

Executive Summary

In 2018 Delta County received a gold designation from the national SolSmart program for making it faster, easier and more affordable for homes and businesses to go solar. The County also encourages climate-friendly improvements by participating in the State C-PACE program, which allows commercial and multi-family property owners to finance improvements qualifying for energy efficiency, water conservation and renewable energy for existing and newly constructed properties, with repayment of the financing through a voluntary assessment on the owner's property tax bill. Delta County is also a member of the North Fork Valley Coal Mine Methane Working Group that is striving to find solutions to capture coal mine methane waste. Energy efficiency retrofits, renovations and new construction of county facilities are a focus of the County to reduce operational costs. Yet, despite the fact that Delta County is a climate hotspot, and a top-ten environmentally burdened community subject to climate vulnerability,¹ that is the extent of its climate actions.

Rural regions have an essential role in the transition to net-zero emissions economies and building resilience to climate change. Rural regions cover...natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services needed to sustain our lives. They produce food and energy, clean water and air, and sequester carbon. Simultaneously, there is an urgent need to transform emission-intensive activities in rural regions into environmentally friendly and net-zero alternatives, not least as emissions per capita are on average higher in rural regions.

*~Rural Agenda for Climate Action,
Organisation for Economic Co-operation
and Development (OECD)*

Delta County has the opportunity to be a leader in the transition to renewable energy and pollution reduction that diversifies and strengthens our economy, creates good-paying, local jobs, and improves the health and well-being of our communities. **This work should be motivated by an imperative to protect the health and safety of Delta County citizens, as well as the unprecedented opportunity to drive innovation and ensure prosperity for future generations.**²

As stated in Delta County's Master Plan, the County's vision is to:

- remain an agricultural county by protecting agricultural lands and operations and supporting agricultural innovation
- be a leader in protecting clean air and water and continue to protect community health, safety, and welfare for present and future generations
- strive to protect water supplies, delivery systems and water quality... to minimize the potential loss of quantity or quality of its water resources

1. Colorado EnviroScreen Environmental Justice Mapping Tool, https://teeo-cdphe.shinyapps.io/COEnviroScreen_English/ accessed October 21, 2022.

2. See Colorado Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap, January 14, 2021, p.1.

The county cannot achieve this vision without acknowledging the impacts of climate change on Delta County and doing everything within its power to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate the impacts, and reverse the local warming trends that threaten everything the County cherishes and what makes it so special – water, agriculture, public lands, biodiversity, and wildlife.

Currently, Delta County has no policies or plans for protecting agriculture, water resources, or community health, safety, and welfare from the impacts of climate change.

Here are some of the risks that Delta County residents face from climate change:

- Water scarcity due to high temperatures, reduced precipitation, and aridification of soils.
- Food insecurity due to crop failure and dried-out rangeland.
- Health risks, including extreme heat and West Nile Virus.
- Economic insecurity, including loss of livelihood and higher energy costs.
- Public safety, including risk of wildfire, landslides, mudslides, and dust storms.
- Infrastructure vulnerabilities, including degradation of roads and bridges, and rail lines.

While many individual landowners, farmers, and citizens are playing their parts through the establishment of conservation easements, restorative and regenerative farming, driving electric vehicles, building energy-efficient and environmentally friendly homes and businesses, and replacing fossil-fuel energy with solar, more is needed to scale-up the impact. That will come from strategically channeling county and local government resources and authority.

Recommended Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions

(FROM DELTA COUNTY'S
2019 BASELINE GHG
EMISSIONS INVENTORY):

- Electricity Generation 15%
- Transportation 8%
- Oil and Gas 80%
- Buildings 34%
- Increase Carbon Sequestration from Tree Cover and Soil by 31%

***Overall net emissions reduction goal: 54%
31% decrease in gross emissions, and a target carbon sequestration from tree cover and soil -52%***

Citizens for a Healthy Community engaged in this climate action planning study and development of climate action recommendations to fill the void left by the County's inaction over the last decade. The recommended greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) reduction targets considered the following:

- the State's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets as stated in HB19-1261 and HB21-1266;
- Colorado's GHG Emissions Reduction Roadmap;
- the 2019 Delta County Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory;
- objectives and emissions reduction targets identified in West Slope county plans and policies;
- the current state of Delta County warming and climate change impacts;
- the International Energy Agency's conclusion in its May 2021 report *Net Zero in 2050: A roadmap for the global energy system*, that "No fossil fuel exploration is required...as no new oil and natural gas fields are required beyond those that have already been approved for development";
- and the OECD's Rural Agenda for Climate Action.

This report recommends deep reductions. Specifically, it recommends reducing emissions from Electricity Generation by 15%, 8% in Transportation, 80% in Oil and Gas, 50% in Abandoned Coal Mine Methane Waste, and 34% in Buildings (from Delta County's 2019 baseline GHG emissions inventory) to achieve an overall 31% decrease in gross emissions. It also recommends a target carbon sequestration from tree cover and soil of -52% to achieve a 54% decrease in net emissions. Setting, monitoring, and achieving these goals will require commitment from Delta County to hire a sustainability director or appoint County staff responsible for development and implementation of climate action plans, and securing the necessary funding. This report and its recommendations are a first step to empower the County and Delta County citizens to take urgent action to ensure the resiliency of our community and ecosystem upon which we depend for life and prosperity.