

Northern Colorado BUSINESS REPORT

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Drahota first to buy into Colorado carbon fund

By Steve Porter

FORT COLLINS - Drahota Construction Co. is the first private business in Colorado to sign up to take part in the newly launched Colorado Carbon Fund, which aims to reduce greenhouse emissions and global warming.

The CCF, a program under Gov. Ritter's Energy Office, was kicked off in August and is designed to link businesses and other entities interested in offsetting their carbon emissions with projects in Colorado that can reduce that carbon footprint.

"The CCF provides high-quality carbon offsets as a way to support new energy-efficient and renewable energy projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our state," said Susan Innis, CCF program manager.

Innis said the Energy Office has had about 45 participants sign up for the program through September with plans to ramp up marketing in coming months. As of mid-October, she said Drahota was the first and only Northern Colorado business to make a tax-deductible contribution to the fund.

Todd McCowin, Drahota Construction's safety and environmental director, said company president Terry Drahota wanted to get on board with CCF as soon as it started.

Spending locally

"One of the big things when I brought this to Terry Drahota, his response was, 'Why can't we spend the money locally?'" he said. "We looked at a lot of different options and then we saw the Colorado Carbon Fund was going to be available."

McCowin said the CCF lets carbon offset buyers reduce their impact on the environment by supporting Colorado-based projects that remove carbon emissions or reduce them through new technology.

"It's kind of a community trade system," he said. "You pay for credits and CCF funds worthy projects. It's typically not tree-planting in Colorado but more investing in new technologies."

Earlier this year, the Governor's Energy Office contracted with Portland-based The Climate Trust to help develop partnerships with greenhouse gas reduction projects.

"GEO selected The Climate Trust to design its Colorado Carbon Fund and engage individuals, businesses and government agencies in purchasing Colorado-based, verifiable carbon offsets that will reduce their carbon footprint," energy office director Tom Plant said in a statement announcing the partnership.

Colorado's first step

Mike Burnett, The Climate Trust's executive director, said he applauded Colorado's efforts to reduce carbon emissions. "Colorado is the first state to do something like this as a state-sponsored carbon fund," he said. "That's a first, and it's very far-sighted."

Burnett also praised Drahota Construction's commitment to the fund. "I would say it speaks to a strong commitment to green and environmentally conscious construction," he said. "It's being a good corporate citizen for the planet and for their customers as well."

Burnett said The Climate Trust is still working to find carbon offset projects in Colorado to receive funding. He said there should be no shortage of projects.

"I don't think it will be that difficult," he said. "It depends on the popularity of the program but we're very confident we'll find some good carbon offsets in Colorado."

"It might include forestry-type projects, agriculture-type projects, dairy digesters addressing manure from feedlots, coal mine methane - there's lots of different things."

Oregon also leads

Burnett said Oregon has been a leader in advancing carbon offsets since 1997. According to its Web site, The Climate Trust has placed \$8.8 million in a diverse portfolio of projects in the U.S. and other countries that are expected to offset nearly 2.6 million tons of carbon dioxide.

Businesses and other participants in the Colorado Carbon Fund can use a "carbon footprint calculator" on CCF's web site at ColoradoCarbonFund.org to figure out how much of a carbon offset they want to buy.

Drahota's McCowin said the company used about 46,000 gallons of gasoline and diesel in its trucks last year, which resulted in about 450 tons of carbon emissions released into the atmosphere. He said at \$20 per ton, the carbon offsets were the best way to address that pollution.

"The biggest problem for us is our trucks," he said. "Compared to investing in new trucks and higher miles per gallon it's easier to buy the carbon offsets."