Stakeholder Mapping for CBS Engagement

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This report marks the second phase of work by the Northwest Colorado Energy Initiative (NCEI) with support from the Energy Communities Alliance (ECA). The focus of this stage has been to deepen regional dialogue on collaboration-based siting (CBS) for spent nuclear fuel, while also exploring how cooperation across counties and state lines could strengthen both economic opportunity and public confidence in the process.

Engagement across Northwest Colorado provided a clear picture of the priorities shaping local perspectives. Residents and leaders expressed consistent interest in the potential for economic diversification, workforce retention, and stabilization of the local tax base. At the same time, participants raised important questions about safety, transportation, long-term stewardship, and the capacity of local infrastructure. The message was consistent: communities are willing to explore CBS, but only if the process remains transparent, inclusive, and closely tied to their vision of long-term resilience.

From these discussions, new ideas began to take shape. Rather than viewing CBS as a decision confined within a single county or state, participants recognized that the effort could benefit from cooperation across the Rocky Mountain region. Utah has expressed interest in deep geological repositories, Colorado has explored potential roles in reprocessing and research, and states such as New Mexico and Arizona have noted possible economic opportunities. Rail access for any CBS effort may require routes through Wyoming or Utah to avoid steep grades and tunnels in Colorado, further underscoring the need for interstate coordination. Even within Colorado, it is possible that one county may wish to explore CBS while another might be better suited to host a research facility, a training program, or an industrial partnership. These scenarios suggest a pathway where responsibilities are differentiated but benefits are shared.

As the Department of Energy prepares to release an Expression of Interest, Northwest Colorado is positioned to demonstrate readiness. The region has built a foundation of public survey data, technical modeling, state-level policy support, and direct community engagement. The next step is to carry that groundwork forward, aligning local voices with regional partners to show that communities are not only prepared to explore CBS but also capable of modeling a cooperative approach. By engaging in this way, Northwest Colorado and its neighbors can set a national example of how energy communities work together across boundaries to chart a sustainable future.

This phase also included expanded stakeholder engagement across Northwest Colorado. In addition to county-level discussions, NCEI and AGNC convened dedicated work sessions with community and business leaders to prepare for DOE's anticipated Expression of Interest. Those meetings gave local leaders the chance to discuss potential site options, transportation logistics, workforce needs, and economic development impacts in greater detail. A full summary of these discussions is provided in Appendix B.

Background

The spark that started the Northwest Colorado Energy Initiative (NCEI) came from a question that emerged during outreach: *What comes after coal – and how do we ensure our communities help define the answer?*

With three coal mines and two coal-fired power plants slated to close by 2028 across Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties, Northwest Colorado faces the compounding threats of high-wage job loss, declining property tax revenues, and population outmigration. The urgency of this transition has elevated the importance of identifying sustainable, economically viable energy alternatives that can support both local livelihoods and long-term regional resilience.

NCEI was formally established under AGNC to lead this kind of community-driven transition strategy. The initiative brings together counties, municipalities, economic development professionals, and private sector partners under a shared mission to foster resilience through informed decision-making. Its advisory board includes regional leaders such as former Colorado State House Majority Leader and Colorado Mesa University President Emeritus Tim Foster, former State Senator Bob Rankin, Mesa County Commissioner Cody Davis, Garfield County Commissioner Mike Samson, Rio Blanco County Commissioner Doug Overton, former Moffat County Commissioner Ray Beck, and AGNC Executive Director Tiffany Dickenson. Matt Solomon, a former Eagle Town Council Member, serves as Project Manager, with Wade Haerle leading field coordination.

AGNC serves as the Council of Governments for Garfield, Mesa, Moffat, and Rio Blanco Counties, and as the federally designated Economic Development District (EDD) for the broader region, including Routt County. AGNC has long helped rural communities navigate the volatility of energy-dependent economies. As Colorado accelerates its energy transition, AGNC remains focused on ensuring that rural Colorado leads this historic shift.

In 2024, with support from the U.S. Department of Energy, AGNC and NCEI conducted a statistically valid, region-wide public opinion survey under the Energywerx Capacity Building for Repurposing Energy Assets grant. The results were unambiguous: 88.58% of respondents supported nuclear energy as part of Colorado's energy future. The survey also revealed strong support for retaining local jobs, strengthening infrastructure, and finding durable solutions for energy reliability. Together, these responses set a clear directive from the community: explore every option – including nuclear energy.

This local momentum paralleled a broader shift at the state level. In 2023, the Colorado Democratic Party platform stated conditional support for nuclear energy, but only if a long-term solution for waste storage could be identified. By 2024, that language had softened. The revised platform encouraged "continued dialogue, responsible research, and exploration" into nuclear energy and called for "safe and efficient transportation and disposal of nuclear waste and byproducts," provided it is governed by strict regulation and robust public input. This evolution signaled growing statewide openness and mirrored the tone of grassroots conversations already underway in Northwest Colorado, where fact-based, transparent engagement was guiding the region's broader energy transition dialogue.

From that momentum, this project was launched. A first round of funding from the Energy Communities Alliance (ECA) was awarded to support preliminary work sessions and public engagement around collaboration-based siting (CBS) for spent nuclear fuel. That effort was designed to introduce the concept of collaboration-based siting (CBS) for spent nuclear fuel and to create a safe, structured forum where communities could begin asking questions. Importantly, the intent was never to advance a siting decision or commit to hosting a facility. Instead, it was to gauge interest, surface concerns, and identify the types of information local leaders and residents would need to engage meaningfully in future phases.

Work sessions were conducted with elected officials in the City of Craig, Moffat County, the Town of Meeker, the Town of Rangely, Rio Blanco County, Mesa County, and Montrose County. Stakeholders were asked to consider a set of structured questions adapted from Department of Energy breakout materials. Those conversations elicited candid feedback: some participants expressed curiosity about potential economic benefits, others voiced deep concerns about safety and trust, and many asked for more technical information and public education before any serious commitments could be considered. These early sessions were successful in clarifying intent, lowering the temperature around the topic, and establishing a baseline of trust that future work could build upon.

These conversations gained even more relevance in January 2025, when Colorado House Bill 25-1040 was introduced to formally classify nuclear energy as "clean" under state statute. The bill passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, reflecting the regional momentum already in motion. Still, as the bill advanced, a series of KUNC/NPR editorials sought to cast CBS discussions in Northwest Colorado as more advanced, and more secretive, than they truly were. Those articles, later reprinted by *The Colorado Sun*, fueled confusion and required NCEI to devote significant time to correcting the record, fielding questions, and reestablishing trust. Ironically, this moment of misrepresentation created an opening for deeper dialogue, as more residents and leaders leaned into the conversation and asked to be part of it.

At the same time, complementary projects helped reinforce and expand the scope of these conversations. The Communities-LEAP technical grant, awarded through the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), added another layer of analysis by modeling workforce impacts and tax base implications of different energy transition pathways. Together, these efforts created a foundation of data, engagement, and trust that positioned Northwest Colorado to take the next step: exploring CBS not only as a local conversation, but as part of a potential regional strategy.

That next step came into focus as NCEI began pursuing a separate initiative to explore the concept of a Rocky Mountain regional energy hub. Though funding for that effort was later withdrawn by the Department of Energy, the conversations it sparked with surrounding states proved invaluable. Leaders in Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona expressed interest in nuclear-related opportunities, including consolidated interim storage and deep geological repositories.

These discussions revealed that CBS could be more than a localized question; it could also become a regional opportunity, with communities across state lines collaborating to distribute responsibilities and share economic benefits.

From these combined experiences, it became clear that CBS should now be treated as a standalone opportunity. While economic development districts may serve as natural connectors in the future, the immediate task is to continue building capacity for CBS engagement. This includes deepening public education, strengthening regional coordination, and preparing for the Department of Energy's anticipated Expression of Interest (EOI) process. That process, if pursued, will require communities to articulate not only their willingness to explore hosting a facility, but also the governance structures, technical readiness, and public engagement strategies to ensure decisions are informed and enduring.

The background to this report, then, is one of evolution: from coal dependence to energy diversification, from skepticism to cautious openness toward nuclear energy, and from local engagement to regional possibility. Each stage has reinforced the same guiding principle — that communities must be equipped with facts, supported by transparent processes, and empowered to chart their own course through this historic energy transition.

Regional History

The history of Western Colorado is inseparable from the history of uranium and vanadium mining. Long before today's conversations about energy diversification and collaboration-based siting (CBS), the region lived through cycles of extraction, boom, contamination, and remediation that continue to shape public attitudes toward nuclear energy.

The first chapter began in the early 1900s, when prospectors in the Paradox Basin and Uravan district discovered carnotite ores rich in radium and vanadium. What started as small-scale mining soon took on global significance. During World War II, uranium from Western Colorado was quietly procured for the Manhattan Project. Grand Junction became a hub for procurement and processing, while the company town of Uravan supplied the "green sludge" that would become the foundation of the nation's nuclear weapons program.

With the creation of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in 1946, federal incentives sparked a full-fledged uranium boom. From the late 1940s through the mid-1960s, prospectors flooded the Colorado Plateau, and towns such as Grand Junction, Naturita, Rifle, Slick Rock, Gunnison, Maybell, and Durango became synonymous with uranium mining and milling. The Climax Uranium Mill in Grand Junction opened in 1950 and processed ore from across the region, earning the city the title of "Uranium Capital of the World."

The boom left an indelible mark. By the time the AEC scaled back its guarantees in the mid-1960s and prices collapsed, the region was dotted with abandoned mines and tailings piles. The Climax Mill closed in 1970, but not before radioactive mill tailings had been spread through neighborhoods, roadbeds, and construction projects in Grand Junction and beyond. By the mid-1960s, studies had identified significant public health risks from radon and gamma radiation, prompting restrictions and eventual federal intervention.

In 1978, Congress passed the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act (UMTRCA), creating a national framework for cleanup and stewardship. Western Colorado became a centerpiece of that effort. Millions of cubic yards of contaminated material were excavated and relocated into engineered disposal cells designed to isolate waste for centuries. Grand Junction, Rifle, Naturita, Slick Rock, Maybell, Durango, Uravan, and Gunnison all saw major remediation projects completed, with long-term care transferred to the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Legacy Management. Grand Junction, once a cautionary tale of contamination, became a national model of successful cleanup. Its former mill site was transformed into community space and parkland, while DOE continues annual inspections, groundwater monitoring, and public reporting at disposal cells across the region.

This history is more than a story of extraction and cleanup; it is a lived experience that informs today's expectations. Communities in Northwest Colorado know firsthand the risks of unmanaged development, but they also know that federal programs, when designed and executed responsibly, can deliver effective stewardship. That dual legacy—opportunity and caution—frames the region's engagement with CBS.

Even today, the cross-border nature of uranium activity underscores the regional character of these issues. For example, as Utah mines reopen, companies have chosen Nucla, Colorado as a base for offices and workforce housing. This demonstrates how economic activity tied to uranium and nuclear development naturally crosses state lines, with one community hosting extraction and another supporting the workforce and infrastructure. It is a tangible reminder that future CBS or nuclear-related opportunities may not fit neatly within county or state borders.

Taken together, Western Colorado's uranium history and its ongoing role in regional energy development position it uniquely for today's dialogue. The region brings decades of hard-earned lessons about health, safety, and long-term stewardship, coupled with a pragmatic understanding that energy and economic futures are shared across counties and states. This history provides not only the context but also the credibility for Northwest Colorado and its neighbors to engage in CBS discussions with clear eyes, informed perspectives, and a focus on ensuring that any future decisions serve the long-term interests of the communities most affected.

NW Colorado Engagement: Findings and Feedback

In August 2025, NCEI and AGNC conducted a dedicated week of regional engagement across Northwest Colorado to build on the foundation established in earlier phases of work. The purpose was to broaden participation, provide factual context, and give local leaders and residents an opportunity to voice their questions, concerns, and ideas regarding collaboration-based siting (CBS) and the broader energy transition.

Format and Approach

Engagement activities included work sessions with elected officials and community leaders, and small group discussions. Each session was designed to be accessible, emphasizing fact-based information, open dialogue, and the opportunity for participants learn about safety and transportation directly from industry experts.

Participants consistently emphasized several themes:

- Economic development – interest in potential job creation and workforce retention.
- Safety and stewardship – questions about transportation, storage technology, and long-term monitoring.
- Infrastructure – recognition that rail, utilities, and industrial support would be critical to any future nuclear mission.
- Trust and transparency – strong preference for open communication, ensuring that no commitments are made without broad, informed community involvement.

Emerging Ideas

Several new concepts and questions surfaced during the week. These included county roles, possible facility types, interest in technical partnerships, or questions about inter-county and inter-state cooperation. The engagement also revealed areas where more information is needed, particularly around technical safety, economic benefits, and federal processes.

Impact and Next Steps

This week of engagement provided a clear signal: communities in Northwest Colorado are willing to explore CBS when the process is transparent, inclusive, and tied to local economic resilience. The feedback gathered will guide next steps, including preparing for the Department of Energy's forthcoming Expression of Interest process, and will inform how Northwest Colorado positions itself in both intrastate and interstate collaborations.

Building on this engagement, NCEI hosted additional EOI-focused work sessions with community and business leaders from across the region. These meetings allowed participants to move beyond general perspectives and consider practical questions: how potential sites might integrate with communities, what transportation routes would be feasible, how to align workforce training with project timelines, what economic benefits or risks should be anticipated, and all levels of safety. The discussion also surfaced site-specific ideas, including interest in Maybell, Trapper

Mine, and Nucla, as well as transportation corridors through Baggs, Wyoming. These conversations underscored both the opportunities and the challenges ahead, reinforcing the value of transparent, community-led dialogue. A report from these work sessions is included as Appendix B.

Opportunities

The Department of Energy's Office of Collaboration-Based Siting (NE-83) is expected to release an Expression of Interest (EOI) in Fall 2025, with the potential for selected communities to receive federal funding beginning in 2026. While details of the EOI process have not yet been finalized, its intent is clear: to identify communities and regions willing to explore, through education and structured engagement, whether hosting a federal consolidated interim storage facility or related nuclear mission aligns with their long-term economic and strategic goals.

For Northwest Colorado and its neighbors in the Rocky Mountain region, the EOI represents more than a local opportunity. It highlights the potential for energy communities across multiple states to coordinate, each contributing in ways that align with their strengths, resources, and public interests. Dialogue to date suggests that CBS cannot be pursued in isolation. Rail access, geology, economic opportunity, and workforce need all cross political boundaries. If approached collaboratively, this reality could become a strategic advantage.

Several illustrative scenarios demonstrate how cooperation might take shape:

Interstate Regional Alliances

Neighboring states have expressed interest in different aspects of the nuclear energy life cycle. Utah has explored the potential of deep geological repositories in salt formations, while Colorado has considered reprocessing, recycling, or advanced research. New Mexico and Arizona have also raised interest in possible economic benefits associated with CBS. Rather than treating these interests separately, a coordinated approach could allow states to align roles, distribute responsibilities, and share economic benefits. By demonstrating that communities can collaborate across borders, the region could offer DOE a model of how CBS might succeed on a larger scale.

Infrastructure and Logistics

Transportation highlights the necessity of regional cooperation. In Colorado, steep grades and mountain tunnels limit rail options for moving spent fuel. Practical routes would likely require rail lines entering Colorado through Wyoming or Utah. This logistical reality means that even if a facility were located in Colorado, successful implementation would depend on neighboring states. By coordinating transportation planning and presenting unified positions, states could improve safety, minimize costs, and strengthen their negotiating power with federal partners.

Intrastate Coordination

Within Colorado itself, differentiation of roles may also emerge. One county may wish to explore CBS directly, while another might be better positioned for research facilities, workforce training, or industrial partnerships aligned with a university. By coordinating rather than competing, counties could spread benefits across the region, reinforce each other's strengths, and present DOE with a pragmatic, community-driven model of alignment.

These scenarios are illustrative, not prescriptive. They show the kinds of questions that naturally arise when communities consider CBS in a regional context: How can jurisdictions complement one another? How can infrastructure challenges be addressed collectively? How can responsibilities and benefits be shared in ways that build trust?

Framing CBS through regional and multi-state opportunities does not commit any community to a particular project. Instead, it acknowledges the reality that nuclear energy and spent fuel management extend beyond local borders. By approaching CBS as a cooperative endeavor, Northwest Colorado and its neighbors in the Rocky Mountain region can demonstrate readiness for the EOI process and position themselves as a national model of fact-based, community-led collaboration.

Conclusion

The work documented in this report represents both continuity and expansion. It continues the values that shaped the earliest conversations—transparency, fact-based dialogue, and community-driven decision-making—while expanding those conversations into a broader recognition that collaboration-based siting (CBS) has potential well beyond any single jurisdiction.

Northwest Colorado's history with uranium and nuclear materials has left the region uniquely prepared to engage in this dialogue. Decades of extraction, contamination, cleanup, and long-term stewardship have given communities both caution and perspective. They understand the risks, but they also recognize the opportunities that responsible federal programs can bring when combined with strong local leadership and accountability.

What has become clear through this phase of work is that CBS is not a local issue alone. Transportation corridors cross state lines, geological formations differ from one county to the next, and economic opportunities vary across communities. Utah may see potential in deep geological repositories, Colorado in reprocessing or research, New Mexico and Arizona in economic development partnerships, and Wyoming in essential rail connections. Each piece on its own is incomplete. Together, they could form a regional approach that balances responsibilities, distributes benefits, and ensures that no single community bears the burden or reaps the rewards in isolation.

As the Department of Energy prepares to release its Expression of Interest in Fall 2025, Northwest Colorado is positioned to demonstrate readiness. The groundwork laid through ECA-1 and expanded under ECA-2 provides a foundation of trust, data, and engagement that few regions can match. The next step is to strengthen coordination—not only across counties, but also across state lines—so that the Rocky Mountain region can present itself as a national model for how energy communities collaborate.

Taken together, this report reflects the full scope of work advanced during this phase. Stakeholder mapping provided a structured view of regional interests and capacity, while expanded engagement—captured in the EOI work sessions—allowed communities to wrestle with practical questions of siting, transportation, workforce, and economic development. These combined efforts demonstrate not only that Northwest Colorado is engaging in CBS with seriousness and transparency, but also that it is preparing its communities to participate meaningfully in DOE's forthcoming process.

The path forward will not be without challenges. It will require ongoing dialogue, respect for community concerns, and careful planning. Yet it also offers the chance to redefine how nuclear-related decisions are made: not imposed from above but shaped from the ground up through cooperation and shared purpose. By embracing this approach, Northwest Colorado and its neighbors can ensure that CBS becomes more than a technical process—it becomes a framework for resilience, economic opportunity, and regional partnership.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Mapping

Filed as a separate document.

Appendix B: EOI Work Session Discussions

Spent Fuel and Reprocessing

- Best fit in Maybell
- May also work on Trapper Mine property
- Nucla, Colorado also interested in hosting a CSM site
- TBD

Topics of Discussion

- Integrate and assimilate with the community
  - Participate and buy 4-H to support kids, for example
- Neighboring Maybell rancher offered his land to be used
- This is the first time the DOE or a company has *asked* before doing
- How is it transported and who is notified
- After visit to site: Maybell is the perfect site for this
- Bring train down from Baggs, WY – avoid the hills in the mountains, Moffat Tunnel, and the anti-nuclear people in ski towns. It's an easier path
- "Build a nuclear economy"
- How close to population base?
- How do you get over the stigma of nuclear?
- Applaud creative look for industry
- Economic development impact?
- What's the timeline?
- Viability? Is this a community that would qualify?
- How quickly can this be funded?
- How much radiation from casks?
- Conceptual of full facility (CSG, reprocessing, SMP/Power, Manufacturing)
- How do we transition current work force?
- Need to codify in local and state law
- County to take lead, city to support
- How do we expedite and balance training with construction, so they are timed?
- How do we educate and train local workforce?
- Share safety/security slides?

- Set up pre-EOI meetings with local groups
- What are ancillary businesses?
- Leverage current infrastructure.
- Possible to align CSF to mine/plant closure?
- How do we keep current work force here?
- Possible to cover salaries for upskilling/reskilling during transition?
- What is permitting process? Timeline?
- What would revenue to the county be?
- What makes this area attractive?
- What are the negatives?
- Rail: should go south from Baggs, WY.
- How many trains per month?
- What is the reality? (PRA, Probability Risk Assessment)
- What are the arguments against?
- Could this come with a SMR?
- How to ensure longevity?
- Outreach would benefit from including overall timelines, long term jobs, and economic development for a blue-collar community like Craig
- The need for nuclear power is one of the few issues where Democrats and Republicans can agree, as it provides both carbon free energy and more base-load power.