



AGELESS ART A PART OF THIS MONTH'S ARTWALK ROUNDUP, B1

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Police to increase presence downtown

Pedestrian, traffic safety ID'd in new strategic plan

Chris Rourke
Times Staff Writer

A new strategic plan drafted by the Gunnison Police Department calls for increased enforcement of traffic and pedestrian safety laws in downtown Gunnison. The draft plan also expands its scope of what the department deems as "downtown."

Police Chief Keith Robinson told Gunnison City Council last week that the new plan identifies objectives his department wants to achieve over the next five years. Chief among those priorities is for citizens and visitors to "feel safe downtown."

In an effort to identify those goals, Robinson said a strategic group was formed comprised of university students and faculty, representatives of Gunnison Watershed REIJ School District, business owners and citizens to review the blocks which surround the intersection of Main Street and Tomichi Avenue. Robinson said the group broadened its definition of "downtown" to include other walkable areas within the city.

CYCLIST STRUCK BY CAR THIS WEEK. SEE A5

"We're trying to get back to what's been coming out in everybody's strategic planning — just feeling safe while you're shopping, or eating, or whatever in that downtown area," Robinson said.

Robinson said enforcement will be key in achieving those safety goals. Officers may be paid overtime wages to spend additional hours patrolling. Specifically, they will be looking to make contact with citizens, and issuing tickets for

Police A10



Ecologist Renee Rondeau speaks with High Country News' Emily Benson about the ecology of Chance Gulch.

Spreading the word on Wet Meadows

Environmental journalists visit restoration work near Gunnison

Roberta Marquette-Strain
Special to the Times

Dark, stormy clouds hung low over Lower Chance Gulch south of Gunnison. A murmur of thunder rumbled every so often. Heavy rain began to fall, but it didn't deter the group of 18 journalists from scribbling notes or snapping photos.

The writers asked questions as ecologist Renee Rondeau discussed the "plug and spread structure complex" — a restoration structure that utilizes a plug made out of soil or clay to block the flow of water — utilized in the area.

The restoration structure is one of more than 1,000 being used as part of the Wet Meadows Restoration-Resilience initiative, which has been working to restore wet meadow habitats to benefit animals such as the Gunnison Sage-grouse and the plants on which they depend.

The journalists spent the week prior traveling across Colorado and areas of Utah and New Mexico as part of the Upper Colorado River Basin Institute put on by the Institute for Journalism and Natural Resources (IJNR).

Wet Meadows A10



Emery Cowan with the Arizona Daily Sun takes a photo at Lower Chance Gulch.

"We have this idea that environmental journalists should actually get out and see the things they're covering, instead of just picking up a phone and making a call."

Melissa Mylchrest

Methane capture may see spark

Officials considering working group to explore options

Alan Wartes
Times Staff Writer

Coal mine methane capture and utilization may be an idea whose day has come — judging from the response to a Gunnison County-led initiative to facilitate the process in the North Fork Valley.

Discussion is underway to create a North Fork Coal Mine Methane Working Group, which would include a broad selection of stakeholders, from conservationists to coal mine operators to state and federal officials.

County Commissioners John Messner and Phil Chamberland reported meeting last Friday with officials representing Gov. John Hickenlooper, Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet, Delta County and Mountain Coal Company — owners of the West Elk Mine near Somerset — to begin developing a "framework" for the initiative.

Two weeks ago, in response to an opportunity to comment on a proposed 1,700-acre expansion of the West Elk mine into the Sunset Roadless Area, County Commissioners wrote a letter of conditional support for the project — so long as methane capture was included in the plan.

The process of mining coal releases large amounts of methane gas which gathers in underground mine facilities, posing a threat to miners through asphyxiation and/or combustion. It also leaks into the atmosphere, where it acts as a potent contributor to global climate change. In fact, researchers believe a spike in methane concentration to be the chief cause of dramatic warming 250 mil-

Methane A10

inside today

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Wet Meadows

from A1

By the time the group reached Gunnison Friday, July 28, their heads had been stuffed with information on various water laws and projects.

But after getting a quick look into what the Wet Meadows initiative is accomplishing, the group didn't leave Gunnison feeling overwhelmed or depressed about the current state of water issues.

"It's hard to be hopeless when you see projects like these and seeing people getting things done," said Osha Davidson, a Phoenix-based freelance journalist.

For the past five years, multiple public and private entities have worked together on the Wet Meadows project. Many of the journalists found this feat encouraging, as they rarely see groups, such as the Bureau of Reclamation, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and local ranchers working together efficiently to solve problems.

"They're interested in solutions here," freelance writer Cheryl Katz said of the people involved in Wet Meadows. "We're interested in problems a lot in the media, but it's much more interesting to know how we can fix problems."

Members of the press from



Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologist Nathan Seward discusses the Gunnison Sage-grouse's habitat before showing the group the plug and spread structure complex at Lower Chance Gulch.

Colorado, Arizona, California and other states attended IJNR's program to learn more about the problems, and solutions, taking place around the Upper Colorado Basin.

Some signed up out of curiosity, others because they are connected to the Colorado River and its livelihood. However, all 18 writers embarked on the eight-day trip to take part in one of the unique institutes that IJNR hosts, which includes talking to a diverse number of experts from different entities and attending presentations — which are usually in the field — to better understand the topics the trips focus on.

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Cheryl Katz

"We have this idea that environmental journalists should actually get out and see the things they're covering, instead of just picking up a phone and making a call," said Melissa Mylchrest, IJNR's director of communications and development.

To achieve that, IJNR — which boasts the motto "get out there" — organizes multiple



Roberta Marquette-Strain

Journalists take photos and notes at Middle Chance Gulch, where they learned about different riparian restoration technique.

beat are often more drawn to the trips. Each of the 18 writers represented a different news agency. That included *High Country News*, *Arizona Daily Sun*, *Newsweek* and the *Associated Press*.

Many journalists mentioned their plans to pursue stories on the issues facing the Upper Colorado River Basin, as well as projects such as Wet Meadows that work to tackle them.

"Environmental reporting is polarizing and one-sided, so we like to see these collaborative programs where we see agencies and private outfits getting together for a common goal," Mylchrest said.

Police

from A1

pedestrian and traffic violations if necessary.

"I always tell everyone we have a 'zero tolerance' but that doesn't mean you have to write everyone a ticket," Robinson said. "As long as people see us stopping someone, they don't

know what we are doing. If we can educate someone, the rest of the public just sees us make the stop and they figure out why we're stopping them, and it spreads from there."

City Manager Russ Forrest said the police department strategic plan is part of a larger assessment to be conducted by city departments. Forrest said city departments have been tasked with identifying ways

"What we are trying to get to is, what are ... the most important things to the community and to the departments from an operational standpoint."

Russ Forrest

they can better serve the public based on citizen feedback. Then, he said, staff are defining

the goals they want to achieve based on those comments.

"What we are trying to get to

is, what are ... the most important things to the community and to the departments from an operational standpoint," Forrest said, adding that measured results will be shared with the community about those priorities and the progress made by city staff.

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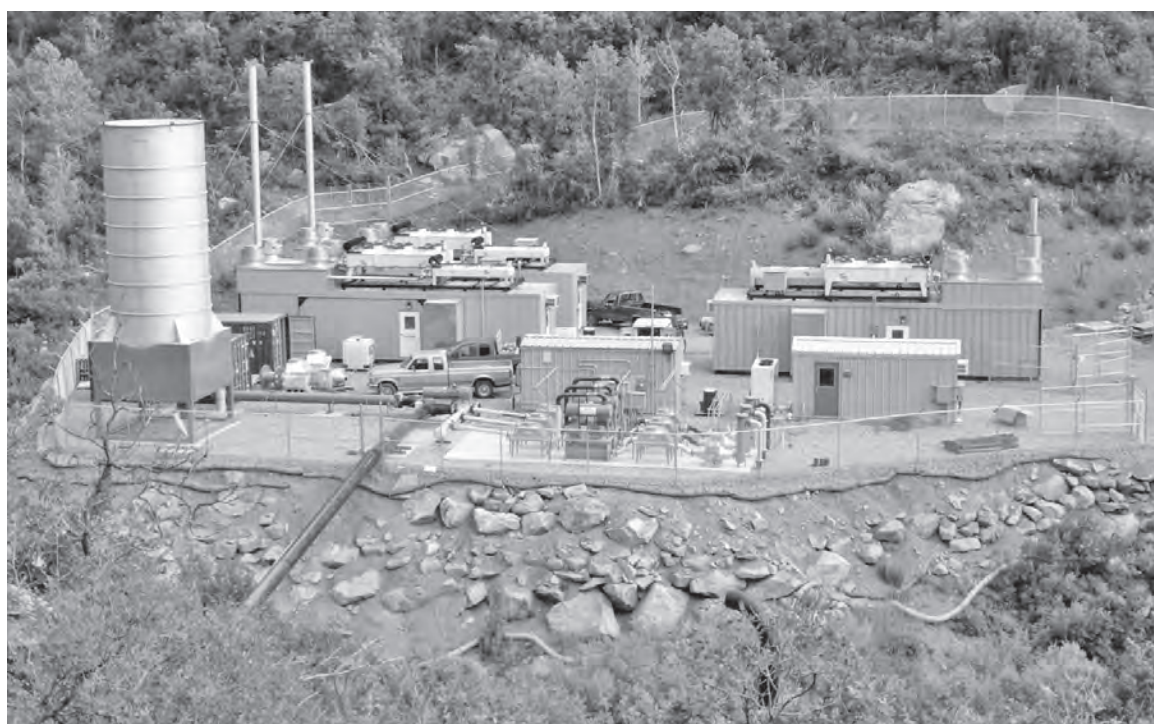
Methane

from A1

lion years ago, which led to what geologists call the Great Permian Extinction — in which up to 90 percent of species on earth perished.

According to the Colorado Greenhouse Gas Inventory 2014, coal mining accounts for roughly 8 percent of total methane emissions in the state — putting the equivalent of 7.54 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2010. By some estimates, coal mines in the North Fork region contribute a large portion of that amount.

But methane is not just a pollutant — it's also a wasted energy resource. Technology exists to capture methane and put it to use as fuel for power generation and other applications. However, for mine operators the question of whether to invest in methane capture has traditionally come down to economic feasibility — which encompasses a range of complex factors from the availability of accessible markets to how governments classify methane in relation to tradable carbon credits.



Courtesy

A facility is pictured here that generates electricity from captured methane at the now-closed Oxbow Mining in northern Gunnison County.

At the end of 2012, it's estimated there were 38 methane capture projects active in the U.S. — including one in the North Fork Valley. Gunnison Energy, Oxbow Mine LLC, Vessels Coal Gas, Aspen Ski Co. and Holy Cross Energy have partnered to capture methane

at the now-closed Oxbow Mine and use it to generate around three megawatts of electricity.

"Ever since I toured the Vessels project in 2013 as a new commissioner, I've wondered why we aren't doing more (methane capture)," said Commissioner Jonathan

Houck. "It just makes sense."

A report prepared by Western State Colorado University Master of Environmental Management student Chris Nutgrass estimated the potential to generate up to 10 megawatts of electricity in the North Fork, drawing meth-

ane from several coal mines in the area.

"The governor's office is very, very interested in this," said Messner. "They are willing to involve the Department of Local Affairs, Department of Natural Resources, Colorado Energy Office and the Department of Health and the Environment."

"Basically, they don't want to impose anything on us at this point, but they're all available if we want to bring them in," added Chamberland.

After President Trump announced a decision to end U.S. participation in the Paris Agreement — an international climate accord aimed at holding global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius — Gov. Hickenlooper recently affirmed Colorado's commitment to abide by its terms anyway. Messner posed that significantly reducing methane emissions in the state — beginning with a North Fork pilot program — could be an attainable way to help meet those goals.

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