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Climate Action Panel Recommendations Approved By Project Directors, Would Cut Emissions and Save Money

Denver – The mayors of three of Colorado’s five largest cities today announced at a news conference the approval of the recommendations of the blue-ribbon Climate Action Panel. The announcement was made by Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, Fort Collins Mayor Doug Hutchinson, and Lakewood Mayor Steve Burkholder. They are three of the Colorado Climate Project’s eight project directors, who appointed the 34-member panel and decided to accept its recommendations. With that decision by the project directors, the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization, the nonprofit organization that convened the project, will now work for the consideration and adoption of the recommendations by the state government, local governments, water providers, and others.

Altogether, 114 public and private leaders and experts served on the Climate Action Panel and the six policy work groups that advised it. They worked for 10 months to develop their report, which recommends 70 actions – 55 directed at reducing Colorado’s emissions of heat-trapping gases and 15 at preparing for the effects of a changed climate. Sixty-two recommendations were approved unanimously, six by super-majority vote (meaning with no more than five objections), and two by majority vote (with six and nine objections, respectively).

Mayor Hutchinson said, “This has been a balanced, nonpartisan, centrist process that has produced a strong consensus about the things we can do to reduce our contribution and vulnerability to climate change.”

Mayor Burkholder added, “These are practical, proven steps, borrowed shamelessly from what works in other states. The actions will protect our climate and actually strengthen our economy, saving Coloradans \$2.6 billion.”

Mayor Hickenlooper pointed out, “We are proud of the collaborative work done by the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and the broad participation in this effort to identify solutions to address any changes in our atmosphere. On the local level, we have reached a pivotal moment of opportunity to make smart choices on energy use to grow our economy, foster environmental health, and leave a legacy of genuine sustainability for future generations.”

The panel recommended that the governor establish a goal for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Colorado. The panel expressed its belief that the goals should be “in the vicinity of” a 20% reduction in emissions by 2020 and an 80% reduction by 2050, both compared to 2005

levels. For 2020, that would be a 37% reduction in the state's emissions projected for that year under current law, to 93 rather than 147 million metric tons of carbon-dioxide equivalent. Other western states with statewide emission goals are Arizona (45% below projected emissions in 2020), Oregon (44%), New Mexico (33%), California (28%), and Washington (28%).

Of the 55 recommendations focused on reducing emissions, 33 were analyzed quantitatively and were estimated to have a cumulative effect of reducing emissions by about 40 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2020, enough by themselves to achieve three quarters of the reductions necessary to meet the 2020 goal suggested by the panel. Twenty-seven of these measures were also analyzed in terms of their cost effectiveness, and were estimated to have a total net savings of about \$2.6 billion between now and 2020. That is because the most effective way to reduce emissions often is to improve energy efficiency, which both cuts emissions and saves money.

Seven recommended actions, alone, would achieve over half of the emissions reductions needed to meet the suggested 2020 goal:

- Expanding programs by utilities to help customers reduce energy use. One recommendation is to establish “inverted block rates” for electricity and natural gas use, so larger users pay more for their use above average levels, raising funds for programs to reduce energy use. (Adopted by majority vote, with six objections; 12 percent toward the recommended 2020 goal, at an estimated savings of \$30 per ton or \$1.135 billion in total from now to 2020.) Another recommendation would require utilities to adopt “demand side management” programs to reduce electricity and natural gas use by one-half of one percent per year, compared to business as usual. (Unanimous vote; 10 percent toward the goal, at an estimated cost savings of \$32 per ton or \$853 million in total.)
- A 50% strengthening of the state's renewable portfolio standard, so that investor-owned utilities would have to get 30% of their power, and municipal and cooperative utilities 15% of theirs, from renewable energy sources by 2020. (Super majority vote, three objections; 9 percent toward the recommended 2020 goal, at an estimated cost of \$16 per ton or \$524 million in total.)
- Expanding solid waste reduction, recycling, and composting programs, to cut by three quarters the wastes going into landfills. (Unanimous vote; 8 percent toward the 2020 goal, at a savings of \$13 per ton or \$311 million in total.)
- Adopting California's motor vehicle emission standards for new cars and trucks, requiring for the first time that vehicles reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. This is estimated to reduce emissions by 3.4 million tons in 2020. Thirteen other states have already signed up to adopt the California standards, as allowed by the federal Clean Air Act. (Unanimous vote; 6 percent toward the 2020 goal, at a savings of \$100 per ton or \$1.88 billion in total – calculated using a price for gasoline of \$1.74 per gallon.)
- Increasing production of cellulosic ethanol from Colorado sources, to replace fossil fuels. (Unanimous vote; 6 percent toward the 2020 goal, at an estimated cost of \$3 per ton or \$58 million in total.)
- Updating local building codes regularly to match changes in international standards for energy efficiency measures in new construction. (Unanimous vote; 5 percent toward the 2020 goal, cost savings not estimated.)

- Reducing emissions of methane (a greenhouse gas) from oil and gas operations by 35% by 2020. (Unanimous vote; 5 percent toward the goal, at an estimated cost of \$0.80 per ton or \$12 million in total.)

The panel also recommended 15 actions to begin preparing for the predicted effects in Colorado of climate change. Fourteen of these are the first comprehensive recommendations for actions by water providers and others to meet our water needs if our snowpacks are smaller and melt earlier.

The work of the Climate Action Panel was supported and facilitated by the Center for Climate Strategies (www.climatestrategies.us) and patterned after similar efforts in which CCS was involved in other states, including Arizona, New Mexico, and Montana. The Colorado panel is the first such effort in the nation undertaken by a nonprofit organization rather than by a state government. The Rocky Mountain Climate Organization began organizing the Colorado Climate Project two years ago, to develop recommendations to be considered by Colorado's new governor, General Assembly, local governments, water providers, and others. In his 2006 campaign, Governor Bill Ritter expressed support for the project and as governor has repeated that he looks forward to reviewing the panel's recommendations.

The other project directors of the Colorado Climate Project are Tom Long, Summit County commissioner; Matt Baker, director, Environment Colorado; Gary Hart, Wirth Chair professor, University of Colorado-Denver; Gail Klapper, director, Colorado Forum; and Al Yates, former president, Colorado State University. The Rocky Mountain Climate Organization is a three-year old mainstream coalition whose partners include 16 local governments, Denver Water, 17 businesses, and 11 nonprofit organizations. More information is available at the project web site, www.coloradoclimate.org.

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