

STEWARDSHIP FAQs

As of Oct. 29, 2018

WHY IS THE COLORADO TOURISM OFFICE (CTO) PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE TOURISM?

On March 15, 2017, the Colorado Tourism Board unanimously adopted the statewide industry strategic plan known as the Colorado Tourism Roadmap, embracing STEWARD as one of the four Pillars. Established to "Protect the integrity of Colorado resources through sustainable tourism," the STEWARD Pillar grew from Coloradans' concerns about the impacts of travelers.

In more than 20 face-to-face listening sessions throughout the state, tourism stakeholders and other residents shared concerns ranging from impacts on water, land and wildlife to the experience of too many people in the same place. It was clear that failing to address those concerns could threaten public support for Colorado tourism.

HOW IS THE CTO PUTTING THE STEWARD PILLAR INTO ACTION?

The first objective under the STEWARD Pillar is to "Embrace thinking that disperses visitors in productive ways." The CTO addresses this mainly through the Colorado Field Guide, an online collection of 90-plus itineraries aimed at inspiring travel in less-visited destinations and seasons. Even Expedia is using the CTO's multi-day itineraries as a planning resource, based on research showing travelers are seeking less-common experiences.

The Field Guide points travelers to lodgings, restaurants and things to do and is loaded with call-outs for "Sustainability Activities" giving visitors tips on traveling like a local and where to find "voluntourism" opportunities. Tourism industry partners have a standing invitation to work with the CTO in developing new Field Guide itineraries.

Additionally, the CTO's Destination Development program supports dispersion by helping small rural communities develop new traveler experiences in less-visited parts of the state, while the Colorado Welcome Centers share travel advice encouraging visitors to explore all parts of the state. The CTO's main publications – the Official State Vacation Guide and the new Love, Colorado seasonal guide – provide travelers with a balanced mix of content promoting both the state's most famous destinations as well as the roads less-traveled.

WHY DID CTO PARTNER WITH THE LEAVE NO TRACE CENTER FOR OUTDOOR ETHICS?

With passage of the Roadmap, CTO began considering ways to implement the second objective of the STEWARD Pillar: "Invite travelers to embrace Coloradans' sustainability ethic while here."

Rather than invest in the heavy lift of creating and branding new messaging, the CTO set its sights on identifying a partner with established messaging and credibility. That search led to Boulder-based Leave No Trace, founded in 1994 by the U.S. Forest Service and reorganized as a nonprofit in 2000. The Leave No Trace Seven Principles already were widely embraced by public lands agencies, outdoor manufacturers and Subaru and known to the public.

Following board-level discussions, the CTO and Leave No Trace developed an innovative memorandum of understanding, with a renewable one-year task agreement, signed in a public ceremony Oct 11, 2018. With that action, CTO became Leave No Trace's first state strategic partner. Both are mindful in developing the relationship in a way that could serve as a model for other destination marketing organizations.

HOW WERE THE CARE FOR COLORADO PRINCIPLES DEVELOPED?

The first item in the CTO's task agreement with Leave No Trace was foundational to the partnership – development of shared messaging based on the Leave No Trace Seven Principles to educate travelers about reducing their impacts on Colorado.

The CTO and Leave No Trace shared a commitment to creating the messaging in an engaging way. After many rounds of review, involving CTO, vendors, Board Members and others, CTO and Leave No Trace settled on the language for the Care for Colorado Principles. It was shared publicly at the start of the Memorial Day weekend, the official start of the summer travel season, in a brand-new, light-hearted "Are You Colo-Ready?" brochure that also was packed with tips on traveling like a local.

HOW IS THE CTO SHARING THE CARE FOR COLORADO PRINCIPLES?

In addition to the "Are You Colo-Ready?" brochure, the CTO has created a fun new animated video with a catchy jingle and "Are You Colo-Ready?" quiz to inspire others to share the Care for Colorado Principles far and wide on social platforms, websites, web links and other channels.

Additionally, the CTO has incorporated the Care for Colorado Principles into its own channels, including Colorado.com; the OSVG; Love, Colorado; appropriate advertorial placements; and the Colorado Welcome Centers.

Leveraging a relationship with a Leave No Trace outdoor manufacturing partner, the CTO last summer purchased polos at a greatly reduced cost for all Welcome Center personnel, branding the polos with both the CTO and Leave No Trace logos. All Welcome Center personnel were trained in how to share the Care for Colorado Principles in case travelers asked why they were wearing the logo.

CTO works closely with Leave No Trace to ensure that all executions of the Principles are consistent with their philosophy and brand.

HOW CAN OTHER COLORADO ORGANIZATIONS JOIN THIS INITIATIVE?

One of CTO's goals in creating the Care for Colorado Principles was to provide the Colorado tourism industry with a platform for sharing a consistent message with travelers. All of the materials CTO is creating are available for re-use by destination partners. Already, three destinations – Colorado Springs, Longmont and Frisco – are customizing and reprinting the "Are You Colo-Ready?" brochure for distribution to their own audiences. Other destinations are exploring this opportunity. The animated video and "Are You Colo-Ready?" quiz are available for all Colorado destination partners to share.

The new Colorado Rural Academy for Tourism (CRAFT) includes a Sustainable Tourism Workshop among its program offerings and a Sustainable Tourism Toolkit in its online offerings. The CTO's new Western Hospitality training initiative will include a module on responsible tourism.

The CTO and Leave No Trace task agreement also expressed a shared goal of enlisting at least three Colorado tourism industry sectors as strategic partners, whether to identify and promote industry best practices or share the Care for Colorado Principles with their own audiences. To date, discussions have been under way with the Colorado Hotel and Lodging Association, the Colorado Dude and Guest Ranch Association and the Colorado River Outfitters Association.

All of this work directly addresses the third STEWARD objective to "Create alliances with other stakeholders to magnify the impact of sustainable tourism initiatives."

WILL THIS HELP COLORADO ATTRACT TRAVELERS?

Although the STEWARD Pillar was established primarily to address in-state concerns about traveler impacts, a growing body of evidence shows that travelers, especially Millennials, are paying increasing attention to a destination's sustainability practices.

The CTO's most recent SMARl research shows 36% of Colorado travelers believe that a destination's sustainability practices are at least somewhat important. About 49% of Millennials and 36% of GenX'ers fall into that category, while only 20% of Baby Boomers and Silents do.

On top of this, although the Colorado Field Guide was created to inspire dispersion, it's a big hit with travelers. Field Guide itineraries boosted on the Visit Colorado Facebook page have twice the engagement rate (10.36%) of other content.

IS THIS INITIATIVE ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS OF COLORADO RESIDENTS ABOUT TRAVELER IMPACTS?

It remains to be seen how widely understood the CTO's initiative is to date. However, the CTO's new Resident Sentiment study shows 84% of Coloradans believe it's important to attract visitors to less-visited seasons, while 80% say it's important to attract them to less-visited destinations. The survey also showed 80% saying they would feel more positive about tourism if destinations educated visitors to reduce their impact on resources. These findings provide strongly support for the steps CTO has been taking to implement the STEWARD Pillar. Fielded last May, the online survey of 400 Coloradans ages 18-84 had a 4.5% margin of error.

ARE OTHER DESTINATIONS CONCERNED ABOUT THESE KINDS OF ISSUES?

Concerns about traveler impacts are beginning to erupt around the world, as an emerging new middle class gains the means to travel. Many European destinations are being overrun, and the cruise industry has identified "overtourism" as its top issue. These kinds of crisis conditions have not emerged in the U.S., but early warning signs have surfaced, primarily in national parks. The Western states, where residents have been accustomed to wide-open, empty spaces, are most sensitive to these issues. Many U.S. states are still in a come-one, come-all mode of promotion.

Colorado has emerged as a national leader for its efforts to educate visitors and encourage travel to less-visited destinations and in

less-visited seasons. A July 9, 2018, Travel Weekly article noted: "The biggest takeaway is that the (Colorado) tourism office didn't wait for rebellious residents to shout what they didn't want; they reached out and discovered what they did want."