

Title: Reaching and Engaging Absentee Landowners on Sustainable Property Management Education.

Mentors: Eight field agents in the Western Region including Linda Masters (Rio Blanco), Aleigh Aurin (Jackson), Gus Westerman (Delores), Robin Young (Archuleta), Todd Hagenbuchand Libby Christensen (Routt); and three regional specialists including Seth Urbanowitz (Agronomy), Jenny Beiermann (Agriculture & Business Mgt), and Retta Brugger (Range Mgt), have committed to supporting this intern. Dr. Libby Christensen, based out of Routt County, will be the primary mentor. Questions can be directed to lchristensen@co.routt.co.us

Location: Western Colorado based out of Routt County; much of the internship can be done remotely if necessary, although an in-person experience is preferable if protocols allow.

Goals, Scope, and Objectives: The overall goal of the internship is to support efforts to improve CSU Extension's ability to provide educational programming about sustainable land management for absentee landowners. Absentee landowners are responsible for an increasingly large share of acreage in the Intermountain West. Their land use decisions, or lack thereof, has important consequences for the overall sustainability of the region. Our traditional methods of engaging and educating landowners is not well suited for part-time or non-residents. The intern will be responsible for laying the foundation for future work with absentee landowners. This will involve working with a team of field agents and regional specialists. The specific objectives include: (1) creation of a GIS database of absentee landowners in western Colorado, (2) literature review of existing research and tools engaging absentee landowners, (3) development of a survey for identified absentee landowners, and (4) identification and creation of materials for potential funding.

Background: Routt County will be the base for the internship. In Routt County, based on 2020 county assessor data, nearly 390,000 acres, more than half of all the agricultural acreage in the county, is owned by individuals primarily residing outside of the region. Since 2013, Colorado State University Routt County Extension in partnership with the Community Agricultural Alliance (CAA), a local non-profit, has offered four sections of a six-week land stewardship course for rural property owners and real estate brokers. The goal of the course is to promote stewardship of the county's natural resources by providing site-specific, regional and profitable sustainable farming and ranching methods. In Routt County, there has been a shift in course participation from rural property owners to individuals involved in the real estate industry. While brokers are a valuable audience to reach, rural landowners are the course's primary target. At the same time, Routt County is experiencing increasing conflicts between traditional and absentee landowners. Absentee landowners are seen to detract from the overall quality of life of farmers and ranchers and threaten the viability of rural communities.

Outcomes: By the end of the internship the intern will develop important skills necessary to: (1) work with county departments to create a GIS database, (2) conduct a rigorous literature review, (3) engage diverse stakeholders in the creation of a useful and effective survey instrument, and (4) identify grant funding opportunities.

Mentorship Style: Dr. Christensen will be the primary mentor. The mentor contacts will provide the general structure of the internship and ongoing support to ensure that the mentee can thrive, while providing the flexibility necessary to make the project something they can own. The mentee will also be encouraged to experience the wide variety of tasks associated with an Extension career, in addition to the focusing on a particular research project.

Travel Funds: Limited funding for travel and housing within western Colorado may be available.