



Colorado Natural Areas Program

2021-2025 Strategic Plan



Colorado Natural Areas Program Strategic Plan Update 2021-2025

Mission

To identify, evaluate, and protect specific examples of natural features and phenomena as enduring resources for present and future generations, through a statewide system of Designated Natural Areas. [C.R.S.33-33-102]

Vision

Protecting Colorado's most significant natural features through a robust Natural Areas system that integrates with partner conservation efforts.

Background & Purpose:

The [Colorado Natural Areas Program \(CNAP\)](#) is a statewide conservation program created in 1977 by the Colorado Natural Areas Act (C.R.S. 33-33). The Program is housed within [Colorado Parks and Wildlife \(CPW\)](#) and is advised by of the [Colorado Natural Areas Council \(CNAC\)](#), a seven member Governor appointed board. This strategic plan serves as an update to the plan that was created and adopted by the CNAC in 2015. It is intended to be a 5-year plan to help guide the work of the CNAP staff and Council and to complement the larger scale [CPW strategic plan](#) (see addendum at end of document).

Acknowledgements

This updated strategic plan was written cooperatively between the Colorado Natural Areas (CNAP) staff and the Colorado Natural Areas Council (CNAC).

CNAC members that contributed to this strategic plan include:

- Ken Strom (chair)
- Dina Clark (vice chair)
- Denise Culver
- Lynn Riedel
- Julia Kinstch
- Phyllis Pineda Bovin
- Commissioner John Shaw (SLB)
- Commissioner Charles Garcia (PWC)
- Commissioner Taishya Adams (PWC)

CNAP staff that contributed to this strategic plan include:

- Raquel Wertsbaugh (program coordinator)
- Jessica Smith (contract botanist)

- Savanna Smith (lead field technician)
- Lindsey Conrad (field technician)

Strategic Plan Updates & Highlights

This strategic plan is intended to be an updated version of the previous 5-year plan. The previous plan was written following an unsettled time including the merger of Parks & Wildlife, a new CNAP coordinator, and many new CNAC members. Since then the program has made great strides and accomplished almost all of the goals, objectives, and strategies set in the prior plan. The traction gained by the Program is reflected in this updated plan.

A brief summary of highlights of this updated plan include:

- Recognition of the importance of climate change and climate resiliency in our planning
- Expanding our monitoring to better include insects, pollinators, and soil health
- Utilization of our new selection criteria and ranking for natural areas
- Utilization of our new stable operating budget
- Recognition and implementation of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion into our Program
- Creating increased awareness of our Program's unique focus and leadership on rare plant conservation in Colorado
- Elevating our Program's role in statewide conservation efforts through our partnerships and outreach

CNAP 2021- 2025 Goals, Objectives, and Strategies:

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES
1) Maintain and strengthen a robust and resilient Natural Areas system	1) Evaluate and build climate resiliency into the Natural Areas system	1) Define climate resiliency and what it means for the Natural Areas system 2) Evaluate at least 20 registered, designated, and/or potential Natural Areas for climate resiliency 3) Evaluate climate impacts to individual natural features (rare plants, ecological systems, wildlife) and potential adaptation strategies 4) Conduct literature review and participate in climate resiliency related training opportunities at least biannually 5) Provide partners with meaningful data and observations that helps them implement strategies to increase climate resiliency
	2) Conduct and facilitate effective monitoring and research that supports Natural Areas conservation	1) Conduct literature review and participate in training opportunities biannually to stay up to date on the latest methods and best available science for effective monitoring 2) Investigate and employ techniques to evaluate and monitor soil health at key Natural Areas 3) Increase monitoring and reporting of insects and other pollinators in conjunction with our triennial monitoring and reporting of Natural Areas. 4) Coordinate with diverse partners to complement our monitoring efforts 5) Improve equitable evaluation and reporting on the state of the natural areas
	3) Utilize CNAP's established criteria and ranking to build a more comprehensive Natural Areas system	1) Engage diverse and representative partners in identifying gaps and potential new sites for inclusion in the Natural Areas system 2) Pursue and strengthen partnerships with landowners of high priority designation potential, with a focus on the Eastern Plains 3) Designate high priority Natural Areas that are representative of the state's significant natural features 4) De-designate Natural Areas when they no longer fit the program's criteria 5) Coordinate with diverse partners to gain additional knowledge and information about natural areas to aid in monitoring and evaluation

<p>2) Sustain and enhance a strong program foundation</p>	<p>1) Support the continuity of high quality diverse staff</p>	<p>1) Evaluate & implement ways to incentivize the continuity of high quality diverse staff and recruit motivated new staff as needed</p> <p>2) Evaluate ways to increase assistance from support staff (i.e. accounting, procurement, grant tracking, cultural competency)</p> <p>3) Council to continue working with DNR and CPW leadership to communicate program needs and increase permanent staffing levels</p>
	<p>2) Increase council engagement and effectiveness</p>	<p>1) Continually recruit diverse quality council members when vacancies occur</p> <p>2) Support & encourage CNAC mentorship to help guide and inspire incoming CNAC members and CNAP staff</p> <p>3) Continue quarterly communications from staff to Council, working collaboratively to refine communications to meeting Council's needs</p> <p>4) Increase CNAC participation in natural area field visits and CNAP events such as volunteer gatherings and designation events</p> <p>5) Increase the role CNAC members play in promoting CNAP to DNR/CPW and public audiences.</p>
	<p>3) Recruit, retain, and support diverse, high-quality volunteer stewards</p>	<p>1) Continue intentional and strategic recruitment and evaluation of potential volunteers to determine the best fit for the program and volunteers with an eye towards racial/ethnic, age, geographic diversity.</p> <p>2) Continue to define and communicate clear duties and expectations for volunteers</p> <p>3) Continue to provide up-to-date, comprehensive information to volunteer stewards about assigned natural areas, monitoring resources and technological guidance in order to support them in their monitoring and data collection</p> <p>4) Strengthen connection to CPW statewide volunteer program in order to better serve our volunteers and highlight CNAP volunteers and their value to the agency</p> <p>5) Conduct survey of volunteer stewards to gauge their needs, how they prefer to be recognized for their contributions, and to best support their work.</p> <p>6) Conduct an annual virtual or in-person volunteer training and/or appreciation event to increase engagement</p>

	<p>4) Maintain a budget that is sufficient for current needs and builds towards the future</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continue to evaluate and implement best uses of our current budget to maintain and improve our program 2) Continue to communicate annually with CPW leadership about program needs, successes, and ideas on how to best utilize budget that is in the best interest of the program and the agency 3) Develop a list of challenges that Natural Areas face, strategies to address those challenges, and resources needed to accomplish these strategies. (e.g., wish list if RAWA passed)
	<p>5) Improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of the program</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Evaluate CNAP's baseline as it relates to DEI practices and cultural responsiveness and assess the current needs of the program to implement DEI principles & practices 2) Investigate and implement practices that reduce bias in hiring and other relevant aspects of the program 3) Coordinate with Natural Area landowners/managers that have engaged with tribal liaisons to incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Natural Areas interpretation 4) Develop and monitor CNAP materials for inclusivity, including compliance with Title II of the American Disabilities Act (ADA) 5) Identify funding to support translation services for CNAP outreach materials 6) Encourage staff to participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion training beyond that which is required in Governor Polis's EDI executive order and DNR guidelines 7) Engage in discussions and learning opportunities to recognize systemic inequities, identify and revise inequities in CNAP practices, and protocols, and monitor impact through staff satisfaction surveys and DNR DEI goals.
<p>3) Elevate and demonstrate CNAP's role in conservation through partnerships and outreach</p>	<p>1) Improve awareness of CNAP's contributions within CPW/DNR and integrate CNAP's skills and knowledge into</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Better integrate CNAP into CPW strategic planning, operational planning, and subsequent reporting by providing aligned CNAP strategic planning language and crosswalk to CPW leadership and policy and planning unit staff 2) Provide quarterly CNAP volunteer steward updates and highlights to statewide CPW volunteer coordinator for inclusion in newsletters and other media

	<p>CPW/DNR programs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Define and communicate the benefits of natural area designation as it relates to CPW/DNR 4) Strengthen CNAP's role in CPW work including land use commenting, environmental review, State Parks planning, outreach/marketing, SWAP implementation, management recommendations, etc. 5) Communicate CNAP's role as a resource and subject matter expert and a resource for new technologies, including climate resiliency planning tools, SWAP implementations and data collection, and outreach using GIS products and other spatial analysis tools to other CPW programs 6) Continue to engage CPW biologists, coordinators, area and region staff in natural areas monitoring and research 7) Highlight CNAP's role in recognizing, evaluating, monitoring, and implementation of other conservation actions on SWAP species 8) Staff will provide annual CNAP update to the Parks and Wildlife Commission (PWC) and PWC representative on the CNAC will provide updates to PWC throughout the year, as appropriate 9) Promote CNAP accomplishments to DNR and the Governor's office through triennial reports, branch updates, and other outreach opportunities
	<p>2) Increase public visibility and recognition of CNAP's accomplishments and values</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Define the benefits of natural area designation from the perspective of private landowners, government agencies, municipalities, etc. and increase those benefits through an ongoing multi-pronged approach 2) Coordinate with and provide stories and content to CPW Public Information and Marketing teams at least biannually that highlight the value of CNAP, our partnerships, and volunteer steward program 3) Improve the content of CNAP's website including increased information on individual Natural Areas and Natural Areas that are visitable by the public 4) Coordinate with CPW public information officers to increase media releases for significant events such as designations, as well as referrals to CNAP within other CPW media releases 5) Increase involvement and presentations at professional meetings and events that help to highlight CNAP's role in statewide conservation and beyond the

		<p>state (e.g. highlight unique aspects of CNAP, such as the power of voluntary cooperative partnerships)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Highlight CNAP's role to play in AFWA's Relevancy Roadmap 7) Submit CNAP-related photos, content, and highlights to CPW digital marketing staff at least quarterly for inclusion in CPW-wide social media 8) Evaluate and monitor CNAP's marketing and outreach to ensure intentional and strategic messaging of CNAP's mission and accomplishments to diverse audiences
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Integrate the Natural Areas system and staff expertise into larger scale conservation planning efforts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Maintain and expand successful partnerships with natural areas landowners, diverse volunteers, and the scientific and conservation community 2) Contribute to statewide land use planning and review the development of statewide conservation plans, conservation techniques, and work with collaborative groups 3) Disseminate information to partners and volunteers on tools and techniques to be used in monitoring and planning (e.g. Land PKS) 4) Contribute expertise on rare plants, geologic and paleontologic features, insects, and other pollinators to partner conservation and conservation planning efforts 5) Seek out opportunities to utilize Natural Areas as reference sites for broader conservation studies (ex. Reference sites for ecological restoration, climate change impacts, recreation impacts, etc.) 6) Collaboratively develop a list of research questions related to Natural Areas to distribute to the wider scientific community
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Represent and lead state government in the conservation of Colorado's rare plant species 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Lead state government actions to support the recovery of listed plant species and preclude the need for additional listing of plant species under the Endangered Species Act. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Support monitoring, surveying, and research of plant species which are federally-listed, petitioned, and likely to become petitioned, using the best available science and monitoring techniques, with a focus on state natural areas and state lands 2) Work with USFWS to contribute data, serve on technical committees, and provide review of documents supporting the evaluation of petitioned species and recovery of listed species 3) Maintain the Section 6 cooperative agreement with USFWS on plants and utilize Section 6 grant opportunities on high priority projects

	<p>2) Lead the conservation of State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Plant Species of Greatest Conservation Need (PGCN) and aid in the conservation of other rare plant species</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Play a lead role in supporting the evaluation and implementation of conservation actions for PGCN in the SWAP 2) Collaborate with partners on conservation strategies, research, monitoring, and inventory efforts, focusing on high priority PGCN 3) Survey for PGCN on natural areas, state lands, and other high priority habitats 4) Submit and encourage partner submission of new and updated plant element occurrence data to CNHP 5) Collaboratively develop and disseminate information on research questions regarding rare plants 6) Support the SWAP revision process for 2025 and lead in the prioritization of PGCN 7) Support research and conservation of PGCN pollinators 8) Support the creation, implementation, and adoption of BMPs to support the conservation of PGCN
	<p>3) Demonstrate the value and ensure awareness of CNAP's contributions to rare plant conservation in Colorado to DNR/CPW</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Collaborate with CPW & DNR staff on rare plant conservation issues on state lands (i.e. land use such as oil & gas development, SWA & state park management, liaison to Attorney General's Office for ESA-listed plants, etc.) 2) Provide useful, accessible resources to CPW/DNR staff on rare plant conservation including online rare plant guide, BMP documents, monitoring reports, occurrence data, etc. 3) Play a lead role in the development of the Colorado Conservation Data Explorer tool (CODEX) as it relates to rare plants 4) Highlight CNAP's success stories on the recovery efforts of ESA listed species, efforts to preclude the need for additional listings, and conservation actions for SWAP PGCN through internal CNAP and CPW publications and media outreach 5) Engage CPW/DNR staff, such as area biologists, PIOs, and habitat coordinators, in rare plant monitoring research and conservation activities taking place on state lands
	<p>4) Promote the awareness of rare plant conservation to the public and broader</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Collaborate with diverse partners to raise awareness of the importance of rare plants 2) Collaboratively create and provide educational materials that support rare plant conservation, such as BMPs, online rare plant guide, inventory needs, etc. 3) Highlight CNAP's success stories of rare plant

	conservation community	inventory, monitoring, natural areas designations, and conservation actions through media releases, website, etc. 4) Increase rare plant conservation awareness through outreach at conferences, professional societies, symposiums, and other meetings 5) Provide useful and updated resources related to rare plant conservation and resources on CNAP's webpage
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Addendum

Figure 1: Crosswalk of CNAP and [CPW strategic plan](#) goals and objectives

		CNAP Goal 1: Maintain and strengthen a robust and resilient Natural Areas System			CNAP Goal 2: Sustain and enhance a strong program foundation					CNAP Goal 3: Elevate and demonstrate CNAP's role in conservation through partnerships and outreach			CNAP Goal 4: Represent and lead state government in the conservation of Colorado's rare plant species			
		Obj 1	Obj 2	Obj 3	Obj 1	Obj 2	Obj 3	Obj 4	Obj 5	Obj 1	Obj 2	Obj 3	Obj 1	Obj 2	Obj 3	Obj 4
CPW Goal I: Conserve wildlife & habitat to ensure healthy populations & ecosystems	Obj A															
	Obj B			X												
	Obj C											X	X			
	Obj D															
	Obj E		X													
CPW Goal II: Manage State Parks for world class recreation	Obj A									X						
	Obj B															
	Obj C										X					
CPW Goal III: Achieve and maintain financial sustainability	Obj A						X									
	Obj B															
	Obj C															
CPW Goal IV: Maintain dedicated personnel and volunteers	Obj A															
	Obj B				X											
	Obj C						X									
CPW Goal V: Increase awareness and trust for CPW	Obj A									X	X	X			X	X
	Obj B															
	Obj C															
CPW Goal VI: Connect people to Colorado's outdoors	Obj A															
	Obj B															
	Obj C															
	Obj D									X	X				X	X
	Obj E															

Reference:

Colorado Parks & Wildlife Strategic Plan, 2015,
<https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/StrategicPlan.aspx>