



Western Colorado

LEGACY PROGRAM

The Sonoran Institute's Western Colorado Legacy Program represents an enduring commitment to the land, people, and communities of western Colorado. Based in Glenwood Springs, the Program works with community partners to shape a region of healthy landscapes, resilient economies and thriving communities.

OUR VISION & GOALS

Western Colorado's allure is undeniable. It is treasured for its iconic landscapes, western heritage and abundant recreational opportunities. With its beauty and quality of life, this growing region is primed to harness the creative capital needed to build new economies and strong communities. But, this opportunity is not without challenges. Unplanned growth has spread across thousands of acres of ranches and wildlife habitat. Many residents face long commutes due to lack of housing and transportation choices. Our water supplies are stretched thin and rivers and watersheds are degraded.

Despite these and other challenges, we believe that this is a moment of opportunity for western Colorado. Now is the time to shape the change that is coming to the region, to create more livable communities and carry out a sustainable vision for the future.

We envision a region of healthy rivers and landscapes, where compact, walkable communities are powered by clean energy, connected by transit and surrounded by ranches, wildlife habitat and open space. It is a vision where strong, livable communities and conservation support prosperity and quality of life.

To achieve this vision, we:

- Provide technical assistance to help communities develop and implement solutions to local needs and challenges.
- Build strong partnerships between diverse stakeholders to craft collaborative solutions to shared concerns.
- Conduct research to inform decisions and help communities evaluate the costs, benefits and tradeoffs of different policy choices.
- Provide training and outreach to build local capacity and leadership.
- Promote programs and policies that support healthy landscapes, resilient economies and livable communities.



Shaping the Future of the West

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Western Colorado Legacy Program

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Resource Stewardship

The Challenge: Colorado's open lands support farming, ranching, recreation, wildlife habitat and clean water, but they are disappearing due to increased pressure from regional growth.

The Opportunity: Work with diverse stakeholders to create collaborative strategies to protect and manage the lands that are critical to the region's prosperity.

Growing Responsibly

The Challenge: Increasingly scattered patterns of growth are a drain on public coffers and come at the expense of the wildlife, ranchlands and tight-knit communities that drew people to western Colorado in the first place.

The Opportunity: Work with public and private sector partners to shape compact, walkable communities with vibrant downtowns, healthy neighborhoods and diverse housing choices. How the region grows in the future greatly impacts the health of communities, landscapes and economies.

New Energy Solutions

The Challenge: Energy is essential to our lives and economy, but the nation's reliance on fossil fuels cannot continue forever. Transitioning to an energy economy of clean fuels, renewable sources and increased efficiency is a matter of national security and economic necessity.

The Opportunity: Work with local partners to create community energy plans that integrate conservation and efficiency, provide transportation choices and encourage investment in renewable energy sources.

Healthy Rivers and Watersheds

The Challenge: Water is the lifeblood of our region and economy. It sustains communities, agriculture and wildlife habitat and supports hunting, fishing and whitewater industries. Today, our rivers and watersheds capture and cleanse our water for us – free of charge. But with ever greater demands on these resources, we place greater stress on the clean and reliable water we depend upon.

The Opportunity: Work with local agencies, water managers, landowners, and citizens to address shared challenges, implement practical solutions, and improve local capacity for water stewardship and efficiency.

Building Resilient Economies

The Challenge: In the wake of the Great Recession and housing bust, many citizens and businesses are struggling to stay afloat while communities struggle to provide basic services. The increasingly unstable and uncertain global economy requires that communities build strong and resilient local economies.

The Opportunity: Work with communities that want to take control of the future by investing in their assets, building vibrant downtowns, and using their resources efficiently to chart a course for lasting economic prosperity.

Bringing People Together

The Challenge: Too often, divisiveness and distrust prevent solutions to our biggest problems. The challenges we face require collaborative solutions and coordination between diverse interests.

The Opportunity: Bring together diverse interests to forge partnerships, create shared understanding and identify practical, community-based solutions to community challenges.



STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE RESULTS

Our work in western Colorado respects the character and culture of the region. We collaborate with local and regional partners on projects that respond to community needs and challenges, including:

Livable Communities – Work with community partners to implement plans and projects that shape compact, walkable communities and vibrant local economies.

Lasting Conservation – Work with local partners and stakeholders to identify practical conservation tools that fit local values and result in healthier landscapes and stronger communities.

Regional Collaboration – Encourage cooperation between local governments, businesses, and residents to create collaborative solutions to regional problems.

Community Leadership – Provide training and outreach to increase awareness and build local capacity to tackle difficult challenges and respond with effective solutions.

Informed Decisions – Provide information and tools through applied research to inform public discourse and support sound decision-making.

Coordinated Planning – Work with local agencies to integrate community and economic development with clean energy, water conservation and agricultural preservation.

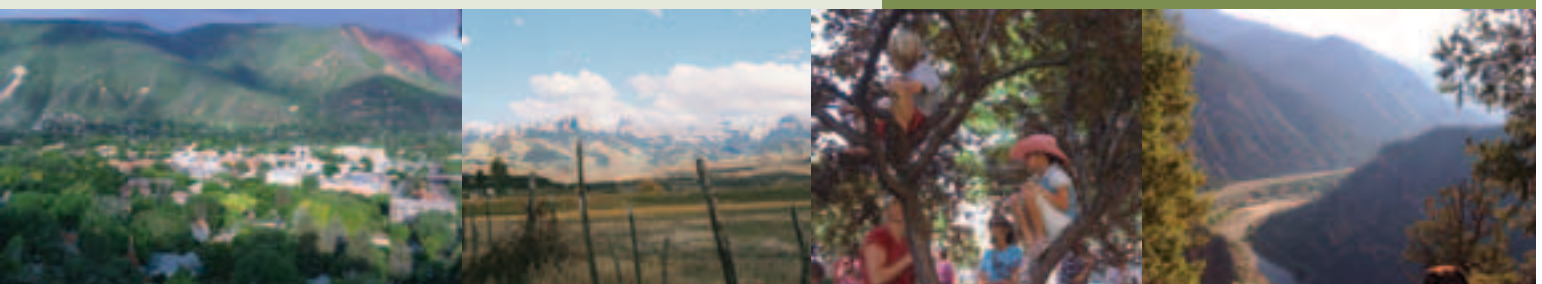
Model Projects and Policies – Develop and promote model programs, policies and demonstration projects that provide models for other communities to learn from and emulate.

A PIVOTAL MOMENT

Before the onset of the Great Recession, Western Colorado’s economy and population were booming. Real-estate was hot; housing demand and prices soared as thousands of people and jobs poured into the region. Communities enjoyed surging tax revenues and could scarcely keep up with project approvals. By the time the bottom dropped out, thousands of new homes were constructed or approved and waiting for development.

Development has since slowed to a halt. Jobs are scarce. Local budgets are broken and many communities are making deep cuts to local services. Housing prices continue to drop and a glut of foreclosures and vacancies burden local markets. As the economy sputters, there are growing questions about the nature and trajectory of the changing economy and its influence on growth and development.

The answers are still unclear, but smart communities are positioning themselves for success in the changing economy. They are building partnerships to spur investments that make our communities more attractive places to live and locate business. They are taking advantage of a growing demand for walkable neighborhoods and vibrant downtowns. They are looking for new ways to expand housing and transportation choices and provide amenities that attract visitors and businesses. They are using resources more efficiently and investing in their assets. The challenge is great, but successful communities will learn from the past to establish livable communities and resilient economies of the future.



Current Initiatives

Analyzing Housing Market Trends in a Changing Economy

The Sonoran Institute is researching real estate and development trends in the post-recession economy. This work builds on a growing number of studies that suggest a growing market demand for “smart growth” development. Our research is exploring if and how these trends are unfolding, what they mean for future housing markets, and how communities and developers can work to meet future housing needs.

Boosting the Tax Base: The Benefits of Compact Development

The Institute recently completed a pioneering analysis detailing how compact, mixed-use development compares to conventional development in terms of generating tax revenue. The results showed that compact, mixed-use development yields far higher revenue per-acre than conventional big-box or strip development. This finding underscores the economic importance of building walkable communities and investing in vibrant, mixed-use downtowns.

Garfield County Livable Communities

The Western Colorado Legacy Program places a priority on helping communities plan for town-centered growth and shaping Livable Communities—places that are compact, walkable and transit-oriented while preserving remaining open space. We recently completed a project with the cities of Rifle and Glenwood Springs to explore market-feasible redevelopment opportunities. We are helping the City of Rifle meet the goals of its Energy Village Plan and remove policy barriers to mixed-use redevelopment in the city’s downtown. In Glenwood Springs, we are working with stakeholders to evaluate opportunities to redevelop a dilapidated commercial strip into a walkable mixed-use district.

Supporting Open Lands

The Sonoran Institute provides support to the Garfield Legacy Project (GLP), a group of citizens and organizations working to create a county-wide open lands conservation program in Garfield County. Working with local partners and the Trust for Public Land, we conducted a financial feasibility study and public opinion survey, and recently secured funds to complete an open space vision that identifies local conservation priorities.

Middle Colorado River Watershed Partnership

Stretching from Glenwood Canyon to Debeque Canyon, the Middle Colorado River is a critical water resource in western Colorado. The Western Colorado Legacy Program helped to establish the Middle Colorado River Watershed Partnership, which brings together a diverse array of interests to identify collaborative solutions to water quality and quantity issues. With our assistance, the Partnership recently secured a grant from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to complete a watershed assessment for the Middle Colorado.



The Sonoran Institute inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of Western North America.

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