



## Breaking News: Brown Ranch Rejected by SBS Voters

On Tuesday, March 26th, Voters in Steamboat Springs voted to kill the region's single most extensive affordable housing development. The meaningful vote of the people on whether to add housing for 6,000 workers on 420 acres gifted to the Housing Authority with a 24 million dollar anonymous gift and potentially double the number of full-time residents has gotten coverage from [The Colorado Sun](#) and [NBC News](#) and again with [NBC in an article](#) that featured Eagle County also and quotes Margaret Bowes, executive director of the Colorado Association of Ski Towns.

Like those elsewhere across the country, Routt County and Steamboat have extreme workforce shortage issues that profoundly impact their brand as a world-class place to visit in summer and winter, and leaders there have been talking about housing and taking some of the boldest steps in taxing and which also recently went to the voters. STRs are about managing and leveraging existing housing. In contrast, this vote for 2,000 more housing units must be weighed against the heart of Routt County's other brand—premium small town feel with growth concentrated in municipalities and at the resort area with plenty of premium agricultural land protected from development. As a result, coming into Steamboat Springs from any road in any direction is a different “real Colorado” experience that few other peer locations can match.

## From the Director's Desk

### Congress's TikTok Reaction Misses the Point

The U.S. House voted 352-64 to 'ban' TikTok in the U.S. or effectively nationalize it by forcing a sale of the Chinese company to a U.S. company, according to [NBC News](#), on March 13<sup>th</sup>. The Senate has not yet taken action. I don't pretend to know something that you don't here. Still, I think we, citizens, should pause to contemplate what risks not regulating the internet or social media, and now AI has opened for us individually and as a society.

A must-read [New Yorker article](#) explores the super-nerd world of those who debate among each other whether AI will improve the world -“boomers” or those who believe it will destroy humanity -“doomers.” In not demanding protections, we've all become “boomers,” the New Yorker also refers to as “techno-optimists,” assuming these powerful tools will only be used for positive outcomes. Were we more cautious, many consumer protections would have been enacted decades ago. The article quotes Alphabet CEO, the parent company of Google, who predicts“(Artificial Intelligence will be) more profound than fire or electricity.”



We dabble with Chat GPT and allow phone apps to open with facial recognition; we click-bait things that

tillate us, exposing ourselves to scams, misinformation, and propaganda posing as news; we anger-post or share personal content that lives eternally out there. Evidently, this cumulative information is of great interest to our geopolitical foes. From our point of view, the internet appears relatively organized and benign, but scholars warn of the impacts of the meta-world on our brains and society. Others warn of threat actors relentlessly trolling the content we generate, ad nauseam, and the hidden data generated about us.

If Congress is going after TikTok, something significant is up. Unified action is abnormal behavior for Congress. The entire Colorado House delegation--Doug Lamborn, Lauren Bobert, and Ken Buck, to Jason Crow, Diana DeGette, and Joe Neguse--voted alike. The unity is likely related to national security, not a sudden interest in consumer protection. Something newly sinister is out there. Even so, it is unclear if the Senate will pass the bill, so this is a prime moment to consider this unique situation.



Homeland Security has warned for years about cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure being a more likely threat than foreign invasions. A good primer on that is *The Shadow War* by Jim Sciutto, the subtitle of which is *inside Russia's and China's secret operations to defeat America*. The gist of Sciutto's work is the concept of "winning without fighting." At least here on earth the way we traditionally think of warfare. The book opines at length for instance, about what may happen if one country gains technology to knock out communications satellites, but the real success of Russian intervention in our 2016 and 2020 election was sewing distrust in each other and in the concept of truth. The issue is as

important at that level as it is at the individual level. While U.S. internet companies from Apple to Facebook to Google have built-in increasingly sophisticated tools designed to scrape and steal personal information, surveil and track user's locations and behaviors, regulators have looked away, as we too "accept" the fine print which no one ever reads. Occasionally, we get alarmed when personal data is accessed through a "security breach" by threat actors tapping into these treasure troves of "consumer data." But we rarely ask if the company being stolen from needed the information it is keeping, whether it sold off your data, or what eventually happens with it. Some would say that the pace of technological innovation moves faster than regulators could ever effectively address, faster than parents know what to limit. This is another 'boomer' mantra. That may be so, yet it is no excuse.

Today's cyber technology can utilize open-source materials innocently posted in photo collections, or Facebook posts. Fake Robo calls impersonating a politician and ransom calls impersonating your distressed Mother are real things. Apparently, such 'deep fakes' are becoming more frequent, cites [The New Yorker](#) in another article. With vastly improved AI technology: "now that TikTok, YouTube and Instagram store endless videos of regular people talking... you take thirty or sixty seconds of a kid's voice and log into ElevenLabs, and pretty soon Grandma is getting a call in Grandson's voice saying... I'm in trouble." ([The Terrifying A.I. scam that uses your loved one's voice](#), NYT March 7, 2024).

As one of many social media platforms, TikTok has 170 million users in this country and "thousands of small businesses that rely on it," cites the NBC story quoting one business owner who says "90%" of (Tik Tok) business comes from their use of the platform. Later it quotes House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La, who said of the House's vote that "Communist China is America's largest geopolitical foe and is using technology to actively undermine America's economy and security," and spread "harmful" information. Oh, my! Congress's power in the TikTok case is derived from the Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act.

Curbing the dangers of unregulated capitalism may come second to national security for Congress, but when will concern for personal privacy and protections for consumers rise to the same level? We need a major regulatory focus on the internet.

We will likely learn that this sudden concern and consensus in the House is because of "classified intelligence," and that China is leveraging information gathered from TikTok for strategic purposes to undermine.... (Forgive some irony here.) What? Our national cohesion by spreading misinformation? Manipulating voters and undermining our elections? Gathering "street level" data about national infrastructure and vulnerabilities from consumers carrying devices today that far exceeds the sleuth work of thousands of Cold War human spies? Evidence of foreign misinformation to manipulate elections we have collectively known about for four election cycles not only without action from Congress distrust of the intelligence because it was inconvenient for some politically.

So, in this moment of apparent national security alarm, can we also see American corporations harvesting and monetizing personal information, including locations, behaviors and facial recognition of American consumers, surveilling them and exposing a second generation of children to known threats, as worthy of action? Or does the threat have to be a foreign one to move us?

The ubiquity of technology today, and the Pandora's Box of risks it opens makes Consumer Protection, Public Health and National Security impossible to separate. Tell Congress to look more broadly. The clock

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## Bear Claw Land Services Utilizes Northwest Loan Fund to Expand Operations



Bear Claw Land Services is a testament to entrepreneurial spirit and environmental stewardship in the heart of Grand County, Colorado. Recently, in an interview with Austin Gray, the owner of Bear Claw Land Services, we delved into the journey of this burgeoning business and its partnership with the Northwest Loan Fund (NLF).

Established in August 2022, Bear Claw Land Services quickly gained traction in the local community for its commitment to forest management and land clearing services. However, like many startups, the hurdle of acquiring the necessary equipment loomed large. When questioned about the challenges of obtaining equipment, Gray said, "Most equipment companies like Bobcat & Caterpillar offer good financing deals to get into new equipment. As long as you have good credit and an LLC with good credit history, you can get a loan." Nonetheless, securing a tracked whole tree chipper (pictured above) posed a

more significant challenge, leading Gray to seek assistance from the Northwest Loan Fund.

Gray's connection with the NLF was facilitated through Tim Reeder of the Colorado State Forest Service, underscoring the importance of networking and community ties in business development. Reflecting on his experience working with the NLF, Gray commended Anita Cameron, Director of Business Lending, saying, "Anita has been great to work with. She understands the needs of entrepreneurs, and it is great to work with someone who understands the lifestyle we live."

The loan provided by the NLF holds profound significance for Bear Claw Land Services. Gray noted, "This piece of equipment differentiates us from our competitors. It's an expensive piece of equipment, but the amount of dead wood we will be able to clean up with this piece of equipment greatly pays off for our company & community."

Gray emphasized the transformative impact of this equipment on the company's mission to clean up the forests of Grand County and contribute to the well-being of the community and local ecosystems. In essence, Bear Claw Land Services' partnership with the Northwest Loan Fund exemplifies the power of collaboration in driving positive change. Through strategic investments and a shared commitment to environmental conservation, both entities are poised to make lasting contributions to the landscape and economy of Grand County, Colorado.

As a reminder, it is important to highlight the ripple effect of NLF's support, noting that as loans are repaid, the funds are reinvested into Northwest Colorado, fostering a cycle of economic empowerment and sustainable growth.

## NWCCOG Celebrates Milestone Anniversaries: Decades of Dedication to Community Impact

Erin Fisher, Director of Vintage Area Agency on Aging, has completed ten years of service. In her role, Erin has provided invaluable resources and support for aging adults in our communities through Vintage. Her dedication and passion have profoundly impacted



thousands of community members, making a positive difference in their lives.



Nate Walowitz, Director of Broadband Services, also marks ten years of service with NWCCOG. Nate's leadership in expanding broadband services has improved connectivity across our region and beyond. His efforts have enhanced access to essential resources and opportunities for countless individuals and businesses.



We also want to recognize Doug Jones, Energy Program Director, and Nate Speerstra, Energy Program Manager, for their remarkable 25 years of service. Together, they have spearheaded initiatives that have resulted in substantial energy savings for consumers, conducted safety checks on hundreds of homes, and significantly influenced energy consumption practices on the western slope of Colorado. Their dedication to promoting sustainability and efficiency has made a lasting impact on our communities.

We congratulate Erin, Nate Walowitz, Doug, and Nate Speerstra on these milestone anniversaries. Their commitment and contributions have been integral to NWCCOG's success and mission, and we are grateful for their continued service and dedication.

## Celebrating Diversity through Inclusive Communications

The United States has always been a melting pot of cultures, and in recent years, the size and influence of the Spanish-speaking community has been on the rise.

In January, Vintage Area Agency on Aging launched its first quarterly E-newsletter for Spanish-speaking older adults and caregivers called "El Impulso." It's full of provider information, resources, programs, tips, and even recipes. Want to be in the know about news important to Spanish-speaking older adults and caregivers across Grand, Jackson, Pitkin, Eagle, Summit, and Routt? Fill out this short form to become a subscriber: <http://eepurl.com/gA2zgT>

Vintage also added a resource tab on our website, specifically for Spanish-speaking older adults and caregivers. The tab "En Espanol" offers Spanish-language information on services, resources, and news. Some readers are English speakers learning to speak Spanish, and we hope you'll visit this tab, too!

Another great resource is the caregiver support group, provided entirely in Spanish. Many caregivers find that joining a support group offers unique understanding, solace, company, and encouragement. Often, caregivers can feel like no one understands their situation, leading to feelings of isolation. Join five other caregivers and learn that you're not alone.

For more information, contact Ceci Peterson at 970-531-4087 or [cpeterson@nwccog.org](mailto:cpeterson@nwccog.org)

## Upcoming Board Meetings

**Thursday, March 28, 2024:** Full Council, EDD Board

**Location:** Zoom Conference Call, On-Site Location Silverthorne - Lunch provided

**Time:** Council 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., EDD Board 12:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

**Primary Agenda Items:** approve January meeting minutes, approve List of Bills, program overviews, distribute electronic version of Member Handbook, review Council Rules of Conduct

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