

Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities

Economic Diversification Strategy
Northwest Colorado Development Council

BRECC ACTION CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

Coal communities across the country are reimagining local industries and developing transformative initiatives to build stronger, more resilient economies. Supported by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the [Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities \(BRECC\) Action Challenge](#) provides technical assistance to communities that have been negatively impacted by changes in the coal economy. In partnership with the National Association of Counties (NACo), the West Virginia Community Development Hub, Community Builders, and EntreWorks Consulting provided community coaching support and planning expertise through the BRECC Action Challenge to develop community-led economic diversification strategies.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION STRATEGY

BRECC's Economic Diversification Strategies aim to prepare coal communities to overcome economic shocks and build stronger local economies. In 2023, NACo selected eight coal communities for the BRECC Action Challenge through a competitive application process. Collaborating with their county, each coal community formed a cross-sector team that worked alongside with their BRECC coach to develop an economic diversification strategy customized to their community's needs, priorities and strengths. This one-year planning process included conducting a community assessment, identifying goals and opportunities, developing projects and establishing action steps. BRECC Economic Diversification Strategies will help align stakeholders and foster collaboration, build consensus around priorities and provide a roadmap for broadening economic drivers and advancing revitalization.

BRECC PARTNERS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Introduction</u>	4
Process.....	4
About Northwest Colorado	5
About the Team.....	5
Document Content.....	6
<u>The Case for Assistance</u>	7
A Regional Commitment.....	8
<u>Coal Transition Goals and Strategies</u>	9
Coal Transition Goals.....	9
Diversification Strategies.....	9
<u>BRECC Action Plan</u>	10
<u>Strategy 1: Infrastructure & Physical Investment</u>	10
<u>Strategy 2: Target Industry Expansion</u>	17
<u>Strategy 3: Housing Access and Affordability</u>	25
<u>Strategy 4: Workforce Development</u>	31
<u>Strategy 5: Clean Energy</u>	38
<u>Strategy 6: Coal Transition Capacity</u>	48
<u>Implementation Resources</u>	55
Implementation Approach.....	55
Monitoring.....	55
Other Resources.....	56
Related Documents.....	56

Introduction

In 2022, Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt counties through the Northwest Colorado Community Development Council (NWCDC), were competitively selected to participate in the BRECC 2023 Action Challenge Cohort. Through the year-long process the NWCDC team sought to identify coal transition strategies and initiatives that align with the organization's broader shared regional economic development roadmap. By taking a regional approach, the team is looking to leverage capacity and align efforts to diversify their economy *before* devastating coal mine and power plant closures impact property tax revenues and jobs. The result is this community-specific report, with strategies for economic diversification to support coal transition.

Process

Through the BRECC Action Challenge, the Northwest Colorado team was paired with coaches for the length of the process: the Colorado-based non-profit Community Builders (CB), which works alongside communities to build stronger places and economies. The BRECC process was divided into the six strategic planning steps shown in the diagram below and refined for each Team based on their unique starting points and needs. Although the project was not scoped for grass-roots community engagement, it was deeply grounded in existing community-derived policies, priorities and recommendations found in community-led planning documents for the region. The NWCDC Regional Roadmap, county master plans, the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and several local plans, as well as extensive and ongoing input from the project team formed the foundation for the economic diversification strategies found in this document.



The primary activities and outcomes for each step of the process were as follows:

1. **Groundwork:** In the first month of the process the Team put in place the shared systems, tools, and partnerships needed for a successful process. The group discussed process goals and developed a tailored scope to ensure clarity and agreement on desired outcomes.
2. **Community Assessment:** The Team conducted a review of existing regional policies and data metrics related to their coal transition to quantify the region's need and understand the broader community's documented alignment on economic development priorities. As a crucial step, the CB coaches visited the region to conduct tours and in-person work sessions in order to build relationships and better understand the regional assets, gaps, and opportunities.
3. **Opportunities & Goals:** The NWCDC Team worked in this phase to articulate their primary goals for coal transition. This phase also included establishing an ongoing inventory of existing and proposed economic diversification initiatives and the respective status, leadership, and funding potential for each.
4. **Strategies & Initiatives:** During this important phase, the Team honed a set of concise, impactful, and achievable strategies and supporting initiatives. Initiatives were screened with a variety of criteria, including potential region-wide benefit, positive job and property tax impact, fit with coal transition resources, local leadership, and readiness to move forward.

5. **Action Steps:** In this phase, the Team worked through an iterative process of refining and finalizing the coal transition strategies and initiatives, developing a set of implementation steps, connecting to specific and relevant funding opportunities, and developing an initial draft of the Economic Diversification Plan.
6. **Report Results:** In this final step, the Team finalized the Economic Diversification Plan and communications materials. Deliverables from each phase were transferred as editable documents and tools for the teams to continue to use. The Team presented final results at the February NACo BRECC Capstone event in Washington, DC.

About Northwest Colorado Coal Country

Northwest Colorado's Routt, Moffat, and Rio Blanco counties make up a large, culturally, economically and geographically diverse region. The combined land area, which features snow-capped mountains, agricultural valleys, and deep sandstone canyons, is more than 10,300 square miles, larger than the state of Vermont. The region is primarily rural, with only 44,650 residents, about half of which are located in the Steamboat Springs micropolitan area. This large area, which is more than 50% public land, is known for its agricultural and mining history and amazing natural and outdoor recreation assets. However, the rural communities, large ranches and agrarian character, and extensive public land and wilderness areas also contribute to many of the region's economic development challenges as well.

Top of mind for the community, and the region's strong collaborative organization, the NWCDC, are the ongoing impacts of coal transition. The three counties have seen significant economic benefits from the two active power plants and four coal mines. However, the loss of these economic drivers is close at hand. Hayden Generating Station ("Hayden Station"), owned by Xcel Energy, is slated for closure in 2028. Craig Generating Station ("Craig Station"), operated and co-owned by Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, recently moved up its timeline to a complete closure by 2028. Closure of two of the region's four active coal mines will follow. While Xcel Energy intends to repurpose Hayden Station ([see Xcel's Reuse plan here](#)), likely retaining some of the jobs and tax base, the future of the larger Craig Station is unknown in early 2024 ([see Tri-State Plan here](#)). Its operator has not yet stated intent to repurpose the facility for energy production. The anticipated impacts for Northwest Colorado are staggering, with the loss of an estimated 2,800+ direct and indirect jobs, about 22% of regional GDP, and \$6.2 million in property tax revenue.

About the Team

The development of this economic diversification strategy was guided by the following community organizations.

Lead Organizations:

- Northwest Colorado Development Council (NWCDC)
- Routt County
- Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC)
- Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), Northwest Workforce Region

Strategic Partners:

- NWCDC's ten voting members: Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt Counties and the communities of Craig, Hayden, Meeker, Oak Creek, Rangely, Steamboat Springs, and Yampa
- Colorado's Office of Just Transition (OJT)
- Face to face meetings conducted with representatives from: Craig, Hayden, Meeker, and Rangely municipal staff and several business owners

Additionally, a Moffat County Commissioner was selected and participated in the BRECC Coalition, a leadership network for coal-impacted communities that included regular webinars, case-studies, opportunities to coordinate with other coal communities, and site visits.

The Team had a number of **early wins** and developed momentum through the BRECC Action Challenge process. The formation and work of the BRECC Team demonstrates a strong regional commitment and through the process the team developed a number of tools and materials to communicate the region’s dedication. The team has had multiple opportunities through the process to pitch the region’s coal transition approach to federal partners and funders through a virtual western Connection Session and an in-person Capstone event in Washington DC, building recognition and relationships with these entities and strengthening future funding opportunities. In addition, during the Action Challenge the NWCDC made progress towards an organizational status and website and bolstering its internal capacity. Specifically, and with some guidance and encouragement from the BRECC Team, the region was awarded an Economic Recovery Corps Fellow hosted by Routt County Economic Development Partnership and support of Northwest Colorado Economic Development Council, which will proudly serve Northwestern Colorado.

Document Content

This document contains coal transition goals, strategies, and initiatives to advance economic diversification. It also includes key data and policies to support the case for assistance, as well as implementation information to assist the region in pursuing next steps. Key sections are as follows:

Coal Transition Goals

The NWCDC BRECC Team identified several **overarching goals** (page 9) for their coal transition process. These are linked to the needs facing the region and apply to all strategies and initiatives.

Economic Diversification Strategies

Through the process of articulating their goals and reviewing existing and future initiatives, the Team identified a set of six broad, **high-level strategies**. Each of the six strategies includes information about why this strategy is important to the region, the related assets and gaps, the regional policies supporting the strategy, and ongoing efforts and momentum.



Initiatives

Each strategy includes 3-6 related initiatives. The initiatives are specific locally-relevant projects and programs that were identified and vetted by local economic development leaders and partners through the BRECC coaching process. The initiatives are not an exhaustive list of potential steps, rather they are a pragmatic list of actions based on potential positive impacts and implementation readiness. Initiatives were selected based on their comparative impact, readiness, the ability for the Team or region to advance them, and their alignment with available coal transition assistance and funding. Future initiatives may be added that will further advance the strategies as new opportunities arise. Information for the initiatives include:

- **Readiness Table:** A table summarizes identified initiatives for each strategy and includes information on the current status, implementation readiness, potential impacts, and key roles. In a context of constrained staffing and resources, the comparative information in the table can be used to determine which initiatives to advance first, and what next step may enhance the readiness of an initiative.
- **Implementation Guidance:** For the selected initiatives in each strategy that currently appear most ready to advance, this section provides more detailed information on roles, action steps, and relevant funding opportunities.

In the readiness table a check mark symbol indicates an initiative with implementation guidance.

The Case for Assistance

As part of the NWCDC region's community assessment, key data metrics were collected and summarized to assist the region in making a succinct case for eligibility and the pressing need for coal transition support and funding. The following indicators, primarily collected from a 2022 economic report¹ indicate that the coal industry makes up a substantial share of the regional economy, employment, wages, and tax base, and that the closure of the power plants and mines will put a significant strain on the region.

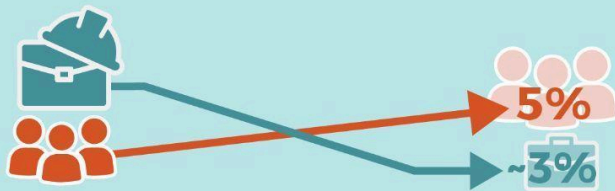
The coal industry makes up a substantial share of the regional economy...

An economic study of the Northwest Colorado¹ used a number of inputs, including 2018 data for direct coal employment, severance taxes, and mineral leases, and ad valorem taxes, to create an economic contribution model. The economic impact modeling software showed that for the combined region the elimination of both coal power and mining would result in **an estimated \$621,433,561 (or about 22%) loss in regional GDP.**



...and accounts for a very large share of the regional tax base.

The model measures the economic contribution of coal in the region. It estimates **a total of \$6.2 million in tax revenue** lost and accounts for severance tax, FML contributions, and coal-related ad valorem tax.



The region as a whole has not returned to peak employment since the 2008 economic recession even as the population has increased 5%.

Coal industry declines and increased pressure from population growth present significant hurdles for the Northwest Colorado region.

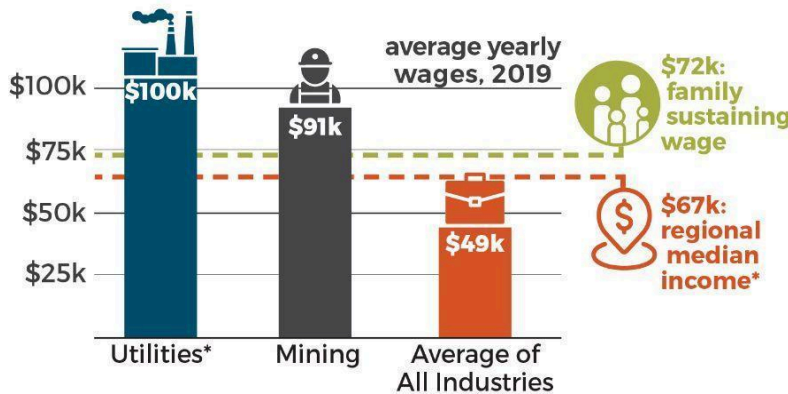
¹ NOTE: This data was sourced from the economic model created for the Data Intensive Economic Report (DIER), published by AGNC and Nathan Perry in 2022.

Coal jobs are a major source of employment...

A significant portion of each County's employment is tied to the coal industry. In Moffat County **coal mining and power plant jobs account for 19.8% of total employment**. In Rio Blanco and Routt counties coal jobs account for **9.1% and 4.5% of total employment**.



Economic modeling shows that if coal power and mining are eliminated **an estimated 2,862 jobs will be lost** (includes induced and indirect).



...and have paid the highest wages in the region.

In Moffat and Rio Blanco counties **coal industry jobs provide the highest weekly wages** at \$1,808 and \$2,044 respectively. These measure up well to the regional self-sufficiency standard of **\$1,390 a week for a family of four** but is in stark contrast to the **average wage** of other industries which is **\$959 a week**.

Plant and mine closures will extinguish many or most of these high paying job opportunities.

*Moffat County data not included, information not-disclosable due to limited sample size

*The AMI in Moffat and Rio Blanco counties only is \$57.7k

A Regional Commitment

A key part of the case for assistance in Northwest Colorado is the regional commitment to economic development and diversification demonstrated through many local policy and strategic plans. A large sampling of relevant policies were collected through the NWCDC Policy Scan and several regional policies to illustrate this commitment are shown below.

"Members from the town and county governments along with other organizational leaders and entrepreneurs have begun to devise plans and make investments to diversify the community's economic portfolio."
-Moffat County Vision 2025 Transition Plan

"The residents of the county want to create greater economic diversification to offset the impacts of the boom/bust cycles of extractive industries."
-Rio Blanco County Master Plan

"Routt County seeks a diverse and sustainable economy with opportunities and career pathways for all current and future residents. The County will help the economy and workforce adapt to changes in technology and markets."
-Routt County Master Plan

"The NWCDC is a regional collaboration to **guide regional economic development** efforts in Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties. The Roadmap's two main goals/objectives are to **enable economic transition** and growth and to **create a more livable region**."
-Northwest Colorado Roadmap

Coal Transition Goals and Strategies

During the planning process the BRECC Team identified six high-level goals that act as overarching guides for future economic diversification efforts.

Coal Transition Goals



- Find opportunities to act as a collective region through the NWDC.
- Pursue coal transition resources to proactively offset the impacts of plant and mine closures.
- Enable economic transition and growth. *(from Roadmap)*
- Attract and retain diverse new businesses, industries, and workforce.
- Retrain the energy workforce into sectors that provide high-quality jobs with similar wages.
- Create a more livable and affordable region. *(from Roadmap)*

Economic Diversification Strategies

The above goals helped to guide the creation of six strategies, under which the economic diversification initiatives are nested. These strategies represent the six main areas of focus for NWDC's coal transition efforts.



Infrastructure Enhancement

Develop missing components of foundational infrastructure for business and industry expansion and reclaim stranded assets for productive use.



Target Industry Development

Support business expansion and development in industries that have been identified as a fit across multiple municipalities in the region.



Housing Access & Affordability

In order to attract and retain a skilled workforce, expand the supply and diversity of quality homes that are affordable to workers earning the prevailing local wage.



Workforce Development

Retain and reskill the labor force to thrive in new and expanded businesses.



Clean Energy

Encourage development of clean energy technologies in Northwest Colorado.



Coal Transition Capacity

Increase NWDC's organizational, staffing, and funding capacity for regional coal transition and economic diversification projects.



Strategy 1: Infrastructure & Physical Investment

Develop missing components of foundational infrastructure for business and industry expansion and reclaim stranded assets for productive use.

Why It Matters

Infrastructure is an essential building block for economic development and diversification. Energy, transportation, and telecommunication infrastructure are foundational to business development. The public sector traditionally takes a leadership role in developing and investing in such assets, either as sole developer or in partnership with private entities.

While Northwest Colorado has many serviceable infrastructure assets, it is limited by crucial gaps in broadband and transportation connectivity, particularly in the more rural parts of the counties. Other assets - notably air service and rail lines - exist, but vary in their quality and utilization, with some falling significantly short of their full potential. Addressing gaps and enhancing service are key to improving the region's livability, marketability, and opportunity to attract and retain workforce, businesses, and industries.

Assets and Partners

Northwest Colorado benefits from numerous physical infrastructure and transportation assets including indirect access to Interstates 70 and 80, an existing east/west running bus system (plus municipal services in Steamboat and Craig), the rail line and spurs that once carried coal, a large and well-utilized regional airport (Yampa Valley Regional Airport near Hayden), and several general aviation airports. The counties have some existing broadband/fiber connectivity, though it is not consistent across the region. The privately-owned assets associated with the coal plants and mines may be able to provide an ongoing benefit to the region and productive future uses for this land and the associated infrastructure should continue to be part of regional conversations. Finally, while water is currently an abundant resource for the region many of the water rights are owned by the utility sector and its conservation should be considered going forward.

Challenges and Gaps

As the region works to improve its infrastructure, several barriers and uncertainties will need to be addressed. These challenges include the unknown future and accessibility of the rail line and spurs, a lack of adequate funding, incomplete broadband coverage, roadway constraints, air-service constraints in more rural parts of the three counties, and delays associated with permitting requirements. Finally, the highly rural nature of the region presents issues with connectivity, access, and a high-cost to serve outlying areas, particularly with regard to transportation, utilities, and last mile broadband.

Supporting Plans and Policies

Regional and local community plans provide support for this strategy as shown in these selected policy excerpts:

- "There is a need for improved and equitable access to broadband and to data for mobile coverage in rural Routt County. Barriers to learning and economic advancement include a

lack of access and cell coverage, which makes broadband and telecommunications infrastructure a high priority.”

-Routt County Master Plan (2022, page 31)

- “Support the creation of a Regional Transportation Authority to address transportation and commuting issues.”
-Northwest Colorado Roadmap (2022, page 51)
- Goal: Extraordinary Infrastructure: “Ensure access to safe drinking water, protection of water quality through updated waste disposal systems, improved transportation resources, broadband, and access to quality recreation and entertainment.”
-Associate Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) CEDS (2021, page 53)
- Focus Area: “Improve quality of life for locals while attracting more visitors and residents... and attract new business and development... through improved infrastructure and planning”
-Moffat County Vision 2025 Transition Plan (2020, page 5)

Momentum

This strategy builds on ongoing work in the region being led by a diverse set of local governments and community, educational, and other partner institutions in the region. Initiatives within this document build on and strive to further advance their efforts. The below list of examples demonstrates traction and commitment from NWCDC and partners:

- **U.S. Highway 40 Improvements** - With support from the regional Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Transportation Planning office and elected officials, several improvements have been made to U.S. Highway 40, which functions as the region’s primary east/west corridor. While additional improvements are desired to address some traffic and connectivity challenges, Highway 40 and connections to I-70 and I-80 are adequate to support economic development and some population growth.
- **Yampa Valley Regional Airport expansion and roadway improvements** - Routt County and the Town of Hayden, with funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), are expanding Yampa Valley Regional Airport facilities for additional passenger flights and are making improvements to the access road. This work is only one phase in a robust master plan, a portion of which – the Terminal Area Plan – is currently being updated.
- **Union Pacific Corridor Improvements** - Improvements are currently being made to the Union Pacific rail line that supplies Craig and Hayden Station. These improvements will ensure ongoing rail capacity and enhanced safety.
- **Broadband THOR Project** - The Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG), in conjunction with several Northwest Colorado counties, recently completed phase one of a 400-mile middle-mile broadband network, establishing affordable and reliable connectivity for 14 communities across Northwest Colorado, including three in the NWCDC region.

Projects and Initiatives


Initiatives Descriptions

- a) **Develop regional broadband connectivity.**
Leverage the collaborative organizational structure of the NWCDC, in partnership with the Colorado Office of Broadband and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), to provide regional leadership and coordination on the development of broadband access and improved affordability in all communities across the region.
- b) **Enhance regional air services.**
Support the expansion of services and capacity for the region’s airports to better move cargo, fight wildfires, support healthcare services, treat crops, serve passengers, and support pilot training. Coordinate between airports to ensure that each can fulfill locally desired roles and consider broader inclusion of airports in the Regional Airport Commission.
- c) **Enhance regional transportation.**
Advocate and provide support for regional transportation improvements, including the potential development of a commuter rail line. Coordinate the creation of a regional transportation authority (RTA) to enhance connectivity between county seats and provide multi-modal transportation options for the three-county area.

Comparison Table

The below table summarizes and compares the readiness and benefits of initiatives that would advance the Infrastructure Enhancement Strategy, as identified by local economic development leaders through the BRECC Action Challenge process.

Infrastructure Enhancement Initiatives			
Initiative	Readiness	Anticipated Benefits	Role(s)
Develop regional broadband connectivity. 	<p>Status: In progress, significant work has been done on middle-mile connections, final-mile connectivity is inconsistent</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, existing broadband access assessment needed</p> <p>Leadership: THOR lead larger effort, local partner needed to coordinate with state agencies</p> <p>Funding: Some local providers have already received funding, additional funds may be available through BEAD</p>	<p>Revenue: Near term direct revenue from permitting and property value increase; long term supports economic development broadly</p> <p>Jobs: Near term jobs in construction of facilities</p> <p>Other: Enhance quality of life and place value for residents and labor force</p>	<p>There are many entities playing various roles in broadband development. The region would benefit from NWCDC playing a lead coordination role to ensure all efforts are being synchronized.</p>

<p>Enhance regional air services.</p> 	<p>Status: In progress, needs coordinated leadership</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed; needs comparative analysis of different opportunities and needs for each airport</p> <p>Leadership: Can benefit from additional coordination across counties/facilities</p> <p>Funding: Funding not identified</p>	<p>Revenue: Enhanced facilities should see increased revenue from carrier contracts, user fees, etc.</p> <p>Jobs: Tens of jobs; enhanced job training opportunities</p> <p>Other: Enhanced commercial service supports the outdoor recreation industry, existing flight training programs, local business/industry expansion and creation; in addition, enhanced fire fighting capacity reduces wildfire hazard and protects forest health and biomass supply</p>	<p>Local municipal owners will determine and lead any projects; NWCDC role is to convene and explore/advocate for how to best serve the region's diverse needs at each of the facilities.</p>
<p>Enhance regional transportation.</p>	<p>Status: In progress, consultant in place for the RTA and moving forward on outreach, legal needs, and identifying modes; study underway for commuter rail</p> <p>Feasibility: RTA feasibility study underway; commuter rail service plan study funded</p> <p>Leadership: Steamboat Springs Transit, Routt County, Moffat County</p> <p>Funding: Funding secured for both RTA consultant and rail study; additional funding may be needed for implementation</p>	<p>Revenue: Reduced costs through coordinated efforts</p> <p>Jobs: Grow jobs in construction and transportation service</p> <p>Other: Regional coordination, improved traffic and transit patterns</p>	<p>Union Pacific has upgraded the rail line and a study is underway to explore commuter rail between Craig and Steamboat. Whether or not commuter rail goes forward, the RTA seems to be moving forward and can provide additional transportation alternatives.</p> <p>NWCDC's role is to champion regional transportation initiatives and provide context for their economic development and diversification benefits.</p>



Implementation Guidance

Initiative: Develop regional broadband connectivity.

Leverage the collaborative organizational structure of the NWDC, in partnership with the Colorado Office of Broadband and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), to provide regional leadership and coordination on the development of broadband access and improved affordability in all communities across the region.

ROLES

- **Lead:** NWDC
- **Partners:** THOR, Colorado Office of Broadband, regional internet providers, Yampa Valley Electric Authority (YVEA) and Luminate, DOLA, National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) Colorado representative, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), broadband providers; Northwest Council of Governments (NW COG)
- **NWDC Role:** Lead regional collaboration, convene parties, seek funding and manage project and grant administration, determine connectivity gaps, advise local entities of next steps, and ensure ongoing state and federal coordination

ACTION STEPS

- Work with local co-ops to advocate for BEAD eligibility, despite RDOF participation
- Identify a representative from the region to serve on the State Broadband Board
- Consider technical assistance to clarify planning, data, and financial needs
- Update connectivity map, identify gaps in coverage and affordability
- Identify support for organization and project staffing capacity
- Regularly convene regional jurisdictions to coordinate broadband development
- Identify and pursue shared regional funding opportunities to support broad coverage and universal access, support area internet provider in similar efforts
- Administer grants and manage collaborative project implementation
- Potential future step: work with CNCC to develop a broadband training program so that future high-paying installation jobs can go to the local workforce

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
DOLA - Broadband Planning and Implementation Broadband Planning and Implementation. Administrative planning grant for design, engineering, planning, & feasibility studies.	Eligible: Yes, local govts - Counties, municipalities, and COGs are eligible Note: "To be accepted into the grant cycle, applicants must contact their Regional Manager prior to submitting and must be "ready to go"	2023 application closed December 1st. Recurs periodically. Look for re-opening in fall, 2024.	Type: Grant Amount: Tier I (up to \$200,000) and Tier II (\$200,001 to \$1,000,000) Match: 1:1 minimum match	Minimum 30 awarded (likely more) - "directed to communities that are impacted by the development of energy and mineral resources. Awarded based on financial need, among other criteria. The majority is directed to rural communities where broadband is lacking."	Highly recommend, if the match can be found. This would be great planning/capacity support to really accelerate broadband development.

<p>USDA - Broadband Technical Assistance Grants</p> <p>Provides funding to receive technical assistance, training, & support for development and expansion of broadband coops.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, state or local governments, including agencies in rural areas A rural area is defined as “any area not located in a city, town, or incorporated area with a pop greater than 20,000”</p>	<p>2023 application closed June 20. Recurs annually. Look for re-opening in summer, 2024.</p>	<p>2023 Info: Type: Grant Amount: \$50-250k for technical assistance Match: None</p>	<p>Fairly competitive given national scale - at least 30 technical assistance grants were awarded in 2023 - 2024, funding amount unknown</p>	<p>If this re-opens it could be a good fit, with no required match. It is more competitive than the DOLA opportunity.</p>
<p>Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grants</p> <p>Grant assistance to create and augment high-wage jobs, accelerate the formation of new businesses, support industry clusters and maximize the use of local productive assets in eligible low-income rural areas.</p>	<p>Eligible: NWDC may be able to apply as a “job accelerator partnership,” but may require teaming with CNCC to qualify: “Eligible applicants are rural jobs accelerator partnerships with expertise in delivering economic and job training programs, consisting of: Non-profits, state or tribal entities, institutions of higher ed, or public bodies”</p>	<p>2023 application closed in April. Recurs annually. Look for re-opening in spring, 2024.</p>	<p>Type: Grant Amount: \$500,000 - \$2,000,000 Match: 20%</p>	<p>Very competitive - Total program funding in 2023 was \$2 million. The number of awards varies by year, but with grants of \$500k to \$2 million, only a few are typically awarded. Because this is specifically for rural areas, NWDC would likely be fairly competitive with the rest of the funding pool. Look into what it takes to be recognized as a “job accelerator partnership” and potentially build a team with CNCC.</p>	<p>Could provide funding to train the workforce for future broadband jobs. Although competitive, the high-award amounts and low match, plus the flexibility of uses make it compelling.</p>

Initiative: Enhance regional air services.

Support the expansion of services and capacity for the region’s airports to better move cargo, fight wildfires, support healthcare services, treat crops, serve passengers, and support pilot training. Coordinate between airports to ensure that each can fulfill locally desired roles and consider broader inclusion of airports in the Regional Airport Commission.

ROLES

- **Lead:** Municipalities/counties with airports
- **Partners:** Regional Airport Commission, Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) (specifically the Northwest Mountain Region), Yampa Valley Regional Airport, Craig-Moffat Airport, Meeker Airport, Rangely Airport, Steamboat Springs/Bob Adams Airfield, AGNC Aerospace roundtable
- **NWDC Role:** Convene, explore, and advocate for how to best serve the diverse needs at each of the facilities, coordinate with partners on broader industry expansion opportunities

ACTION STEPS

- Regularly convene airport authority representatives from across the three-county region to enhance communication and explore potential for coordination
- Conduct a comparative analysis of the master plans of each airport and the different opportunities and needs
- Explore potential for airport equipment transfer and resale between facilities to reduce costs and meet a broad range of needs
- Explore potential to share capacity in grant pursuits and management to the benefit of multiple facilities in the region



- Conduct a gap analysis to understand potential business synergies and then encourage related business development around the airports (ex. shuttles, foam companies, etc.)
- Explore a partnership with the AGNC Aerospace Roundtable to conduct an air service/aerospace summit to bring in potential investors and funders for industry expansion
- Facilitate connections with CNCC’s pilot training program to private businesses that pay to have their pilots and mechanics trained

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
<p>EDA - Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Program</p> <p>Assist communities and regions in devising and implementing long-term economic development efforts. Investments to help distressed communities build, design, or engineer critical infrastructure and facilities to implement development strategies.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, eligible entities include: Educational Institution, Local Government, Native/Tribal Entity, Non-profit, State Government</p>	<p>Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis with expeditious review.</p>	<p>Type: Grant Amount: \$100k-\$30 million Match: Yes, generally, the EDA will cover 50% of project costs, but may fund up to 80% of total project costs based on the needs of the region.</p>	<p>While a large, national program, the EDA plans to make around 3,000 awards, making this less competitive than many federal opportunities.</p>	<p>This funding opportunity could help fund a comparative analysis necessary to strengthen the initiative or provide technical assistance to enhance the capacity of key economic development actors in the regions. Contact the Colorado EDA rep to determine applicability.</p>
<p>FAA Airport Improvement Program (AIP) Discretionary Grants</p> <p>Issue grants for airport planning and development in the United States. Eligible projects include those improvements related to enhancing airport safety, capacity, security, and environmental concerns. The AIP provides grants to public agencies and, in some cases, to private owners and entities for the planning and development of public-use airports that are included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS)</p>	<p>Eligible: Potentially. Eligible entities are public agencies operating airports that have a role in the National Airspace System (NAS). The FAA formulates a 3-year Airports Capital Improvement Plan to guide the assignment of funding to projects based on airport development needs identified in the NPIAS.</p>	<p>The FAA considers applications on a rolling basis until mid-year. Recurs annually.</p>	<p>Type: Grant Amount: Up to \$50 million Match: Yes, typically 5-30% matching funds required, based on airport size and type of project</p>	<p>This large national program is likely fairly competitive, though it does have significant funding allocated to it annually. An estimated \$1.5 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 discretionary grants; funding is typically between \$1-3 billion for each fiscal year.</p>	<p>This could potentially be a strong option for any Northwest Colorado airports that are part of the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), for projects identified in the Airports Capital Improvement Plan. Contact the FAA Northwest Mountain Region.</p>



Strategy 2: Target Industry Development

Support business expansion and development in industries that have been identified as a fit across multiple municipalities in the region.

Why It Matters

At the heart of economic diversification is growing existing and emerging industries to replace lost coal industry jobs and revenues. Through studies and policy plans, the NWCDC has identified promising target industries based on the area's assets and comparative advantages. These industries include forestry, agriculture, clean energy, and outdoor recreation. Within each target industry, expanding existing businesses is as important as cultivating more value-added product businesses.

Forest health in Northwest Colorado has suffered from beetle kill and climate changes, resulting in extensive biomass available for harvest. The area's ranching history and meat processing assets are strengths to build on. The region's unique natural assets also drive a robust and varied outdoor recreation and hospitality industry that is a valuable component of a diverse regional economy.

See also: Strategy 5, Clean Energy

Assets and Partners

The NWCDC provides a major asset to the region in the form of grant writing capacity and has secured funding to create a regional website to promote economic opportunities. Northwest Colorado also benefits from numerous physical assets that can contribute to industry growth including abundant natural resources, extensive public lands, forests, the Yampa Valley Regional Airport, and a steady water supply from the Yampa and White rivers. In addition, many of the assets associated with coal production including the power plants, substations, and transmission lines, as well as the skilled workforce, present industry expansion opportunities. The communities of Northwest Colorado also have a significant agricultural heritage with robust agricultural education, events, and partners such as the USDA, Colorado State University (CSU), Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC), high-school agriculture programs, and the Community Agriculture Alliance (CAA).

Challenges and Gaps

There are several challenges the region faces in attracting and supporting industry expansion, including transportation infrastructure and connectivity, long distances to major markets, a lack of licensed CDL drivers, poor broadband access and affordability, and competition from large factory farms and resort communities. A potential barrier to industry development may be capacity of the workforce. While there are many soon-to-be dislocated coal workers in the region with a variety of skills, they will likely need to be retrained into other fields, which may take some time as new industries are identified and curriculum developed. As the region pursues alternative energy options, varying levels of support for clean energy may present a political hurdle.

Supporting Plans and Policies

Regional and local community plans provide support for this strategy as shown in these selected policy excerpts:

- "Work to expand the availability of industrial space in the region to support the growth of new and expanding manufacturing businesses. Identify manufacturing niches that are best suited and/or exist in the region and promote the growth of these types of businesses."
-Northwest Colorado Roadmap (2022, page 23)
- "Leverage and expand the region's roots in agriculture and ranching... Explore warehousing opportunities for meat packing and enhance and promote local food-supply chains."
-Moffat County Vision 2025 Transition Plan (2020, page 13)
- "Promote economic diversity through innovative uses of natural resources. This includes pursuing policies and programs that encourage advanced manufacturing from local materials, sustainable power technologies, and innovative ways to retrain and utilize workers from the coal/energy sectors."
-Associate Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) CEDS (2021, page 77)
- "Encourage tourism by coordinating with the Chambers of commerce to promote the assets of the County including archaeological sites, hunting/fishing, the Flat Tops, scenic byways and other qualities that are of interest to visitors." And, "attention should be directed to the mainstays of agriculture, outdoor recreation, tourism and the pristine environment."
-Rio Blanco County Master Plan (2011, pages 34 and 13)

Momentum

This strategy builds on ongoing work in the region being led by a diverse set of local governments and community, educational, and other partner institutions in the region. Initiatives within this document build on and strive to further advance their efforts. The below list of examples demonstrates traction and commitment from NWCDC and partners:

- **Agriculture producer needs surveys** - Colorado State University (CSU) and the Community Agriculture Alliance (CAA) recently completed agricultural producer needs surveys that identify specific needs for expanding the local value-added agriculture industry. These surveys help identify projects that can benefit from grant funding.
- **Recreation asset development** - Jurisdictions within the region have pursued funding and overseen a range of projects to enhance local recreation assets. Some discussion and planning has occurred around regional asset development (such as a system of river access points to better enable more rafting and kayaking trips of varying length and difficulty), but have not yet been funded or developed.
- **Trapper Industrial Park marketing** - Moffat County and Craig Economic Development, in partnership with AGNC, are laying the groundwork for a state-of-the-art industrial park redevelopment on the site of the Trapper Mine, which offers excellent access to transportation, utilities, and other mine-related assets. A key output is a marketing brochure to help advertise the unique industrial development opportunity.
- **Event center feasibility study** - Moffat County is undertaking a feasibility study for a major event center on the site of the Moffat County Fairgrounds, which would significantly expand the community uses and benefits from this existing agricultural asset.
- **Yampa River Corridor Project** - The City of Craig has been awarded a \$3.3 million Economic Development Administration (EDA) Assistance to Coal Communities Grant for construction of the Yampa River Corridor Project. The corridor project will upgrade the city's water intake infrastructure and add new visitor amenities along the river to help grow Craig and Moffat County's outdoor recreation economy.

Projects and Initiatives

Initiatives Descriptions

- a) **Expand meat processing and cold storage.**
Provide support and regional coordination for the local agricultural industry by pursuing and managing grant funding for the expansion of meat processing and cold storage in order to grow the value-added agriculture industry, support and retain existing businesses and ranchers, and create new jobs.
- b) **Develop and market value-added agriculture.**
Coordinate with CSU, CNCC, and the Community Agricultural Alliance to further develop value-added agriculture and regional branding that reflects farmers and ranchers across the region while still honoring their varied character and products. Improve the marketing of Northwest Colorado agricultural products and consider co-op sales and marketing approaches. Explore other potential products and markets in the region such as wild game, fish farms, etc.
- c) **Prepare and market industrial sites.**
Continue to support the preparation of industrial sites within the region. Pursue funding opportunities to make site improvements and provide utilities to potential industrial sites. Use the NWCDC website to assist in marketing available sites in the region, including in the Hayden Light Manufacturing Business Park, the Trapper Industrial Park, the Craig Business and Industrial Park, and Rangely manufacturing/industrial sites.
- d) **Develop regional outdoor recreation assets.**
Provide leadership for the coordinated planning and development of an integrated system of regional outdoor recreation assets and infrastructure, including trails, off-roading areas, signage and wayfinding, river access sites, hospitality businesses, etc. in order to increase visitor numbers, spending, and length of stay. Advocate for the synergy of diverse assets and local “niches” to strengthen the regional outdoor recreation industry; cross market local assets to outdoor enthusiasts.
- e) **Expand outdoor recreation manufacturing.**
Provide coordination and leadership for the development of the outdoor recreation manufacturing industry. Determine existing opportunities and markets and provide resources and support for new outdoor recreation manufacturers interested in starting-up or relocating in the region.
- f) **Repurpose Craig Station assets.**
Support the reuse of the existing site and physical assets at the Craig Station, either by conversion to a new energy generation technology (See related Strategy 5b) or to a new employment and revenue generating use. Coordinate with Tri-State to identify potential uses, support needed studies, promote regional collaboration and input into the process, and ultimately, determine a productive future use for the Craig Station site.

Comparison Table

The below table summarizes and compares the readiness and benefits of initiatives that would advance the Target Industry Development Strategy, as identified by local economic development leaders through the BRECC Action Challenge process.

Target Industry Development Initiatives			
Initiative	Readiness	Anticipated Benefits	Role(s)
Expand meat processing and cold storage. 	Status: In progress, needs replication across other processors Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed Leadership: NWCDC Funding: Project specific funding identified; additional sources may be needed	Revenue: Increase local business and sales tax revenues Jobs: Add tens to hundreds of well-paying jobs in meat processing Other: Support and continue the region's heritage in the agricultural industry	CAA has identified a need and opportunity to expand meat processing and storage with local private sector partners. NWCDC's role is to identify and vigorously pursue grant funding available to local government entities that can support these efforts.
Develop and market value-added agriculture. 	Status: In progress Feasibility: Feasible, studies underway Leadership: CAA Funding: Potential funding opportunities identified	Revenue: Increase business sales and tax revenues Jobs: Supports existing and expanded agricultural employment Other: Support and continue the region's heritage in the agricultural industry	CAA and CSU Extension are leading studies and convening local partners to identify promising opportunities. NWCDC's role is to identify and vigorously pursue available grant funding available to local government entities that can support these efforts.
Prepare and market industrial sites. 	Status: In progress by locality, lacks regional coordination Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed Leadership: NWCDC Funding: Funding not identified	Revenue: Initial investment (cost) can attract private investment and new business revenues Jobs: Indirectly creates new living wage jobs through industrial business attraction and expansion Other: None	Individual parks and their local owners are working to market sites and opportunities. NWCDC's role is to support and extend these marketing efforts by serving as a "one stop shop" for all available sites in the region.



<p>Develop regional outdoor recreation assets.</p>	<p>Status: Some aspects in progress, more consolidated effort needed</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed</p> <p>Leadership: Coordinated leadership needed for ongoing efforts of municipalities and non-profits</p> <p>Funding: Funding identified; additional funding may be needed for ongoing projects</p>	<p>Revenue: Increase lodging and sales tax from visitors</p> <p>Jobs: Add tens to hundreds of jobs in hospitality and the recreation industry</p> <p>Other: Enhance local residents' recreation access and quality of life</p>	<p>NWCDC can play a role in coordinating among local projects to frame their fit within a larger regional strategy to jointly pursue funding, thus reducing competition among local projects and enhancing appeal to funders.</p>
<p>Expand outdoor recreation manufacturing.</p>	<p>Status: Some aspects in progress, more consolidated effort needed</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed</p> <p>Leadership: Coordinated leadership needed for ongoing efforts of municipalities</p> <p>Funding: Funding not identified</p>	<p>Revenue: Add local sales tax revenues from sales by manufacturing businesses</p> <p>Jobs: Add tens of jobs in small scale manufacturing</p> <p>Other: Cross-marketing with outdoor recreation service businesses</p>	<p>Local municipalities are leading efforts to identify promising opportunities. NWCDC can play a role in coordinating among local projects to frame their fit within a larger regional strategy to jointly pursue funding, thus reducing competition among local projects and enhancing appeal to funders.</p>
<p>Repurpose Craig Station assets.</p>	<p>Status: In progress, additional collaboration needed</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasibility of various technologies still unknown, NWCDC should support Tristate in feasibility studies as needed</p> <p>Leadership: Tri-state</p> <p>Funding: Funding not identified</p>	<p>Revenue: Depending on the reuse, retain property tax revenue and possibly some local transfer taxes</p> <p>Jobs: Depending on the reuse, create hundreds of jobs in construction to repurpose the facility and in new business(es) at the property</p> <p>Other: Reduces costs associated with stranded assets</p>	<p>The property/facility owner (Tri-state) is the natural lead, but has not yet determined whether they will convert or dispose of the property and assets. NWCDC's role is to continue championing proactive exploration of an outcome that will replace jobs and revenue, and not leave stranded assets idle in the region.</p>



Implementation Guidance

Initiative: Expand meat processing and cold storage.

Provide support and regional coordination for the local agricultural industry by pursuing and managing grant funding for the expansion of meat processing and cold storage in order to grow the value-added agriculture industry, support and retain businesses and ranchers, and create new jobs.

ROLES

- **Lead:** NWCDC
- **Partners:** The Community Agricultural Alliance (CAA), Fitch Ranch, USDA and the USDA Flower Hill Institute, existing processors
- **NWCDC Role:** Identify and pursue funding opportunities

ACTION STEPS

- Collaborate with Fitch Ranch on the completion of their expansion, identify opportunities to replicate the approach or expand the market
- Collaborate with CAA to identify priority needs and opportunities in meat processing
- Prioritize and pursue relevant funding opportunities
- Distribute funding to relevant local business and other agricultural entities
- Administer grant reporting
- Explore demand for air shipment of highest quality cuts and advocate for continued rail service and access for local meat processing businesses

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
USDA Rural Development - Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program Provides grants to help eligible processors expand their processing capacity, which create new, better and more processing options for meat and poultry producers; Intent to encourage competition and growth in the meat processing sector, and improve supply chain resiliency.	Eligible: Yes, for entities that engage or plan to engage in meat and poultry processing, including private, non-profit, coop, state or local gov. , among others. Private entities must be independently owned and operated. Applicants must: -Process (or plan to process) one or more species subject to the Federal Meat Inspection Act -Have (or plan to get) inspection through USDA Food Safety	2023 application closed November 22. Recurs annually. Look for re-opening in fall, 2024.	Type: Grant Amount: Maximum award amount is \$10 million, or 30 percent of total project costs, whichever is less. The minimum award amount is \$250,000. Match: No match, but can only be 30% of project total costs	Fairly competitive given national scale. Approximately \$123 million available in funding this cycle, meaning at least 12 awards, but likely many more than that will be awarded.	Though fairly competitive, the funding is significant and can be used for many aspects of meat processing expansion, including equipment, facilities, MKUs, inspection costs, workforce training & retention, etc. With the right applying entity in place, this may be worth pursuing.

<p>USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Local Meat Capacity Grant (MCap)</p> <p>This program supports independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses with funds to provide more and better processing options for local livestock producers by modernizing, increasing, diversifying and decentralizing meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, eligible applicants include: individual, sole proprietor business or other business entities engaged in meat and poultry processing, including rendering animal carcasses or byproducts, including Tribes and Tribal Entities, for-profit entities, and State or local government entities. Private entities must be independently owned and operated.</p>	<p>2023 application closed July 19. Likely to re-open in spring 2024.</p>	<p>Type: Grant Processing Expansion Projects: \$100k - \$5 million with a 50% match (reduced for historically underserved farmers or women/veteran-owned small businesses) Simplified Equipment-Only Projects: \$10-250k (easier application), no match</p>	<p>Fairly competitive given national scale. Approximately \$75 million is available under this grant program, subject to appropriations and funds availability. Given grant amounts, at least 12 awards, but likely many more than that will be awarded.</p>	<p>This could fund a variety of meat processing projects. The Simplified Equipment-Only Grants is a great fit for specific equipment improvements with a simple application and no match required.</p>
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Initiative: Develop and market value-added agriculture.

Coordinate with CSU, CNCC, and the Community Agricultural Alliance to further develop value-added agriculture and regional branding that reflects farmers and ranchers across the region while still honoring their varied character and products. Improve the marketing of Northwest Colorado agricultural products and consider co-op sales and marketing approaches. Explore other potential products and markets in the region such as wild game, fish farms, etc.

ROLES

- **Lead:** Community Agricultural Alliance (CAA)
- **Partners:** NWCDC, CSU Extension, CNCC, local agricultural producers
- **NWCDC Role:** Continue to coordinate and convene parties, seek and administer needed funding and capacity support

ACTION STEPS

- Convene parties to identify needs, map out next steps, and define roles
- Assist in the securing of services for creating and registering a regional brand
- Use NWCDC’s capacity and platform to support the launch of a regional marketing campaign
- Help pursue and manage grants that allow the CAA to expand their work more regionally

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
<p>USDA, Agriculture Innovation Center Program</p> <p>Technical assistance and funding for agriculture innovation centers to develop and market value-added products. Can be used for operations, development, marketing, financial or engineering services, connecting producers to distribution & processing facilities.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, eligible applicants include: Local and State Govts; Tribal entities; higher ed; Nonprofits; and Commercial orgs</p> <p>Note: Funds must be used to establish the Innovation Center, but that entity can then provide quite a bit of value-added ag support.</p>	<p>Application window anticipated February - March 2024. Likely to recur.</p>	<p>Type: Technical Assistance Grant Amount: \$600 thousand to \$1 million Match: Yes, at least 1/3 of the total project budget.</p>	<p>\$8 Million was available in funding for program year 2023. In 2022, only 2 awards were granted, without expending all available funds. Seems fairly competitive.</p>	<p>The use of this grant to create and operate an agricultural innovation center could jump start and support local producers to create value-added products. Would need a group identified with capacity to implement the Innovation Center.</p>



Initiative: Consolidate and market industrial sites.

Continue to support the preparation of industrial sites within the region. Pursue funding opportunities to make site improvements and provide utilities to potential industrial sites. Use the NWCDC website to assist in marketing available sites in the region, including in the Hayden Light Manufacturing Business Park, the Trapper Industrial Park, the Craig Business and Industrial Park, and Rangely manufacturing/industrial sites.

ROLES

- **Lead:** NWCDC
- **Partners:** Local municipalities and private landowners, Steamboat Chamber of Commerce, Craig Economic Development, the Hayden Light Manufacturing Business Park, the Trapper Industrial Park, and the Craig Business and Industrial Park
- **NWCDC Role:** Coordinate a regional “one-stop shop” for industrial sites, enabling and encouraging site selectors to fully consider all available sites in the NWCDC region; coordinate with existing marketing efforts and amplify resources

ACTION STEPS

- Articulate a case for regional coordination on site marketing and promotion
- Meet with local partners to determine their interest and needs for consolidated site marketing and development
- Partner with local economic development groups to amplify and coordinate existing resources and efforts as further assessment on a regional strategy is developed
- Inventory available sites, including information about those that are build-ready versus needing utility and access improvements
- Seek technical assistance support to develop a consistent and effective format for site description that meets site selectors’ needs
- Seek funding for website development and maintenance to promote sites
- Promote sites online; update and maintain site for accuracy as transactions occur
- Endorse local entities proposals to secure funding for cleanup, utilities, and other improvements, providing context for how individual projects contribute to a regional economic development strategy

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
EDA - Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Program Assist communities and regions in devising and implementing long-term economic development efforts. Investments to help distressed communities build, design, or engineer critical infrastructure and facilities to implement development strategies.	Eligible: Yes, eligible entities include: Educational Institution, Local Government, Native/Tribal Entity, Non-profit, State Government	Applications accepted on an ongoing basis with expeditious review.	Type: Grant Amount: \$100k-\$30 million Match: Yes, Generally, the EDA will cover 50 percent of project costs, but may fund up to 80 percent of total project costs based on the relative needs of the region.	While a large, national program, the EDA plans to make around 3,000 awards, making this less competitive than many federal opportunities.	This funding opportunity could help fund site improvements and utilities for potential industrial sites or parks. Contact the Colorado EDA rep to determine applicability.



Strategy 3: Housing Access and Affordability

In order to attract and retain a skilled workforce, expand the supply and diversity of quality homes that are affordable to workers earning the prevailing local wage.

Why It Matters

Adequate supply of workforce housing is an important underpinning for economic diversification and business growth. One factor business locators consider is the availability of skilled local labor. For workers, quality affordable housing is a significant factor in choosing whether to move to or stay in a location. The limited supply of workforce housing is a barrier to initially attracting workers, and then by extension, new businesses.

In Northwest Colorado, quality housing that is affordable to the workforce is in limited supply. For a mix of regulatory and market reasons, workforce housing is not distributed evenly in the three-county region. The existing and anticipated new housing is not adequate near some employment centers. Developing additional workforce housing that is well distributed throughout the region can enhance the attractiveness of individual communities and the region to new employers.

Assets and Partners

The area has a high quality of life, which greatly benefits local residents and overall interest in the housing market, though it does create additional demand on the housing supply. The local and regional housing authorities in Northwest Colorado – including the Yampa Valley Housing Authority and the Craig Housing Authority – as well as the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) and the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA), are important partners in improving housing access and affordability in the region. In addition, the local municipalities have shown strong commitment and interest in creating new housing opportunities and creating momentum through local workforce housing projects.

Challenges and Gaps

There are several major challenges to the development of affordable housing in Northwest Colorado, in particular the high-cost to build relative to local wages, shortages and delays in the construction industry and workforce, and the aging housing supply. A specific challenge is the region's remoteness which adds cost and time to housing projects and makes it difficult to attract developers to the region to complete projects, especially those that are small-scale or below market rate.

Supporting Plans and Policies

Regional and local community plans provide support for this strategy as shown in these selected policy excerpts:

- "Create a regional entity that provides housing services to the entire region or areas not covered by the Yampa Valley Housing Authority. The organization will create a better connection to funding and programs for underserved communities."
- Northwest Colorado Roadmap (2022, page 41)
- "Develop workforce housing that meets current and future needs."
-Moffat County Vision 2025 Transition Plan (2020, page 5)

- "Housing: Develop a better understanding of housing needs across the region and reduce the gap between available wages and housing costs. Improve the quality of housing through increased access to weatherization and efficiency programs."
-Associate Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) CEDS (2021, page 44)
- Housing Opportunities: "Balance housing with short-term workforce demands and long-term county needs without over building. Investigate, with major employers, methods on temporary housing strategies for short-term workforce peaks that can be scaled back with workforce reductions. The county should investigate a variety of affordable housing options."
-Rio Blanco County Master Plan (2011, page 15)

Momentum

This strategy builds on ongoing work in the region being led by a diverse set of local governments and community, educational, and other partner institutions in the region. Initiatives within this document build on and strive to further advance their efforts. The below list of examples demonstrates traction and commitment from NWCDC and partners:

- **Brown Ranch Project** - A large-scale workforce housing development, led by the Yampa Valley Housing Authority, will occupy a 543-acre site in Steamboat Springs and provide 2,264 additional housing units from single-family to multi-family, with a mix of rental and ownership opportunities.
- **Prairie Run Project** - The Town of Hayden, in partnership with Gorman and Company, secured an \$8.6 million Transformational Housing Award that has allowed for the development of 129 workforce housing units in a multi-family complex.
- **Craig Townhomes Project** - The Craig Housing Authority is in the process of developing a 20-townhome housing complex for essential workers.
- **Rangely Workforce Housing** - The Town of Rangely is currently working with the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA), the local school district, CNCC, the hospital, and a private investor on the development of 6-8 river-front lots for workforce housing. The Town is also in the process of updating their Master Plan, which will include a new housing section and assessment.
- **Housing Needs Assessments** - Since 2021 multiple communities in Northwest Colorado, including Craig, Meeker, Hayden, and Steamboat Springs, have received awards from the Colorado Innovative Housing Planning (IHOP) Grant to conduct Housing Needs Assessments (HNA) and action planning. South Routt County is also committed to and currently seeking funding for a combined HNA. HNA's are an important step for communities to understand their housing gaps, code barriers, and future development needs.

Projects and Initiatives

Initiatives Descriptions

- a) **Create a regional housing RFP.**
As a means of attracting developers to creating needed workforce housing in rural communities within the region, coordinate and create a consolidated housing Request for Proposal (RFP) with enough scope and scale of development to attract a developer. Explore potential to attach this to the development process for the Brown Ranch project.
- b) **Champion regional housing solutions.**
Leverage the collaborative organizational structure of the NWCDC to provide information to jurisdictions about creative and successful examples of regional collaboration for housing solutions. Continue to convene housing-related entities and consider the development of a program and/or networking event to bring developers to the region to view available sites and collaborate with local owners, realtors, and lenders.
- c) **Advocate for workforce housing.**
Use the platform of the NWCDC to educate the general public and local elected bodies of the region about the regional need for workforce housing, the benefits of developing housing types that are more affordable to the labor force, examples of creative workforce housing solutions, and resources for local outreach and advocacy. Use the NWCDC to disseminate information across municipalities, organizations, and elected officials.

Comparison Table

The below table summarizes and compares the readiness and benefits of initiatives that would advance the Housing Access and Affordability Strategy, as identified by local economic development leaders through the BRECC Action Challenge process.

Housing Access & Affordability Initiatives			
Initiative	Readiness	Anticipated Benefits	Role(s)
Create a regional housing RFP. 	<p>Status: Some aspects in progress, more consolidated effort needed</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, needs housing needs assessment</p> <p>Leadership: Varied, needs regional consolidation and leadership</p> <p>Funding: Specific municipal projects funded, additional funding needed</p>	<p>Revenue: New housing property tax revenues can offset costs for municipal services</p> <p>Jobs: Expand or extend anticipated housing construction jobs</p> <p>Other: Expand quality, affordable housing options for existing residents and workers, increase potential to attract new businesses and residents</p>	<p>Note: Attracting a developer to build a small number of units in remote rural locations can be difficult. There is a possible timely opportunity to negotiate to add some dispersed sites/units in multiple localities onto the large and desirable Brown Ranch contract.</p>



<p>Champion regional housing solutions.</p>	<p>Status: Concept, housing assessments and capacity funding needed</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, needs further assessment to identify applicable housing solutions</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC</p> <p>Funding: None identified</p>	<p>Revenue: N/A</p> <p>Jobs: Indirect, increase housing construction jobs</p> <p>Other: Expand quality, affordable housing options for existing residents and workers, increase potential to attract new businesses and residents</p>	<p>NWCDC is positioned for this role if resources can be secured for technical assistance and staffing capacity. One critical barrier has been a lack of contractors and other trades people, see related steps in Strategy 4, Initiative B.</p>
<p>Advocate for workforce housing.</p>	<p>Status: Concept, needs capacity funding</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC</p> <p>Funding: None identified</p>	<p>Revenue: N/A</p> <p>Jobs: Indirect, increase housing construction jobs</p> <p>Other: Expand quality, affordable housing options for existing residents and workers</p>	<p>NWCDC is positioned for this role if resources can be secured for staffing capacity.</p>



Implementation Guidance

Initiative: Create a regional housing RFP.

As a means of attracting developers to creating needed workforce housing in rural communities within the region, coordinate and create a consolidated housing Request for Proposal (RFP) with enough scope and scale of development to attract a developer. Explore potential to attach this to the development process for the Brown Ranch project.

ROLES:

- **Lead:** NWCDC
- **Partners:** Individual municipalities, Craig Housing Authority, Yampa Valley Housing Authority, CHFA, DOLA
- **NWCDC Role:** Coordinate with Brown Ranch/Yampa Valley Housing Authority leadership, convene parties, provide capacity resources and pursue funding as needed

ACTION STEPS

- Discuss concept with leadership of Brown Ranch project, Yampa Valley Housing Authority
- Convene municipal leaders to explore interest in a regional RFP to build units in additional communities on available, municipally-controlled land
- Establish a working group with Brown Ranch leadership and interested municipalities to establish criteria for participation
- Consider pursuing funding for a regional RFP coordinator or technical assistance to support
- Quantify five, ten, and twenty-year workforce housing need (e.g. through housing assessments) in municipalities within the region
- Identify and inventory potential sites for workforce housing, take steps to ensure these sites are within municipal ownership and are construction-ready to incentivize development
- Prepare an addendum to the Brown Ranch development agreement adding a five to ten year supply of workforce units in satellite locations
- Consider convening developers to tour sites and network with local realtors and lenders

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
DOLA - Strong Communities Infrastructure Grant Program The Strong Communities Infrastructure Grant Program provides grants to local governments for infrastructure to develop community benefit-driven infill affordable housing that meets critical housing needs as identified by the local government. Awards cannot be made directly to housing authorities or regional governments, but partnerships are encouraged.	Eligible: Yes, Colorado counties and municipalities can apply for funds to support affordable housing development located in or adjacent to downtowns, municipal core business districts, transit oriented development areas, or where onsite child care is offered.	2023 application closed August 18. Will recur in summer 2024, uncertain thereafter.	Type: Grant Amount: Up to \$4 million, though most in the \$1-3 million range Match: Yes, 20% - the match is reduced to 15% by incorporating certain benefits (accessible design, childhood ed, renewable energy, infill, transit, etc)	Less competitive than federal funding opportunities. This year's funding cycle provided about \$33.5 million for infrastructure awards. Given award amounts this means 10-30 projects were funded to Colorado communities.	This funding is a very strong option. Readiness is a criteria, so project development should be well established. Note: Program is intended to incentivize the adoption of transformational practices, programs, and policies that support sustainable development patterns and affordable housing.



<p>USDA Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grants</p> <p>Provides grants to help organizations carry out local self-help housing construction projects. Grant recipients supervise groups of low-income individuals and families as they construct their own homes in rural areas. The group members provide most of the construction labor on each other's homes, with technical assistance from the organization overseeing the project.</p>	<p>Eligible: Potentially - would need to identify or form the organization to apply. Eligible applicants include: Government non-profit organizations Tribe; Private non-profit organizations (Available to rural areas)</p>	<p>Open on a rolling basis. Recurs annually.</p>	<p>Type: Grant Typical amounts not stated</p>	<p>Competitiveness is somewhat unknown - it is a national program but there is funding allocated for each state and the specificity of the program may make it somewhat less intensive. Contact your state representative for more information: Charlene.fernandez@usda.gov</p>	<p>This route to new housing development would require local investment for materials. If there is a strong charitable entity within the region this would support and build mutual trust and community investment for low-income residents.</p>
<p>Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing (PRO Housing)</p> <p>HUD will provide PRO Housing grants to identify and remove barriers to affordable housing production and preservation. Grantees may use awards to further develop, evaluate, and implement housing policy plans, improve housing strategies, and facilitate affordable housing production and preservation.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, States and local govts, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and multi-jurisdictional entities</p>	<p>2023 application closed in October. 2023 was the first program year, recurrence is unknown.</p>	<p>Type: Grant Amount: \$1 million to \$10 million Match: No</p>	<p>Very competitive national program: total of \$85 Million available in 2023, HUD anticipates making 20 awards. HUD will prioritize applicants that demonstrate: (1) progress and a commitment to overcoming barriers to affordable housing production and preservation; and (2) an acute demand for housing affordable to households with incomes below 100% of the AMI.</p>	<p>While this seems like a potentially strong resource for reducing barriers to affordable housing it is quite competitive and the chance of recurrence in 2024 is unknown.</p>



Strategy 4: Workforce Development

Retain and reskill the labor force to thrive in new and expanded businesses.

Why It Matters

A community's coal transition most directly impacts coal workers who lose quality, high-wage jobs in mining and power generation. As a generality, about one-third of displaced coal workers retire, one-third relocate to work in mining and power generation elsewhere, and one-third seek a new type of work. Thus a top priority in any community transitioning from coal is to create new local job opportunities, and train local workers for those new jobs.

Northwest Colorado has a strong asset - as well as industry - in post-secondary education, with capable partners to develop training programs. There is an immediate opportunity to expand training programs and grow local education jobs, but these reskilled workers may have to leave to find employment unless the new jobs are created locally. Thus Strategy 4 is closely related to and iterative with Strategy 3, Target Industry Development. An additional workforce development initiative is entrepreneurship training and support to enable self-employment for transitioning workers by starting a new small business.

Assets and Partners

The NWCDC has many strong partners in the workforce training and development sphere, including Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) and its existing programs, other secondary educational institutions involved in the region including Colorado Mountain College (CMC) and Colorado State University (CSU), the Colorado Welding Institute in Hayden, the Colorado Department of Labor & Employment (CDLE) resources, the Colorado Office of Just Transition (OJT), local small business development centers (SBDCs), and the local school districts. In addition, the region's existing coal-based workforce has a variety of strong and transferable skills that will serve as an asset to local training programs and industry development, if re-training can be executed in-line with plant closures.

Challenges and Gaps

The region will face challenges in attracting and/or retaining a skilled workforce, particularly as the cost of housing and living continues to increase. Workers will be significantly less likely to move to the region if the housing supply is limited and if affordable options are not available. The transitioning coal workforce may not be able to afford to stay in the region as housing costs rise and they have to take lower paying jobs. Additionally, the gaps in skills between existing coal jobs and new industry fields will need to be addressed promptly in order to retain the skilled coal workers.

Supporting Plans and Policies

Regional and local community plans provide support for this strategy as shown in these selected policy excerpts:

- Four key workforce focus areas: "Workforce Transition – Supporting the transition of the coal mining and power generation workforce. Entrepreneurship Support – Supporting the growth of new and small businesses within the region. Education/Skill Training – Aligning and

expanding workforce resources in the region in coordination with the school districts and two community colleges Workforce Support – Nontraditional issues related to supporting the workforces' quality of life and ability to remain employed."

-Northwest Colorado Roadmap (2022, page 27)

- Goal 3 - Ready and Willing Workforce: "Integrate job development with business creation and multigenerational education to create and attract a skilled and talented workforce that is prepared for 21st century jobs."
-Associate Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) CEDS (2021, page 49)
- Key focus area: "Workforce: Attract a location-neutral workforce and retain and retrain affected coal workers with a small business innovation center, establish a Vocational Training Center, and market Craig as a relocation hub for people working from home."
-Moffat County Vision 2025 Transition Plan (2020, page 1)

Momentum

This strategy builds on ongoing work in the region being led by a diverse set of local governments and community, educational, and other partner institutions in the region. Initiatives within this document build on and strive to further advance their efforts. The below list of examples demonstrates traction and commitment from NWCDC and partners:

- **CNCC Training Programs** - A longtime leader in workforce training, CNCC has a track record of identifying workforce training needs, developing responsive curricula, employing qualified trainers, and effectively marketing programs to trainees.
- **Entrepreneurship Support Programs** - CNCC and SBDC are currently collaborating on an initiative to bolster CNCC's entrepreneurship programming and resources. In addition, the City of Craig, Moffat County Local Marketing District, the Moffat County Chamber, Routt County Economic Development Partnership, and the SBDC have collaborated on providing more entrepreneurship support in the region.
- **Meeker Business and Visitors Center** - Meeker's existing Business and Visitors Center is currently being renovated to provide new small business and entrepreneur resources, including new meeting space, conference rooms, and coworking space.

Projects and Initiatives


Initiatives Descriptions

- a) **Reskill coal workforce to other energy technologies.**
In partnership with CNCC, utilities and private developers, and state and federal partners, train local coal workers for identified future energy generation opportunities, including biomass, pumped hydropower, and solar, which have the potential to create hundreds of jobs, generate clean energy, fill gaps in the energy grid, mitigate wildfire hazards, and enhance forest health.
- b) **Support construction trades training.**
Work with local partners to identify barriers to participation in the local trade and construction industries and work to promote these industries to potential workers, develop training opportunities and direct pathways to employment, and support the growth of these industries, which are currently lacking critical capacity for needed projects.
- c) **Support entrepreneurs and small businesses.**
Partner with local small business development councils (SBDCs) and the Routt County Economic Development Partnership to create a central hub of resources and support spaces for entrepreneurs and small businesses. Consider providing tools such as access to start-up capital, technical assistance, access to a patent officer, meeting/co-working spaces, access to printing and other amenities, etc. Tools should be available virtually and ideally, in multiple physical locations in the region.
- d) **Identify future workforce skill needs.**
Convene local industries and organizations, including Xcel, Tristate, CNCC, and other major employers to identify needed existing and potential future workforce skills and consider priority retraining opportunities for coal-impacted workers.

Comparison Table

The below table summarizes and compares the readiness and benefits of initiatives that would advance the Workforce Development Strategy, as identified by local economic development leaders through the BRECC Action Challenge process.

Workforce Development Initiatives			
Initiative	Readiness	Anticipated Benefits	Role(s)
Reskill coal workforce to other energy technologies. 	<p>Status: Biomass conversion, solar development, and hydropower projects moving forward</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, Biomass supply and Xcel plant conversion studies completed; need additional study for secondary industries</p> <p>Leadership: Numerous partners identified but needs consolidated leadership</p> <p>Funding: Some potential funding identified, ongoing funding needed to support curriculum development</p>	<p>Revenue: Indirectly, supports very positive revenue retaining projects</p> <p>Jobs: Prepares local workers for new employment and supports job creation in biomass harvesting</p> <p>Other: Biomass jobs support forest health and reduce wildfire risk</p>	<p>Note: With Xcel publicly committed to Hayden Station conversion to biomass, and rPlus Energies advancing the hydropower project, reskilling the coal workforce to move into new positions in local energy generation is a high priority.</p>

<p>Support construction trades training.</p> 	<p>Status: Concept, needs study of barriers</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, CNCC has needed expertise</p> <p>Leadership: Yampa Valley Partnership for Students, Stewardship, and Sustainability (YVPS3)</p> <p>Funding: Funding needed but not identified for capacity, barriers study, curriculum development, equipment</p>	<p>Revenue: Indirectly, supports positive revenue retaining projects</p> <p>Jobs: Prepares local workers for temporary employment in local construction projects</p> <p>Other: Trained construction labor force support desired future industry expansion and housing development</p>	<p>YVPS3 is leading by convening educators and community workforce, trying to align programs with the construction trades. NWCDC can provide support by framing how this effort fits into regional coal transition strategies.</p>
<p>Support entrepreneurs and small businesses.</p>	<p>Status: Some aspects in progress, consolidated effort needed</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed</p> <p>Leadership: Consolidated effort and leadership needed</p> <p>Funding: Some potential funding sources identified (CDLE, RTAP, etc.)</p>	<p>Revenue: N/A</p> <p>Jobs: Indirectly helps develop self-employment jobs</p> <p>Other: Helps grow a more entrepreneurial culture in the region which has been dominated by large employers</p>	<p>Note: Many entities are currently interested in supporting rural communities in the development of an “entrepreneurial ecosystem”</p>
<p>Identify future workforce skill needs.</p>	<p>Status: Concept</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, study or coordination with industry needed to identify specific skills</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC, CNCC</p> <p>Funding: Funding not identified</p>	<p>Revenue: N/A</p> <p>Jobs: N/A</p> <p>Other: Indirectly helps re-skill workers and develop the local labor force</p>	<p>CNCC has experience in developing curricula and marketing programs. NWCDC can support by helping to identify the skills that existing and potential employers will need</p>

Implementation Guidance

Initiative: Reskill coal workforce to other energy technologies.

In partnership with CNCC, utilities and private developers, and state and federal partners, train local coal workers for identified future energy generation opportunities, including biomass, pumped hydropower, and solar, which have the potential to create hundreds of jobs, generate clean energy, fill gaps in the energy grid, mitigate wildfire hazards, and enhance forest health.

ROLES

- **Lead:** Coordination and leadership - NWCDC; Curriculum - CNCC
- **Partners:** Utilities, NWCDC, CNCC, CDLE, OJT, energy industry partners and developers
- **NWCDC Role:** Ensure ongoing coordination, convene parties, advocacy, funding and administration for study of barriers and needs

ACTION STEPS

- Convene CNCC representatives and reach out to San Juan BRECC team to learn about replicable opportunities from the School of Energy at San Juan College
- Work with CNCC to identify and pursue funding to convene employers, identify needs for re-skilling, and develop a responsive curriculum
- Promote training program to attract instructors and trainees
- Initiate CNCC training program(s)
- Advocate for local hiring in energy facilities projects

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
Department of Labor - Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants This program's purpose is to build community college capacity to meet the skill needs of employers and support students in obtaining good jobs in in-demand industries, based on labor market info.	Eligible: Lead applicant of an SCC Partnership must be a community college that is a public institution (CNCC would apply in partnership with NWCDC)	2023 application closed November 14. Recurs annually. Look for re-opening in August, 2024.	Type: Grant Amount: Awards range from \$1.5 - 5.75 million Match: No	Fairly competitive, national program with approximately 17 awards expected. This round will focus on equity, providing economic opportunities for dislocated workers (could make a strong argument here for coal workforce), or underserved communities.	The funding amount and lack of match makes this a very compelling opportunity, although the difficulty of the application should be assessed given competitiveness.
Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grants Grant assistance to create and augment high-wage jobs, accelerate the formation of new businesses, support industry clusters and maximize the use of local productive assets in eligible low-income rural areas.	Eligible: NWCDC may be able to apply as a "job accelerator partnership," but may require teaming with CNCC to qualify: "Eligible applicants are rural jobs accelerator partnerships with expertise in delivering economic and job training programs, consisting of: Non-profits, state entities, higher ed, or public bodies"	2023 application window was March-April. Recurs annually.	Type: Grant Amount: \$500k - \$2 million Match: 20%	Very competitive - Total program funding in 2023 was \$2 million. The number of awards may vary by year, but with grants of \$500 thousand to \$2 million, only a few are typically awarded. Because this is specifically for rural areas, NWCDC would likely be fairly competitive.	A fairly competitive opportunity. The high-award amounts and low match, plus flexibility of uses make it compelling. NWCDC should look into what it takes to be recognized as a "job accelerator partnership" and potentially build a team with CNCC.

<p>U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Capacity Building for Repurposing Energy Assets</p> <p>The objective of this effort is to directly support an embedded workstream supported by a staffer whose primary responsibility is coordination and planning, with a particular emphasis on workforce development oriented around productively and sustainably repurposing such assets, their sites and associated infrastructure.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, Municipal governments and nonprofit organizations with an energy asset that has retired or is slated to retire before 2032 (both Craig and Hayden would qualify)</p>	<p>2023 was the first year of this program. The application window closed in November. Recurrence is uncertain but look for re-opening in Fall 2024.</p>	<p>2023 Info: Type: Grant Amount: Expecting \$100k per award Match: No</p>	<p>Total program funding for 2023 project period is \$3.5 Million, with 35+ awards anticipated. Fairly competitive given national scale and limited awards, though it is only open to communities with energy assets (power plants, coal mines, oil/gas well lands) that have retired, or are slated for retirement (2009-2032), which narrows the pool quite a bit.</p>	<p>This is a very unique and applicable capacity support opportunity worth pursuing. However, recurrence is uncertain Reach out to: info@energywerx.org</p>
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Initiative: Support construction trades training.

Work with local partners to identify barriers to participation in the local trade and construction industries and work to promote these industries to potential workers, develop training opportunities and direct pathways to employment, and support the growth of these industries, which are currently lacking critical capacity for needed projects.

ROLES

- **Lead:** The Yampa Valley Partnership for Students, Stewardship, and Sustainability (YVPS3)
- **Partners:** NWCDC, CNCC, CDLE, OJT local construction/trades industry
- **NWCDC Role:** Ensure ongoing coordination, convene parties, advocacy, funding and administration for study of barriers and needs

ACTION STEPS

- Convene parties anticipating significant construction projects and others to determine roles, responsibilities, and next steps
- Support CNCC's existing apprenticeship program to ensure implementation and participation
- Identify and pursue funding to study barriers and develop a regionally responsive curriculum
- Promote training program to attract instructors and trainees
- Initiate construction trades training program; consider locating program locations or secondary resources centers in several locations in the region, including in the smaller communities that previously housed CNCC branches like Oak Creek and Meeker
- Market trained labor force to construction and development companies
- Connect graduates with small business and entrepreneurship support
- Advocate for local hiring in major construction and development projects

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
<p>Department of Labor - Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants</p> <p>The purpose of this program is to build community college capacity to meet the skill needs of employers and support students in obtaining good jobs in in-demand industries, based on labor market information.</p>	<p>Eligible: Lead applicant of an SCC Partnership must be a community college that is a public institution (CNCC would apply in partnership with NWCDC)</p> <p>Some previous awards were specifically for construction training (as well as advanced manufacturing)</p>	<p>Next award cycle anticipated in August, 2024.</p> <p>Recurs annually.</p>	<p>Type: Grant</p> <p>Amount: Awards range from \$1.5 - 5.75 million</p> <p>Match: No</p>	<p>Fairly competitive, national program with approximately 17 awards expected.</p> <p>This round is specifically stated to focus on equity, providing economic opportunities for dislocated workers (a strong fit for coal workforce retraining), or historically underserved communities.</p>	<p>The funding amount and lack of match makes this a very compelling opportunity, but the difficulty of the application should be assessed given the relative competitiveness.</p>
<p>Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grants</p> <p>Grant assistance to create and augment high-wage jobs, accelerate the formation of new businesses, support industry clusters and maximize the use of local productive assets in eligible low-income rural areas.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, NWCDC may be able to apply as a “job accelerator partnership,” but may require teaming with CNCC to qualify:</p> <p>“Eligible applicants are rural jobs accelerator partnerships with expertise in delivering economic and job training programs, consisting of the following: Non-profits, state or tribal entities, institutions of higher edu., or public bodies”</p>	<p>2023 application window was March through April.</p> <p>Recurs annually.</p>	<p>Type: Grant</p> <p>Amount: \$500,000 - \$2,000,000</p> <p>Match: Yes, 20%</p>	<p>Very competitive - Total program funding in 2023 was \$2 million. The number of awards may vary by year, but with grants of \$500 thousand to \$2 million, only a few are typically awarded.</p> <p>Because this is specifically for rural areas, NWCDC would likely be fairly competitive with the rest of the funding pool.</p>	<p>Seems like this is a fairly competitive opportunity, but the high-award amounts and low match, plus flexibility of uses for the funds do still make it a compelling opportunity. NWCDC should look into what it takes to be recognized as a “job accelerator partnership” and potentially build a team with CNCC.</p>
<p>Workforce Resilience Program Grant</p> <p>Intended to be a flexible and easy-to-access resource for rural Colorado, administered by the Colorado Community College System and OEDIT.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, applicants must be: a business, 501(c)3, 501(c)6, Institute of Higher Education, government or tribal organizations, located in rural Colorado</p> <p>Beneficiaries must be: Rural individuals, jobseekers, or students negatively impacted by Covid-19</p>	<p>2024 priority application window closes March 1. Will not recur.</p> <p>Window remains open until funds are expended</p>	<p>Type: Grant, distributed as quarterly reimbursement</p> <p>Amount: \$25,000 - \$75,000</p> <p>Match: No</p>	<p>A state program specifically geared for rural Colorado, making this a significantly less competitive opportunity than federal programs.</p>	<p>These funds are very flexible and can be used for a variety of educational equipment or program development to support the local workforce. However, this opportunity is time limited and must be pursued in 2024.</p>
<p>OJT and OEDIT, Coal Transition Community Grants</p> <p>OJT and OEDIT have some remaining community grant funding yet to be expended. Likely, but not confirmed, that OJT will seek to continue this funding for future program years as well.</p>	<p>Eligible: The Yampa Valley is a Colorado Tier 1 coal community, giving it priority access to this funding. Capacity building initiatives such as this are a top goal for OJT.</p>	<p>Available on a rolling basis.</p> <p>Funded through a one-time legislative earmark, available until expended.</p>	<p>Type: Grant</p> <p>Amount: Varies</p> <p>Match: None</p>	<p>The Yampa Valley has been allocated to receive \$5.15 million in Community Grant Funding. This funding will all go to NWCDC communities and priority projects, making this the region’s least competitive funding opportunity.</p>	<p>OJT funding has been identified as a potential source of funding for the equipment needed for construction trades training.</p>



Strategy 5: Clean Energy

Encourage development of clean energy technologies in Northwest Colorado.

Why It Matters

Clean energy development is a shared interest among Routt, Moffat, and Rio Blanco counties according to the NWCDC charter. Northwest Colorado's existing transmission capacity and generating plant assets are competitive advantages in the energy generation industry. Conversion of existing generating stations to new, clean energy technologies could create numerous high paying jobs and help retain property tax value and revenue from the generating stations.

Wind and solar energy farms also have strong development potential in the region given the expansive undeveloped land area, low regulatory barriers, and available transmission infrastructure. Although wind and solar facilities create fewer permanent jobs than some other energy generation technologies, building these facilities could offer transitional employment in construction as the region works to create additional permanent jobs. Other emerging energy technologies have also been identified as opportunities in the region, including hydropower, geothermal, and advanced nuclear, and there are ongoing conversations about green energy development priorities.

Assets and Partners

Northwest Colorado has many advantages in the realm of clean energy. With a long history in energy generation the region can leverage its existing energy assets, including the decommissioned coal plants, the associated substations, and the transmission lines and capacity. Additionally, the region's natural resources offer clean energy potential including solar, geothermal, wind, and biomass. Public and private entities are advancing clean and efficient energy projects in the region, while Xcel has taken strong leadership in converting Hayden Station assets to cleaner energy technologies.

Challenges and Gaps

Some potential challenges for the region as it transitions to clean energy generation methods include the uncertainty around future ownership and use of Craig Generating Station which is partly due to the unknown feasibility of emerging energy technologies such as hydrogen. Additionally, there are substantial divisions in public and political opinion within the three-county region about the meaning of "clean" energy that could lead to different approaches within the region to pursuing or supporting individual energy development proposals. Notably, the region is starkly divided in opinions about the desirability of nuclear energy development, which might direct potential nuclear energy developers to other regions where there are more supporters.

Supporting Plans and Policies

Regional and local community plans provide support for this strategy as shown in these selected policy excerpts:

- "Support and invest in alternative energy generation projects that can supplement the loss of the coal power plants."
-Northwest Colorado Roadmap (2022, page 23)

- “Leverage the region’s power generation identity and transmission infrastructure with renewable energy sources.”
-Moffat County Vision 2025 Transition Plan (2020, page 5)
- “Strategic planning at the state and federal level has outlined a process by which clean energy production can be expanded while maintaining support for extraction industries. Such support includes the potential for coal facilities to be adapted for renewable energy uses. Routt County has been identified as an ideal location for solar energy production, but not for wind energy production.”
-Routt County Master Plan (2022, page 57)
- “Although Colorado is in the process of transitioning away from coal power, opportunities exist to replace coal power with low-carbon emission generation such as small-scale nuclear power, solar power, and manufacturing components for sustainable power technologies.”
-AGNC Economic Emergency Recovery and Resiliency Plan (2022, page 90)

Momentum

This strategy builds on ongoing work in the region being led by a diverse set of local governments and community, educational, and other partner institutions in the region. Initiatives within this document build on and strive to further advance their efforts. The below list of examples demonstrates traction and commitment from NWCDC and partners:

- **Hayden Station Biomass Conversion Plan** - Xcel Energy has released their official proposal for the conversion of Hayden Generating Station to a biomass plant. Approval of the proposal is still needed by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Many local governments, the NWCDC, and AGNC have expressed support for the conversion. The PUC is slated to review the decision in December 2024. Burning biomass is anticipated to generate 19 megawatts of energy - much less than the station’s 441-megawatt coal-burning capacity - while creating a market for the byproducts of the local forest industry. Through the conversion process Xcel Energy has committed to no layoffs for the coal plants 75 employees and the plant conversion will fill 26 of the lost full-time, high-paying jobs.
- **Regional Solar Developments** - A large number of planned and potential solar projects have been identified throughout the region. These include: the 20-acre, 4-megawatt Yampa Valley Regional Solar Garden outside of Craig which the Yampa Valley Electric Association broke ground on in May, 2023; the 145-megawatt Axial Basin Solar array that Juwi energy has contracted with Tri-State energy to build at the Colowyo Mine; a solar array planned for a 160 acre parcel near Craig Station that was recently leased by RWE Renewables (formerly Con Edison Clean Energy); and, in the event that the Hayden Station Biomass Conversion is not approved by the PUC, Xcel Energy has proposed a 200-megawatt solar farm at Hayden Station. These combined projects will provide significant tax revenues, hundreds of temporary construction jobs, and several permanent jobs for the region.
- **Utility-Scale Solar Zoning Updates** - Through Routt County’s subdivision and zoning regulation updates, after the adoption of the Routt County Master Plan in 2022, the planning department prioritized an overhaul of the County’s regulations addressing utility-scale solar. By providing a more clear process and set of guidelines the County has been able to support the approval of new solar projects while addressing potential development impacts.
- **Rangely Geothermal Microgrid** - The Town of Rangely has been awarded a \$5 million Congressional Directed Spending grant administered through the Department of Energy to design, construct and operate three microgrids at Rangely municipal facilities using

geothermal microgrid technology. The Town is anticipating a four-year timeline for the design and construction of the project with potential to expand if successful.

- **rPlus Energies Pumped Hydropower project** - A privately-owned company, rPlus Energies has proposed and is pursuing additional feasibility studies and preliminary engineering for a \$1.5 billion pumped storage hydropower project outside of Craig. Pumped storage hydropower generates power by moving water between two reservoirs of differing elevations, acting as a battery and energy grid supplement/ stabilizer. The project would create 300-500 temporary construction jobs and 35-40 permanent employees.
- **Guzman Energy projects** - The Yampa Valley Electric Authority (YVEA) has entered a contract with Guzman Energy, which will increase the potential locally-generated renewable energy contribution to up to 15% of load and drive development of 90,000 mW of new local renewable energy projects within the next five years and is expected to drive even more economic and renewable energy development after the contract goes into effect in 2028.
- **Carbon Ore, Rare Earth and Critical Minerals (CORE-CM) Research** - Several local partners, including CNCC and AGNC, are engaged in ongoing meetings, research, and opportunities assessment for the development of CORE-CM in the Greater Green River Basin, which extends through southwest Wyoming and northwest Colorado. The research being led by the University of Wyoming is primarily investigating opportunities associated with existing coal reserves, rare earth minerals, and carbon sequestration.

Projects and Initiatives



Initiatives Descriptions

- a) **Support the Xcel Hayden Station conversion.**
Provide ongoing coordination, messaging, and support, and potentially identify additional funding for the Xcel Energy plant’s conversion to any new clean energy technology that will replace jobs and retain tax revenue. For example, biomass has been determined feasible and would support local goals such as expanding local forest operator jobs, reducing wildfire risk, and improving forest health.
- b) **Support reuse studies for Craig Station.**
Continue to coordinate with the owners of Craig Generating Station to explore opportunities for conversion to another energy generation technology and/or redevelopment of the site and valuable associated assets, including rail spurs, water rights, and transmission infrastructure and capacity, for industrial use. If no reuse is identified, ensure local regulations prevent permanent abandonment without remediation.
- c) **Support clean energy projects.**
Continue to provide education, advocacy, and grant writing in support of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects in the region, particularly for those that offer jobs and replacement tax revenue potential.
- d) **Explore carbon sink/land stewardship opportunities.**
Study the potential for a coordinated regional effort to sequester carbon through land sinks, improve land management practices, and preserve Northwest Colorado’s natural landscapes. Explore job and tax revenue options and funding opportunities associated with this potential effort.

Comparison Table

The below table summarizes and compares the readiness and benefits of initiatives that would advance the Clean Energy Strategy, as identified by local economic development leaders through the BRECC Action Challenge process.

Clean Energy Initiatives			
Initiative	Readiness	Anticipated Benefits	Role(s)
Support the Xcel Hayden Station conversion. 	Status: In progress Feasibility: Biomass identified as feasible, other technologies unknown Leadership: NWCDC / Xcel Funding: Funding for station conversion through Xcel, potential for NWCDC/ municipalities to supplement; additional funding needed for NWCDC capacity	Revenue: Plant conversion will retain significant local revenue Jobs: Plant conversion will increase total permanent jobs slightly; conversion will create several hundred temporary construction jobs Other: Supports NWCDC members’ shared goal of advancing regional clean energy development; if biomass, fuel harvesting in the region will support wildfire mitigation and forest health	Xcel has identified biomass as a feasible reuse, but this plan has not achieved PUC approval. If a technology is approved, NWCDC can play a role by coordinating with key partners on next steps and if needed, long-term fuel supply. See Also: Strategy 4, Biomass Workforce Training Initiative (a)

<p>Support reuse studies for Craig Station.</p> 	<p>Status: NWCDC support is ongoing, station reuse efforts are not currently making progress</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasibility studies needed</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC / Craig Station owner</p> <p>Funding: Funding not identified</p>	<p>Revenue: Indirectly, supports development of a new revenue producing replacement use of the energy generation asset</p> <p>Jobs: Indirectly, supports development of new employment opportunities, replacing jobs for local labor force that is skilled in the energy sector</p> <p>Other: Indirectly, helps reduce the cost of stranded assets and retain the community's energy producer identity</p>	<p>Utility owners are essential as the lead actor in potential plant conversion. Given the enormous positive benefits in revenue and jobs replacement that conversion could yield if a feasible technology is identified, NWCDC's role is to convene parties and advocate for funding and technical assistance to move feasibility studies forward.</p>
<p>Support clean energy projects.</p> 	<p>Status: In progress</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, no study needed</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC</p> <p>Funding: Funding not identified</p>	<p>Revenue: Indirectly, through renewable energy projects</p> <p>Jobs: Indirectly, through renewable energy projects</p> <p>Other: Support NWCDC members shared goal of regional clean energy development</p>	<p>While development of these projects are being led by private entities NWCDC's role is to convene parties and to champion and advocate for clean energy projects.</p>
<p>Explore carbon sink/land stewardship opportunities.</p>	<p>Status: Concept, needs leadership</p> <p>Feasibility: Study needed</p> <p>Leadership: Needs regional leadership</p> <p>Funding: Funding not identified</p>	<p>Revenue: Needs study</p> <p>Jobs: Needs study</p> <p>Other: Improve land management practices and preservation of Northwest Colorado's natural landscapes</p>	<p>Note: A first step to exploring this concept would be to pursue funding for technical assistance with a feasibility study.</p>



Implementation Guidance

Initiative: Support the Xcel Hayden Station conversion.

Provide ongoing coordination, messaging, and support, and potentially identify additional funding for the Xcel Energy plant's conversion to any new clean energy technology that will replace jobs and retain tax revenue. For example, biomass has been determined feasible and would support local goals such as expanding local forest operator jobs, reducing wildfire risk, and improving forest health.

ROLES

- **Lead:** Xcel
- **Partners:** NWCDC, CNCC, CDLE, OJT, Public Utilities Commission (PUC), Wildfire Mitigation Council, US and CO Forest Service, elected officials
- **NWCDC Role:** Convene parties, coordinate Xcel and CNCC for timely curriculum development, convene information sessions, pursue and administer grant funding

ACTION STEPS

- Coordinate with Xcel about the timeline, potential future technology, and PUC approval for conversion of the Hayden Station
- Convene local information sessions to educate the community about new generation technologies, jobs and revenue implications of conversion, and other benefits
- If biomass is approved, pursue grant funding opportunities that reduce the cost of biomass fuel harvesting and transport, including those targeting wildfire hazard mitigation, and coordinate with the local USFS to address any potential barriers to consistent, long-term fuel supply delivery
- Educate local workers about opportunities in biomass harvesting and/or other energy generation jobs and training opportunities

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
USDA US Forest Service - Wood Innovations Grant Program Provides grants to meet the challenge of disposing of hazardous fuels from US forest lands in a manner that supports wood products and energy markets. Focus areas include mass timber, renewable wood energy, and tech development that supports hazardous fuel reduction and sustainable forest management.	Eligible: Yes, open to for-profit entities; state, and local govts; Indian Tribes; not-for-profit orgs; higher education; and special purpose districts. Priority given to projects that stimulate, expand, and support U.S. wood products markets and wood energy markets to support the long-term management of forest lands.	2023 application closed December 1st. Appears to recur annually, look for re-opening in spring, 2024.	Type: Grant Amount: \$10-300k (more provided for 5 MW+ energy projects) Match: Yes, 1:1 match required	At least 65 applications will be awarded (likely more) though it is nationally available to many entities, so likely still competitive. Seems to be looking for fairly well-developed project concepts with strong partnership and known benefits. Note: Feasibility studies and early phase project development proposals are allowed but specifically stated as NOT competitive.	Additional planning/project development would likely be needed before applying to this opportunity. Match is required and partnership and additional funding will need to be identified.



<p>USDA US Forest Service - Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance Program</p> <p>The intent is to substantially decrease the cost of conducting restoration projects involving vegetation removal on federal and Tribal lands and invest in surrounding communities. Byproducts could include trees and woody biomass harvested through timber sales, thinning, hazardous fuels reduction, or other restoration activities.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, open to for-profit entities; state, and local governments; Indian Tribes; not-for-profit orgs; higher education; and special purpose districts</p> <p>The project facility must be in close proximity to federal or Tribal lands and procure raw materials from federal/Tribal lands. Sourcing must be in areas identified as high need for ecosystem restoration.</p>	<p>2023 application closed December 1st.</p> <p>Appears to recur annually, look for re-opening in spring, 2024.</p>	<p>Type: Grant</p> <p>Amount: \$50k to \$1 million</p> <p>Match: No match, however “cooperator contribution funding level is a selection criteria”</p>	<p>At least 23 applications will be awarded (likely more) though it is nationally available to many entities, so likely still quite competitive.</p> <p>Funding priority will be to an entity seeking to establish, reopen, retrofit, expand, or improve a sawmill or other wood-processing facility that will utilize the byproducts from projects on federal/Tribal land (50%+ preferred) that have been identified as at risk and a high priority for ecological restoration.</p>	<p>Additional planning/project development would likely be needed before applying to this opportunity. The lack of match is a plus, but additional funding strengthens an application. Funding and partnerships will need to be identified.</p>
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Initiative: Support reuse studies for Craig Station.

Continue to coordinate with the owners of Craig Generating Station to explore opportunities for conversion to another energy generation technology and/or redevelopment of the site and valuable associated assets, including rail spurs, water rights, and transmission infrastructure and capacity, for industrial use. If no reuse is identified, ensure local regulations prevent permanent abandonment without remediation.

ROLES

- **Lead:** Craig Station owner (Tri-State at report publish date) and OJT-funded facilitator
- **Partners:** NWCDC, OJT, OJT-funded grant team, CNCC, AGNC, elected officials
- **NWCDC Role:** Convene parties, convene information sessions, and pursue and administer studies, technical assistance, and grant funding as needed

ACTION STEPS

- Periodically convene meetings with the Craig Station owner and other partners to advocate for and explore funding opportunities to enable plant conversion feasibility studies
- Lead, support, or participate - as appropriate - in securing technical assistance and funding for conversion and reuse studies
- If a reuse plan is identified, convene local information sessions to educate the community about the new technology and coordinate workforce retraining opportunities through CNCC
- Work with OJT and local regulatory bodies, primarily Moffat County, to ensure that if station reuse does not move forward that local regulations require full remediation; consider clauses to prioritize the local workforce for remediation jobs

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
<p>Economic Development Administration (EDA), Planning and Local Technical Assistance Programs</p> <p>Provides technical assistance awards to strengthen the capacity of eligible entities to undertake and promote effective economic development programs through projects such as feasibility studies, impact analyses, and project planning.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, Educational Institution; Local Government Native/Tribal Entity; Non-profit; State Government</p>	<p>Applications accepted on a rolling basis.</p>	<p>Type: Grant or technical assistance Amount: Subject to availability of funds. Median awards have been \$70k for Planning and \$100k for Technical Assistance. Match: Yes, varies by local unemployment rate.</p>	<p>Historically, EDA has awarded funds for 320-450 Planning projects, and 30-50 Technical Assistance projects a year. Note: The availability and committed nature of matching funds is a competitiveness factor in evaluating applications against each other</p>	<p>Applicants are strongly encouraged to work with the appropriate EDA representative from their regional office. This is a national program but it has a lot of awards. Could be an option for feasibility studies in particular. Connect with Trent Thompson at EDA as a first step.</p>
<p>U.S. Department of Energy and National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), Clean Energy to Communities (C2C)</p> <p>The C2C program provides communities with expertise and tools to achieve their clean energy goals. C2C offers three types of support to communities: in-depth partnerships, peer-learning cohorts, and expert match (recommended).</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, City, town, county, and tribal govts; metropolitan and regional planning organizations; community-based organizations; non-governmental organizations; utilities; Electric utilities; universities.</p>	<p>Peer Cohort cycle application expected in spring 2024. Expert Match open and reviewed on a rolling basis.</p>	<p>Type: Technical Assistance Amount: Varies Match: No</p>	<p>\$550 million in total program year funding. ~100 communities expected for the Peer Learning Cohort and 200 for Expert Match. A national program but rolling application and about 200 expected awards make this somewhat less competitive than most federal programs.</p>	<p>A good option for technical assistance or feasibility information for potential reuse options. Could also help with messaging options to the community. Small time commitment and lack of match are a plus.</p>
<p>U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Capacity Building for Repurposing Energy Assets</p> <p>The objective of this effort is to directly support an embedded workstream supported by a staffer whose primary role is coordination and planning, with a particular emphasis on workforce development oriented around productively and sustainably repurposing such assets, their sites and associated infrastructure.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, Municipal governments and nonprofit organizations with an energy asset that has retired or is slated to retire before 2032 (both Craig and Hayden would qualify)</p>	<p>2023 was the first year of this program. The 2023 application window closed in November. Recurrence is uncertain.</p>	<p>2023 Info: Type: Grant Amount: Expecting \$100k per award Match: No</p>	<p>Total program funding for 2023 project period is \$3.5 Million, with 35+ awards anticipated. Fairly competitive given national scale and limited awards, though it is only open to communities with energy assets (power plants, coal mines, oil/gas) that have retired, or are slated for retirement (2009-2032), which narrows the pool quite a bit.</p>	<p>This is a very unique and applicable capacity support opportunity. However, it is uncertain if it will recur. Reach out to: info@energywerx.org</p>



Initiative: Support clean energy projects.

Continue to provide education, advocacy, and grant writing in support of renewable and efficient energy projects in the region, particularly for those that offer more jobs and tax revenue replacement potential.

ROLES

- **Lead:** NWCDC
- **Partners:** Utilities, Municipalities, Yampa Valley Electric Association, AGNC, elected officials, private energy developers
- **NWCDC Role:** Act as a resource partner to clean energy developers; educate and advocate for clean energy projects; convene needed parties to advance potential energy projects

ACTION STEPS

- Create a web-based resource page inviting to prospective private energy project developers with information and local contacts in the NWCDC region
- Act as a “conciierge” contact for prospective private energy project developers to identify and explore opportunities across the three-county region
- Provide a forum of informational sessions for elected officials and the community to learn about and provide comments about proposed clean energy projects, new energy technologies
- Research and distribute information about clean energy and energy efficiency project funding opportunities to NWCDC members
- Ensure ongoing collaboration between AGNC and NWCDC energy development tasks to ensure coordination and better alignment of efforts

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes / Rec
<p>U.S. Department of Energy and National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), Clean Energy to Communities (C2C)</p> <p>The Clean Energy to Communities (C2C) program provides communities with expertise and tools to achieve their clean energy goals. C2C offers three types of support to communities: in-depth partnerships, peer-learning cohorts, and expert match (recommended).</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, City, town, county, and tribal governments; metropolitan and regional planning organizations; community-based organizations; nongovernmental organizations; utilities; Electric utilities; universities.</p>	<p>Peer Cohort cycle application expected in spring 2024.</p> <p>Expert Match open and reviewed on a rolling basis.</p>	<p>Type: Technical Assistance</p> <p>Amount: Varies</p> <p>Match: No</p>	<p>\$550 Million in total program year funding. ~100 communities expected for the Peer Learning Cohort and 200 for Expert Match.</p> <p>A national program but rolling application and about 200 expected awards make this somewhat less competitive than most federal programs</p>	<p>A good option for capacity support in new energy development, identifying best technology fits, and gaining tools to provide to developers and local leadership.</p> <p>Small time commitment and lack of match are a plus. Would be a stronger application if combined with other energy technical assistance needs (see previous initiative).</p>



<p>Qualifying Advanced Energy Project Credit (48C) program</p> <p>The program aims to create high-quality jobs, reduce emissions, and increase production of clean energy products and materials. Allocates credits to projects in three categories: (1) Clean energy manufacturing and recycling, (2) greenhouse gas emission reduction, and (3) critical materials refining, processing, and recycling.</p>	<p>Eligible: Determined by the project, all taxpayers are eligible. This information should be distributed to any entity considering the creation of clean energy or critical materials projects. Project eligibility is described in more detail here: irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-23-44.pdf</p>	<p>It is likely a round of credits will be available in summer/fall 2024. A concept paper deadline, due earlier, will be the first step to submit an application.</p>	<p>Type: Tax Credit Amount: Varies Match: No</p>	<p>The IRA provided \$10 billion in funding, with at least \$4 billion reserved for projects in energy communities with closed coal mines or power plants. While this is a national program there is significant funding set aside for energy communities, making it less competitive.</p>	<p>While not directly applicable to NWCDC, this opportunity could be used to help catalyze energy projects in the region with partnership or support from the NWCDC. The application process is somewhat intensive so do recommend leaning on potential support or questions through: 48CQuestions@hq.doe.gov</p>
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Strategy 6: Coal Transition Capacity

Increase NWCDC's organizational, staffing, and funding capacity for regional coal transition and economic diversification projects.

Why It Matters

The local drive to implement coal transition strategies is strong in Northwest Colorado, but the means to do so are limited. Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt counties have made an impressive step forward in aligning around their shared challenges and opportunities in creating the Northwest Colorado Development Council (NWCDC) through an Intergovernmental Agreement among the counties and municipalities. The NWCDC Board of Directors has further recognized that NWCDC's effectiveness will be stronger with legal organization status and standing to receive grants, manage funds, and similar.

To implement coal transition initiatives, NWCDC will need to identify resources for project development including technical expertise, detailed studies, and implementation funding. Within the region, resources are limited to match grant funds. NWCDC also requires expanded staffing and operational capacity to provide the leadership and steady presence needed to shepherd coal transition strategies and initiatives from concept to reality, and to convene collaboration among local economic development entities, utility representatives, and coal transition experts and supporters at the state and federal level.

Assets and Partners

Perhaps Northwest Colorado's greatest capacity asset is the NWCDC, which facilitates collaboration, coordination, and grant writing throughout the region. In addition, the region's educational institutions, including the Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) and the local school districts, as well as the many other dedicated organizations, housing authorities, businesses, and other partners throughout the region enhance project and organizational capacity. The NWCDC also benefits from a number of state partners that provide capacity support, including the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), the Office of Just Transition (OJT), the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE).

Challenges and Gaps

The NWCDC's largest barrier to implementation of its many initiatives is simply ongoing staffing and funding. As with many rural areas, those working within the NWCDC and its member entities wear many hats and have limited time and resources to pursue additional funding, manage contracts, and implement projects. Many initiatives lack a champion that can commit to the staff power needed. The NWCDC region includes several very small communities, including Yampa, Phippsberg, Oak Creek, and Dinosaur, which face even more acute capacity challenges and will need additional support to act on the diversification strategies outlined in this document.

A specific challenge for Northwest Colorado is that it does not meet qualifying or prioritizing criteria for many federal funding sources, in part because closures are still on the horizon and impacts aren't yet visible in data, and in part because of the relatively high-cost of living and the relative wealth of Steamboat acting as an outlier in the data. There is significant concern that proactive measures are

not successful in funding pursuits and may not be until job and revenue losses are dire enough. An additional barrier to funding is that the NWCDC is currently a partnership formed through an intergovernmental agreement and not a standalone organization or fiscal agent eligible for funding.

Supporting Plans and Policies

Regional and local community plans provide support for this strategy as shown in these selected policy excerpts:

- "After June 2023, the NWCDC will lack human capacity and dedicated staff to support the organization. Capacity to implement this roadmap is an essential element for ensuring the smaller communities in the region can realize meaningful change. Addressing creating human capacity for the NWCDC is the top priority."
-Northwest Colorado Roadmap (2022, page 15)
- "The NWCDC will need a fully funded director and additional administrative capacity to implement the Roadmap. Funding sources that can be established to fund the NWCDC staff need to be secured in the next two years to sustain the collaboration. Explore the viability of funding sources including membership dues, dedicated property tax levy, expansion of lodging tax, excise/use tax on tourism tickets/attractions, and/or a regulatory or impact fee."
-Northwest Colorado Roadmap (2022, page 15)
- Goal 5A Capacity Building: "Identify, engage, and educate communities on resources available from local/state/federal partners for business growth and expansion as well as economic development activity."
-AGNC Economic Emergency Recovery and Resiliency Plan (2022, page 40)

Momentum

This strategy builds on ongoing work in the region being led by a diverse set of local governments and community, educational, and other partner institutions in the region. Initiatives within this document build on and strive to further advance their efforts. The below list of examples demonstrates traction and commitment from NWCDC and partners:

- **Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) grant** - In 2021 the NWCDC received a grant through the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA,) with matching funds from the voting members of the NWCDC and Colorado's Office of Just Transition, to support implementation of the Regional Resiliency and Recovery Roadmap, which provided the region with a shared direction for economic development and diversification. The funding will be used for capacity building and the hiring of a regional project manager.
- **NWCDC Regional Website** - The NWCDC is in the process of developing a regional website in order to market the region, connect NWCDC members to resources, connect businesses and industries to Northwest Colorado opportunities, and host a site inventory. The NWCDC will continue efforts to promote the use of the site for a variety of partners.
- **Ongoing NWCDC Collaboration** - In ongoing monthly meetings the NWCDC plays a critical role in coordinating, discussing, and ultimately approving the funds for regional Roadmap projects, which ensures the dollars are used in ways that align with their shared vision.

Projects and Initiatives


Initiatives Descriptions

- a) **Establish NWCDC as a legal organization.**
Take steps to pursue 501(c)(3) status or similar for the NWCDC to enable the organization to pursue long-term organization funding, hire staff, and further support and manage grants and projects in the region. Consider full-time staff hires and fundraising.
- b) **Expand capacity funding.**
The NWCDC should continue to function as a shared regional resource for applying to, administering, and managing coal transition-related funding and assistance opportunities. Seek to provide long-term staffing capacity to manage project and grant contracts, including ensuring ongoing coordination and collaboration.
- c) **Advocate for proactive funding criteria.**
Advocate with federal entities for changes or waivers to funding requirements that would allow Northwest Colorado to be eligible for coal transition funding before plant closures, job losses, revenue losses, and potential mine closures occur. Utilize existing local partnerships with the Colorado Office of Just Transition and the Four Corners Rapid Response Team to assist in coordination and advocacy at the federal level.
- d) **Promote aligned, partner-led initiatives.**
Where partner entities such as CNCC, AGNC, counties, and municipalities are pursuing funding, workforce training, and project implementation that align with NWCDC’s mission, the NWCDC Roadmap, and this Coal Transition Strategy, NWCDC should provide assistance in the form of promotion, collaboration, letters of support, and advocacy, as capacity allows.

Comparison Table

The below table summarizes and compares the readiness and benefits of initiatives that would advance the Local Coal Transition Capacity Strategy, as identified by local economic development leaders through the BRECC Action Challenge process.

Coal Transition Capacity Initiatives			
Initiative	Readiness	Anticipated Benefits	Role(s)
Establish NWCDC as a legal organization. 	<p>Status: In progress</p> <p>Feasibility: Feasible, the process of determining what organizational model to pursue would benefit from technical legal assistance</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC</p> <p>Funding: Some potential supporters for this effort have been identified; ongoing costs have been requested from member entities, scaled by size, on a yearly basis</p>	<p>Revenue: Improve capacity to secure millions in grant funding for economic diversification projects</p> <p>Jobs: 1-2 new direct jobs; spur projects that can create hundreds of new jobs</p> <p>Other: Demonstrate regional commitment and coordination, thus becoming more competitive for funding</p>	<p>Note: This effort has begun, but still needs dedicated capacity and funding to move ahead.</p>

<p>Expand capacity funding.</p> 	<p>Status: In progress</p> <p>Feasibility: No study needed</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC</p> <p>Funding: Ongoing funding for capacity not secured; some capacity resources identified and being pursued</p>	<p>Revenue: Improve capacity to secure millions in grant funding for transition projects</p> <p>Jobs: 1-2 new direct jobs; spur projects that can create hundreds of new jobs</p> <p>Other: Demonstrate regional commitment and coordination, thus becoming more competitive for funding</p>	<p>Note: The need for staffing capacity to advance regional priorities in economic diversification generally and coal transition specifically is significant and ongoing.</p>
<p>Advocate for proactive funding.</p>	<p>Status: In progress, needs additional capacity support</p> <p>Feasibility: No study needed</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC</p> <p>Funding: Funding not needed, could use capacity support</p>	<p>Revenue: Improve capacity to secure billions in grant funding for transition projects</p> <p>Jobs: Spur projects that can create hundreds of new jobs over time</p> <p>Other: Enhance federal agency personnel awareness of regional efforts and commitment to coal transition</p>	<p>Conversations have begun with OJT and Rapid Response Team, and federal agency representatives on the BRECC Advisory Board. This work requires capacity and is ongoing.</p>
<p>Promote aligned, partner-led initiatives.</p>	<p>Status: In progress, needs additional capacity support</p> <p>Feasibility: No study needed</p> <p>Leadership: NWCDC</p> <p>Funding: Ongoing funding for capacity not secured; some capacity resources identified and being pursued</p>	<p>Revenue: Support partners efforts to secure grant funding economic development projects</p> <p>Jobs: N/A</p> <p>Other: Demonstrate regional commitment and coordination, thus becoming more competitive for funding</p>	<p>NWCDC can assist partners by promoting and providing letters of support for efforts that are aligned with the organization's mission and strategic policy documents.</p>



Implementation Guidance

Initiative: Establish NWCDC as a legal organization.

Take steps to pursue 501(c)(3) status or similar for the NWCDC to enable the organization to pursue long-term organization funding, hire staff, and further support and manage grants and projects in the region. Consider full-time staff hires and fundraising.

ROLES

- **Lead:** NWCDC
- **Partners:** Participating NWCDC Counties and municipalities, DOLA, OEDIT, OJT, Moffat County Local Marketing District, and local community foundations
- **NWCDC Role:** Lead the effort, identify and pursue funding and technical assistance as needed, provide ongoing organizational maintenance

ACTION STEPS

- Identify and approach funding or in-kind assistance opportunity(s)
- Secure competent legal assistance
- File legal paperwork
- Maintain ongoing legal records and paperwork
- Leverage non-profit status to pursue additional funding opportunities and fund raising

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes
OJT and OEDIT Coal Transition Community Grants OJT and OEDIT have some remaining community grant funding yet to be expended.	Eligible: The Yampa Valley is a Colorado Tier 1 coal community, giving it priority access to this funding. Capacity building initiatives such as this are a top goal for OJT.	Available on a rolling basis. Funding is through a one-time legislative earmark and will be available until expended.	Type: Grant Amount: Varies Match: None	The Yampa Valley has been allocated to receive \$5.15 million in Community Grant Funding. This funding will all go to NWCDC communities, making this the region's least competitive funding opportunity.	NWCDC has already requested capacity funding through OJT. This funding should be used as much as feasible to support NWCDC as a long-term organization facilitating coal transition.
Solicit support from local community foundations such as the Yampa Valley Community Foundation (YVCF) or El Pomar See also: YVCF's Nonprofit Jumpstart program that helps organizations better establish and fundraise after receiving non-profit status.	Given that these requests would not be through a standard grant/technical assistance application process the eligibility, timing, and terms are unknown. This ask would support the YVCF's stated goals and mission of "inspiring collaboration, sustaining nonprofits, and building vibrant communities". Similarly, it is in line with El Pomar's goal of "empowering communities, nonprofits, and leaders." Note, both organizations do state that they don't fund "Organizations that do not have an active 501(c)(3) nonprofit IRS determination letter" - would likely need a personal connection or some confirmation that they'd be willing to help a well-established organization with an IGA to set-up non-profit status.			Local foundations will be less competitive than state-wide or national funding opportunities.	Approach Community Foundations to request support for the hard costs and legal assistance for establishing the NWCDC as a 501(c)(3) or other organizational structure.

Initiative: Expand capacity funding.

The NWCDC should continue to function as a shared regional resource for applying to, administering, and managing coal transition-related funding and assistance opportunities. Seek to provide long-term staffing capacity to manage project and grant contracts, including ensuring ongoing coordination and collaboration.

ROLES

- **Lead:** NWCDC
- **Partners:** Local governments, OJT, Just Transition Fund (JTF), local representatives from state agencies
- **NWCDC Role:** Lead and coordinate regional efforts to increase capacity for coal transition

ACTION STEPS

- Hire or contract staff that can continually to scan for funding opportunities that are relevant and timely to coal transition strategies and initiatives
- Utilize the multijurisdictional structure of NWCDC to advocate for collaborative and/or prioritized funding requests, enhancing appeal and minimizing instances of competing for the same resources
- In the case of coordinated regional grant requests/awards, utilize the leadership structure of NWCDC to determine equitable distribution of resources among projects and partners
- Utilize staff or contractor capacity to pursue and administer funding

FUNDING / ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES					
Opportunity	Eligibility	Timing	Terms	Competitiveness	Notes / Rec
JTF - Federal Access Center Application- Ready Support 1) Direct grants proportional to the size of the potential fed funding, up to \$100k, to support costs associated with developing apps (research, grant writing, partnerships, engagement, and matching funds) 2) Individualized technical assistance provided by a team of experts to help identify funding, understand the application process, build relationships, and review grants.	Eligible: Yes, any community affected by a coal plant and/or mine closure is eligible. (Prioritizes communities experiencing the greatest distress.) Qualified 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations and local governments are eligible.	Application is open on a rolling basis, indefinitely. The first step is a brief interest form and call with JTF.	Type: Grant or Technical Assistance Amount: Up to \$100k Match: None	The program is only open to coal communities and is open on a rolling basis. Some sort of support from them is likely!	Highly recommend utilizing this resource for projects that are well defined and ready to pursue funding. Fills key capacity gaps in grant writing, coordination, matching funds and helps with the application process.

Economic Diversification Plan
February, 2024



<p>JTF Get Ready Challenge For orgs with little experience applying for federal funds in early stages of developing their projects - will receive grants and technical assistance that will help build readiness to apply for and manage federal funding.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, any community affected by a coal plant and/or mine closure is eligible to apply. We will prioritize communities that are experiencing the greatest economic distress.</p>	<p>Currently closed, likely to reopen summer/fall of 2024.</p>	<p>2023 Info: Type: Grant Amount: Up to \$150k with one year of technical assistance Match: None</p>	<p>Fairly competitive given national scale and only available for 8-10 communities. However, it is only available to coal communities.</p>	<p>Keep an eye for the recurrence of this opportunity next year if additional funding assistance is desired. The lack of match and pairing a capacity grant with the technical assistance is excellent.</p>
<p>EDA - Economic Recovery Corps The ERC will recruit and place more than 65 trained Fellows in economic development organizations throughout the nation. Serving 2.5 year terms, Fellows will help organizations develop and execute regional economic development plans and projects in the communities they serve.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, open to a broad range of public and nonprofit community and economic development organizations: City & county govts; Regional coalitions; Economic development orgs and EDDs; Education institutions</p>	<p>2023 applications closed June 30th. Recurrence uncertain.</p>	<p>2023 Info: Type: Capacity assistance Amount: 30 months of dedicated technical assistance and capacity-building Match: None</p>	<p>Very competitive, with hundreds of communities applying to be host organizations and only 65 fellows anticipated to be placed.</p>	<p>The region has already applied to this opportunity and is awaiting final selection. No confirmation if this opportunity will be available in future years. It could provide crucial capacity support for NWDC initiatives as well as one local job for 2.5 years.</p>
<p>Moffat County Local Marketing District Grant Funds projects which help to promote Moffat County as a premier recreation and tourism destination, as well as a business-friendly location for those who enjoy the outdoors. Funds may not be used for capital expenditures other than in relation to visitor centers. The 2023 Operating Plan indicates a desire to fund economic development projects as well.</p>	<p>Eligible: Yes, eligible entities may include private businesses and public agencies.</p>	<p>Application is open on a rolling basis, the tax that funds this program is scheduled to sunset in 2025. Applications will be reviewed at November and April LMD meetings.</p>	<p>Type: Grant Amount: Funding amounts vary Match: None</p>	<p>Very local to Moffat County organizations and projects, significantly less competitive than other opportunities, though yearly funding amounts aren't substantial compared to federal funds.</p>	<p>A very specific opportunity primarily for Moffat County businesses and organizations related to outdoor recreation and tourism, although economic development and diversification are also listed priorities. A good place to refer local entities that could help NWDC's capacity to support the community.</p>

Implementation Resources

A key purpose of this document is to identify and guide realistic, impactful initiatives and to provide NWCDC communication tools about the region's coal transition. To fully implement the initiatives of this plan, NWCDC and regional partners will need to invest significant effort and attract resources not yet secured.

Implementation Approach

With limited capacity, NWCDC will need to pace and prioritize implementation. In this document, initiatives are characterized by both potential benefits and “readiness” factors such as capacity, momentum, and apparent leadership and funding resources. Those that rank highest have been developed with implementation guidance and are expected to be undertaken earliest. The Implementation Timeline, shown as an appendix, indicates the anticipated pacing of initiatives from 2024-2026.

As “the only constant is change”, capacity and funding opportunities will shift in coming years. While Northwest Colorado's Coal Transition Goals and Strategies are likely to remain viable for a decade or more, the Implementation Timeline is designed to be reviewed annually and updated to add, remove, or shift initiatives within the timeline reflecting current realities and new opportunities.

Monitoring

Monitoring can be an important part of tracking implementation progress and how projects create results. Not only does it provide accountability and data that may be needed for grant reporting, but it can also help paint a picture of success for leaders and the broader community. The key goals of this plan are creating new jobs and replacing local government revenue that have been or will be lost in the coal transition. As is true of many of the identified initiatives of this report, regional organizations such as NWCDC often undertake connecting roles and foundational projects that lay the groundwork for jobs and revenue creation. As such, it can be difficult to attribute an exact number of dollars or jobs generated by NWCDC's activities. It is also important to keep monitoring efforts scaled to available organizational resources.

Many key metrics, such as trends in countywide jobs, revenue, and overall economic health, are available through publicly available sources and can be reviewed or compiled by NWCDC and its partners. Some of these metrics may include:

- Gross receipts tax
- Number of businesses
- Property tax base
- Jobs created or total employment
- Revenue created
- Regional domestic product
- Per capita income

In addition, NWCDC internally monitors metrics that demonstrate the organization's capacity and productivity. Examples of such metrics include:

- Total organizational revenue
- Grants applied to, awarded, and funding received
- Local funds invested and additional funds leveraged
- Funded staff and contractor positions

- Active NWCDC members
- Educational events or public convenings
- Development-ready projects

As NWCDC continues to refine and scale its monitoring approach, key considerations for metrics include:

- Who will be assigned to track this metric?
- How often should it be tallied?
- How often should it be reported?
- Where and how will it be tallied and reported?
- Are there target levels of jobs or revenue generation at which coal transition would be considered complete?

Other Resources

A number of other coal transition and capacity resources are available to communities. A good place to start is the [Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization](#) (IWG). A few key resources they offer are:

- [The Getting Started Guide](#) - Includes step by-step- instructions, tips, and tricks for planning, executing, and managing projects. It also links to a number of useful external resources for grant applications and implementation.
- [The IWG Navigator](#) - The energy communities IWG team is available to support communities navigating federal agencies and opportunities. Their request form is simple and an IWG team member will respond to requests within two business days.
- [The Funding Clearinghouse](#) - An extensive and searchable repository of federal funding opportunities. Opportunities can be filtered by status, funding type, agency, and eligibility.

Other notable resources that should be utilized include:

- [The Just Transition Fund \(JTF\)](#) - JTF is a foundation-supported national fund that partners with communities and community-based organizations working to strengthen and diversify their local economies facing transition. They offer a number of funding and support opportunities, including a [Blueprint for Transition](#), the [Federal Access Center](#), which provides early stage and application-ready support through grants and technical assistance, and a [Resource Hub](#), that collects case studies, tools, and other relevant programs and resources.
- [Grants.gov](#) - An official federal resource center for grants and grant-writing help. In particular they provide an extensive list of [applicant trainings](#) and [grant writing tips](#) to help communities trying to navigate federal opportunities.
- [Colorado Office of Just Transition \(OJT\)](#) - OJT works to assist communities and workers transitioning away from the mining and coal sectors, with a focus on retaining and creating jobs, increasing economic diversity, and helping coal industry workers transition. OJT also partners with OEDIT to provide [grant funding](#) to Colorado coal communities.
- Several other [State of Colorado](#) departments also provide funding and assistance to communities and businesses, including the [Department of Local Affairs \(DOLA\)](#) and [Office of Economic Development and International Trade \(OEDIT\)](#).

Related Documents

NWCDC and local partners have completed many important planning, assessment, and strategic efforts prior to the BRECC process. Local plans and reports were reviewed in this process to help identify coal transition strategies that can advance both local and regional interests, and with respect



for the public input many of them embody. This plan strives to encourage regional collaboration by describing strategies that can benefit the broader region, including some efforts that are tied to one or more specific localities. This plan has no authority or intention to supersede any local plan.

Referenced documents include:

- [Northwest Colorado Roadmap \(2022\)](#)
- [Associate Governments of Northwest Colorado \(AGNC\) CEDS \(2021\)](#)
- [Moffat County Vision 2025 Transition Plan \(2020\)](#)
- [Routt County Master Plan \(2022\)](#)
- [Rio Blanco County Master Plan \(2011\)](#)
- [AGNC Economic Emergency Recovery and Resiliency Plan \(2022\)](#)
- [AGNC A Playbook for Innovation in Northwestern Colorado \(2022\)](#)
- [AGNC Data Intensive Economic Report \(DIER\) \(2022\)](#)
- [Economic Transition in Northwest Colorado, Colorado Mesa University \(2020\)](#)
- [Hayden Forward Master Plan, 2020](#)