

LEVELING UP!!!

THE 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, AUGUST 26 • DOUBLETREE BY HILTON, GRAND JUNCTION

Western
COLORADO
ALLIANCE
FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

CLARION

Vol. 43 No. 1 - Summer, 2023

Western
COLORADO
ALLIANCE
FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

CONFERENCE
COVERAGE
STARTS ON
PAGE 4!

Open doors. Open hearts.



Western Colorado Alliance hosted an Open House at our new offices at 601 N. 1st Street in Grand Junction on June 1. The new offices give us space for our growing staff and are much more centrally located and visible from the street. Over 70 friends and members showed up for the Open House and were treated to food from the Hog and the Hen, and a tour of our new facilities.

IRA funds light up rural electric co-ops



by Tyler McDermott
Regional Organizer

Summer is Rural Electric Co-Op season on the Western Slope!

Rural Electric Coops (RECs) were founded in the 1930s, created to ensure all Americans had access to electricity in their homes and a voice in how that power is generated, transmitted, and allocated to homes in rural America in

the spirit of local government control and democratic principles. In Colorado, we have 22 RECs serving nearly 1.5 million member-owners, many of whom live right here in Western Colorado.

RECs are a critical component to how rural communities can thrive, grow, and contribute to greenhouse gas reduction in Colorado, and it is important

to know that you likely have a voice in our energy future this summer in your co-op. Each person who lives in a REC service area gets a vote and a voice in REC business meetings and elections, deciding who sits on the board to make energy decisions on your behalf. These decision makers elected to the boards decide things like where energy is purchased from, how it is generated,

how much is generated locally, what grants will be sought and infrastructure projects will be built, how they will work with county and city governments, among many other critical components to energy generation and transmission. These seats are more important today than ever for a host of reasons, so let's look at a few.

Continued on page 8

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Get ready for this year's Annual Conference!



by **Andreya Krieves**
Alliance Chair

For so many of us, summer on the Western Slope means warm weather, bright sunshine, and an opportunity to enjoy the bounty of the summer season.

For our Alliance, summer is also when we get ready for the Annual Conference in August. Like the beginning of a new school year, the Annual Conference signals a fresh start, forward thinking, connection with friends old and new, and a renewed energy and commitment to the values that matter most.

There's a lot to love about the Annual Conference. It's when we celebrate wins from the past year, honor outstanding individuals, get inspiration for continued action with our keynote speaker, and add to our toolbox of skills in the workshops.

Attendees will see the Alliance's near-future as we proudly share the recently approved three-year strategic plan after it was developed for a year with member input. As a member-led and democratic organization, we'll also be electing officers and voting on our platform during the business meeting.

This year, we're also leveling up the awards! In addition to the Worley Award (our Alliance's highest honor) and the Rising Star award, we will also be bestowing a new award, presented to recognize the efforts of an Alliance member who demonstrates dogged determination to fight for healthy, just, and self-reliant communities in the face of adversity. This award is named in honor of Peggy Rawlins, a longtime Alliance member leader and board member emeritus who lives and fights for these values

every day.

In addition to the scheduled content and workshops for this year's conference, we've made sure to build in plenty of social time to reconnect or build new connections! At the end of the day, we'll raise a glass to toast each other, our alliance, and our continued commitment to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development.

I sincerely hope you'll join us at Western Colorado Alliance's 43rd



Western Colorado Alliance
Chair Andreya Krieves

Annual Conference on **August 26**, at the Doubletree Hotel in Grand Junction. If you can't join us in person, please join us virtually! Be sure to register at westerncoloradoalliance.org.

West Slope Youth Voice triumphs on health center



by **Tyler McDermott**
Regional Organizer

The students at West Slope Youth Voice are celebrating a huge win for young people in Mesa County — the passage of a School Based Health Center (SBHC) at the new Grand Junction High School (GJHS).

After facing defeat back in March when the school board voted the SBHC down in a 3-2 vote based largely on misinformation and fearmongering, the students were not deterred and made their voices heard at numerous school board meetings, in the **Daily Sentinel**, and through reaching out to the board members directly

in support of the health center. Their efforts were not in vain, resulting in a 5-0 vote in support of the health center and ensuring health care access such as dental care, vision, mental health support, and more for all GJHS students regardless of income and health insurance status.

School based health centers are a highly effective way to improve student outcomes as has been shown in numerous studies and demonstrated right here in Mesa County at the Warrior Wellness Center in Central High School, an already established SBHC that has seen over 5,000 student appointments in its three years of operation.

SBHCs allow students access to critical health care components in a place they spend the majority of their time, whether they are experiencing a mental health crisis, a sprained ankle, or a toothache, students can get the help they need immediately at no cost. They get back in the classroom right away to learn at their maximum potential.

In Western Colorado, where youth suicide rates are far higher than the national average, SBHCs have been shown to reduce suicide rates by as much as 30%. Central High has not experienced a single suicide since implementing the Warrior Wellness program, something many other schools in

Western Colorado cannot boast.

The students of West Slope Youth Voice continue to watch what happens next and will stay engaged with the SBHC, as the board has placed future decision making (such as whether the SBHC will be located within GJHS or placed across the street at a building a quarter mile away) with District Superintendent Dr. Brian Hill. At West Slope Youth Voice, we know this is only the beginning of the fight and we hope to not only see the GJHS SBHC successfully implemented *within* the school, but other SBHCs implemented in the remaining two high schools in the valley and other schools across the West Slope.



brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development.

Our Alliance's vision for the future is one where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just, and self-reliant.

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Our Alliance's Board of Directors

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Chair, Grand Junction

Kevin Kuns
Vice Chair, Montrose

Bill Wellman
Treasurer, Crawford

Adriene Moline
Acting Secretary, Grand Junction

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Rodger Steen, Steamboat Springs
Haley VanCamp, Grand Junction
Barbara Vasquez, Cowdrey

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Betsy Leonard, Battlement Mesa

RIDGWAY-OURAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Ames Risch, Ridgway

UNCOMPAGRE VALLEY ALLIANCE

Kevin Kuns, Montrose

WESTERN COLORADO ALLIANCE OF MESA COUNTY

Steve Allerton, Grand Junction

Director Emeritus

Peggy Rawlins, Grand Junction

The bond that breaks



by **Laura Bloom**
Regional Organizer

The tortoise and the hare are meant to be parables, not working models. In the case of federal rules governing oil and gas leasing on public lands, the rules have run the race far longer than they should have. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has not updated its oil and gas regulations comprehensively since 1988.

In July, the Department of Interior announced new oil and gas leasing rules to fix a broken bonding and leasing system. These long-awaited rules will protect taxpayers from cleaning up the industry’s mess, provide adequate money to clean up abandoned oil and gas sites, direct leasing to appropriate locations, and encourage responsible development by companies that are prepared to reclaim and restore the lands they disturb.

Our Alliance has been working for these changes for decades and welcomes these overdue rules. In the words of our Alliance’s own Barbara Vasquez: “We look forward to the BLM enacting the increased bond requirements included in the new rules in the hopes that public health, the environment, and the taxpayers’ wallets will be meaningfully protected.”

The Bureau of Land Management leases areas of land for extraction of raw materials and resources, including oil and gas. Each lease has regulated costs for the value of the land occupied and the resources extracted, and there is an upfront fee called a “bond.” This bond money is meant to be an assurance to pay for any damage done during the leasing term, each gas well is bonded for \$10,000. For the oil and gas industry, it’s cheaper and easier to work the loopholes. Paying the minimum bonding cost and paying a paltry fine for not finishing their clean-up is much more appealing to the industry than settling the tab for \$145,000 per well. But when industry walks, that bill falls to the taxpayers. The DOI is currently expending \$250 million in taxpayer funds to clean up orphaned wells on federal public lands.

Western Colorado has relatively low costs for closing wells and rehabilitating the land after extraction, something to the tune of \$20,000 per well in 2022, but we still don’t see oil and gas corporations laying in the beds they’ve made, instead saddling people like us with the remaining costs.

The BLM has finally started to address this chasm of



cost with these new rules. Specifically, the rules will:

- Set the minimum bond amount for any well at \$150,000
- Set minimum statewide bonds at \$500,000 for any one operator
- Eliminate blanket bonds
- Adjust the royalty rate to 16.67%
- End speculative oil and gas leasing on public lands with low development potential

This rulemaking shows the BLM intends to adopt new procedures and requirements to address those issues. This rule applies to a massive amount

of land — roughly equal to Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming combined — and is a solid step towards protecting financial interests of taxpayers and promoting more diligent development requirements for sustainable leasing practices. These updates will save the BLM more than \$2.7 million each year.

The next step for Colorado residents to have a say in this rulemaking comes on August 29, when the BLM will host another meeting in Denver. We are looking for Western Colorado residents who want to make a difference for our public lands by joining us at this important meeting. Join us by contacting Laura Bloom for more information: laura@westerncoloradoalliance.org.



Western Colorado Alliance is giving thought to how best to serve our members via our quarterly newsletter, **The Clarion**. Toward that end, we are collecting data on our members’ experience with **The Clarion**. Thank you for taking a couple minutes to share your opinions. (Most of these questions are simple multiple-choice questions regarding **The Clarion**, but you will be invited to optionally offer additional thoughts at the end of the questionnaire.)

1. Do you find The Clarion informative?

- Very! Somewhat. Not much... Not at all

2. Roughly how much of each issue of The Clarion do you actually read? (Choose the answer which best describes your typical behavior.)

- I read the whole thing! I read most of the stories. I read a few of the stories. I skim but don't read much.

3. My favorite parts of The Clarion are (Select all that apply):

- Updates on issue campaigns Stories about our members Information on upcoming events Analysis of decisions impacting our area
- Other _____

4. Would you prefer The Clarion’s current format of tabloid-sized newspaper, or one of these alternatives?

- Current format Magazine format Digital only Other _____

5. Optional: Do you have any other thoughts, comments, or suggestions regarding The Clarion? (Use a separate piece of paper if necessary.)

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Please clip your answers and mail to: Western Colorado Alliance PO Box 1931, Grand Junction, CO 81502</p> | <p>Or save postage and tell us online at: bit.ly/clarion-questions</p> |
|---|---|



LEVELING UP!!!

THE 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Saturday, August 26
DoubleTree by Hilton, Grand Junction

DAY AT A GLANCE

DOORS OPEN 9:30 AM

Sign in, grab some continental breakfast and coffee, check out the table displays, and visit with Alliance friends, old and new!

BUSINESS MEETING 10 AM

Reports, officer elections, and platform discussion.

CELEBRATIONS/AWARDS 11:45 AM

Organizer Report Video.

Rising Star Award, Worley Award, and Rawlins Award.

LUNCH 11:45 AM



KEYNOTE 12:15 PM

Keynote speech by Rep. Elizabeth Velasco, State Representative, Colorado House District 57.

WORKSHOP BLOCK 1 1:15 PM



ASSEMBLE YOUR PLAYERS!

It's time to level up. This workshop will equip you with the tools to capture the attention and enthusiasm of potential members and learn how to craft an easy and compelling pitch for our Alliance's mission, values, and impact, to leave a lasting impression. By the end, you'll be a vital player with a shared understanding of the need for members to help foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie within our network.

WORKSHOP BLOCK 2 2:30 PM

(Choose one:)



LEVEL 1: QUEST FOR CHANGE

Welcome Brave Explorer! In the realm of gaming, you can zoom out to gain a clear perspective of your position on the map as you embark on a quest. In the world of organizing, the path forward isn't always obvious. In this workshop we'll gain a deeper understanding of the diverse and complex organizing movements, explore the challenges and opportunities inherent in this landscape, and discover why our work is essential on the West Slope map of social change.



LEVEL 2: POWER MOVES

Congratulations, Adventurer! You've successfully identified an issue worth championing, but the journey doesn't end there. In this workshop, we'll equip you with the knowledge and tools to select strategic campaigns that can drive real impact. Join us as we delve into the essential elements that define a successful campaign within our Alliance. Discover the craft of strategic bets to explore the balance between calculated risks and potential rewards, and how to utilize power mapping to navigate the



LEVEL 3: BEATING THE BOSS

Valiant Hero! You've journeyed through challenges, honing your skills, and now stand at the precipice of victory. In this workshop we'll discuss the crucial role of narratives in shaping public opinion. Explore how narratives influence perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors, and how they can be harnessed as a powerful tool for change. We'll practice the art of narrative jiu-jitsu, where you'll wield the skill of reframing narratives to better control the message surrounding important issues and discover how to shift the conversation to resonate with a broader audience to evoke empathy and understanding.

GROUP PICTURE 3:45 PM

ADJOURN/HAPPY HOUR! 4 PM

OUR 43RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE!

If you're a videogame enthusiast, you know there's a real satisfaction when you "level up." It means you've weathered some battles. It means you're closer to your goal. It means progress.

This year, our Alliance has grown in very significant ways. That's why the theme for our 43rd Annual Conference is: **LEVELING UP!!!**

Join us on **August 26** at the **Double-Tree by Hilton** in Grand Junction to help us map our path for 2024 as our Alliance hits a new level in our work on behalf of healthy, just, and self-reliant communities!

REP. ELIZABETH VELASCO



Rep. Elizabeth Velasco grew up in a low-income family, living in mobile home parks in the Vail Valley and working multiple jobs to put herself through college and support her family. Eventually, she formed her own thriving language services company.

In 2022, she ran for the District 57 Colorado House seat on a platform emphasizing affordable housing, language access, and access to clean air and water, in support of her district's working families. She won the race, becoming the first Mexican-born state representative in Colorado, the first Latina legislator from the Western Slope, and the first open LGBTQ legislator in Western Colorado. We are thrilled to have Elizabeth deliver this year's keynote address!

For more information, or to register:

westerncoloradoalliance.org/annual-conference-2023/

or call

(970) 256-7650

Registration is \$40. (If you cannot afford a ticket at this cost, please call — there are less expensive options available under certain circumstances.)

Much of the event will also be presented on Zoom. There is no cost to join us by Zoom. Information is available on our website at the above address.

Our 2024 Draft Platform

From 1983 through 2017, Alliance members adopted resolutions at our annual conference to shape the organization's policy and issue work. While the resulting 100+ resolutions covered a wide range of topics, they did not easily convey our values and purpose which are bigger and more inspiring than any one issue or position.

At our 2016 annual conference, we adopted a resolution to transition from this resolution-based process to a platform that would be reviewed and reaffirmed each year.

The 2023 Platform was ratified at the Western Colorado Alliance's 42nd Annual Conference on August 20, 2022. Proposed changes for 2024 are marked in red.

1. We believe in an authentic GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY where each one of us has an equal right and opportunity to impact public decisions that affect our lives, and where government is open, honest and responsive to the needs of the people. More specifically, we support:

- a. Reducing the influence of moneyed interests in elections and the legislative process.
- b. The protection of individual voting rights and fair representation practices (e.g., in drawing legislative district boundaries and in reforming the Electoral College).
- c. The protection of a free press as an integral part of any democracy.

2. We believe that global CLIMATE CHANGE is the most important world-wide environmental crisis of our time. Science has shown that human activity is a major cause of climate change and, as such, we have an immediate and urgent responsibility to act to address its causes and impacts. We recognize that while climate change affects the entire world, it has a disproportionate impact on communities of color and low-income communities and so any solution must be based in CLIMATE JUSTICE. Specifically, we support:

- a. Pro-active policies, regulations, and practices that:

- promote biologic carbon sequestration (See also planks under Local Foods & Agriculture and Public Lands);

- minimize the emission of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases;

- minimize the environmental, economic and social impacts of climate change (climate justice); and

- foster societal and ecological resiliency to adapt to and survive climate change.

b. Genuine consideration of the cumulative impacts of climate change in all decision-making in every sector of our society.

3. We believe in the inalienable right of individuals and communities to a CLEAN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT including air, water, land, and food supplies. More specifically, we support:

- a. The protection of the world's water quality and availability, as well as the integrity of aquatic ecosystems.
- b. The protection of our air quality, including the reduction of toxic emissions and those that contribute to climate change.
- c. The principles of "reduce, reuse, share and recycle" to conserve the world's limited resources and limit the harmful effects of production and disposal of consumer products.
- d. Establishing a program with adequate ongoing funding to clean up "legacy" pollution sources including orphaned oil and gas wells, abandoned mines and contaminated former industrial sites.

4. We believe in SOCIAL JUSTICE that respects human rights, uplifts all people to their potential and values everyone's participation in their communities and in decision-making processes. Our belief in Social Justice requires us to not only support equitable policies but also to eliminate

systemic oppression and racism. More specifically, we support:

- a. Systems that equitably value the contributions and dignity of all workers, including the right to collective bargaining, substantial paid family and medical leave, and an adequate living wage.

- b. A comprehensive approach to creating health equity that encompasses a wide range of social and economic factors such as education, social welfare, housing, income, environmental conditions, nutritious food, social and emotional health care, and universal access to health care.

- c. Environmental justice policies that protect poor and minority communities from bearing an inordinate burden on their health from industrial development.

- d. Comprehensive and thoughtful reform of our nation's immigration and refugee policies to reflect the values of the United Nations' Global Compact for Migration.

- e. **Language justice in all levels of our society to create shared power, practice inclusion, and dismantle traditional systems of oppression that have traditionally disenfranchised non-English speakers.**

5. We believe in HOMEGROWN ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, reflected in a Western Slope that is home to diverse and resilient local economies that work for all of us while protecting the natural environment that makes our communities desirable places to live. To that end, we support policies and actions that:

- a. Invest in local, community-based leaders to help communities plan and respond to changing economic conditions.
- b. Invest in entrepreneurs and locally owned small businesses to grow diverse economic sectors that contribute to stronger, more resilient communities, improved public health, restored ecosystems and equitable opportunities for all people.
- c. Provide a broad system

of support for workers and viable pathways to quality, family-sustaining jobs.

- d. Invest in physical and social infrastructure to stimulate economic development and build a foundation for change.

- e. Empower local communities by providing direct access to state and federal resources to make change possible.

6. We believe our communities have exciting opportunities to shape A SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FUTURE. We believe we can substantially reduce energy usage and, through the use of clean and renewable sources, reduce air pollution, eliminate the harmful effects of fossil fuel extraction, create new jobs and industries, and lessen our contribution to climate change. More specifically, we support:

- a. Governmental policies that provide incentives for clean energy projects, and regulations that require/encourage energy conservation and efficiency practices in homes, transportation and industries.
- b. Restructuring/scrapping of utility contracts that are prolonging fossil fuel use and discouraging increased renewables.
- c. Regulation of public utilities in a manner that protects both consumer interests and environmental sustainability.
- d. Proactive upgrades of energy delivery systems to anticipate changes in energy technology.

- e. Distributed energy sources that are locally owned and small scale.

7. We believe that our nation's PUBLIC LANDS must be managed in ways that respect our collective histories and recognize the Indigenous peoples who have called these lands home for millennia. These lands connect our cultures and communities and we all depend on them for a sustainable future. Public lands

Our 2024 candidates

Candidate for Vice President: Adriane Moline

Adriane Moline is our Candidate for Western Colorado Alliance's open Vice President board seat.

Adriane has a background in accounting and business administration.

Prior to moving to Grand Junction, she trained to become an Iowa Master Naturalist, and she has since devoted her professional and volunteer work to conservation and supporting a sustainable future. In addition to the Western Colorado Alliance board, Adriane volunteers weekly as a Monument Steward.

Adriane has been Acting Secretary for the Alliance Board since mid-2022.



Adriane Moline

Candidate for Secretary: Haley Van Camp

Born and raised in Grand Junction, Haley earned a BA from the University of Denver in 2016, double majoring in Emergent Digital Practices and Applied Computing.

Haley is a graphic design and marketing professional, currently working for The Art Center of Western Colorado as the Design and Communications Manager. Years of

ballet, music, and fine art have instilled in her a love for the arts, and, specifically, how the arts can enrich lives and foster community. Haley enjoys dancing and spending time outdoors camping, hiking, and skiing.

Haley has been an at-large member of the Western Colorado Alliance Board since 2022.



Haley Van Camp

Our 2024 Draft Platform

Continued from page 5

support healthy wildlife populations and their habitat and forests crucial to the health of our atmosphere. They protect the headwaters of many vital watersheds and provide the safest refuge for essential biodiversity. These lands also sustain a strong and growing outdoor recreation economy that enhances everyone's quality of life and nourishes the human soul. More specifically, we:

a. Recognize that public lands are the ancestral territory of **Indigenous** peoples who have called them homes since time immemorial. For this reason, we insist on their involvement in the decision making for our public lands.

b. Insist that public lands remain public. Transfer of federal lands to states, or worse, private interests, compromises all of the values mentioned above.

c. Support responsible management of public lands that prioritizes ecological

integrity and resilience of those lands and our climate.

d. Support maintaining the size and integrity of existing wilderness areas, parks and monuments along with connecting wildlife corridors, as well as expanding such protections to other areas that have appropriate characteristics.

8. We believe that food production and marketing systems that prioritize **LOCAL FOODS AND AGRICULTURE** are best able to sustain healthy communities and economies, protect the environment and safeguard the rights of farm workers. The creation of a decentralized food system protects family and independent producers and processors who are the key to feeding local peoples with local foods. More specifically, we support:

a. Policies and practices that support soil health and regenerative agriculture to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, chemical use and water consumption,

improve crop yields, drought and flood tolerance, and air and water quality.

b. An individual's rights to be able to make informed food choices through improved labeling on how and where their food is raised and processed.

c. Livestock production systems that are as humane as possible and minimize the need for antibiotics and other chemical intervention.

d. A Farm Bill that includes the programs and policies prioritized by the WORC Farm Bill Platform.

e. International trade and domestic policies that strengthen human and environmental health, food sovereignty, workers' rights and competitive market-places in all countries involved.

9. We believe that local communities should have a fair say in where, how, and if **NATURAL RESOURCE EXTRACTION** occurs in their area, and that

when these economic activities are permitted, they should employ the best available technologies for protecting public and environmental health. Specifically, we support:

a. Comprehensive bonding and reclamation fees so impacted areas can be restored as much as possible to their pre-development conditions.

b. Requiring royalty payments from private industry that reflect the full worth of the public resource being extracted or harvested.

c. Stringently enforced regulation of all extractive practices using evidence-based safety and environmental standards, including setbacks from industrial activities and the emission of contaminants to air and water.

d. Transparent and inclusive processes for decision-making that genuinely and adequately address the concerns of the community in the final decision.

“Sprouting New Futures” tours cultivate success



by **Karen Rose**
Alliance Member

&



by **Arn McConnell**
Communications
Coordinator

It's Farm Tour Summer here at Western Colorado Alliance!

Sprouting New Futures, our series of six two-hour tours of local farms, is a project of the Local Food and Agriculture Committee shepherded by Western Colorado Alliance regional organizer Nick Allan.

The goal of these tours is to connect consumers with local farmers, so people can see where food is grown in our community, and learn a little bit about the work it takes to grow it. We hope to show that really good, healthy food is grown

right here at home in Western Colorado!

Farm Tour Summer started with a visit to **Early Morning Orchard (EMO)** in Palisade. More than an orchard, EMO produces vegetables, tree fruit, and eggs in their main location near Mt. Garfield or at one of three other sites. Their naturally-grown food doesn't travel far; it goes to local community food banks and to Skip's Market in Fruita. The short trip keeps it really fresh.

Our second tour took us to **Green Junction Farmstead** near Palisade. Here, farmers Dawn and Brian Adams grow a summer's worth of vegetables that they sell through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model

and also at the Palisade Farmers Market. Dawn and Brian will tell you they grow healthy soil first, because that's the way to grow truly healthy vegetables.

The third tour to **Hit the Hay Farm** in north Fruita/Loma was a little different. Farmer Lowell King raises premium grass-fed cattle, and grows hay and corn for animal feed. Soil health here too comes first, because it's important for growing healthy food and for taking care of the planet. Lucky cows graze on a nutritious blend of crops including grasses and legumes, and raise healthy, frolicky calves!

Our fourth tour was with the

Lobato Farm in Fruita, where Farmer Michael Lobato grows vegetables in soil that is increasingly healthy because of the farm's regenerative practices, including “no-till” planting and the use of cover crops to feed the soil. Future plans for the Lobato Farm include an orchard and a vineyard.

Still to come at publication time: We'll be leaving Mesa County to visit **Highwater Farm** in Silt and **Freshies** in Montrose.

Our Alliance's farm tour schedule has grown dramatically in recent years, and seen an enthusiastic response from local residents. Dozens of folks have taken advantage of at least one tour this summer. Many participants had never interacted with our Alliance before. Roughly half of those who were new to our Alliance elected to become members.

There are still slots available for the Montrose tour on **September 16**. These fill up fast! If you would like to tour Freshies, you can sign up at westerncoloradoalliance.salsalabs.org/farm-tour-september-16.

Fresh food grown in healthy soil is nutritious — it's good for us! And it's good for our local economy when we “keep it local” by supporting our farmers. Our planet also benefits, from growing practices that preserve our soil's fertility, reduce the need for harsh inputs, keep carbon in the soil where it belongs, and help us reduce our water use.

We hope to see you at a farm tour this summer!



Welcome our new Office Administrator, Shanna Shepherd!



by **Arn McConnell**
Communications
Coordinator

Join us in welcoming our Alliance's new Office Administrator, Shanna Shepherd!

Shanna will be working closely with Executive Director Emily Hornback and Finance Administrator Alicia Lucero in keeping the Alliance office and business matters in professional shape.

Shanna Shepherd was born and raised on the Western Slope. She earned a bachelor's degree in Communications from Colorado State University and a master's degree in Public Affairs from Missouri State University.

Shanna's professional background encompasses both non-profit work and volunteerism, alongside several years

of administrative experience.

During her free time, she indulges her love for animals by fostering kittens and takes care of her personal furry family, consisting of four cats and one dog.

Among Shanna's first assignments was ordering our Alliance's new telephone system. You can expect a big improvement as that gets rolled out over the next couple months.

Shanna brings a number of skills beyond the traditional office administrator set. We're thrilled to have her join our team and know her knowledge will help make our efforts on behalf of healthy, just, and self-reliant Western Colorado communities run more smoothly.



IRA funds light up rural electric co-ops

Continued from page 1

In early June, member-owners in Delta Montrose Electric Association (DMEA) had the chance to vote on three seats and chose to return all three incumbents (**Damon Lockhart, Enno Huescher, and Stacia Cannon**) to the board to continue representing them and their energy future. DMEA has been a true model of a REC, being one of the only RECs to keep energy rates the same in a time when every other co-op and major generation and transmission (G&T) company saw rate hikes and increased energy prices last winter, some as high as 400%. DMEA was able to accomplish this through a forward-thinking plan to produce more local energy, seeking to get up to 20% of their energy from solar farms across Delta and Montrose counties. This gave DMEA more freedom from national energy rate increases, but also has advanced DMEA as one of leaders in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and decreased reliance on gas/oil/coal as an energy source in a community

that has traditionally been a fossil fuel producer. DMEA has also created Elevate, a broadband internet service that will shortly expand to reach every person in DMEA service territory increasing the ability for local businesses to compete.

Grand Valley Power (GVP), covering all of Mesa County with the exception of the City of Grand Junction (Xcel Energy), is the next local REC election on the horizon taking place on August 3, 2023. Three seats will be up for election and it is imperative member-owners participate to continue advancing clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction in Western Colorado.

Our opportunities through RECs have never been greater, especially since the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) by the Biden Administration in August of 2022. The IRA is the single largest clean and renewable energy bill ever passed in the United States, allocating billions of dollars to rural local governments, cities, and, most especially, RECs.

There are four main programs through which RECs can access this money: New ERA (Empowering Rural America), Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), Direct Pay Tax Credits, and Powering Affordable Clean Energy (PACE). Each of these programs offers a different means of paying for projects, and each project must be aimed at reducing or eliminating greenhouse gas emissions.

New ERA offers \$9.7 billion worth of grants, covering up to 25% of a project's cost up to \$970 million, REAP offers grants covering between 25-50% of a project's cost, Direct Pay Tax Credits can cover 30% of a project cost but can be stacked with additional 10% project cost reduction depending on who it aims to provide energy for (tribal nations, low-income communities, etc.), and PACE offers \$1 billion for loans that are forgivable for between 20-60% of the project cost.

This unprecedented investment in American clean energy is an opportunity for rural communities to not only

expand but vastly increase their local energy production and move us towards a real clean energy future. But it is only an opportunity if our RECs seek the funding.

The first deadline for RECs to submit an application for IRA funding is fast approaching. RECs must submit their letters of inquiry to seek funding through New ERA by August 31, with deadlines for other IRA programs coming this fall. This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime chance being offered by the Federal Government to support local, rural communities in making the clean energy transition and we must encourage our Rural Electric Co-ops to be proactive in this with an eye to the future.

Please reach out to your REC board and encourage them to submit their letter of inquiry by **August 31, 2023**. You can find more information on the IRA programs at ruralpower.us, and find the service area and contact information for your board members at crea.coop/co-op-map-of-colorado.