

## WETLANDS COMPONENT

### Overview of Wetland Resources in Colorado

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service defines wetlands as “lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water”. Based on this definition, wetlands must have one or more of the following characteristics:

- At least periodically, the land supports predominately hydrophytes (aquatic plants)
- The substrate is predominately undrained hydric soil (soil that is sufficiently wet in the upper part to develop anaerobic conditions during the growing season)
- The substrate is non-soil and is saturated with water or covered by shallow water at some time during the growing season of the year

In Colorado, wetland acreage is estimated at about 1.5% of total surface land area (approximately 1 million acres).<sup>1</sup> Since the state was first settled, over half of Colorado’s wetlands have vanished. In the past, wetlands were often regarded as useless lands that had to be drained or filled in order to provide significant value. Today, the values of wetlands to wildlife, humans, and the environment are better understood as wetland areas in Colorado provide essential habitats for wildlife in the state and contribute significantly to maintaining biodiversity in Colorado. Wetlands also protect water quality, provide flood protection, and mitigate erosion along shorelines.<sup>2</sup>

### Colorado Wetland Types

In 1998 Dr. David Cooper produced the first hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification system for categorizing wetlands in Colorado. The four wetland classes Cooper identified are riverine, slope, depression and mineral soil flats. These classes have been used as a basis for other wetland stratification efforts, including the Colorado Natural Heritage Program’s 2003 wetland classification and categorization report. An overview of the four wetland classifications follows:<sup>3</sup>

#### Riverine

Riverine wetlands occur along rivers and streams. Riverine wetlands are important for flood control, maintaining water quality, stabilizing stream banks, and providing habitat for fish and other wildlife.

#### Slope

Slope wetlands occur on gentle to moderate slopes and are supported by groundwater. Areas categorized as slope wetlands can include floodplains, wet meadows, and subalpine and montane fens.

#### Depression

Depression wetlands occur in shallow or deeper depressions and are supported by the water filling the depression. This wetland type encompasses peatland, marshes, reservoir and pond margins, abandoned beaver ponds, small irrigation ponds, and playa lakes.

<sup>1</sup> Dahl, T. E. 1990. Wetlands losses in the United States 1780s to 1980s. U. S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 13pp

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Wetlands and People*. March 6, 2012. <http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/people.cfm> (accessed October 15, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Carsey, Kathy, David Cooper, Karin Decker, Denise Culver, and Gwen Kittel. "Statewide Wetlands Classification and Categorization." *Colorado Natural Heritage Program*. April 2003. [http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2003/wetland\\_classification\\_final\\_report\\_2003.pdf](http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2003/wetland_classification_final_report_2003.pdf) (accessed October 15, 2012).

## **Mineral Soil Flats**

Mineral soil flats occur on relatively flat ground and are supported by precipitation and surface runoff. Mineral soil flats occasionally have standing water and more frequently have a seasonally high water table. In Colorado, mineral soil flats are especially common in South Park and the San Luis Valley, and are found on the eastern plains, along the front range, in North Park, and at lower elevations on the western slope.

## **Federal Wetland Programs and Initiatives**

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)**

The FWS is the principal federal agency providing public information on the status and extent of wetlands across the country. One of the primary programs of the FWS related to wetlands is the National Wetland Inventory (NWI), which provides data for wetland protection and management, climate change analyses, emergency planning and recovery, and wildlife management and conservation. The focus on the program has been on two fronts: 1) map or digital database preparation and delivery to the public, and 2) projecting and reporting on national wetland trends using a probability-based sampling design. Since its inception in 1974, the NWI has produced digital data for approximately 81 percent of the country, 89 percent for the continental US.<sup>4</sup>

### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

As part of its strategy to protect the nation's water resources, the EPA partners with other government agencies, nonprofit organizations and citizens to actively preserve, monitor and assess wetland resources. The EPA promotes a Watershed Protection Approach to wetland preservation by encouraging integrated planning and management at the watershed scale.<sup>5</sup> Targeted efforts of the EPA to support wetland protection activities include the following:

- Implementation of the National Wetland Condition Assessment (NWCA), a nationwide survey to monitor, assess and report on the quality of wetlands in the United States<sup>6</sup>
- Funding of wetland improvement programs through the Wetland Program Development Grant<sup>7</sup>
- Development of policy, guidance and environmental criteria related to wetland permitting
- Dissemination of public education about wetlands protection, including coordination of American Wetlands Month<sup>8</sup>

EPA grants and programs have supported watershed improvement efforts throughout Colorado, including recent condition assessments and monitoring along the North Platte River and efforts to mitigate urban impacts on the South Platte River watershed.<sup>9,10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. *National Wetland Inventory Program Overview*. 10 4, 2012. <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/NWI/Overview.html> (accessed October 26, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Wetlands and Watersheds*. October 9, 2012. <http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/outreach/fact26.cfm> (accessed October 17, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "National Wetland Condition Assessment Fact Sheet." *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*. January 2008. <http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/assessment/survey/upload/Wetland-Survey-Fact-Sheetv6.pdf> (accessed October 17, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Region 8 Wetlands Homepage*. July 30, 2012. <http://www.epa.gov/region8/water/wetlands/> (accessed October 17, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Wetlands Education*. March 6, 2012. [http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/outreach/education\\_index.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/outreach/education_index.cfm) (accessed October 17, 2012).

## **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE)**

In most situations that involve potential impacts to wetlands, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has legal authority under Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act to issue permits and enforce regulations.<sup>11</sup>

The wetland permitting process typically requires an assessment to determine:

- whether the area in question qualifies as a wetland under the Clean Water Act;
- whether the proposed impact or activity requires a permit; and
- if so, what type of permit is required, the extent of review, and the need for off-setting mitigation.<sup>12</sup>

## **Colorado Wetland Issues and Priorities**

In Colorado, the Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program (WWCP), which is administered through Colorado Parks and Wildlife, conserves wetland and riparian habitats and their ecological functions for the benefit of wildlife by planning and delivering conservation actions on a landscape scale. The WWCP also establishes priorities for protecting wetlands by focusing on conservation of wildlife habitat for wetland-dependent species. The program oversees projects that are associated with public access (increase waterfowl hunting) and not associated with public access (recovery of species).

In July 2011, the Terrestrial Habitat Conservation Program of Colorado Parks and Wildlife completed a strategic plan for *Statewide Strategies for Wetland and Riparian Conservation (The Wetland Strategic Plan)*. This plan includes information at length on the needs, premises, planning approach and strategies and priorities for wetland conservation in Colorado; therefore, it is referenced heavily below.

Wetlands are important to wildlife as well as to the communities in Colorado by providing opportunities for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. Protecting hydrological functions conserves ecological integrity, and society benefits through economic savings. Wetlands act as temporary storage areas for flood waters and slow the flow of water, therefore allowing the water to be filtered. In Colorado, 125 species (26 percent of the species that inhabit Colorado) are wetland-dependent species, including birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. Forty-two of these species are categorized as rare and imperiled by the Colorado Natural History Program (CNHP).

Support from the public for wetland conservation proves to be positive in Colorado. In a survey completed by Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), 55 percent of respondents strongly agreed that “wetlands are very important and should be protected by government,” another 28 percent somewhat agreed.

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *EPA provides \$120,000 to support South Platte watershed projects in the Denver metro area*. June 26, 2012. <http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/D3A6814535CE562985257A29006C2247> (accessed October 17, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Colorado Natural Heritage Program. "North Platte Wetland Profile and Condition Assessment." *Colorado Natural Heritage Program*. March 31, 2012. [http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2012/North\\_Platte\\_Wetland\\_Profile\\_and\\_Condition\\_Assessment\\_-\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2012/North_Platte_Wetland_Profile_and_Condition_Assessment_-_FINAL.pdf) (accessed October 17, 2012).

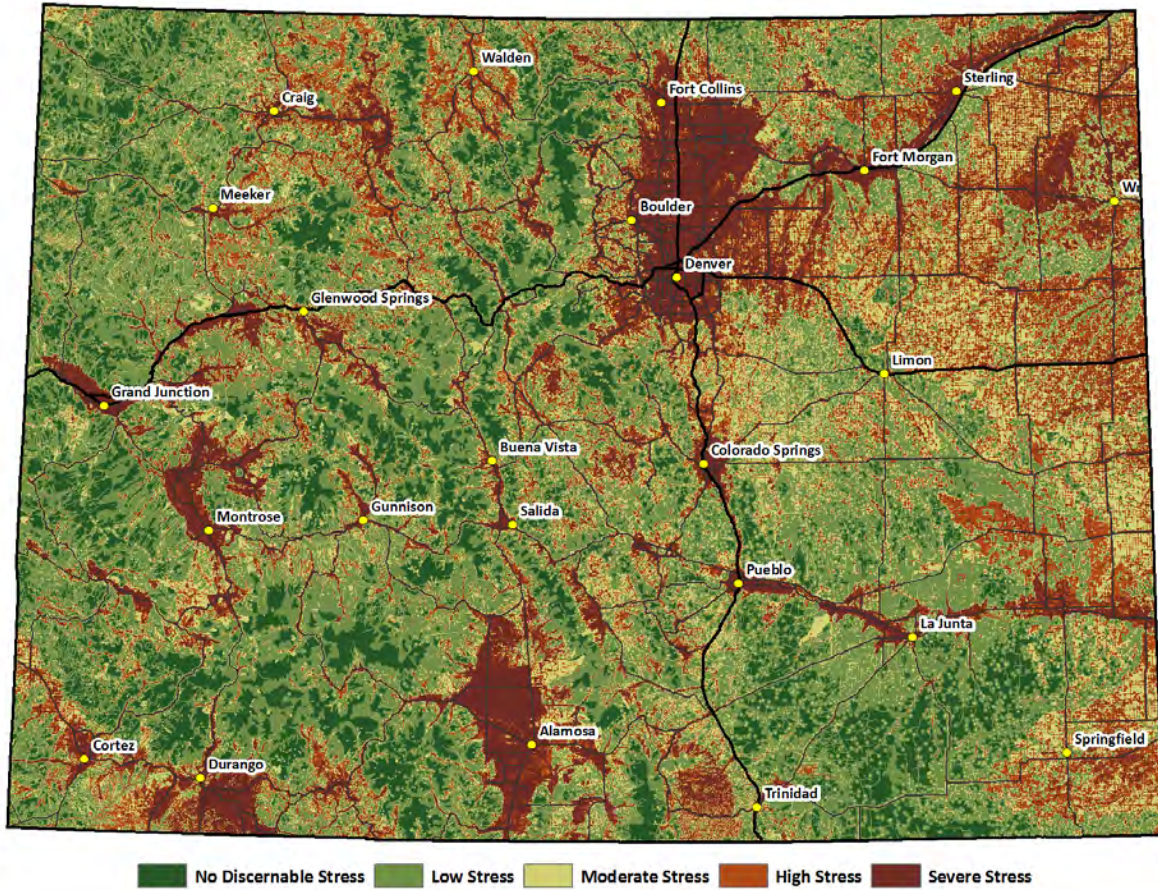
<sup>11</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Section 404 Permitting*. October 9, 2012. <http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/guidance/cwa/dredgdis/> (accessed October 17, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Colorado Parks and Wildlife. *Wetland Regulations*. June 11, 2012.

<http://wildlife.state.co.us/LANDWATER/WETLANDSPROGRAM/WETLANDREGULATIONS/Pages/WetlandRegulations.aspx> (accessed August 30, 2012).

According to The Wetland Strategic Plan, wetlands in Colorado are vulnerable to residential, agriculture, transportation and energy development as well as mining, timber harvest, hydrologic alterations, grazing management, invasive plants and climate change. A Landscape Integrity Model (LIM) developed by CNHP classified 51 percent of the state under severe, high or moderate stress (Map 1).<sup>13</sup>

**Map 1: Wetland Landscape Integrity Model**



Redder colors indicate higher stress and lower integrity; greener colors indicate lower stress and higher integrity.

<sup>13</sup> Colorado Parks & Wildlife. "Statewide Strategies for Wetland and Riparian Conservation." *Colorado Parks & Wildlife*. July 2011. <http://wildlife.state.co.us/SiteCollectionDocuments/DOW/LandWater/WetlandsProgram/CDOWWetlandsProgramStrategicPlan110804.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2012).



## Colorado Wetland Priorities

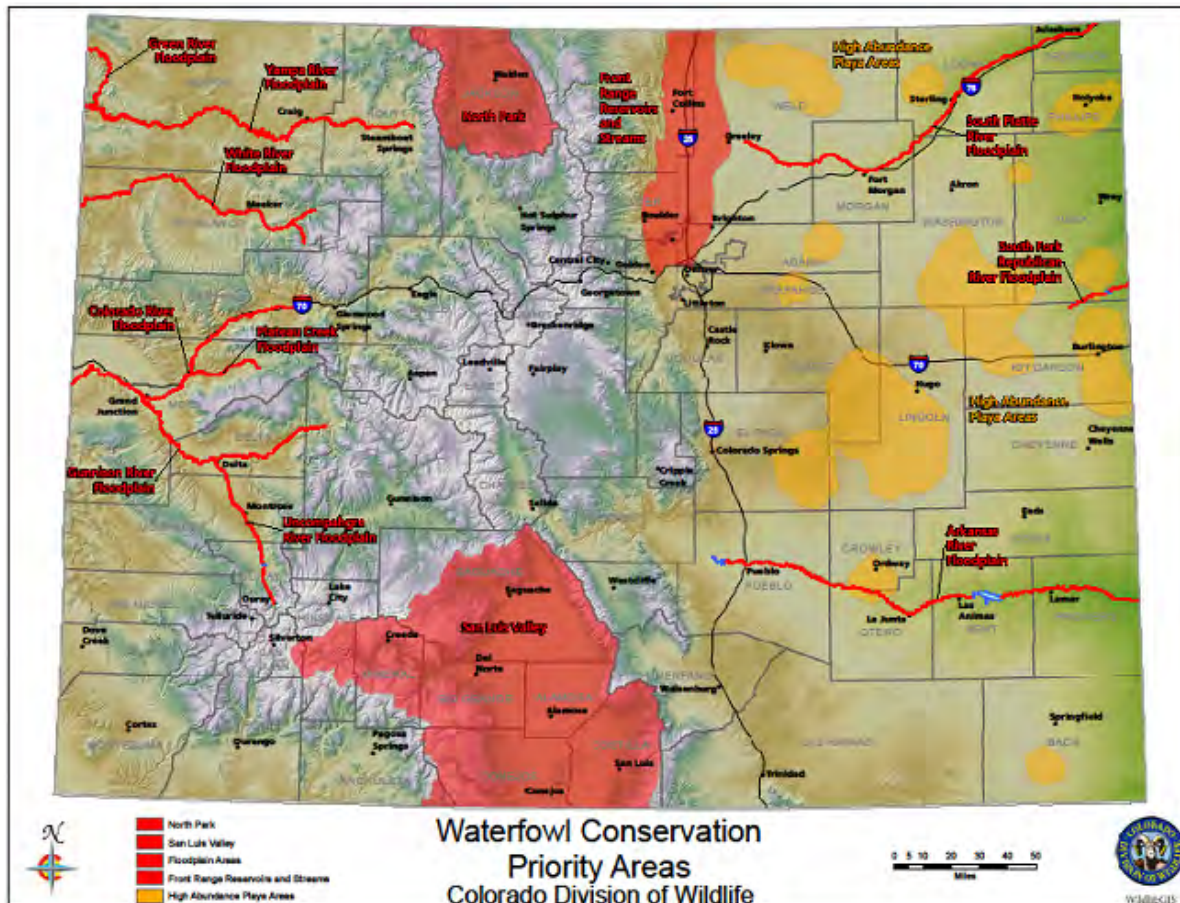
The Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program's 2011 Wetland Strategic Plan identified the following goals for wetland conservation:

**Goal 1:** Improve the distribution and abundance of ducks, and opportunities for public waterfowl hunting

**Goal 2:** Improve the status of declining or at-risk species associated with wetlands and riparian areas

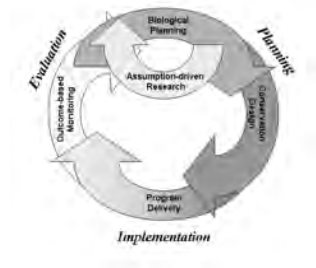
Strategies identified to achieve these goals include a focus on protecting breeding areas and spring migration areas as well as fall migration and wintering habitat, along with improving public access for waterfowl hunters. Priority habitat areas are identified across the state (Map 2). Species-level strategies for 25 priority species of greatest conservation will also be implemented to analyze and achieve population objectives.

**Map 2: Waterfowl Conservation Priority Areas**



**Statewide Strategies**

To preserve and protect the state’s wetlands, the WWCP adopted the “Strategic Habitat Conservation” approach.<sup>14</sup> This approach is an adaptive resource management strategy with five key elements: biological planning, conservation design, conservation delivery, decision-based monitoring and assumption-driven research. Strategies to accomplish each element were developed. The status of each individual strategy and detailed tasks to achieve the strategy are outlines in The Wetland Strategic Plan.



<p><b>Biological Planning:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define spatial planning units</li> <li>• Select priority and focal species</li> <li>• Set population objectives</li> <li>• Identity limiting factors and appropriate management treatments</li> <li>• Develop and apply models to help understand the relationship of species populations to limiting factors</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conservation Design:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characterize and assess the landscape</li> <li>• Assess the conservation estate</li> <li>• Develop species-specific, spatially-explicit models as decision support tools</li> <li>• Designate priority areas</li> <li>• Formulate habitat objectives</li> </ul>	<p><b>Partnerships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support exiting wetland and riparian conservation partnerships and foster new partnerships as needed</li> <li>• Incorporate Program habitat objectives into Colorado’s water supply planning</li> </ul>
<p><b>Funding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue the recent level of Program funding</li> <li>• Diversify Program funding to allow direct support of planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects</li> <li>• Increase net revenue from the Colorado waterfowl stamp program</li> <li>• Help partners secure non-CPW funds to support all Program elements</li> </ul>	<p><b>Education and Outreach:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop tools to increase CPW staff and partner knowledge of wetland and riparian habitats and their conservation</li> <li>• Conduct professional training workshops on wetland and riparian habitat conservation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Monitoring:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop conservation project tracking system</li> <li>• Develop conservation project monitoring program</li> <li>• Assess net change in habitat (and species population status)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Research:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define species/habitat model assumptions</li> <li>• Define habitat treatment assumptions</li> <li>• Assess spatial data</li> </ul>	<p><b>Granting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide funding on a competitive basis through a wetlands funding Request for Applications (RFA)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Habitat Delivery:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop program objectives</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> Colorado Parks & Wildlife. "Statewide Strategies for Wetland and Riparian Conservation." *Colorado Parks & Wildlife*. July 2011. <http://wildlife.state.co.us/SiteCollectionDocuments/DOW/LandWater/WetlandsProgram/CDOWWetlandsProgramStrategicPlan110804.pdf>

## Statewide Wetland Programs, Initiatives and Partnerships

### Colorado Parks and Wildlife

The Colorado Waterfowl Stamp was authorized in 1989 by the passage of Senate Bill 102. The stamp program generates revenue to conserve habitat for waterfowl and water birds through stamp sales to hunters and the sale of stamp art prints.

### ***Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program***

The Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program (WWCP) is a voluntary, incentive-based program to protect wetlands and wetland-dependent wildlife on public and private land. In 2012, the WWCP awarded 19 grants totaling \$1,018,020 for projects that will impact 2,870 acres of wetland and riparian areas.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, another 12 projects were completed to improve wetland habitat for eight priority waterfowl species on public and private lands.<sup>16</sup> An essential element contributing to the success of CPW's Wetland Initiative is volunteer participation in local Focus Area Committees (FACs). The committees serve as working groups that offer knowledge and expertise on local wetland issues and generate ideas for wetland projects.<sup>17</sup>



### ***CPW Partnerships***

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Wetlands Program supports many wetland conservation related partnerships across the state. These partnerships help to leverage additional funding so that every dollar invested through the Program represents several additional dollars for conservation.<sup>18</sup>

### **Colorado Partners for Fish and Wildlife**

This partnership works to design and prepare Wildlife Extension Agreements that restore and enhance wetland and riparian habitat on private land throughout Colorado. Over the past five years, Partners for Fish and Wildlife has invested \$625,000 of Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) funds to leverage \$1.64 million for conservation. Working with biologists, the landowners implement the projects and are reimbursed for project costs. As of 2013, the program has generated a total project value of \$28.9 million impacting nearly 32,000 wetland acres and 368 riparian miles.

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<sup>15</sup> Colorado Parks & Wildlife. *Wetlands Project Funding*. August 2, 2012. <http://wildlife.state.co.us/LANDWATER/WETLANDSPROGRAM/PROJECTFUNDING/Pages/WetlandsProjectFunding.aspx> (accessed October 17, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Colorado Parks & Wildlife. *Wetlands Program Fact Sheet*. <http://wildlife.state.co.us/SiteCollectionDocuments/DOW/LandWater/WetlandsProgram/CPWWetlandsProgram.pdf>. (accessed October 2, 2013)

<sup>17</sup> Colorado Parks & Wildlife. *Focus Area Committees*. June 18, 2012. <http://wildlife.state.co.us/LANDWATER/WETLANDSPROGRAM/FOCUSAREACOMMITTEES/Pages/FocusAreaCommittees.aspx> (accessed October 17, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Sullivan, Brian. "CPW Wetlands Program Partnership Fact Sheets." *Colorado Parks and Wildlife*. 2013.

### **Ducks Unlimited**

Colorado Parks and Wildlife works with Ducks Unlimited on a shared commitment to conserving landscapes that play a key role in sustaining waterfowl populations. This partnership has worked on 155 projects, including many State Wildlife Areas, that have managed, restored, or acquired over 40,000 acres of wetlands and related habitat. In the past five years, 4,600 wetland acres on huntable public lands have been conserved.

### **Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory**

With the objective to advance wetland and riparian habitat delivery in Colorado, this wetlands partnership has worked to re-vegetate riparian areas, remove invasive species and create marshes, increasing staff capacity to deliver habitat projects and leverage partner funding. In particular, funds support one-third of expenses for a private lands biologist who focuses on wetlands inventory, conservation, restoration and delivery along the South Platte River. The biologist has been instrumental in getting \$1 million in Farm Bill funds dedicated to WRP in Colorado and completing a South Platte WRP inventory on 7,598 acres to guide future management and conservation efforts.

### **Colorado Natural Areas Program**

The Colorado Natural Areas Program (CNAP) is dedicated to protecting the best natural features in Colorado. By preserving designated areas on public and private land through management agreements with land owners, CNAP works to conserve the ecosystems, species, geology and fossils that are unique to Colorado. Of 89 designated natural area sites in 2012, more than 20 contain wetland or riparian features.<sup>19</sup>

### **Colorado Natural Heritage Program**

Focusing on Colorado's rare and threatened species and plant communities, the Colorado Natural Heritage Program has taken a lead role in wetlands-related research. The program developed a Wetland Program Plan in 2010 to guide strategies related to building comprehensive wetland information for the state. The five-year program plan identifies the following strategic directions:

- Help wetland professionals determine the types of wetlands that occur in Colorado.
- Create a comprehensive digital map of wetland resources that will help determine the extent and location of wetlands across the state.
- Refine wetland condition assessment protocols and promote their use to public and private entities conducting wetland condition assessments.
- Continue to identify and track wetlands of high biodiversity significance.
- CNHP will coordinate and partner with federal, state and local agencies as well as with conservation organizations and local citizens to transform the information gained through the previous strategic directions into effective conservation and management.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Colorado Parks & Wildlife. *Colorado Natural Areas Program Alphabetical Listing*. January 17, 2012.

<http://www.parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP/NaturalAreasInfo/AlphabeticalListing/Pages/CNAP%20Alphabetical%20Listing.aspx> (accessed October 26, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Colorado Natural Heritage Program. "Colorado Natural Heritage Program Wetland Program Plan." *Colorado Natural Heritage Program*. December 15, 2010. [http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2010/CNHP\\_WetlandProgramPlan.pdf](http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2010/CNHP_WetlandProgramPlan.pdf) (accessed October 15, 2012).



## Additional Resources:

Organization/ Program	Acronym/ Abbreviation	Overview/Mission
<b>Colorado Riparian Association</b>	CRA	To promote the conservation, restoration, and preservation of Colorado's riparian areas and wetlands.
<b>Colorado Watershed Assembly</b>		To provide leadership and support to Colorado's watershed groups to enhance their ability to protect, conserve and enhance our state's watersheds.
<b>Ducks Unlimited – Colorado</b>	DU - Colorado	Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl.

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## 2014 STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP) YOUTH AND FAMILIES FOCUS GROUP REPORT NOVEMBER 2013

### Executive Summary

Another important step in the SCORP public input process included three targeted focus group meetings with Denver metropolitan area urban youth. These focus groups were conducted with the assistance of SCORP Advisory Group members, and were a critical element in ensuring that more diverse perspectives (particularly with respect to traditionally underrepresented populations such as urban youth) were considered as statewide priorities were developed as part of the 2014 SCORP.

The vast majority of the focus group participants expressed that outdoor recreation was important to them. However, it was clear that the surveyed youth had varying definitions of what constituted outdoor recreation. Their definition commonly did not include the traditional activities that were previously surveyed through the *Public Participation Survey* such as backpacking, camping, ATVing, skiing, hunting and fishing. Team sports such as soccer and basketball were participated in more frequently. Biking, skateboarding and running were also very important. Nearly everyone participated in these activities with their friends—most commonly in and around their neighborhoods and at local parks and recreation centers. Some outdoor recreation involved family members, including extend family, in some cases. When the focus group participants travelled beyond their neighborhood for recreation to places such as Rocky Mountain National Park or open space parks in the foothills, it was often through school or direct youth outreach programs such as Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) or Groundwork Denver.

Youth are very informed of the benefits of outdoor recreation. Focus group participants listed many benefits of outdoor recreation ranging from physical health benefits like getting exercise and improving your physical shape; mental and social health benefits such as stress relief, meeting new people, and getting away from technology; growing one's character by becoming a leader, staying out of gangs and pushing oneself to do better; and creating a connection with nature by watching wildlife, getting fresh air and learning about the environment. However, there seemed to be disconnect between the benefits of outdoor recreation and the activities the groups actually participated in. It was as if the groups have been told about the benefits of outdoor recreation, and even may have directly experienced these benefits, but it was not translating to their daily activities.

Barriers that prevent many of us from enjoying outdoor recreation such as commitments to work, school and family were also frequently cited by focus group participants. The internet and video games were another major factor as to why they did not participate more in outdoor recreation. Laziness and a lack of general interest in outdoor recreation were mentioned by some. Logistical challenges such as lack of transportation—either public transit or by parents—and costs to take part in outdoor recreation, limit youth participation. Additionally, awareness of places to recreate kept youth from participating more in outdoor recreation.

Focus group participants emphasized that competition and incentives were helpful to getting youth and families outdoors, but education was by far most important. Surveyed participants were unaware of outdoor recreational opportunities, even if they existed close to home. It was expressed that even if they knew about a place, there were unknowns about costs, ability for the public to access those places, and safety. Word of mouth was seen as the main way to tell others about outdoor recreation opportunities. Technology, although seen as a barrier, is a way to disseminate information on outdoor recreation through use of social media and applications that tell you where you can go and what is there when you get to a park or recreational site.

## Introduction

The SCORP is an opportunity to reflect on the significance of outdoor recreation to our state, and to contemplate strategies for the future. Each state's SCORP must identify outdoor recreation trends and issues, demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources, and demonstrate ample public involvement. The SCORP also helps direct a state's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) apportionment, which is appropriated annually by Congress. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), the agency responsible for overseeing the LWCF program in Colorado, oversees the SCORP planning process. In spring 2013, an Advisory Group was convened to help inform development of the plan. Members represented a variety of interests including trail users, conservation groups, funding partners, health and education advocates, sportsmen/women's groups, and other outdoor recreation providers. Early in the SCORP planning process, Advisory Group members expressed a desire to capture some of the issues/needs of youth, particularly underserved populations. Focus groups were determined to be an effective way of capturing some of this information.

The goal of the focus groups is to provide supplemental, qualitative information that would be relayed to individual SCORP workgroups tasked with developing the SCORP priority goals, objectives, and suggested actions. Focus group surveys attempted to qualify the types of outdoor recreation activities youth participate in, barriers to outdoor recreation among underserved populations, and what can be done to encourage more youth and families to become more active in the outdoors.

This report outlines the focus group methodology, survey questions and summary responses, as well as key results and conclusions.

## Methodology

### **Focus Group Survey**

After the June SCORP Advisory Group Kick Off meeting, interested Advisory Group members met via Conference Call to follow-up on concepts related to youth engagement in the outdoors, and ensuring that more diverse perspectives (particularly with respect to traditionally-underrepresented populations like urban youth) were considered as statewide priorities were developed as part of the 2014 SCORP. A focus group concept emerged from this discussion. Due to staff and funding limitations, Advisory Group members volunteered to lead these efforts in select locations, centered primarily around the Denver Metropolitan Area.

Preliminary focus group questions were drafted by the Diversity Focus Group Subcommittee and presented to the full Advisory Group. The following six questions were incorporated into the SCORP Focus Group Survey:



1. Do you think outdoor recreation is important?
2. What types of outdoor recreation activities do you participate in?
  - a) Where do you go for these activities (local park, state park, federal lands, etc.)?
  - b) Who do you go with (friends, family, organizations, etc.)?
3. What do you enjoy most about being outdoors? What benefits do you gain from outdoor recreation?
4. What keeps you from participating in outdoor recreation activities?
5. Youth and families in outdoor recreation. What ideas do you have to help engage more youth and families in outdoor recreation?
6. What is the most important thing that can be done to get more youth and families to be active in the outdoors?

The intent of the focus groups was to be qualitative in nature; therefore the findings cannot be interpolated to be representative of the entire youth population in Colorado.

### **Focus Group Sessions**

Focus group sessions were conducted with students from three different organizations; Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK), a group from West High School, and youth tied into Groundwork Denver efforts. These groups were chosen based on their diverse backgrounds and association with a member of the Advisory Group. Other members of the SCORP Advisory Group were asked to help facilitate the group discussions. Kristina Kachur, planning assistant at Colorado Parks and Wildlife, was present at all the focus groups and collected responses.

Session #1: Groundwork Denver Group, October 4, 2013, Bear Creek Lake Park

- Facilitator: Scott Babcock, CPW

- Participants: 18 total: 14 youth ages 13-14 years; about half female, half male and 4 participants between ages 18-21, all male. Majority African-American and/or Hispanic.

Session #2: Environmental Learning for Kids, October 18, 2013, ELK Headquarters, Montebello, Denver

- Facilitator: Alan Ragins, NPS

- Participants: 16 youth ages 16-19 years; 11 males and 5 females. All African-American and/or Hispanic.

Session #3: Class from West High School, October 24, 2013, West High School Classroom

- Facilitator: Katie Navin, CAEE

- Participants: 17 youth ages 14-15 years; 13 males and 4 females. Majority Hispanic with a few African-American.

## **Summary Results**

### **Is Outdoor Recreation Important to Youth?**

Participation in outdoor recreation was seen as very beneficial to the surveyed groups. There was always a resounding “yes!” from focus group participants. However, when asked additional questions, it was clear that the definition of outdoor recreation varied. It was evident that many did not think of outdoor recreation of adventure sports or more traditional outdoor recreation activities (e.g., skiing, fishing, ATVing, camping, etc.) but as playing team sports outside or playground activities. Outdoor recreation was further defined as playing or spending time outside.

### **Participation in Outdoor Recreation**

The most common outdoor recreation activities typically cited by focus group participants included team sports such as soccer, football and basketball. Swimming, running, skateboarding, biking, picnicking and sledding were also mentioned. Passive recreation such as relaxing and wildlife viewing were also popular answers. Camping and backpacking were mentioned as an afterthought, and only a handful of the participants took part in these activities.

The most common responses for where youth recreated included local parks, recreation centers, school playgrounds, as well as their own backyard or on the streets. In general, participants had a local park or facility within two to six blocks where they recreated. The surveyed participants usually only traveled to “the mountains” or “the forests” with groups like ELK and Groundwork Denver. ELK members have been on trips to Rocky Mountain National Park and Rocky Mountain Arsenal, however, they were generally unfamiliar with public lands such as national forests or state parks.

Direct relatives (parents and siblings) and extended family (such as cousins or other relatives) were mentioned by some focus group participants as being directly involved in outdoor recreation activities, particularly activities such as picnicking or team sports. However, participants generally expressed a preference to go on trips and recreate outdoors with their friends. And when participants travelled beyond their neighborhood for outdoor recreation, it was most commonly with a group or program. In the ELK focus group, a few participants emphasized that outdoor recreation was an opportunity to get away from their family, and emphasized that they only did so because they had another family type organization (such as ELK) to turn to for that opportunity. One African American teenager stated “I do ELK to get away from my little sister; ELK is like my second family.”

### **Benefits of Outdoor Recreation: A Youth Perspective**

Participants in the focus groups had a good understanding of the many benefits of outdoor recreation. Although, there seemed to be disconnection between the benefits of outdoor recreation and the activities the children actually participated in. That is, some of the participants had obviously been told about the benefits of outdoor recreation, or may have even experienced it a few times, but it was not translating to their daily activities. Typical responses on the direct benefits of outdoor recreation included:

#### *Physical Health*

- Get exercise
- Get energy/anger out
- Get your heart rate up
- Improve physical shape

#### *Mental/Social Health*

- Improve social skills and meet new people
- Have fun
- Stress relief
- Feeling happy
- Getting anger out
- Get away from technology
- Feels good-relaxing

#### *Personal Growth*

- Be a young leader
- Push yourself to do better
- Make real connections other people
- Expand knowledge
- Meditate
- Freedom
- Stay out of gangs

#### *Connection with nature*

- Enjoying fresh air
- Seeing wildlife
- Seeing cool things
- Seeing the stars
- Make real connections with nature

### **Barriers to Outdoor Recreation Activities**

Barriers expressed by surveyed youth included personal interests as well as logistical barriers. Technology was considered a barrier in that the children were often more interested in playing video games, being on Facebook and Twitter, and watching TV than playing outdoors. Other obligations to work, family, and school were also significant barriers to participating in outdoor recreation. A lack of money and transportation was also mentioned. Additionally, these groups were often unaware of the opportunities for outdoor recreation as well as what to expect when they visited a public park or public lands. Some of the responses included:

- Taking care of younger siblings
- Lack of transportation/public transit
- No off leash dog areas
- Internet and video games
- Weather
- Poor facilities
- Personal choices-Laziness
- Curfews
- Not knowing where to go
- Parents don't let me-its unsafe
- Rather do indoor sports
- Lack of funds to go to parks

### **Engaging Youth and Families in Outdoor Recreation**

Overall, surveyed youth expressed a desire to be more engaged in outdoor recreation. Competitions and programs to keep outdoor recreation interesting and relevant were cited as being important. Many of the focus group participants were unfamiliar with outdoor recreation opportunities beyond their immediate neighborhood. Often there were limited opportunities within their neighborhood as well. Many perceived that there were limited options to participate in outdoor recreation and expressed a desire to see more parks in the city. More education on easily-accessible recreational opportunities that are free or have minimal costs would be helpful.

Although technology was seen as a barrier to outdoor recreation, it was expressed that smart phone applications and websites with information on where to go and what to do would help get youth outside. Using technology in an interactive way was another idea. Other suggestions related to encouraging more youth and family participation in outdoor recreation included:

- Tournaments
- Giveaways, raffles
- Take a kid outdoors days
- More parks close to home
- Hold special events for kids
- Informational Flyers, more information in visible areas
- Help raise money and additional Support for outdoor recreation partners
- More bike routes
- Benches and tables for picnicking
- Clean facilities, especially bathrooms
- Sports leagues where parents and kids play together, learn from adults
- Entertainment- concerts
- Off-leash dog parks
- Trees in parks
- Have indoor parks to promote year around activities
- Local runs/races
- Neighborhood potluck
- Educate parents

## Conclusions

Underserved youth populations in Denver most frequently associated outdoor recreation participation with team sports and most frequently participated in these activities at local recreation facilities. Although youth may enjoy traditional outdoor recreation activities, trips to national parks and public lands are limited to a few program-led events. Hunting, fishing, mountain biking, OHV activities, skiing and rock climbing are not even on their radar. Camping, backpacking and rafting are vaguely familiar.

Youth today are very aware of the health benefits of physical activity. The groups identified many benefits related to physical, social, and mental health; connection with nature; and personal growth. Understanding the benefits of outdoor recreation is not a barrier to outdoor recreation.

On the other hand, youth may be aware of the benefits of outdoor recreation but remain unaware of all the opportunities that are available, or how to participate in these activities. Educating youth and their parents on available outdoor recreation opportunities is key to getting more children outdoors. A general lack of knowledge on the types of outdoor recreation opportunities available, and location in which to participate in these opportunities, coupled with perceptions of safety, costs and what to expect, may prevent parents from letting their children become more involved in outdoor recreation. Educating parents through culturally appropriate and bilingual messaging may increase participation.

In addition, utilizing technology in a way that is interactive can help engage the youth who are always plugged in. Children and teens, in general, get bored easily. Having more opportunities and ways to learn about outdoor recreation will help keep kids more interested and engaged.

Community-based outdoor programs, such as ELK and Groundwork Denver, seem to have a powerful impact on the types of activities and the frequency that urban youth participate in outdoor recreation. Teaching children and teens about natural resources and outdoor recreation resources in their own community is a jumping off point to increased participation. Trips that take kids on life-changing adventures to more distant parks, open spaces and outdoor recreation areas are most often made possible through programs like these. Such programs create a sense of family, a safe and fun environment, and opportunities for partnerships. Furthermore, programs that give leadership opportunities to teenagers can foster greater support for natural resources and expand possibilities for personal growth.



## APPENDIX F — ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full Name
AGO	America's Great Outdoors
BLM	United States Bureau of Land Management
CAEE	Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education
CCI	Colorado Counties, Inc.
CDE	Colorado Department of Education
CDOT	Colorado Department of Transportation
CDPHE	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
CFI	Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
CMC	Colorado Mountain Club
CNAP	Colorado Natural Areas Program
COE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
COGs	Councils of Governments
COHVCO	Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition
CPRA	Colorado Parks and Recreation Association
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
CSFS	Colorado State Forest Service
CTO	Colorado Tourism Office
CWCB	Colorado Water Conservation Board
CYCA	Colorado Youth Corps Association
DNR	Colorado Department of Natural Resources
DOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
DOLA	Colorado Department of Local Affairs
DRCOG	Denver Regional Council of Governments
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
GOCO	Great Outdoors Colorado
LiveWell	LiveWell Colorado
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
NPS	U.S. National Park Service
NVUM	National Visitor Use Monitoring
OEDIT	Office of Economic Development and International Trade
OHV	Off-Highway Vehicle
OIA	Outdoor Industry Association
SCORP	Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
SLB	Colorado State Land Board
The Alliance	Alliance for Sustainable Colorado
TPL	Trust for Public Land
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
VOC	Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado
WUI	Wildland-Urban Interface
WWCP	Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program

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STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING COLORADO'S OUTDOORS HERITAGE



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For more information on the SCORP, contact:  
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