



The Mountain Pact

Meet Frank Lancaster--Former Town Administrator of Estes Park, CO

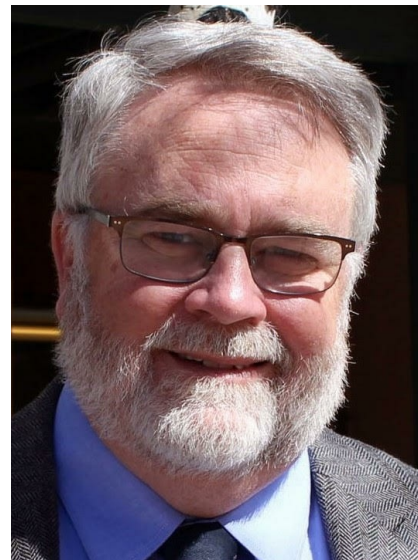
The Mountain Pact works with over fifty mountain communities across eleven states in the West. We created the Community Highlights Project to interview individuals from The Mountain Pact to learn more about their involvement and goals while connecting communities across states with one another. Though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

Congratulations on Retirement!

Frank has been an incredible partner for The Mountain Pact and we wish him the best in his retirement. We are excited to continue our relationship with Estes Park through his successor, Travis Machalek.

Meet Frank Lancaster, Town Administrator for Estes Park, Colorado

Frank is a Colorado local and a long-time resident of Larimer County where he worked for many years as the County Manager in Fort Collins. But, having often visited the town of Estes Park and having always loved mountain communities, when the opportunity arose for him to be the Town Administrator of the beautiful mountain getaway, Frank jumped at the idea. Seven years later, Frank still loves that Rocky Mountain National Park is his backyard and loves Estes Park's proximity to urban centers. Now, after years of hard work and seeing the town through several natural disasters such as the devastating 2013 Front Range Floods, he gets to retire to enjoy all of the wonderful outdoor activities and amenities that his destination community has to offer.



Life as a Town Administrator

Frank moved to Estes Park to take on the role of Town



Administrator and was immediately thrown into the fire - literally. Within Frank's first month there was a devastating wildfire that destroyed 21 homes. Six months later there was another wildfire, in December(!), where luckily no homes

were lost. Then, nine months after he started, the Front Range Floods "really intensely changed everything" for about a year after. For a little while after the floods the only way to access Estes Park was through Rocky Mountain National Park, leaving the community isolated. They began to run out of gas and food as no commercial vehicles could make it to the town. However, as Frank said, "due to good staff and strong community" as well as good town infrastructure, they were able to manage the impacts and come out thriving on the other side.

After earning the nickname "Disaster Lancaster" Frank worked to maintain the unique character of Estes Park while confronting challenges related to an increasing population and increased visitation. He described one of the biggest challenges as balancing the conflict between people who have been there a while, the newcomers who make their livelihood on visitation, and those who want the amenities that come with high tourist numbers, but not the people. Overall he feels lucky to live and have worked in a beautiful community where he can have daily interactions with wildlife, access to the amenities of a larger town, and competent, supportive staff.

Involvement With The Mountain Pact

Frank has been involved with The Mountain Pact from nearly the beginning. He has always valued the network of communities because "there are things that are different for mountain/resort communities than other small communities." Having such intimate experience with the impacts of wildfire is what first got Frank's attention with The Mountain Pact. He sees the need to talk about preventing catastrophic wildfire and not "wait until everything is out of control."

As the Town Administrator, Frank has been the main contact for The Mountain Pact. When he sees an issue that warrants trustee attention he will bring it to the [Board of Trustees](#) to get them involved. The Board of Trustees has signed on to letters relating to the Outdoor REC Act in 2017, as well as two Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) letters in 2018 and 2019.

The undeniable relationship between the health of Rocky Mountain National Park and Estes Park has enhanced the town's understanding of the need to protect public lands and the programs that fund them. In 2018, Frank

partnered with The Mountain Pact to author an [opinion-editorial](#) speaking out about the importance of the LWCF to both Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park.

Why The Mountain Pact?

Frank remains involved with The Mountain Pact because he feels it is important to work with other towns who have mutual interests and similar threats to their communities. Frank sees Estes Park and others like it as "communities of common interest." The Mountain Pact "represents communities



that have common needs," they are communities with a lot of visitors that are surrounded by a lot of public lands. Frank recognizes that in "speaking together we have much more authority," and that "particularly those with name recognition have a greater impact."

Frank thinks that it is important to have an organization like The Mountain Pact to keep an eye on impactful federal policies because small towns can get lost in the day to day stuff. He says that it's "nice to know that The Mountain Pact is out here looking at the big picture."

Estes Park: Not Just Another Ski Town

Although Estes Park shares many characteristics with other Colorado mountain communities, it is unique in that it was never anything other than a destination community. It was never a mining or industrial community, and never had a ski resort. Instead, it was a hunting, fishing, and recreating destination. The Stanley Hotel only contributed to this. When Rocky Mountain National Park was established in 1917, it further cemented Estes Park's future as a thriving destination community.

Now, with a population of just over 6,000 people, Estes Park can see as many as 30,000-50,000 visitors on the weekends. This is all supported by a unique and funky downtown filled with mostly "mom and pop" shops. The large number of visitors does present challenges, but it also provides significantly more services and infrastructure for its residents than many other similar-sized communities. All in all, Frank is excited to retire and enjoy the amenities--in town and out.

Looking Ahead

Although Estes Park is a strong community with good infrastructure and employees, Frank worries about the impacts that climate change and



decreased funding for public lands research and funding will have on Estes Park. The town is completely surrounded by public lands and he notes that "the government needs to continue to invest and work on protecting those lands." As the Front

Range cities of Colorado expands, Estes Park sees more and more visitors. "This is not the time to cut back on wildfire funding, flood relief, and river restoration." Rocky Mountain National Park is critical to Estes Park; if the infrastructure or resources get damaged the community will also suffer.

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 ED, Anna Peterson: anna@themountainpact.org.

Photo Credit: Kate Rusch

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