

Background

In 2021, The Environmental Center and Sustainable Northwest co-hosted a Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) AmeriCorps member. The RARE member researched best practices, compiled a report ([Best Practices for Community Energy Planning in Rural Oregon](#)) developed a [baseline energy inventory](#), held stakeholder listening sessions /focus groups, and researched community energy project potential.

During year two the RARE member's intent was to work with local commissioners to determine the appetite for a county-wide energy plan. Ultimately, while not outright opposed to the idea, commissioners showed little interest in developing or supporting an energy plan. Subsequently, the Energy Plan Working Group members, who volunteered to help with this effort, concluded that we needed to get this effort going now, with or without county support.

Our new goal: develop a grassroots, community-driven energy plan. If this effort is for the entire community, then it must be community led, and much bigger than TEC alone. We recognize that transformative change only happens through collaboration. We are just one piece of a larger ecosystem of experts and organizers dedicated to making Central Oregon more sustainable and livable. We will strive to build intentional relationships that center our communities' needs with the intent to lead, develop, and adopt an energy action plan for the community to co-implement.

Goals (to be finalized by the Leadership Team)

1. Radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel based energy production, energy used in local buildings, and fossil fuels used in the transportation sector within the county.
2. Enhance the resilience of the energy system in the county, particularly as related to possible disruptions caused by extreme weather, severe heat waves, wildfires and earthquakes.
3. Ensure that benefits and outcomes are distributed fairly and equitably across Deschutes County with an emphasis on rural and agricultural areas that have not yet benefited from energy transition incentives/improvements or an existing climate plan (i.e. City of Bend's Climate Action Plan).
4. Encourage and create avenues for intergovernmental and regional community collaboration, bringing key public and private partners together to collaborate, invest in more comprehensive clean energy projects, and ensure work is not being duplicated.
5. Uplift our community's lived experience and leverage local technical expertise to create a plan that is rooted in culturally relevant strategies and sound science.

Purpose

The purpose of Deschutes Energy Future is to ignite energy planning in Deschutes County to develop and implement a community-led energy action plan. Deschutes Energy Future seeks to:

1. Establish a leadership team that represents the diversity of Deschutes County and will engage the community in the energy planning process to:
 - a. Initiate working groups in each of the plan's focus areas
 - b. Develop the energy action plan
 - c. Ensure the plan is implemented over the near and long terms
2. Engage with diverse segments of the population, government entities and commercial sectors (retail, industrial, agricultural) to ensure all stakeholder viewpoints are considered
3. Collaborate with other organized efforts to promote and catalyze existing work and expertise for the clean energy transition within the county to create more momentum for clean energy projects, and to avoid duplicating existing efforts
4. Identify partners and funding opportunities to leverage to put the plan into action.
5. Track progress towards the goals laid out in the energy action plan
6. Maintain the baseline inventory and update every 3-5 years
7. Reevaluate and update the plan at least every 5 years

Scope: Focus Areas

1. Local Renewable and Resilient Energy

Plan, develop, deploy, and promote new solar or renewable energy projects that will produce power for our county and/or improve resiliency of our energy supply in the face of climate change and natural disasters.

2. Energy in Buildings

The energy efficiency of our buildings, including:

- a. Building electrification for heating, cooling, cooking, and even electric car chargers.
- b. Assessing and improving efficiency in older buildings in a way that is accessible and affordable for all.
- c. Ensuring new construction is as energy efficient as possible.

3. Transportation and Mobility

Improving how people get around in our community by promoting low-carbon or net zero modes of transportation, by:

- a. Decreasing the amount of cars on the road via better alternative transportation options like carpooling, public transit, and safe routes for walking and biking
- a. Increasing the adoption of electric vehicles, for both individuals and fleets, especially transit fleets like schools and public buses
- b. Advocate for design of growth and development in urban and rural communities that is safe, affordable, and includes low-carbon transportation options for all.

Scope: Geography

Deschutes Energy Future includes all parts of Deschutes County including urban, rural, agricultural, and forested lands. Less emphasis will be put on areas that are already covered by a climate action plan, but they will not be excluded as there may be opportunities for strategic partnerships or to complement efforts already underway.

