

John Nielsen Vice President of Policy and Programs



John Nielsen is the vice president of policy and programs at Western Resource Advocates (WRA). In his role, he guides the development of long-term strategic plans that align WRA's vision, culture, and strategy to advance an ambitious and focused conservation agenda in the Western United States.

Leading a team of more than 40 individuals across seven states, Nielsen has been with the organization since 1995. Before taking on his current role, he directed WRA's Clean Energy Program for many years. As an economist, he came to WRA with a passion to fuse two broad interests: the environment and how economics shapes our society. While academics led him to the latter, it was Nielsen's childhood that fostered a love of the land. A Colorado native, whose family farmed and ranched in Southeastern Colorado, Nielsen has a deep appreciation for the West and a desire to protect it.

For more than two decades, Nielsen has been at the intersection of environmental and economic policy working to develop innovative solutions to the West's most challenging conservation issues. Through his leadership, WRA created the framework that has allowed Interior West states to rapidly phase out coal generation in favor of cleaner energy sources, greatly reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. Working with state and federal environmental regulators, he has helped guide technical and policy analysis demonstrating the important role that renewable energy and energy efficiency could play in reducing greenhouse gases and other harmful pollutants. He helped design the first green marketing programs in the region, making it possible for electricity customers to choose renewable energy rather than fossil fuels to meet their energy needs and was instrumental in developing Colorado's Renewable Energy Standard and strengthening it over the years.

Always working to provide practical, on-the-ground solutions to climate change, Nielsen's contributions haven't gone unnoticed. In 2015, he was awarded the Air & Waste Management Association's Richard Beatty Mellon Environmental Stewardship Award, which is granted annually to an individual or organization who has aided substantially in reducing pollution. He was also a co-recipient of the 2011 Wirth Chair Creative Collaborations in Sustainability Award for his work on the Clean Air-Clean Jobs act and a co-recipient of the 2002 American Wind Energy Association's Wind Advocacy Award for his work in support of Colorado's Amendment 37 – the nation's first citizen-initiated renewable energy standard – as well as other renewable energy policies in the state.

Nielsen has served on boards and councils around the region, including the Interwest Energy Alliance, the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEET), Utah Clean Energy, and the Colorado Renewable Energy Society. He has testified before state legislative committees and state regulatory commissions, has authored articles and reports on clean energy development and its pollution-reducing benefits, and is a frequent speaker at conferences and proceedings on energy and environmental issues.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Economics from the University of Colorado at Boulder and a Master of Philosophy in Economics from Yale University.

Nielsen is married with two sons; one recently graduated from the University of Washington who now lives in Seattle and one is a student at University of Wisconsin in Madison. Nielsen loves to travel and enjoys cycling, hiking, camping, fishing and reading in his spare time.

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