



**COLORADO**

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources



## **COLORADO NATURAL AREAS COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

Denver CPW Office

6060 Broadway Denver, CO 80216

Bighorn Conference Room

**CNAC Attendees:** Tom Nesler (Chair), Ken Strom (Vice Chair), Denise Culver, Julia Kintsch, John Shaw (SLB), Dina Clark

**CPW Staff:** Raquel Wertsbaugh, Savanna Smith, Lisa Merkhofer, David Klute (SCON supervisor), Craig McLaughlin (Terrestrial section manager)

**Other:** Jessica Smith (CNHP Botanist), Mindy Gottsegen (SLB)

### **Call Meeting to Order**

Council Chair Tom Nesler called meeting to order at 10:06am

### **Presentations from Commissions and Appointees**

John Shaw: SLB is working on 5 year updates to asset management plans for Bohart and Chancellor Ranch.

Ken Strom: Cranes started arriving on the Platte River in March, millions of snow geese are coming in. This is a good reminder that Natural Areas serve as important places for animals migrating through, not just year-round residents.

Dina Clark: Arikaree River is known as an important place in the plains for migrating birds. We should consider migrations routes when registering new sites.

Dense Culver: Yuma County commissioners not comfortable with CNHP conducting a county-wide survey. Working with Bruce Bosley to identify landowners in the county who would allow access. TNC is hosting a bioblitz during the last week of July on Fischer Peak and Crazy Frenchman Ranch. CNHP will assist. The Lake County report is complete. Highlights: Found the first extreme rich fen on the west side of the Rockies. Fen restoration at Hayden Ranch doing well. Found 3 fen complexes in the Sawatch Range owned by USFS. Found over 40 new county records. CPW owns an extreme rich fen in the county containing pale blue-eyed grass.

Tom Nesler: Sent aquatic information for Eastern Plains to CNAP.

### **Update from CPW Staff**

David Klute (CPW): Annual budget review is complete. CNAP will now have a long-term program budget. Federal fund matching is allowed. The new executive director of DNR has been appointed.

Craig McLaughlin (CPW): In the process of selecting a new CPW director, expected appointment by June. Hoping to have a new commissioner appointee to the CNAC council in the next month.

### Matters from Staff

- *Staffing updates:* Savanna Smith is the new CNAP Field technician. She previously worked with SLB and has experience monitoring NA properties. Lisa Merkhofer will stay a few months longer to help with field monitoring and program needs.
- *2019 field season updates:*
  - Staff conducting first field visit to Owl Canyon next week to assist with CSU course.
  - CNAC invited to field visits. Potential visits include 4/15 volunteer field visit to Trinidad State Park (K-T boundary), Dakota Hogback, Staunton SP, Chalk Bluffs, High Creek Fen, Mount Goliath, Tamarack Ranch.
- *Program updates:*
  - Sent out staff and volunteer reports to partners.
  - Staff working with FWS on recovery plans and species status assessments for many federally listed plant species. CNAP is main researcher of several species, including Pagosa skyrocket and Parachute penstemon. CNAP is in a good position to inform the plans and coordinate with FWS.
- *Natural Areas System re-alignment update:*
  - Update on identification of potential sites on Eastern Plains
    - Staff reached out to several partners (CNHP, CPW habitat coordinators and law enforcement, NRCS, TNC, BLM, USFS) for further site suggestions.
    - Tom worked with CPW native aquatic group. Talked to NE and SE aquatic biologists, they will send over information for Tier 1 fish and amphibians.
    - William Burnage (TNC) thinks timing is not right for JE Ranch due to potential transfer of ownership.
    - Staff picked out tentative highest priority sites from list.
      - Fischer Peak/Crazy Frenchman Ranch identified (currently owned by TNC). Could be a good designation to capture the western terminus of Mesa de Maya and include montane plant communities and important wildlife habitat.
      - TNC's Fox Ranch is already a registered NA and might be an easier designation due to partner support. Has high quality, diverse upland and riparian areas and greater prairie chicken habitat.
      - Picketwire Canyon- Staff is talking with Steve Olson (USFS botanist) who can assist with designations on USFS sites in the SE. Potential site if partners in the area are willing.
    - Need to revisit conversation with Fort Collins Natural Areas program when they have filled staff vacancies.
  - Next Steps
    - Evaluation of identified sites
      - Reach out to people who identified sites to request more natural history information. CNAP staff could rank identified sites and compare scores

with existing natural areas when there is enough site information available. Need to take into account landowner willingness.

- CNAP staff will contact Comanche National Grassland staff and update CNAC in June.
- Need to discuss de-registration of natural areas

### Matters from Council

- *Approval of December minutes:* Motion to approve made by John Shaw, seconded by Denise. All in favor.
- *Upcoming CNAC vacancy:* Reminder of Tom Nesler's 2<sup>nd</sup> term ending this June.
  - CNAC members can approach potential candidates and encourage them to submit an application. Important to inform candidate of position duties and report back to CNAP if candidate will apply. Council identified several people who might be a good fit.
  - Raquel will email link to CNAC application and position expectations.
- 2019 CNAC Natural Area field visit
  - Council is interested in visiting Fox Ranch but will defer confirming trip until June meeting.
  - Council members encouraged to accompany CNAP staff on a summer field visit.
- Next meeting rescheduled to **Monday 24<sup>th</sup> of June.**

### CNAP Strategic Plan update and next steps discussion

- Plan lasts until March 2020, need to consider next steps.
- CNAP has met or is continuing to improve upon several listed objectives. Staff highlighted accomplishments and areas to continue working on.
  - New designations/de-designations: Due to legislative limitations on staff numbers, CNAP needs to prioritize de-designations if many new sites are to be added.
  - Strengthening partnerships: Staff have been receiving feedback from partners in-person instead of formal survey.
  - Council has helped communicate with CPW leadership on program needs.
  - Monitoring efficiency has significantly improved.
  - Volunteer Steward program: Improved communication and coordination and created individualized site visit goals for volunteers
  - Internal communication: Chain-of-command communication has improved. Have succeeded in working with real estate group to raise awareness of rare plants in property decisions.
  - External communication: Have increased external marketing. Will continue to promote public visibility and rare plant conservation.
- 2019 Goals
  - Finalize rankings on all designated natural areas
  - Continue to refine site list for eastern plains, prioritize sites, and begin registration process
  - Continue to improve upon communication with volunteers, partners, and CPW staff

- Continue inviting CPW staff to site visits
- Find ways to reach out to new CPW leadership, highlight program value, share success stories

**CNAP Project Updates**

- *Geodatabase*
  - Lisa has been working to streamline data collection and storage for CNAP GIS data. New system for this summer will be more efficient and will allow for better insights into the data.
  
- *GIS storymap demonstration*
  - Lisa walked council through a draft storymap she created. Storymaps are a web-based platform for outreach. Will be a good tool to communicate with CPW staff, partners, and the public. Council gave ideas for improvement and staff will incorporate them into next iteration.
  
- *Rare plant monitoring*
  - Jessica gave council an overview of CNAP's current rare plant monitoring efforts including updates to data collection protocol, Pagosa skyrocket monitoring and CNAP funded monitoring projects.

Meeting Adjourned: 2:45pm

Respectfully submitted:

  
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Raquel Wertsbaugh, Colorado Natural Areas Program Coordinator

Approved:

  
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Tom Nesler, Colorado Natural Areas Council Chair