

BIG PIVOTS

Energy and water transitions in Colorado and beyond

January 5, 2021 Issue No. 26

<https://mountaintownnews.net>

Xcel says it wants to close Hayden in 7 years. Others itch for much sooner

by Allen Best

For environmental advocates, the closing of the Hayden coal-burning power plants in 2027 and 2028 announced on Monday by Xcel Energy won't be soon enough. Xcel ratepayers, they say, would be better off with retirements early in the decade, not later.

Contemplating the loss of property tax revenues from the plants and likely an associated coal mine, elected officials in Hayden and Routt County see that day of reckoning arriving plenty soon.

The fulcrum for this debate will be the Colorado Public Utilities Commission, which later this year will begin hearing the evidence.

Western Resource Advocates will be among those calling for earlier retirements. "Ceasing operation of the Hayden coal plant before 2027-28 could bring even greater

economic and environmental benefits for the West," said Erin Overturf, deputy director of the group's Clean Energy Program.

The Sierra Club echoed that argument, citing a 2019 report by Strategen that found closing the two Hayden units by 2023 would save customers of Xcel and other utilities \$246 million. Calculating benefits through the social cost of carbon, the benefits would increase to \$1.3 billion.

At least one state senator agrees. "Let's be blunt about it. The Hayden power plant is not economic today. It makes sense to close it as soon as possible," says State Sen. Chris Hansen, a Democrat from Denver and among the architects of key energy legislation of recent years. "There are alternative power options that are much less costly and better for the environment."

An even more blunt assessment came from Ron Lehr, a former PUC commissioner. "This old dog is losing money," he said in an e-mail. "Why lose more money by waiting 7 or 8 more years to stop the bleeding. Is it because Xcel shareholders get paid to hang on, even though consumers pay more than they should?"

Leslie Glustrom, senior advisor of Clean Energy Action, said this decision should have come years ago—even before the Hayden plant was outfitted with expensive pollution reduction equipment. A 2010 law, Clean Air-



The sun will set on the Hayden Generating Station, probably during this decade, as it did in a literal way in early March. Photo/Allen Best

Clean Jobs, accommodated continued use of Hayden after expensive retrofits.

Those retrofits, she said, served primarily to add to the rate-base of Xcel, the amount of investments that by law is used to calculate rates the utility can charge consumers. The greater the investment the utility is paying off, in theory, the more that Xcel should be able to charge customers.

“It created a false sense of hope for the school and other districts,” says Glustrom. “They could have instead spent the decade planning for the inevitable transition. That’s tragic for the many workers and families that could have used that time to prepare for a different future.”

As early as 2009, she said, it was clear that the already decreasing cost of renewable energy would justify coal plant closures by around 2015. She pointed out that Xcel then had different managers.

As majority owner, Xcel operates both plants. Two other utilities, Phoenix-based Salt River Project and Portland-based PacifiCorp, own slightly less than half of the plants and their output.

In announcing the accelerated retirements, Xcel said it will work with the

communities and stakeholders to explore new uses of the Hayden site that will “promote clean energy innovation and economic opportunity” in Northwest Colorado. It did not provide details.

“Hayden has been part of the Northwest Colorado community for 55 years. We are committed to supporting our employees and the region as we move forward with our clean energy transition in Colorado. We have a long track record of successfully transitioning coal plants we’ve retired,” said Alice Jackson,

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**Alice Jackson
Chief executive
Xcel Energy-Colorado**

president of Xcel Energy’s Colorado division, in a statement.

“Our top priority is finding new roles for our workers and supporting the communities that have served us so well,” Jackson added.

The plant employs about 75 people, and no layoffs are anticipated. Instead, Xcel Energy and its co- owners will manage the transition through attrition, retirement and retraining employees in partnership with IBEW Local 111, which represents the workforce.

Doug Monger, a Routt County commissioner until Monday, said Xcel has shared some ideas with local community leaders.

“They have land, they have water, they have a workforce, they have (electrical) transmission, and they have a railroad siding into Hayden, which is available as well,” said Monger. Xcel, he added, has some things it is focusing on, “but I would rather you hear it from them than me.”

Hansen, the state senator, said he expects legislation to be introduced in the session that begins Tuesday on behalf of Xcel that provides the company a pathway to make substantial capital investments. That investment could overlap with various ideas—including those of Hansen—to make use of existing transmission lines in and out of Hayden and Craig coupled with new storage devices such as green hydrogen or other emerging technology.

Taking the long view, Routt County Commissioner Tim Corrigan described a continued transition to tourism and sustained attention to community infrastructure that makes the communities attractive places to people with location-neutral jobs, a process underway since the 1990s. The shift was accelerated last year by

the escape of urban residents because of covid.

“I don’t view this as the end of the world. I just view this as the turning of the page,” said Corrigan. “We will adapt. The question is how well we will adapt.”

Lost property tax collections will challenge local districts to varying degrees. The Hayden School District last year collected 57% of property tax assessments from the power plant. The same goes for the local fire and library districts.

A portion of the lost revenue to the school district will be made up by the state in a process called backfilling. That process, however, will not make the Hayden School District budget whole, explains Monger.

If you lose \$1 million in operational budget, the state will pick up a portion of that loss, maybe three-quarters, explains Monger, a former school board member. “You don’t stay whole.”

Of even greater concern is the ability of the school district to pay for the new PK-high school that was completed in September. The state doesn’t backfill any of the debt for capital infrastructure.

The property tax hit to Routt County will be relatively modest. The power plant was responsible for 5.27% of property tax revenues last year, but it has been declining over time as the coal units have aged. The largest sector is commercial and residential real estate in and around Steamboat Springs, the county seat.

Also questionable is whether the closing of the coal plants will mean the end of production at the Twentymile Mine—or whether the mine has enough coal to last to 2028. The production in 2019 had

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**Tim Corrigan
Commissioner
Routt County**

dropped to 2.5 million tons, a third of the production from a decade before.

Production almost certainly declined even more in 2020 as the owner, Peabody, furloughed significant number of employees in May. Production numbers for 2020 haven't been reported.

Twentymile Mine managers told Routt County tax officials last year that the mine had reserves for only 3.5 years of production. That projection correlates with the declining valuation of the mine, says Gary Peterson, the assessor of Routt County.

Once the largest single taxpayer in Routt County, Twentymile's payments last year were responsible for just 1.16% of the county's total property tax revenues. Peterson expects it to be less than 1% this year.

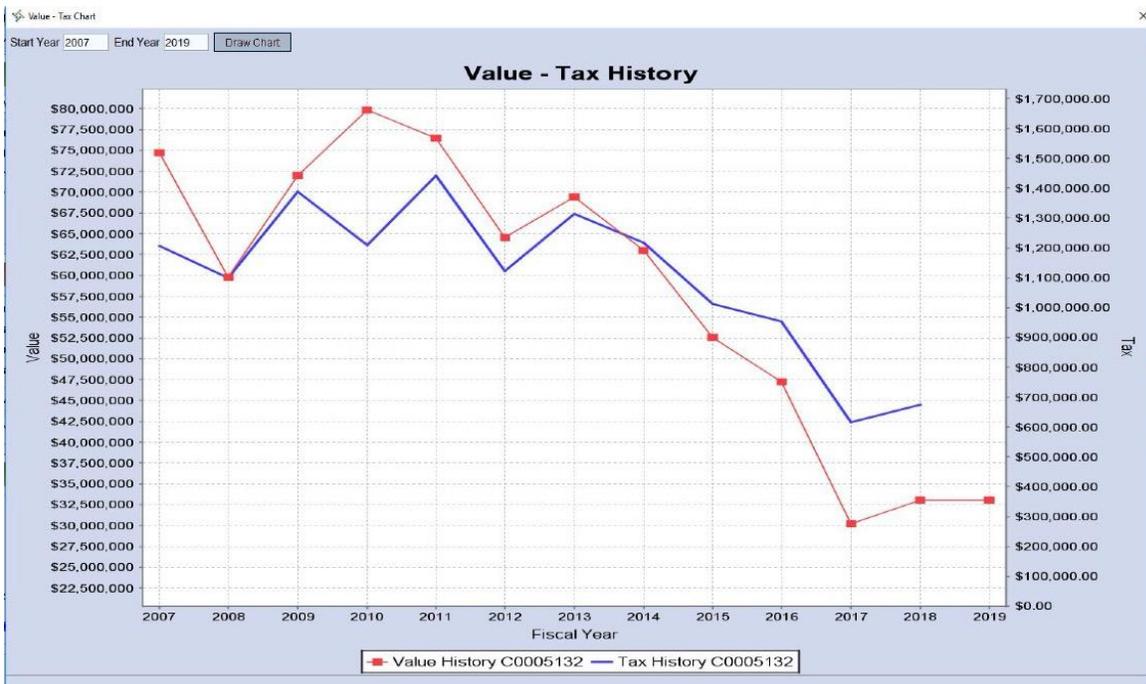
In the area around Oak Creek and Yampa, called South Routt, the coal mine still represents a hefty portion of the tax base. But, again, it has been declining steadily. As recently as 2015, the mine represented about 40% of the tax assessment in the South Routt School District. This year, Peterson expects it to fall below 10%.

"It's getting to the point that when the mine does shut down, it won't be the big scary shift that it would have been 7 or 8 years ago," Peterson says.

In theory, coal mine owner Peabody could develop the infrastructure to excavate additional coal in the area. Coal remains abundant. But the existing production resulted from a \$100 million long-wall investment. Another investment is unlikely given the shrinking market for coal. Too, coal may be more easily extracted from the ColoWyo Mine south of Craig, on the border of Moffat and Rio Blanco counties.

If the coal mine's property-tax payments have diminished, they still represent a vital source of revenue fire, hospital and other taxing districts in South Routt, says Corrigan, the county commissioner from that district, who lives near Yampa. Too, there is the loss of jobs, always tragic.

That said, Corrigan says he's optimistic about the future. Routt County has grown its ability to survive —and thrive—beyond resource extraction. The challenge will be to maintain community infrastructure, to grow the tourism economy and attract location-neutral workers.



Colorado's energy pivot in 2020 told in these dozen stories

by Allen Best

In 2020, the raft of bills passed by Colorado legislators in 2019 began altering the state's energy story. Too, there was covid. There was also the continued movement of forces unleashed in years and even decades past, the eclipsing of coal, in particular, with renewables. Some Colorado highlights:

1) Identifying the path for Colorado's decarbonization

Colorado in 2019 adopted a goal of decarbonizing its economy 50% by 2030 (and 90% by 2050).

The decarbonization targets align with cuts in greenhouse gas emissions that climate scientists warn must occur to reduce risk of the most dangerous climatic disruptions.

In September 2020, the Colorado Air Quality Control Division released its draft roadmap of what Colorado must do to achieve its targets. The key strategy going forward is to switch electrical production from coal and gas to renewables, then switch other sectors that currently rely on fossil fuels to electricity produced by renewable generation. But within that broad strategy there are dozens of sub-strategies

that touch on virtually every sector of Colorado's economy.

A core structure to the strategy is to persuade operators of coal-fired power plants to shut down the plants by 2030, which nearly all have agreed to do. It's an easy argument to make, given the shifted economics. The harder work is to shift electrical use into current sectors where fossil fuels dominate, especially transportation and buildings.

It's a lot—but enough? By February, environmental groups were fretting that the Polis administration was moving too slowly. During summer months, several members of the Air Quality Control Commission, the key agency given authority and responsibility to make this decarbonization happen, probed both the pace and agenda of the Polis administration.

John Putnam, the environmental programs director in the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, and the team assembled to create the roadmap have defended the pacing and the structural soundness, given funding limitations.

Days before Christmas, the Environmental Defense Fund filed a petition with the Air Quality Control Commission. The [85-page document](#) calls for sector-specific and legally binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions. It's called a backstop. The proposal calls for a cap-and-trade system of governance, similar to what California created to rein in emissions. New England states also have used cap-and-trade to govern emissions from electrical generation. In this case, though, the

Colorado Solar & Storage Association gladly supports Colorado-based energy journalism and is pleased to underwrite this effort.



emission limits would apply to all sectors. EDF's submittal builds on an earlier proposal from Western Resource Advocates.

"The state is still far from having a policy framework in place capable of cutting greenhouse gas emissions at the pace and scale required—and Colorado's first emissions target is right around the corner in 2025," said one EDF blog post.

This proposal from EDF is bold. Whether it is politically practical even in a state that strongly embraces climate goals is the big question, along with whether it is needed. All this will likely get aired out at the Air Quality Control Commission meeting on Feb. 18-19.

2) Coal on its last legs as more utilities announce closures

It was a tough year for coal—and it's unlikely to get better. Tri-State Generation and Transmission and Colorado Springs Utilities both announced they'd close their last coal plants by 2030. Xcel Energy and Platte River Power Authority had announced plans in 2018.

That will leave just a handful of coal plants operated by Xcel Energy puffing, but who knows what state regulators will rule or what Xcel will announce in 2021. It has a March 31 deadline to submit its next 4-year electric resource plan.

Meanwhile, Peabody, operator of the Twentymile Mine near Steamboat Springs,



furloughed half its employees in May, partly because of covid, and in November announced it was considering filing for bankruptcy. If so, it will be the second time in five years.

It was an image from Arizona, though, that was iconic. The image published in December by the *Arizona Republic*, a newspaper, showed three 750-foot stacks at the Navajo Generating Station at Paige beginning to topple.

3) How and how fast the phase-out of natural gas?

Cities in California and elsewhere have adopted bans on new natural gas infrastructure in most buildings. Several states have adopted bans against local bans. Colorado in 2020 got a truce until 2022.

But the discussion has begun with a go-slow position paper by Xcel Energy and heated arguments from environmental hard-hitter Rocky Mountain Institute. It's insane to build 40,000 new homes a year in Colorado with expensive natural gas infrastructure even as Colorado attempts to decarbonize its economy, Eric Blank, appointed by Polis in December to chair the PUC, told Big Pivots last summer. The PUC held an [information hearing in November](#) on natural gas.

State Sen. Chris Hansen, a Denver Democrat, sponsored a bill that would have created a renewable natural gas standard, to provide incentives to dairies and others to harness their methane emissions. The bill got shelved in the covid-abbreviated legislative session. Expect to see it in 2021.

But even without the incentive, Boulder in July completed a biogas conversion project at its sewage treatment plant. [It was the fourth such project in Colorado in the last several years.](#)

Adding a hard edge to the natural gas story was the sabotage to the Black

Hills natural gas distribution system just after Christmas, causing 3,500 properties to lose their heat. An “Earth first” tag was left at one of the three sites of sabotage suggested a political statement.

4) Colorado begins effort to define a Just Transition

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis spent the first Friday in March in Craig and Hayden, two coal towns in northwest Colorado.

Legislators in 2019 created an Office of Just Transition. The goal is to help communities and workers in the coal sector affected by the need to pivot to cleaner fuels create a glide path to a new future. No other state has the same legislative level of ambition.

There are many places in Colorado where the impacts of this transition will be felt, but perhaps no place quite as dramatically as in the Yampa River Valley of northwest Colorado.

Polis and members of the Just Transition team created by legislators spent the afternoon in the Hayden Town Hall, hearing from disgruntled coal miners, union representatives, and local elected and economic development officials. That very afternoon, the first covid case in Colorado was reported.

Legislators funded only an office and one employee. That remains the case. Some



Rich Meisinger Jr., business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, explains an aspect of the coal economy to Gov. Jared Polis in March.

money will have to be delivered in coming years to assist workers and, to a lesser degree, the impacted communities. As required by law, [a final report to legislators was posted in late December.](#)

Legislators will have to decide whether the task force got it right and, if so, where the money will come from to assist workers and communities in coming years.

Meanwhile, in Craig, and elsewhere, the thinking has begun in earnest about the possibilities for diversification and reinvention. But it will be tough, tough, tough to replace the property tax revenues of coal plants in the Hayden, Craig, and Brush school districts.

For more depth, see the [first](#) and [second](#) stories I published on this (via Energy News Network) in August.

5) Will the West’s newest coal plant make it to 20 years?

Comanche 3 began operation in 2010, and it remains the newest (and likely last) coal-burning unit in not only Colorado but all Western states.



It’s been a lemon. In 2020 the Colorado Public Utilities Commission decided to order a deep dive into why Xcel Energy, the primary owner, was forced to spend so much money on this plant. Those costs get passed along to customers. The commission first [broached the subject in May](#) and then made the [decision formal in October.](#)

The question driving the upcoming investigation is whether Xcel customers, who represent 53% of electrical demand in Colorado, would be better served by shuttering this coal plant well ahead of its originally scheduled 2060-2070 closing.



6) Work begins on giant solar farm that will power steel mill

In October, site preparation work began on the periphery of Pueblo on 1,500 acres of land owned by Evraz, the steel mill, for a giant 240-megawatt solar farm. Keep in mind that nearby Comanche 3 has a generating capacity of 750 megawatts. Commercial operations will begin at the end of 2021.

Evraz worked with Xcel Energy and Lightsource BP to make the giant solar installation happen. The company expects the solar power to provide nearly all of its needs. See artist depiction on page 15. [See August story.](#)

7) A new framework for oil and gas operations

Colorado's revamped oversight of oil and gas drilling and processing continued with a new legislatively-delegated mission for the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission: protecting public safety, health, welfare, and the environment. The old mission: fostering development.

Guiding this is a new 5-member commission, only one of whom can be from the industry. The 2019 law also specified shared authority over oil and gas regulation with water and other commissions to also

have say-so. And local governments can adopt more restrictive regulations.

The specifics of this came into sharp focus in November with 574 pages of new rules adopted after 10 months of proceedings, including what both industry and environmental groups called cooperative and collaborative discussions.

The new rules simplify the bureaucratic process for drilling operators, require that drilling

operations stay at least four blocks (i.e. 2,000 feet) from homes; old regulations required only a block. The new rules also end the routine venting of natural gas.

The new rules likely won't end all objections but the level of friction may drop because of the rules about where, when, and how.



Drilling pads in eastern Weld County.



Both idle fleet pickup trucks and drilling rigs were abundant in Weld County in June.

8) Covid clobbers the drilling rigs and idles the pickups

Oil prices dove from near \$60 a barrel in January to \$15.71 in May. All but 7 drilling rigs in Colorado’s Wattenberg Field had folded by then, compared to 31 working a year before. Covid-dampened travel had slackened demand, and supply was glutted by the production war between Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Unemployment claims from March to November grew to 8,425, compared to 30,000 direct jobs in 2019. The full impact may have been 230,000 jobs in Colorado, given the jobs multiplier. Dan Haley, chief executive of Colorado Oil and Gas Association, at year’s end reported cautious optimism for 2021 as prices escalated and vaccines began to be administered.

Covid slowed the renewable sector, too, causing Vestas to announce in November it would lay off 185 from its blade factory in Brighton.

9) Utilities mostly hold onto empires—for now

Xcel Energy got a big win in November when Boulder voters approved a new franchise after a decade-long lapse while the city investigated creating its own utility. Black Hills Energy crushed a proposed municipal break in Pueblo. And Tri-State Generation & Transition stalled exit attempts by two of its three largest member cooperatives, Brighton-based United Power

and Durango-based La Plata Energy, through an attempt to get jurisdiction in Washington D.C.

But there was much turbulence. Xcel lost its wholesale supplier contract to Fountain, a municipality. Canon City voters declined to renew the franchise with Black Hills. And Tri-State lost Delta-Montrose, which is now being supplied by Denver-based Guzman Energy, a relatively new wholesale supplier created to take advantage of the flux in the utility sector. Low-priced renewables have shaken up the utility sector – and the shaking will most certainly continue as the relationship between consumers and suppliers gets redefined.

10) Two utilities take lead in the race toward 100% renewables

Xcel Energy in December 2018 famously announced its intent to reduce carbon emissions from its electrical generation 80% by 2030 (as compared to 2005 levels), a pledge put into law in 2019. In 2020, nearly all of Colorado’s electrical generators mostly quietly agreed to the same commitment.

Meanwhile, several utilities began publicly plotting how to get to 100%. Most notable were Platte River Power Authority and its four member cities in northern Colorado. Holy Cross Energy, the electrical cooperative serving the Vail-Aspen, Rifle areas, announced its embrace of the goal in December. CEO Bryan Hannegan said the utility sees multiple pathways to this summit.



Rivian expects to begin delivering pickup trucks to the marketplace in 2021.

11) Gearing up for transportation electrification

You can now get a fast-charge on your electric car in Dinosaur, Montrose, and a handful of other locations along major highways in Colorado, but in 2021 that list will grow to 34 locations.

Colorado is gearing up for electric cars and trying to create the infrastructure and programs that will accelerate EV adoption, helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, now the No. 1 source, while delivering hard-to-explain-briefly benefits to a modernized grid.

Also coming will be new programs in Xcel Energy's \$110 million transportation electrification program approved by the PUC just before Christmas. It creates the template going forward.

Now comes attention to medium- and heavy-duty transportation fleets. Easy enough to imagine an electrified Amazon van. How about electric garbage trucks?

Colorado and 14 other states attempted to send a market signal to manufacturers with a July agreement of a common goal of having medium- and heavy-duty vehicles sold within their borders be fully electric by mid-century. Of note: Other than Vermont, Colorado was the only state among the 14 lacking an ocean front.

Many await arrival of the first Rivian pickup trucks in 2021, while Ford is working on an electric version of its F-series pickup.

12) Disproportionately impacted communities

The phrase "disproportionately impacted communities" joined the energy conversation in Colorado in 2020.

In embracing the greenhouse gas reduction goals, in 2019, state legislators told the Air Quality Control Commission to identify "disproportionately impacted communities," situations where "multiple factors, including both environmental and socio-economic stressors, may act cumulatively to affect health and the environment and contribute to persistent environmental health disparities."

The law goes on to describe the "importance of striving to equitably distribute the benefits of compliance, opportunities to incentivize renewable energy resources and pollution abatement opportunities in disproportionately impacted communities."

Specific portions of Air Quality Control Commission meetings were devoted to this. What this will mean in practice, though, is not at all clear.

A version of this was previously published by Empower Colorado.

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Summit Lake and Mt. Evans.

Mt. Blue Sky: another proposed name for state advisory board to consider for Mt. Evans

by Allen Best

Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes have announced an official petition to rename Mt. Evans, the 14,264-foot peak in the front tier of mountains west of Denver.

Mt. Blue Sky, their proposed name, was arrived at after consultation with The Wilderness Society. It signifies the Arapaho who were known as the Blue Sky People and the Cheyenne who have an annual ceremony of renewal of life called Blue Sky.

“It is time to rename Mt. Evans and remove the stain of this name from our public lands,” said Paul Spitler, director of wilderness policy at The Wilderness Society. “No name can undo the pain and suffering caused by the Sand Creek Massacre, but removing the name of the man most responsible for the massacre honors the very tribes that Evans sought to destroy. There is no place to honor perpetrators of atrocities on America’s public lands.”

Wilderness Society wants to use Colorado peak as prototype for methodical cleansing of Western landscape

The petition by the tribes was initiated in consultation with The Wilderness Society following that organization’s probing during the last two years of the namesakes of federal wilderness areas, national forests,

and features of public lands as well as rivers and streams.

Sand Creek remains one of darkest stains on Colorado's history. It occurred on Nov. 29, 1864, in the dry bed of Sand Creek as it flows across the Great Plains in eastern Colorado, about 180 miles from Denver. The flood of settlers to the new territory of Colorado created after the discovery of gold in 1858 had inflamed tensions between native tribes and newcomers. Depredation and acts of bloodshed were committed on both sides.

As summer waned, a tribal leader among some of the bands bravely approached a U.S. military fort along the Arkansas River to solicit interest in peace. Defying orders to kill all Indians, Ed Wynkoop, the post commander at Fort Lyon, was intrigued. This led to an envoy of Black Kettle and several others traveling to Camp Weld, near what is now downtown Denver, that September. The Indians returned to eastern Colorado, near the Kansas border, believing they had an agreement that they would not be attacked if they stayed true to their promise of peacefulness. John Evans, after whom the mountain is named, was territorial governor during those sessions.

Before arriving in Colorado, Evans already had had an illustrative career. He had founded Northwestern University, in Evanston, Ill., and as a physician, he had accomplished much in medicine. Later, he founded the University of Denver and became wealthy because of his investments in railroads and other infrastructure of the new state. His name lingers in towns, streets, and other public places in Colorado and several states.

Just what role Evans played in the massacre remains disputed. Evans was absent from Colorado that November when the Colorado Third Cavalry led by Col. John Chivington made its way to southeastern Colorado to attack the peacefully assembled



The tombstone of John Evans at Denver's Riverside Cemetery.

Cheyenne and Arapaho. A majority were women, children, and older males. The younger males were mostly absent—and, it must be noted, not necessarily bound to the terms of peace negotiated in Denver.

Attacking at dawn, the soldiers from the gold camps of Colorado killed an estimated 150 of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe. Mutilations were commonplace and obscene. About three-quarters of those killed were women and children. The U.S. Army led an investigation in following months that resulted in the formal condemnation of Chivington.

In advance of the 150th anniversary of the massacre in 2014, both Northwestern University and the University of Denver commissioned in-depth investigations by historians and others to examine the culpability of Evans. They found no evidence Evans knew of the plans and, had he known, likely would have opposed them. But they didn't let him off the hook, either. One tell-tale fact is that even decades later he did not condemn what happened.

See the [Northwestern University study](#) and find the University [of Denver report here](#).

The Wilderness Society has concluded that Evans created the climate in which the Sand Creek Massacre could occur. Spittler points to directives from Evans to

Colorado residents to kill and destroy natives. A telling fact, he says, is that President Andrew Johnson dismissed him as territorial governor.

Tribal representatives see no reason to continue celebrating the career of Evans with his name on a fourteener.

“One hundred and fifty-six years ago, Territorial Governor Evans devised the strategy for the massacre at Sand Creek for political gain, and now the victims, the Cheyenne and Arapaho People, will continue to be known in Colorado through the renaming of that mountain as Mt. Blue Sky,” said Fred Mosqueda, Arapaho coordinator of the Culture Program of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes.

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names has final authority. Jennifer Runyon, senior researcher with the national board, advised the Colorado board that state recommendations are very influential.

In past controversies about names, the positions of local jurisdictions have typically been solicited and often honored. Mt. Evans is in Clear Creek County. The county previously had officially registered opposition to a name change, but that opposition was registered in error, says Randy Wheelock, one of three county

commissioners. The county took no position, nor has it established one now.

The county’s position will be determined by stakeholder discussion, he says. He considers Cheyenne and Arapaho people to be important voices in discussions within Clear Creek County. That includes those for whom Clear Creek County was part of their ancestral homes.

As an individual, though, Wheelock has strong feelings: He was moved enough to get up at 3 a.m. on the last Sunday in November to drive to the [Sand Creek National Historic Site](#) to participate in the dawn memorial that is held each year after Thanksgiving.

“I recognize the atrocities caused by Governor Evans at Sand Creek and consider it wholly unacceptable for such a prominent place as Mt. Evans to be named for a man responsible for such horrific acts,” he said.

He says he strongly supports changing the names of both Evans and the adjoining Squaw Mountain.

The latter name, a reference to an anatomical part of women who are Native American, is seen by most tribes as offensive.

“My hope and intention are that we will move directly from or in parallel with the Mt. Evans conversation to that about Squaw,” he says.

Colorado advisory board to process for names on Friday

A key tribunal will be the new [Colorado Geographic Naming Advisory Board](#) appointed by Gov. Jared Polis last year to recommend to him positions on renaming proposals. It has now met twice, during which it grappled with its mission and the housekeeping matters of a new organization.

On Friday, Jan. 8, it will take up the process to consider naming and renaming features. The board, however, will not take up the proposals to rename Mt. Evans.

For the Wilderness Society, this will be the first of many such efforts, the result of a new focus on equity and inclusivity on public lands, says Spitler. In 1993, The Wilderness Society and other conservation organizations supported creation of the Mt. Evans Wilderness Area, supporting the choice of the name, unaware of the history.

But with the new drive to reexamine the historical record, the Wilderness Society began sifting through names and also reached out to tribes. Mt. Evans and the wilderness area were at the top of the list.

“We had no idea that (wilderness) area was named for a man who facilitated the Sand Creek Massacre,” says Spittler. “Now we are recognizing that we can’t ignore these issues anymore.”

U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland, a Democrat from New Mexico (and Biden administration nominee for Secretary of Interior) introduced a bill in September. The Reconciliation in Place Names Act would create an Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names on geographic features to be renamed and recommendations to Congress on renaming Federal land units with offensive names.

“All visitors to public lands deserve to feel welcome and comfortable while enjoying all that nature has to offer them. However, offensive or racist place names are restricting access and prevent many from feeling welcome on lands that belong to all of us,” Haaland said in announcing the legislation in September.

“It’s past time to change the offensive names of public lands, especially with input from groups who have been discriminated against.”

Experience abounds in Polis appointments to state air commission

Experience abounds in the appointments by Colorado Gov. Jared Polis to the Air Quality Control Commission, the body with the primary responsibility for creating policies necessary to decarbonize Colorado’s economy 50% in the next decade.

Polis appointed Martha Rudolph to the commission for the first time, reappointed Curtis Rueter, and appointed Anthony Gerber after a brief lapse.

They replace Tony Williams, of Georgetown, whose term expires at the end of January, and Tom Gonzales, of Fort

Collins. Gonzales, the public health director of Larimer County, resigned because of the crush of work caused by the covid pandemic.

Rudolph, an attorney, had directed environmental programs at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment



Martha Rudolph

from 2007 until early 2019. The position is now held by John Putnam, one of the key architects of the decarbonization roadmap.

Before that she had been with the Denver law firm of Sherman and Howard, a senior counsel at Kinder Morgan, and an attorney in the Colorado Attorney General’s Office. She’s a Democrat.

Rudolph was previously appointed chair of the Regional Air Quality Council, a body that works closely with the air commission, a term that expires in 2022.

Rueter, a Republican, is an engineer by training. He’s the manager of liquid natural gas and compressed natural gas development in U.S. on-shore operations for Noble Energy. He had previously been environmental and regulatory manager for the company.



Anthony Gerber

In his previous work he had been engaged in the air quality issue and natural gas processing.

Gerber, also a Democrat, had previously been on the commission but was not reappointed last summer. He’s a physician with expertise in pulmonology, and he also has a Ph.D. He is affiliated with National Jewish and is also a professor of medicine-pulmonary sciences and critical care at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

The massive 250-megawatt solar farm at Pueblo will soon be evident to drivers of I-25 on the city's south side. The Comanche Generating Station is on the high-right end of this depiction.

