Historic wins for public health & safety!

by Brian Williams
Community Organizer

As the roil of the 2020 U.S. election captivated the world, Western Colorado Alliance and its stalwart members continued to advance our work in developing healthy, just, and self-reliant communities by fighting for protections from the negative impacts of the oil and gas industry.

After almost a full year of rulemaking, these efforts paid off when, in late November, the Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) voted to approve a suite of new rules to protect public health, safety, welfare, the environment and wildlife resources. Because of the tireless efforts of our members, our Alliance has secured a number of key victories which we have sought to win for decades.

The 7 big changes

1. Coloradans throughout the state now enjoy an enhanced capacity to engage with oil and gas permitting applications that could impact them. The new rules grant automatic standing to all tenants and homeowners who live within 2,000 feet of a proposed well pad.

2. An analysis of possible alternative locations for well pads must be submitted with all permit applications near homes, important wildlife habitat, and disproportionately impacted communities. This analysis will play a vital role in allowing the state regulators to determine if the location selected by oil and gas operators is the most protective site available for drilling.

3. Language has been included that specifically highlights the COGCC’s authority to deny permits on the basis of conflict with the agency’s mission to protect the health of people and their environment — including currently pending applications. This language empowers commissioners to enforce the letter and the spirit of these new rules.

4. The COGCC has recognized itself to be an independent, coequal permitting authority that makes its own permitting decisions distinct from local governments. This was a crucial move that effectively creates a set of minimum, state-wide standards designed to protect people and their environment which all operators must respect, regardless of which county they drill in.

5. The assessment of cumulative impacts that oil and gas extraction has on the surrounding landscape and the people who inhabit it will begin in earnest. The rules will now require operators to produce data for impacts on water, wildlife, public health, and air emissions that are expected as a result of their activity. They will also be required to submit the estimated emissions from other proximate well pads for a comprehensive assessment from the COGCC.

6. The practice of venting and flaring away excess natural gas is coming to an end in Colorado. Though operators will still be able to vent and flare in emergency situations, no longer will the wanton release of methane and other pollutants be a standard practice in our state.

7. The commission has instituted new rules for wildlife and riparian areas. These include

Continued on page 2
Drawing lessons from a relentless year

by Andrea Krieves
Alliance Chair

Relentless: [rəˈlen(t)ləs] Adjective – oppressively constant; incessant

Pretty much sums up 2020, doesn’t it? From the global pandemic to climate disasters, from a reckoning with long-standing institutional racism to a deeply divisive election season, this year has been relentless in its challenges. Even approaching the season of Thanksgiving seems fraught with difficulty as infection rates surge in our communities and uncertainty continues to be the norm. It’s an exhausting year to say the least, and each of us has a story to tell about how we’ve been impacted, and how we’ve made it through.

But that’s just it. We’ve made it through — at least so far. We are relentless too.

Despite isolation, we’ve connected. Who knew we could all be so good at Zoom? We’ve met the deep divisions in our communities with a strengthened resolve to listen to and learn from each other. We’ve taken a hard look in the mirror to acknowledge our role in the many challenges we face and committed to making meaningful advances in the work that is most important. We stand up to the uncertainty ahead knowing that despite our physical isolation, we are not alone. For 40 years, our Alliance has been bringing people together to build grassroots power around the things that are important to our members. As you read through this issue of the Clarion, I hope you will be inspired by the stories of resilience in this relentless year and galvanized into action for the year ahead.

We know all too well that closing the book on 2020 won’t magically fix everything. And so, whether virtually or in person, we will continue to reach out and connect with our members, to draw strength from each other, and to stand together to face 2021 head on.

Historic wins for public health and safety!

Continued from page 1

a wide range of measures, such as a 300-foot setback for new oil and gas development from rivers, and the protection of high priority habitat for several species.

But without question, the crown jewel of this rulemaking is the COGCC’s mandate that all new oil and gas drilling must be setback at least 2,000 feet away from homes. Though limited exceptions to this rule do exist, the standard setback for well pads has quadrupled, in part due to the commission’s acknowledgement of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s 2019 finding that people living too close to oil and gas wells are at an elevated risk of experiencing a host of health problems ranging from trouble breathing to cancer.

Despite all that our Alliance has accomplished in the COGCC, we must be vigilant in defending our wins, and turn our gaze to the future of oil and gas in Colorado. In the spring, we intend to tackle the thorny issue of bonding and financial assurances in our state.

Wins for air quality

Though much of the Alliance Oil & Gas Committee’s attention has been focused on the COGCC mission change rulemaking, our work also continues in the state’s Air Quality Control Commission (AQCC).

Earlier this year, members of Western Colorado Alliance successfully advocated for the introduction of new rules which will require operators throughout the state to begin monitoring their pre-production emissions.

The time range for this monitoring will include the ten days leading up to drilling, and go through the six months after production begins. The resulting data will be instrumental in informing the work of the AQCC as they strive to meet ambitious requirements set forth by both the state legislature and the federal government.

In December, the AQCC is poised to consider rules which would require faster leak repair for oil and gas pads near homes, and use equipment designed to engage with pressurized gas that does not result in additional emissions. As the work continues, our Alliance stands ready with the people of Colorado in the fight for clean air, healthy people, and a sustainable future.

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Chair Andrea Krieves

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Nick Angi, Vice Chair, Montrose
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(970) 256-7650
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Our Alliance’s Board of Directors
Before you read another word, take a deep breath with me. We’re officially through the 2020 election, and now we look towards what to do to manifest positivity moving forward. Did you do it? Did you take a breath? OK, let’s dig in…

Around the U.S., we saw a record turnout of voters, and the West Slope was no exception. We can’t help but think you had something to do with that, as Western Colorado Alliance members and staff canvassed thousands of doors and mailed thousands of postcards. Overall, 82% of registered voters who live on the West Slope turned out to vote in this election. Traditionally, West Slope voters show a strong turnout, but we outdid ourselves this year!

In past elections, less than 50% of voters under 35 years of age have voted in presidential elections, but this year 63% of West Slope young voters cast their ballots. With 11 state-wide issues on the ballot and a hotly contested presidential race, it’s clear that when the issues hit home, we ALL want our voices to be heard! No matter which side of the issues you fall on, many voters in this election were probably surprised by the closeness of the presidential election results.

As numbers started rolling in on election night, what looked to be given scenarios quickly turned into a Red Mirage and a Blue Ripple. We should all give a round of applause to the State of Colorado, the local election offices, and our tried and tested mail-in ballot system.

What has become commonplace for Colorado voters was an experiment for many of the battleground states that kept us counting for many days after the election. While the election favored President Trump early on, results eventually narrowed towards Joe Biden, leaving many of us uncomfortably aware that the divide in our country and communities is much greater than we had imagined. So, while the election is over, in our quest to build healthy, just, and self-reliant communities, there is much work to be done. Colorado voters were “yes” voters for most state-wide issues. Of the 11 ballot issues, ten passed with a “mixed bag” of results. Our biggest celebration was the passage of paid family and medical leave, which brings us one giant step forward toward ensuring adequate health care for Colorado families. Alongside paid family leave, Gallagher was repealed, saving local districts such as schools and fire from losing millions of dollars needed to recover from the COVID pandemic. While our Alliance did not take a position on grey wolf reintroduction or taxation on nicotine and tobacco products, our members fell strongly on both sides of these issues, which also passed.

Unfortunately, Propositions 116 and 117 also passed, lowering state income taxes with little benefit going to the majority of Coloradans, and big benefit going to the wealthiest 2%, so further driving the economic divide. Amendment 76 proved to be another loss for Colorado residents. Its passage was a sneaky success at youth voter suppression. In 2019, the state legislature passed a bill allowing 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they were 18 by Election Day. While the ballot language was unclear, by definition and for voting purposes, a “citizen” excludes anyone who has not attained the age of 18. This seemingly simple change from “every citizen” to “only a citizen” made the 2019 bill, allowing 17-year-olds to vote, unconstitutional.

In addition to the ballot issues, we saw some changes in the make-up of the state legislature. Despite two seats flipping in the Colorado House of Representatives, Democrats continue to maintain a 41-24 majority. Democrat Brianna Buenteiio of Pueblo lost her seat to Republican Stephanie Luck, and Democrat newcomer David Ortiz unseated incumbent Richard Champion in Arapahoe County.

In the State Senate, Democrats increased their majority, with...
Clean energy: The shift is happening

Lazard Ltd. is the world’s largest independent investment bank. When it speaks, markets and policymakers listen. First formed in 1848, the bank today commands the heights of global asset management and investment, with offices in 40 countries and the most coveted real estate in the imagination of American capitalism — the top floors of 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York.

Lazard’s analytical juggernaut saw the seismic shift in clean energy technologies coming. For the last 14 years, the bank has published some of the deepest analytical numbers crunching on energy costs in the world. This October, it dropped a bombshell 2020 report.

The 2020 Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis (LCOE 14.0) reveals the raw cost of energy technologies coming. For the last 14 years, the bank has published some of the deepest analytical numbers crunching on energy costs in the world.

New wind and solar projects beat all new gas, coal, and nuclear projects on pure cost. In fossil fuels, existing combined cycle natural gas plants are one-third cheaper (and a good bit cleaner) than existing coal.

The leading edge of newly built wind and solar projects come in cheaper than maintaining existing natural gas and coal facilities.

Utility scale solar continues to plummet in price, with a 9% fall in 2020.

Onshore wind shows signs of cost curve maturity, falling to a 2% cost decrease in 2020.

Cheaper renewables won’t dethrone the on-demand capacity of fossil fuels without affordable grid-scale battery storage, of course. Lazard finds storage technologies still early on their commercialization cost curve, with the 2020 average costs of lithium-ion short term battery storage (1-4 hours) and solar plus storage projects down roughly 20% for the year. The average cost of short term lithium-ion storage, at $150/MWh, now ties with the lowest cost of the existing gas peaking facilities that providers activate to meet peak demand. The battery revolution has arrived.

...and Tri-State is catching up

Tri-State Generation & Transmission is rural Colorado’s dominant energy supplier, providing power under decades-long contracts to most of the 3rd Congressional’s rural electric associations. Until last year, Tri-State’s coal-heavy portfolio had the distinction of being one of both the costliest and dirtiest in the country, trailling other suppliers’ adoption of cheaper, cleaner new energy technologies by a decade or more.

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Years of grassroots citizen organizing — with Alliance members from Gunnison to Montrose, Telluride to Cortez on the frontlines — won historic change this November, when Tri-State announced a goal to reduce emissions 80% by 2030. The first steps of this plan will come through the retirement of one gigawatt of costlier coal generation and the addition of roughly one gigawatt of new wind and solar, with future supply decisions to come.

Tri-State also announced that it will join the Southwest Power Pool and Western Interconnection, allowing it to sell, purchase, and trade wholesale power over the wires with other massive regional suppliers. This landmark announcement is a vital component of a future renewables-dominant regional grid, enabling supply reliability when the sun is shining or wind is blowing in one location but non-producing in another.

Tri-State says it will include this planning in its December Phase 1 filing with the Colorado Public Utilities Commission Electric Resource Plan process, at which point important details will become known to the public.

Putting a clean energy future to work

Tri-State’s historic announcement signals a cleaner energy future for Colorado consumers while leaving key questions unanswered:

- Will member rural electric co-ops be consulted in where new clean energy generation and jobs are located?
- Will the cost savings of clean energy be shared with co-ops through lower rates or transferred into greater contract freedom?
- Will co-ops gain the ability to build cost-saving local battery storage or expand their existing community solar gardens, both important sources of grid resiliency?
- Lastly, how will Tri-State work with members to integrate this supply transition with the coming seismic demand shift to electric vehicles and building heating and cooling electrification?

Alliance members and rural Colorado have much to celebrate in this announcement — and this organization will continue to lead on dialogue and solutions on the journey to come.

The Clarion Winter 2020

by Joel Dyar
Community Organizer

The 2020 Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis (LCOE 14.0) reveals the raw cost of energy sources scrubbed bare of the tangled web of American energy subsidies so often weaponized in our political discourse.

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<th>Renewable Energy</th>
<th>Conventional</th>
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<td>Solar PV-Rooftop Residential</td>
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<td>Gas Combined Cycle</td>
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Selected renewable energy generation technologies are cost-competitive with conventional generation technologies under certain circumstances.

Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis—Unsubsidized Analysis

The 2020 Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis (LCOE 14.0) reveals the raw cost of energy sources scrubbed bare of the tangled web of American energy subsidies so often weaponized in our political discourse.
Dr. Grandin’s recipe for the food chain

On October 20, Western Colorado Alliance’s Local Food and Agriculture Committee members had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Temple Grandin.

Dr. Grandin revolutionized the meat processing industry. She brought a focus on animal welfare to the industry. Before her work, animals heading to slaughter were treated atrociously. Without going into detail, large-scale meat processing, rarely, if ever, considered the wellbeing of the animal. Dr. Grandin worked for large corporations, including helping to revamp the suppliers of McDonalds. In her experience working with large processing operations, Dr. Grandin saw the “cracks” in the system. Those cracks — and what could be done to change them — are exactly what our membership wanted to know more about.

The coronavirus pandemic expanded the cracks into clear breaks in our food system. As Dr. Grandin put it, “Large processors are efficient but fragile, and the virus broke it.” This breakage led to massive food waste.

Across the Midwest, we saw the euthanasia of thousands of pigs, their meat gone to waste. “It was tragic and unnecessary. This was an utter failure of our food supply chain.” Without major changes, this will not be the last failure of our food system.

However, there is hope. If there ever was a time to change the system, it is now.

There are different paths to making a new supply chain. Instead of “efficient but fragile,” we are working toward being “diverse and resilient.” In our system, what makes money makes policy. Dr. Grandin argues for the ability of small, well-run businesses to take on the large conglomerates.

Her example: the Fort Collins beer industry.

Fort Collins is home to Fat Tire, Odell, and a swell of other popular microbrews. As a result, the city has put Coors and Budweiser on their heels. “Why can’t Western Colorado be known for its beef, like Fort Collins is known for its beer?” questioned Dr. Grandin.

Of course, as Dr. Grandin admitted, the comparison isn’t perfect. Meat processing presents different complexities from brewing. However, the ability to disrupt the status quo is quite comparable.

As members of Western Colorado Alliance, we are committed to help build grass-roots power and Western Colorado communities that are healthy, just, and self-reliant. Our Alliance will be deciding between four possible paths for action. These include: Advocating for state meat inspection; pushing for a potential Food Freedom Act; bolstering work for a local food processing and distribution center on the Western Slope; and bringing a focus on regenerative soil. This, along with national level work being conducted with Western Organization of Resource Council, will require the ability to generate power from all types of members. We are all affected by the current food supply chain, and it will take a mass effort on all our parts to change it.

The Red Mirage & The Blue Ripple

Democrat Chris Kolker beating Suzanne Staiert in historically Republican-held Senate District 27. With this seat, the new make-up will be 20 Democrats to 15 Republicans. This will likely change committee structures, furthering Democrat advantages in the higher chamber.

John Hickenlooper’s win over Senator Gardner sends two Colorado Democrat senators to DC. Lauren Boebert’s win over Diane Mitch-Bush maintains the Republican stronghold in the 3rd Congressional District.

Something to keep in mind is that the 2020 Census could trigger a redistricting that impacts this District.

While we wait with bated breath for the final presidential election results, we don’t have to wait to address the divide in our local communities. During the isolation of the pandemic, it’s been easier to tune-out estranged family and friends who are not like-minded. But the upcoming holidays, whether in person or virtual, give us an opportunity to reconnect and build bridges that work to support our minority and oppressed communities.

With that in mind, we hope that in the last few months of the year, you’ll communicate with family and friends with the intent to listen and hear opposing views in order to find commonalities that can manifest positivity. Happy holidays to all!
On October 15, a group of people engaged in some “socially distant” hiking in the San Juan Mountains. While not an official Alliance event, most of the hikers were Alliance members hiking in support of the CORE Act, which would protect this area of Western Colorado’s wilderness and another 340,000 acres throughout the state. Joining photographer Nick Allan were Karen Rose, Lisa Eckert, Al Lowande, Mary Hertert and Doug Van Etten.
In September, Western Colorado Alliance organized its 40th Annual Conference. What was initially planned as a giant, two-day event in Montrose had to be scaled back and moved online due to health restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID pandemic. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that it was the first time Alliance staff had ever attempted an online event of this scale, the conference proved to be very successful.

The event was kicked off at 9 am on September 19 by outgoing Board President Steve Allerton. Following various business meeting activities, new Board officers were elected. Andreya Krieves was elected as Chair, replacing Allerton. Bill Wellman of Crawford was elected as Treasurer, and Brenda Bafus-Williams, former Communications Coordinator of Western Colorado Alliance, was appointed as Secretary.

The Rising Star Award, given each year to someone who is new to the organization, went to Grace Logsdon.

Members were delighted by memorable keynote speeches by Janice “Jay” Johnson and Joe Szakos of Virginia Organizing. Both addressed how organizing across differences made their organization both stronger and healthier. Some attendees could be heard repeating Joe’s admonition that “No constituency can win alone” some days later!

Western Colorado Alliance also hosted four workshops in the weeks leading up to the main event: the always popular “Capitol Confidential” (with our Alliance’s legislative liaison, Sol Malick), “Building a Resilient Rural America,” “Diversity, Equity & Inclusivity: Working for Justice in Rural America,” and “Building the Better Normal: A Frontline Update from Work in the West.”

The Clarion

Mountainfilm On Tour rocks — even “virtually!”

Hundreds of Western Colorado Alliance members and other Western Colorado residents enjoyed Mountainfilm On Tour - Grand Junction — during the weekend of November 20, in the comfort of their own homes!

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the film festival — which has become an annual favorite in Grand Junction — was held as an online event for the first time.

Mountainfilm On Tour - Grand Junction has for many years been the largest fundraiser of the year for our Alliance.

When the decision was made to conduct the festival online, no one knew what it would mean for the bottom line. But eventually, nearly 500 people signed up to watch the festival this year.

This year’s theme was “adventure,” and the films delivered that without question. “As I was watching the films, I kept thinking, ‘These people are insane!’” said Alliance Operations and Finance Director Stefanie Harville. She said the “insanity” was mitigated by the inspiration she felt in seeing people driven by their passion.

It was the people in the films who also inspired Alliance member Penny Heuscher. “Some demonstrated total selflessness, and all are reminders that we have goals we can attain when we stay focused on our heart and soul’s desire.”

Our 40th Anniversary Conference: Weathering the Storms

by Arn McConnell Communications Coordinator

In September, Western Colorado Alliance organized its 40th Annual Conference.

What was initially planned as a giant, two-day event in Montrose had to be scaled back and moved online due to health restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID pandemic.

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Next, the draft platform was discussed and ratified. (You can read the 2021 Platform at westerncoloradoalliance.org/40th-annual-conference-platform.)

In the mid-morning, our annual awards were bestowed. This year, Steve Allerton and Brenda Bafus-Williams both received the Worley Award, presented to outstanding Western Colorado Alliance volunteers each year (and named after Chuck and Betty Worley, long-time organizers on Colorado’s Western Slope).

The Rising Star Award, given each year to someone who is new to the organization, went to Grace Logsdon.

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Among the highlights of this year’s Annual Conference were the keynote speeches by Janice “Jay” Johnson and Joe Szakos of Virginia Organizing.

Give where you live.
As 2020 draws to a close, our Alliance is reflecting not only on a historic year, but 40 years of grassroots organizing across Western Colorado. And looking back, we have such deep appreciation for the road we have traveled together.

It all started one sunny day in a farm house outside of Montrose with a group of everyday folks who knew together they could accomplish more than they could as individuals. In the face of imminent threats to our Western Slope communities — coal mining, clear cutting, and oil shale to name a few—we organized to create a united voice for Western Coloradans who believed in a different future for our region.

Thus Western Colorado Alliance was born — an organization dedicated to community organizing and working with local people to build power over the decisions that impact our lives. Over the ensuing decades, we have won many precedent-setting victories for ranchers, workers, consumers, and this beautiful place we call home.

In 2020 alone, we:

- Won comprehensive oil and gas reforms, rewriting hundreds of rules to put public health and safety above industry profits. New protections include 2,000 foot setbacks of oil and gas facilities away from homes and people, legal standing for property owners, and more (see article, page 1).
- Registered hundreds of Western Slope students to vote, helping achieve record turnout of youth voters in Colorado in both the primary and general election. In Western Colorado, 63% of eligible 18-34 year olds voted in this election.
- Organized rural electric co-op members across the region to move Tri-State Generation and Transmission away from coal power to more clean and renewable energy sources. Tri-State has now pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 80% by 2030.
- Passed the RECLAIM Act out of the U.S. House of Representatives, a bill which would invest $45 million back in Colorado coal communities, ensuring workers and communities are not left behind as rural economies move away from fossil fuel-based economies.
- Worked with FarmAid and other regional partners to dispense thousands of dollars of emergency COVID relief aid to farmers and farmworkers across the Western Slope.

And so much more, both this year and in years past.

Regardless of the issue, we will always be committed to working with local people for that better future our founders envisioned 40 years ago. We are going to keep up the work knowing that right now, today, we can build a future where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado.

Thank you for all you do. Onward!

Yes, I want to make an end of year gift to keep the Alliance strong into the future!

☐ $10 Student
☐ $35 Individual member / ☐ $25 limited income
☐ $55 Family member / ☐ $35 limited income
☐ $100 Business or organization

And here’s even more to help keep Western Colorado communities healthy, just and self-reliant!

☐ $100 ☐ $200 ☐ $500 ☐ $1,000 ☐ $5,000 ☐ $_____

☐ I want to be a sustaining member - bill my credit card $___ / month.
☐ I’d like to learn about including our Alliance in my will or other giving options. 
☐ I’d like to remain anonymous.

If you live in a county with a local affiliate, or check one of the boxes below, you will become a member of that group as well.

☐ Grand Valley Citizens Alliance (Garfield County)
☐ Ridgway-Ouray Community Council (Ouray County)
☐ Uncompahgre Valley Alliance (Montrose County)
☐ Western Colorado Alliance in Mesa County

Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
Phone ____________________________ Email ____________________________

☐ My check (or first installment!) is enclosed.
☐ Please bill my ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover ☐ American Express.
Cardholder’s signature: ____________________________ Exp date: / __
Card number: ____________________________

Make checks payable to: Western Colorado Alliance P.O. Box 5531, Grand Junction, CO 81502

Save a stamp - make your secure donation to WesternColoradoAlliance.org!

Tell us about your interests:

☐ Clean energy ☐ Grassroots democracy ☐ Public lands & wilderness
☐ Oil & gas drilling ☐ Affordable housing ☐ Other ________
☐ Coal transition ☐ Health care ☐ Other social justice
☐ Local foods & ag ☐ Leadership training
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