



Mystic San Luis Valley Regional Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan

FISCAL YEAR 2025–2035



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Acknowledgments

The development of a Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan for the Mystic San Luis Valley travel region was a collective undertaking of stakeholders throughout the region. The Colorado Tourism Office expresses our profound appreciation to all individuals who played a pivotal role, including representatives from government agencies, destination management/marketing organization partners, industry associations, tourism stakeholders, and residents. Through virtual meetings, workshops, interviews, and surveys, you generously shared your expertise, perspectives, and vision, shaping a comprehensive strategy that reflects our collective aspirations for destination stewardship. Special recognition is also extended to the members of the Destination Stewardship Council, whose guidance and leadership steered the process with wisdom and foresight.

We also extend our gratitude to Solimar International and their team of regional consultants for facilitating the development of the Colorado Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan and eight regional plans. Their dedication and expertise were instrumental in guiding us through a comprehensive and inclusive consultation process, resulting in a plan reflective of the perspectives and voices of stakeholders.

Solimar International Team

- **Sarah-Jane Johnson**, Mystic San Luis Valley Regional Facilitator
- **Chris Seek**, Team Leader
- **Natalie Sellier**, Project Manager

Land Acknowledgment

In the spirit of healing and education, the Colorado Tourism Office acknowledges the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the 51 contemporary tribes with historic ties to the land currently known as Colorado. We recognize and honor these Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of this land.



Introduction

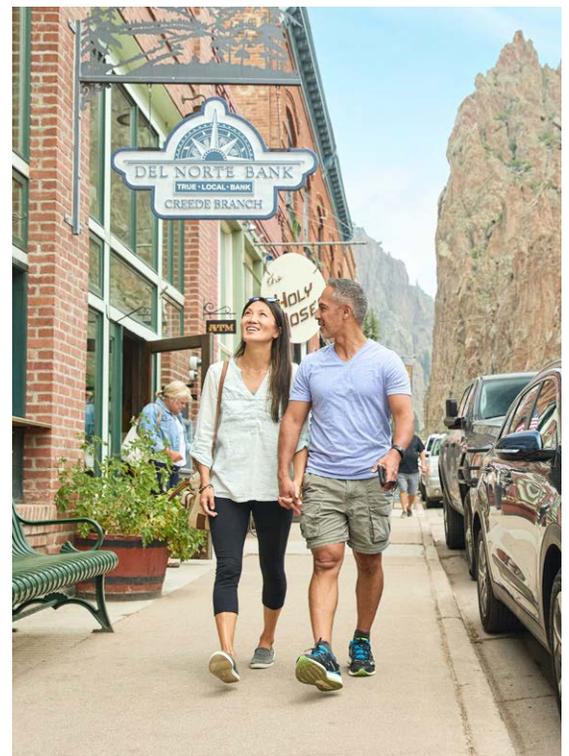
Colorado, renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and vibrant cultural scene, attracted 93.3 million visitors in 2023.* The Colorado Tourism Office (CTO), a division of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), aligns with OEDIT’s mission to empower all to thrive in Colorado’s economy. The CTO’s vision is to empower the tourism industry by inspiring the world to explore Colorado responsibly and respectfully. As the nation’s first state tourism office with a Destination Stewardship department, the creation of a statewide strategic plan and eight regional plans was essential to identify and align opportunities.

Recognizing the importance of stewardship in the tourism industry, the CTO embarked on a strategic planning initiative to achieve a more sustainable future. This endeavor resulted in the development of both a comprehensive statewide plan and customized plans for Colorado’s eight travel regions. The eight regions are Pioneering Plains, Canyons and Plains, Pikes Peak Wonders, Mystic San Luis Valley, Mountains and Mesas, Rockies Playground, The Great West, and Denver and Northern Colorado. By balancing the needs of visitors with the preservation of unique local assets, these plans reflect input from diverse stakeholders and seek to foster responsible tourism practices.

The localized approach taken in crafting the regional plans empowers communities to address their specific challenges and opportunities. Through collaboration and stakeholder engagement, these plans allow for more precise resource allocation and the implementation of strategies aligned with each region’s distinct characteristics. Central to this process is the tourism industry’s role in advancing destination stewardship principles and informing visitors about the importance of preserving Colorado’s natural resources and cultural heritage for future generations.

Why Is This Plan Needed?

Many of Colorado’s tourism destinations face critical challenges due to rising visitation and climate change, necessitating strategic action. An increase in tourists, while beneficial for the economy, can exert pressure on the environment, leading to habitat degradation, pollution, and resource depletion. Additionally, the influx of visitors in some areas is intensifying traffic congestion and affecting the overall quality of life for residents. Rising global temperatures are reducing Colorado’s snowpack, shortening the ski season, and impacting other forms of winter tourism and recreation. Recognizing these complexities, the CTO and its partners across the state are working to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism while continuing to strengthen the tourism economy. This plan serves as a roadmap for our collective destination stewardship efforts, guiding the tourism industry toward a sustainable future through collaboration with organizations, leaders, and stakeholders.



* [Longwoods International. Travel USA Visitor Profile. 2023.](#)

Who Is This Plan For?

The Mystic San Luis Valley Regional Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan is the region's comprehensive roadmap for how industry leadership, the tourism industry, and tourism partners can collectively address shared priorities surrounding destination stewardship over the next 10 years. It provides guidance for stakeholders and residents on fulfilling stewardship roles within their communities. Recognizing that destination stewardship involves many interconnected efforts, this plan emphasizes the importance of public-private partnerships and aims to strengthen and align existing initiatives across multiple agencies, organizations, and communities. It underscores the collaborative efforts of the CTO and its partners, including state agencies, destination management/marketing organizations (DMOs), local communities, and tourism businesses.

Industry Leadership



CTO, DMOs, and other tourism industry associations

The Tourism Industry



Tourism businesses and attractions

Tourism Partners



State and federal agencies, Tribal and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and residents

Structure of the Plan and Implementation

The success of each strategy is based upon the details of their implementation, outlined as follows:

- **Tactics and Resources:** Specific action steps, along with the educational, financial, and communal resources available for executing the strategy.
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Metrics used by the potential lead partner to measure the success of the strategy.
- **Case Studies:** Examples of the strategy implemented in other communities. *Of note, the stewardship case studies included are not an exhaustive list. Additional references to inspiring examples of destination stewardship will be captured as implementation of the plan advances.*
- **Role of the Tourism Industry:** Outlines how tourism businesses and attractions, often coordinated by DMOs can contribute to and support these efforts.
- **Alignment to the Statewide Plan:** The regional strategy aligns closely with these statewide strategies, enabling consistent tracking and progress of stewardship efforts across Colorado.
- **Potential Lead Partners:** Recommended agencies or organizations equipped with the capacity, resources, or programs to lead the implementation and reporting efforts.
- **Potential Supporting Partners:** Entities with relevant expertise that support the action but are not directly responsible for leading it. *This is not an exhaustive list and is meant to serve as a guide.*

This plan seeks to catalyze destination stewardship by establishing partnerships and leveraging a blend of educational, financial, and community resources to bring each strategic vision to life.



Situation Analysis

The Mystic San Luis Valley, known as the birthplace of modern Colorado and steeped in a rich history of Hispanic settlers and explorers, is celebrated for its diverse culture and strong community bonds. Despite its unique natural landscapes, agricultural heritage, and rural sense of place, the region faces challenges including limited funding and capacity among small volunteer organizations overseeing its tourism, economic development, and destination promotion efforts. With targeted funding and technical support, this region has the potential to foster tourism development and destination stewardship initiatives that not only drive economic growth but also enrich the quality of life for its residents.

The destination stewardship priority strategies identified through stakeholder consultations for this region include:

1. Foster Increased Collaboration and Coordination of Regional Tourism
2. Increase Responsible Visitation
3. Support Regional Transit Solutions for the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve
4. Increase Economic Development Opportunities for Small Local Food and Agricultural Businesses
5. Advance the Expansion of Collaborative Agritourism Initiatives
6. Strengthen Collaboration and Promotion of Local Heritage, Creative Industries, Folk, and Traditional Arts
7. Increase Climate Resiliency Among Rural Tourism Stakeholders
8. Convene Regional Outdoor Recreation Stakeholders in Economic and Environmental Stewardship Efforts



Tourism Assets and Infrastructure

- **Commercial Airports:** San Luis Valley Regional Airport (subsidized by the Essential Air Service Program)
- **Scenic Byways:** Highway of Legends, Silver Thread Scenic Byway, Los Caminos Antiguos
- **Wildlife Preserves:** Baca National Wildlife Refuge, San Luis Valley National Wildlife Complex, Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge
- **Heritage Areas:** Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area
- **Creative Districts:** La Veta Creative District
- **National Public Lands (parks/historic sites):** Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve
- **Main Street Communities:** Lake City, Creede, Monte Vista, Center, San Luis, Alamosa, Walsenburg
- **State Parks:** Lathrop State Park

Economic Impact of Tourism in 2023**

- Visitor Spending: \$210.2M
- Other Travel Spending: \$2.1M
- Total Travel Spending: \$212.3M
- Travel Industry Earnings: \$59.2M
- Employment: 2,300 jobs
- Local Tax: \$7.5M
- State Tax: \$6.1M
- Total Tax: \$13.6M

Destination Stewardship Partners

The Mystic San Luis Valley region is supported by various organizations and initiatives dedicated to destination stewardship. Given its vast geography and sparse rural population, these efforts are primarily county-focused rather than region-wide. Tourism coordination also operates on a county level due to funding constraints. However, some counties face challenges with limited capacity and resources for managing visitor information websites. For a detailed list of Destination Stewardship Partners, please refer to Annex 2.

Strategic Planning Process

The destination stewardship strategic planning process for the Mystic San Luis travel region involved extensive consultations with stakeholders to understand their perspectives and priorities, garner broad-based support, and align the plan with their needs and expectations. This was accomplished through a series of in-person workshops, interviews, webinars, and surveys conducted from July 2023 through June 2024. Stakeholders actively participated and contributed to the development of the regional plan through these engagement methods:

July–September 2023: Introductory Meetings

During this initial phase, an introductory webinar was conducted in each region to introduce the destination stewardship strategic planning initiative and engage participants in identifying the key priorities throughout the state.

August–November 2023: Stakeholder Interviews

Through one-on-one conversations, the regional facilitator delved deeper into the priority issues to understand the root causes, the current efforts to address them, and future opportunities.

** The Economic Impact of Travel in Colorado / 2023p / Prepared by Dean Runyan Associates

September–October 2023: Regional Workshops

Regional workshops were held in Alamosa and Saguache to gather further input on priority issues and potential solutions.

December 2023: Stakeholder Survey

An online survey was offered to tourism stakeholders and community members to increase awareness of the strategic planning process, encourage broader participation, and gather additional input on future priorities and opportunities for tourism.

April 2024: Regional Presentation and Roadshow

A regional presentation was held in Alamosa, accompanied by a “roadshow” featuring a series of focused discussions and meetings. These meetings provided an overview of the draft statewide strategy and allowed attendees to discuss region-specific strategies and priorities for inclusion in the draft plan.

June 2024: Public Feedback Process

The draft plan was made available online, giving stakeholders the opportunity to provide comments and suggestions before finalization.

Key Metrics:

- 16 individual stakeholder Interviews
- 48 attendees across three workshops
- 52 individuals consulted during roadshow meetings

The following community-led strategies emerged from the consultation process, providing a framework for the region to address collectively its most pressing destination stewardship priorities over the next 10 years.



Priority Regional Strategies

Strategy 1:

Foster Increased Collaboration and Coordination of Regional Tourism

Throughout the strategic planning consultation process, many DMO partners expressed a desire for more frequent engagement with regional partners to enhance collaboration and share ideas on industry priorities. This strategy aims to cultivate greater collaboration among the region's DMO network and forge partnerships to address priority issues such as regional tourism development and marketing efforts. By increasing participation in marketing partnerships, the region can better support resources and capacity. The San Luis Valley Tourism Association (SLVTA) has already made significant strides in partnering with the Saguache County Tourism Council (SCTC). There is potential to expand the geographical reach of this effort by collaborating with other county tourism boards, including Rio Grande, Huerfano, Mineral, Costilla, and Conejos County. This effort will strengthen the collective voice of the region where partners often face limited capacity and resources, thereby enhancing tourism development and promotional opportunities.



Tactics:

- Establish a Mystic San Luis Valley Destination Alliance to convene a broader geographical range of industry partners, elevate capacity and identify opportunities for securing increased tourism development and marketing resources.
- Initiate organizational strategic planning to develop guidance documents, a community charter, a strategic work plan, and funding models to support activities or initiatives.
- Develop a strategy to enhance capacity and secure funding to support implementation efforts.

Resources:

- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)
- [CTO's Colorado Tourism Leadership Journey](#)

Destination Stewardship Case Studies

The following case study illustrates examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- [Roaring Fork Valley Destination Alliance](#) is an industry coalition of the regional destination organizations within the Roaring Fork Valley that work together on identified priority projects including responsible visitation campaigns and regenerative tourism programs for visitors.

Strategy 1 continued

Key Performance Indicators:

- Formation of a regional industry alliance
- Representation from all regional DMO participants across the seven counties
- Identification of shared priorities and destination management projects for the region
- Increased volume of CTO resources and funding dispersed throughout the region

Role of the Tourism Industry: Participate in the regional DMO alliance to collaborate on marketing campaigns, coordinate events, and share visitor data to inform strategies. By attending networking events and training programs, businesses can stay informed, improve service quality, and influence tourism policies. Additionally, they can support advocacy efforts, engage local communities, provide feedback, and participate in crisis management planning to build resilience.

Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Local Tourism Businesses and Organizations

1. Provide Support to Rural Tourism Organizations
2. Strengthen Destination Management/Marketing Organizations Across the State

Potential Lead Partners: SLVTA

Potential Supporting Partners: CTO, Alamosa Convention and Visitors Bureau, Saguache County Tourism Council, Spanish Peaks Country Tourism, Rio Grande Country Tourism, Conejos Tourism, Costilla County Tourism, Creede and Mineral County Lodging Tax Panel, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area

Strategy 2:

Increase Responsible Visitation

The Mystic San Luis Valley is a uniquely environmental and culturally sensitive region, offering a rural experience that attracts many visitors. This strategy aims to raise awareness of the specific needs of rural destinations, provide visitor education and encourage respectful behavior throughout the region. It builds on the established *Do Colorado Right* stewardship messaging campaign tailored for the Saguache County Tourism Council, emphasizing the importance of implementation support and additional resources throughout the region.

Tactics:

- Develop regional gateway signage featuring “This Land is Sacred” messaging to provide cultural and visitor education, aligning with a land acknowledgment at all major entry points and highways into the Mystic San Luis Valley Region.
- Expand engagement among regional tourism stakeholders, including public land managers and municipal leaders, to identify problematic visitor behaviors and determine the necessary messaging.
- Apply for technical assistance grants to build capacity for coordination and development of campaign messaging and outreach strategies.

Strategy 1 continued

- Encourage participation in the Care for Colorado Coalition to gain access to marketing assets, communication materials, and educational resources.
- Seek grants to support the installation of gateway signage.
- Pursue marketing funding opportunities to create digital and print marketing collateral tailored for DMO partners.

Resources:

- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)
- [Care for Colorado Coalition](#)

Destination Stewardship Case Studies

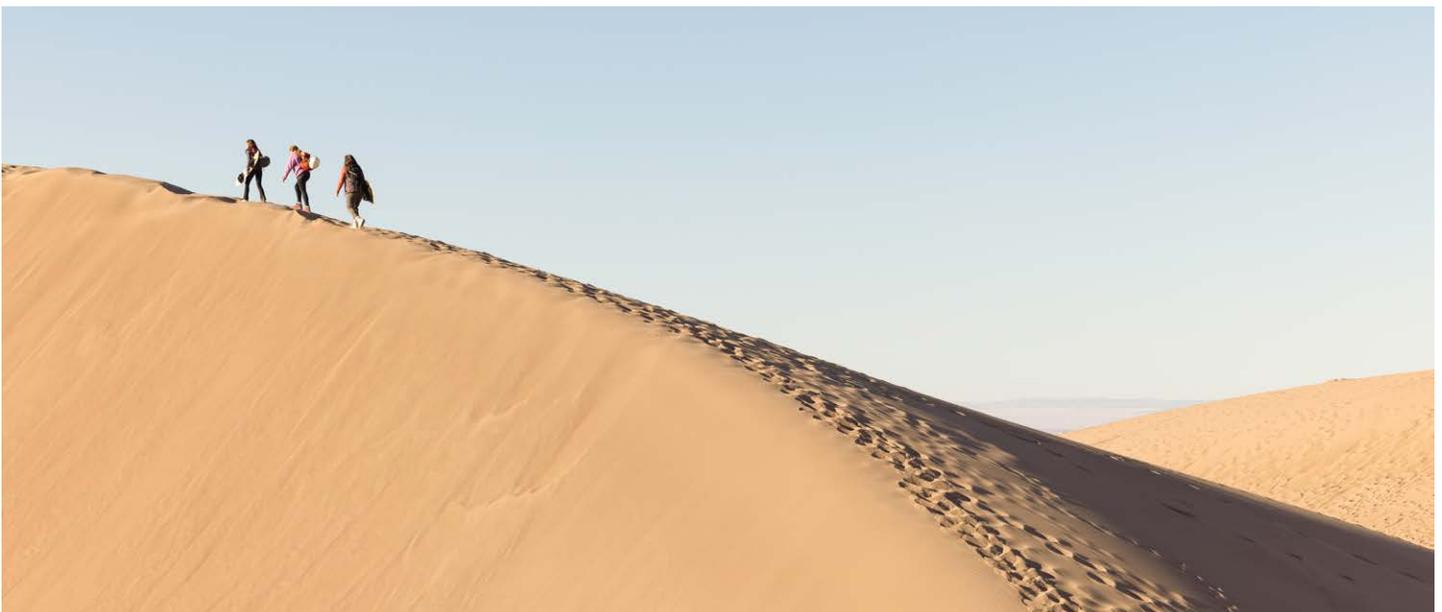
The following case studies illustrate examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- The [Do San Luis Valley Right](#) campaign is a responsible visitor education initiative created for the Saguache County Tourism Council in collaboration with the CTO. It was designed with the flexibility to be adopted and implemented valley-wide by other regional partners.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Increased impressions of *Do San Luis Valley Right* marketing and messaging collateral
- Number of regional DMO participants adopting *Do San Luis Valley Right* visitor messaging
- Engagement in *Do San Luis Valley Right* by regional visitors
- Reduction in behavioral issues on public lands including trespassing, trash, vandalism, search and rescue calls
- Increased positive feedback from resident and tourism stakeholders regarding visitor behavior

Role of the Tourism Industry: Join the Care for Colorado Coalition and engage in visitor education campaigns promoting responsible and respectful behavior in rural communities and on public lands.



Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Communities

4. Encourage Responsible Visitation in our Communities

Outdoor Recreation

1. Expand *Do Colorado Right* Campaigns on Public Lands
7. Promote Guided Recreation Opportunities
8. Enhance Destination Stewardship through Strategic Partnerships with the Private Sector

Potential Lead Partners: SLVTA, CTO

Potential Supporting Partners: Alamosa Convention and Visitors Bureau, Saguache County Tourism Council, Spanish Peaks Country Tourism, Rio Grande Country Tourism, Conejos Tourism, Costilla County Tourism, Creede and Mineral County Lodging Tax Panel, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

Strategy 3:

Support Regional Transit Solutions for the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

Visitation to the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (GRSA) has doubled in the last six years, surpassing more than 600,000 visitors annually. The park is currently developing an infrastructure and transportation plan that seeks public input to address issues such as overcrowding and traffic congestion. Regional tourism stakeholders can contribute to these solutions by actively participating in the planning process and coordinating efforts.

Tactics:

- Establish a public-private partnership to provide connectivity between regional destinations and GRSA while reducing cars and congestion, encouraging low-impact travel options, and increasing awareness of the rural tourism experiences throughout the Mystic San Luis Valley for national park visitors.
- Participate in the GRSA transportation and transit plan to provide input and support sustainable mobility solutions.



Strategy 3 continued

- Update trip-planning information on transportation and transit options for visitors through regional DMO websites and other communication channels.
- Collaborate with GRSA to advocate for ongoing transit plans and future transportation initiatives, as well as share tourism visitor arrival data to support transportation development opportunities.
- Identify and promote alternative transit opportunities for visitors including ride shares and partnerships for private transit or shuttle services.
- Develop responsible and respectful park visitor messaging as part of regional *Do San Luis Valley Right* campaigns.
- Create pre- and post-park visit itineraries to encourage visitors to explore the region beyond peak national park travel times and seasons, promoting economic benefits across the Mystic San Luis Valley.

Resources:

- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)

Destination Stewardship Case Studies

The following case study illustrates examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- [U.S. Forest Service Hanging Lake Management Plan](#) was designed in partnership with Visit Glenwood Springs, the City of Glenwood Springs, and Glenwood Adventure Company, and provided transit solutions to a natural attraction with limited access and parking facilities.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Increased awareness of transportation and transit updates at GRSA
- Reduction of transit capacity issues at GRSA

Role of the Tourism Industry: Promote and distribute transit initiatives and low-impact transportation options to visitors and residents.

Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Transportation

3. Raise Awareness and Ridership of Bustang, Snowstang, and Pegasus Services
5. Upgrade Pedestrian and Bike Pathways
6. Promote Carpooling for Tourism

Potential Lead Partners: SLVTA, GRSA, San Luis Valley Council of Governments, South Central Council of Governments

Potential Supporting Partners: Alamosa Convention and Visitors Bureau, Saguache County Tourism Council, Spanish Peaks Country Tourism, Rio Grande Country Tourism, Conejos Tourism, Costilla County Tourism, Creede and Mineral County Tourism/Visitor Center

Strategy 4:

Increase Economic Development Opportunities for Small Local Food and Agricultural Businesses

The San Luis Valley boasts a robust agricultural industry and community that is gradually elevating the local food economy through dedicated efforts and resources. However, many small local food and agricultural producers lack essential resources or infrastructure, such as commercial kitchens, food and produce storage, event spaces, and office facilities, necessary to develop into a thriving tourism business. This strategy aims to empower and elevate regional tourism and agricultural entrepreneurs by increasing access to business resources tailored to their specific industry needs as small entrepreneurs.

Tactics:

- Launch an incubator space offering comprehensive resources including business training, financial resources, and specialized infrastructure for local food producers and makers, such as a commercial kitchen, event and dining spaces, and co-working offices.
- Secure technical assistance to develop an incubator development strategy, encompassing a business plan and financial resources for funding.
- Identify potential locations throughout the region for the incubator facility.
- Develop an outreach strategy to ensure widespread regional engagement and participation in the incubator program.

Resources:

- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)
- [Rural Opportunity Office](#)
- OEDIT programs including [Rural Jump-Start](#), [Enterprise Zones](#)
- Just Transition Funding, [Skill Advance Colorado Job Training grants](#)
- [Business Foundations Technical Assistance program](#)
- [Small Business Navigator](#)
- [Colorado Startup Loan Fund](#)
- [Inclusive Guide](#)



Destination Stewardship Case Studies

The following case study illustrates examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- [Paonia Community Kitchen](#) is a certified commercial kitchen available for rent by businesses to turn produce into value-added products, launch their concept, and start generating income before investing in equipment. The kitchen is also available to individuals and private groups for parties, educational events, or canning, pickling, or dehydrating produce. The kitchen seeks to cultivate the local food economy by supporting entrepreneurs in establishing themselves without massive overhead costs in a shared-use kitchen. The kitchen also offers community events including pop-up dining and a self-serve retail space featuring in-house producers.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Value of funding and investments secured for incubator space
- Number of businesses participating and utilizing the facilities and services
- Number of jobs increased
- Number of small local food and agriculture launched regionally
- Number of minority and Hispanic local businesses engaged with targeted resources and support

Role of the Tourism Industry: Support tourism development through the promotion of new and existing local food and agritourism offerings and experiences.

Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Local Tourism Businesses and Organizations

3. Empower Tourism Entrepreneurs
4. Provide Technical Assistance and Disaster Relief to Tourism Businesses
5. Support Minority Tourism Entrepreneurs
6. Promote Employee Ownership for Tourism Entrepreneurs

Agriculture, Food, and Liquid Arts

6. Advance the Development of Agritourism
9. Promote Local Agricultural Products

Potential Lead Partners: Saguache County Sustainable Environment and Economic Development (ScSEED), Colorado Small Business Development Center Network (SBDC)

Potential Supporting Partners: San Luis Valley Development Resource Group and Council of Governments, SBDC, Adams State University, SLVTA, San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition, chambers of commerce

Strategy 5: Advance the Expansion of Collaborative Agritourism Initiatives

In the Mystic San Luis Valley travel region, visitors can discover a variety of experiences, offering connections to local food, artisanal beverages, farming, ranching culture, and history. This strategy focuses on enhancing product development and marketing efforts to establish the San Luis Valley as a premier agritourism destination within the broader region. It includes support through technical assistance and funding programs to highlight the region's authentic experiences.



Tactics:

- Develop a Mystic San Luis Valley visitor guide to showcase local food and farm experiences, craft beverages and liquid arts, local dining, farm and ranch tours, food festivals, farm-to-table dinners, agritourism lodging such as guest ranches and farm camps, and highlight each community's unique culinary offerings and local produce.
- Develop a marketing and promotion strategy for the visitor guide, including a distribution plan in collaboration with Colorado Visitor and Welcome Centers.
- Secure CTO technical assistance to create an agritourism development strategy.
- Conduct an asset inventory of local food, dining, events, lodging, and visitor-ready experiences with regional tourism, local food, and agricultural stakeholders. Engage stakeholders through surveys to gather insights and input on enhancing agritourism initiatives.
- Organize facilitated education and training opportunities.
- Provide regional education opportunities, including familiarization tours, to increase awareness and participation in food and farm experiences and local food heritage among visitors and residents.
- Launch an online contest to increase visitor engagement and participation in regional food tours.

Resources:

- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)

Destination Stewardship Case Studies

The following case study illustrates examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- Carbondale Tourism spearheaded the creation of a regional agritourism development strategy funded by a 2022 CTO Tourism Management grant. This initiative resulted in product development and the launch of a visitor education guide known as the [Roaring Fork + Farm Map](#).

Strategy 5 continued

Key Performance Indicators:

- Number of regional local food and agricultural stakeholders participating in the tourism development process including outreach and engagement opportunities, workshops and training, and final visitor guide development
- Number of local food and agricultural businesses promoted through tourism efforts
- Value of investment and funding resources provided to the Mystic San Luis Valley

Role of the Tourism Industry: Promote the development and marketing of agritourism experiences and visitor interpretive materials.

Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Agriculture, Food, and Liquid Arts

1. Safeguard and Celebrate Culinary Traditions
4. Support Culinary Festivals and Events
5. Create Immersive Culinary Tourism Itineraries
6. Advance the Development of Agritourism
8. Promote Agritourism Offerings
9. Promote Local Agricultural Products

Potential Lead Partners: SLVTA, ScCEED

Potential Supporting Partners: CTO, [Valley Roots Food Hub](#), Colorado Agritourism Association, Adams State College, Colorado State University Extension, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area

Strategy 6:

Strengthen Collaboration and Promotion of Local Heritage, Creative Industries, Folk, and Traditional Arts

The Mystic San Luis Valley is home to numerous small arts organizations and programs facing challenges in coordinating marketing and accessing tourism development opportunities. A unified effort is crucial to fostering economic growth and preserving cultural heritage, especially in this unique region of historical significance. This strategy aims to uplift heritage, rural arts and creatives throughout the region emphasizing folk and traditional arts and culture. The goal is to unite diverse artistic voices to develop a strategy that enhances tourism and increases visitor engagement in arts, including performing arts, music, events, festivals, tours, and gallery openings, while promoting regional history and culture.



Tactics:

- Develop and launch a Mystic San Luis Valley Heritage, Creative Industries, Folk, and Traditional Arts Trail to increase connectivity and collaboration among local arts communities and organizations, boosting regional arts tourism as a visitor experience.
- Secure technical assistance to initiate and execute a strategic planning effort.
- Engage and outreach to creative industries, artists, studios, and galleries to foster participation.
- Conduct a comprehensive planning process, including workshops, training, asset mapping, and the development of a finalized tourism product or visitor experience.
- Secure marketing funding to effectively brand the creative visitor experience.
- Explore regional advocacy efforts to pursue a valley-wide Creative District designation by the Colorado Creative Industries (CCI).

Resources:

- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)
- [OEDIT grants and financing programs](#) for business start-ups
- [CCI Colorado Creates grants](#)

Destination Stewardship Case Studies

The following case study illustrates examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- [Colorado Creative Corridor](#) is a regional creative district and tourism collaboration among Carbondale, Paonia, Crested Butte, Ridgway, Gunnison, and Salida that has increased the promotion of small creative businesses as a visitor experience and successfully engaged Creative Districts in local and regional tourism development.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Number of local artists, makers, and creative industry organizations engaged in the development process
- Number of arts and creatives promoted as part of the visitor experience
- Number of visitors participating in or interacting with regional heritage, creative, folk and traditional arts

Role of the Tourism Industry: Engage in outreach and promotion of visitor experiences centered around the creative arts and heritage.

Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Arts and Creative Industries

1. Foster Partnerships with Local Artists
3. Promote Diverse Arts through Festivals and Events
6. Amplify Local Artisan Markets
8. Create Interactive Artistic Experiences
9. Develop and Promote Community Arts Guides

Potential Lead Partners: La Veta Creative District, CTO, CCI

Potential Supporting Partners: La Veta Creative District, Spanish Peaks Arts Council, Mystic Valley Arts Council, Museum of Friends, Heart of Saguache, The Range, Saguache, Creede Arts Council, South Fork Music Association, Crestone Artists, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, Fox Theatre Walsenburg

Strategy 7:

Increase Climate Resiliency Among Rural Tourism Stakeholders

The San Luis Valley's unique environment makes it particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts including drought and extreme weather. This strategy aims to support rural small tourism businesses by providing resources like training and education programs, enabling them to advocate more effectively for sustainability initiatives. Key efforts include conserving the valley's water resources, expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and offering business incentive packages such as funding and rebates.

Tactics:

- Launch a San Luis Valley water conservation campaign to educate businesses and visitors on effective water conservation methods that support quality of life and the local economy
- Develop sustainable business education programs in partnership with DMOs to help small businesses implement water management, energy efficiency, and waste reduction practices.
- Create a targeted *Do San Luis Valley Right* campaign to educate visitors on sustainable behaviors like carrying reusable water bottles, minimizing waste, using alternative transportation, and supporting local businesses.



Strategy 7 continued

- Advocate for increased electric vehicle charging infrastructure along the region's scenic byways.
- Advocate for a single-use plastic ban throughout the Mystic San Luis Valley.
- Develop a climate action plan for the Mystic San Luis Valley to guide carbon reduction efforts within the tourism industry.
- Support the San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council in creating a regional climate resiliency action plan, advocating for tourism industry interests.

Resources:

- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)
- [Actively Green Certification/Walking Mountains Science Center](#)
- [Adventure Travel Trade Association Sustainability Resource Center](#)
- [Colorado Energy Office \(CEO\) climate and energy resources and grants](#)
- [Colorado's Electric Byways Tourism Toolkit](#)
- [U.S. Green Building Council](#)
- [Energy Star](#)
- [Green Lodging News](#)
- [Colorado's Outdoors Strategy](#)
- [Colorado Green Business Network \(CGBN\)](#)

Destination Stewardship Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- A group of more than 30 stakeholders worked together in 2016 to develop the [Climate Action Plan for the Eagle County Community](#). Since then, a Climate Action Collaborative has been formed to implement the recommendations of the Plan.
- Adopted by the towns of Breckenridge, Dillon, Frisco, Silverthorne and Summit County government, the [Summit Community Climate Action Plan](#) is the guiding document for this work. It outlines strategies for reducing local greenhouse gas emissions across four key sectors: Renewable Energy, Building Energy, Transportation, and Waste. It is now supported by a more recent Climate Equity Plan.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Greenhouse gas emissions (CEO metric)
- Seasonal snowpack and annual mountain precipitation (natural resources conservation service metric)
- Zero emission vehicle registration (CEO metric)
- Building emissions reduction (CEO metric)
- Number of tourism businesses participating in The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism
- Number of businesses participating in Colorado Green Business Network

Strategy 7 continued

Role of the Tourism Industry: Join the Colorado Green Business Network or similar organizations to adopt sustainable practices such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and water conservation. Lead advocacy efforts through educational campaigns to promote sustainability among businesses and visitors alike. Lead in destination-specific climate action plan development.

Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Communities

8. Enhance Water Conservation and Quality Initiatives

Local Tourism Businesses and Organizations

4. Provide Technical Assistance and Disaster Relief to Tourism Businesses

Climate

1. Encourage Sustainable Tourism Business Practices
6. Expand and Promote Electromobility Options for Visitors
7. Encourage Diverse, Climate-Adaptive Tourism Offerings
9. Facilitate Creation of Destination-Specific Climate Action Plans
10. Encourage Climate Impact Mitigation and Reporting

Potential Lead Partners: ScSEED, SLVTA, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!), Huerfano County Water Conservancy District, CGBN

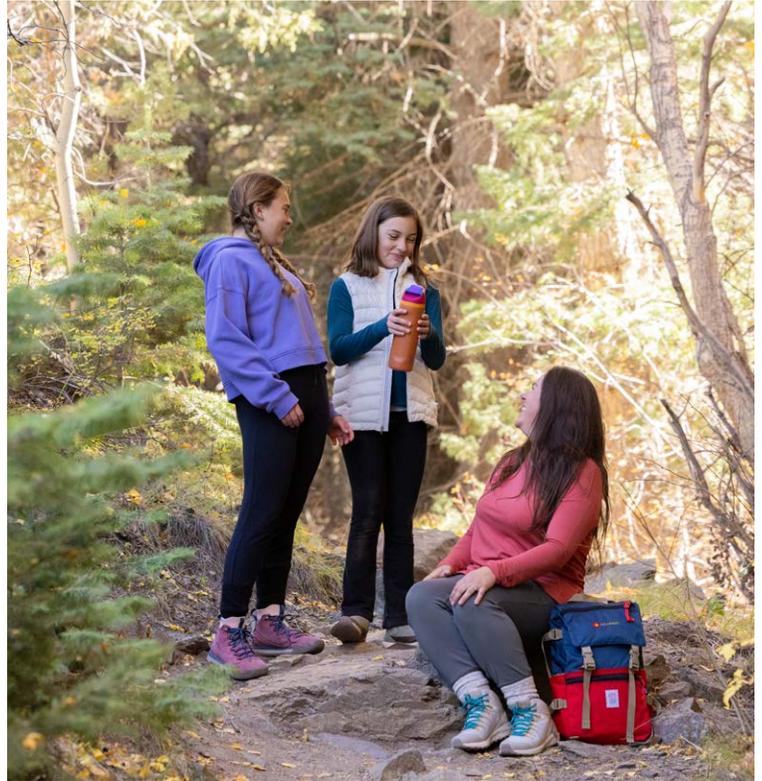
Potential Supporting Partners: CEO, chambers of commerce, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, Colorado SBDC, San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District, Scenic and Historic Byways



Strategy 8:

Convene Regional Outdoor Recreation Stakeholders in Economic and Environmental Stewardship Efforts

This strategy aims to unite outdoor recreation leadership across the Mystic San Luis Valley to prioritize conservation efforts in the region's unique natural environment and bolster the rural outdoor recreation economy. Currently, SLV GO! provides regional leadership on various stewardship and outdoor recreation development opportunities, and this initiative seeks to enhance coordination across collaborating with emerging outdoor recreation coalitions like the Spanish Peaks Outdoor Coalition. This effort aims to expand community involvement in outdoor recreation development, emphasizing conservation and stewardship efforts. The tourism industry will play a pivotal role by participating in leadership roles and fostering collaboration to support and promote upcoming outdoor recreation programs, including festivals and events.



Tactics:

- Launch a signature outdoor recreation event in the Mystic San Luis Valley that engages community and tourism partners to drive local economic impact while promoting outdoor recreation experiences and companies across the region.
- Establish an outdoor recreation coalition with support from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Outdoor Partnership (CO-OP) to convene quarterly meetings of regional land managers, stewardship partners, state parks, private businesses, outfitters, and tourism leaders. This coalition will amplify the efforts of local partners like SLV GO! and the Spanish Peaks Outdoor Coalition to advance conservation and economic development related to outdoor recreation.
- Develop a strategy for the regional rural outdoor recreation economy in collaboration with local businesses, including land managers, outfitters, and tourism partners.
- Identify opportunities to cultivate relationships and promote the region to outdoor recreation event partners.
- Conduct a feasibility study to assess the economic potential of hosting a signature outdoor recreation event or festival, such as a San Luis Valley balloon festival.
- Expand the existing Gravel Adventure Field Guide throughout the Mystic San Luis Valley.
- Replicate Monte Vista's Main Street revitalization efforts to increase tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities throughout other rural towns.
- Foster partnership opportunities between outdoor recreation and heritage to develop visitor experiences such as heritage gravel ride scavenger hunts.

Resources:

- [CPW Colorado Outdoor Partnership](#)
- [CTO Destination Development programs](#)
- [CTO competitive grants and co-ops](#)
- [Great Outdoors Colorado \(GOCO\)](#)
- [United States Environmental Protection Agency Recreation Economies for Rural Communities](#) planning assistance
- [Main Street program](#)

Destination Stewardship Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate examples of this strategy implemented in other communities:

- The Northwest Colorado Outdoor Coalition was formed through CPW CO-OP support and convenes tourism, outdoor recreation, and business leaders of the region in an effort to develop a strong outdoor recreation economy.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Number of outdoor recreation stakeholders engaged in economic and environmental stewardship efforts
- Value of resources including investment and grants secured
- The economic impact of outdoor recreation events measured by the number of attendees, increase in sales and lodging tax, and number of regional businesses participating

Role of the Tourism Industry: Participate in stakeholder coalition meetings and promote both existing and new outdoor recreation programming, festivals, and events

Statewide Strategy Alignment

This regional strategy aligns closely with the following strategies from the statewide plan:

Outdoor Recreation

2. Facilitate and Convene Collaborative Outdoor Management Discussions
5. Develop and Distribute Recreation and Trail Guides
8. Enhance Destination Stewardship Through Strategic Partnerships with The Private Sector

Potential Lead Partners: Spanish Peaks Outdoor Coalition, SLV GO!, Huerfano County’s Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation Coalition (HORC), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regional field office, CPW CO-OP, Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry, Colorado Festivals and Events Association (CFEA), The Great Outdoors Fund

Potential Supporting Partners: SLVTA, Monte Vista Steering Committee, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area

Implementation and Coordination Plan

Implementing the Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan for the Mystic San Luis Valley region is a substantial endeavor, involving the coordination of numerous regional, state, and federal agencies along with a vast network of dedicated tourism industry partners. To effectively execute this ambitious plan, securing solid commitments from these organizations and leveraging existing funding strategies will be essential.

Central to this initiative is the indispensable leadership of the CTO's Destination Stewardship Council (DSC). Comprising industry leaders, the DSC has been instrumental in shaping the strategic direction outlined in the plan. Moving forward, the DSC will serve as the implementation steering committee, convening regularly to facilitate ongoing dialogue on destination stewardship. These meetings will provide a platform to review progress, adjust strategies as needed, and foster collaboration essential to achieving our goals.

An annual report and online platform will serve as resources to evaluate progress against key indicators and celebrate achievements, demonstrating the collective impact of our efforts in advancing destination stewardship throughout Colorado.

Looking Ahead

The Colorado tourism industry is committed to protecting and enhancing our state for present and future generations. By embracing this responsibility, we are working toward a shared vision where destination stewardship is central to our tourism industry and community life. Through collaboration, innovation, and dedication, we aim to leave a lasting legacy for all who call Colorado home and those who are drawn to its stunning landscapes and rich heritage.

We commend the pioneers who have already initiated local destination stewardship plans tailored to their communities. These independent efforts reflect the foresight and dedication of local leaders and stakeholders, deserving our collective admiration and support.

Communities that have not yet begun their destination stewardship planning are encouraged to draw inspiration from the statewide framework and regional plans to pursue strategies that meet their specific needs and ambitions. For those already engaged, we hope these plans reinforce your efforts, providing additional resources, insights, and opportunities for collaboration. By sharing experiences and learning from one another, we can foster a culture of destination stewardship that honors our diverse landscapes and cultures, enriches our communities, and secures a sustainable future for Colorado.



Annex 1: Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACVB	Alamosa Convention and Visitors Bureau
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CCI	Colorado Creative Industries
CEO	Colorado Energy Office
CFEA	Colorado Festivals and Events Association
CO-OP	Colorado Outdoor Partnership
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
CTO	Colorado Tourism Office
DMO	Destination Management/Marketing organization
GOCO	Great Outdoors Colorado
GRSA	Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve
HORC	Huerfano County Outdoor Recreation Coalition
OEDIT	Office of Economic Development and International Trade
RTAP	Rural Technical Assistance Program
SBDC	Colorado Small Business Development Center Network
ScSEED	Saguache County Sustainable Environment and Economic Development
SCTC	Saguache County Tourism Council
SLCVE	San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
SLV	San Luis Valley
SLV GO!	San Luis Valley Great Outdoors
SLVTA	San Luis Valley Tourism Association
USFS	United States Forest Service

Annex 2: Destination Stewardship Partners

Government Agencies

Colorado benefits from vast expanses of public lands, including those within the Mystic San Luis Valley region. State and federal land management agencies are leading efforts to protect natural and cultural resources and promote responsible recreation on these lands.

- Bureau of Land Management
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- National Park Service (Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve)
- U.S. Forest Service (Rio Grande/Saguache Ranger District)

Regional Municipalities and Counties

The Mystic San Luis Valley travel region is comprised of the following cities and counties:

- **Cities:** Alamosa, Antonito, Blanca, Conejos, Creede, Crestone, Cuchara, Del Norte, Fort Garland, La Veta, Moffat, Monte Vista, Mosca, Saguache, San Luis, South Fork, Villa Grove, Walsenburg
- **Counties:** Conejos, Costilla, Huerfano, Alamosa, Rio Grande, Mineral, Saguache

Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative

Several Colorado Regional Partnerships are active in the region, each with varying missions and project scopes. These collaborations bring together land managers, conservation organizations, and recreation user groups, all committed to protecting, restoring, and stewarding habitats.

- **San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)** was originally formed in 2013 as a coalition by a group of citizens, educators, and community leaders who recognized the opportunity to enhance recreational experiences, improve wellness, and connect the communities across the six-county region of the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado. SLV GO! works collectively with nonprofits, businesses, federal agencies, and municipalities to improve health and quality of life via trails and outdoor recreation in the San Luis Valley.
- **Spanish Peaks Outdoor Coalition** builds on the collaborative efforts to create Fishers Peak State Park.
- **San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council (SLVVEC)** fosters an understanding of complex ecosystems and the constructive interplay between human cultures and the natural world. SLVVEC embraces and promotes the preservation of beauty, biodiversity, and the health of the San Luis Valley and upper Rio Grande region. SLVVEC provides education, stewardship practices, community investment, and public policy advocacy efforts.

DMOs and Local Tourism-Related Organizations

The Mystic San Luis Valley region boasts a diverse array of organizations and initiatives focused on advancing destination stewardship. Many of these organizations work locally and often partner with municipal governments. This list is not exhaustive, as numerous emerging efforts involve collaboration among multiple DMOs, local and county governments, state and federal land managers, and other nonprofit organizations.

Alamosa Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB) drives visitor demand through marketing and tourism management activities. ACVB or “Visit Alamosa” is funded by a county-collected lodging tax of 2% as well as a marketing district tax.

Bureau of Land Management San Luis Valley Field Office manages nearly 500,000 acres of public land in Colorado’s Rio Grande Basin. The public lands managed by the BLM’s San Luis Valley Field Office present myriad ecosystems; from the alpine desert to the majestic Sangre de Cristo Wilderness on the eastern side of the Valley.

Conejos County Tourism promotes the southwestern corner of the region as the last frontier of Colorado. This effort is funded by county lodging tax with oversight from a county-appointed board.

Creede/Mineral County Chamber of Commerce represents over 100 members (including businesses, individuals, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and associations) that have come together to develop the economy of Mineral County while working to preserve those community and environmental features.

Creede and Mineral County Lodging Tax Panel provides oversight and coordination of tourism promotions including distribution of lodging tax for marketing opportunities and operates as a county commissioner-appointed board of volunteers.

Creede and Mineral County Tourism/Visitor Center is an organization representing over 100 members—businesses, individuals, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and associations—which have come together to develop the economy of Mineral County while working to preserve those community and environmental features. The Chamber oversees the visitor center.

Cuchara Mountain Park is a community-based, nonprofit-operated outdoor recreation area created through grassroots efforts to renew a special area that was left abandoned in the year 2000.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (GRSA) protects over 100,000 acres in the Sangre de Cristo mountains within the San Luis Valley of Colorado. It was originally designated a national monument in 1932 to protect its dunes from gold mining and sand extraction for cement, but for millennia before the designation, Indigenous communities have viewed the sand dunes as a sacred place. The park contains the tallest dunes in North America at over 750 feet tall. The rugged mountain range provides a dramatic backdrop to the dunes with peaks soaring to over 14,000 feet.

Highway of Legends Scenic Byway Committee is a volunteer board that provides oversight for the 82-mile National Scenic Byway, National Forest Scenic Byway, and Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway located in Huerfano and Las Animas counties.

Huerfano County Tourism Board markets the county as a tourism destination and supports the quality of life for residents by bringing visitors to the county, having a positive impact on the local economy while preserving the environment and culture. The county is promoted as Spanish Peaks Country.

La Veta Creative District is a designated Colorado Creative Industries creative district that operates with the mission to inspire and cultivate a diverse rural community through the development of the arts and creative industries.

Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic Byway Committee is a volunteer stakeholder board providing oversight to the 129-mile byway that explores the wide and flat expanse of the valley floor that served as a gateway into Colorado for Spanish explorers arriving from the south. As a result,

Rio Grande Country Tourism provides oversight of the county lodging tax tourism fund. The purposes of the funding are restricted to advertising and promoting tourism for the benefit of those unincorporated areas and municipalities from which the lodging tax originated. The Rio Grande County Tourism Board is composed of members involved in the tourism industry representing Monte Vista, Del Norte and South Fork and their surrounding areas, and meets monthly to develop and implement strategies to market Rio Grande County as a tourist destination.

Saguache County Sustainable Environment and Economic Development (ScSEED) supports community efforts in Saguache County, Colorado. Founded in 1999, ScSEED's mission is to build a strong community, protect the environment, and develop a sustainable economy.

Saguache County Tourism Council (SCTC) operates as the destination marketing and management organization for Saguache County, funded with a 1.9% lodging tax collected by the county.

South Fork Visitor's Center is a department of the Town of South Fork that provides visitor information resources and the coordination of destination marketing.

San Luis Valley Tourism Association (SLVTA) fosters greater collaboration for the region as a partnership of industry tourism organizations and private businesses.

Sangre de Cristo Dark Sky Coalition aims to help local municipalities and county governments with adopting strong new lighting ordinances and encouraging responsible lighting practices throughout the region. The coalition partners, led by SLV GO!, also provide dark sky education and outreach to inspire people to connect to the night sky and increase engagement in night sky preservation.

Silver Thread Scenic Byway Committee provides oversight of the scenic byway that follows SH-149 from South Fork at the southern end through Creede, Lake City and ends at U.S. Route 50 just west of Gunnison.

NGOs, Academia, and Community Entities

Below is a list of other groups, organizations and entities in the Mystic San Luis Valley travel region currently engaged in resource stewardship at a community or county level. It is important to note there are many other public and private sector individuals and organizations supporting the work of the listed entities as well as championing other initiatives.

- Adams State University
- Creede Arts Council
- Crestone Artists
- Fox Theatre Walsenburg
- Heart of Saguache
- Museum of Friends
- Mystic Valley Arts Council
- San Luis Valley Development Resource Group and Council of Governments
- San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
- Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area
- South Fork Music Association
- Spanish Peaks Outdoor Coalition
- Spanish Peaks Arts Council
- The Range, Saguache
- Valley Roots Food Hub
- Valley Roots Local Food Coalition

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