

# Energy Efficiency Meets Fiscal Responsibility in Jackson, Wyoming

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## Introduction

Surrounded on all sides by the stunning landscapes and unique wildlife of such renowned National Parks like Yellowstone and Grand Teton, it's no wonder that more than two million guests pass through the small town (pop. 9,038) of Jackson, Wyoming on a yearly basis.

Located 6,500 feet above sea level and widely known as a resort community, with its close proximity to ski resorts and majestic mountain ranges, Jackson has a strong local economy and an even stronger legacy of Western culture and values.

The Town of Jackson has been ramping up their environmental initiatives since 2006 and made its first public commitment to climate protection in

November of that year, when Mayor Mark Barron became the first and only Mayor in Wyoming to sign the US Conference of Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement. Shortly after, Jackson joined ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability USA (ICLEI). Alongside Jackson, Teton County is the only other jurisdiction in Wyoming to become an ICLEI member.

Recognizing that both local governments were on similar paths to attain greater environmental sustainability for their communities, Jackson and Teton County formed a critical partnership making them the strongest and largest entity in the state committed to local environmental initiatives.



Teton Range, Grand Teton National Park, Source: Wikipedia

## Strategy

Touting a message of environmental sustainability would not come without challenges in Wyoming, where the state economy is driven mainly by the mineral extraction industry, a major greenhouse gas contributor. The Town of Jackson was prepared to sell the idea of sustainability to its constituents; not in terms of limiting economic

activity, but with the goal of increasing efficiency, thus saving money and boosting the local economy.



Using software and assistance from ICLEI, the Town gathered data and began to assess their energy usage in order to determine a baseline year and set a concrete reduction goal.



This case study is part of the Small Communities Toolkit produced by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability and funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

## Progress

### Challenges

Initial discussions regarding climate protection and global warming were met with significant resistance in both Jackson and Teton County. Located in the top coal producing state in the country, the notion of ceasing mineral extraction in order to curb greenhouse gas emissions was both unpopular and economically unrealistic.



*A Wyoming Coal Mine, Source: Wikipedia*

It was important to not make coal, natural gas, or oil out to be the primary culprits, as those resources help drive the success of the state's economy. So the Town of Jackson stepped back and reevaluated their approach to environmental sustainability. The new town message set out to prove that cutting carbon emissions makes good business sense; and applying energy efficiency and conservation practices was the way to do it.

Mayor Barron often quotes a favorite message, coined by Jim Webb of Lower Valley Energy: "The cheapest kilowatt is the one you never use." By promoting the potential of fiscal savings through energy efficiency and resource conservation, Jackson was able to garner much needed clout for their local environmental initiatives.

Jackson's community goals now rested comfortably at the intersection of energy

efficiency and fiscal responsibility. In order to continue ahead, the Town would need a clear picture of exactly how much energy they used, in order to know how much they could save.

### Successes and Achievements

In 2006, Jackson conducted energy audits and retrofitted all standard incandescent bulbs with energy efficient compact fluorescents (CFLs) in several city facilities, including Town Hall, Public Works, and the wastewater treatment plant.

Jackson's utility provider, Lower Valley Energy, provided a rebate of \$13,000 to use towards these lighting retrofits. The simple step of switching out light bulbs in several municipal buildings will reduce the Town's carbon emissions by 32 tons a year. The return on investment from energy savings alone is expected in three and a half to five and a half years.

In 2007, Jackson introduced their formal target reduction goal in the form of the 10x10 resolution. Adopted by both the Town and County, the two local governments were now committed to reducing all fossil fuels and electrical consumption 10 percent by 2010. Later that year, the Joint Energy Efficiency Advisory Board was formed between the Jackson Town Council and the Teton County Board of County Commissioners. The Advisory Board played an integral role in defining an action plan specific to attaining the goals of the 10x10 resolution as well as mapping out future environmental and efficiency initiatives for the Town and County. Today, Jackson continues to work with Teton County to integrate energy efficiency in many aspects of municipal services such as public transportation, recycling and energy audits for all Town and County facilities.



## Applying Jackson's Successes

The success of Jackson's environmental initiatives was largely due to choosing an appropriate message that would be met with wide community support. Instead of using popular buzz words like "global warming" and "CO<sub>2</sub> emissions," the leaders of the Town and County focused on how energy efficiency and conservation is good for the bottom line. Saving energy means saving taxpayer dollars.

Wisely choosing not to reinvent the wheel, Jackson and Teton County sought technical expertise and support from ICLEI that would enable both local governments to realistically meet their emissions reduction goals.

Despite the community's initial hesitance to climate protection initiatives, Jackson was able to

win broad support by demonstrating the long term savings that could be had as well as a quick return on investment. Without imposing rules or regulations on businesses or citizens the Town took simple and basic steps, like performing an energy audit and switching out light bulbs to more energy efficient CFLs in their municipal buildings. Continuing to implement environmental initiatives that save money and energy in the Town of Jackson and Teton County is a win-win situation that everyone can benefit from.

To further help small communities, ICLEI has created a toolkit designed to provide the resources and tools needed to help small communities begin working on environmental agendas, climate action plans, and a sustainable future.

## Resources

[The Town of Jackson - Environmental Initiatives](#)

[ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability USA](#)

[Bleizeffer, Dustin. "Mayors: Towns save by cutting carbon emissions." Casper Star-Tribune 12 Sep 2008](#)

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