Colorado Natural Areas Council Meeting Minutes

March 4, 2024

Colorado Parks & Wildlife Headquarters

6060 Broadway Denver, CO

CNAC members present:

Lynn Riedel (Chair), Phyllis Pineda Bovin (Vice-Chair), Jessica Pierce, Steve Armstead Josie Heath (SLB Commissioner), Dr. Richard Reading (Parks & Wildlife Commissioner)

CPW staff and other attendees:

Raquel Wertsbaugh (Program Coordinator), Dave Klute (SCON Supervisor), Brian Dreher (Terrestrial Unit Supervisor), Reid DeWalt (Assistant Director ATNR), Savanna Smith (CNHP Botanist), Lindsey Brandt (SLB Stewardship Trust Manager)

Council chair Lynn Riedel called the meeting to order at 9:32am

Presentations from Commissions and Appointees:

Lindsey Brandt (SLB): A draft asset management plan has been prepared for the Badger Creek property, which includes the Mini-Wheeler Natural Area. This will be presented for feedback at the March SLB Commission meeting. CNAP and SLB staff will present an information item on CNAP to the SLB Commission in April.

Josie Heath (SLB Commissioner): Emphasized the importance of the 1996 amendment that changed SLB's mission from maximizing revenue to balancing revenue and stewardship. Highlighted the Metro Denver Nature Alliance. A coalition of several partners (Trust for Public Lands, Arapahoe County, GOCO, TNC) is in place that will help develop recommendations for long-term plans at the Lowry Ranch property.

Dr. Richard Reading (CPW Commissioner): The next Parks and Wildlife Commission meeting will be next week; wolf reintroduction has been at the forefront of many conversations. The Commission will be examining big game license allocations and the recommendations set forth by a working group. This is part of a five-year big-game season structure evaluation process. Several new conservation easements will be presented for final approval at the next meeting. Dr. Reading visited the May Ranch this past winter and highlighted the possibility of this property and the Southern Plains Land Trust property as potential sites to consider for Natural Area designation.

Lynn Riedel: Visited State Forest State Park and highlighted the impressive size and natural quality of this State Park. East Sand Dunes Natural Area is part of this park.

Jessica Pierce: No report.

Phyllis Pineda Bovin: The Federal Government is working through a continuing resolution and budget planning.

Steve Armstead: No report- an update regarding the DNR Pollinating Insect Study will be given later in the meeting.

CPW Updates:

SCON Supervisor David Klute

- The rare plant and invertebrate bill (HB-1117) was recently introduced in the house and would give CPW the authority to study and develop conservation programs for rare plants and invertebrates, a big step for CPW.
- A bill related to the reintroduction of wolverines will also be introduced. The bill will have a provision requiring a 10-J rule to allow for greater regulatory flexibility.
- CPW has gone through significant reorganization and has created a new branch called Outdoor Recreation and Lands. Fletcher Jacobs will be the new assistant director of the new branch. Research will be placed under the Aquatics, Terrestrial, and Natural Resources (ATNR) Branch and Resource Stewardship (previously under ATNR) will be placed within Policy & Planning.
- The 2025 iteration of the CO State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is underway with Kacie Miller as the new coordinator. Internal working groups and steering committees are working to develop a list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need, incorporating significant stakeholder input. The new SWAP will incorporate rare plants and invertebrates into the main body of the plan.
- Budget conversations are ongoing; an additional CNAP FTE is on the staffing work plan and there is support to request this FTE during a future decision item process.

Terrestrial Unit Supervisor Brian Dreher

- Staff are currently revising and updating the mountain lion management plan and working on big game season structure.
- The terrestrial section has expanded significantly over the last several years, added 20 new positions recently, and now holds 115 staff members.

Assistant Director ATNR Reid DeWalt

- CPW director Jeff Davis has made addressing the biodiversity crisis a major priority for CPW, especially in the face of climate change. CPW now has a climate coordinator (Angela Boag). CPW will continue to look at funding opportunities for non-game species and ways to better highlight the work that is being done.
- CPW released 10 wolves in December. The wolves are doing well and have dispersed throughout the state; CPW is releasing a monthly map that shows generalized wolf locations. Locations are buffered to protect both the wolves and overwintering game. An agreement is in place with the Colville Tribes to capture and release 15 more wolves later in the year.
- CPW continues to work with livestock producers to prevent conflict and prepare to meet those challenges. Six new staff members are being hired to help address wolf conflict issues.

Matters from Staff:

- **2024 Staff Updates**: A new 9-month field technician, Brittany Nordentoft, will be starting next week.
- **2024 Field Calendar**: Staff shared the 2024 field calendar and highlighted sites that would be well-suited for council members to join.
- **Volunteer Program Update**: Savanna has been working to onboard new volunteers and assign them to Natural Areas. Despite several retirements, we continue to have more applicants than we can place. Site placements are done with the needs of the site and the abilities/skills of the applicants in mind. Volunteer reports are sent to the relevant landowner every year.
- **Updated Natural Area Ranking Tool**: Savanna highlighted preliminary results after re-evaluating most of the designated Natural Areas with the updated ranking tool. The tool was updated in 2023 and includes new criteria incorporating climate resilience. Results will be incorporated into the upcoming triennial report. The Natural Area ranking tool provides a great framework for evaluating future Natural Area designations and prioritizing sites that score highest.
- **Other Updates:** Raquel highlighted a recent GOCO report that featured CNAP, a newly published paper on Botrychium monitoring at Bonny Prairie Natural Area, and recent ESA decisions for pygmy rabbit and silverspot butterfly.
- **2023 CNAP Strategic Plan Accomplishments:** Raquel presented an overview of ongoing progress on CNAP's strategic plan. The current strategic plan is active through 2025.
- **2024 Legislative Update:** Raquel brought up several bills that are relevant to CNAP. Raquel testified at the hearing for HB24-1257 (CNAC Sunset Bill) last week in the house ag and natural resource committee. This bill passed through committee with a unanimous vote. After the house floor it will move to the senate ag committee. HB24-117 (CPW Rare Plants & Invertebrates Bill) also passed through its initial house committee hearing; this bill would give CPW authority to study and conserve rare plants and invertebrates and would include the addition of several new permanent staff members. Lastly HB24-1168 (Equal Access to Public Meetings) was recently introduced and would add new accessibility requirements for public meetings, including meetings by this council.

Matters from Council:

- December 2023 minutes approval: Motion to approve by Lynn Riedel, seconded by Dr. Richard Reading. All in favor.
- The council discussed future CNAC meeting agenda items.

Colorado Native Pollinating Insects Study

- Steve Armstead, one of the co-authors of the recently released DNR Native Pollinating Insects Health Study, gave a presentation discussing the report and its findings.
- The study was led by a broad team of scientists, CSU Extension, and the Xerces Society.
- The study outlines how Colorado is home to a rich community of native insects whose pollinating services are at the heart of healthy environments and economies, but concludes that overall, the status of Colorado's native pollinating insects is tenuous, with the primary drivers of decline being habitat loss, inadequate land-management practices, pesticides, competition from non-native species, and climate change, among others.
- The study states that promoting policies which benefit native pollinating insects represents the biggest opportunity to foster healthy and sustainable pollinator populations, especially in agricultural and urban habitats and identified areas of immediate action and priorities. These include protecting imperiled native pollinating insects and their habitats, mitigating

environmental changes, reducing the risk of pesticides, and monitoring and supporting native and managed pollinator health.
- The council asked questions regarding best management practices for pollinators and discussed opportunities for CNAP to contribute to pollinator conservation and research.

Meeting adjourned 1:35pm