



## Good Practice Story Title: A Sustainable Materials Management Journey

**Destination: Breckenridge, Colorado**

**Country: USA**

**Submitting Organization: Town of Breckenridge**

### Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

**Destination description:** The history of Breckenridge dates back thousands of years to the nomadic Northern Utes and their ancestors who followed herds of bison and other animals through the rich river valleys and mountain passes to seasonal grazing grounds. Their travel patterns helped shape the trails and roads that later became the bustling thoroughfares for miners and their families and the industry that followed suit. Recreation in Breckenridge wasn't far behind. When real gold was traded for white gold in the 1960s, the Breckenridge Ski Area was born and with it the town became a recreational ski destination overnight.

Today, Breckenridge boasts a culturally rich and historically significant town and consistently ranks as one of the most visited ski resorts in North America. Centrally located 2-4 hours from major metro areas, Breckenridge experiences increased pressure from destination visitors who bring different experiences and practices with them to our community. Perhaps the most inconsistent behavior of visitors is around materials management and recycling. Combined with the community's desire to reduce materials headed for the landfill, Breckenridge has focused on material management as a core pillar of the **SustainableBreck Plan (2022)**, setting goals to reduce material generated by 20% and to divert materials headed for the landfill by 40%.



### Summary of Good Practice Story:

Breckenridge is focused on reducing overall material consumption and increasing recycling and composting across the community. An effective material management system requires the coordination of waste collection, handling, education and prevention. Breckenridge continues to implement measures to improve its material management system that include tried and true policies as well as new and innovative approaches like material bans. As in all sustainability approaches, there is no magic solution but rather a spectrum of opportunities all designed toward achieving the same goal.

### Issues faced:

Breckenridge, like many other small-town communities, has limited access to material end markets, is limited by geography, and is challenged by its status as a destination whereby the diversity of visitors contribute to a difficult landscape of education, messaging, and best practices related to material management. With a mere 21% diversion rate, the material management journey for Breckenridge continues to evolve as we tackle new and innovative ways of reducing our impact on the planet.

### Solution:

Breckenridge has developed a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach to material management. From education and outreach to targeted material messaging, the result has been the implementation of a series of policies and best practices that will result in increased diversion of material from our local landfill.

### Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

**Pay-As-You-Throw & Universal Recycling** - To reach the community-wide goal of 40% waste diversion by 2035, Breckenridge passed ordinances that change how waste providers charge for residential curbside collection. Rather than paying for the same size trash bin regardless of the amount of waste a household produces, residents choose from a small, medium or large trash bin, with recycling included at all service levels. The **smaller the trash bin, the lower the bill**. The Pay as You Throw model, also called volume-based pricing, has helped communities across Colorado and the nation dramatically increase their recycling rates. The 2022 report "[The State of Recycling and Composting in Colorado](#)" identifies Pay as You Throw as a common theme among the Colorado communities with the highest recycling rates. **Universal Recycling** is a companion bill that requires commercial service, and any public facing trash containers, have an accompanying recycling option. This increases access to recycling for all residents and visitors regardless of housing type. PAYT was fully implemented in 2023 and URO is in the process of roll out.

**Be Good At To-Go** - On March 28, 2023, the Breckenridge Town Council took a major step toward its material management goals with the passage of an ordinance that **phases out certain single-use plastics** from food service ware and beverage containers. This ordinance also aligns Breckenridge with new state regulations set forth in HB 21-1162, the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act. Designed to help address the 20% waste reduction goal, the policy will be fully implemented July 1, 2024. In an effort to provide resident, business, and visitor education, Breckenridge created the "[Be Good At To-Go](#)" campaign that provides resources and messaging to be used community-wide. The intent is to drive patrons to dine-in or bring their own reusable dishware if getting food to-go. There are also waste reduction grants available to help businesses install dishwashers for reusable dishware, water refill stations available for the public, implement compost programs, and more.



**Breck Water** – As part of the single-use plastic phase out, Breckenridge will no longer have single-use plastic water bottles less than one gallon available for distribution or sale. Recognizing not everyone traveling to Breckenridge may have **access to clean water** in their own community, Breckenridge wanted to reassure visitors and residents alike that Breckenridge water is **safe, clean, and readily available for hydration**. The campaign will roll out in the summer of 2024 as the single-use plastic water bottles are phased out. The community maintains a [water refill station map](#) available at the Breckenridge Welcome Center and online, so visitors know where they can refill water around town.

**Construction & Demolition Waste** – A 2019 waste audit showed that 30% of Summit County, Colorado’s landfill composition is construction and demolition waste. With little available land for future build out, **construction trends are changing from new construction to infill** with increased density and size. Recognizing the potential to divert C&D waste, Breckenridge has developed a construction and demolition policy recommendation that will go before decision makers in late June. Should this policy recommendation move forward, new construction and major remodels will be subject to **waste diversion plans, mandatory recycling of certain materials, and potentially a deposit** to ensure compliance.

**Precious Plastics** – Destination partners at Breck Create believes that **sustainability and environmental awareness are key values in maintaining the spirit of Breckenridge**. As an extension of their commitment to the natural environment, they partner with Precious Plastic—a worldwide initiative that exists to **reduce plastic waste** through a combination of people, machines, platforms and knowledge. At Breck Create, their participation in the [Precious Plastic initiative](#) takes the form of a “Mix Workspace,” where community members and visitors to Breckenridge can transform plastic waste into art.

In this workspace on the Arts District Campus, the team collects clean, label-free #1, #2, #5, and #6 plastics from local businesses and community members. The plastic is then shredded and sorted for use in classes and workshops, where patrons can learn how to **create new objects** from plastic waste using Precious Plastic equipment. Breck Create offers open studios, during which time patrons who have already taken introductory classes can use the equipment without the guidance of an instructor.

**Oops Tags** – In partnership with the High Country Conservation Center (HC3), the Oops Tag program is designed to educate people about recycling **at the point of disposal**, in this case, at the curb. HC3 inspects recycling bins, leaving personalized tips in neighborhoods throughout Breckenridge from June through September of each year. In 2023, staff implemented **bilingual tags**. Once in use, there was a significant improvement in bin contamination in areas where large non-English speaking populations reside. Now in its fourth year, Oops Tag Outreach has consistently helped residents **improve their recycling practices** and remains an effective outreach tool. In 2024, the intention is to focus on neighborhoods in Breckenridge to further support residential recyclers who have access to curbside recycling as a result of the Pay As You Throw ordinance. Recognizing that visitors in short term rental units provide an added layer of recycling confusion, HC3 is also planning an educational outreach campaign to address those issues.



### **Achievements and Results:**

Breckenridge and Summit County track annual material diversion rates both in aggregate and by material. Results from the newly implemented Pay As You Throw and Universal Recycling policies (2023-2024), as well as the prohibition on single use plastics (2024) will show up in results tabulated at the end of the year.

Five coffee shops in Breckenridge have launched the Good to Go Cups program that helps patrons use reusable coffee mugs, even for to-go orders. All Breckenridge government facilities and events have transitioned away from single-use plastic to durable dishware, including on-street and pop-up events. The 2024 Breckenridge Oktoberfest will be the largest event hosted in Breckenridge with reusable cups. The remaining plastic phase out will occur in July of 2024.

Number of bins tagged by HC3 increased 58% over 2022 numbers. Neighborhoods with a higher percentage of full-time residents had less contamination in their recycling bins than areas with high rates of short-term rentals. A 22% reduced contamination rate helps improve recycling rates and lower costs of recycling for consumers.

### **Lessons Learned and Advice:**

Materials and supply chain management are important aspects of greater climate action. While the greenhouse gas emissions from better recycling pale in comparison to beneficial electrification, renewable energy, or electric powered transportation, the fact is that people can relate to the materials they buy and discard. It's important to incentivize behaviours you want by making it accessible, easy to understand, less expensive, and readily available. On the flip side, producers and consumers of materials that are harmful should also stand to pay for the disposal. Holding polluters accountable and making sure producers of products are using the best and safest materials possible is paramount. In addition, everything should have a plan for the end of life.

For visitors, material management is often neglected until it becomes an eyesore. Overflowing trash cans, litter, or an unsightly landfill can be detrimental to a destination's image. The challenge is to meet people where they're at and not to shame them from failing to conform to local norms. In Breckenridge, we've used a multitude of approaches from regulatory to educational to help drive change. It takes all tools in the toolbox to address materials management in a comprehensive and effective manner.



### **Recognitions and Additional References**

[Good At To-Go | SustainableBreck](#)

[Material Management – Sustainable Breck](#)

["Planet vs. Plastics" Earth Day \(Month\) 2024 \(sustainablebreck.com\)](#)

[How to Make the Switch to Sustainable Serveware in Your Restaurant or Food Prep Business \(sustainablebreck.com\)](#)

[Are You Good "To-Go" Plastic Free? \(sustainablebreck.com\)](#)

[Zero Waste \(sustainablebreck.com\)](#)

[Guest opinion | Breckenridge mayor pro tem: Refuse, reuse, recycle | SummitDaily.com](#)

[As Breckenridge rolls out its plastic ban, eateries are on board but say it will cost them — and customers | SummitDaily.com](#)

[As Breckenridge introduces plastic bans, town staff roll out a campaign to get the community and visitors on board | SummitDaily.com](#)

[How Breckenridge is turning old plastic snow sleds into art \(denverpost.com\)](#)

[Breckenridge passes ordinance to reduce single-use plastics \(denver7.com\)](#)

[How Breckenridge Transforms Broken Toboggans into Works of Art \(mlpeak.com\)](#)

[Why you need to visit the ski town where plastic bags are banned \(usatoday.com\)](#)

[Breckenridge to ban single-use plastic bottles | 9news.c](#)

