

# Editors' Preface and Executive Summary

## THE 2007 COLORADO COLLEGE STATE OF THE ROCKIES REPORT CARD

By Walter E. Hecox, Matthew K. Reuer, and Christopher B. Jackson

### Editors' Preface

As quickly as the Rockies Project addresses one set of challenges to the eight-state region, new issues appear on the horizon. For the *2007 Report Card* such challenges include forest health and the importance of fire mitigation and disease in this region, energy development impacts on Rockies' communities and infrastructure, water use in the Rockies and the growing need for agriculture to urban water transfers, and trends in new communities, including "new urbanism". Why these topics? Certainly many others may be equally deserving of attention and likely will be the focus of future report cards. But pressures have combined to make this year's selection of topics timely and compelling.

The combination of prolonged drought and continuing rapid population growth are key ingredients to a regional "perfect storm". Rockies' forests are stressed by drought, overgrown after decades of fire suppression, and now devastated by insects and disease. The implications for life and property within the fire-prone wildland urban interface as well as the economic health of communities reliant on recreation and tourism are increasingly profound. Drought has simultaneously stressed water uses, particularly agriculture, municipal supplies, industry, and natural ecosystems. Water rights law interacting with the power of markets to divert water to highest bidders is placing increasing pressure on agriculture. This results from decreasing agricultural commodity prices and the growing financial clout of Western cities: water still flows uphill towards money!

Another cloud in our "perfect storm" comes from increasing demands for enhanced domestic energy production. Exploding demand in India and China, unstable political situations in energy-producing nations, and continued U.S. appetite for energy are driving a boom of immense proportions in the Rockies. In prior decades similar booms have turned to "busts" as world oil prices collapsed and the financial viability of domestic energy production was undercut. For the Rockies, the repository for much of the nation's energy resources (conventional as well as solar and wind-based renewables), each boom is a mixed blessing, bringing rural communities jobs and prosperity while challenging the area's infrastructure, social fabric, and environmental health.

All of these "fronts" in the storm affecting the Rockies impact the distribution of people living throughout the region. Contrary to "conventional wisdom" 83 % of the population lives in urban areas. The vast majority of the Rockies is "urban" and growing at some 4.5 times the national average. As more people move into urban and suburban areas, there are opportunities and challenges. Urban growth manifests itself not just in the familiar "sprawl" pattern, but also in planned and thematic development. The trends in new communities result in exciting human-built dimensions to what makes the Rockies such a delightful place to live and visit.

In this, our fourth year of the State of the Rockies Project, we have

*About the Editors: Walter E. Hecox is professor of economics and environmental science at Colorado College and Project Director of the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project; Matthew K. Reuer is Technical Director for the Environmental Science Program and co-editor for the Rockies Project; Christopher B. Jackson, a May 2006 graduate of Colorado College, is the 2006-07 Program Coordinator for the Rockies Project.*

built upon what worked well during the previous three. Summer 2006 witnessed a team of students working with faculty and staff to develop the chosen research topics. Field trips to conduct interviews and observe the particular issues were combined with campus-based research. Generous financial assistance allows this pattern of student involvement to continue and supports a recent Colorado College graduate as Program Coordinator throughout the academic year. Since the summer, the student researchers have met with other scientists and community leaders to fine-tune their research projects which form the substance for the *Report Card* sections.

This year's research topics, similar to those in the past, seek to offer fresh perspectives on critical regional topics. Our aim is to cultivate a new vision of our shared home and to challenge the Mountain West to decide on our collective fate as new arrivals or established locals in this region.

How have we organized this year's *Report Card*? Continuing a tradition, the first section examines key characteristics of the Rockies Region. We explore how it is changing through our "Rockies Baseline", presenting annually-updated demographic indicators for the U.S., the Rockies Region, and each of the eight Rockies states. These "vital signs" lay out basic facts and track trends in this rapidly changing region. Next come the major sections we have studied this year, formed by the "perfect storm" discussed above. Finally, we continue another tradition and "evaluate" the counties in the region on selected measures, including:

- "Democrats and their Rocky Mountain High (Hopes)": A close look at party voting patterns in the eight-state Rocky Mountain West;
- "How the West is Wired": broadband connectivity in the West; and
- "Feeding from the Federal Trough": patterns of federal government expenditures around the Rockies.

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

- Research:** opportunities for collaborative student-faculty research partnerships.
- Report:** publication of annual *State of the Rockies Report Card*.
- Engage:** lectures and conferences that bring the community and public into a conversation about the Rockies.

Through these goals, the project aims to move beyond the educational benefits to involved students by inspiring conference attendees and report card readers to contemplate, discuss, and engage in shaping the future of our beloved region—the Rocky Mountain West.

## Executive Summary

### “Rockies Baseline: Vital Signs for a Region in Transition”

State of the Rockies – Chris Jackson

Similar to past years, we start this *State of the Rockies Report* by checking the region's “vital signs.” Population growth in the Rockies continues to outpace the nationwide average. However, within the region, population change varies widely by state, with Nevada and Arizona recording double-digit values but Wyoming recording less than one percent growth. Jobs have also expanded in the region, with service, professional, and construction jobs expanding more than the national average. Overall, the vital signs reflect a vibrant region with a well educated and diverse population.

### Challenge Essay – “Democrats and Their Rocky Mountain High (Hopes): A Close Look at Party Voting Patterns in the Eight State Rocky Mountain West”

Robert D. Loevy, Thomas E. Cronin, and Jonathan M. Goldstein – guest contributors

Why have the Democrats chosen Denver, in the heart of a “red state” region, for their national convention site in 2008? As Loevy, Cronin, and Goldstein detail in this report, the political landscape of the Rockies is more varied than shown by state-level maps and may be changing. The authors analyze state, county, and metropolitan electoral data to reveal the current political situation and suggest possible future voting trends.

### Challenge Essay – “How the West is Wired: Broadband Connectivity in the West”

D. Corwin Jackson – guest contributor

Imagine working in Asia but never leaving your home office in rural Wyoming. The spread of high-speed Internet services has made such a prospect possible and is creating new workspaces, economies, and even communities throughout the Rockies Region. In this report, Jackson discusses the new frontier of broadband and its impact on the Rockies, where access is varied and demands high to “get on board” the new economy.

### “Water Sustainability in the Rockies: Agriculture to Urban Transfers and Implications for Future Water Use”

State of the Rockies – Tyler McMahon, and Matthew Reuer

Do you know where your water comes from? In some parts of the Rockies, this scarce resource travels for hundreds of miles, through mountains and around thirsty fields, before ever reaching your field or faucet. But will there be enough water to supply the West's fast-growing cities and suburbs? Periodic drought, explosive population growth, and prospects for climate-induced changes in water supply all contribute to water being a fundamental determinant of how the Rockies will be shaped in the coming decades. In this report, McMahon and Reuer use a “water sustainability” construct to discuss water uses and policies and their impacts in the Rockies Region, focusing on agriculture to urban transfers and alternative strategies for addressing competing and increased demands in a water-scarce region.

### Faculty Overview – “The Healthy Forests Restoration Act”

Phillip M. Kannan – guest contributor

Phillip M. Kannan, distinguished lecturer and legal scholar-in-residence in the Colorado College environmental science program introduces the topic of federal forest management with this overview of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. A long history of federal forest management has been dramatically changed recently, in response to what many perceive as a “crisis” in the health and management of our forests. Congressional legislation and administrative action have sought to “speed up” forest management, in fundamental ways by selectively side-stepping other important legislation such as NEPA and the Endangered Species Act.

### “Forest Health in the Rockies: Human Needs and Ecological Reality”

State of the Rockies – Carissa Look, and Matthew Reuer

Stately pines and golden aspens symbolize the West, but as Look and Reuer discuss in this report, forest management in the Rockies involves difficult challenges and debates. The authors examine forest management practices and their historical foundations, as well as the influences of fire, disease, and development on regional forest health. As they note, it is the people of the Rockies who will ultimately play critical roles in protecting our forests for future generations.

### “Energy Development in the Rockies: Tempering the Boom, Avoiding the Bust”

State of the Rockies – Brian Hall and Chris Jackson

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the gold rush lured prospectors to the West, with both prospectors and towns experiencing great prosperity and devastating busts. As Hall and Jackson discuss, today's energy boom towns can learn from this history, as well as from more recent success stories throughout the region. This report reviews the primary forces of energy supply and demand, examines the federal energy leasing process, and looks at the socioeconomic costs and benefits of energy development in the Rockies.

### “The Growing Rockies: New People, New Communities, New Urbanism”

State of the Rockies – Julianne Kellogg and Chris Jackson

The effects of population growth and urban development run throughout the essays in this year's *State of the Rockies Report*, as they have in previous reports. While the *2005 State of the Rockies Report Card* examined urban sprawl, in this report Kellogg and Jackson focus on particular types of new urban development, namely “smart growth” and “new urbanism,” retirement communities, and gated communities. These forms of development reflect not only population trends but reactions to urban sprawl in the Rockies.

### “Feeding from the Federal Trough: Patterns of Federal Government Expenditures Around the Rockies”

State of the Rockies – Pablo Navarro

How are federal dollars divided up among the states and counties of the Rockies? Are some places benefiting more than others? In this section, Navarro presents data on federal funding to states and counties in the Rockies Region. The top-ten and bottom-ten county recipients of federal dollars are listed by total and per capita funding for the major federal agencies whose expenditures and obligations so vitally shape the Rockies Region.

