

Natural Resources Law Center Annual Summer Conference ~ June 4-6, 2008  
*Shifting Baselines & New Meridians – Water, Resources, Landscapes & the  
Transformation of the American West*

Wednesday ~ June 4, 2008  
Session 2: Values for the New West  
Panel A – Lessons from our Communities

Wendy D. McDermott Presentation

**Slide 1** High Country Citizens' Alliance or H-C-C-A for short is located in Crested Butte, Colorado. This background photo shows Crested Butte, population of approx 1500 people. CB is situated directly below Mt. Emmons, locally called Red Lady. H-C-C-A is a grass roots, not-for-profit, conservation organization dedicated to the protection of the land, water, wildlife and communities of the Gunnison River Basin and Mountain West.

**Slide 2** For those of you who may not know where Crested Butte or Gunnison is, we are located in the West-Central portion of the State.

The Crested Butte and Gunnison areas are like many other essentially rural ranching and farming towns that dot the western landscape. What makes Gunnison County different is:

**Slide 3** First, the wealth of natural resources that surround it. Approximately 80% of Gunnison County is public lands – over 5 million acres. Almost 500,000 of those acres are Forest Service Wilderness Areas. We are home to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, the Curecanti National Recreation Area, and a family owned ski area. Crested Butte is the Wildflower Capital of Colorado.

And, second, Gunnison County has become a reservoir of creative, progressive people, and a populace who are keenly aware of what they stand to lose. Good people continue to remain active on many conservation and land use fronts throughout the Upper Basin. In Gunnison County, you have the feeling you can still win a few important battles.

VALLEY BACKGROUND

**Slide 5** The Town of Crested Butte was founded in 1880 as a supply town for the multitude of silver mines in the surrounding mountains.

Gunnison boomed in the late 1880s with the influx of miners, traders and the railroad. The first ranchers came to the valley to supply beef to the local miners. And later with the opening of the Gunnison State Normal School in 1909, which was renamed Western State College of Colorado in 1915.

**Slide 6** In the mid 1890s, after the silver bust in 1893, coal mining became the primary vocation for area residents and sustained Crested Butte until the mid 1950s.

Although Crested Butte almost became a ghost town when the Big Mine just south of town closed in 1952, hard rock mining employed a small number of residents with the opening of the Keystone and Standard Mines on the south flanks of Mt. Emmons.

**Slide 7,  
8, 9, 10**

For nearly a century, mining subjected the valley to boom & bust cycles. During this time ranching and higher education became the stabilizing factor for the local economy, as well as the ski resort which began operations in 1961.

The depressed mineral market of the mid 1960s helped close down the remaining Standard and Keystone mines. The actual demise of the Keystone Mine was the failure of the milling of the copper, lead and silver when a black slimy film surfaced.

**Slide 11**

The molybdenum deposit was discovered. For those who don't know molybdenum, or Moly for short, is used in hardening steel. It is also used as a lubricant. Moly is considered a strategic mineral in the United States.

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In 1977 Amax Corp bought into the property and announced their plans to open a massive molybdenum mine. The '77 proposal included a production rate of 20,000 tons per day over a 30 year life span. A total surface disturbance area of 2336 acres and was proposed to employ 1500.

This proposal greatly alarmed the “new immigrants”, those who had come to the Gunnison Valley for a lifestyle change during a time of change for the valley itself. A time when tourism was emerging and mining had all but died out.

The citizens of the valley took on shaping their future. High Country Citizens' Alliance was formed, local leaders took up the issue with fierce passion, a united community stood against the mine and in favor of the emerging recreation and tourism economy.

In the next 5 years, Amax spent over \$150 million on exploratory drilling and the Crested Butte community dug its heels in and to prevent the mine from getting a much needed toe-hold.

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Mayor Mitchell visited Washington DC. The Town adopted a Watershed Protection Ordinance – one of the first of its kind – and was upheld by the Colorado Supreme Court ruling that municipalities could indeed have jurisdiction outside of their municipal boundaries. Citizens lit flares in a display of opposition, spelling out “Blank” Amax in Red Lady Bowl. The community held off the mine.

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The price of Moly dropped. Amax packed up and left town.

During the next 30 years, the price of Moly languished while recreation and tourism flourished in Crested Butte with Gunnison thriving on the growth of Western State College. Although ranching was somewhat overshadowed by the growth of these two economic engines, it remains a valuable part of our economy – 4<sup>th</sup> in the County today – and is certainly still a prominent part of our culture and society.

From 1977 to today, there have been several efforts to advance the mine and H-C-C-A & the community has been there every step of the way to protect our high quality environment and our economic and social fabric. Many sustainable community initiatives were started.

#### A SLEEPING GIANT AWAKES

##### Slide 16

There are new players on the scene & with the price of Moly holding over \$30 a pound, US Energy Corp, from Riverton Wyoming, is pursuing the opening of a new Moly mine on Mt. Emmons. Our beloved Red Lady.

Overview of the project.....as we know it without a formal application to the USFS

##### Slide 17

- Lucky Jack Project
- Target Ore Body

##### Slide 18

- Mill Site – would be located on ~100 acres, consuming 500-1500 gallons of water per minute, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

##### Slide 19

- Tailings Pipeline – could cut a 50-70' swath through forest & possibly some private lands; would be ~4 mi long

##### Slide 20

- Tailings Pile – would be located on ~200 acres in the saddle of the Ohio & Carbon Creek drainages. This area has gorgeous meadows & primary spruce-fir forest stands. There are federal grazing allotments in this area & has been identified as a future, potential Wilderness Area.

##### Slide 21

- Transportation Routes – supplies in; ore out
  - through residential section in Town of CB, down 135 towards Gunnison; only currently paved, open year around route
  - Ohio Pass – would require major upgrades & widening, avalanche paths exist. Not currently open year round.
  - Kebler Pass Road = a national scenic & historic byway. Also not currently open year around. Would cut through world's largest aspen grove, and through important corridor for the Spine of the Continent in the Southern Rockies.

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This project is being proposed at the headwaters of 5 watersheds, in a municipal drinking watershed, a potential wilderness area, a national scenic & historic byway and in a popular backcountry recreation area. Not to mention the mine would be in the same

##### Slide 23

drainage of an abandoned mine Superfund Site that is currently being cleaned up and is expected to cost \$8-10 million.

30 years later, 3 different mining companies and an enormous growth in tourism and recreation, Crested Butte & the majority of the Gunnison Valley is still not interested in returning to its mining roots.

##### Slide 24

The Valley as a whole is making a conscious effort to become more sustainable. To name a few:

- HCCA's Climate & Clean Energy Program
  - Sustainable Communities Symposium

- Office for Resource Efficiency (ORE)
- Multi-Jurisdictional EE Task Force
- U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement
- Western State College
  - Sustainability Coalition & Campus Compost
  - LEED Certified Buildings

**Slide 25**

We recognize the assets we are entrusted with. And there is a great deal of community involvement to protect those resources.

- Save Red Lady Bracelets
- Prayer Flag Project
- Musicians Uniting
- Mandala Sand Painting
- Businesses holding Fundraisers
- Formation of a new Coalition
- Letter Writing

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**Slide 27**

Our local governments continue to be leaders in resource management. Delegates from the Town of Crested Butte testified before the US Senate earlier this year on 1872 Mining Law reform. Gunnison County has good Land Use Regulations and is updating their Special Development Project Regulations – otherwise know as 1041 Regs. And the Town of Crested Butte recently updated their Watershed Protection Ordinance.

**CONCLUSION**

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In Gunnison County, healthy ecosystems provide the foundation for a viable local economy. The gradual release of the area's large winter snowpack sustains the county's ranching and recreation sectors in the summer months, and the aesthetic beauty of the county's mountains and rivers that attract visitors year around.

The United Nations Environmental Program estimates that only 4% of the earths remaining water resources are fit to use as drinking water. Nearly 1% of that remaining drinking water is located in the inter mountain west of North America.

If we consider a recent study by hydro-geo-chemists Jim Kuipers & Ann Maest who found that 76% of all modern mines evaluated in their investigations had exceedences of water quality standards during operations, in spite of predictions to the contrary in permit documents; and that, in a subset of their study, over 90% of modern mines caused groundwater pollution exceeding state and federal standards - I think its safe to conclude that:

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Life is Fine Without a Mine

Thank you.