

Sustainable Tourism Project

Project Description

This project is a county-wide effort to strengthen community pride, celebrate Custer County's unique character, and elevate its heritage assets across Westcliffe, Silver Cliff, San Isabel, and Wetmore. By showcasing the county's quirky charm, amplifying historic sites, launching a ranching-themed COW art initiative, and enhancing community visibility through the Business Roundtable, the project builds a shared sense of identity and welcome. It also aligns local celebrations with Colorado's 150th anniversary and prepares for Custer County's own 150-year milestone in 2027, including hosting major heritage events such as a Ranching Days Festival and partnering with statewide exhibits. Overall, the project strengthens cultural pride, boosts heritage tourism, and unifies residents around what makes Custer County distinct.

Strategic Alignment with Community Vision

The project directly supports the community vision by strengthening pride in the rural heritage and community livelihood that define Custer County. By highlighting the county's unique character, celebrating its ranching and agricultural roots, and elevating historic sites across Westcliffe, Silver Cliff, San Isabel, and Wetmore, the project reinforces the cultural identity that complements our scenic beauty, working lands, and outdoor lifestyle. Heritage events, the COW art project, and partnerships with local museums and ranches help connect residents and visitors to the landscapes, histories, and traditions that make the valley special. In doing so, the project cultivates lasting appreciation and stewardship; ensuring that the land, stories, and community spirit we value today continue to be cherished for generations to come.

Community Support

45% of community survey respondents rated this project important or very important.

Actions

- Initiation & Organization: Assemble core stakeholders including WMVO, Business Roundtable, heritage sites (All Aboard Westcliffe, SC Museum, Beckwith Ranch, Pines Ranch), ranching community representatives, schools, business leaders, and municipal partners from Westcliffe, Silver Cliff, San Isabel, and Wetmore. Designate leadership roles, including project coordinator(s) and sub-teams for events, heritage assets, communications, funding, and community engagement.
- Determine responsibility for major milestone events:

Sustainable Tourism Project

- CO150 – August 1, 2026: Assign an event lead team and municipal/heritage site liaisons.
 - Custer County 150 – July 31, 2027: Establish a dedicated planning committee with clear ownership and timeline.
- Planning & Strategic Development: Establish a full project schedule outlining quarterly goals leading up to 2026 and 2027, including coordination with statewide CO150 teams for the traveling exhibit.
- Develop and adopt a strategic plan for the overall “Keep Custer Quaint & Quirky” initiative, including branding, messaging, event flow, community engagement, and heritage tourism components.
 - Identify funding needs for art installations, events, transportation solutions, heritage programming, and marketing materials. Draft and submit grants (state, tourism, community foundation, arts, and heritage grants) and seek sponsorships from local businesses.
- Community Visibility & Beautification: Create and schedule a Main Street seasonal clean-up and decorating plan, including flower baskets, banners, ranching-themed décor, quirky wayfinding signs, and town-specific touches for Westcliffe, Silver Cliff, San Isabel, and Wetmore.
- Launch the COW art project, engaging local artists, ranching families, youth groups, and businesses.
- Business & Heritage Engagement:
 - Transform the Business Roundtable into a more public-facing, recognizable program, helping businesses support events and contribute to quirky promotional elements.
 - Coordinate with heritage sites to integrate tours, exhibits, events, and passport stamps.
 - Strengthen ranching community collaboration, including centennial ranch engagement for Ranching Days Festival planning.
- Marketing, Outreach & Content Creation:
 - Develop a unified marketing and communications plan, including branding, website updates, social media themes, and storytelling around quirky, quaint, and historic elements.
 - Produce promotional videos, social media campaigns, and educational content to build excitement.

Sustainable Tourism Project

- Design and launch the “Quaint & Quirky Passport” program with stamps, special offers, and local discounts.
- Execute Key Milestone Events:
 - CO150 Celebration – August 1, 2026
 - Host the traveling exhibit, coordinate county-wide events, integrate Main Street decorations, and offer heritage programs.
 - Use school bus drivers for summer transportation if feasible.
 - Custer County 150th Celebration – July 31, 2027
 - Host a multi-day celebration across all towns.
 - Launch the Ranching Days Festival at Beckwith Ranch, timed with haying season to honor centennial ranches.
 - Integrate passport challenges, heritage tours, quirky attractions, and community pride activities.
- Evaluation & Continued Momentum
 - Track performance metrics throughout 2026–2027 (attendance, tax data, social media analytics, passport redemptions, community pride indicators).
 - Evaluate successes and lessons learned annually, especially after the major 2026 and 2027 events.
 - Update long-term plans to keep the Quaint & Quirky program thriving beyond the 150th celebrations.

Metrics for Success

- 1) Increased attendance at heritage and community events, especially those tied to CO150 (2026) and Custer County’s 150th celebration (2027).
- 2) Year-over-year growth in local sales tax revenue linked to visitor activity.
- 3) Lodging tax increases reflecting stronger tourism engagement.
- 4) Demonstrated rise in community pride through survey responses, volunteer participation, and resident engagement.
- 5) Growth in social media reach, including clicks, likes, shares, comments, and video views.
- 6) Number of promotional videos produced highlighting quirky, quaint, and heritage elements of Custer County.

Sustainable Tourism Project

- 7) Participation and completion rates for a “Quaint & Quirky Passport” (stamps collected, offers redeemed, discounts used).
- 8) Number and depth of collaborations with local ranchers, centennial ranches, and heritage organizations.
- 9) Increased participation of businesses in Roundtable activities and visibility campaigns.
- 10) Attendance and engagement at CO150 traveling exhibit and related educational programming.

Probable Collaboration Partners

- Business Roundtable
- Town of Westcliffe
- Silver Cliff
- School District
- BOCC
- Beckwith Ranch
- Pines Ranch
- USFS
- CC Cattlewoman’s Association

Community Signup List

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS	Include me on the communication list for this project.	I would like to be part of project development work
Rick Montanari		rickmontanari55@gmail.com	1	
Destiny Chapman	USFS	destiny.chapman@usda.gov	1	
Michael Burnell	Resident	michael.burnelljr@gmail.com	1	
Cecilia Timberg	Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative	ceciliatimberg01@gmail.com	1	
Scott Mischnick		scott.mischnick@gmail.com	1	
Eileen Horne		eileenhorne8512@gmail.com	1	

Sustainable Tourism Project

TOTALS			6	0