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## Red state, blue party, green city

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DENVER -- Residents and local officials alike take living green seriously around these parts.

The city's largest taxi service, Metro Taxi, introduced its first hybrid cars last year. Vehicles working at Denver International Airport use alternative fuels, including compressed natural gas and biodiesel. The city promises that the Democratic National Convention will offset its carbon footprint by 100 percent.

Also, many commuters opt out of the city's busiest roadways during rush hour by taking the bike paths that run alongside downtown streets.

Nearby Colorado State University in Fort Collins - a little more than an hour's drive from Denver - is planning the state's first School of Global Environmental Sustainability, in part to ready its students for entering the green work force.

Could this green streak play a role in whether Colorado stays McCain red or turns Obama blue in this fall's tight presidential vote?

"The city has really done a great job of emphasizing the benefits of sustainability, especially during the [convention]," said Brent Hildebrand, vice president of recycling for Alpine Waste & Recycling in Denver. However, Mr. Hildebrand adds that the goal shouldn't be just to host a green convention, but to keep the city green long after the conventioners go home.

Alpine Waste has helped nudge the city along by offering deals for local companies that go green. Hotels that recycle at least 50 percent of their waste instead of sending it to a landfill receive free services from Mr. Hildebrand's company for a year, a program instituted in advance of the convention.

The green movement isn't new for Denver, or for Colorado as a whole, said Robert Duffy, chairman of the political science department at Colorado State University.

"In Fort Collins and a fair amount of the state, there's a real strong natural resources aesthetic. People come [to Colorado] because they like to bike and hike," he said.

Also, people don't mind digging into their wallets for a greener Colorado. Mr. Duffy noted that people in his neighborhood pay more for hormone-free milk, grow their own fruits and vegetables and care about "the whole 'xeriscape' movement," designed to reduce sharply the water needed for gardening.

Federico Cheever, environment and natural resources law professor at the University of Denver, said the city's green ties date back 100 years or more.

"Denver's economy has always been closely related to its climate," said Mr. Cheever, who also serves as chairman of the University of Denver Sustainability Council. "Denver was one of the first hubs of the City Beautiful movement in the 1890s" - a program that suggested that more attractive surroundings would promote civic virtue.

The past 15 or so years, however, have seen a rebirth of interest in the environment in Denver, Mr. Cheever says. That's credited to a combination of quality-of-life concerns and an eye toward the state's modern economy, which counts wind power as a potentially profitable resource.

The city still has work to do to get greener.

"It's almost impossible to get out to the airport unless you get a car," Mr. Cheever said.

Lisa Bardwell, chief executive officer of Earthforce, said the city's Greenprint Denver initiative set the stage for this year's convention.

It began with Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper's 2007 inauguration, when he brought sustainability experts into his administration, said Miss Bardwell, whose group encourages young people to be active in environmental efforts by such means as opting for reusable shopping bags.

Greenprint Denver, meant to transform the city into a model of sustainability, counts among its prime missions a drive to reduce Denver's greenhouse gas emissions.

On a personal level, Miss Bardwell sees more of her fellow Denverites carpooling and biking to work.

Denver still must "get our head around the transportation issues and growth," she said. "We're not a Portland or San Francisco, but we're just starting."

The city's green movement might play a role in which way Denver residents vote in the upcoming elections.

Mr. Cheever said what influences the politics of such areas as Fort Collins, Denver and Colorado Springs aren't much different.

"It's an emphasis on quality urban living at the core," he said, and much of the state includes recreation-dependent communities where environmental concerns bleed over into the pocketbook.

However, other parts of Colorado offer a different vantage point.

Towns in the lower Arkansas River Valley have very few characteristics in common with Aspen, he noted. "The eastern two-fifths of the state is not a big recreational hub."

Mr. Duffy said concern about the environment played a role in recent political developments and that's one reason why the state has a Democratic governor and state legislature.

The same concerns could affect future elections.

"You can't run for office in Colorado without at least claiming you're in tune with the environment," he said.