

Colorado Wildlife Habitat Program: Successes, Evaluation, and 3 Year Accomplishments November, 2019

The Colorado Wildlife Habitat Program (CWHP and colloquially known as the RFP) is CPW's annual private land conservation program that funds real estate interests created to protect Colorado's wildlife habitat in perpetuity and secure access to private land for the public to enjoy hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. The CWHP is administered through CPW's Real Estate Section. The Section works to establish conservation easements, public access easements, and sometimes fee title acquisitions, in support of CPW's mission and the priorities of the CWHP. Since the program's inception in 2006, CPW and its funding partners have invested ~\$164 million dollars to conserve over 257,000 acres across Colorado. Over 100 CWHP projects, involving more than 150 different real estate interests, have closed in the last thirteen years of the RFP. The priorities vary from year to year, guided by Colorado statute and CPW Leadership. The funding for the RFP projects comes primarily from the wildlife quadrant of GOCO and the sale of Habitat Stamps.

Evaluation over the Last Three Years:

2017:

The Program was put on hiatus, providing an opportunity for program evaluation. Stakeholders were involved, including Colorado's land conservation community. The Program's success and funding priorities were assessed. As a result, the scoring matrix was revised to better reflect Colorado statutes and funding priorities (e.g. wildlife viewing, preference for working farms, 3rd party CEs, preference to avoid fee title). Additional outreach was conducted, directed toward the greater conservation community and to the public, through a presentation at the Partners in the Outdoors conference. Staff also focused heavily on building trust and relationships with state legislators, especially those that served on the Capital Development Committee.

2018:

The hiatus was lifted and the program was successfully reinstated. 2018 presented a great learning experience with multiple improvement opportunities identified. We continued outreach to the public about the program through a joint presentation with the Habitat Stamp Committee at the Partners in the Outdoors conference, and relationship building with the legislature. We also worked to build a stronger relationship between the Habitat Stamp Committee and the PWC through joint meetings.

2019:

Staff responded to opportunities identified in 2018 by developing and implementing new application materials and submission requirements. This major overhaul removed redundancies and improved administrative efficiency. The program saw a 79% reduction in applicant errors on the budget section of the application. We developed, and improved relationships with Habitat Stamp Committee (HSC), field staff, and third party partners, and worked closely with the attorney general's office to refine applicant award letters for greater clarity regarding expectations. Staff gave another public facing presentation at the Partners in the Outdoors conference and published an article about the program in Colorado Outdoors Magazine. We also worked with and responded to the HSC's desire to fund non-RFP projects. There are also efforts being developed to better publicize the projects that have recently closed.

Future Goals

In 2020 and beyond we will be exploring refinement of general program management to include a potential new schedule to better accommodate the needs of applicants, better internal communication with CPW field staff, and working with GIS and wildlife crossing liaisons to identify more private landowner wildlife crossing opportunities. We will keep pursuing enhanced promotional opportunities with CPW's Public Information Team and provide relevant updates to materials and our website. We will also work to preserve the integrity of the RFP process in order to accurately measure its success.

For more information about the Colorado Wildlife Habitat Program, please visit:

<https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/LandWaterCWHP.aspx>