

# **Strategic Plan for the Southwest Wetlands Focus Area Committee**

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## Acronyms

CNHP	Colorado Natural Heritage Program
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code
IWJV	Intermountain West Joint Venture
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
PLJV	La Playa Lakes Joint Venture
SW-WFAC	Southwest Wetlands Focus Area Committee
USACE	U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
WFAC	Wetland Focus Area Committee

## **Mission Statement**

The Southwest Wetlands Focus Area Committee works with partners to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands, riparian areas, and associated uplands and to promote the values of functional resilient wetlands and riparian areas through education and outreach.

## **Purpose of Strategic Plan**

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to provide a framework that will help guide the future direction and activities of the Southwest Wetlands Focus Area Committee (SW-WFAC). It is an internal document meant to serve the committee; it is not intended to be used as a recruitment tool or in place of outreach materials, such as brochures. It is also not intended to represent all possible activities or directions that the SW-WFAC may wish to follow, currently or in the future. Similarly, primary goals may be achieved using less than all potential strategies.

## **Introduction**

### **Colorado's Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program**

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) launched a successful and still active Wetlands Program in 1997. The Wetlands Program stresses conservation of wetlands through voluntary, incentive-based programs, involving willing-to-participate landowners and communities. The Wetlands Program fosters cooperation among individuals, interest groups, organizations, and agencies. CPW also assists in establishment of Wetlands Focus Area Committees (WFAC) in key areas throughout Colorado; these WFACs consist of private landowners, interest groups, organizations, Federal, state, and local (municipal) agencies, and tribal governments. While the Colorado Wetlands Program is not the only source of support, it plays a major role in Colorado wetland conservation. The Program has two major goals:

1. "Improve the distribution and abundance of ducks, and opportunities for public waterfowl hunting."
2. "Improve the status of declining or at-risk species associated with wetlands and riparian areas."

— CPW (2011)

The target species in Goals 1 and 2 include a total of 34 species/subspecies. Goal 1 refers to eight species of ducks (Table 1). Goal 2 refers to 26 species/subspecies that are either at-risk or declining in populations: 12 birds, 4 mammals, 2 reptiles, 3 amphibians, and 5 fishes (Table 2).

## **The Wetlands Focus Area Concept**

Originally, WFACs were designated by CPW to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and to concentrate efforts in local areas needing conservation. Historically, ten WFACs have existed in Colorado, with the SW-WFAC being among the most recent (August 2001). Colorado's WFACs are also officially recognized by the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) and La Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV), which is critical to implementation of the NAWMP through the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA). The SW-WFAC was officially recognized by Intermountain West Joint Venture in 2002.

Since inception of the state wetland program and formation of WFACs, an important and calculated shift has occurred from targeting habitat for waterfowl to a more comprehensive approach benefiting other wildlife species, including other birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, and amphibians. More recently, IWJV and PLJV both adopted all-bird approaches (PLJV 2008, IWJV 2013).

## **Role of Focus Area Committees**

The roles of the WFACs are clearly defined by the CPW Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program (CPW 2011):

- “Identify and generate, evaluate and prioritize funding proposals for wetlands projects at the local/regional level.
- Serve as a source for local wetlands knowledge, including quantity, quality, threats, opportunities for conservation, wildlife use, recreational significance, etc.
- Assist in site visits for grant proposals.
- Conduct education and outreach with the local community on wetlands conservation opportunities.
- Provide a forum for wetlands conservation discussions, including how national, regional, and statewide initiatives can be implemented locally on the ground, and establishing local buy-in for projects, especially those that are potentially controversial.
- Participate in forming and nurturing wetlands conservation partnerships.
- Assist the local community in the success of wetlands conservation projects.
- Develop and maintain a strategic plan.”

All of these roles are either explicitly or implicitly stated as strategies under the section, *Goals and Strategies*, in this plan.

Table 1. Duck species identified as high priority for Colorado’s Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program (CPW 2011).

Common name	Scientific name
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
American wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Blue-winged teal	<i>Anas discors</i>
Cinnamon teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>
Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
American green-winged teal	<i>Anas creca</i>
Lesser scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>

Table 2. At-risk or declining wetland-dependent wildlife species identified as high priority for the Colorado’s Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program (CPW 2011).

Common name	Scientific name	In SW-WFA	Population status	Listing status <sup>a</sup>
<b>At-risk species/subspecies (26 species/subspecies, all Tier 1)</b>				
<b>Amphibians</b>				
Boreal toad (S. Rocky Mtn. Population)	<i>Bufo boreas</i>	√	Low	SE
Northern leopard frog	<i>Rana pipiens</i>	√	Low	SC
Plains leopard frog	<i>Rana blairi</i>		Medium	SC
<b>Birds</b>				
American bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	√	Unknown	
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	√	Low	ST
Greater sandhill crane	<i>Grus canadensis tabida</i>	√	Medium	SC
Piping plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>		Low	FT, ST
Western snowy plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus</i>		Low	SC
Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	√	Low	SC
Least tern	<i>Sternula antillarum</i>		Low	FE, SE
W. yellow-billed cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	√	Low	FPT <sup>b</sup> , SC
Short-eared owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	√	Low	
Lewis’s woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	√	Medium	
Red-naped sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>	√	Medium	
Southwestern willow flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>	√	Low	FE, SE
<b>Fish</b>				
Northern redbelly dace	<i>Phoxinus eos</i>		Low	SE
Southern redbelly dace	<i>Phoxinus erythrogaster</i>		Low	SE
Brassy minnow	<i>Hybognathus hankinsoni</i>		Low	ST
Arkansas darter	<i>Etheostoma cragini</i>		Medium	ST
Plains orangethroat darter	<i>Etheostoma spectabile</i>		Low	SC
<b>Mammals</b>				
Preble’s jumping mouse	<i>Zapus hudsonius preblei</i>		Low	FT, ST
New Mexico jumping mouse	<i>Zapus hudsonius luteus</i>	√	Low	FE
River otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>	√	Low	ST
Dwarf shrew	<i>Sorex nanus</i>	√	Unknown	
<b>Reptiles</b>				
Yellow mud turtle	<i>Kinosternon flavescens</i>		Low	SC
Red-sided (common) garter snake	<i>Thamnophis sirtalis</i>		Medium	SC

<sup>a</sup> Listing Status: SC=State Species of Concern, ST= State Threatened, SE= State Endangered, FT= Federally Threatened, FE= Federally Endangered, FPT=Federally Proposed Threatened, FPE=Federally Proposed Endangered.

<sup>b</sup> Listed as Federally Threatened on 3 November 12014.

## Boundaries

The geographic focus of the SW-WFAC is the San Juan drainage west to the Utah border and south to the New Mexico border and includes parts of eight counties (Figure 1) and 11 watersheds (Figure 2). These boundaries, however, are not always strictly adhered to, and when a potential project extends beyond the borders (particularly when a wetland system or watershed crosses a border), the SW-WFAC may be interested in working with partners on the other side of the border.



Figure 1. Map of counties in the Southwest Wetlands Focus Area.

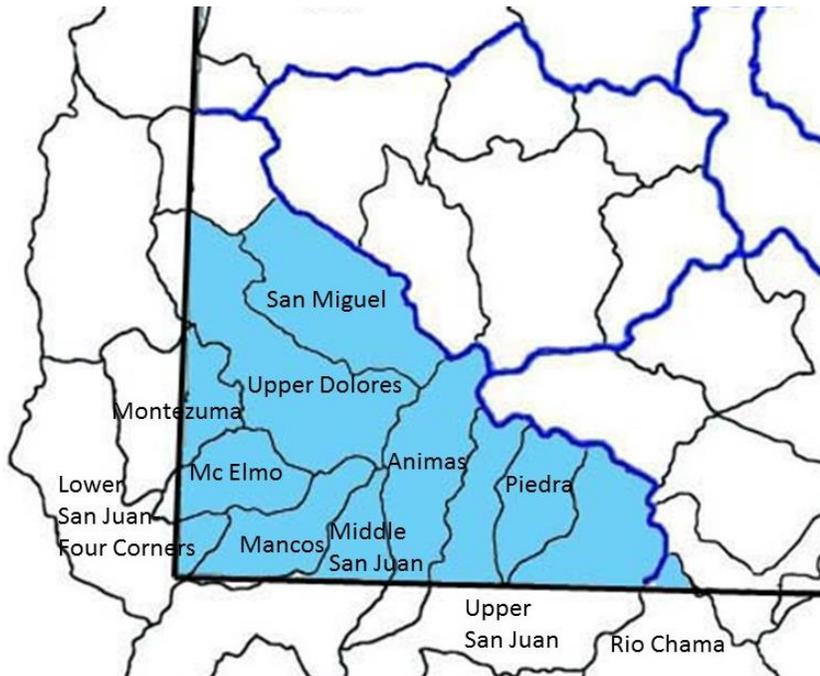


Figure 2. Map of Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs) in the Southwest Wetlands Focus Area.

## Goals and Strategies

### Goal 1: Conservation of wetlands and riparian areas

Assist landowners and managers of public and tribal lands in restoration and enhancement of wetlands and riparian areas to improve and/or maintain biodiversity, water quality, and native habitat for wetland-dependent wildlife that will be resilient through environmental change over time.

### Strategies for Goal 1

#### *Identify*

- Identify and maintain inventory of potential projects.
- Define spatial planning units.
- Identify areas of potential connectivity using the following tools:
  - Conservation Registry: update projects
  - Work with State Coordinator and Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) to get wetland maps digitized
  - Create maps
  - Use CNHP inventories where they have been done
  - Work with other partners who have data, e.g., USACE
- Develop and maintain working relationship with landowners/managers.
- Use additional resources to identify projects:
  - Irrigation districts
  - Land conservancies
  - CPW personnel
  - Other outreach strategies (see below)
- Identify threats to wetlands in the Focus Area

#### *Plan*

- Assist landowners/managers with project planning and funding applications.
- Develop Management Handbook based on the following goals in CPW (2011):
  - Select priority and focal species (*Strategy BP2*)
  - Identify limiting factors and appropriate management strategies (*Strategy BP4*)
  - Formulate habitat objectives (*Strategy CD5*)
  - Develop conservation project monitoring program (*Strategy M2*)
- Evaluate and prioritize wetlands projects for funding, specifically CPW wetland funding.

#### *Deliver*

- Assist landowners/managers by defining and helping secure resources to accomplish their project goals; this may involve one or more of the following:
  - Funding through the Colorado Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program
  - Referral to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Partners for Fish and Wildlife for private lands
  - Funding through other sources

#### *Maintain*

- Assist landowners/managers with resources to maintain their project goals; this may involve one or more of the following:
  - Management recommendations

- Monitoring recommendations
- Coordination of volunteers
- Management and monitoring reference material, e.g., relevant species profiles.
- Develop and maintain cohesive relationships with technical and financial partners.

## **Goal 2: Education and outreach**

Provide education and outreach that will facilitate our efforts in conservation of wetlands and riparian areas. This may include landowners/managers, K-12 and college students, professionals in the wetland business, and the general public.

### **Strategies for Goal 2**

#### *Education*

- Provide education to the public and landowners/managers regarding assistance from the WFAC regarding project planning, management, and funding.
- Identify potential demonstration sites, e.g., Animas Wetlands, James Ranch, Craig wetlands.
- Hold educational workshops for landowners and professionals with an interest in wetlands every 2-5 years.
- Coordinate with local educators, starting with Fort Lewis College (senior projects).

#### *Outreach*

- Provide project tours to public at least once during summer.
- Assist Animas Wetlands with their annual tour.
- Develop tools to increase knowledge of and sustain the Wetland Focus Area Committee
  - Advertise through local sources throughout Focus Area.
  - Update brochure with stickers (contact needs to be updated).
    - Key members of the WFAC will take stack and hand out opportunistically.
    - Other sources to place brochure include
      - Public Lands Center
      - Southwest Conservation Corps
      - Land conservancies
  - Update and maintain website.
  - Provide business cards for regular WFAC members.
  - Recruit additional key players to WFAC

## **Partners**

The SW-WFAC has historically partnered with over 125 agencies and organizations. For the purpose of maintaining this history, these partners, including historic names as written in 2003, are listed in Appendix 1.

Partners currently involved with the program are listed in Table 3, and a list of potential partners targeted for recruitment is provided in Table 4. The SW-WFAC invites all new partners, whether or not they are identified in these lists. These lists will be updated as needed on the website and in the next version of the Strategic Plan.

Table 3. Recently or currently active WFAC partners.

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Bird Conservancy of the Rockies	Mesa Verde National Park
Bureau of Reclamation	Mountain Studies Institute
Chama Peak Land Alliance	National Park Service
Colorado Natural Heritage Program	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Colorado Parks and Wildlife	Private landowners
Colorado Partners for Fish and Wildlife	Southern Ute Tribe
Ducks Unlimited	Southwest Conservation Corps
Environmental consultants	U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
Fort Lewis College	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Intermountain West Joint Venture	

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Table 4. Potential WFAC partners targeted for recruitment.

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Animas River Stakeholders Group	San Juan Citizens Alliance
Boy Scouts of America	San Juan Mountains Association
Bureau of Land Management	Southwest Water Conservancy
Durango Nature Studies	Tamarisk Coalition
Environmental Protection Agency	The Nature Conservancy
La Plata Open Space Conservancy	U. S. Forest Service
La Plata Water Conservancy	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Montezuma Land Conservancy	

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- CPW (Colorado Parks and Wildlife). 2011. Statewide Strategies for Wetland and Riparian Conservation: Strategic Plan for the Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program
- IWJV (Intermountain West Joint Venture). 2013. Implementation Plan – Strengthening Science and Partnerships. Intermountain West Joint Venture, Missoula, MT.
- Johnson, R. R., L. T. Haight, and J. M. Simpson. 1977. Endangered species vs. endangered habitats: A concept. *In* Importance, preservation and management of riparian habitat. Pp. 68-79. USDA Forest Service General Technical Report RM-43.
- PLJV (Playa Lakes Joint Venture). 2008. Playa Lakes Joint Venture: Area Implementation Plan for the Shortgrass Prairie Bird Conservation Region (18) of Colorado.

## Appendix 1

Historic partners of the Southwest Wetlands Focus Area, as of 2003.

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Animal Damage Advisory Committee	Mesa Verde National Park
Animas Conservancy	Montezuma Land Conservancy
Animas La Plata Water Conservancy	National Park Service
Animas River Stakeholders Group	Natural Resources Conservation Service
B.U.G.S. Consulting	Plateau Environmental Services
Boy Scouts of America -- Troop 538	Private landowners
Bureau of Land Management	Rhea Environmental Consulting
Bureau of Reclamation	Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory
City of Durango	San Juan Basin Research Center
Colorado Department of Natural Resources	San Juan Citizens Alliance
Colorado Division of Wildlife	San Juan Mountains Association
Colorado Natural Heritage Program	San Miguel Conservation Foundation
Colorado Partners for Fish and Wildlife	Southern Ute Tribe
Colorado State Parks	Southwest Restoration Services, Inc.
Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation	Southwest Water Conservancy
Diné College	Sugnet Environmental
Ducks Unlimited	Tamarisk Coalition
Durango Nature Studies	The Nature Conservancy
Ecosphere Environmental Services	Town of Ignacio
Environmental consultants	Town of Rico
Environmental Protection Agency	Turtle Lake Refuge
Fort Lewis College	U. S. Forest Service
Friends of the Animas River	U.S. Corps of Engineers
Intermountain West Joint Venture	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
La Plata County Extension	Water Resources Division
La Plata County Planning Department	Whole New Concepts LLC
La Plata Water Conservancy	