



The Mountain Pact

Meet Laura Armstrong- Aspen, Colorado's Sustainability Programs Administrator for the Climate Action Office

The Mountain Pact works with nearly fifty mountain communities across eleven states in the West. We created the Community Highlight Project to interview elected officials and staff who work with The Mountain Pact to learn more about their involvement and goals, while connecting communities across states with one another. Though our work is often one on one with local elected officials, our community is far-reaching and strong, and we hope these updates provide valuable insights and relatable stories.

Meet Laura Armstrong, Sustainability Programs Administrator for the Climate Action Office in Aspen, Colorado

Laura has a classic mountain town story: she moved to Aspen from the East Coast to teach environmental education at a local school only planning to stay for a year or two, but immediately fell in love with the town and community. Five years later, she calls the iconic Roaring Fork Valley home. "I think the mountain lifestyle has totally caught me off guard, and in a really good way." Aspen's strong community, which Laura believes is based on living in the mountains, is ultimately what inspired her to stay.



Laura's Role in Aspen's Climate Action Office

Laura works as the Sustainability Programs Administrator for the City of Aspen's [Climate Action Office](#). What began as a temporary fellowship position evolved into a full-time and permanent role. With a staff of five, the Climate Action Office works to achieve Aspen's community goal to "decrease greenhouse gases 30% by 2020 and 80% by 2050; all below 2004 levels." The Aspen community's first Climate Action Plan to work toward these goals was adopted in 2007. Since then, the Aspen community leveraged this framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the same time as the community experienced growth in population and economic activity. Aspen's newest Climate Action Plan was adopted in 2018 and identifies 46 strategies to further reduce emissions across six sectors.

Laura's role is mainly focused on providing energy efficiency programming to both residents and business owners, as well as Aspen's electric vehicle readiness program which works to support the community transition to electric vehicles of all types. She also leads Aspen's federal policy engagement, which includes working with The Mountain Pact to stay up to date and engaged on what is happening at the national level around federal policies related to climate change.



Involvement with The Mountain Pact

In 2014, Aspen jumped at the opportunity to become one of the founding communities involved with The Mountain Pact. Engaging with The Mountain Pact created the opportunity for a collective and united voice with other mountain towns, especially around climate change and its impact on these communities with outdoor-based

economies and cultures. Laura notes that it has been exciting to see the organization grow in membership and impact.

Over the years, [Aspen City Council](#) members have been active in signing on to many of The Mountain Pact's policy initiatives. They have engaged in issues like the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Methane Rule, supporting the Outdoor REC Act (2017), wildfire funding reform (2016), and reforming federal coal leasing (2015). Engagement has included sign-on letters, writing op-eds, and participating in Washington, D.C. fly-ins. The Mountain Pact's annual D.C. fly-ins have provided Aspen and other communities with the opportunity to meet with members of Congress and agency officials to discuss policies related to climate, public lands, and outdoor recreation.

The opportunities for facetime and relationship building have been valuable for Aspen City Council Members, such as Mayor Pro Tem Ann Mullins. Ann has been "working with The Mountain Pact for the last four years, supporting sign-on letters, writing op-eds, and participating in the Washington DC fly-ins, advocating along with the other mountain towns for the LWCF, Outdoor REC Act, and wildfire funding reform along with other legislation. The Mountain Pact has enabled us (the mountain towns) to speak with a strong, unified, and effective voice in support of the issues that directly affect our mountain resort communities."

Climate Change in a Mountain Town

Aspen, like other mountain towns, has already seen the impacts of a changing climate. With 23 more frost-free days, Aspen is losing its winter and with it, the stable temperatures that make mountain life tick. Laura said that,



"Fundamentally, we know large systemic change and federal action on

climate is required to mitigate the impact of a rapidly changing climate in small mountain towns." Aspen has worked to balance a local and national approach to climate change through crafting local climate action plans while remaining engaged at a state and federal level. The town's most recent climate action plan, completed in 2018, involved 40 stakeholders and experts from the community. Those involved provided direction on action needed from the Aspen community, not just the city. The Climate Action Office supports this plan by implementing a number of these actions and coordinating with other community organizations to support comprehensive implementation of the plan's entirety.

Laura admits that Aspen, like most mountain towns, is vulnerable economically, socially, and culturally. She noted, "We feel we have an imperative to do what we can to encourage change in the large scale systemic action on climate." They work with twenty seven other towns with [Colorado Communities for Climate Action](#) which is an organization that works to advocate for state and national policies to protect Colorado's climate. And at the national level, Laura sees Aspen's involvement with The Mountain Pact as beneficial.



Aspen: Environmental Leadership and Unique Culture

Aspen is a town of 7,000 people with a tourism and outdoor recreation-based economy. The town invites visitors to spend time outdoors in both winter and summer; along with engaging in cultural events such as music, film, dance, and theater. On the busiest days of the year, Aspen hosts up to 30,000 residents and tourists. Like many other mountain towns, life is seasonal and follows the "rhythm of busy and quiet." Laura believes one aspect that makes Aspen special is the town's history valuing both the outdoor environment and mountains along with arts and cultural engagement, creating a "best of both worlds" scenario for residents and visitors.

Laura also notes that Aspen's environmental leadership is unique and it was a large factor in why she stayed and became more active in her role in city government. The leadership over the past several decades by city council members, mayors, and staff has demonstrated a priority to focus on environmental issues.

Aspen has proven to be a leader in environmental stewardship. In 2015, the municipal electric utility achieved sourcing 100% of its electricity from renewables, becoming the third US municipality to do so. It also became one of the first small towns to pass a plastic bag ban, and create a fee for single-use paper bags. Laura is proud to live in a county that led the charge in Colorado on creating a compost program, which is available to residents and businesses. The city boasts an extensive transit system of affordable rural buses that run up and down the valley frequently. Laura feels fortunate to work for a city that prioritizes and supports jobs such as hers, allowing her and others to tackle important work on conservation issues.

Look for Community Highlights focused on introducing you to members of The Mountain Pact. If you are interested in being highlighted, please let us know by contacting Mountain Pact Executive Director, Anna Peterson: anna@themountainpact.org.

www.themountainpact.org | info@themountainpact.org

