



# Policy Update

by Tom Plant



As the effects of climate change become more apparent with a year of record hurricanes, rising oil prices, concerns over increasing levels of mercury from power plants, and continued unrest in the oil producing Mid-East, political attention has taken a sharp turn toward alternative energy and energy efficiency in a way that we haven't seen since the oil embargos of the 1970s.

Nowhere was this shift more stark than during the 2006 State of the Union Speech when ex-oilman President George Bush declared that the country is "addicted to oil". The sense in Washington is that the time is ripe for investment in energy efficiency and alternative energy development.

Colorado is just a bit ahead of the curve. With the passage of Amendment 37 in November of 2004, we established a system of rebates to create incentives for investment in home solar power. In March 2006, the rebate program went into place. A homeowner living in the Xcel territory can now receive \$4.50 per watt in rebates – covering about 50% of the costs of an installed solar system. Further Federal tax credits of up to \$2,000 can help the homeowner save even more.

In November 2005, Boulder County passed County Referendum 1A which included nearly \$2 Million in investments in energy efficiency over the next three years. Boulder will begin initiating county improvements in 2006, followed by an investment in community incentives, and services and rebates to drive efficiency improvements throughout the County. Their innovation is likely to become a model for other counties in Colorado and the nation.

The Center for ReSource Conservation is partnering with Boulder County on a pilot program to provide homeowners with low-cost Energy Audits. Through this program, an energy auditor will come to your home and perform a full battery of tests to tell you how to tune up your home to its maximum energy efficiency. Ongoing savings to the homeowner through their efficiency investments can reach 25%-50% in reduced energy costs.

At the Colorado Legislature, the first bill signed into law in 2006 was the Low Income Energy Assistance Program bill (LEAP). While the LEAP program has traditionally focused on cash assistance for low income individuals in the winter months, a radical shift this year added in a \$4 Million investment in energy efficiency improvements. Now, if you receive cash assistance you will also receive a tune-up for your home to maximize your energy efficiency and permanently lower energy bills. Furthermore, the program shifted from the traditional annual process to multiple-year funding from the Severance Tax fund showing a commitment to efficiency for the long term.

A bill to provide efficiency programs throughout the state is being advanced through HB06-1145. This legislation would create a fund to push gas providers to establish efficiency programs in the home heating industry. Colorado long ago established similar efficiency programs in the electrical industry, but our heating improvements have fallen far behind. With one of the primary causes of Global Warming coming from the building sector, this legislation is essential to address our long term global health.

Finally, a task force on Renewable Energy and Global Warming will be convening beginning in the summer of 2006 to make recommendations to the legislature on further advances available to curb our energy enthusiasm.

The Center for ReSource Conservation continues to be a leader for the state innovating new and exciting programs in energy conservation and renewable energy. Work on a Regional Energy Center (the Energy Center of the Rockies) continues and is on track to open its doors in 2008. This new center will serve as a catalyst for the building industry, homeowners and building professionals to create energy efficient buildings that maximize the benefits of smart design and the latest in renewable energy technologies.

In Colorado they say the whiskey's for drinking and the water's for fighting. This year, the battle has moved to the national level as our interstate compacts with other western states has been opened up for the first time in decades. The State's SWASI (Statewide Water Supply Initiative) Report has just been issued by the Colorado Water Conservation Board and shows that conservation will continue to be a major focus for the state.




The Colorado Legislature is also considering a crop fallowing bill that would allow for an innovative crop rotation plan for farmers during drought years. By letting some of their land lay fallow, they could sell their water interest just for that year to municipalities that have water needs.

Conservation of our resources is the easiest and cheapest way to affect the supply and demand for water. At the Center for ReSource Conservation, we are leading the state with our innovative Water Audit Program – "Slow the Flow Colorado". Following the second year of implementation, Slow the Flow is gearing up for its biggest year ever in 2006. Starting from its inception in 2004 with 400 audits, last year we saw participation triple to 1,200 audits and we anticipate over 2,000 audits in 2006.

Finally, as ReSource has continued to grow and increase in its impact throughout the Front Range, the State is beginning to address waste diversion at the state level. In 2006, HB 06-1303 would establish a grant program for counties to help them address waste diversion and household hazardous waste programs. Initially, \$15 Million would be available to counties with about \$2M per year on an ongoing basis. This level of investment would signify a substantial investment at the state level in waste diversion unequalled in Colorado history.

The Center for ReSource Conservation continues to monitor the activity at the local, state and federal level and work with citizens and local governments to maximize the impact of these various conservation efforts throughout our communities.

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