

2007 Governor's Conservation Report Card

Since 1997 the conservation community has issued a legislative scorecard that shows how lawmakers voted on the most important environmental issues of the year. In 2005, Colorado Conservation Voters began issuing a gubernatorial report card that looks at legislation, executive action, and overall leadership when it comes to protecting our environment. What we hope to achieve with these accountability reports is a fair assessment of how our elected leaders do when it comes to protecting Colorado's natural resources. Our goal is to reward leadership taken, and to point out where more is needed.

It will come as a surprise to few that Governor Ritter received high marks from the conservation community for his first year in office. In fact, the start of the Ritter Administration marks a sea of change in how conservation issues are addressed at the executive level in Colorado. Bill Ritter put the New Energy Economy and wise stewardship of our natural resources front and center in his campaign for governor. What was refreshing for those who have grown tired of politicians making bold promises on the campaign trail but falling short when it comes to governing, is that Gov. Ritter began delivering on these promises within weeks of coming into office.

While Gov. Ritter starts his administration with a strong grade point average, he did not receive straight A's this year. His recent comments on the Roan Plateau were an improvement from the plan developed by the Bureau of Land Management, but did not draw the clear line that conservationists, sportsmen, and local elected officials had hoped for regarding protection of this unique and treasured area.

And, while Gov. Ritter is off to a strong start, much work remains to be done. Two challenges stand out as the most urgent. The first is global warming. Nobel laureate scientists, many working here in Colorado, have declared that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal" – fighting words for scientists. Urgent action is needed at all levels of government, and Colorado should be at the forefront of this effort. Gov. Ritter's Climate Action Plan is a good start, but much of the hard work remains to be done. The second area where urgent action is needed is around the management of oil and gas development in Colorado. Oil and gas drilling is already reshaping our landscape, and state experts forecast that 150,000 wells will be drilled in Colorado over the coming three decades. Gov. Ritter has a critical role to play in our work for permanent protection of some truly unique areas. His administration will also set the direction for day-to-day decisions that will determine how we minimize the lasting impacts of drilling on our communities and wildlife.



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**Organizations are shown for identification purposes only.*

New Energy Economy

A+

As a candidate, Bill Ritter promised to create a New Energy Economy in Colorado “through strong leadership, responsible investment and a clear vision for the future.”

In his first year as governor, Bill Ritter swiftly delivered.

LEGISLATION:

Gov. Ritter’s top 2007 legislative priority was a measure requiring that 20% of Colorado’s electricity come from clean, renewable energy sources by 2020.

Governor Ritter’s success in bringing a diverse set of interests to the table, and ultimately winning the support of long-time renewable opponents such as the rural electric associations, was crucial to this landmark victory.

Gov. Ritter also stepped up where his predecessor had previously failed; signing a proposal to widely expand energy efficiency programs for both electricity and natural gas customers. Experts estimate that this legislation will cut the growth in new demand for electricity in half by 2020.

EXECUTIVE ACTION:

Gov. Ritter issued the Greening State Government Executive Order, ensuring the state leads the way with strong efficiency improvements. Ritter set strong goals for the reduction of energy consumption in state buildings and vehicles, and called for a 75% reduction of solid waste.

LEADERSHIP:

Gov. Ritter is serious not only about his commitment to building the New Energy Economy here at home, but also about the role Colorado can play in moving our nation towards a more secure future. From small ranching communities on the Western Slope, to the halls of Congress, Gov. Ritter has laid out his vision and continues to make the case for economic prosperity and environmental stewardship through investment in a clean, renewable future. Gov. Ritter has also been thoughtful about the team he has assembled, appointing several strong cabinet members and policy advisors with a tremendous depth of knowledge on clean energy policy.

Balanced Oil and Gas Development

A

The number of permits to drill for oil and gas has increased by 280% over the past five years. This increased drilling has resulted in more fragmented wildlife habitat and increased concerns about water and air quality. Gov. Ritter led a call for more balanced oil and gas development during his first year in office.

LEGISLATION:

Gov. Ritter displayed bold leadership when his administration introduced landmark legislation to reform the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission. This body is responsible for determining how drilling operations occur in Colorado, and, until this year, had been stacked with oil and gas industry representatives. Thanks to Gov. Ritter’s desire to create greater balance in how oil and gas drilling occurs, the Commission now includes experts on public health, wildlife and the environment in addition to other

important stakeholders. The governor also signed a measure to give property owners more rights when drilling occurs on their land and a measure to use best management practices for protecting wildlife habitat against the most harmful impacts of oil and gas drilling.

EXECUTIVE ACTION:

The governor has made strong appointments to the Oil and Gas Commission. This new commission has embarked on a critical process that will create new rules to protect wildlife habitat and public health. Gov. Ritter has also appointed leaders to the state Wildlife Commission with expertise when it comes to minimizing impacts of oil and gas development on critical wildlife habitat. Finally, the Division of Wildlife has also taken a stronger stance on behalf of big game and sage grouse protections in the face of expanded oil and gas drilling.

LEADERSHIP:

The conservation community, landowners, sportsmen, and local communities have fought to bring balance to the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission for seventeen years. Gov. Ritter’s leadership was the difference that made this a reality in 2007. Enacting strong rules to implement the letter and the spirit of these new laws will be a test for the governor’s leadership in 2008.



Water

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Ensuring adequate water supplies for growing communities while protecting our rivers and streams is one of the biggest policy challenges in Colorado.

LEGISLATION:

Acknowledging that changing a water right from one use to another can result in diminished water quality in our rivers, Gov. Ritter signed a measure allowing water courts to protect water quality. This legislation, which had failed during seven previous legislative sessions, is especially valuable in light of the increasing number of agricultural water rights being converted to municipal use.

Gov. Ritter signed another measure to increase the fees industry pays to the state for water quality programs, providing much needed revenue

for the state to fund water quality enforcement.

The governor also supported an expansion of the grants to communities to create and implement water efficiency plans. Gov. Ritter and the Department of Natural Resources demonstrated their commitment to local water conservation efforts by making adjustments to free up the necessary dollars for the program.

EXECUTIVE ACTION:

The governor has made several strong appointments to state agencies, boards and commissions with jurisdiction over water issues. As additional vacancies on water boards and commissions occur, the conservation community encourages Gov. Ritter to appoint individuals who will make decisions with the health of the state's waterways in mind.

LEADERSHIP:

During the campaign, Bill Ritter embraced the concepts in "Facing Our Future," the conservation community's blueprint for meeting the water demands of Colorado's growing population without further damaging the state's already stressed rivers. Some Front Range developers and water providers continue to promote old ideas to divert additional water from the West Slope to the Front Range. The time is ripe for Gov. Ritter to articulate a vision for meeting Colorado's growing water needs while protecting and restoring the state's rivers and streams. Strengthening and promoting the state's instream flow program is another important area in 2008. www.westernresourceadvocates.org/facingourfuture/

Protecting Open Spaces & Wild Places

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We are fortunate to live in a state with tremendous beauty. Coloradans treasure their outdoor experiences whether it's a ski vacation, a walk through a local park, or a hunting trip during elk season. Conservationists believe we must protect our most special places so that future generations will also be able to share these experiences.

LEGISLATION:

Gov. Ritter signed a measure giving counties the authority to increase local sales tax for open space protection – a bill that has passed in previous legislatures only to be vetoed. This legislation will provide Colorado counties with an important tool to protect open space and agricultural lands.

EXECUTIVE ACTION:

Gov. Ritter has weighed in on the protection of public lands in Colorado.

He lobbied for and won addition time for the state to make recommendations on the proposed management of the Roan Plateau to ensure the federal government is a good steward of Colorado's public lands and wildlife. Unfortunately, his statements at the end of the review period failed to fully commit the state to the level of protection requested by conservationists, sportsmen, and community leaders. However, in the pending negotiations with the federal government on the Roan, he has the opportunity to speak out against more drilling. Gov. Ritter has advocated for the protection of the Vermillion Basin in Northwest Colorado and has also insisted on the need for reliable protections for Colorado's national forest roadless areas from new oil and gas development.

LEADERSHIP:

The Governor has signaled a new direction by insisting on being part of the discussion when it comes to protection of federally owned public lands in Colorado. His Director for the Department of Natural Resources has been an advocate for protection of Colorado's public lands. On the room for improvement side, conservationists would like to see a more active partnership with the Ritter Administration around increasing public funding for private lands protection.



Global Warming

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With just less than a year as governor under his belt, Bill Ritter has quickly moved Colorado off the long list of states with no plan for tackling our toughest environmental challenge and joined those leading the way with strong goals to reduce global warming pollution.

LEGISLATION:

Gov. Ritter's strong energy agenda during the 2007 session not only paved the way for a new, sustainable economic future for the state of Colorado, but will also be a key part of moving our state forward in the fight against global warming. Energy production from the utility sector accounts for over one-third of all global warming pollution in Colorado, and continuing to increase the amount of clean, renewable energy we produce is essential for real progress to take place.

In addition, Gov. Ritter's legislative efforts last session on efficiency are

already helping move the state towards the goal of being 20% more efficient statewide by 2020. Additionally Ritter signed HB 1146 which instituted the first ever statewide energy code for buildings in Colorado which, when implemented, will account for 16% of our efficiency goal.

EXECUTIVE ACTION:

Gov. Ritter's climate action plan foreshadows strong executive action on global warming, ranging from reducing vehicle emissions by enacting the Clean Cars Program to requiring public utilities to submit resource plans that demonstrate a 20% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020. These new orders come on the heels of the Greening State Government Executive Order, which directed the state government to reduce overall energy consumption by 20% by 2012, and petroleum use by the state vehicle fleet by 25% by 2012.

LEADERSHIP:

Within months of taking office, Gov. Ritter appointed the state's first ever "climate czar" who over the course of a few months worked with agency heads and policy advisors to develop a plan that outlines goals for reducing Colorado's global warming pollution. The plan sets a bold, long-term goal that reflects what we absolutely must do to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. While Colorado's intermediary goal is not as aggressive as other states', this middle-range target will certainly get Colorado moving in the right direction.

The Ritter Administration has faltered at the regional level where we still remain a bystander in the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative, but nevertheless Gov. Ritter has shown leadership in crafting a Climate Plan that sets the stage for meaningful state action for years to come.

Growth

Incomplete

Colorado has added 1.3 million residents since 1990, and the population continues to climb rapidly with an expected million more residents to arrive between now and 2025. Despite the impact new development patterns and transportation choices will have on air & water quality, open space protection, and even global warming pollution, Gov. Ritter has not yet taken the lead to ensure that our state will grow in the best way possible.

LEGISLATION:

Outside of a modest bill allowing communities to make their master plans enforceable, no major growth policy proposals were brought to Gov. Ritter in 2007.

EXECUTIVE ACTION:

To the dismay of smart growth leaders, the Ritter Administration continued to move forward this year with Gov. Owens' plan to develop a portion of the former

Lowry Bombing Range, a large tract of open prairie grassland 25 miles outside of downtown Denver. Despite many unanswered questions around the existence of a sustainable water supply, the impact to the regional transportation system, and the availability of enough land within the existing regional growth area to accommodate new urban development for the next 20 years, the State Land Board forged ahead signing a development agreement in June, 2007. Though Colorado is continuously getting closer to having a state-sponsored sprawl project sprout up and drive development even further outward, there is still time for Ritter to take action to defend the Denver-metro region from significant fiscal and environmental impacts.

On the more positive side, Gov. Ritter convened a Blue Ribbon Panel on Transportation that met intensively in

an effort to address Colorado's transportation funding shortfall. The panel recommended increased investment in transit as well as mitigation for impacts to wildlife & habitat – both important considerations for the conservation community.

LEADERSHIP:

While Ritter has stayed silent on the Lowry debate, in the newly-released Climate Action Plan he expressly recognized the connection between land use patterns, transportation choices, and global warming pollution – and outlined the importance of having smart community and neighborhood design to give Coloradans the option to get out of their cars. This is significant as the state works to hit their climate goals. Smarter growth patterns will play a critical role, and will help Ritter turn the goals from his climate plan into meaningful action.

Colorado Conservation Voters is the independent political voice of Colorado's conservation community. Our mission is to make protecting Colorado's environment a top priority for voters, political candidates, and elected officials. CCV educates the public about the conservation positions of candidates and elected officials, and holds elected officials accountable for their environmental records.