Colorado Communities for Climate Action Highlights (March 2022)

Colorado Communities for Climate Action is a coalition of 39 counties and municipalities across Colorado advocating for effective state climate policy. Our members span the Western Slope and Front Range; small rural towns and major suburbs; counties and municipalities; and wealthy, middle income, and low-income neighborhoods.

New members last year included Durango, Edgewater, Ouray County, Snowmass Village, Superior, and Wheat Ridge. Representing nearly one-quarter of all Coloradans, with rural communities making up two-thirds of the membership (and half our member communities on the Western Slope), and with populations ranging from under 1,000 to more than 500,000, CC4CA has become a high-impact voice for clean air, climate action, and public health protection.

Legislative Successes

The 2021 legislative session was another extraordinary session, substantially building on the transformative success of the 2019 session. CC4CA directly engaged on 44 bills, securing the desired outcomes on all but two. Some of the most consequential outcomes focused on the electric grid, including steering Colorado toward becoming part of a much larger regional grid (which provides a dramatic increase in grid reliability even as we aggressively shift to zero-carbon energy sources), curtailing one of Xcel's most problematic limits on rooftop solar, substantial improvements in the way electric utilities handle resource planning, and forcing Tri-State to become much more transparent and accessible to member co-ops, which will make it easier for rural co-ops to move more quickly toward clean energy.

Other highly consequential legislation adopted last year generates $5.4 billion in transportation funding (including sizable amounts for electrification and multi-modal), bans the use of styrofoam and single-use plastic bags, allows local governments to adopt more stringent limits on single-use plastics, requires GHG emissions caps for entire sectors like oil & gas and industrial emissions, and further expands equity and environmental justice obligations for state agencies. CC4CA also led on a successful bill to create a local government grant fund for tackling natural hazard mitigation challenges.

We are currently deep into the 2022 legislative session, with some minor successes but with most of the consequential legislation still in motion.
Electric Utilities

In part due to sustained pressure from local governments within its service area, Tri-State finally committed to 80% greenhouse gas emissions reductions by 2030. CC4CA is working with allies to lock in that commitment through Tri-State’s ongoing Electric Resource Plan process.

Additionally, although we don’t yet have a final resolution in the Electric Resource Plan process, Xcel has been making some key concessions and the PUC has responded favorably to many of the arguments calling for more rapid retirement of Colorado’s coal-fired power plants and less construction of new gas plants.

Pushing for Strong Executive Branch Policies and Programs

December 2021 marked the adoption of two truly landmark, precedent-setting state agency regulations, both of which were top priorities for CC4CA. The Air Quality Control Commission voted unanimously to substantially increase controls of GHG and ozone-forming Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) emissions from oil and gas operations. The centerpiece of the suite of new rules is new toughest-in-the-nation statewide requirements for operators to substantially increase the frequency to find and fix leaks from oil and gas wells and compressor stations. The rules also break new ground in protection of Disproportionately Impacted Communities and of buildings, schools, and other public places in close proximity to well sites.

In addition, the Transportation Commission adopted a rule establishing GHG budgets for future projects of CDOT and Metropolitan Planning Organizations through 2050. The rule creates a strong financial incentive for CDOT and the five MPOs (covering the Denver Metro Area, the North Front Range, the Pikes Peak region, Pueblo, and Grand Junction) to include in their project funding plans investments in capital projects that will reduce GHG and VOC emissions. Encompassing a range of important co-benefits for expanded mobility options, better transit networks, and reduced air pollution, the rule incorporates important protections for DICs from further transportation system impacts, as well.

There were other significant outcomes last year, as well. We successfully supported strengthening the Regional Haze State Implementation Plan by making federally enforceable the retirement of 15 coal plant units at sites statewide by 2029. We celebrated a successful effort to secure AQCC approval of the Ozone Nonattainment State Implementation Plan, which includes provisions to limit future emissions of ozone-forming VOCs and nitrogen oxides (NOx), as well as to require faster repair times for oil and gas leaks discovered within 1,000 feet of occupied areas. And in the so-called "industrial rulemaking," the AQCC required energy intensive, trade-exposed steel and cement manufacturers to reduce GHG emissions 5% by 2030, bolstered by provisions for emissions audits every five years testing whether they are using the Best Available Control Technologies and for using the best available energy efficiency practices.

And already in 2022 we have celebrated a major regulatory success with the COGCC’s adoption of new financial assurance rules.
Elevating the Local Government Voice

CC4CA ensures that its members – local elected officials and local government staff – have the opportunity to serve as witnesses during legislative hearings, meet with their legislators, testify during agency rulemaking processes, speak to reporters, and publish opinion pieces in local and statewide media outlets. In the past year alone, we supported:

- 124 local officials and four jurisdictional staff members testifying in 37 separate regulatory hearings and sessions
- 21 elected officials and two jurisdictional staff submitting written comments in four separate regulatory proceedings
- 50 elected officials and five jurisdictional staff/advisory board members in testifying in 17 separate legislative hearings
- 21 public officials in meetings with state and federal lawmakers, and we have met with the governor’s team many dozens of times.

Additionally, more than 120 local officials joined sign-on letters to members of Colorado’s federal delegation, we supported 40 elected officials in publishing guest editorials and letters to the editor, and we helped influence at least 40 news stories.

Importantly, 71 of the people we supported in regulatory proceedings, at the Legislature, publishing opinion pieces, and in other ways were first-timers – 2021 was the first time we had worked with them, representing a substantial expansion in our network of local officials engaging in these key policy venues.

In just six years, Colorado Communities for Climate Action has evolved from a promising idea into an influential coalition shaping state climate policy. It can be very difficult for individual local governments to influence state policy on their own, but our coalition of counties and municipalities all speaking with one voice is having an outsized impact.

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