



western views

CONGRESS ENACTS AN ENERGY BILL

By Jim Martin, Executive Director

Just before leaving for the summer recess, both houses of Congress passed a wide-ranging energy bill that was signed by President Bush a few days later. Although this legislation contained some provisions that we supported, the bill as a whole was a disappointment on several levels.

The good news...

First, the good news. The legislation extends the renewable energy production tax credit for two years, providing some stability for future investments in resources like wind energy. Combined with the renewable portfolio standard that Colorado and other states have in place, this tax provision will result in a significant expansion of wind energy and other renewable energy

our growing dependence on imported oil to power our cars and trucks, and global warming. Many western members of Congress supported an amendment (led by Senator Bingaman of New Mexico) that would have established portfolio standards for renewable energy, and a parallel amendment (sponsored by Senators McCain of Arizona and Lieberman of Connecticut) that would have established a trading program for carbon dioxide emissions. Together, these provisions would have represented a major step forward in addressing global warming. Unfortunately, these provisions were dropped from the legislation by the conference committee that was reconciling the House and Senate bills.

The legislation will result in a significant expansion of wind and other renewable energy resources across the nation.

But it does virtually nothing to address either our growing dependence on imported oil or global warming.

resources across the nation. The energy legislation also includes several provisions that were designed to encourage a federal-private partnership to prove the effectiveness of new coal gasification strategies. These clean coal technologies can significantly reduce emissions of pollutants that scar the landscape and threaten human health. They also offer some realistic promise for capturing and sequestering carbon dioxide emissions that cause global warming.

...and the bad news

On the other hand, this legislation does virtually nothing to address two of the greatest energy, environmental, and national security threats confronting the United States:

Ill-advised provisions

Closer to home, the final legislation also included several ill-advised provisions that exempt an industry practice called “fracking”—injecting liquids under very high pressure into geologic formations to encourage natural gas recovery, but which may also pose a threat to ground water—while simultaneously limiting the EPA’s ability to regulate run-off from oil and gas development activities that threaten water quality. Just as worrisome, the final legislation opened the door to exempting some oil and gas activities from compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Continued on Page 4



Wind Power 500 Challenge

On August 26, Western Resource Advocates partnered with the City of Boulder to launch the Boulder Wind Power 500. The campaign challenges 500 new Boulder households or businesses to use wind energy. New participants must sign up to purchase wind energy or renewable energy credits from one of four participating suppliers by October 31.

Boulder is currently one of the nation’s leading supporters of wind power, with more than 5,000 households and 300 commercial and industrial customers purchasing wind power for their home or business. Renewable energy, including the city’s hydroelectric generation, represents almost seven percent of the total electricity used in the city.

You can sign up to help meet the challenge by visiting www.cogreenpower.org.



Wind power—a natural for Boulder.
PHOTO COURTESY OF JEREMY CARLSON.

LAS VEGAS: New Outreach for WRA's Water Program



Waterfall outside Mirage Resort, Las Vegas, NV.

It is impossible to visit Las Vegas without noticing that there is a lot of water being used in a place that is, for lack of a better word, a desert. Now Las Vegas' rapid growth is placing even greater stress on regional water resources. For example, the Southern Nevada Water Authority is planning to pump enormous quantities of groundwater from eastern Nevada, and to pull water from the Virgin River and Muddy River in Utah for use in Nevada. These proposals threaten to affect other water users and damage unique southwestern river systems.

Seeking more sustainable solutions for meeting Las Vegas' water demands, WRA is now part of a coalition formed to find ways to protect the environment and rural communities. Looking ahead, we plan to provide technical assistance to grassroots groups promoting urban water conservation and finding other ways to protect irreplaceable western rivers.



WESTERN RESOURCE ADVOCATES FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

Western Resource Advocates' 15th Anniversary Celebration will be held the evening of Thursday, November 3rd, 2005 from 5-7 p.m. at the Hotel Boulderado in downtown Boulder. Join us as we celebrate fifteen years of conservation successes benefiting the Interior West's land, air, and water. If you plan to attend and have not RSVP'd, please call WRA at 303-444-1188 x227.

A Boost for Renewable Energy in Arizona

by John Nielsen, Energy Program Director

Arizona residents can breathe a little easier knowing that the Arizona Corporation Commission recently decided to dramatically increase the state's environmental portfolio standard from 1.1 percent renewable energy by 2012 to 15 percent renewable energy by 2025. WRA has been working for years to en-

Arizona is planning to dramatically increase the state's Environmental Portfolio Standard to 15% renewable energy by 2025.

courage the Arizona Commission to tap into the state's abundant solar and other renewable energy resources. We helped establish Arizona's initial Environmental Portfolio Standard in 1999, one of the first in the nation.

While the overall renewable energy targets under the 1999 standard were modest, they included an unprecedented commitment to solar. As a result, Arizona is a leader in solar development nationwide, with a robust and active solar industry. Now, wind, biomass and other renewable energy resource will be joining solar in the state's renewable energy mix, as the new Environmental Portfolio Standard will maintain Arizona's current commitment to solar development while greatly expanding the level of non-solar renewable resources in the coming years. WRA played a lead role in educating the commissioners, their staff and other stakeholders on the ratepayer and risk management benefits of renewable energy development, especially on the role it can play in helping reduce expensive and volatile natural gas use, and in helping dispel some common misconceptions about the reliability of renewable energy. The revised rules are expected to be released for public comment in October.

www.westernresourceadvocates.org

SUCCESS IN DENVER New Water Rates to Encourage Conservation

by Bart Miller, Water Program Director

For over a year, WRA has been encouraging Denver Water to adopt water rates that will promote conservation. WRA picked Denver Water as a key utility for change because Denver Water serves 1.2 million customers and because the utility has plans to divert additional water from the Colorado River Basin—water that is needed on the West Slope for local communities, economies, and the environment.

Our advocacy for improved water rates has included discussions with Denver Water staff, board members, and Denver's Citizens' Advisory Committee. Last summer, we partnered with another non-profit group that canvassed door-to-door in Denver and its suburbs with our rates analysis and talking points in hand. The canvass raised citizen awareness of the rates issue and generated over 1000 letters to the board.

Our efforts paid off. On September 14th, the Water Department's board of directors voted to adopt a new rate structure that will charge customers slightly more per gallon if they

reach very high levels of use. It thus provides greater incentive for more efficient water use, especially outdoor watering. The new rates take effect on January 1st.

This recent and important action is part of a new and evolving approach by Denver Water. Chips Barry, Denver Water's General Manager, wrote a *Denver Post* column on September 9 describing a "new ethic" of conservation that is sweeping the City of Denver and his department. WRA is delighted to have been invited to provide input along the way, helping to shape this "new ethic" into sustainable policies.



South Platte River, Denver, CO

WRA is a Membership Organization We Invite you to Join Us!

All of us at WRA know that our successes would be impossible without the loyal support of our donors. To build on fifteen years of achievements protecting the Interior West's land, air and water, we recently made the decision to officially become a membership organization. WRA has come a long way in fifteen years, and becoming a membership organization will help us be even more effective in years to come.

If you have not already joined WRA or sent your annual gift, I invite you to do so now. As a WRA member, some of the benefits you will receive include:

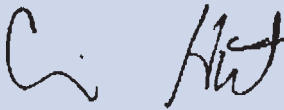
- WRA's newsletter, as well as our e-newsletter, if you provide your e-mail address;
- E-mail updates sharing news of recent successes and, on occasion, important new developments;
- Advance notice of special events in your area; and

- Access to our web site (www.western-resourceadvocates.org) where you may comment on our work, suggest projects that deserve our attention, and ask questions about current issues.

Our region faces tremendous challenges, but I am confident that we can protect our air and water quality and preserve our public lands. There is much to do, but working together, we will make a difference and we will remain proud to call ourselves Westerners twenty years from now. Please join us!



Jim Martin, Executive Director



Eric Hirst, President, Board of Directors



Advocacy Requires Information: WRA Prevails and Judge Orders Release of Cultural Resource Records

by Sean Phelan, Staff Attorney

As an advocacy organization, WRA is increasingly concerned about the growing trend in recent years of federal agencies stifling public access to government records by charging exorbitant processing fees. On behalf of Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance and Great Old Broads for Wilderness, WRA challenged this alarming practice. WRA filed suit over the Bureau of Land Management's charge of over \$20,000 in fees to release records acknowledging past damage to cultural resources in the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument and other significant archeological regions in Utah. On July 25, the District of Columbia federal lower court reaffirmed that, pursuant to the Freedom of Informa-

tion Act, **records requested in the public interest must be processed free of charge.** The judge recognized that the records "would provide useful insight into the relative threats to cultural resources on public lands ... [and that] such information would help the public understand and respond to such a threat."

Access to public information is vitally important to WRA and our partners. We plan to use the records to compel agencies to protect irreplaceable cultural resources, such as pueblo villages and rock art, from damage caused by off-road vehicle use and increasing oil and gas development.



spot
light

Pete
Conovitz

Pete Conovitz is a water guy: he's a rafter, kayaker, and hydrologist. That last one occupies Pete's time at WRA. Pete is investigating water uses in proposed Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service wilderness areas, identifying water rights and potential conflicts in upstream areas, and modeling streamflow. His work will help the wilderness community prioritize areas they wish to save and craft language for water protection legislation.

Pete joined WRA in May, and then wrote a grant to the Earth Systems Research Institute requesting geographic information system software. The awarded software has been very helpful, aiding Pete in his Colorado water protection work that includes Brown's Canyon, and the Uncompaghre and White River forest areas.

Born in New York, raised in Los Angeles, and with a geology degree from Tufts University in Boston, Pete moved to Telluride to live the ski bum dream. It was there that he began to understand how critical water is in the West, and how it affects all aspects of society and environment. Pete moved to Boulder, and volunteered with the U.S. Geological Society (USGS). With National Science Foundation funding, Pete's work for USGS on Antarctic streams led to earning a master's degree in watershed science from the Colorado State University, and two seasons in Antarctica. Upon return, Pete worked with private consultants and as the water resource specialist for Boulder County's Open Space department.

"I'm impressed with WRA's dedication to protecting and enhancing all aspects of the western environment. It feels good to play a small part in fighting the good fight," says Pete. WRA's water guy spends his free time renovating a fixer-upper in Fort Collins ("It's a bigger project than I expected"). Pete's laid-back style belies the meticulousness of his mapping work, the perfect combination for the WRA team.

Congress Enacts an Energy Bill

WRA's executive director discusses how the Energy Bill will affect the American Interior West.

Water Program Success in Denver and Beginnings in Las Vegas

WRA's efforts to promote conservation-friendly water rates pay off in Denver, and we're beginning work in Las Vegas.

A Boost for Renewable Energy in Arizona

Arizona's environmental portfolio standard will increase to 15 percent renewable energy by 2025.

Advocacy Requires Information: WRA Prevails and Judge Orders Release of Cultural Resource Records

Access to public information is vitally important to WRA and our partners.

Congress Enacts an Energy Bill, cont.

The federal energy legislation could have done far more to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy, to address oil imports and tackle global warming, and to advance a balanced program for developing natural gas in the West while protecting water and air quality, wildlife habitat, and our western way of life. But the good news is that WRA and countless other conservationists across the West are making progress on these fronts. Arizona just moved toward adoption of an environmental portfolio standard that is more than seven times more ambitious than its previous program—with the assistance of WRA's staff and advisors. Nevada, Colorado, and New Mexico are implementing their own renewable portfolio standards. Western electric utilities are beginning to factor the economic risk of carbon dioxide regulation into their decisions about future investments. Wyoming and Montana are exploring options for new-generation coal gasification plants in their states. Conservationists are working with ranchers and farmers, hunters, and others to find ways in which natural gas development could be made more compatible with protection of other resources. And the Western Governors' Association is working toward identifying policies needed to implement its resolution in support of a clean and diverse electrical energy supply.

These developments all point to the progress that conservationists are making at the state and regional level—and reinforce our efforts to promote change here at home.

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