

# Going green in Casper: transportation, lighting, water, property

---

By KRISTY GRAY

Star-Tribune staff writer

Monday, June 23, 2008 7:07 AM MDT

It takes more than sun and trees to turn a city green.

It takes energy-efficient traffic lights, water-wise parks and a fleet that travels further on less fuel.

And the City of Casper thinks it can run greener -- or at least become more sustainable. As city council members consider the city's proposed budget for 2009, they will see more sustainability goals than in past years.

"We have a great desire to look for ways to save energy and water and a great belief that there are ways to do it," said Peter Meyers, Administrative Analyst for the City Manager's office.

"Like everything, it is a problem that when we turn our attention to, we think we can make some improvements."

About three months ago, the City of Casper created an internal sustainability task force. Its goals, over the next several years, are to reduce consumption in city operations, reduce costs and become sustainable, said Gary Clough, the city's public services director. The task force is made of representatives from each department, employees familiar with the day-to-day city operations and who can bring ideas for "greening" up the city.

Of course, Casper isn't alone. "Green" has become a national buzz word with everything from salad dressings to lipsticks marketing themselves as Earth friendly.

If done right and with sound planning, going green can save money -- especially in light of rising energy prices. But there's more than the color of money turning people green.

"I think people are doing it because it's the right thing to do," Clough said.

Here's a look at some of the City of Casper's sustainability proposals for the upcoming fiscal year:

## The Fleet

The city of Casper's fleet includes 857 units -- everything from pick-ups, front-end loaders, trucks, police cars, lawn mowers, backhoes and more.

To power those units, the city used 195,000 gallons of unleaded gas and 161,000 gallons of diesel last year, Clough said.

With gas prices a dollar more than last summer, it's getting more expensive to do city business. In fiscal year 2007, the cost of bulk fuel was \$794,641, Meyers said. The city expects to spend \$972,500 on fuel this fiscal year and \$1.2 million in 2009. ¿

"We've been discussing energy efficiently for a while. The goal is develop a plan to decrease fuel use while increasing mileage," Meyers said.

One way to achieve this is by "right-sizing" the fleet. This means assigning the "right-sized" vehicle to any particular job. For example, a landscaper hauling mowers from park to park can't do that job with a fuel-efficient sedan. He or she needs a truck to haul the mowers and trailers. But a city code inspector, doesn't need a half-ton pickup to do inspections. The sedan is better suited for in-town driving.

Recently, the city purchased its first hybrid car, Meyers said. It will be driven by code inspectors this year to see how it performs in Wyoming's wind and cold and on its hilly streets.

"We don't change the whole fleet in one day. It means a whole learning curve," he said.

The city won't be trading the rest of its fleet for the gas-savings hybrids anytime soon. First, officials need to see how reliable the cars will be and how well city mechanics can maintain them.

## Lighting

Traffic, street and park lights are the city's biggest users of electricity, accounting for 25 percent of electricity the city

uses, Meyers said.

The city is now in the middle of a three-year plan to replace all traffic lights with energy-efficient LED -- light-emitting diode -- lights and have replaced the lights at 10 intersections already, Clough said. Each LED bulb saves an estimated 60 percent from a traditional light.

The Parks Department is similarly trying new types of lights to save energy in Casper parks. Officials switched to induction lighting at Veterans Park last year and has seen a 40 percent to 50 percent energy savings during a two-month period as compared to the same period last year, Clough said. Lights along parts of the Rails to Trails system will be changed within the month and other lighting may be changed out in the future.

Officials think they can achieve 35 percent to 40 percent energy savings for lighting by these measures, Meyers said.

## **Water**

Casper has 35 landscaped parks, "something we are very proud of," Meyers said.

They also take a lot of water.

The Parks Department is trying different soil amendments -- any material added to a soil to improve the environment for roots -- on different testing fields at Mike Lansing Field and the North Casper Soccer Complex to see how they affect water usage, Clough said. So far, the city has saved 30 percent on water costs.

The city will also consider new ways to plant shade trees, using more native plants and planting in zones to reduce water usage.

Overall, the city has cut irrigation water usage by 3 percent this year and will spend this fiscal year studying more water-wise practices. One possibility is installing soil-moisture sensors that control park sprinkler systems, which would only water when needed.

Similarly, the Casper Municipal Golf Course has set a goal to cut water consumption by 10 percent while cutting down on the amount of potable (or drinking) water it uses.

## **Buildings and Grounds**

The goal is to cut energy consumption in city buildings by 10 percent over the next two years.

The task force thinks it can reach the goal by replacing plumbing fixtures for low-water usage models and replacing old appliances (including computers) at the end of their life spans with energy-efficient models. This will especially be helpful in saving energy in fire stations, breakrooms and recreation centers where the public uses the facilities.

On renovation projects, including a new fire station, the city will research applying for LEED certification -- Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating system.

"It increases cost of construction, so we have to be reasonable in our budget," Clough said. While cost may prohibit building to the highest green standard, there are parts of such renovations that can be done in more environmentally friendly ways that can save money on energy and water in the long run.

Along with other renovations, the city is looking at bringing an energy consultant to test city buildings for energy efficiency.

Reach features editor Kristy Gray at (307) 266-0586 or [kristy.gray@trib.com](mailto:kristy.gray@trib.com)