

Greenbelt Meadows neighborhood works together to go green and save big

By Heather Hansman, CU Environmental Journalism student

:: At Home Series ::
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The Center for ReSource Conservation (CRC) is an environmental nonprofit whose mission is to empower Boulder County residents to conserve natural resources through its energy, water & waste diversion programs. Today the CRC serves 20,000 residents annually.



Greenbelt Meadows residents enjoying green grass in a park that boasts low water use

It doesn't always take a village to make change. Sometimes it just takes a neighborhood. That is what happened at Greenbelt Meadows, a neighborhood with a homeowner's association in south Boulder. In 2007 the HOA decided to have a Slow the Flow Colorado sprinkler system audit done by the Center for ReSource Conservation. It was a big success, saving the area both water and money. Since then they've worked to make other changes to lessen the neighborhoods impact.

According to Steve Bauhs, a resident who is a member of the HOA Board of Directors, the sprinkler audit was the first step towards conservation. "Two things came out of it," he said. "They did the audit so we got a new irrigation system, and then we ended up saving a lot of money."

Because changing the watering system was such a success it sparked other conservation measures in the neighborhood. Bauhs now has a photovoltaic solar electric system on his roof, as do three other homeowners. He says that the HOA encourages solar electric systems, and is thinking about setting up a solar hot water system for the communal pool and hot tub.

They have already started to xeriscape the public walkways, and when a tree dies they try to replace it with a native plant that doesn't use much water. "As we do remodeling we look at using low impact native plants," Bauhs said. The HOA also recently installed four bat houses to control mosquitoes without pesticides.

Not every venture has been easy and successful. There have been bumps along the road. When they tried to convert half of the neighborhood part to a native grass the seed didn't take. The park turned brown and people complained. Now, they use a hybrid grass, which looks good and also uses less water.

The hard part of trying to green a whole neighborhood, Bauhs says, is that you can't make everyone happy all the time. People within the neighborhood have different views of what the area should look like. Right now there is a debate going on about weather to turn a volleyball court into a community garden. The best part of that, Bauhs says, is that it fosters debate, and gets people talking. "We're trying to spur people to action, and show them that it can be good for the environment and good for their pocketbook," he says.

The latest part of the plan is a neighborhood energy fair, which is slated for Saturday, June 6. The fair, which Bauhs hopes will draw

people from 2,000 homes in the surrounding neighborhoods, will host a variety of different organization, from Eco-Cycle to Simple Solar, who can help the residents learn about practical ways to promote energy efficiency, water saving, and conservation in their homes. It's a unique event, and it's designed to help people realize what kind of projects they can do on an individual basis.

"We want to stimulate and encourage action by residents," says Bauhs.



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-Greenbelt Meadows resident Steve Bauhs



If, like Green Meadows residents, you want to learn how to conserve natural resources and save on utility bills in simple ways, start by scheduling a free sprinkler system inspection with the Center for ReSource Conservation (CRC). The CRC's Slow the Flow program runs June through August annually in participating cities.

Visit ConservationCenter.org or call (303) 999-3820 Ext. 217