Let wind keep delivering for Colorado

“Cool Breeze” report details benefits of wind

According to a report Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center released this winter, wind energy saves Colorado a billion gallons of water every year, while avoiding a year’s worth of air pollution equivalent to half a million cars.

This progress is largely due to policies we’ve won over the years. Between 2000 and 2011, electricity production from wind energy in Colorado grew from zero to 4.7 million megawatt-hours, and is now producing nearly 10 percent of the state’s electricity.

Even with so much progress, wind power tax credits were at risk of expiring in Congress at the turn of the New Year. As a part of our successful campaign to extend the wind incentives, we earned media attention, released more research, talked to thousands of Coloradans about the benefits of wind, and asked them to take action.

“The rapid growth of wind energy in Colorado is yielding huge benefits for the environment, our health and our increasingly scarce water supplies,” said Jeanne Bassett, senior associate with Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center. “We need our state and national leaders to support policies that will keep us on track towards a cleaner energy future for Coloradans.”

Koch Brothers opposed wind credits

It’s clear that wind power is a win-win for our environment and health, but the oil tycoon Koch Brothers and nuclear giant Exelon lobbied Congress last year to let the clock run out on wind tax credits and end clean energy incentives altogether—a particularly brash move given that the oil and nuclear industries still receive enormous subsidies from the federal government. But we knew the public supported wind power, so we worked to engage thousands of citizens and stakeholders in Colorado to convince our members of Congress to act. Wind energy has already helped America make significant strides for our health and environment. And because of the actions from our supporters, wind energy will continue to thrive in this country.

See our recent wind energy reports on our website: www.EnvironmentColoradoCenter.org

(Left to right) Angela Joslyn, regional director for Sen. Mark Udall’s office; Anneli Berube, regional field director for Environment Colorado; and Scott Harvey, an engineer and renewable energy advocate.
Recent action

Chimney Rock preserved as a national monument

In September, President Obama declared Chimney Rock in Southwest Colorado a national monument under the Antiquities Act.

Chimney Rock, a landmark built by ancient Pueblos a thousand years ago, is located on a 4,100-acre site in the San Juan National Forest. The area is known for being the site of a “lunar standstill,” when the full moon rises for several nights in a row in the same area, hovering between the two stone chimneys.

Environment Colorado Field Associate Margaret McCall stated, “Chimney Rock has immense historical and cultural value. We are very grateful that President Obama has recognized its significance and has taken steps to ensure its preservation.”

Another wake-up call on climate change

When Superstorm Sandy slammed the Mid-Atlantic in late October, it claimed dozens of lives and caused tens of billions of dollars in damage. It also brought more attention to scientists’ warnings that global warming will cause intense storms like Sandy to become more frequent.

To slow this trend, it is critical to clean up carbon pollution that is fueling global warming. The Obama administration is on the verge of taking a critical step in that direction, as this newsletter goes to print.

The Environmental Protection Agency is expected to finalize the first-ever carbon pollution standards for new coal-fired power plants. Environment Colorado helped demonstrate historic support for these standards, and we will continue to push to limit carbon for existing plants as well.

To our members

The latest crop of legislators in Washington, D.C., and Denver needs to remember what all of us already know—protecting our environment needs to be a top priority.

This past year showed us what a difference it makes to fight for the issues we believe in. In 2013, we will need to fight just as hard. Increasing renewable energy in Colorado, fighting for clean water protections, and protecting our most beautiful places will all be major issues for us.

None of this will be easy, but I have seen time and time again that when we work together and raise our voices as one we can win.

Thanks for all your support.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Bassett
For Environment Colorado

Above: Jeanne Bassett, joined by Chris Urbina, MD, MPH, the executive director and chief medical officer of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Firing a new salvo in the ongoing debate over the gas drilling practice known as fracking, Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center in September released a report that documents a wide range of dollars and cents costs imposed by dirty drilling.

As tallied in “The Costs of Fracking,” the controversial drilling practice creates millions of dollars in costs related to everything from air pollution to ruined roads to contaminated property.

“Fracking’s environmental damage is bad enough, but it turns out that this dirty drilling imposes heavy dollar and cents costs as well,” said Jeanne Bassett, senior associate for Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center. “And in many cases, the public will be left holding the bag for these costs.”

While the report details a wide range of costs imposed by fracking, Environment Colorado is particularly concerned about what drinking water contamination would mean for Colorado.

“If I lived near a site, I would move”
Waste from fracking operations has contaminated drinking water sources in the West. In just one case of groundwater contamination in Garfield County, Colo., cleanup costs ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In addition to water cleanup costs, the report shows that fracking damage exacts other tolls on communities, from road repairs to health costs to emergency response.

In Arkansas’ Fayetteville Shale region, air pollution from fracking operations imposes health costs estimated at $9.8 million in one year. In Texas’ Barnett Shale region, these costs reach $270,000 per day during the summer smog season.

With fracking operations requiring thousands of trips by trucks and heavy machinery, a Texas task force approved $40 million in funding for road repairs in the Barnett Shale region.

“There are documented studies of chemical pollution in water and air related to fracking activities. So if I lived near a fracking site and had young children, I would move,” said Laird Cagan, MD, practicing internist, resident of Longmont, and immediate past president of the Boulder County Medical Society.

Longmont votes to ban fracking
Moreover, as with previous extractive booms, fracking will impose long-term costs as well. As noted in the report, the coal boom in Appalachia left Pennsylvania with an estimated $5 billion cost for cleaning up acid mine drainage.

“Like coal and oil booms before it, fracking creates the illusion of prosperity during the boom. But in the end, communities are stuck with a slew of costs—from property losses to ruined roads and health costs. That is why it is particularly important to allow communities to decide at the local level whether they want these dirty drilling practices in their back yard,” said Bassett. Residents in Longmont, Colo., voted on and passed a ballot measure that bans dirty drilling in their community.

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“President urged to restore clean water”

Coloradoans overwhelmingly support an Obama administration proposal to restore protections for Colorado’s rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands, according to a recent poll commissioned by leading environmentalists and sportsmen organizations.

Nearly seven in 10 Colorado respondents support the president’s proposal to restore clean water safeguards, with strong support across political affiliations.

In the last decade, polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions left nearly 75,000 miles of Colorado’s streams and hundreds of acres of wetlands vulnerable to pollution and development. And it’s not just small streams and wetlands—these waterways are the same ones that feed the Arkansas, the South Platte and all of our rivers and help to keep them clean.

From the mighty Colorado and Arkansas rivers, to Boulder Creek, Clear Creek, and the rest of the streams in our backyards, Colorado’s waters are a part of what makes life here so great. We should be able to raft, fish, tube or otherwise enjoy our waters knowing that they are protected from toxic dumping and irresponsible development.

Learn more about the Colorado Rivers Project on our website: www.EnvironmentColorado.org
Don’t shortchange Colorado’s parks

Our parks are where some of our families’ most unforgettable memories are formed—from our first childhood hikes to our first glimpses of wildlife. Yet, drilling, mining and other industries in Colorado consider the lands in and around many of our local parks more like “investment opportunities” to be exploited.

This encroachment is leaving the land surrounding these parks at risk—seriously threatening their ecosystems, waterways and wildlife. Meanwhile, every year Congress raids the Land and Water Conservation Fund, robbing the program dedicated to protecting treasured places like Rocky Mountain National Park and South Boulder Creek.

Environment Colorado is bringing people together to convince Sens. Michael Bennet and Mark Udall to make protecting our parks a top priority and help pass a bill that will fully fund our parks.