



COLORADO NATURAL AREAS COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday March 30, 2022
Virtual Meeting-Zoom

CNAC Attendees: Ken Strom (Chair), Lynn Riedel (Vice Chair), Phyllis Pineda Bovin, Jessica Pierce, Denise Culver, Taishya Adams (CPW Commissioner), Josie Heath (SLB Commissioner)

CPW Staff: David Klute (SCON supervisor), Raquel Wertsbaugh (Program Coordinator), Caroline Hildebrand (Stewardship Specialist), Lucy Haggard (Outreach and Volunteer Program Assistant)

Other: Lindsey Brandt (SLB Stewardship Trust Manager), Savanna Smith (CNHP Botanist)

Council Chair Ken Strom called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

Presentations from Commissions and Appointees

Denise Culver: Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) was able to revise and reprint all three [pocket guides to common wetland plants](#). These were offered at the CNHP partners meeting.

Commissioner Josie Heath: State legislature recently confirmed three new State Land Board (SLB) commissioners. [State HB 1146](#) would help the land board by having investments done in such a way to yield more for schools. There is now interest from the City of Telluride in acquiring an SLB property that may soon be removed from the stewardship trust.

Commissioner Taishya Adams: CPW is moving forward on timed entry for Eldorado Canyon State Park, following significant increase the park has seen in recreation traffic. Outdoor Afro recently co-hosted a Black History Month event at Denver Botanic Gardens and CPW education team staff assisted with a booth. Although CNAP staff was not able to attend, Commissioner Adams helped with CNAP outreach and awareness. Highlighted upcoming [CPW Partners in the Outdoors conference](#) in Vail.

Phyllis Pineda Bovin: [Amache National Historic Site](#) in southeastern Colorado was recently added to the National Parks Service system. Congress had passed an act in 2019 for a Special Resources Study, and more recently another bill went ahead and designated the site as NHS. The Special Resources study will wrap up soon. NPS is looking to incorporate climate change responses and vulnerability assessments in planning projects going forward. This may include visitor use, shoulder season growth, wilderness management, and more. Many are advocating for “plain language” in this project, aka more accessible than strictly academic terminology.

Jessica Pierce: Shared a [recent journal article](#) from NatureServe highlighting how the use of habitat suitability models for diverse taxonomic groups (such as plants) can better help to identify opportunities for protecting imperiled species. The article highlighted the high numbers of unprotected imperiled species, mostly plants, specifically in Colorado. It could be interesting to consider how state legislation

could change this paradigm. It could be interesting to spotlight specific plant species within an individual natural area to open the public's eye to the importance of that species, and how it's interconnected with the broader ecosystem.

Lynn Riedel: Currently involved with the development of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Species Status Assessment (SSA) for Ute ladies tresses, a species that occurs on City of Boulder OSMP property. The USFWS is proposing to delist the species, which is currently listed as threatened. The Marshall Fire was tragic for the loss of homes in the Boulder County area. Significant acreage of City of Boulder OSMP land burned, including some of the Colorado Tallgrass Prairie and South Boulder Creek Natural Areas. The fire was very fast, and burnt surface material quickly. The native prairie will likely recover well, depending on spring and summer moisture. More recently, the NCAR Fire burned in the Boulder Mountain Park Natural Area. No homes or structures were destroyed, weather conditions were much more favorable, and much of that land had recently undergone fire mitigation treatment.

Lindsey Brandt: SLB staff recently gave a general presentation to CPW education section staff. SLB has been working with a paleontological contractor at Chalk Bluffs Natural Area, after they were made aware of a fossil found by the CNAP volunteer steward for the site. After excavating, they believe they may have a complete skeleton of a prehistoric horse from the Ogallala Formation. The prehistoric horse is a somewhat common species, but a complete skeleton is rare. Contractors also found two complete prehistoric tortoise shells from that formation.

CPW Updates (SCON Supervisor David Klute):

- CPW budgets are looking positive. There is consideration of a new habitat unit within the terrestrial section, which would include several new staff as well as some reorganization of existing staff. This may intersect with CNAP.
- Recovering America's Wildlife Act is going well in Congress. If passed, it would fund \$26 million for Colorado annually to address SWAP priorities, with an additional \$2 million for plants. Markup in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee is scheduled for April 7, and if it passes out of that committee it is set for floor action. The legislation has already passed out of committee in the House.
- Many CPW units are gearing up for the field season. New grad students are working on burrowing owls and black rails. There is experimentation with using scent dogs to detect hard-to-find black-footed ferrets. Groups are looking at recreation impacts on birds in northwest Colorado, and inventories will begin on massasauga rattlesnakes and olive-backed pocket mouse.
- The SWAP conservation dashboard project is moving along, with beta testing and formatting adjustments based on updated progress reports. The dashboards are intended to show the progress made on implementation of conservation actions outlined in [Colorado's SWAP](#).
- Multiple ESA related decisions are affecting CPW, especially the courts' vacature of gray wolf delisting. Gray wolves are back to being listed as federally endangered in Colorado. Prop 114 implementation now requires a lot more interaction with FWS. CPW is hiring a new Wolf Program Manager to help manage that workload. Also, in June it is likely that FWS will again list lesser prairie chicken as a threatened species. CPW received a notice of intent by Defenders of Wildlife to pursue listing of pinyon jay.
- There is now more travel and more in-person meetings as COVID abates, including the Partners in the Outdoors Conference in Vail in April. There is also a summit in early April on Gunnison sage grouse. In May, there will be an invitation-only Grasslands Roadmap Summit in Fort Collins as a continent-wide effort between countries, tribes, and many other stakeholders.

- CPW will be developing a habitat and connectivity plan, which will go beyond big game and will consider all wildlife species, climate resiliency and refugia, and more. The revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan is also due in 2025, so there will be overlap between all these reports and planning processes. There are already some tools to inform these, including COMAP which is managed by CNHP, as well as TNC's Resilient Connected Networks toolkit.

Matters from Staff

Staff Updates – Team Roles:

- Two new seasonal staff joined the team on March 1st for the 2022 season: Caroline Hildebrand as Stewardship Specialist (the job formerly named Field Technician), and Lucy Haggard as Outreach and Volunteer Program Assistant (a new position as of the 2022 season). This brings the CNAP team to four people, with Raquel Wertsbaugh as Program Coordinator and Savanna Smith as a contract botanist from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program.
 - Caroline has begun converting CNAP from the old ArcGIS system to the new ArcPro, and will also work on evaluating climate resiliency in regards to natural areas. Caroline will also help elevate the integration of mycology data and associated data gaps in relation to State Natural Areas.
 - Lucy is working on the annual newsletter, website updates, updating the new volunteer database CPW Connect, and will begin a “legacy project” for current and former CNAP members. There will also likely be a 45th anniversary project, and some field assistance.
- Savanna finished field updates from the 2021 season and sent them out to partners. These also included surveys to assess what CNAP can be doing better or differently with partner organizations.
- Raquel and Savanna remain involved with USFWS technical teams and ESA implementation.

2022 Field Schedule: The 2022 field season will begin in late April, with the first visit to Trinidad K-T Boundary Natural Area. CNAC is always welcome to join on field visits! There may also be a volunteer gathering mid-summer at Mount Goliath Natural Area where CNAC would be welcome.

Strategic Plan Progress: The 2021 Strategic Plan Progress Report was distributed, which outlines the progress made in the last year since the updated plan was created. Almost every objective has been started to some degree. Additional discussion with CNAC may be warranted at future meetings.

Conservation & Outreach Updates:

- Raquel has been serving as a CPW representative on the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission's Biological Resources Working Group, following the COGCC mission change in 2020. The recommendation report was presented to COGCC in February, and it will likely take a while before any actions are taken by COGCC as a result of that report. Since CPW only has management authority of wildlife, other taxa including plants and insects don't currently have the same level of O&G consultation as wildlife. The new CODEX data tool can be used as a first step to assess potential overlap and impacts on species and areas of concern.
- The [2022 CNAP newsletter](#), “The Field Press”, will be complete and sent out soon. It will be posted on the website as well as distributed electronically to CNAP volunteers, partners, and CPW staff.
- CNAP continues to dedicate a significant amount of time to assisting the USFWS with ESA related plant work. There are currently 15 federally listed T&E plant species in Colorado, and

four more that are either petitioned or proposed for listing. The majority of those 19 species were being acted upon by USFWS, such as through tech teams to inform Species Status Assessments, recovery plans and actions, and more. For several of these species, there has been a trend from USFWS to recommend delisting, not warranted findings, and proposed listing withdrawals.

- There is a state legislative bill proposed ([SB22-169](#)) to protect sensitive species data, including rare plant locations.

Matters from Council

Approval of minutes from December 2, 2021 meeting: Motion by Jessica Pierce, second by Josie Heath. No discussion. Unanimous pass.

2022 CNAC meeting dates and locations: Assuming the COVID-19 situation is going well, in-person meetings with a hybrid option will resume. The next meeting is June 16th and will be held at the CPW Denver Office (6060 Broadway) tentatively from 9am- 1pm.

Upcoming CNAC vacancy: Ken Strom's council term will end on June 30th. The Governor's Office is seeking applications. Since Ken is currently serving as CNAC chair, a new chair will need to be voted on by the CNAC at a future meeting.

Coal Creek Tallgrass Prairie Registration:

Lynn Riedel (City of Boulder OSMP Grassland Ecologist), led a presentation on the Coal Creek Tallgrass Prairie and proposed registration of the property. The property was formally named "Jewel Mountain" but because the name was used by the former landowner and does not relate to any actual geographic feature, the City of Boulder OSMP changed the name to Coal Creek Tallgrass Prairie in order to better reflect the geography and natural features of the site. Lynn discussed the property background and history and the natural features and their ecological importance. These natural features include: high quality example of xeric tallgrass prairie (a declining grassland type in Colorado), grassy slope sedge (G3S2), associated wildlife species including grassland nesting birds, rare butterflies, and northern leopard frog. The property includes 1458 acres located in Jefferson County on the Rocky Flats Mesa, with Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge just to the east. CNAP and City of Boulder OSMP have been working towards registration of this property for nearly 13 years.

In a letter dated January 20, 2022, City of Boulder OSMP Director Dan Burke sent a formal letter to CNAC requesting the area to be registered. The Boulder OSMP Board of Trustees is also highly supportive of the registration effort. Raquel briefly discussed a tentative timeline for future designation. The group discussed an interest in the indigenous history of the land before settlers' arrival. Indigenous acknowledgement and history should be considered in the site documents and interpretation.

Formal approval to register Coal Creek Tallgrass Prairie: Motion from Josie Heath, second by Taishya Adams. Lynn Riedel recused herself from the vote due to involvement as a City of Boulder employee. Remaining 6 CNAC members in favor.

Brief updates from Raquel and Lynn on other Natural Area amendments: CNAP and City of Boulder OSMP continue to work on amendments for Colorado Tallgrass Prairie and White Rocks Natural Areas. The amended AODs will be seen by legal teams and then will be sent through PWC, due to the proposed

significant increase in acreage for both sites. Ideally these expansions will occur concurrently with the Coal Creek Tallgrass Prairie designation process and tentatively be completed by Winter 2022/2023.

Potential CNAP Outreach and Marketing Opportunities

CNAC brainstormed new outreach-oriented projects that Lucy (new CNAP Outreach and Volunteer Program Assistant) could pursue. There are numerous outreach related goals and objectives in the CNAP Strategic Plan and new projects should align with these goals/objectives. Discussion centered around ensuring outreach efforts are clear in audience and intent, are efficient in using existing infrastructure and CPW support staff, avoid promotion of recreational use of sensitive areas, and align with CNAP's limited resources. Outreach can mean social media and external communications, building a CNAP 101 media toolkit, creating rare plant education curriculum, and/or collaborating with community science initiatives.

Meeting adjourned at 4pm. Discussion on the final meeting item continued after the official adjournment.

Respectfully submitted:



Raquel Wertsbaugh, Colorado Natural Areas Program Coordinator

Approved:



Ken Strom, Colorado Natural Areas Council Chair