
Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Grant

From Jonathan Godes <jgodes@nwccog.org>

Date Fri 1/10/2025 11:53 AM

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Cc Jon Stavney <jstavney@nwccog.org>; Dana Wood <dwood@nwccog.org>; Ashley Badesch <ashley.badesch@strategiesdc.com>; Lew - CDOT, Shoshana <shoshana.lew@state.co.us>; Dinberg - OEDIT, Alyssa <alyssa.dinberg@state.co.us>

All,

I am greatly disappointed to inform you that we were not selected for [this cycle's CFI grant](#), which we all worked so hard on. The funding opportunity received 416 applications requesting a combined \$4.05 billion in funding, more than six times the amount of funding available, making this a much more competitive round than last year's. Only one applicant from Colorado (Pueblo) was awarded.

Reading through the successful grant recipients it is clear that the awards went overwhelmingly to large population centers. Of the 49 projects, there were three Native American Tribal awards and an additional two that could be considered rural (AL and NH). This is disappointing since the grant guidelines, guidance, and scoring leaned so heavily to investments in rural communities.

I want to thank you all for the incredible amount of effort, teamwork and collaboration it took to bring this together. I would like to extend an especially large thank you our contracted grant writer Ashley Badesch (Sustainable Strategies) and NWCCOG's Mobility Director Dana Wood for helping me to organize the effort. Without their leadership, we would not have been able to bring 21 municipalities across seven counties together for the ask for \$20 million to fund 153 chargers.

Thank you all again, and please reach out to me for further discussion on this or any federal grants applications.

Jonathan Godes

Regional Grants Navigator

Cell: 970 379-4248



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Montezuma
Silverthorne

January 8, 2025

Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary,

Please consider this letter expressing our unwavering support for the Town of Eagle's submission for an implementation grant under the FY 2025 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) discretionary grant program.

Eagle has diligently identified and addressed critical needs within its transportation network, culminating in the comprehensive Grand Avenue Multimodal Reconstruction Project. This initiative encompasses intersection enhancements, infrastructure improvements to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles, and road widening along Grand Avenue, a pivotal thoroughfare connecting local communities and serving as a crucial alternative to the adjacent I-70.

The imminent challenges facing the current stretch of Grand Avenue, approaching its traffic capacity and lacking essential multimodal facilities, are exacerbated by the proximity of Eagle County Airport and traffic influx from I-70. The proposed reconstruction project addresses these challenges comprehensively, focuses on safety concerns, integrates pedestrian and bicycle access, and fortifies the community for sustained growth and potential emergencies that may divert significant traffic to the project road.

The Grand Avenue Multimodal Corridor Project is vital to the CORE's multimodal transit system. As a crucial link to the I-70 arterial, it ensures seamless transportation to and from Eagle County Airport. This essential corridor connects the towns of Gypsum and Eagle and provides vital access to economic job centers in Vail, Avon, and Beaver Creek Ski Resorts. Given the integral role of these entities in the global economics of Eagle County and the State of Colorado, the enhancement of the Grand Avenue Multimodal Corridor is imperative to support the daily commute of the workforce and guest visitors to the world-famous Vail and Beaver Creek Ski Resorts. The envisioned corridor is poised to offer efficient multimodal transit services, benefiting pedestrians, cyclists, public transit users, and motorists alike, thereby emphasizing the creation of safe streets for all users.

Beyond its local impact, this project holds regional significance by substantially improving multimodal transportation. The proposed enhancements will benefit the town of Eagle and extend their positive influence on Eagle County and surrounding towns and communities. The documented need for this project within the Town of Eagle, spanning several years, underscores its importance and relevance.

We firmly believe that the RAISE grant will be pivotal in advancing this crucial infrastructure project, benefiting the town of Eagle and contributing significantly to the broader state of Colorado. Your thoughtful consideration and approval of this application would be instrumental in realizing these essential improvements.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we remain optimistic about the positive impact the Grand Avenue Multimodal Reconstruction Project can have on our local and regional communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Stavney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jon Stavney
Executive Director
Northwest Colorado Council of Governments
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BUSINESS

Colorado's first biomass energy plant closed, set for auction as owner files for bankruptcy protection

The leading bid for the first-of-its-kind facility in Gypsum that converted forest slash into electricity is from an Illinois real estate company.



Jason Blevins

3:50 AM MST on Dec 4, 2024



The Eagle Valley Clean Energy biomass plant in Gypsum closed last month after its owners filed for bankruptcy protection. There are 7,000 tons of shredded forest slash at the facility. The leading bid for the biomass operation is a real estate company. (Jason Blevins, The Colorado Sun)

The pioneering biomass plant in Gypsum — the first in the state to begin converting shredded beetle-kill trees into electricity — has shut down and its owner has filed for bankruptcy protection citing more than \$40 million in debt.

The closure has terminated wildfire mitigation efforts in Colorado's forests and reveals the growing struggle of burning biomass for electricity as demand grows for more affordable renewable energy options like solar and wind. The highest bidder for the plant and the 94-acre property along the Eagle River in Gypsum — revealed last week in Colorado U.S. Bankruptcy Court — is **an Illinois-based real estate firm** that proposes paying \$2.45 million. The trustee in charge of the sale said the Urban Investment Research Corp. bested four potential bidders — and 22 who expressed interest in the plant and its assets — and the

commercial real estate owner would not renew a contract to sell electricity to Holy Cross Energy.

“This is a huge hit to our forests, forest health, wildfire mitigation, watershed protection and water quality in our communities on the Western Slope,” said Kendric Wait, the general manager of Forest Range Products, the Colorado company hired by the Forest Service to mitigate wildfire threats and supply the Gypsum plant with forest slash for conversion into electricity. “I think everyone in our communities should be really concerned about this. There are entire forest projects that will not be done because of this. That impacts every resident up here.”

The \$56 million Eagle Valley Clean Energy Biomass Plant opened in 2013 with a federally funded mission to burn as much as 250 tons of shredded beetle-kill trees a day to produce steam that turned a turbine to generate enough electricity to power as many as 10,000 homes a year. The plant abruptly closed last month. The “stalking horse” bid from the Illinois firm selected by the trustee includes \$550,000 for the plant, equipment and 7,000 tons of shredded wood biomass on a 19.8-acre lot and \$1.9 million for an empty 73.8-acre parcel next to the facility.

When Holy Cross partnered with the plant in 2013, the energy provider was hoping to have 20% of its power coming from renewables. Now, the nonprofit electric co-op serves its 45,000 members with **about 90% of its electricity coming from clean energy**, and most of that is coming from solar and wind farms. The Gypsum biomass plant provided about 7% of the co-op’s energy and was among the first renewable providers enlisted by Holy Cross. The co-op paid a lot for biomass electricity back then.

“It was great because it was a consistent supply but it was our most expensive source. Because it was built 20 years ago and renewable was expensive at the time and we chose to spend more at that time because we thought renewables were important,” said Jenna Weatherred with Holy Cross. “At this point, renewables are our cheapest form of energy.”

Weatherred said the Gypsum plant cost a lot to run, especially compared to solar and wind energy generators.

“It’s really expensive to cut down beetle kill and drive it over to the plant,” she said.

A long history of lawsuits, challenges

The plant struggled from the start as the Utah-based owners battled lawsuits filed by the Town of Gypsum and **the Oregon company that built the plant**. A fire in 2014 idled the plant for nearly a year. In April 2019, Utah's Evergreen Clean Energy sold the plant to New York-based **Greenbacker Renewable Energy Co., LLC**, which owns and manages \$3.8 billion in renewable energy operations across the country that provide enough **clean energy to power 808,000 homes a year**.

That sale — for an undisclosed price — ended the plant owners' ongoing lawsuits with Gypsum and the construction company. The owners who opened the plant also **paid \$2.6 million in 2019** to settle allegations that they defrauded a federal renewable energy funding program.

Earlier this year Greenbacker and its subsidiary Eagle Valley Green Energy filed for bankruptcy in U.S. District Court in Denver. The Rural Utilities Service in the Department of Agriculture is cited as the top creditor with secured claims, owed \$35.4 million from a 2013 loan. The filing includes \$4.6 million in unsecured claims from dozens of contractors and service providers. The filing cites \$3.2 million owed to the Greenbacker Renewable Energy Corp. The filing also notes more than \$630,000 owed to West Range Forest Products. The Gypsum-based West Range has long-term stewardship contracts with the Forest Service, tasked with logging operations across several regions.



The Eagle Valley Clean Energy biomass plant in Gypsum closed last month after its owners filed for bankruptcy protection. The federally funded \$56 million facility opened in 2013 to convert shredded beetle-kill trees collected in nearby forests into electricity. (Jason Blevins, The Colorado Sun)

It's not the first time a biomass processor has shut down in Colorado.

Confluence Energy opened in 2007 with a plan to process beetle-kill trees at a facility in Kremmling. The company acquired a competitor in Walden in 2013 and the two facilities produced pellets for heating, mulch and wood-fiber products for pet beds and absorbent pads for the oil and gas industry. Confluence Energy was the largest producer of pellets in the West when it filed for bankruptcy protection in 2018, citing \$14.9 million in debt and \$11.2 million in assets that included the 20,000-square-foot processing plants in Kremmling and Walden. Confluence reported revenues of \$4.7 million 2017, down from \$5.9 million in 2016.

Colorado's innovations in recycling biomass

Still, there are innovations and opportunities circling Colorado's forest trash.

Xcel Energy wants to **convert the coal-fired power plant in Hayden** — which is set to retire in 2028 — into a 19-megawatt biomass facility that would burn forest waste and pine beetle-kill wood to generate enough electricity for 36,000 homes a year.

California-based Charm Industrial **in July opened a facility in Fort Lupton** that processes agricultural waste and wood slash **collected from Front Range forests** into a biomass liquid called Bio-oil, which it then injects into orphan oil and gas wells. The company has collected more than \$100 million from investors and partnered with companies like Google, J.P. Morgan, Meta and Stripe that **paid \$53 million** to reduce their carbon footprints by permanently removing carbon from the atmosphere.

The Loveland-based Biochar Now **burns shredded trees collected from forests** in 40 high-heat, oxygen-deprived kilns at a facility in Berthoud to create biochar, a sort of charcoal that is used for improving soil, adding to livestock feed and filtering water. The **process captures carbon dioxide** before the wood rots on a forest floor and releases greenhouse gases. And like Charm Industrial, the innovative Biochar Now sells carbon offsets to companies seeking to green up operations.

The newly formed **Colorado Mass Timber Coalition** works to encourage timber products in new buildings and bolster the economics around local timber harvested from on the state's forests. The group has 280 members, up from 70 in April.

The growing number of members reflects interest and opportunity in finding uses for forest products in Colorado, said Will Lepry, the first director of the coalition who took over in April.

“The more end markets we have the cheaper it is to manage the forest to make them healthy,” Lepry said. “It’s not good that the Gypsum plant is shut down. That’s one less place for slash to go. That means it’s going to be left in place or burned in slash piles instead of being used to create energy.”

“I think we need to look at biomass in a different way”

Looking at biomass as an energy source is the wrong perspective, said Scott Fitzwilliams, the head of the White River National Forest.

“This is not about making energy. It’s about treating forests,” Fitzwilliams said.

The 2.28 million-acre White River National Forest uses mechanized timber harvesting to treat about 2,000 acres a year as part of its fuel-reduction wildfire mitigation and vegetation management program. It pays contractors as much as \$2,500 an acre for that work. About 45% of the slash and scrap wood harvested by those contractors was delivered to the Gypsum plant for biomass-generated electricity.

“The loss of this plant is really disappointing for our vegetation program,” Fitzwilliams said. “We are not exactly sure if there will be someone else to fill that void and take that material.”

Wait, with Forest Range Products, has ongoing mitigation projects on public land around Summit County, Vail, Eagle, Glenwood Springs and the Roaring Fork Valley. He charges the Forest Service cost plus 10% and the bankruptcy of the Gypsum biomass plant will end several of his company’s wildfire mitigation projects. Without the contract with Holy Cross, “the power plant is not worth anything,” Wait said.

As the bankruptcy sale moves through the process, Wait hopes Holy Cross members can urge the co-op to keep biomass in the energy provider’s renewable portfolio.

“Biomass has always been expensive,” Wait said. “But the price for this plant is cheap and the benefits are just so huge.”

Trying to make biomass energy economical is a challenge as the cost of wind and solar energy drops. Burning slash for energy should be seen as a tool for reducing the cost of wildfire mitigation, Fitzwilliams said, not as a rival for cheaper natural gas, solar and wind energy. He toured Europe a few years ago to study the vibrant biomass industry in places like Germany and Austria, “where it is heavily, heavily subsidized,” he said.

“It’s just too labor intensive and equipment intensive — with very technical machinery — to not have that subsidy,” Fitzwilliams said. “In Europe, where freezing to death or not depends on (Russian President Vladimir) Putin, the incentives to subsidize other energies like biomass are very high.”

In the Western United States, those incentives should include reducing the threat of a wildfire that costs \$20 million to \$50 million to fight, Fitzwilliams said.

“Our public policy folks should focus on forest health and whatever beneficial consequence is great,” Fitzwilliams said. “Spending \$600,000 on a treatment that prevents a \$50 million

wildfire is a good investment and it protects watersheds for so many rural communities. I think we need to look at biomass in a different way.”

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NEWS Thursday, December 5, 2024

Steamboat trails fight reveals growing discord over whether public funds for recreation should focus on residents or tourists

Plus: Hunting groups sue CPW commissioners, Jeremy Bloom takes X Games reins, Justice Gorsuch won't weigh Uinta Basin Railway, the bane of biomass

Jason Blevins

Outdoors/Business Reporter



SNEAK PEEK OF THE WEEK

Steamboat Springs council OKs funding for remote singletrack trails, ending years of RouttCo contention over tourist-versus-local amenities





Steamboat Springs resident Scott Smallish mountain bikes Sept. 7, 2020, along the Continental Divide Trail in Routt County near Rabbit Ears Pass. (Matt Stensland, Special to The Colorado Sun)

“People are asking why we are funding these trails to attract tourists when we are already overcrowded and a growing number of short-term rentals has us facing a housing crisis.”

— Larry Desjardin with Keep Routt Wild

\$1.6 million

Steamboat Springs lodging tax revenue directed toward new trails atop Rabbit Ears Pass

The steady stream of residents testifying before the [Steamboat Springs City Council late Tuesday](#) night all spoke of their appreciation for trails. But there was friction over where those trails

appreciation for trails. But there was friction over where those trails should be built and whether publicly funded recreation should be designed for locals or visitors.

It's a scene playing out across the Western Slope as residents of busy mountain towns push elected leaders to [focus more on the local quality of life and less on the visitor experience](#). That's a bold move in communities built by tourist dollars. And it's a sign of the [changing tides in tourist-based economies](#).

"A lot has changed in the last 10 years. We have had COVID and huge crowds in the summer and we are saying we want tax dollars spent locally," said Larry Desjardin, whose [Keep Routt Wild](#) group is fighting a plan for new trails on Forest Service-managed land atop Rabbit Ears Pass near Steamboat Springs. "People are asking why we are funding these trails to attract tourists when we are already overcrowded and a growing number of short-term rentals has us facing a housing crisis."

In 2013, Steamboat Springs voters overwhelmingly approved a plan to direct lodging taxes toward trails. As that funding plan expires next year, the city has developed a vast network of trails ranging from paved sidewalks to rocky singletrack, bolstering the city's appeal for both locals and visitors.

The 2A ballot measure approved by more than 70% of Steamboat Springs voters was meant to expand the intent of the city's 1986 accommodations tax ballot measure that promoted tourism, the economic health of the city and bolstered Steamboat Springs "as a premier destination resort."

A [trails committee](#) started meeting in 2014 and began ranking 46 possible trails projects inside and outside the city proposed by the trails alliance that backed the 2A proposal.

The committee last year reevaluated the way it ranked trail projects. That overhaul added new goals, like "bang for the buck" and improved connectivity and diversity of trails, to the ranking of possible trail projects that could be funded with local lodging tax collections.

At the Dec. 3 city council meeting, the committee gave its final recommendation of 23 potential projects before the 2A lodging tax expires. The committee asked the council to direct a vast chunk of the final allocation — \$1.6 million from more than \$2 million in the

trails fund — to the Forest Service to support building [13 new trails atop Rabbit Ears Pass in a region known as Mad Rabbit](#).

After nearly three hours of comment and debate, the council agreed with the committee, voting 5-2 on Tuesday to approve funding for trails in the Mad Rabbit region.

The vote ended almost six years of angst surrounding the Forest Service's plan for trails connecting Rabbit Ears Pass with Mad Creek. The agency is finalizing a decision on a multiyear environmental review of the controversial [Mad Rabbit Trails Project](#), which would expand trails around the Continental Divide Trail on Rabbit Ears Pass.

Many of the council members said that no other issue has harvested so many comments from Steamboat Springs residents.

Councilman Steve Muntean said he has received 300 emails from constituents on the funding plan and 60% supported trails atop Rabbit Ears.

“I don't see how I can go against a majority of the people as well as the science and experts,” Muntean said, noting the trail advocacy groups and Forest Service supporting the Mad Rabbit trails network.

Councilwoman Joella West said the volunteers on the trails committee spent a decade coming up with recommendations anchored in the 2013 2A ballot language that voters approved.

“I'm sorry that we are still dealing with tourism but we are,” West said. “That is the ballot language we have. That doesn't mean we have to go out and advertise all of these trails to tourists but we have to observe the ballot language.”

>> Click over to [The Sun](#) on Friday to read this story

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IN THEIR WORDS

Hunting groups sue CPW commissioners





Signs on the side of U.S. 40 in Kremmling display opposition for Proposition 127, which would have banned mountain lion, bobcat and lynx hunting in Colorado. (Photo courtesy of Dylan Roberts)

A pair of hunting groups are suing the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission and two commissioners, saying a column written by the commissioners and published before last month's vote on Proposition 127, violated state open meetings laws.

Safari Club International and The Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation last month filed a lawsuit in Denver District Court arguing that the opinion piece opposing mountain lion hunting penned by commissioners Jessica Beaulieu and Jack Murphy and [published in the Durango Herald](#) violated state transparency laws. The lawsuit contends Beaulieu and Murphy must have discussed lion hunting as the commission was studying a new management plan for lions on the Eastern Slope. Colorado's open meetings laws require public notice for a meeting when two or more members of a state public body discuss public business.

The Durango Herald piece in opposition of Prop. 127 criticized lion hunting as a "highly unpopular, unscientific and unwarranted abuse and exploitation" of wildlife that "in no way contributes" to the "bright future of ethical outdoor recreation" in Colorado.

It also called out "a small lion-hunting industry" that guarantees 100% trophy lion harvest, the needless killing of female lions, and CPW itself, for offering cougar hunting "to serve mountain lion hunters alone, for a recreational opportunity."

The column was published a few weeks before voters [rejected the proposal to ban mountain lion hunting](#).

The lawsuit argues the two commissioners must have discussed the opinion article, which "flatly — and falsely — criticized Colorado's current mountain lion and bobcat management programs." Any

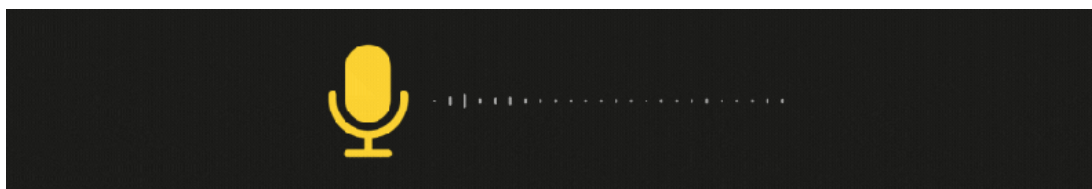
discussion outside of a public meeting violated state open meetings laws, the lawsuit contends.

The Oct. 12 article by Beaulieu, Murphy and former commissioner James Pribyl noted they were expressing their individual opinions, not the position of the board of CPW commissioners. (The board [unanimously approved](#) the Eastern Slope lion management plan at its Nov. 15 meeting.)

Jeff Roberts, the director of the Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition, said there is robust conversation around the ability of members of a public body — like the CPW commission — to express opinions outside of their professional jobs.

“Here, Murphy and Beaulieu say they are expressing their views as citizens and note that the commission is neutral,” Roberts said in an email, pointing to a [paper published last month](#) by the Knight First Amendment Institute that suggests “accepting a government office — including an elected or appointed position — does not divest a speaker of all First Amendment rights.”

>> Click over to [The Sun](#) on Friday to read this story



The Outsider now has a podcast! Veteran reporter **Jason Blevins** covers the industry from the inside out, plus indulges in the fun side of being outdoors in our beautiful state.

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NEWS Thursday, December 26, 2024

A year of Outsider stories from Colorado's Western Slope communities

Plus: Tourists or locals first, the hardest decision for SAR, crashing on a snowy pass, ski area injuries, big wins in small towns, river permit bots

Jason Blevins

Outdoors/Business Reporter



Happy day-after-Christmas! Here's a roundup of top stories from this year's Outsider, which seemed to revolve around Colorado's mountain communities working to balance and protect lifestyle, recreation, conservation and economic vibrancy. I'm over-the-moon grateful for your support. Holler anytime.

-j

SNEAK PEEK OF THE WEEK

Turning up the heat on the tourists-or-locals debate





A pack of cyclists grind their way up a gravel road in Routt County during the 2023 SBT GRVL race. The race, capped at 3,000 riders, is one of the largest gravel cycling events in the world. (Dane Cronin, Special to The Colorado Sun)

“Recreation and agriculture are the backbones of Routt County. We need each other to survive.”

— Amy Charity, founder of the SBT GRVL bike race

Tracy’s Ross’s early-January look at the [simmering feud between ranchers and organizers](#) of the wildly popular [SBT GRVL bike race in Steamboat Springs](#) reflects the increasing tension between tourists and locals in resort communities.

Now granted, the local bemoaning of tourist hordes is a time-worn narrative in resort communities, but it’s one that has gained volume in recent years as towns deal with skyrocketing home prices, a shortage of workers and a need for a better balance between local lifestyles and catering to visitors.

Steamboat-area ranchers said the gravel race, which drew 3,000 cyclists, was too big and disrupted agricultural work on rural roads around town. Supporters said one of the largest gravel races of its kind pumped \$4.5 million into the local economy in only a couple days.

After contentious debate, local leaders scaled back the size of the sixth annual race for 2025.

That reflects an evolution in communities that are built on tourism and a common theme in this year’s Outsider newsletters. [A survey by the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments and the Colorado Association of Ski Towns published in June](#) showed a growing population of residents in mountain towns who are not necessarily dependent on tourism. [And those newcomers are joining a growing swell of old-timers keen to shift away from a decades-long focus on visitors and find a new balance that includes local lifestyle](#)

long focus on visitors and find a new balance that includes local lifestyle considerations like fostering a sense of community and “a small town atmosphere.”

That shift might mean fewer tax dollars flowing into towns. And the survey showed residents OK with that. I’ve heard one leader in Crested Butte call it a move toward “Just Shitty Enough.” Yeah, the sidewalks maybe aren’t going to be meticulously cleared every snowstorm. And the roundabouts won’t be bursting with flowers all summer. Downtown parking will be a nightmare. That massive rec center — built with taxes paid by tourists — might not be open every day of the week all year. (The overarching logic in the Just Shitty Enough ethos is that maybe high-elevation mountain towns should not be unwaveringly accommodating to all comers.)

There’s a trade-off when tourist towns start to turn away from visitors. And with fewer mountain town residents actually depending on those tourists for their livelihoods, there’s a big evolution on the horizon in Colorado’s high country economies. Time will tell if locals actually are willing to make sacrifices for fewer visitors. And we’ll be there watching.

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NEWS

Are ski towns making progress on housing?

Resort areas in the West continue to chip away at an age-old problem with varied success

 by **Alex Miller / For The Park Record**
December 13, 2024

Location	Total housing units	Owner-occupied	Renter-occupied	Vacant/seasonal
Park City	8,585	24%	9%	52%
Ketchum, ID	3,835	29%	12%	55%
Vail, CO	7,483	23%	9%	58%
Mammoth Lakes, CA	9,642	17%	14%	58%
Jackson, WY	5,058	35%	50%	6%

Credit: Northwest Colorado Council of Government

It’s fair to say that ever since there have been ski towns, there have been housing problems. From when those early lifts started turning after World War II, when there was little nearby housing, to today, when affordability is the main issue, it’s never been an easy one to solve.

Those early “ski bums” happy to crash in a basement or their VW bus are long gone, replaced by either seasonal workers who expect decent and affordable living conditions or full-time resort-area workers who want to be part of a community.

But as ski towns like Park City, Vail and Jackson Hole continue to grow while real estate values climb ever higher, there’s a simple, stubborn reality that likely won’t ever go away: Beautiful places with great skiing, amazing views and year-round outdoor recreational opportunities will always attract those able to afford a second (or third or fourth) home they may only occupy a few weeks a year.

Popularity — often driven by resort marketing — drives up prices, as well as demand for armies of seasonal and year-round workers to make the place run. It's a particular irony that, amid a shortage of worker housing, so many dwellings are vacant for much of the year.

“We don't have a housing problem. We have a housing utilization problem,” said Margaret Bowes, executive director of the Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST). “There are plenty of units. They just sit empty.”

Despite its Colorado origins, CAST's membership today includes many other Western resort areas, including Park City, Jackson Hole, Big Sky, Mammoth Lakes and Whistler.

Housing, of course, is a big focus for the group. In 2023, CAST teamed with the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) to create a **Workforce Housing Report** that's the most comprehensive study ever done on the topic. The 82-page report goes into exhaustive detail on the problems and solutions while devoting a page to all the member areas — including Park City.

Quantifying the issue

As Bowes said, the study didn't contain any surprises, but it did help quantify the situation while putting many of the solutions currently planned or in place in one document.

In Park City, for example, the report shows 8,585 total housing units — with 52% being vacant or seasonal and only 24% owner occupied. Park City's **affordable housing page** notes that the government has been working on the housing issue since the early 1990s and has helped create 651 deed-restricted units — 69% rental and 31% owner-occupied. (Deed restrictions typically cap how much the unit can be sold for and/or the type of owner or renter living there.)

It's more than a drop in the bucket, but there's plenty more to be done as the page states: “Park City must create an additional 800-1,000 units over the next five years to support its workforce and middle-class residents.”

For many of the locations documented in the report, the numbers are similar: Half or more of the total housing units are vacant/seasonal, 20-30% are owner-occupied, and only 10-15% are renter occupied.

Megan McKenna, a housing advocate for the Mountainlands Community Housing Trust representing the Wasatch Back, it's a problem that's continued to worsen.

“The housing crisis we’re seeing nationally is highly exaggerated in mountain towns,” she said. “The cost of living is so much greater, and so is the wealth disparity. We’re like the canary in the coal mine.”

As a member of the local workforce who also lives in an affordable housing unit herself, McKenna will also soon be in a stronger position to tackle the problem as a newly elected Summit County councilor.

New problems

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated existing trends, creating what Jon Stavney, executive director of NWCCOG, called “a supply and demand breaking point.” Remote workers flooded mountain towns armed with big-city salaries and were able to outbid locals for housing. A 2021 study found that 70% of newcomers arrived with jobs paying over \$150,000 annually, while 60% of existing, full-time residents earned significantly less.

“What happened after COVID is that those distinctions became blurred,” Stavney said. “Places in Gypsum and Eagle (Vail bedroom communities) were filling up. These are places that were classically downvalley, worker communities that almost overnight became second-home communities.”

In recent years, two other forces compounded the problem: the rise of Airbnb and VRBO making it much easier to do short-term rentals, and a big jump in housing costs driven by the pandemic and low interest rates.

Suddenly, landlords who might have rented out for a whole season or year to locals were able to rent short-term units to visitors for more money. Meanwhile, a modest home that might have cost \$400,000 in 2015 was now selling for \$1.2 million.

This and other factors helped wake up the resorts themselves. Often criticized for driving the demand for housing with their workers and not doing much to help, ski areas, hotels and other businesses were compelled to step up to the plate.

As Bowes said, it’s not an easy question to answer when it comes to whose responsibility it is to house workers. In most places, it’s left to the market with perhaps some government assistance for low-income families.

Wins

While the problem is a stubborn one, there are successes being reported as well as a larger menu of tools to tackle the problem from multiple angles.

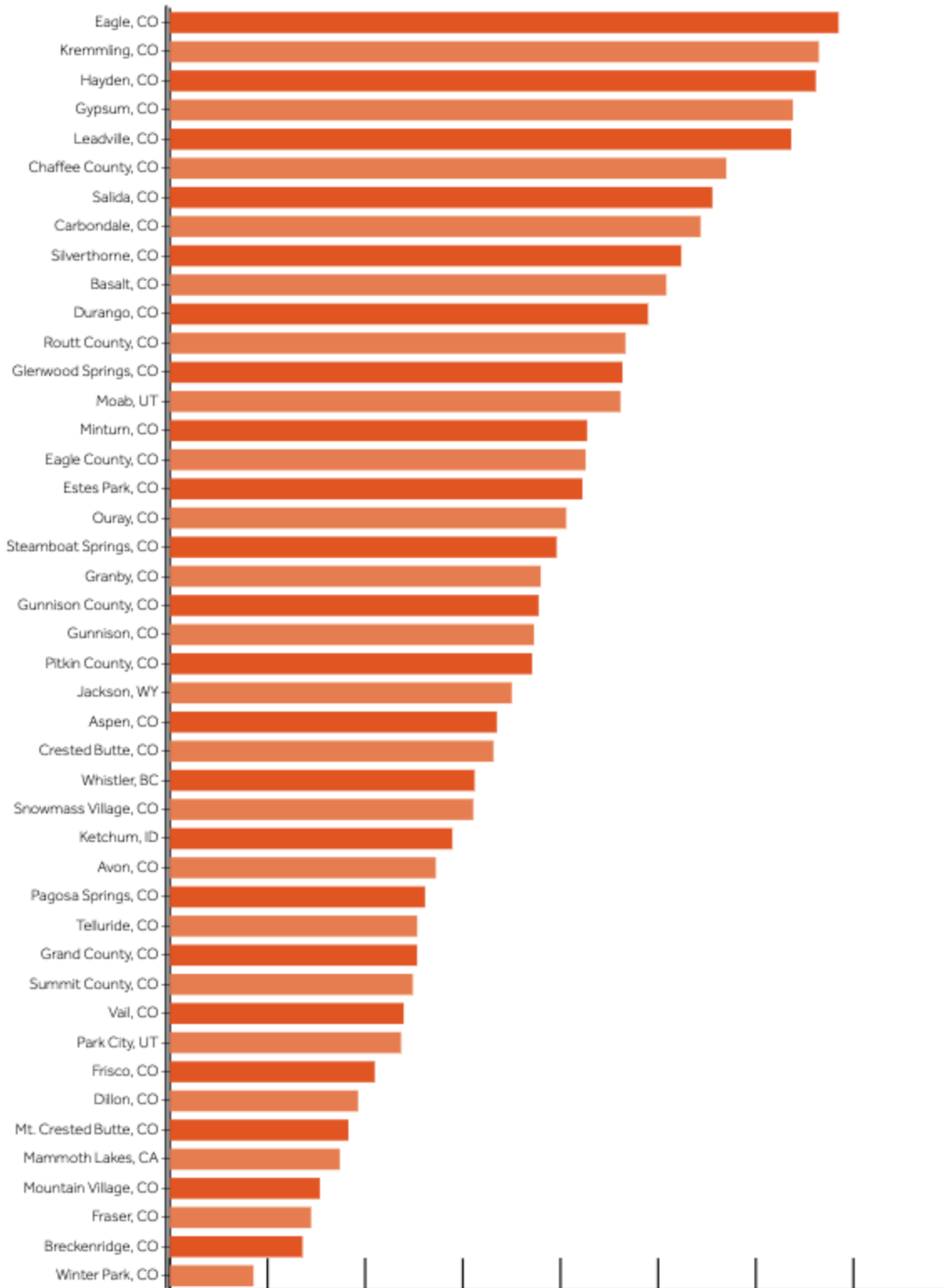
Jackson, Wyoming, for one, has doubled its affordable workforce housing since 2016 through public-private partnerships. In Ouray, Colorado, four local businesses joined forces to purchase the Ouray Chalet Inn to house their workers. In Durango, the city is converting a former Best Western hotel into 120 apartments.

Locally, Park City has created deed-restricted properties with the Snow Creek Cottages (13 homes); Empire Pass (17 units); Parkside Apartments (42 rental units) and **others**. Future plans include Park City Heights (79 units) and the EngineHouse development with 99 mixed-income units.

McKenna said many of the successes come from tackling the problem from different angles and creating partnerships.

“Local government can’t go it alone,” she said. “So, when nonprofits and private businesses are part of the solution, there’s a much greater likelihood that we can make a greater impact.”

Owner Occupied as a % of Total Housing Units



Credit: Northwest Colorado Council of Government

Deed restrictions may be one of the most baseline tools, but she said innovation continues to point to more solutions while the problem itself is being taken more seriously.

“The big resorts are concerned, of course, but so are the smaller business who also feel the impact of the housing crisis,” she said.

For the bigger employers, McKenna said there’s a movement toward more direct approaches like securing master leases and building their own housing units.

Other innovative programs are popping up all over. Vail’s InDEED program pays homeowners to place permanent deed restrictions on their properties, ensuring they remain available for local workers.

Breckenridge has committed to adding 924 workforce housing units by 2027, with about 300 currently under construction. And Summit County, Colorado, launched a program offering up to \$60,000 for homeowners who create accessory dwelling units (ADUs) for workforce housing.

At the ballot box

Local governments are also seeing strong support from their communities willing to back policy changes and new funding mechanisms. In 2022, voters in multiple mountain communities approved new taxes on short-term rentals to fund workforce housing. Steamboat Springs passed a 9% tax on vacation rentals, while Summit County, Colorado, approved a 2% tax for housing and child-care initiatives.

On the federal level, recent legislation allows the U.S. Forest Service to lease administrative sites for workforce housing, leading to projects like Summit County’s partnership to build 177 units on Forest Service land along I-70.

“The political will equation for elected officials has changed,” said Stavney. “They recognize that they have to be leaders for future residents if they want to have a community.”

Still, challenges remain. Construction costs continue to climb, and infrastructure expenses can add tens of thousands per unit for roads, water and sewer connections. And in many communities, NIMBYism (“Not in My Back Yard”) has morphed into “NIMSBY” — “Not in My Second Back Yard” — as vacation homeowners resist density and development.

Despite the obstacles, mountain communities are proving that solutions are possible with political will and creative thinking. And those wealthy out-of-towners may someday see the light and not stand in the way.

“Recognize that the place that you value and the reason you came here is the same reason that people who want to be here and build a community here and build a life here want to be here,” Stavney advises second-

home owners. “That vibrancy comes from the full-time residents who operate that quirky coffee shop or that little retail store you like to pop into.”

As she looks ahead to taking her seat on the Summit County Council, McKenna said she’s looking forward to a renewed focus on the housing crisis.



“It’s definitely one of our greatest challenges, and I’d love to see the council come up with a housing goal that we can track the progress of,” she said. “I hope to see new partnerships, working with the chamber and others to find ways to engage employers big and small.”



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Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch Recuses Himself From Case After Pressure

Story by Aila Slisco • 1d • 3 min read



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Supreme Court Justice [Neil Gorsuch](#) has agreed to recuse himself from an upcoming case following a pressure campaign from activist groups and Democratic lawmakers.

Gorsuch, part of the court's current 6-3 conservative majority, [indicated](#) on Wednesday that he would not be participating in [Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County, Colorado](#), a case that will determine whether the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider "downline impacts" of projects like oil drilling operations.

 Feedback



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Calls for the justice to recuse himself intensified due to his relationship with Philip Anschutz, a Colorado billionaire who built his fortune in the oil industry and could benefit from the court's ruling. Gorsuch represented Anschutz while working as a corporate lawyer in the early 2000s.

News that Gorsuch recused himself broke in the form of a memo sent to lawyers involved in the case by Supreme Court Clerk Scott Harris on Wednesday.

It announced that "Justice Gorsuch has determined that he will not continue to participate in this case" due to the court's code of conduct, which was enacted last year following criticisms of Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito for refusing to remove themselves from other cases.

The current [case](#) is set for oral arguments on December 10 and arrived at the Supreme Court after a federal appeals court sided with Eagle County's lawsuit to block the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition-sponsored construction of a rail line in rural Utah. The



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In September, the Anschutz Exploration Corporation filed an amicus brief, or "friend-of- the-court" brief, urging Supreme Court justices to limit the scope of NEPA and to allow the rail line to be constructed by overturning the lower court's decision.

"Because NEPA applies to every major federal action—including the authorizations Anschutz needs to develop federal oil-and-gas reserves—far more is at stake in this case than the 88-mile rail line in rural Utah," the [brief](#) states.

Newsweek reached out for comment to the Anschutz Exploration Corporation via email on Wednesday evening.

Accountable.US and 14 other groups including Greenpeace USA argued that "the cozy relationship" between Gorsuch and Anschutz "requires Justice Gorsuch to recuse from this case as Anschutz's businesses could financially benefit from how the case is decided" in a [letter](#) sent to Chief Justice John Roberts in October.



"The blatant conflict of interest is clear—therefore, we urge you to take appropriate action to ensure Justice Gorsuch recuses himself from this case," the letter states. "This relationship that creates a conflict of interest is just the latest example of countless violations in the years-long Supreme Court ethics crisis."

Last month, Democratic Representative Hank Johnson of Georgia and 12 of his House colleagues sent a [letter](#) to Gorsuch, demanding his recusal, arguing that Anschutz "played a significant role" in his ascent to the Supreme Court in addition to ongoing personal ties.

"To show the American people that the Supreme Court is impartial, you must recuse yourself from any case that directly impacts the financial fortunes of Philip Anschutz, the man who was your previous legal client, who helped raise you to the Supreme Court, and who now treats you to lavish vacations on his exclusive 60-square-mile ranch," the lawmakers wrote.

"You must do the honorable thing and recuse yourself from any decisions in the case of *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County, Colorado*," they added.

Following the announcement that Gorsuch had recused himself, Johnson issued a statement praising the justice for doing the "honorable thing" by showing that he was "not in the pocket" of Anschutz.

"I think it is essential to maintaining the public's respect in the integrity of the Court, and I applaud Justice Gorsuch for doing the right and honorable thing," Johnson said. "It is important that the Court show the public that it is not in the pocket of billionaire benefactors."



— SIMI VALLEY, CALIFORNIA - AUGUST 08: Supreme Court Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch speaks about his brand-new book "Over Ruled: The Human Toll of Too Much Law" at the Reagan Library on August 8, 2024 in Simi Valley, California. Gorsuch spoke about cases he had come across involving "ordinary Americans" who faced legal battles lengthened by federal regulations. Former President Donald Trump nominated Gorsuch as a nominee for Associate Justice of the Supreme Court to succeed Antonin Scalia in 2017. (Photo by Apu Gomes/Getty Images)

Related Articles

- [Gorsuch and Sotomayor Seek Clarity on Critical Issue in Takings Clause Case](#)



1/10/2025

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Montezuma
Silverthorne

Gregg Hefner
Senior Director
The Colorado Energy Office
1600 Broadway, Suite 1960
Denver, CO 80202

Subject: Letter of Commitment for TREC Competitive Grant –DE-FOA-0003316
Dear Greg Hefner,

Thank you for the opportunity to share this letter of support from the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) Energy Program to formally commit to partnering with the Colorado Energy Office to provide support for the “Crafting a Future-Ready Workforce: Colorado's Pre-Apprenticeship Pathways in Weatherization, Electrification, and HVAC” proposal under the TREC competitive grant program.

The NWCCOG Energy Program operates in some of the highest cost of living and most challenging labor markets in the country. Attracting and retaining staff to do the important work of weatherization is an ongoing challenge. We must use every possible recruitment and retention method available and see implementing a pre-apprenticeship as a valuable strategy to achieve a talented and eager workforce to meet the demands of the residential energy workforce. We anticipate success in leveraging our experience with regional public, private, business and education partners on behalf of the TREC Program.

Joining Colorado Energy Office through TREC to advance accessible pathways for residential energy occupations is important and we are committed to both the short and long term goals. We know that job quality helps to attract and retain workers. We are ready to help other industry and employer partners across the state working in residential energy contractor sectors identify areas where they can invest in changes for long-term growth and market competitiveness. Notably several areas where we employ staff have a large diverse worker population that values the bilingual pay incentive the Energy Program offers. This incentive, and offering training resources in Spanish, help amplify that we value staff members from underrepresented populations.

As part of this commitment, NWCCOG Energy program will partner with the Colorado Energy Office and looks forward to accepting TREC pre-apprentices into apprenticeship or other positions. We understand that these resources, support, and logistics are essential for the success of the project, and we are dedicated to ensuring they are made available as required.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this important project. We look forward to collaborating with The Colorado Energy Office and other project partners.

Sincerely,

Darcy Owens
Workforce Development Manager