



YAMPA VALLEY
**SUSTAINABILITY
COUNCIL**

Strategic Plan

2022 – 2026

*Advancing Climate
Solutions Together*





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Uniting the Yampa Valley Region Through Collaborative Climate Action.



Introduction

The Yampa Valley region in Northwest Colorado, encompassing both Routt and Moffat Counties, is unique in the state and nation. It contains one of the major tributaries to the Colorado River. It is undergoing an energy transition away from coal. It is a tourist destination and an iconic western slope agricultural region.

The region is also changing in unprecedented ways: it is getting hotter and drier. Routt and Moffat Counties are “hot spots” of warming, tracking over two times the national and global average temperature increases over the last century. Increased temperatures are causing drying in the landscapes and reducing the amount of moisture in the soils. Snowpack is more variable, spring melt is shifting earlier, and the usual relationship between snowpack and runoff is changing as drier soils absorb more runoff. Reduced runoff impacts the upland forests, riparian and rangeland ecosystems and communities in uneven and consequential ways.

As the leading regional organization focused on advancing sustainability and resilience in the Yampa Valley, we at Yampa Valley Sustainability Council (YVSC) see these changes as a call to climate action.

Taking climate action means both reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increasing resilience to current and projected changes.

According to recent research, reducing emissions is best achieved through the dual-pronged approach of decarbonization and investments in natural climate solutions. Decarbonization means shifting away from carbon-intensive waste, energy and transportation systems. Natural climate solutions are land-based climate strategies that increase carbon sequestration and resilience across our forests, wetland, riparian areas and grasslands. Advancing natural climate solutions alongside decarbonization is particularly appropriate for our region due to our unique mosaic of upland forests, riparian and rangeland ecosystems.



Investing in resilience strategies is an essential component of climate action because even with greatly increased efforts to reduce emissions, we in the Yampa Valley will continue to see and feel the impacts of increased temperatures for many years to come. We can build resilience to climate change impacts, such as increased stream temperatures, through strategies like riparian reforestation, where increased shading of streams helps reduce stream temperatures in time, maintain wildlife corridors and more.

Our work as an organization is to find ways to build upon common ground, core values and places of connection, to collaboratively create initiatives that sustain the rich cultural and natural heritage we treasure.

Residents of the Yampa Valley region value clean air, clean water, healthy soils, family, meaningful work and a vibrant and healthy economy. If successful, our 2022-2026 Strategic Plan will ensure that these markers of a resilient and healthy Yampa Valley will be bolstered through collaborative climate action.

We are energized by and committed to these next five years of climate action. We see this next chapter in our work as a vital one that we will all look back to as the time we stepped forward to act when we needed to, together. Join us.

Michelle O. Stewart, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Our Mission

Serve as a leader, catalyst and resource for building a sustainable and resilient Yampa Valley region.

Our Values

Underpinning our work and mission at YVSC are the following values:

Resourcefulness

We utilize multiple pathways, strategies and approaches to address sustainability challenges. We will innovate, be creative and think outside the box to move forward thoughtful and creative solutions with available resources.

Inclusivity

We strive for equal access to our programs, services and opportunities. We are building an inclusive community through collaboration, dialogue and by engaging and honoring different perspectives and values.

Science

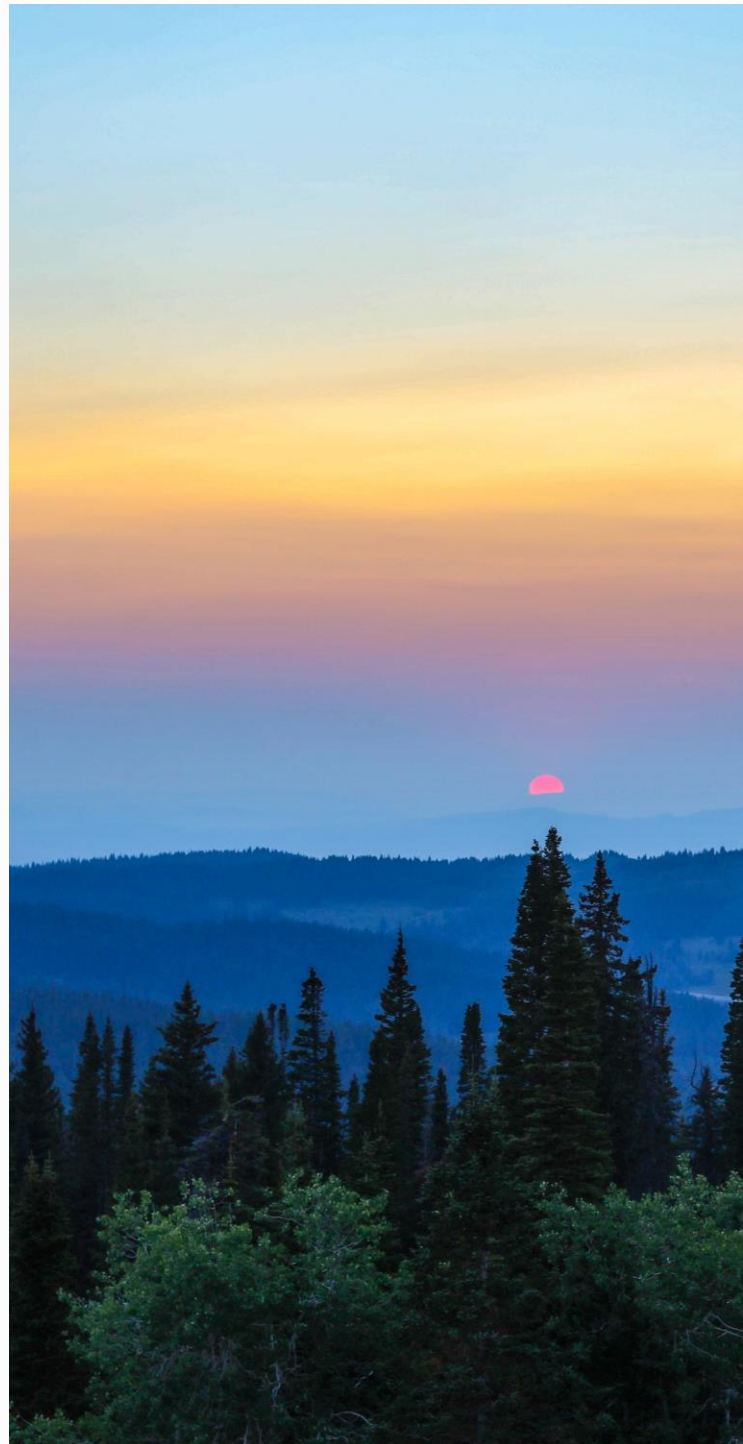
We incorporate timely and relevant science into the service of decision making and action in the community.

Hope

Through the delivery and communication of our programs, we provide solutions that bring hope to current and future generations in the Yampa Valley. What we do today matters and makes a difference to preserve the environment we've chosen to live and work in.

Respect

We welcome diverse perspectives, talents, experiences, knowledge and contributions to all that we do.





Our Vision

We envision a healthy, resilient Yampa Valley united through climate action.



Photo: Hazy Valley © Chris Hylen

Our Approach

To achieve our vision, and catalyze action that is greater than the sum of the parts, we:

Advocate for policies, practices and actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience, guided by science and relevant research.

Collaborate with community members, businesses, governments, and other nonprofits to build community, achieve shared goals and scale impacts.

Educate the public about pressing sustainability issues and empower them to connect their knowledge to actions that build a more sustainable and climate resilient community.

Implement projects on the ground that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience.

Integrate the community's values, knowledge and needs into processes that address sustainability challenges to protect the cultural and natural heritage of the Yampa Valley.

Our Statement of Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

YVSC believes that justice, equity, diversity and inclusion are foundational for building a sustainable and climate-resilient future.

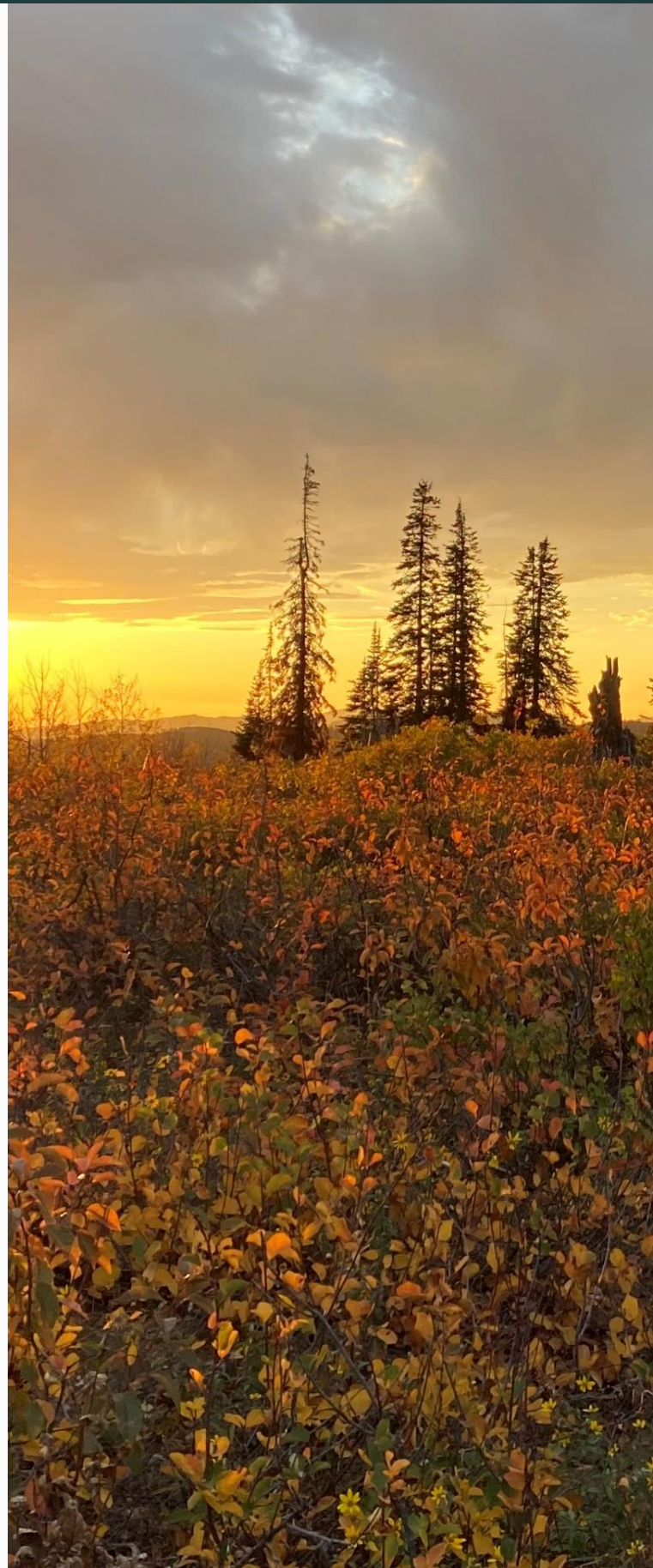
We acknowledge that marginalized and historically underrepresented populations are often disproportionately affected by social and environmental problems.

We strive to understand how regional social, economic and environmental changes create uneven and unintended consequences for social groups, and where possible, reduce these impacts through programs and partnerships.

As an organization, we cultivate an equitable culture for staff and community members that embraces differences and offers respect in both words and actions for all people.

We promote an inclusive culture, where any individual or group feels welcomed, respected, heard and valued to fully participate and share their lived experiences.

We commit to taking intentional steps to establish accessible, relevant opportunities for all groups to participate in and benefit from our work.





Our Priorities

Over the next five years, YVSC will focus on five Priority Areas: Waste Diversion, Energy, Transportation, Resilient Land and Water, and Community Engagement.



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Our Vision

A healthy, resilient Yampa Valley united through climate action.

Our Values

Resourcefulness
Inclusivity
Science
Hope
Respect

Our Approach

Advocate
Collaborate
Educate
Implement
Integrate



Together these Priority Areas define our work in sustainability as anchored in climate action, where climate action means taking steps to decrease emissions and increase resilience to current and projected changes to our environment.



Priority Area 1 Energy

► The Challenge

Electricity production is the largest source of carbon emissions in the US. Federal and state efforts to reduce emissions in the energy sector are driving transitions away from fossil fuels and increasing the development of renewable energy. As electricity generation becomes less carbon intensive, energy policy is promoting beneficial electrification and renewed efforts to increase energy efficiency in new and existing buildings.

Regionally, there are several challenges to the transition towards low or no-carbon energy. The rate structure of the local utility has lower incentives for solar and renewable energy than other regions in the state. Labor shortages are a key challenge to scaling up beneficial electrification and energy efficiency: there is a lack of qualified contractors and skilled labor, and overall contractor labor costs are very high due to limited supply.

Photo: Solar Array © Yampa Valley Electric Association

Our Goal

Reduce overall energy use and increase transitions to low or no-carbon energy systems in residential and commercial buildings throughout the Yampa Valley.

Our Role

YVSC will advocate for and provide education, technical assistance and needed services that increase energy efficiency and facilitate the transition to low or no-carbon energy. We will catalyze and support workforce development opportunities that strengthen local capacity and vibrant regional economic development. We will connect industry partners with local clients to increase adoption of energy technologies that reduce overall energy use.



Our Objectives

E1: Ensure that new construction in the Yampa Valley prioritizes energy efficiency and uses low or no-carbon energy sources.

Priority Actions:

- Promote and technically assist with the electrification of new residential and commercial development projects.
- Connect energy technology industry partners with regional partners to develop pilots that showcase new technologies.
- Develop workshops and resources to increase local capacity to install and maintain new energy technologies.
- Participate in state and regional strategic climate meetings to connect Colorado Energy Office actions with Yampa Valley needs.

E2: Reduce energy use and use of fossil fuels in existing commercial and residential buildings.

Priority Actions:

- Promote and technically assist with deep electrification assessments for large-scale commercial clients.
- Provide and support trainings for installers and energy users that catalyze energy efficiency, electrification and shifts to renewable energy.
- Develop Efficiency Certification program with the Colorado Green Business Program.
- Advocate for the creation of a County-level Renewable Energy Mitigation Program (REMP).
- Facilitate a pilot community beneficial electrification co-op and share process and data as pilot model.

E3: Increase public understanding of the need for and ways to participate in the transition to renewable energy in Routt and Moffat County.

Priority Actions:

- Increase public awareness of renewable energy options for energy users.
- Leverage YVSC energy assessment program as a first-step exploration of efficiency, electrification and solarization.
- Support and strategically partner with Solar United Neighbors (SUN) community solar program to increase public education and installation options.



E4: Increase workforce development and training or credential programs that support the transition to a low or no-carbon energy economy (electric vehicles, beneficial electrification, energy technologies, etc.).

Priority Actions:

- Develop and maintain a database of contractors and architects by category who are allies in energy efficiency and electrification and who might benefit from and/or train new workforce members.
- Leverage YVSC energy assessment program as a first-step exploration of efficiency, electrification and solarization.
- Support and strategically partner with Solar United Neighbors (SUN) community solar program to increase public education and installation options.

Photo: *Brown Ranch* © Yampa Valley Housing Authority



Project Spotlight Brown Ranch

The [Brown Ranch](#) is a donated 536-acre parcel of land set for development on the west end of Steamboat Springs that has become a beacon of relief amid a valley-wide affordable housing crisis. Brown Ranch sets a precedent for building new developments in the Valley, by placing community values – affordability, sustainability, and preserving cultural heritage, natural resources, and open space – at its core. YVSC is a member of the consulting team that is working closely with the Yampa Valley Housing Authority to advance the development planning phases of the project. Our staff have worked closely with the Infrastructure and Natural and Built Sustainability Focus Teams to help conceptualize, coordinate and advance climate solutions through the parcel’s new developments and related infrastructure. YVSC’s involvement with the Brown Ranch development process demonstrates how YVSC can provide expertise and support for progressive, new construction pilot projects that lead the way forward.



Priority Area 2 Transportation

► The Challenge

Transportation is the second largest source of carbon emissions in the U.S. The largest sources of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions include passenger cars and light-duty trucks, sport utility vehicles, pickup trucks, and minivans. Federal and state efforts to reduce emissions in the transportation sector are pushing ahead ambitious electric vehicle (EV) adoption goals, anchoring the need for more electric vehicle structural equipment (EVSE) infrastructure.

Rural regions like the Yampa Valley lack local EV vendors, service providers and necessary EVSE infrastructure. While EVs are an important transportation strategy, overall focus on strategies to reduce per capita vehicle-miles-traveled, investments in multi-modal and public transportation is essential to a low to no-carbon transportation future.

Photo: EV Charger in Steamboat Springs © Tom Ross, Steamboat Pilot & Today

Our Goal

Increase access to and use of multi-modal transportation and transitions to low or no-carbon transportation systems throughout the Yampa Valley.

Our Role

YVSC will be a connector between the low and no-carbon transportation industry opportunities to residents, businesses and governments. YVSC will educate and provide technical assistance to governments and businesses working to increase electric vehicle adoption, electric vehicle structural equipment infrastructure and multi-modal transportation use at scale.



Our Objectives

T1: Increase regional adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) (including electric bikes/other) and Electric Vehicle Structural Equipment (EVSE).

Priority Actions:

- Establish YVSC as a hub for information about EV ownership, maintenance, and rebate options, leveraging EV Ambassadors and EV Ride-and-Drive events as public outreach and connection points.
- Participate in state and regional strategic climate meetings to connect Colorado Energy Office initiatives with Yampa Valley opportunities.
- Recruit and provide technical assistance to increase public, workplace and residential charging infrastructure and electric fleet adoption throughout the region.

T2: Reduce vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) per person, business or entity.

Priority Actions:

- Organize and host annual events promoting alternative transportation (e.g. CARbon-Free Challenge).
- Work with businesses and institutions to develop and communicate programs that incentivize non-single occupancy vehicle travel.
- Communicate and expand successes of businesses and institutions reducing VMT through the Yampa Valley Green Business Program and Routt County Climate Action Plan Collaborative.
- Provide technical assistance to land management and planning discussions to increase multimodal transportation access and use.



Photo: Bike commuter in Downtown Steamboat Springs © John F. Russel, Steamboat Pilot & Today



Priority Area 3 Waste Diversion



► The Challenge

The primary greenhouse gas emitted from waste is methane, which is 86 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere over a 20-year period. Methane accounts for about 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions but is responsible for about half of the net increase in global temperature since pre-Industrial era. Diverting waste from the landfill through reduction, reuse, and recycling, thereby mitigating even small amounts of methane, can drive significant progress towards achieving a 1.5 degrees Celsius future.

The state of Colorado has set goals to achieve 35% waste diversion by 2026 and 45% waste diversion by 2036. Routt County's current waste diversion rate is estimated to be 9-12%, meaning regional recycling needs to increase four-fold by 2036 to achieve the state goals. Low recycling rates are caused by both limited recycling services and limited public education.

Photo: YVSC Zero Waste Station

Our Goal

Increase regional recycling, composting and waste reduction in Routt and Moffat County.

Our Role

YVSC will provide education, technical assistance and services to increase regional waste diversion and become a regional leader in circular economy thinking and action. YVSC will serve as a science-based resource to decision-makers who seek to increase waste diversion in the region and advocate for decisions and actions that do so.



Our Objectives

WD1: Make waste reduction a priority action.

Priority Actions:

- Implement an education campaign that increases public understanding of why waste reduction matters and how to incorporate it into our daily lives.
- Provide technical assistance to businesses, organizations and other entities to help them reduce waste.
- Track and report on waste reduction measures along with associated greenhouse gas emission reductions.
- Participate in state and regional strategic climate meetings to connect those efforts with Yampa Valley opportunities.
- Support initiatives that reduce and eventually eliminate the use of single-use plastics in the Yampa Valley.

WD2: Support and increase regional recycling and composting.

Priority Actions:

- Develop Yampa Valley Recycles partnerships in the region, revitalizing the brand as a symbol for regional recycling education, outreach and action.
- Provide technical assistance to regional businesses and organizations to help increase recycling and composting.
- Advocate for local and state policies, ordinances and legislation that address barriers to recycling and composting for the residential and commercial sectors.
- Participate in state and regional recycle and compost meetings to connect these initiatives with Yampa Valley opportunities.



Photo: Compost

WD3: Support and/or provide stop-gap access to traditional recycling for businesses, residents and tourists who lack access to curbside recycling in the region.

Priority Actions:

- Support or conduct needs assessment to determine infrastructure and capacity needs to provide recycling access to all in Routt and Moffat Counties.
- Develop cost and emissions analysis for transporting materials from YVR Depot and Moffat drop-off centers to regional recycling facilities.
- Support regional City and County leadership in assessing feasibility of recycling drop-off centers.
- Work with regional City and County leadership to site permanent drop-off center locations.

WD4: Enable a standard for Zero Waste events throughout the Yampa Valley.

Priority Actions:

- Develop and launch an Advancing Zero Waste with YVSC program to centralize Zero Waste education and services for the region.
- Provide Zero Waste education, training, services and resources for entities that coordinate events in the Yampa Valley.
- Continually increase YVSC's capacity to serve as the regional hub for Zero Waste services and training for events.

WD5: Provide year-round access to recycling services for hard-to-recycle (HTR) materials.

Priority Actions:

- Establish and grow the Yampa Valley Recycles (YVR) Depot in Routt County as a year-round, convenient, staffed outlet for recycling hard-to-recycle materials.
- Provide technical assistance to Moffat County to scale up their HTR recycling programs and evaluate west branch of YVR Depot.
- Provide regional education and outreach and promotion of the YVR Depot.

Photo: YVR Depot © Suzie Romig, Steamboat Pilot & Today



Project Spotlight Yampa Valley Recycles Depot

In December 2021, YVSC opened the doors to the [Yampa Valley Recycles Depot \(YVR Depot\)](#), in partnership with Routt County and the City of Steamboat Springs. This facility serves as a pilot program to offer convenient, year-round access to the disposal of hard-to-recycle materials including electronics, batteries, light bulbs, and mattresses. During its first six months of operation, the Depot diverted over 9 tons of electronics alone. The YVR Depot is a demonstration of YVSC's resourcefulness and willingness to step forward to fill gaps and implement solutions to local waste diversion challenges. YVSC will continue to collect data through this pilot program and determine the best long-term solution for the diversion of hard-to-recycle materials in the Yampa Valley.



Priority Area 4

Resilient Land & Water

► The Challenge

Investing in land management and water conservation actions that reduce emissions and increase resilience is essential to climate action. Up to 1/3 of the emissions needed to meet global climate goals can be achieved through the enhancement of land management practices that reduce carbon emissions, known as natural climate solutions (NCS). We cannot meet our climate goals without reducing emissions through land and water conservation actions.

At the same time, current and projected temperatures are increasing, causing changes in precipitation, loss of soil moisture and other watershed-related changes that stress natural systems and water supplies. Investing in resilience strategies like restoration and water conservation, as well as research partnerships that increase understanding of how water supplies and natural systems are changing in the basin, bolster our capacity to endure current and future changes in a proactive versus reactive way.

Photo: ReTree 2021 Aerial View © Colorado Lottery

Our Goal

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilience through land and water conservation management actions and improved decision-making.

Our Role

YVSC will be the leading source of information for how natural climate solutions can help meet climate action goals and create co-benefits for communities and landowners. YVSC will catalyze, lead, support and/or implement collaborative reforestation and restoration processes and projects across forests, riparian, wetland, rangeland and grassland ecosystems that reduce emissions, increase resilience and demonstrate results. YVSC will pursue and strengthen research partnerships that connect relevant research on how climate change is influencing the Yampa River Basin with data gaps and water manager/user decision-making needs, while serving as a hub for related public education and outreach that promotes water conservation and stewardship among diverse stakeholders.



Our Objectives

RLW1: Solidify natural climate solutions (NCS) as an important climate action strategy in the Yampa Valley.

Priority Actions:

- Work with Routt County Climate Action Plan Collaborative and others to develop an implementation plan for priority NCS actions across forested, riparian and rangeland ecosystems to increase carbon sequestration and resilience.
- Develop science-based information to share with government and the public on potential sequestration benefits of land management actions relevant to the Yampa Valley.
- Participate in state and regional strategic climate meetings to connect Colorado's Natural and Working Land's Strategic Plan actions with Yampa Valley opportunities for action.
- Lead, support and/or implement impactful NCS projects throughout the Yampa Valley region, utilizing Yampa Valley Climate Crew partnerships and projects to increase scale and impacts.

RLW2: Catalyze projects to protect and restore wetlands and other significant carbon sinks in the Yampa Valley.

Priority Actions:

- Lead on implementation of the long-term plan for the Yampa River Forest Restoration Project.
- Collaboratively develop plans for and help implement projects with partners on major wetland and riparian restoration projects (e.g., Walton Creek confluence; California Park wet meadows).
- Develop educational material for residential areas along the Yampa River on how to restore and protect the Yampa River riparian ecosystem.

RLW3: Increase the pace of forest restoration activities that increase resilience, sequestration and watershed health.

Priority Actions:

- Engage through the Routt County Wildfire Mitigation Council to increase capacity for forest restoration through large-scale collaborative projects and increased community education on the need for restoration.
- Partner in the development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan that prioritizes large-scale restoration and help bring funding for new projects.
- Partner with USFS on forest restoration through volunteer support (Yampa Valley Climate Crew), planning, and funding.



Photo: YVSC intern performing a soil moisture transect

RLW4: Increase urban and residential water conservation in the Yampa Valley.

Priority Actions:

- Educate the public (residents and tourists) about how water resources are changing in the Yampa Valley.
- Develop, promote and technically assist with advancing water conservation practices that reduce or eliminate the use of treated water for outdoor irrigation purposes, e.g. water reuse, Yampascaping or native/low-water landscaping, efficient irrigation, etc.
- Integrate water conservation into the Routt County Climate Action Plan Collaborative discussions in order to collectively identify and advance water conservation as a mitigation and adaptation strategy.
- Provide technical assistance to government, water districts and businesses to increase indoor and outdoor water conservation practices, e.g. turf replacement, and advocate for supportive policies.
- Advocate for water conservation practices in new construction and urban design processes.

RLW5: Increase scientific research and public understanding of how climate change is influencing water resources in the basin in order to identify and pursue resilience strategies that sustain Yampa Basin ecosystems and livelihoods in a warmer and drier future.

Priority Actions:

- Support the installation of and help maintain a soil moisture monitoring network in the Yampa Basin and pursue and support collaborations that expand the network throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin.
- Support the creation and maintenance of a soil moisture data dashboard that supports water manager decision-making needs.
- Pursue and manage research partnerships, citizen science and projects that connect knowledge about how water is changing in the Yampa Basin due to climate change and water use needs actions that increase resilience.
- Support and convene workshops, speaker series and conferences that connect relevant research and science with water user decision-making needs and conservation opportunities.
- Be a regional hub for resiliency research, education and action.

Photo: ReTree 2021 plantings

Project Spotlight Yampa River Forest Restoration Project

The [Yampa River Forest Restoration Project \(YRFRP\)](#) was collaboratively launched in 2019 by YVSC, Colorado State Forest Service, and the City of Steamboat Springs in response to the Yampa River Health Assessment and Streamflow Management Plan. The assessment identified that water temperature is the biggest water quality issue that the Yampa faces. The goal of this project is to maintain or improve native riparian vegetation extent and condition along the Yampa River riparian corridor to reduce solar loading and temperature increases along the river. Reforestation is, arguably, the most impactful natural climate solution opportunity here in the Yampa Valley. Planting trees offers the opportunity to directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions while increasing resiliency through increased shade and native habitat. The YRFRP demonstrates YVSC's ability to lead and collaborate on projects that directly increase the resilience of our natural landscapes. Since the project began in 2019, YVSC has engaged over 300 community volunteers to help plant more than 1,300 native trees along the river, making this a unique and impactful community-based reforestation initiative.





Priority Area 5 **Community Engagement**

► The Challenge

The Yampa Valley is changing socially, economically and environmentally. The region is transitioning away from coal and the economic development pathways for the region are uncertain. Tourism remains a major source of regional revenue while sustainable tourism management and planning lags behind other mountain tourism destination norms. We are seeing the effects of climate change firsthand in the Yampa Valley through increasing temperatures, earlier spring melt, changing snowpack, increasing risk of wildfire and more.

73% of people in Routt County and 63% in Moffat County believe that global warming is happening, but over half do not know what they can do to address it. This underlines the need to increase public understanding of what we can do to address climate change. There is a need to increase connection between Routt and Moffat County so NW Colorado can create and scale services and economic development pathways that advance climate solutions and increase resilience, while increasing mutual understanding and respect among disparate geographies and ways of life in the Yampa Valley.

Photo: ReTree 2020 volunteers © Tai Juneau

Our Goal

Empower individuals, governments, businesses and organizations to connect their knowledge of how the Yampa Valley is changing to actions that collaboratively conserve resources, increase resilience and reduce emissions throughout the Yampa Valley.

Our Role

YVSC brings relevant science and research into the service of dialogue, decision-making and collaborative action, serving as a consistent and reliable resource for understanding how climate change is influencing the Yampa Valley and how our region can impactfully mitigate it (reduce emissions) and increase resilience to current and projected changes. YVSC supports, convenes and leads collaborations in an approachable, community-centered, nonpartisan and respectful manner. We advocate for frameworks and actions that advance the health and resilience of the people and ecosystems of the Yampa Valley. We strive to be a hub for volunteers who want to take climate action. Our Internship Program connects students and entry-level professionals with science-based, real-world training and experience in sustainability work that advances them in their trajectory towards sustainability professions.



Our Objectives

CE1: Increase public understanding of how climate change is influencing the Yampa Valley region and co-produce actions that mitigate climate change and increase resilience to current and projected changes.

Priority Actions:

- Pursue and strengthen research and technical partnerships to bring relevant climate change science and research into the service of decision-making needs and generate applied science pursuits that are shaped by and inform knowledge gaps.
- Develop a YVSC Fellows program that connects graduate students with regional fieldwork opportunities and public education and outreach forums.
- Pursue institutional partnerships that enable YVSC to establish a regional Yampa Valley Climate Resilience hub.

CE2: Strengthen connections and collaborations throughout the Yampa Valley that elevate climate action as something that unites the region, working to increase mutual understanding, learning, empathy and dialogue among the diverse people and places of the region.

Priority Actions:

- Catalyze, support and lead regional initiatives that bring cross-Valley stakeholders to the table.
- Recruit cross-Valley participation in programs, job openings, internships and volunteer opportunities.
- Host and support workshops, speakers and field trips with cross-Valley participants that facilitate mutual learning, dialogue and sharing narratives and experiences with change in order to increase learning and empathy.

CE3: Empower government, organizations and community members to be leaders in collaborative climate action and resilience in the Yampa Valley.

Priority Actions:

- Administer and technically assist the Routt County Climate Action Plan Collaborative in identifying and advancing collaborative actions that reduce emissions across energy, transportation, waste, land and water sectors.
- Increase opportunities for volunteers and ambassadors to engage in YVSC Priority Areas so willing individuals and groups can participate and contribute to initiatives that advance climate solutions and resilience.
- Participate in state and regional strategic climate meetings and workshops to both share successes and lessons learned with other regions and bring best practices from others into the work we engage in the Yampa Valley.

CE4: Support, educate and empower youth and students to be leaders and agents of change in the Yampa Valley.

Priority Actions:

- Provide technical assistance to youth-led initiatives.
- Increase the number of events, workshops and speakers that target and connect to youth.
- Strengthen Rising Leaders program and engagement plan (e.g. Careers and Leadership in Sustainability event) through collaborations with student groups and educational partners.
- Ongoing and annually, host paid YVSC Internships and recruit cross-Valley participants.

CE5: Increase local business presence and leadership in climate action.

Priority Actions:

- Collaboratively establish and administer the Yampa Valley Green Business program in partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), local Chambers and other partners across Routt and Moffat Counties.
- Develop and strengthen business-oriented resources and technical services across YVSC programs that support local businesses in reducing emissions and leading by example.
- Establish a lasting coalition of businesses that facilitates learning, resource sharing and collaboration to sustain and support a green business economy.

Photo: Summer 2021 Interns with YVSC Executive Director



Project Spotlight Internship Program

The impacts of climate change are here and now; young people around the world and within our community have been demanding increased action to mitigate and combat impacts, which will only intensify with time. YVSC embraces opportunities to invest in, empower and elevate the voices of the next generation so they can rise as the leaders we need now and in the future. In early 2021, YVSC formalized an [internship program](#) for local students and young professionals. The program is designed to equip interns with the skills needed to develop and implement projects that advance climate solutions. Interns complete an independent project under the mentorship of YVSC staff. This project-based model is an ideal steppingstone for interns, many of whom go on to secure positions in sustainability-related professions or continued education. This program demonstrates YVSC's investment in youth leadership, empowerment and professional training.



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