



SUSTAINABILITY

FORT CARSON, COLORADO

COLORADO ARMY INSTALLATION BUILDS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AROUND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE



Committee member. Community activist. Planner. Spokeswoman.

Annie Oatman-Gardner has taken stands on public transportation, environmental quality and recreation issues. She has a record of involvement in projects to improve life on the front range of the Colorado Rockies.

Today, Oatman-Gardner is involved with Fort Carson, Colo. As military impact planner for the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG), she is coordinating among Fort Carson and its neighbors to figure out how to measure achievement in sustainability.

Working with the installation led to what Oatman-Gardner called “one of those great ah-ha’s of this project”: its commitment to a partnership approach to sustainability.

“We’ll partner with almost everyone,” said Tom Warren, director of environmental compliance and management for the installation. “It’s not just a one-way street. We’re always asking other agencies, be they governmental or nongovernmental, to work with us. We have many successfully equitable partnerships in any number of other programs that are outside the fenceline, because they benefit Fort Carson and the larger community as a whole, either operationally or from a resource stewardship perspective.”

“Fostering and maintaining great relationships is also at the core of sustainability within the region,” Oatman-Gardner said. In fact, creating a “community of one” of understanding is one of 12 stated goals of Fort Carson’s 25-year sustainability plan.

The plan, established in 2002, enlisted Fort Carson and regional partners in reaching 12 goals by 2027. Enhancing partnerships to collaboratively improve regional sustainability also makes the list. Those partnerships are integral to the success of the plan.

The Quality of Life-Sustainable Indicators Project is one such initiative. Managed by Oatman-Gardner as part of her larger program, the Fort Carson Regional Growth Coordination Plan, the Indicators Project synchronizes the area-wide effort to select trends to serve as gauges of the health of the community.

For example, gallons of water used per person makes a useful indicator in the area’s semi-arid climate.

The Indicators Project evolved from Fort Carson’s intent to develop its own gauges.

For more information

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“One of their goals was stronger partnerships with their community,” Oatman-Gardner said. “That was part of the sustainability calculus, which was not only reducing water usage, energy conservation and protection of the military training lands, but also an understanding that they would have a relationship with the outside community, because sustainability doesn’t stop at the boundary.”

Working with leaders to develop indicators that both the community and installation could use “would help the community understand it was helping Fort Carson with its sustainability goals,” Oatman-Gardner said.

Several years after Fort Carson started the Indicators Project, the installation combined the work that had been done with a collaborative effort underway at PPACG. The project needed to live apart from Fort Carson, so it would not be perceived as simply an installation project, according to Oatman-Gardner. Fort Carson helped PPACG apply for an Office of Economic Adjustment grant for the regional growth project and included the sustainability indicators in the request. The grant would help PPACG study how the troop increases would affect the community.

A parallel indicators project, sponsored by the Pikes Peak United Way, is looking only at El Paso County, home of Colorado Springs but only one of the five counties most affected by Fort Carson. The United Way report was published in August, Oatman-Gardner said, and PPACG will integrate the results with the broader Fort Carson regional project soon. The Indicators Project could lead to better relationships among the jurisdictions, Oatman-Gardner said. Colorado Springs and Pueblo, in particular, haven’t had a strong relationship, especially in the area of water issues, she said.

“Lots of parts are fitting together,” Oatman-Gardner said.

Even before the Indicators Project, Fort Carson has been taking a noticeable lead in regional environmental issues, Oatman-Gardner says. She points to the annual Fort Carson Sustainability Conference. With the sixth conference scheduled for October 30 and 31, the event has evolved from a close focus on installation issues to the primary cross-jurisdictional sustainability event in the region.

“It’s getting known as the premiere event [where] people can get great information and do a lot of sharing ... a time to learn what is cutting edge and to talk together,” Oatman-Gardner said.

Community outreach becomes essential when a whole community grows up next door. In 1975, Fort Carson was still “14 or so miles from the main part of town,” said Warren. Now, “the community has come to us.” A good amount of that growth has come in the last three or four years, where back-to-back deployments have kept the ranges relatively quiet.

However, “Now that we’re gearing up and training our 3rd Brigade Combat Team, for example, and we’re actually

doing gunnery again, the noise complaints have started,” Warren said. “So it is incumbent on us not only to inform and educate but to attempt to, where possible and where practical, minimize additional incompatible land use both from outside the perimeter wire and from our use in the other direction.”

Army Compatible Use Buffers (ACUB), in which the Army helps third parties purchase land or conservation easements, is one answer. Working with other agencies is also part of the program.

Cheyenne Mountain State Park, literally across the highway from Fort Carson’s main gate, has been one of the beneficiaries. Just recently opened to the public, the park benefited from the installation’s extensive natural resources expertise.

Though the park land purchase “missed the window” for ACUB, said Park Manager Richard Dudley, “We did know they had to be to our first partner in helping us review our stewardship efforts.”

As a result, “We manage things not just bit by bit, but cohesively on a regional basis,” Dudley said.

The installation benefits not only because the park is considered a compatible land use, Warren said, but also because it offers an opportunity to cooperate in providing Soldiers and family members’ recreational opportunities.

Fort Carson’s environmental initiatives will continue to be a model for its neighbors as the installation grows, according to Oatman-Gardner.

“When I first got introduced to the program, [we were] pointing to them and saying, ‘let’s do what they do in our community as well as they do it, and we’ll all be lucky.’ So they really are the leader in environmental protection,” she said.

The goals of the 25-year sustainability plan are a large portion of that, Oatman-Gardner said. Fort Carson can be considered a community in and of itself. “I often hear the garrison commander talking about himself as a city manager,” said Oatman-Gardner. “He is looking as a city manager at how his community is going to reduce their impact on the region now and in the future.”



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