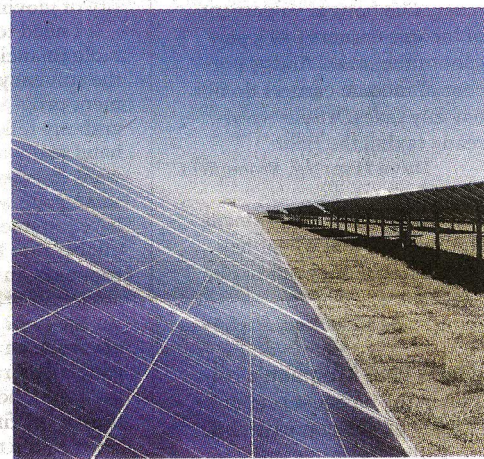
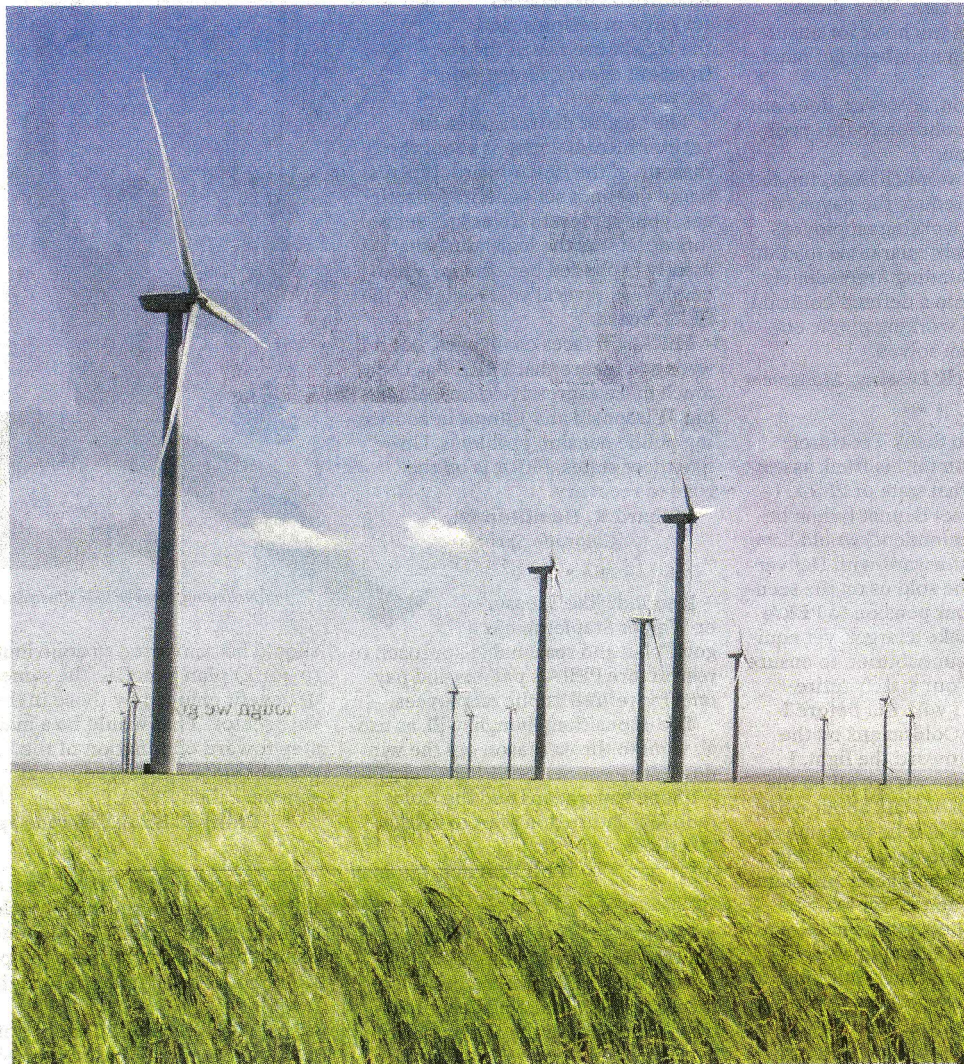


PERSPECTIVE

Western values



A POWER STRUGGLE? Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are trying to figure out the best environmental policies in the West.

Photos (clockwise from left): Windmills at Judith Gap, Mont., by Emil Demantchev; oil well in Ridgway and solar panels in the San Luis Valley by Russell Clarke

Republicans say they're speaking for Westerners when fighting wildlands policies, but they need to look at the actual views of those in the West.

By Walter E. Hecox and Mark Barna

Last month, Republican lawmakers participated in hearings in Washington with U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management officials on BLM's new "wild lands" policy.

The hearings were especially pertinent for residents of the Western states because BLM owns and manages a whopping 264 million acres in the West. In Colorado, 37.4 million acres, or 39 percent of the state, is BLM land.

House Republicans are concerned that the new policy, ordered by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, a former Colorado senator and attorney general, will further cripple the West's economy and eliminate jobs by increasing restrictions on public land use for businesses.

During the hearings, some Republicans said they were carrying out the will of Westerners by saving jobs through reducing environmental restrictions and demanding that more public land be opened for mining, timber and oil companies.

Yet a recent poll released by the State of the Rockies Project at Colorado College in Colorado Springs suggests that when it comes to conservation many House Republicans are out of sync with Colorado residents and other Westerners.

The new BLM policy designates "appropriate" federal land to be managed as "wild lands." BLM collaborates with the public to determine how the land should be used, BLM director Bob Alley

said at the unveiling of the policy last December.

"Wild lands" would allow recreation activities like biking as well as limited fencing and water catchment facilities for ranchers, which are not allowed on land designated as "wilder-ness," Alley said.

Some Colorado elected officials, such as Democratic Sen. Mark Udall, support Salazar's order.

But other Western politicians, like Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., are calling the policy part of an ongoing "war on the West."

Rehberg introduced a bill in March that takes away the Obama administration's ability to designate wild lands without approval from Congress. Rehberg said in a statement that he's tired of the federal government assuming it knows better what to do with public lands than "the folks who live and work the land."

But what do Western "folks" really think about environmental regulations on oil and mining companies? And do they believe that environmental laws are "killing" Western jobs, as many conservative Republicans contend?

For years the assumptions were that Westerners put jobs ahead of environmental conservation and would support relaxing regulations for oil and mining giants.

Westerners, moreover, were suspicious of alternative energy sources. They wouldn't support paying extra for renewable energy or support regulations to decrease carbon emissions.

But a poll released on Feb. 23 suggests that

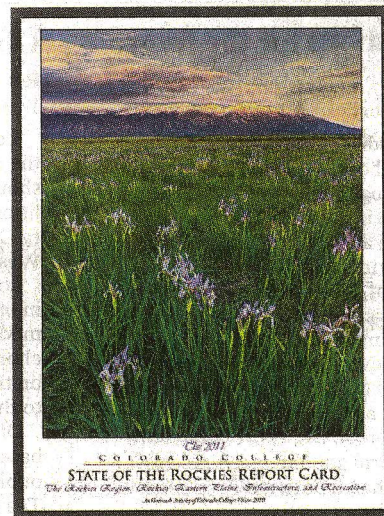


Photo: Steven Weaver

Read more about it. The full State of the Rockies Project report can be viewed at the group's website:
[»coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewestsurvey_e.html](http://coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewestsurvey_e.html)



Fly fishermen work the waters near Picabo, Idaho. Alison Stewart, Special to The Denver Post

HECOX: Westerners still believe in strong protections for environment

◀◀ FROM 1D

the common assumptions about Westerners are simply wrong.

The January 2011 "Conservation in the West" bipartisan survey polled 2,200 registered voters in five states — Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, Montana and Utah.

Among its findings:

- Seventy-seven percent of respondents believe that stringent environmental standards and a strong economy can co-exist.

- Eighty-one percent believe environmental laws should not be relaxed for oil, gas and mining companies.

- Three-quarters view wind and solar power as job creators and better energy sources than fossil fuels. Respondents overwhelmingly support paying as much as \$10 more a month for renewable energy use.

Why have Westerners' views been mischaracterized on conservation issues?

It appears to be due to the long history of partisan politics surrounding American environmentalism.

Gifford Pinchot, a Republican who became the first head of the U.S. Forest Service in the early 20th century, developed the notion of sustainable yield as a working model of "conservation." He called for "the greatest good for the greatest number over the long run."

Pinchot's ideas were strongly debated by lawmakers then and

remain part of partisan politics today, typically in the guise of issues involving federal land use and climate change.

The rocky relationship between politics and conservation ratcheted up a notch in the 1980s during the Reagan administration. Conservative Republicans opposed the new environmental regulations imposed on mining and oil giants, and questioned why the federal government, rather than the states, owned and managed hundreds of millions of acres of public land.

Those themes returned in 2001 in the form of the Bush administration's Energy Task Force, which helped curb environmental restrictions for oil giants and mining companies in an effort to create jobs — another example of what many call the "politicization" of land management.

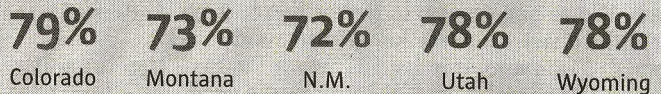
Last September, the Republican-sponsored Senate and Congressional Western Caucuses' "War on Western Jobs" report argued that President Obama's "job-killing" policy of taxing energy use would skyrocket electricity rates. The report further stated that the federal government restricted "access to America's vast reserves of affordable American oil and natural gas" and was "over-regulating coal."

The U.S. economy continues to sputter, and the national jobless rate remains high. In Colorado, unemployment in February

What the West believes

A January 2011 poll of registered voters in five states gauged Westerners' opinions on environmental issues:

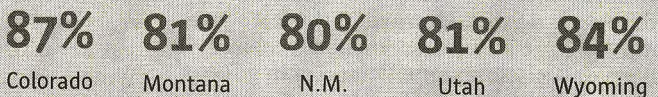
Agree that environmental protections should be maintained:



Agree that the EPA should closely regulate carbon emissions:



Agree that, even with state budget problems, money can still be found to protect the environment:



Source: "Conservation in the West: A Survey of Attitudes of Voters in Five Western States"

was 9.3 percent, the highest rate the state has experienced since record-keeping began in 1976.

The high rate of joblessness and heated political rhetoric about Western jobs disappearing suggest that Westerners should be furious over conservatism. Moreover, it would seem likely that they'd embrace fossil fuels rather than solar and wind power, which still need to overcome reliability is-

issues and typically are more expensive than traditional energy sources.

But the "Conservation in the West" study reveals that's not the case.

Government efforts such as the Energy Task Force and partisan reports like the "War on Western Jobs" are out of sync with what Rocky Mountain residents believe and want when it comes to the environment.



Walter E. Hecox, left, is faculty director of the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project. Mark Barna is a State of the Rockies Project writer.