

This is an overview of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) State Trails Program to address concerns with trail planning and wildlife. Below is a background of the program, grant funding, the wildlife impact assessment process, updates to this year's non-motorized grant cycle, and our goal to move forward.

**Background:** Since its establishment in 1971, the CPW State Trails Program has administered grants for trail-related projects to local, county, and state governments, federal agencies, special recreation districts, and non-profit organizations with management responsibilities over public lands. This statewide program is supported by the State Trails Committee (STC) who advises the Parks and Wildlife Commission (PWC) and CPW staff on all matters pertaining to trails, their use, extent, location and funding. The PWC appoints the members of the STC and is asked to approve all trail grants before any funds are awarded. The STC consists of nine volunteer members representing Colorado's seven congressional districts, one at-large member, and one member who represents the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Board. In accordance with state statute Section 33-11-105, the STC reviews, scores, and ranks grant applications and formulates funding recommendations to the PWC. The STC also advises on strategic and policy issues and serves as a liaison with trail user groups for CPW.

The State Trails Program does not directly build, maintain or manage trails in Colorado. Agencies with trail management jurisdiction handle both trail maintenance and construction. In fact, of the 39,829 miles of trails currently mapped in Colorado, only 2.1% are on lands managed by CPW. Our grants program enables us to have on-going interaction and cooperation with management agencies, including our federal partners, other state agencies, local and regional government groups, stakeholder organizations and the general trail recreation community. This allows the Trails Program to provide our partners the ability to accomplish work "on the ground", while ensuring that we are able to work with them to fund projects that are compatible with statewide priorities laid out in the State Comprehensive Recreational Plan and the State Trails Strategic Plan.

**Grant Funding:** The trail grants for motorized and non-motorized trail recreation provide a much needed funding source to accomplish trail work throughout Colorado. Motorized and non-motorized trail grant application cycles take place at different times of the year, spreading out the workload for Trails Committee and staff reviews of the applications. For our motorized trail programs, registration fees for OHV and Snowmobiles primarily fund the cost of those grant programs, with some additional funding from the federally funded Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The funds can be used for maintenance, construction, planning, education, and enforcement. For non-motorized trails, there is no dedicated user funded revenue specifically dedicated to this program so it relies primarily on funds from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) as well as federal funds through the Recreation Trails Program (RTP) and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). These funds can be used for construction, maintenance, planning, and education but are not eligible to be used for enforcement.

**Wildlife Impact Assessment:** The design of the grant process aims to fully accommodate wildlife issues so that trail grants are not detrimental to wildlife objectives. The wildlife impact assessment process was set up to mirror the land use comment system since our regional staff is familiar with it. Every grant is reviewed by CPW regional staff, specifically field wildlife managers, so that wildlife related concerns are vetted first, and before the proposal goes to the next step in the grant review. This approach allows wildlife experts to comment and recommend changes early in the process regarding any potential concerns and possible solutions. Wildlife staff utilize the Wildlife Assessment Guidelines (attached on page 3) when reviewing grant applications. If the CPW review determines that there are potential concerns about wildlife or habitat, staff notify the grant subcommittee of those concerns. Sponsors have to address any concerns before the grant is approved or funded. If a trail is on federal lands, there will also be a review through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

The wildlife assessment process is a collaborative effort between CPW regional staff (wildlife managers, trail coordinators, deputy regional managers, and regional managers) and biologists (area and regional aquatic and terrestrial biologists) in the Wildlife/Natural Resource Branch. This ensures there is a natural checks and balances component to the process. The grant scoring and award process itself is publicized, transparent, and open to public comment. Applications are posted on the website for comments via email, comments are welcomed during the subcommittee review, and during the STC meeting when they vote to recommend trail grant funding to PWC for final approval. This means that any grant application with significant wildlife concerns faces a very challenging path before possible approval.

**Updates to the Trail Grant Process:** To continue our goal to improve trail recreation opportunities while protecting wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources, the state trails program is implementing the following changes to our 2019-2020 non-motorized grant cycle.

- 1) Last year, the commission approved the pilot to change the three non-motorized grant categories to 1. Construction 2. Maintenance 3. Planning & Support. We are planning on moving forward with that pilot this year which we believe will allow us to address the differences between types of trail projects and have a more direct comparison of different applications.
- 2) For each of the three categories, we have updated our scoring criteria to ensure we are properly considering wildlife impacts.
  - Updated scoring for the Wildlife and Natural Resources Criteria so it is now weighted at 15 points which puts it at equal standing with all the other criteria.
  - Added questions that ask applicants to describe how impacts to wildlife and habitat were avoided and/or minimized; including asking applicants how they plan to avoid and/or minimize the potential for wildlife fragmentation; and, if recommended, how they plan to support implementation of a seasonal closure (gates, signage, trail cameras, etc).
  - Asked applicants to include maps of the proposed areas including existing roads and trails which will help staff and grant reviewers understand impacts on a landscape level.
  - Asked how the applicant plans to decommission and restore any existing trails that have been deemed unsustainable.
- 3) We will continue to work with regional staff on our wildlife impact assessment process.
  - We will publicly share Regional Memos that address all grant application's wildlife assessments.
  - We are beginning to update the Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind manual to continue to offer guidance not only to our staff but also other agencies and future grant applicants.

**Moving Forward:** Every time we recreate outside we are having some impact but we do not know what the cumulative effect is on the landscape at this time. Trails are a tool that allow us to better manage human use on the landscape. They are also how many Coloradans and visitors to Colorado connect to nature and wildlife. By ensuring we are providing sustainable trails for them to enjoy outdoor experiences, these recreationists are able to become advocates in our efforts to protect our state's natural resources. We must continue to work cooperatively with other land management agencies to find successful solutions that achieve a balance between protection of wildlife habitat and providing outdoor recreation opportunities.



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## Wildlife Impacts Assessment Guidelines State Recreational Trails Grant Programs

This document is intended to inform applicants on the wildlife review criteria that Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Staff will use to evaluate trail grant applications. While no action is required on behalf of the applicants regarding the below criteria, *please remember that all applicants must submit a basic project scope and map to Area Wildlife Managers (AWMs) by September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019*. The following web address can be used to access a map that identifies the boundaries for CPW's area offices as well as contact information for each AWM: [CPW Areas](#).

CPW emphasizes the importance for grant applicants, land managers, and trail constituents to include CPW wildlife staff early in their trail planning processes. The planning phase is the ideal time to evaluate and address any possible wildlife concerns.

### Wildlife Review Criteria

- **Special Status Species:** Known (or likely) special status species present on the proposed project site.
  - Federally or State listed threatened, and/or endangered species
  - Tier 1 Species of Greatest Conservation Need identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan
  
- **Habitats and their Values:** Known important, productive or pristine wildlife habitat in the project area.
  - Impacts to crucial or limiting wildlife habitat(s) for a particular species (e.g. winter ranges, migration routes, or areas with high value for nesting, feeding, or birthing).
  - Existing developments and development trends that place the proposed trail project in a landscape context. This may include existing human impacts, existing land uses that may already have degraded habitat values, or proximity to existing roads or transmission lines.
  
- **Wildlife Impacts:** Short-term (during project activity) and/or long-term impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat.
  - Extent to which potential spatial and temporal impacts to wildlife exist;
  - Population trends for impacted species and habitats in the project area and CPW population objectives for those species; and
  - Appropriate avoidance, minimization, mitigation measures to address impacts and population objectives to ensure consistency with CPW's Mission.

- **Environmental Compliance:** Required regulatory compliance, applicable permits and/or agency concurrent procedures.
  - Migratory Bird Treaty Act/Eagle Act
  - Compliance with CPW Raptor Buffer Guidelines
  - Concurrence from USFWS for effect determinations
  - US Army Corps of Engineers 404 permits
  
- **Education/Interpretation:** Identify project potential for education and/or interpretation.
  - Opportunity or need to educate recreationists through environmental education interpretation or programs
  - Opportunity for watchable wildlife
  
- **Recommended Design Features and Mitigation:** Summary of design features and other recommended measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to known wildlife species and habitats from proposed trail development, such as:
  - Alternative design or trail route selection to avoid specific habitats or sensitive areas
  - Consolidation of routes or limits on trail density
  - Screening of users from sensitive areas or channeling use through less sensitive areas
  - Incorporation of buffers around sensitive wildlife features (e.g. active nests, leks, den sites)
  - Timing of construction/maintenance activities during sensitive periods
  - Seasonal closures during sensitive periods
  - Improvement (i.e., restoration) of impacted habitat areas
  - Habitat replacement for unavoidable impacts