

# Sustainable Crested Butte: **BE THE CHANGE**

*New group trying to make a difference*

[ STORY BY NICHOLE REYCRAFT — PHOTOS BY LYDIA STERN ]

Crested Butte environmental activist Benjamin Swift was a driving force behind the town's recent single-use, plastic bag ban that will be in effect September 1, 2018. The passion Swift used in his crusade against wasteful plastic products harming the environment has resulted in the overall awareness, for himself and those who were affected by his outreach, that despite the success of his original mission, there is always room for more change. Hence, the formulation of Sustainable Crested Butte.

Though Swift is currently abroad, he left a devoted crew of activists ready and willing to continue developing his vision. The group is made up of people Swift handpicked to help with his Bag Ban project as well as

those who were simply inspired by his energetic activism to protect the world we live in, starting with our own beautiful valley, and asked to be on board.

Familiar local faces such as the organization's president, Kelly Jones, and board members Erika Vohman, Gabi Prochaska, Joan Swift and Joyce Rossiter are only a few of those committed to the cause. Board member Gabi Prochaska says, "Plastic bags are only a tiny part of an enormous story. We began our transition into a greater entity of sorts about nine months ago."

A non-profit, Sustainable Crested Butte is growing into itself, finding its place in the hearts of the community and hungry to begin implementing changes that will contribute to

waste reduction in the valley. In a town where the community feels so strongly about the choices we make and how they impact our environment, small changes may not be so difficult to make. Prochaska said, "We have a small enough population that we could actually do something impactful. A town like this should be the cutting edge of environmental responsibility."

At a meeting on Wednesday, December 14, members of Sustainable Crested Butte sorted through the environmental jargon to create a strong, solid mission statement. Both eloquent and direct, it reads, "Our mission is to promote environmental sustainability in the Gunnison Valley through education, advocacy, public outreach and



**Board member Gabi Prochaska shows off reusable bags sewn by Sustainable CB board members and volunteers.** PHOTOS BY LYDIA STERN

the implementation of community initiatives." Now, with the success of the Bag Ban under its belt, the group can focus on executing even more projects for change.

Sustainable Crested Butte has put Crested Butte on the map as the second community in the United States to be involved in what is quickly turning into a worldwide movement.

### Borrow a Bag

One of Sustainable Crested Butte's first actions was the implementation of the home-made Boomerang Bags in the community. The clever idea behind Boomerang Bags is that you can borrow the reusable bag from local retail stores, use it for the day or even several days, and when you no longer have use for it, simply bring it back to a participating store.

Prochaska and the other members of the board made it clear that it doesn't matter for how long the bags are borrowed or even if more than one are borrowed, if it means there is one fewer plastic bag in use. In fact, the words "borrow and bring back" are stamped on the reusable bags.

The idea comes from Boomerang Bags, an Australian organization working to find sustainable alternatives to plastic bag use. They encourage entire communities to get involved and make it a fun, free way to help in the fight against plastic waste.

By making a donation to the Boomerang Bags organization,



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**Gabi Prochaska**  
Sustainable Crested Butte board member

The dedicated members of Sustainable Crested Butte have sewing parties (which are open to anyone who wishes to be involved) where they turn donated upholstery and other recycled fabrics into high-quality totes. The hope is that by providing a bag that both tourists and locals can bring with them, businesses will no longer need to waste paper and plastic bags.

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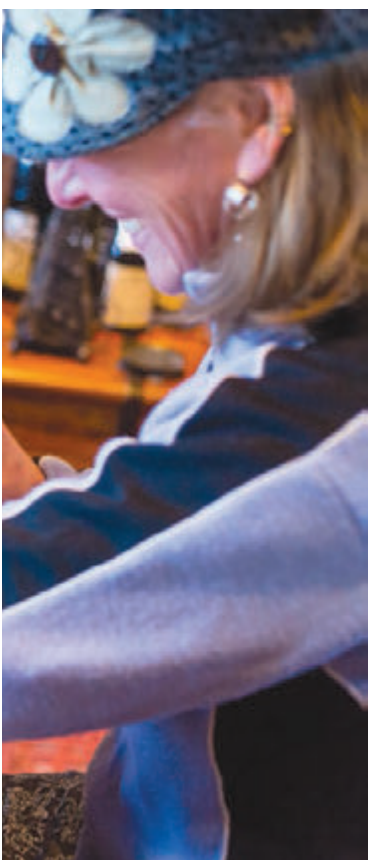


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The reusable bags can be found at seven retail stores including Pema Dawa, Little Sparrow and the Crested Butte Heritage Museum as well as the Mountain Express transit center at Mountaineer Square, the Chamber of Commerce, and most all of the hotels. Eventually, Sustainable Crested Butte would like the Boomerang Bags available in every retail store and each hotel room for visiting tourists (possibly along with a reusable water bottle) as a souvenir of sorts for those who stay a certain number of nights.

**Waste-free cutlery and other endeavors**

Sustainable Crested Butte has also begun a Waste Free Events rental service. Rather than shopping for paper plates, plastic cutlery and napkins that will end up in plastic trash bags for a large event, try contacting Sustainable Crested Butte for the use of their reusable dinnerware and napkins. Prochaska, while folding the organization's colorful cloth napkins, described the process of their new



endeavor as young and with several kinks to be worked out but off to a wonderful start. Already, events such as the Blazer's Ball, the Vinotok feast, the Slate River Clean-Up and Tommy Martin's farewell party have reached out to Sustainable Crested Butte for the use of their plates.

Prochaska said, "This is a replacement for paper plates and napkins. It is not high-end crystal; we are not an elegant affair; it's simply, do not fill up the garbage. The main idea is to create awareness and people's actions. If we can impact those choices, so be it." Sustainable Crested Butte asks only for a donation for the use of the dinnerware.

The Waste Free Events and Boomerang Bags are just the tip of the iceberg of projects that Sustainable Crested Butte hopes to put into action. Other goals include refillable water stations, community composting and creative ways to dispose of construction waste. It is clear that we can expect some big environmental impacts from this young organization.

Prochaska explained that in the face of environmental issues that are very depressing, Sustainable Crested Butte hopes to inspire our community to be part of the change that the world desperately needs.

"We want the locals to embrace this idea fully and unequivocally. The hope is that we could become part of the local psyche where if you have an event or an idea we can offer our support financially, structurally and morally. That's the pipe dream."

Be on the lookout for public outreach events such as reusable bag drives, movie nights featuring documentaries such as National Geographic's Before the Flood and Discovery Channel's Sonic Sound to create awareness on global environmental issues, and weekly eco-tips from board member Joyce Rossiter found in both the Crested Butte and Gunnison newspapers.

To become involved in Sustainable Crested Butte or to make a donation, go to <http://sustainablecb.org/>.

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