



NASS IDEAS Award Application – 2016 State of Colorado

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Program Title:

ACE - Accountability in Colorado Elections

Program Description:

Colorado is the first state to utilize a centrally located interactive website to visually display quantitative and qualitative election data and make it available to the public and media at no charge. The Accountability in Colorado Elections (ACE) project displays publically available data related to the state's conduct of elections, as well as the voting behavior of its 3.5 million active and inactive registered voters in a series of interactive maps, charts, and tables summarizing Colorado elections by county. ACE maps currently highlight voting methods, compliance with legal requirements, vote credit based on registered party affiliations, election cost, and two types of voter registration statistics. Additional data is added to the website on an ongoing basis.

General Subject Area:

Elections

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACE's History

Origins of ACE

Colorado is the first state to put election and registration data in one centralized online location, available for citizens, the press, county officials, and election activists. When the Secretary of State's office launched ACE, many in the elections community celebrated.

"This is a big step forward in the world of elections data."

-Mindy Moretti, Election Line Weekly

The Colorado Secretary of State created ACE to visually display tracked and reported county election data. This initiative strengthens transparency and accountability in the elections system and in its results.

The idea of ACE began in 2010 in conjunction with a broader effort by the Colorado Secretary of State's office to make public data available and useful. ACE became a full-fledged project in early 2013 with the formation of a working group to identify election data with applicable performance benchmarks and activity metrics, similar to the type of data PEW reports in its Elections Performance Index, which assesses state election performance across 17 measures.

The working group set out to:

- identify available data and performance benchmarks
- collect, evaluate, and establish metrics for that data
- find a platform to package and present the data
- create an interactive environment for the graphical presentation of the data

By mid-2013, election data collected for ACE focused on legislative and statutory requirements for preparing and conducting an election. Once identification of the initial data and metrics was complete, the group began creating visual prototypes. The working group determined that it wanted to create a visual top level analysis with drill down interactive maps of different performance-based election data metrics. The working group selected Instant Atlas (<http://www.instantatlas.com/>) to provide digital software and evolved into an ACE Project Team.

While formatting and designing the initial data set, the team expanded the information to include legal requirements, voter registration statistics, vote methods and ballot statistics, and election costs.

Introducing ACE

ACE went live on the Secretary of State's website in late July 2014. Since then, ACE has received more than 26,000 visits and has become an essential site for anyone seeking information on Colorado elections.

Much of the information on ACE concerns Colorado county compliance with federal and state law. Consequently, the Secretary of State invited Colorado counties to preview the data and provide comment and feedback to assure that the data was accurate before the public could view it. As ACE evolved, the team took into account the information desired by the media, election activists, and citizens. The

Secretary of State's office conducted two ACE training sessions for Colorado media outlets and advertised the platform's existence and utility through official press releases and on social media.

"I have been begging for this kind of information for years,"

-Shaun Boyd of CBS4 Denver, after attending a training session.

In fact, on Election Day, November 3, 2015, Secretary of State Williams was trending on Twitter due to interest in the ACE platform.¹

ACE has earned notice and praise in various national forums. ACE has been presented at conferences of the National Association of Secretaries of State Election Directors (NASSED) and at a conference of the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws (COGEL) to showcase its usefulness as a tool in election administration and its applicability to government ethics and transparency.

ACE's status as a one-stop shop for election data continued with the addition of voter turnout by party affiliation data that debuted in October 2014. This addition allows comparison of two different party affiliations at one time and displays the percentage of the eligible voters of a particular political party who voted in each county. The latest addition to ACE is voter registration by congressional and legislative districts. ACE also shows how disparate the seats are in terms of the number of registered voters. The county level detail of this map demonstrates the level of complexity each county encounters to create the ballot styles to accommodate the many state House and Senate districts. Updates are continual and ACE currently includes data for the four most recent elections.

ACE's Significance

ACE is a project that once again places the Colorado Department of State at the forefront of the open-data movement. ACE proactively packages information that is often requested by legislative leaders, media, and concerned activists on an easy-to-navigate website that is available at no charge.

"There's a lot of talk these days about transparent and open governments and recently the Colorado Secretary of State's office put their money where their mouth is and created a statewide elections data portal," wrote Mindy Moretti in an August 7, 2014 edition of Election Line Weekly.² Charles Stewart, the Kenan Sahin Distinguished Professor of Political Science at MIT added "Over a century ago, states started reporting election returns in a centralized, uniform fashion, which was an important step in reassuring the public that election results were determined above-board. Now, the big question is, 'what are election officials DOING in their jobs?' Something like ACE helps answer that question." The program was also mentioned by Doug Chapin in his Election Academy blog.³

Specifically, ACE is significant because it:

- makes Colorado the first state to place election and registration data in one online location.
- allows political and data analysts to more easily study election statistics.
- allows a closer examination of Colorado elections, including voter behavior and turnout.
- allows county officials to monitor compliance of statutorily required deadlines.
- assures election officials are complying with federal and state law.
- provides an historical record of election costs and results, bringing accountability to taxpayers.
- makes ACE source data available for download by consumers.
- displays the statistics for overseas and military ballots issued and returned, by method.
- enhances election transparency and open government.

¹ See Supplemental Materials, "Twitter Storify: So Cool. Maps and Charts!"

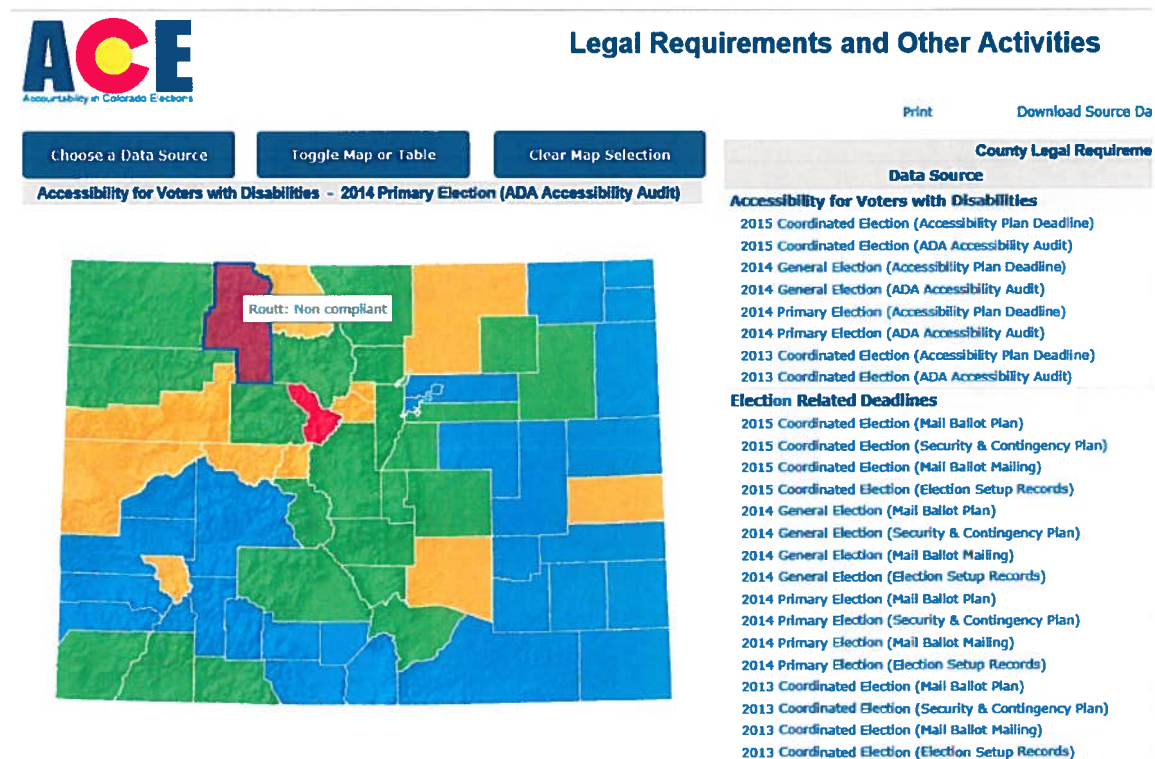
² See Supplemental Materials, "Election Line Weekly-August 7, 2014"

³ See Supplemental Materials, "Election Academy blog: "Election Line Weekly: Colorado Opens Its Books to the People and Data Geeks"

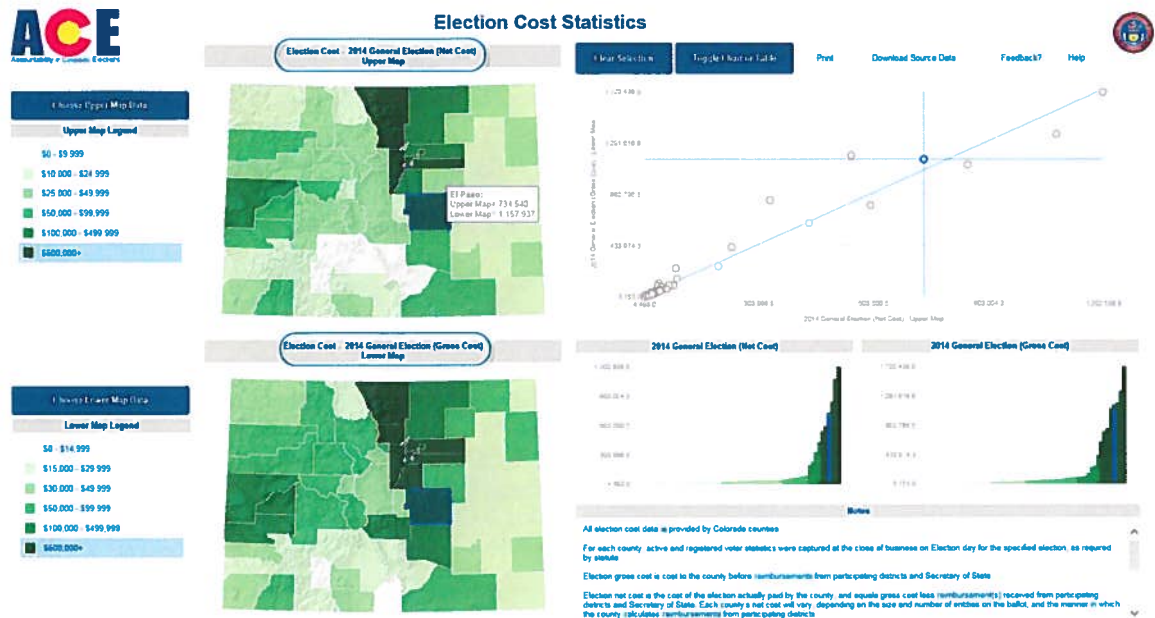
ACE's Impacts

ACE provides useful data in a visual format for anyone interested in Colorado's elections including political junkies who are not professional statisticians. It also provides a public record of compliance and gives consumers the ability to easily visualize data that was historically only available in a static format. The following are some notable impacts resulting from ACE.

Evolution of county compliance. Every election cycle, personnel from the Secretary of State's office visit counties to perform American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility audits at polling places. The ratings for these audits are full compliance, substantial compliance, and non-complaint. Prior to the creation of ACE, several county clerks attempted to convince their county commissioners that they required additional funding to make their polling places ADA compliant. ACE publicly identified counties that received a "non-compliant" rating from the Department of State's ADA accessibility audit. This public awareness led to a better understanding throughout the counties of their strengths and weaknesses pertaining to compliance with election law requirements. County commissioners in non-compliant counties found funding for their clerks, and as a result, counties became compliant before the next audit or before the next election cycle. As an illustration, the map below shows Routt County as non-compliant as of the 2014 primary election. Routt County became fully compliant before the 2014 general election.



Election costs. Counties report election costs for every general election and coordinated election that includes a statewide ballot question. With ACE, the public can now view the gross and net cost costs for each county. Publicly reporting election costs began conversations between counties meant to reduce costs through collaboration, comparing vendor rates, and other subjects. Below is an example of the 2014 general election costs. Because Colorado's election cost data is so readily accessible, the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) named the Secretary of State's office to a blue-ribbon committee tasked with better understanding election costs.



Benefits for media. A significant amount of staff time is consumed by media and public watchdog organization inquiries asking about voter registration statistics, election results, election cost data, and many of the other features of ACE. To date, the Secretary of State's office conducted two training workshops for members of Colorado's media to show them the information available on ACE and how it can be used. Reporters who attended these workshops gave very good feedback about the benefits of the website as well as suggestions for how to make it better.⁴ Several even drew attention to ACE in online publications and in social media to make the public aware of this service.⁵

Improving public-private partnerships. Instant Atlas, the company that provided the software for the ACE platform, showcased the ACE project on its main webpage and through a white paper published in early 2015 because no other client had ever used the software for such a purpose. Instant Atlas drew attention to the project in an effort to illustrate not only the capabilities of the software, but to encourage other states and municipalities to engage in similar efforts.⁶

Improving public awareness and education. More than anything, ACE is an important step forward in government transparency and accountability. As the platform gains exposure, more and more interested parties, from elected officials, administrators, concerned citizens, and media outlets, are able to access the information and make better informed decisions.

Conclusion

Conceived as a way of making public data available to a broad audience, ACE blossomed into a cutting-edge, one-stop shop for members of the general public, election geeks, data junkies, and election administrators alike to examine and interpret public data. ACE now is the only centralized platform in the country that provides useful elections and registration data as a public service. It is great step forward in government transparency and accountability.

⁴ See Supplemental Materials, Todd Engdahl letter

⁵ See Supplemental Materials, Pagosa Daily Post article

⁶ See Supplemental Materials, Instant Atlas white paper (link)

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Accountability in Colorado Elections (ACE) website:
<http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/ACE/home.html?menuheaders=5>
- ACE user guide
 - A user guide is available providing the user information to navigate the maps available

General Navigation Information: A screen resolution of no less than 1280 x 600 is optimum for viewing ACE.

1. The ACE logo navigates back to the ACE landing page. The State seal navigates back to Elections landing page
2. The "Clear Selection" button clears county, data, and legend selection(s)
3. The "Print" button allows you to print the page (Note: Internet Explorer does not support printing)
4. Source data is available to download in an Excel file by clicking the "Download Source Data" button
5. Submit your comments and questions to the ACE Team by clicking the "Feedback?" button
6. Access to this help guide is available while viewing a map report to assist in navigating the data
7. Select a range(s) in the legend. All counties in that range are outlined/highlighted in blue. De-select by clicking the range again.
8. Hover over a county to display statistics for the selected data source
9. The Notes section provides details about the selected data source



- An interactive user guide is also available to demonstrate the use of each type of map

ACE Maps Interactive User Guide

[Home](#) | [Help](#) | [Print](#)

Introduction

This interactive guide contains information to navigate the maps available for ACE.
Select a subject below to navigate to the specific information. Or click Next to view each subject in order.

[Return to ACE home page | Feedback or Comments?](#)
[Next](#)

- Election Line Weekly-August 7, 2014 <http://electionline.org/index.php/2014/1351-electionlineweekly-august-7-2014>
- Election Academy blog: "Election Line Weekly: Colorado Opens Its Books to the People and Data Geeks" <http://editions.lib.umn.edu/electionacademy/2014/08/08/electionlineweekly-colorado-op/>
- Instant Atlas white paper <http://instantatlas.com/colorado-department-of-state/index.html>



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So Cool. Maps and Charts!

Twitter's response to the user-friendly maps displaying the 2015 Colorado election data.

by  Kiki (keara) Brosnan a few seconds ago 16 Views ▾

The 2015 State of Colorado elections generated a lot of excitement over the ACE Project's maps and charts that use publicly-available election data and display it in a user friendly and interactive manner. This includes interactive maps, charts and data tables. Using these tools, one can visualize and interact with statistics on election costs, voter registrations and legal requirements.

The goal is to demonstrate transparency and accountability, monitor compliance and provide a historical record. It can be used as a tool for media, voters and activists alike.



Lynn Bartels
@lynn_bartels

[Follow](#)

If you like #'s and [#COPolitics](#) you will love this link from the [@ColoSecofState](#). Great data for today's election.
sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections...

1:26 PM - 3 Nov 2015

9 4

This tweet by Lynn Bartels, communication's director for Colorado's Secretary of State, generated likes and retweets:



Allie Morgan
@CHI_AllieM

[Follow](#)

So cool. Maps and charts! twitter.com/lynn_bartels/s...

1:57 PM - 3 Nov 2015

1 1

The response was positive and attracted the attention of leaders in the political and news communities.



Boulder Tomorrow
@bouldertomorrow

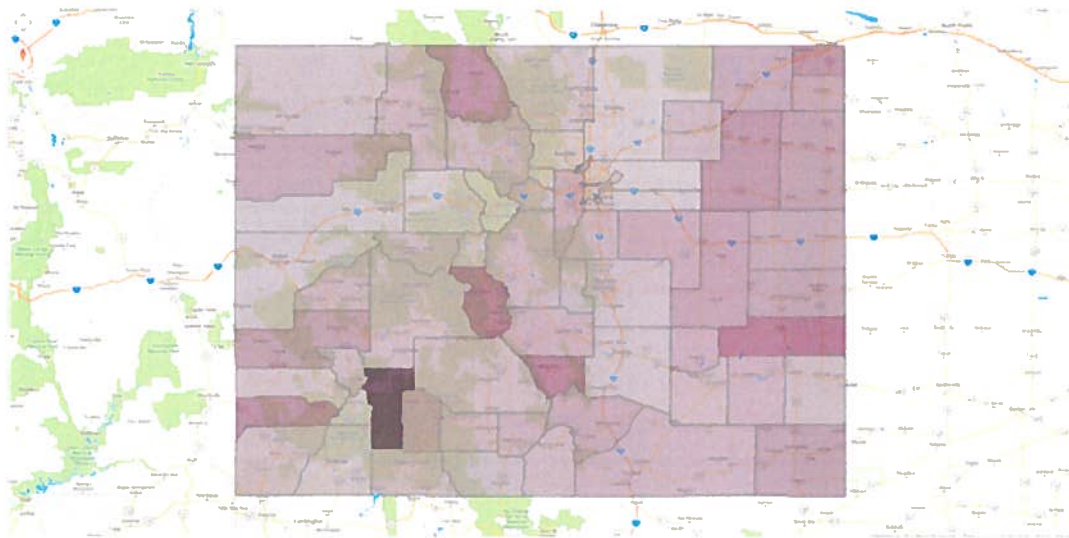
[Follow](#)

[#policy](#) works! RT [@lynn_bartels](#): you will love this link from the [@ColoSecofState](#). Great data for today's election.
sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections...

1:46 PM - 3 Nov 2015

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Even Denver 7 News retweeted the data:



Denver7 News
@DenverChannel

[Follow](#)

26% of voters cast ballots early, according to [@ColoSecofState](#) data. Here's a map of where thedenverchannel.com/news/politics/...

11:24 AM - 3 Nov 2015

3 2

These tweets regarding the new technology and the Colorado elections generated a conversation around Colorado election day and Colorado Secretary of State Wayne Williams. This placed Williams as one of the trending topics on Nov. 3rd, election day.



Trendsmap Denver
@TrendsDenver

[Follow](#)

Wayne Williams, [@colosecofstate](#) is now trending in [#Denver](#)
trendsmap.com/us/denver

8:11 PM - 3 Nov 2015 · Denver, CO, United States



Trendsmap

Twitter Trends in Denver, United States - Trendsmap

Latest Denver, United States Twitter trends, people, videos, images, and links

[View on web](#)

After the election had ended and turnout results were known, Williams tweeted about this new feature and used the results to curate content on his twitter account.



Wayne Williams
@ColoSecofState

[Follow](#)

ACE feature allows closer examination of Colorado elections
lnks.gd/2/XjijnH

8:45 AM - 25 Nov 2015

5 1



Wayne Williams
@ColoSecofState

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Official 2015 voter turnout drops compared with 2013, but Jeffco turnout is up [#copolitics](https://lnks.gd/2/XTq9v)

3:35 PM - 23 Nov 2015

5 1



Wayne Williams
@ColoSecofState

Follow

ACE feature on our website provides invaluable election, voter data. [Inks.gd/2/b5rw5](https://inks.gd/2/b5rw5) #copolitics #coleg

8:49 AM - 9 Dec 2015

6

5

And Bartels, of course, chimed in and tweeted out to the "numbers geeks" in response.



Lynn Bartels
@lynn_bartels

Follow

Calling all numbers geeks. A treasure trove of info. #copolitics
[twitter.com/ColoSecofState...](https://twitter.com/ColoSecofState)

1:49 PM - 25 Nov 2015

1

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The press learned how to use this tool for potential stories in the future.



Lynn Bartels
@lynn_bartels

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Press checks out [@ColoSecofState](#)'s newest feature on ACE.
Great data. [#coleg](#) [#copolitics](#) [Inks.gd/2/b5rw5](#)

9:34 AM - 9 Dec 2015

3 3

Nick Coltrain, a reporter for the Coloradan tweeted:



Nick Coltrain
@NColtrain

Follow

Turns out [@jaredpolis](#)' district has highest # of unaffiliated voters
& total voters in the state. Via [@lynn_bartels](#)
[content.govdelivery.com/accounts/COSOS...](#)

1:18 PM - 9 Dec 2015

1 1

To which Jared Polis, Congressman for the 2nd district of Colorado replied:



Jared Polis
@jaredpolis

Follow

@NColtrain @lynn_bartels yes very independent minded in
CD2!

2:11 PM - 9 Dec 2015

1

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Tim Griesmer

From: Lynn Bartels
Sent: Wednesday, December 09, 2015 11:10 AM
To: Tim Griesmer
Subject: FW: Your recent press briefing

Lynn Bartels

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1700 Broadway, Suite 200
Denver CO 80290

From: Todd Engdahl
Sent: Thursday, October 29, 2015 1:29 PM
To: Lynn Bartels <Lynn.Bartels@SOS.STATE.CO.US>
Subject: Your recent press briefing

Lyn,

I wanted to thank you again for the Oct. 6 press briefing on how to use TRACER and the department's other online resources. I learned some things I didn't know about TRACER, and learning more about ACE was especially helpful. I used it to find some voter turnout data for an article I published last week.

Thanks again,

TODD ENGDAHL | Capitol Editor | [Chalkbeat Colorado](#)
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NEWS/POLITICS

New Voter Data Available from Colorado Secretary of State

BY SPECIAL TO THE POST · DECEMBER 10, 2015

Colorado's 2nd Congressional District – home to Boulder, Larimer and other counties – hosts the highest number of unaffiliated voters in Colorado.

Unaffiliated voters – who belong to no party – comprise the largest voting block in Colorado, followed by Republicans and then Democrats. The other voters belong to minor political parties.

The 2nd District, which is represented by Democrat Jared Polis, also is home to more voters than any of the other six congressional districts, according to ACE — Accountability in Colorado Elections.

ACE debuted in 2014 and allows browsers to check out party registration, voter methods, registration statistics and election costs in a format that features maps and charts, and is invaluable for campaigns, consultants, concerned citizens and other political observers.

The Secretary of State's Office this month unveiled the latest version of ACE.

In addition to congressional district information, it now also offers data on Colorado's 35 state Senate and 65 state House seats. Although legislative boundaries were redrawn after the 2010 census to make each district roughly the same size in population, ACE shows how disparate the seats are in terms of the number of registered voters. For example, in House District 13 in Boulder, Democrat K.C. Becker represents 69,442 voters, according to the latest registration figures. In House District 17 in Colorado Springs, Republican Kit Roupe represents 39,371 voters.

The U.S. Supreme Court is currently hearing cases involving the question of whether an entire population or just eligible voters should be considered when drawing political boundaries.

The new feature on ACE also allows browsers to look at which state House and Senate districts are in a certain congressional district.

You can review the ACE data [here](#).



Special to the Post

The Pagosa Daily Post welcomes submissions, photos, letters and videos from people who love Pagosa Springs, Colorado. Call 719-581-9812 or email editor@pagosadailypost.com

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