

Annual Report FY 2023

Arkansas Vally Energy Future (AVEF) Vision & Mission

AVEF was founded as a Colorado nonprofit corporation on February 7, 2022. Our vision is to achieve a cleaner, more independent, lower cost energy future in the upper Arkansas River valley, which is predominantly served by the Sangre de Cristo Electric Association (SDCEA). We serve to advocate for and educate SDCEA members and other citizens who support this vision of a better energy future.

AVEF’s Mission is the following:

Purpose: We advocate for powering our region with local renewable energy to achieve an economically and environmentally sustainable energy future;

Focus: We encourage SDCEA to pivot towards local energy generation and storage to become more energy independent and resilient; and

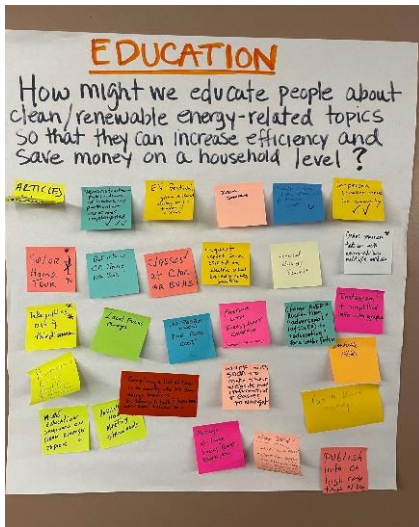
Outcome: We believe this energy transition will lower costs for members, diversify job growth, boost our local economies and protect our environment for future generations.

Community Engagement

The only way we can know the energy concerns and priorities of our communities throughout the upper Arkansas Valley is to engage with them; so we did! We began 2023 by conducting a facilitated engagement process with the member-owners of SDCEA that included input from a community survey conducted in November 2022 and three community meetings in Howard, Poncha Springs and Buena Vista in early January 2023. The meetings were well attended by more than a hundred energetic participants who shared



concerns, priorities and hopes for their electric cooperative. A wealth of ideas related to SDCEA, AVEF and the rapidly evolving energy landscape were discussed. We invite you to read our Community Engagement Summary Report on our website at: www.arkvalleyenergyfuture.org/engagement



Working Groups

The community engagement process informed AVEF of members' interests and concerns and served as a road map to focus our efforts in 2023. The result was the formation of three volunteer working groups to begin addressing various issues. A description of each group follows:

Education Working Group: This group of volunteers works to inform people about clean/renewable energy-related topics so they can increase energy efficiency, consider beneficial electrification and save money by taking advantage of new tax credits and incentives. Sharing knowledge about energy topics and these consumer programs, as they pertain to both individuals and communities, will help people understand what is possible.

Clean Energy Transition Group: This group investigates ways that SDCEA can take a more sustainable approach to energy generation, storage and consumption. They research other electric cooperatives, as well as programs and infrastructure that can support community members at all income levels.

Election Working Group: This group helps to evaluate and support SDCEA Board of Director candidates, new and incumbent, who can successfully help steer the electric cooperative through a transition to a future with local, clean energy and a modernized electric grid.

Leadership Change and New Director

AVEF's former Chair and founding director, Tom Plant, moved on to greener pastures in early 2023. It was a great honor for Tom to be appointed by Colorado Governor Jared Polis to Commissioner at the Public Utilities Commission. We continue to wish Tom all the best in his new role. Following Tom's resignation from AVEF, Rich Shoemaker was appointed as Chair by the remaining directors. Rich had been serving as Vice-Chair. Sandy Long was named the new Vice-Chair.

Additionally, Mike Wrigley, AVEF's hard-working Campaign Director from Fremont County, announced his resignation following the successful election cycle in June. Mike worked tirelessly in 2022 and 2023 and was 100% successful in getting two AVEF-endorsed candidates elected to the SDCEA Board each year. Under Mike's leadership, voter turnout for the SDCEA elections set new records each year.

Karen Pate, a long-time AVEF supporter and volunteer, joined us as a new director after Mike's resignation. Karen is a project management professional with roots in environmental engineering and a former professional engineer. Karen's bio can be found on AVEF's website at: <https://arkvalleyenergyfuture.org/board-of-directors>

2023 - Second Year Successes!

Since our community engagement process in January, and with the financial and volunteer support of our passionate advocates, we have:

- **Successfully defended another SDCEA rate restructuring:** The SDCEA Board tried again to roll-out a carbon copy of the failed rate restructuring attempt from 2022 (that led to our formation). AVEF's advocates once again rallied to defeat the rate change and send SDCEA back to the drawing board.
- **Communication Channels:** We improved communication channels with changes to our website; a switch to a public Facebook page; and a dedicated email address from which to send updates to our advocates, receive feedback and recruit more volunteers. We have been communicating with advocates steadily throughout 2023 using these improved communication channels.
- **Social Gatherings:** We held in-person social events to continue building our advocacy base, share ideas, promote SDCEA Board candidates, provide updates, distribute information and have some fun!

- **SDCEA's CEO Resigns:** In March, SDCEA's long-time CEO, Paul Erickson, abruptly resigned and was subsequently replaced by Chief Operations Officer, Gary Kelly, as Interim CEO. AVEF has worked extensively to provide input to the search process for a new CEO. Following a failed search attempt by SDCEA utilizing National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) resources, the Board elected to appoint Gary Kelly as Acting CEO for the next year, but has indicated that another search will be conducted sometime in 2024. Subsequently, AVEF researched what other electric cooperative have done regarding a CEO search and in January 2024 we presented the Board with a report containing ideas, suggestions from other co-op board members around Colorado, and contact information for these resources for the SDCEA board to consider during the upcoming CEO search.
- **Campaign for New SDCEA Board Members:** We executed a successful campaign to recruit, support and assist in the campaigns for one of the At-Large and one of the Rural Chaffee/Lake County SDCEA Board seats. We encouraged yet another record voter turnout for the election in June 2023, which saw both AVEF-endorsed candidates defeat incumbent Board members.
- **SDCEA Electronic Voting:** AVEF lobbied for SDCEA to implement web-based electronic voting in the 2023 Board election. SDCEA staff worked in short-order with their balloting company to make this happen. The result was another record turnout of members casting their votes for the future leaders of our electric cooperative.
- **SDCEA Board Meetings:** We and our advocates have attended monthly SDCEA Board meetings (virtually and in-person) to monitor, learn and work to foster change. We provided public comment on a range of topics and used our website to share summaries of those meetings for members who are unable to attend the meetings.
- **Relationship Building:** Our directors and advocates held informal meetings with SDCEA Board members and management to share ideas, learn mutual interests, discuss concerns, build trust, and encourage continued dialogue.

- Chaffee County Home and Garden Show:** AVEF, spearheaded by Vice-Chair Sandy Long, crafted a booth for this popular April show at the Chaffee County Fairgrounds. It was staffed with several volunteers over two days, as well as AVEF-endorsed candidates for the SDCEA board, Mark Boyle and Jeff Fielder, who handed out information on energy audits, provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act and electric vehicle (EV) tax credits. We also held a drawing for a \$100 credit towards a home energy audit. We were honored by the show's sponsor, the Sunrise Rotary Club of Salida, with the ribbon for "Best Green Product Search" award.



- Educational Articles and Presentations:** We have provided educational opportunities to co-op members about clean and sustainable energy using resources on our website, Facebook posts, and via on-line webinars. In conjunction with the Chaffee County Citizens' Climate Lobby we held webinars on incentives for electric vehicles and other electric efficiency changes, as well as clean energy incentives in the landmark Inflation Reduction Act. In another webinar, AVEF invited Rob Rosengren, Chaffee County Energy Auditor, and Kasey Provorse from Energy Smart Colorado to help explain the home energy audit process. In December, during a combined webinar, Bill Lucas-Brown of GB3 Energy Solutions discussed cold weather heat pump technology and Matt Wright of Deeper Green Consulting presented information on energy recovery and ventilation systems. These webinars and other informational articles and videos can be reviewed on the Education Channel of AVEF's website at: www.arkvalleyenergyfuture.org/education-channel

- Buena Vista Optimist Club’s Mountain Mania Car Show:** In July, AVEF supporters entered seven different electric vehicles (EVs) to display and share with attendees in this popular, long-running area car show. We also had an information booth where we passed out flyers on federal and state EV tax credits. There was tremendous interest and one of the cars, a Chevy Bolt, won the “Mayor’s Choice Award” for the show! We hope to build on this exciting event in 2024.



- Input to the Colorado Public Utilities Commission:** In August, AVEF joined eight other rural Colorado organizations in signing a letter to the Colorado Public Utilities Commission providing input to ensure that Tri-State Generation & Transmission and its rural cooperatives work to capitalize on all potential opportunities for historic federal funding under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The magnitude of the IRA and IIJA funding is transformational, and the more Colorado and rural communities can reap from this funding, the better for the state’s continued transition to a zero-emissions economy that benefits all.
- Geothermal Energy Development in Chaffee County:** AVEF continued to track efforts by Mt. Princeton Geothermal LLC to explore the development of geothermal energy resources in Chaffee County, specifically a proposed generation plant west of Buena Vista. AVEF representatives attended a geothermal meeting convening at Mt. Princeton Hot Springs Resort in May, followed by a field trip to the proposed exploration and plant sites, to learn more about this potential development. We continue to advocate for and support education and public dialogue about this topic.

- **Energy Planning Groups:** We continue to monitor the energy component of the Chaffee County Sustainability Plan and the City of Salida’s Partners in Energy Workshops that are sponsored by Xcel’s community collaboration program.
- **Green Homes Tour:** AVEF led the effort with New Energy Colorado and the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA) in planning, promoting and participating in the Ark Valley Green Homes Tour in September. Upwards of 60 people toured nine cutting-edge homes in Salida, Poncha Springs and Buena Vista to view and learn about energy efficient construction techniques, smart home controls, beneficial electrification, solar energy and storage, and electric vehicle charging.



- **Fundraising:** We continued to seek donations to further advocate for positive change at the co-op, support potential SDCEA Board of Director candidates, offer various educational opportunities to members and build a coalition of groups interested in the changing energy landscape.

We participated in Chaffee County/Colorado Gives Day in December through the Chaffee County Community Foundation, where donations to AVEF far exceeded our expectations and were testimony to the efforts of our directors and volunteer advocates.

- **SDCEA Membership Survey:** We also lobbied for SDCEA to conduct a broad-based membership survey to find out what is working and what needs improvement. SDCEA staff worked hard to make this happen, but so far, the results of the survey have not been shared with the co-op’s membership.

- **Net Metering Advisory Group:** Work began on recruiting a group of volunteers who are net metering their energy generation with SDCEA and interested in potential changes that could be enacted by the Colorado State Legislature in 2025. One objective of this group is to provide collective input to the Governor’s task force on net metering from the perspective of members of a typical rural mountain electric cooperative. This work is expected to continue throughout 2024 in a collaborative effort with SDCEA.

Rounding Out the Year and Looking Ahead

We saw many exciting opportunities in 2023 to advance our mission. We have a sense that even bigger changes involving both our electric cooperative and parent cooperative, Tri-State, will begin to take shape in 2024 and beyond. New technologies to be implemented by SDCEA and Tri-State will bring changes in the way things have been done in the past and will require significant member education. We look forward to addressing these challenges and helping SDCEA members learn about the clean energy transition to the betterment of their lives and our shared environment.

We remain excited about the future and potential for more local and resilient energy solutions that can reduce costs and support our economies, while helping to tackle the growing threat of climate change. We thank you and respectfully ask for your support as we continue with our important work in 2024!

With deep appreciation for our supporters,

Ark Valley Energy Future (AVEF)

2023 Board of Directors:

Rich Shoemaker, Chair
Sandy Long, Vice-Chair
Deb Hannigan, Secretary
Sue Greiner, Treasurer
Iris Herder, Fundraising Director
Mike Wrigley (Partial Year)
Karen Pate (Partial Year)

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