COLORADO NATURAL AREAS COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday December 5, 2023
Colorado Parks & Wildlife Headquarters Office
6060 Broadway Denver, CO

CNAC Attendees: Lynn Riedel (Chair), Phyllis Pineda Bovin (Vice-Chair), Jessica Pierce, Josie Heath (SLB Commission), Dr. Richard Reading (Parks & Wildlife Commission)

CPW Staff: Raquel Wertsbaugh (Program Coordinator), Victoria Oliu (CNAP Technician)

Other: Savanna Smith (CNHP Botanist), Lindsey Brandt (SLB Stewardship Trust Manager)

Council Chair Lynn Riedel called meeting to order at 9:34 am

Presentations from Commissions and Appointees

Josie Heath (SLB Commissioner): Discussed the outcome of the RFP process for the Chico Basin Ranch lease. After many hours of contentious public testimony at the November commission meeting, the staff recommendation was upheld and the upcoming 10 year lease was awarded to Flying Diamond Ranch. Josie mentioned that she hopes the multitude of conservation and education efforts facilitated and implemented by the current lessee (Box T Partners), will continue under the new lessee. She also mentioned the ongoing efforts of the REPI project and upcoming disposal of the Bohart Ranch, an effort being facilitated by The Nature Conservancy.

Dr. Rich Reading (Parks & Wildlife Commissioner): Informed the council on the recent wolf reintroduction updates, possibility of wolverine reintroduction in the near future, resident/non-resident bear license costs, and recent conservation easement decisions by the PWC. Rich recently attended the WAFWA meeting as a representative of the PWC. He expressed his excitement about the proposed legislation for invertebrates to be defined as wildlife in Colorado, mentioning the recent changes in invertebrate status in other states as well. Following this discussion, Josie Heath asked about the potential for CNAC to support a resolution and/or letter of support for the integration of invertebrates and rare plants in CPW planning processes.

Lindsey Brandt (SLB): The SLB recently acquired the Williams Park Ranch property in Routt County. SLB is in the process of developing a new asset management plan for the Badger Creek property. Eliot Hoyt has been hired as the new assistant director of field operations, and the second assistant director position has not been filled yet. The Governor's proposed budget included the addition of four new SLB positions to address biodiversity. Lindsey recently got to participate in the black footed ferret release on the Thatcher property in Pueblo County.

Phyllis Pineda Bovin: NPS is working on long-range interpretive plans, with the goal of telling and connecting stories to their lands. Phyllis mentioned that Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is one of the places that will be implementing these new interpretive plans.

Lynn Riedel: Lynn spoke about the success of the recent CNAP and City of Boulder designation event. She mentioned that the City of Boulder was happy to see the large CPW staff presence, and the visit from Director Davis. She thanked CNAP staff for a great year.

CPW Updates (Raquel Wertsbaugh, giving updates on behalf of David Klute)

- CPW is working with DNR on three proposed legislative bills- reintroduction of wolverines, invertebrates being included under CPW authority, and rare plants being included under CPW authority.
- There are no anticipated changes to the future CNAP budget.
- SCON has several new hires. Dan Neubaum, previously a CPW area biologist out of Grand Junction, has filled the species coordinator role previously held by Tina Jackson. Kacie Miller, previously with CPW policy and planning, is the new SWAP Coordinator.
- New CPW positions in the works for 2024 include a Forest Carnivore Coordinator, SCON Data Manager, a Pollinator Coordinator, and a Resource Stewardship position.

Matters from Council

- September 2023 minutes approval: motion to approve by Josie Heath, seconded by Jessica Pierce. All in favor.
- Josie Heath made a motion for Lynn to remain as chair and for Phyllis to remain as vice chair. Seconded by Rich Reading, all in favor.
- 2024 CNAC meeting dates were solidified: March 4th, June 18th, September 18th, and December 4th.
- Staff and council discussed potential agenda topics for the 2024 meetings including: 2021-23 triennial report finalization, strategic plan accomplishments, presentation from CNHP botany program, further discussion on eastern plains identified natural area prioritization.

Matters from Staff

- **2023 Field Season Reports:** Savanna informed the council that the comprehensive report of the general summaries from the field season is coming soon. She presented an example completed field report and supporting materials from the CNAP staff visit to Rajadero Canyon.
- **USFWS and CPW Meeting:** Raquel attended the annual coordination meeting between the USFWS and CPW in late November. There are several new pollinator species petitioned for listing that occur in Colorado. An important takeaway was that over half of the species in CO that USFWS is dealing with are invertebrates and plants.
- **CNAC Sunset Review Update:** The Department of Regulatory Affairs recently recommended that CNAC continue. This will be presented at a house committee hearing during the next legislation session, and hopefully proceed from that point.
- **Triennial Report Update:** Staff has initiated the development of the 2021-2023 triennial report, which will follow a similar format to previous reports. Using the advice given by the Council during the last meeting, staff recommended that two new pages be added to highlight the program's monitoring work, SWAP conservation actions, strategic plan accomplishments, etc. A timeline was discussed including presentation of a draft final report to the Council at the March meeting.

- **Natural Area Ranking Criteria Update:** Staff presented their updates on the natural area ranking criteria, including a new climate resiliency factor. Staff adjusted the weighting system and made improvements to the overall scoring scheme.
- **Eastern Plains Site Prioritization:** Raquel presented background information outlining goals and accomplishments thus far on identifying and prioritizing sites on the eastern plains for future designation. Staff requested the council's input on next steps given our current limited resources. Staff and council agreed upon continuing conversations with TNC regarding the Fox Ranch Registered Natural Area, and initiating conversations on newly identified sites in southeastern Colorado.

Meeting Adjourned: Motion to adjourn by Lynn 2:00 PM, second by Lindsey, all in favor. Meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Raquel Wertsbaugh

Raquel Wertsbaugh, Colorado Natural Areas Program Coordinator

Approved:

Lynn Riedel

Lynn Riedel, Colorado Natural Areas Council Chair