Building Rural Community Coalitions for Trails and More!

*Western Places/Western Spaces Conference*
*University of Denver*
*March 8, 2019*

**Rio de la Vista**
Director, Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center at Adams State University

**Mick Daniel**
Executive Director, San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLVGO!)

**Kairina Danforth**
Mayor, Town of Crestone; Board Member, Eastern San Luis Valley Trails Coalition

**Sally Wier**
San Luis Valley Volunteer and Partnership Manager, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado
Introducing the San Luis Valley & the Rio Grande Basin

Rio de la Vista, Director, Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center
Adams State University, Alamosa, Colorado
Where in Colorado is the San Luis Valley?
Who owns the land in and around the San Luis Valley?

- 57% Public land (Mineral County 97%, Costilla County 1%)
- USFS = surrounding high country
- BLM = foothills & wetland habitats
- Great Sand Dunes National Park
- Alamosa, Baca, Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges
- Many State Wildlife Areas
- Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area
- Rio Grande Natural Area
- 6”-8” annual rainfall on Valley floor
- Rio Grande: 175 river miles
- > 200,000 wetland acres
- > 350,000 private acres conserved

Demographics:
- 46,000 population
- 46% Hispanic
- Avg. income = approx 70% of Colorado avg.
Water, especially in a dry landscape, is what brought people here, over millennia….and Spanish settlers in the mid-1800s…. 
Water supports agriculture.

Sourced from mountain snowmelt and underground aquifers, water is literally The lifeblood of the Valley. It supports the base economy of agriculture, ranching to farming.
Surface water is diverted from rivers and streams...
Rio Grande River near Del Norte, CO
Annual Calendar Year Flows

[A图示数据]
... and ground water is pumped from the underground aquifers. These sources support the base economy of agriculture, in the high, dry San Luis Valley.
The San Luis Valley is a microcosm of the West: Long Term Drought… Climate Change… Aridification…

Since 2002:
• 11 of the 17 years have been below average
• Largest year was 123% of long term average
• Lowest year was 24% of long term average
• Average of those years was 84% of long term average

The San Luis Valley is a microcosm of the West: Long Term Drought… Climate Change… Aridification…
Agriculture:

Challenges:
- Reduction in snowpack/aridification
- Groundwater Sustainability
- Surface Water Variability
- Variable Markets
- Aging Infrastructure

Opportunities:
- Community Partnerships & Collaboration
- Groundwater Management Subdistricts
- Building Soil Health
- New Crops & New Markets
- Improved Irrigation Infrastructure
Water supports internationally important wetlands & wildlife habitat
Environment, Wildlife & Watershed Health:

Challenges
- Habitat Fragmentation & Degradation
- Changing Climate
- Endangered Species at Risk
- Fires and Beetlekill in Forests
- Mining, highways, resort & 2nd home construction

Opportunities
- Landscape Scale Planning
- Investments in Forest Health
- Endangered Species Protection, & Reintroduction
- Private Land Conservation
Water supports recreation
Recreation:

Challenges
- Access
- Variable Flows
- Hazardous Infrastructure
- Information & Outreach
- High Visitation & Impacts

Opportunities
- New Recreation Areas and Access
- Collaborative Flow Programs
- Stewardship Education & Initiatives
- Local Trail Coalitions
- Youth Engagement Programs
- Agricultural & Cultural Tourism
- SLV GO!
Community Engagement & Public/Private Partnerships:

Federal:
USDA- forest Service and NRCS
USDOI-Bureau of Land Management
US Fish & Wildlife Service
National Park Service

State:
Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Private:
Conservation, Community Development, & Health Foundations
Businesses
Individuals

Local:
Counties
Cities
Towns
Water Districts & Organizations
Soil Districts
SLV GO!
SLV Wetlands Committee
Local Foods Coalition
Adams State University

Conservation Organizations:
Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust
Colorado Cattleman’s Agricultural Land Trust
Colorado Open Lands
The Nature Conservancy
Western Rivers Conservancy
Trust for Public Land
Ducks Unlimited
Trout Unlimited

And many more!
Community Planning for Outdoor Recreation

**Mission:** To provide residents and visitors throughout the San Luis Valley with accessible and inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities that connect communities, to improve wellness, encourage stewardship, and contribute to the economic vitality of the region.
History

America’s Great Outdoors Initiative

Secretary of the Interior - Ken Salazar
Community Planning for Outdoor Recreation

**Mission:** To provide residents and visitors throughout the San Luis Valley with accessible and inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities that connect communities, to improve wellness, encourage stewardship, and contribute to the economic vitality of the region.
"As highlighted in the America’s Great Outdoors vision, recreation provides one of the easiest and most natural ways to connect with the outdoors. America’s lands and waters offer a multitude of outdoor recreation activities that enhance health and wellness, encourage appreciation for natural and cultural resources, and present enjoyable opportunities to connect with family and friends."

- America’s Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations
Spearheaded by the SLVGO Coalition, SLV GO! is a partnership between counties, municipalities, interested organizations and federal, state and local land management agencies.

Efforts to holistically approach trail and recreation development in the SLV began in 1996 with the development of the Great San Luis Valley Trails and Recreation Master Plan.

Building on the 1996 Master Plan and inspired by the America’s Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative launched by President Obama in 2010, SLVGO brings partners from all reaches of the SLV together in order to develop a framework for improving, sustaining and promoting outdoor recreation opportunities.
SLV GO!
Priority Initiatives

Improve community wellness through enhanced in-town recreation facilities.
SLV GO!
Priority Initiatives

Connect, expand, and enhance trail systems throughout the San Luis Valley.
SLV GO!
Priority Initiatives

Grow more recreation programs and activities specifically tailored to SLV youth.
SLV GO!
Priority Initiatives

- Expand water-based recreation.
- Expand opportunities for winter recreation.
SLV GO! Priority Initiatives

Promote the SLV’s recreation opportunities and increase information sharing about what there is to see and do in the SLV.
How do we enact those priorities?

**HOW TOOL KITS**

- SHAPING RECREATION DESTINATIONS
- BUILDING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES
- DEVELOPING TRAIL SYSTEMS
- REALIZING TRAIL CONNECTIONS
- CONNECTING YOUTH & THE OUTDOORS
- BALANCING RECREATION & CONSERVATION
- PROMOTING RECREATION
- HOSTING RECREATION EVENTS
- FUNDING & SUSTAINING RECREATION
Eastern SLV Trails Coalition (ESLVTC)

COALITION PARTNERS
- Town of Crestone
- Baca Grande Property Owners Assoc.
- Baca National Wildlife Refuge (USFW)
- Bureau of Land Management
- San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLVGO)
- Crestone Charter School
- Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve
- Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC)
- Saguache County
- Colorado College at the Baca
- U.S. Forest Service
Sangre De Cristo Wilderness Area

70 miles long from Salida to Mt. Blanca

180 miles of trails

220,000 acres

Third largest Wilderness in the state
Sangre De Cristo Wilderness Area

**Crestone Group of “Fourteeners”** is the most visited destination in the Wilderness.


Climbers consider Crestone Needle the most difficult climb of all “Fourteeners.”

The Sangres are fault-block mountains, with sharply uplifted blocks, jagged ridges, and soaring pinnacles.

The wilderness is crisscrossed east-west by short narrow drainages terminated by impassable ridges and cliffs.

Hiking trails follow drainages to high altitude lakes and fourteeners.
The Trails Coalition collaborates with community leaders to coordinate and facilitate joint initiatives in the implementation of a Trails Master Plan for the locale and region.
Crestone/Baca Local Area

Surrounded on all sides by Public Lands

Area: 42,000 acres

Population: 1900+/-
Campground’s 13 sites can generate more than $1 million in annual revenue.

Amounts spent per person within a 50 mile radius of their destination within the Rio Grande National Forest:
Lodging, $568
Food, $319
Transportation $168

3000 climbers per year summit on the “Crestone Group”

Crestone Needle has been included as one of the “Fifty Classic Climbs in North America”

Crestone’s one campground and two primary trailheads remain surprisingly unrecognized and unpromoted. There is significant economic potential from hikers, backpackers and climbers accessing the Wilderness Area.
280,000+/- visitors per year

149,000 acres encompass the entire Sand Creek and Medano Creek watersheds

Multiple ecosystems ranging from mixed conifer forests to alpine tundra, and including pristine alpine lakes and major creek headwaters

Hiking and equestrian trails, backpacking, fishing and hunting

ATVs are not permitted anywhere in the national park and preserve

Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve
Baca National Wildlife Refuge
92,000 Acres

- 41 million people visit America’s 59 Wildlife Refuges each year.

- ACTIVITIES: Wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretive programs, hunting and fishing.

- FUTURE DEVELOPMENT: The developing program at the Baca Wildlife Refuge offers visitors a fascinating and accessible destination to nourish spirit and connect to the environment.
MISSION

Create a MULTI-MODAL TRAIL SYSTEM
That connects VITAL DESTINATIONS
& accesses surrounding PUBLIC LANDS
Recreation & Education opportunities

- Safe Access to Schools and Surrounding Public Lands
- Reduce Traffic Conflicts & Limitations Based on Distances and Absence of Routes
- Separate Hike/Bike Lane Along Camino Baca Grande
- Multi-User, Maximum Accessibility
- Access to Public Lands
- Health and Wellness
- Community Building
- Community Buy-in and Management
- Community Acceptance as a Viable Transportation Mode

- Preserves Habitat Areas
- Reduces “braiding” & Protects the Fragile Environment
- Increases Walkability, Encourages Walking & Makes Scenic Areas Accessible
- Connectivity to Schools, Baca Refuge, and Between Town and the Baca. Builds Relationships
- “Trunk line” Supports Future Trail Branches
- Creates Seamless Connections Across Jurisdictions

- Low Impact & Sustainable
- Youth Engagement
- Cultivates Awareness and Appreciation for the Natural Environment
- Engages Youth, Promotes Stewardship and Develops Trail Building Skills
- Increases Tourism Access
- Attracts Recreational Users
- Supports Town’s Goal as ‘Gateway Community’
- Increases Access & Promotes use of the Baca Refuge Asset
- Enhances Social Connections

Visioning Workshop Courtesy National Park Service Rivers & Trails Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) In-Kind Contribution

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ESLVTC’s emerging ROLE

- Collaboration
  With partners to achieve shared goals

- Coordination
  Among partners to fulfill project requirements

- Facilitation
  Thru administration, grant writing and seed funding
Crestone/Baca Safe Routes to School Project Phase I
Saguache County, Colorado & Partners

An eighth grader biking along Camino Baca Grande at the downhill turn where the proposed Safe Route to School accesses the Pinyon-Juniper Woodland.
SRTS Project Team

Safe Routes to School Application

ESLVTC, SLVGO, VOS, GSDNP, TOWN, USFS, BLM, POA, CCS, CC, COUNTY (Applicant)
## Engineering

**Coordinated with CDOT**

### Timeline

#### Safe Routes to School - Phase I

**Saguache County**

*Prepared By: Davis Engineering Services Inc.*

*Prepared October 25, 2019*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestones</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
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<td>3.7 Final Environmental Investigation &amp; Report</td>
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<td>5.1 Final Set of Plans &amp; Specifications</td>
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<td>5.2 Project Construction BID Advertisements</td>
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<td>5.3 Bid Review Opening</td>
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Eastern SLV Trails Coalition (ESLVTC)

The Trails Coalition collaborates with community leaders to coordinate and facilitate joint initiatives in the implementation of a Trails Master Plan for the locale and region.

MISSION • PLAN • ROLE
Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

motivating and enabling people to be active stewards of Colorado’s natural resources since 1984
VOC San Luis Valley Field Office

In partnership with the

Rio Grande National Forest

and the

Bureau of Land Management

San Luis Valley Field Office
Sangre de Cristo Family Camping and Trail Construction Projects

Photo credit: Cindy Bond
Volunteer Crew Leaders – A model to leverage more quality work

Photo credit: Cindy Bond
Funding

“Conservation without finance is just conversation.”

-Jim Levitt, Harvard Forest

Sources

• Bureau of Land Management
• USFWS
• Grants
  • San Luis Valley Conservation and Connection Initiative – collaborative grant to leverage more funds
  • Saguache County Sales Tax grant
• Private and corporate donors to VOC and Memorial Funds
• In-kind donations of funds and goods from local businesses
Partnerships
Southwest Conservation Corps
Accomplishments

The Trails Coalition collaborates with community leaders to coordinate and facilitate joint initiatives in the implementation of a Trails Master Plan for the locale and region.
Accomplishments

2017 and 2018

• 120 individual volunteers engaged
• 4,900 feet of new, sustainable trail
• 2 rock steps constructed
• 4 climbing turns constructed
• 104 feet of rock wall installed
• 1 foot of rock wall restored
• ½ mile of trail maintained and restored
• 500 feet of trail revegetated
• 2 bags of trash collected

Photo credit: Cindy Bond
Moving Forward – 2019 Project

The Trails Coalition collaborates with community leaders to coordinate and facilitate joint initiatives in the implementation of a Trails Master Plan for the locale and region.
MAY, 2019: VOC TRAIL CONSTRUCTION & HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT LINKING BACA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE TO THE COLORADO COLLEGE BACA CAMPUS

Volunteer on Your Public Lands in the Upper Rio Grande Basin!

Strengthening Overall Stewardship in the Upper Rio Grande Basin
The Upper Rio Grande Basin and San Luis Valley is surrounded by amazing public lands held by the Rio Grande National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management. Opportunities abound here to be involved with active stewardship on public lands. Join us for larger Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado projects (visit www.voc.org/volunteer), or work with community-based projects on the National Forest or BLM. Come work with us to help maintain trails, create healthy environments for plants and wildlife, plant trees and community gardens, and restore fire- and flood-damaged places!

Email Sally at sally@voc.org to get involved.
Outdoor Stewardship Institute

- Building greater local capacity
- Training for crew and team leaders
- Technical assistance and design
- Basic and advanced trail construction
- Ecological Restoration skills
- Volunteer and project management training
- Customized trainings
Stepping Up Stewardship

PUTTING VOC’S EXPERIENCE TO WORK FOR YOU.

GUIDES
Learn the Basics

TRAINING
Hands-on Practice

CONSULTING
Additional Services
Questions?

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Kairina Danforth – kdanforth.townofcrestone@gmail.com 719-239-1327
Sally Wier – sally@voc.org 719-852-6234