

The Colorado Sustainability And Digital Storytelling Project



Advancing the environment and public health through communicating **why we care** and **how we can make a difference** for current and future generations where we live, learn, work, and play

Background

In 2022, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Office of Environmental Justice launched Colorado EnviroScreen to provide quantitative data to assess environmental and public health risks in communities. Quantitative data can explain how the environment impacts our health. It can help show whether certain groups of people are more impacted by pollution than others. Maintaining EnviroScreens also can provide a way to evaluate progress across time and to become more transparent.

But, communities cannot be reduced to numbers. Further, when numbers are shared without the human element, information can become not only overwhelming, but depressing--defeating the goal of building the capacity of communities to make a difference.

CDPHE Office of Environmental Justice, therefore, also works with University of Colorado Boulder Professor Phaedra C. Pezzullo and her students to creatively collaborate on stories that provide context of why we care about the communities being addressed and how to support those already trying to improve environmental and public health risks. The goal is to synthesize and share existing resources, as well as to center people's everyday lives and voices in our stories to promote further engagement.

The collaboration led to five StoryMaps featuring the five communities in Colorado, which EnviroScreen identified as facing the greatest challenges. Students who opted into the project found the experience rewarding. In addition to gaining skills in translating technical scientific data, storytelling across media, and incorporating collaborative feedback, students learned more about community engagement, government policies, and sustainability.

Identifying the communities

[Arkansas Valley](#)

[Commerce City/North Denver](#)

[Pueblo](#)

[Ute Mountain Ute Tribe](#)

[San Luis Valley](#)

[https://cdphe.colorado.gov/
colorado-enviroscreen-
storymaps](https://cdphe.colorado.gov/colorado-enviroscreen-storymaps)

Impacts

The Colorado Resiliency Office's 2022 Annual Progress as a Community Spotlight for Supporting Strategies that "develop & deploy community engagement and civic capacity tools," "strengthen local resilience planning," and "integrate equity" (p. 12).

Civic Achievement Award in 2023, CU Boulder

Community response to sharing the StoryMaps in public meetings has been favorable

Nationally, other agencies have reached out to CDPHE to replicate it in their communities

What are we working on now?

Bolstered by new leadership on campus and initial successes, the Colorado Sustainability and Digital Storytelling Project continues today based out of the University of Colorado Boulder's new Sustainability And Storytelling Lab (SAS Lab, affectionally called "sass").



Creating More StoryMaps and Updating Stories Told

Given the positive feedback received on the pilot, we are working on new stories: one on Mobile Home Parks and another on Supplemental Environmental Projects. We also are improving the pilot StoryMaps through updating data, increasing readability for multi-lingual readers, and assessing visualizations of the numerical data from EnviroScreen 2.0.



Getting More Creative with/for Youth

We have begun to create K-12 materials for communities highlighted through the StoryMaps, including interactive educational worksheets and zines.



Planning Podcasts and Publicity

In the future, the SAS Lab is considering how this project could dovetail with the lab's podcast Communicating Care, as well as how we can improve publicity.

For more on the pilot: Warren Cook, Anthony Albidrez, Sam Collier, Danielle Miyoko-Furuichi, and Phaedra C. Pezzullo. "Amplifying Desire-Centered Research Beyond Deficits and Fatigue: A Case Study of Environmental Justice ArcGIS StoryMaps in Colorado." *Environmental Justice* (2023, June), 152-159. <https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2023.0009>

Funding for this project has come from the SAS Lab, private donations, a de Castro Research and Creative Work Award, and the ongoing support of the CU Boulder Office for Public and Community-Engaged Scholarship

For more information on our ongoing work: <https://www.colorado.edu/lab/sas/>

For more on CDPHE's efforts to improve sustainability and public health, contact: cdphe_ej@state.co.us



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