

## Climate Change Action from the Ground Up

*Submitted by Holly Loff, Assistant Director, High Country Conservation Center*

Climate Change. Global Warming. The Greenhouse Effect. Upon hearing these words many people are struck with a feeling of doom and gloom. Many think "if this ship is sinking anyway, why bother to make changes to my comfortable routine."

Until recent media coverage shed light on climate change, the issue was not accepted as a real issue. Denial was the reaction from many government officials and laymen alike.

High Country Conservation Center (HC3) recognized early on that these two hurdles were present in the struggle to address climate change, particularly as the organization navigated the often tumultuous waters of local politics. We realized we both had to fight the denial that climate change even existed *and* fight the apathy caused by the overwhelming enormity of the issue.

Our strategy was to develop programs, projects and events that worked on the issue from the ground up. We began to offer solutions in bite sized pieces and without ever uttering the words "climate change" - at least not publicly and not yet. We still had to make the lifestyle changes digestible; we knew that we could bring in the concept of climate change later.

High Country Conservation Center chose to provide the tools that people needed to make positive changes. And allowed those with more famous faces (and therefore more influence) and bigger wallets to work on changing the minds of the public in regards to the big picture of climate change. We knew that the mercury was rising not only on the planet but also in the argument on the existence of climate change.

So as Leonardo DiCaprio and Al Gore worked to bring the subject into every American home, we began selling compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) at farmers markets and other events, all the while explaining the simple economic and environmental benefits of doing so. We continued our push to increase recycling rates and general waste reduction, as we have done since 1976, through our school education programs, newspaper articles, composting workshops and recycling hotline.

We continued on this route until the media started giving more attention to climate change and fewer politicians were denying its existence. Then we became more open in our war on climate change. Our executive director, Carly Wier, spoke at Summit County's first Climate Change Forum in 2005. Her presentation was crucial in rallying early momentum for the issue locally. Since that time, the Town of Frisco has signed onto the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives ((ICLIE) an international association of local governments and government organizations that have made a commitment to sustainable development) and the Town of Breckenridge and the Summit County Government have both signed on with the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization.

HC3 has continued its work to create practical solutions to address climate change and now relates those solutions and actions back to climate change. We formed the Efficient Building Advisory Group in 2005 to create a uniform Efficient Building Code for Summit County by building consensus and identifying key issues with a representative group including the Summit Home Builders Association. Local building officials anticipate that the code will be implemented in early 2007.

Next HC3 issued The Summit Wind 100 Challenge to the community on September 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, setting a goal of getting over 100 Summit County households, businesses and local governments to sign up for wind energy with Renewable Choice Energy before the end of the year.

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, HC3 will launch the Basic Energy Audit Program, which will offer low cost home energy audits to help homeowners and renters identify simple solutions to increase energy efficiency. We have partnered with local hardware stores to provide discounts to audit participants on the tools needed to make the improvements that will reduce their energy consumption and resulting greenhouse gas emissions.

There is enough fear out there about climate change; our role is to offer the opportunity to make positive and simple changes.