

# Editors' Preface

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## THE 2011 COLORADO COLLEGE STATE OF THE ROCKIES REPORT CARD

### Perspectives on the Rockies Project

The end of an era can be momentous and indeed the Rockies Project finds itself reflecting on our origins and eight years of student-centered activity. While it seems ages ago, the 2002-03 academic year was a time of institutional reflection and thought about the college's future, as the new president Dick Celeste organized a months' long discussion process leading to a program of action called Vision 2010. Below was his 2002 charge to the campus:

"I challenge you to find ways to make Colorado College – already a very good enterprise – even better between now and 2010."

The initiatives in Vision 2010 focused on further developing the college's existing strengths in an effort to translate our values into reality, with the mission of providing the best undergraduate liberal arts education in the country. Doing so requires matching our performance to our promise, moving toward a

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new level of intellectual rigor, creating a more diverse and respectful community, and building a 21st-century campus.

Early in the "visioning process" arose the idea of re-connecting the college to the Rocky Mountain region. It quickly resonated with President Celeste, former two-term Governor of Ohio, who grasped how important geography and terrain are in shaping an educational institution such as Colorado College. The very founding of the college and its evolution over nearly 14 decades deeply reflects the Rockies in all of their grandeur and forbidding challenges. Generations of students, many from the Rockies, have received their undergraduate education from CC and often have returned to the region, providing careers of leadership and service. Indeed being "in" the Rockies at the foot of Pike's Peak brings immense opportunities for field study, research and recreation in our spectacular Rocky Mountain backyard.

As some say, "the rest is history": the Rockies Project commenced during 2003 and the first *Report Card* was published in April 2004. In succeeding years annual report cards have been joined by yearly speakers' series, symposia and conferences, as well as widespread visibility through media coverage. In the process, roughly 40 bright CC students have par-

ticipated as student-researchers; and after graduation are in the process of gaining additional experience, graduate work, challenging jobs and service around the nation as well as within the Rockies region.

Upon the imminent retirement of President Celeste from Colorado College at the end of the 2010-11 academic year, the Rockies Project extends a hearty thanks to him for his vision, leadership and enthusiasm. Without his help, the project literally would not have found a place at CC and been successful for eight years!

### Rockies Project 2010-11 Focus

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

- **RESEARCH:** To involve Colorado College students as the main contributors to the *Report Card* and conferences,
- **REPORT:** To produce an annual research document on critical issues of community and environment in the Rocky Mountain West (the *Report Card*), and
- **ENGAGE:** To host annual monthly speakers series and conferences at Colorado College, bringing regional experts together with concerned citizens.

### Research and Report

#### *Rockies Region and Zones*

The term "land and sky determine" effectively ties together the content of this *Report Card*. Our Project's Rocky Mountain region, consisting of 8 states and 281 counties, whose spine is the Continental Divide, is characterized by vast open spaces, towering mountains, spectacular beauty, and harsh climatic conditions. In earlier report cards our project took a different approach to defining the region by dividing it into three "north-south" areas called "zones" that depict similar conditions:

- **the Eastern Plains Agricultural Zone**
- **the Continental Divide Spine**
- **the West and Southern Mountain Amenity Zone.**

The first section of this year's *Report Card* revisits our 2004 "trifurcation" of the Rockies. Here we update information which sustains our original concept: people and communities and counties within each of these "north to south" zones often have more in common with each other than with those in their own state, but differing zones to the east and/or west. The "Continental Divide Zone" continues to host most of the urban areas and population, with high education and income levels largely flowing from jobs in the service sector. Proximity to recreation in the mountains continues to be a major "comparative advantage" for this part of the Rockies. To the east of the Continental Divide, the part of the Great Plains overlapping Rockies' states, our "Eastern Plains Agricultural Zone," clus-

ters together counties and communities with far different characteristics than the mountainous region. Levels of population growth, income and employment are low, many communities are dwindling in size and vibrancy, and the original defining characteristics of intense agriculture as a "breadbasket for the nation" is fast changing. To the west of the Continental Divide the "West and Southern Mountain Amenity Zone" is defined by rugged plateaus and river basins, abundant energy and mineral resources, and sparse populations.

The close look this *Report Card* takes at both the entire Rockies region's characteristics and the distinct ways by which Rockies zones or sub-regions differ on the same measures makes starkly clear one reality of the region. A "one-set-of-policies-fits-all" approach to management of resources, the environment, communities, and their infrastructure in the Rockies is as inappropriate as would be a national set of policies that does not take into account the substantial differences between the Rockies vs. the neighboring Pacific and Central Divisions that have integrity within Congress and the Census Bureau.

#### *The Eastern Plains: Decline and Potential Rejuvenation*

What should our nation do in reaction to the stagnant conditions depicting much of the Great Plains, and thus the Rockies Project's "Eastern Plains Agricultural Zone"? Periodically, there are Congressional proposals for a new Homestead Act that is proposed as a way, once again, to populate the Great Plains region and return the economic vitality of the early decades after settlement. This year's *Report Card* starts with the challenge from these legislative proposals: what is to be made of the depressed economic, social and community conditions in the region? Should government once again create incentives that entice what now should be called re-settlement? Or should long-term market and demographic forces work their way through the region, eventually resulting in a far different region than our concept of a "breadbasket"? While counties north to south in the "Eastern Plains Agricultural Zone" share many characteristics, the news is not uniformly bad. Some communities are discovering sources of economic and population vitality through renewable energy activity including biomass, solar and wind; others are seeking to return vast stretches to "open range" areas for domestic and wild animals to roam and tourists to enjoy, a phenomenon discussed as an "American Serengeti."

#### *Infrastructure: Essential Services in Need of Attention*

The human settlement of the Rockies has been one long and continuing struggle against near impenetrable mountains and harsh conditions. Creating human transportation and communication infrastructure is synonymous with the "settling" of the American West. Transport evolved from early explorers and settlers on foot, horseback and wagon train, to rugged paths evolving into toll roads and then paved roads and highways. Similarly, communication has evolved to stitch together peoples and communities once in near isolation; first via the pony express, then the telegraph and then telephone, now supplanted by satellite and fiber optic cable. Again, the Continental Divide at first was nearly impenetrable, resulting in north to south roads and communication pre-dating the later

engineering feats that have penetrated the mountains, deep valleys and deep river canyons. We explore the history of conquering the Rockies with infrastructure, reflect upon the fact that location of economic activity and communities has largely been dictated by the resulting corridors of communication and transportation, and end by asking a key question: has the Rockies region received it's "fair share" of what the nation has spent as investment in regional infrastructure?

### *Nature Based Recreation in the Rockies: the New Value of the Region's Resources*

The Rocky Mountains continue to define the region and its human and economic activity. Once nearly impenetrable, as we trace out in our section on infrastructure, settlers long were attracted to the vast mineral riches and then arable land, forests, water and wildlife that also define the region. An era of resource extraction can be traced from the late 1800's until the middle of the twentieth century. The mountains, during this era, largely were viewed as harsh and hostile, a barrier to what humans wanted to extract as wealth-creating economic activity. But a counter value to the same mountains and rugged landscape gradually evolved post World War II: increasing levels of leisure, income and mobility have spawned a continually growing demand for the intangible benefits people can extract from the Rocky Mountains as tourists, recreationists, and early retirees.

Remember that the "Continental Divide Spine Zone" itself is vibrant largely because people seek out jobs and homes close to nature's spectacular beauty and recreational opportunities. This "amenity" use of nature is every bit as directly grounded in the "land and sky" as has been the extractive era of resources. However, now people are seeking out, indeed demanding, communities with a high quality of life and close proximity to open lands for recreation and tourism. Jobs and income result from this "new" use of nature, ones that often conflict with the remaining demands for extraction of resources from the very lands people now wish could stay in their "natural condition" rather than be developed and exploited. Where are the prime areas in the Rockies that contain the recreation activities so much in demand? Can communities and regions in the Rockies have viable economies and communities that are so heavily dependent upon recreation? These and other aspects of recreation are illuminated by our intense look at recreation in the Rockies.

### *Summer 2010 Field Trip Perspectives*

In addition to the intense research on the CC campus, multiple trips throughout the Rockies accompanied the ten week student research season. These trips allowed the inclusion of case studies and qualitative experiences to help strengthen the topics being discussed and viewed through data. Traveling over 2,400 miles through Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska allowed the researchers to see a plethora of people, places, businesses and organizations related to the topics of the Rockies Eastern Plains, Infrastructure and Nature Based Recreation covered in *The 2011 Report Card*.

First, the Rockies' team headed north to Yellowstone,

Wyoming for two nights of camping. After experiencing the classic natural wonders of Yellowstone the team headed to Jackson, Wyoming for a meeting with Jon Shick, owner of High Mountain Heli-Ski. The afternoon was spent in the Jackson area meeting with Paul Walters from the Jackson Hole Airport, the only airport in a national park, and Lori Iverson from the National Elk Refuge. In the afternoon the entire group sat down to discuss conservation efforts with Louise Lasley from the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance. This meeting was followed by a conversation with Rick Knori from Lower Valley Energy about the unique state of the Jackson Hole area's energy needs. The evening was capped off with a small gathering of CC alumni in the area at the local Snake River Brew Pub.

The following day was spent in West Yellowstone, Wyoming on a tour of Yellowstone's boundaries, highlighting the friction over bison moving outside the park and interacting with cattle. This tour was led by Mark Pearson of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Later the Rockies team traveled on to Bozeman, Montana where the next two days were spent meeting with various nonprofits, organizations and businesses.

In Bozeman, part of the Rockies team met with the Director of Public Services for Bozeman, Debbie Arkell, while the other researchers met with Sarah Olimb from the World Wildlife Fund to learn more about the Great Plains ecosystem. Later in the day the team met with Ganay Johnson from the American Prairie Foundation to learn about the Prairie Reserve in northeastern Montana, followed by a meeting with the Sonoran Institute to focus on planning issues that are facing Rockies' communities. The evening brought together CC and State of the Rockies alumni for food and drinks at Montana AleWorks.

On the way out of Bozeman the Rockies team was fortunate to tour the high-tech factory of Simms Fishing Products. Aaron Theobald, John Hoagland and K.C. Walsh, owner of Simms, discussed the future of outdoor recreation through their hand-crafted, high end fishing products. Afterward Ray Rasker and Mark Haggerty from Headwaters Economics discussed some of their research findings on relevant topics in the Rockies to the researchers.

Heading northeast the Rockies researchers stopped in Judith Gap, Montana to tour the Judith Gap Wind Farm and sit down with town resident Harry Peck to discuss the history and future of the tiny plains town. After spending the night in Sheridan, Wyoming and experiencing the Rodeo, the Rockies team traveled to the Black Thunder Coal Mine in Wright, Wyoming to tour one of the largest open pit coal mines in the world, powering 6 percent of the United States electricity and providing numerous jobs for the region.

Turning south towards Colorado College the team stopped at Wind Cave National Park to talk with biologist Dan Roddy about bison management issues related to recreation. After camping at the park and experiencing the American classic, Mt. Rushmore, the Rockies team finished off the eight days of field research with a drive through Nebraska, stopping to view a Burlington Northern train yard.

Throughout the summer student researchers took various day trips around Colorado. This included Fowler where they learned about this community's unique approach to utili-

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ties and job creation. Visits with various other organizations along the Front Range rounded out the field work that contributed to the *Report Card*.

In addition to the data analysis and interviews presented in the main sections, the *2011 Report Card* includes case studies largely based upon the field research conducted on the various field trips. These depictions help sketch the unique challenges and opportunities that exist not only in the small corners of the Rockies, but the thriving megapolitans of the region as well.

## Engagement

### *Monthly Speakers Series on Forest Health*

Building upon three years of experience with monthly speakers series on topics relevant to the Rockies, during the 2010-11 academic year we have helped fulfill our “engagement” objective by inviting experts to campus around a common focus: “Are Our Forests Dying? Forest Health in the Rockies.” Given the millions of acres being killed in the Rockies by a massive pine beetle infestation, there is large public awareness and concern about our forests, a defining aspect of what makes the Rockies so spectacular. Our speakers included: Professors Dave Theobald and Jason Sibold of Colorado State University; Timothy Egan, Award Winning Author talking about his book: *The Big Burn*; Forest Service managers Tony Dixon and Jan Burke covering the impacts of the infestation on the White River National Forest; Colorado State Government employees Mike King, Executive Director of Natural Resources, and Nolan Doesken, State Climatologist, reflecting upon Colorado forest health controversies; and Suzanne Jones, regional director for the Wilderness Society, and Sloan Shoemaker, Execu-

tive Director of the Aspen Wilderness Workshop, winding up the series with comments on the role of environmental groups and public involvement.

### *Reinstating April Rockies Conference*

The unveiling of this 2011 State of the Rockies *Report Card* once again offers us an opportunity to celebrate the Rockies Region with an annual conference on April 4-6, 2011. Our over arching theme for the series of three evening sessions is: “Envisioning and Managing Rockies’ Unique Landscapes and Resources.” Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup> we welcome to campus Terry Tempest Williams, renowned author and advocate of the American West; she will be recognized as our 2010-11 “Champion of the Rockies” and give a reading from her perceptive writings. Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup> Mike Kaplan, CEO of Aspen Skiing Company, will offer provocative perspectives entitled: “What Do We Want to Be? Business and Community Coming of Age in the Rockies”. Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup> is devoted to the concept of an “American Serengeti” through screening of a National Geographic special and perspectives from Martha Kauffman, Managing Director of the World Wildlife Fund Northern Great Plains Program, and Dick Dolan, Managing Director of the American Prairie Foundation.

### **Pull Together to Protect the Rockies**

For the eighth year the Rockies Project and Colorado College aim to inspire *Report Card* readers and Rockies event attendees to creatively contemplate, discuss, and engage in shaping the future of our beloved, beautiful, and fragile region—the Rocky Mountain West. Enjoy!