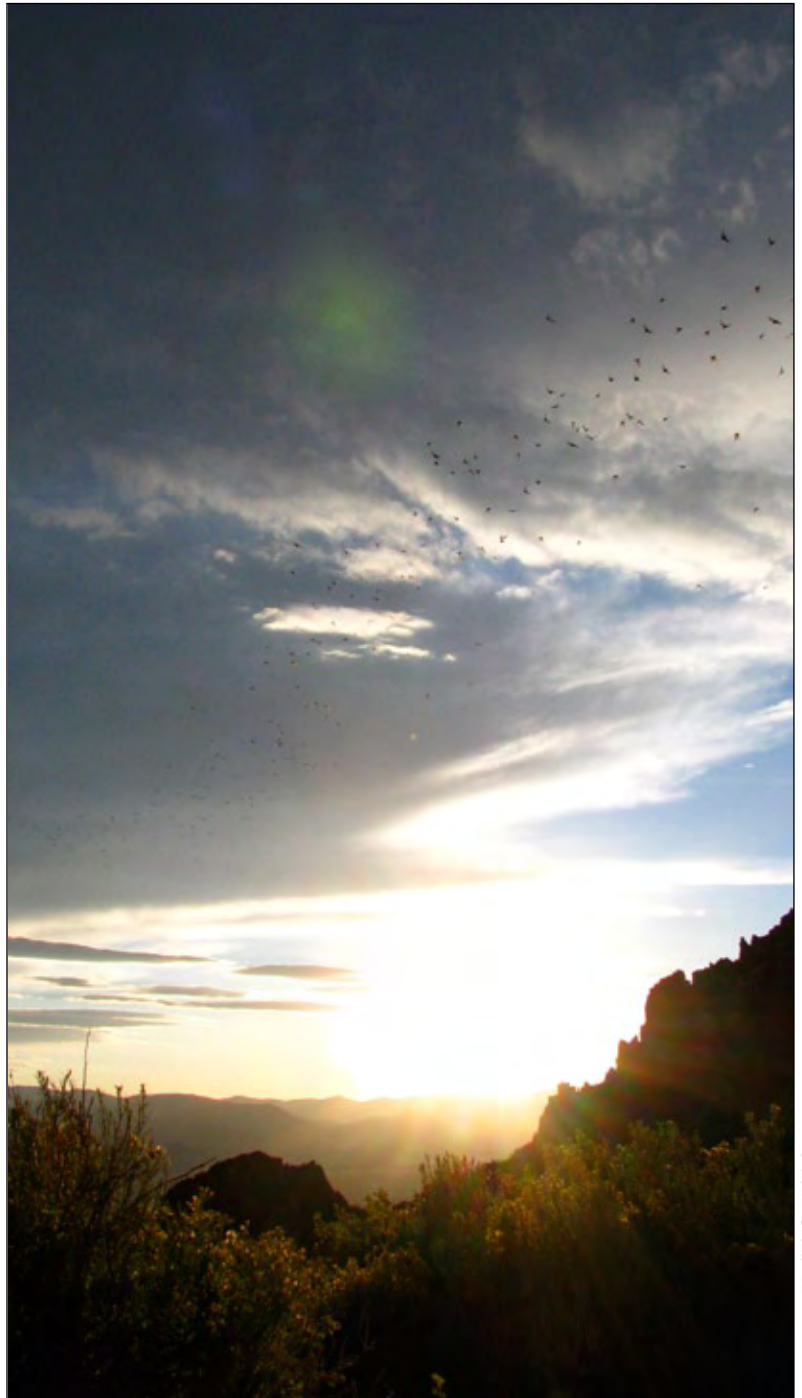
The next three 2009 research topics, each focused on wildlife, are introduced by a faculty overview of U.S. laws and policies protecting wildlife. These topics are “nested” together, taking distinct but related perspectives on the complex issue of wildlife in the Rockies.

A section on historic range and current condition comes first, introducing this natural treasure, providing a context for the past regional prevalence of species, and discussing their vastly reduced current extent and health. The second section examines several areas in the Rockies where vast riches of both wildlife and energy resources and development coexist, creating challenges and tradeoffs to use and management. Pinedale, Wyoming, embodies our current dilemma: our thirst for more domestic energy collides in areas with world-class wildlife populations and habitat. Wildlife management tools and techniques are presented in the final section. This section traces the history of wildlife management from the ecological rule of natural predator-prey relationships, to early human intervention through subsistence hunting, and finally to more contemporary management tools (recreational hunting, relocation, harassment, and even disease management).

Speaking to a long-standing tradition of the *Rockies Report Cards* “grading” the region on a variety of attributes, this year we briefly look at three areas: crime and incarceration in the Rockies, historic preservation in the Rockies, and an evaluation of regional representation by elected officials.

Central to this year’s project activities, as in the past, are the three goals of the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project:

- To involve Colorado College students as the main contributors to the *Report Card* and conferences.



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- To produce an annual research document on critical issues of community and environment in the Rocky Mountain West (the *Report Card*); and
- To host an annual speaker series and symposium at Colorado College, bringing regional experts together with concerned citizens.

Through these goals, the Rockies Project aims to inspire *Report Card* readers and Rockies events attendees to creatively contemplate, discuss, and engage in shaping the future of our beloved, beautiful, and fragile region—the Rocky Mountain West.