

Supporting Information for 10/3/2024 Commission Meeting

**Agenda Item 12: CPW Private Lands Program: Status, Challenges & Opportunities**

Ray Aberle, Private Lands Program Manager

Michael Blanck, Habitat Partnership Program Coordinator

- I. **Programs for Private Landowners Fact Sheet**  
Summary of CPW private lands programs and contacts.
- II. **Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Fact Sheet: Private Lands Matter**  
Fact Sheet highlighting the importance and challenges facing private lands delivery for state wildlife agencies nationwide.
- III. **National Agricultural Statistics System: A Colorado Interpretation**  
Summary document identifying Colorado agriculture with a CPW perspective.
- IV. **CRP in Colorado**  
Summary document covering the history and current status of the Conservation Reserve Program in Colorado.
- V. **Five-year Report: Private Lands Wildlife Biologist Program**  
Executive summary of the Private Lands Wildlife Biologist Program from 2018-2023.

# Programs for Private Landowners



Colorado Parks and Wildlife recognizes the essential role private landowners play in stewarding wildlife and the habitat they depend on for the benefit of all. Below are programs that may be of interest to private landowners in seeking assistance in habitat preservation and restoration, managing public access onto their private lands, securing hunting licenses, and managing conflict between wildlife and agricultural production.

**Landowner Preference Program:** This serves to give landowners preference for hunting licenses. Conditions include: 160 contiguous acres of private agricultural land, predictable occupation and habitat of the species applied for and located in a totally limited unit for which the species is applied:

<https://cpw.state.co.us/landowner-preference-program>

**Colorado Wildlife Habitat Program:** This funding opportunity is aimed at landowners who wish to voluntarily protect important wildlife habitat through term or perpetual easements, fee title sale, and/or access for wildlife related activities. <https://cpw.state.co.us/colorado-wildlife-habitat-program>

**Habitat Partnership Program:** HPP works to reduce wildlife conflicts, particularly those associated with conflicts related to forage and crop damage and conflicts with fences both inhibiting wildlife movement or in protecting agricultural resources. Additional habitat improvement projects are considered. Project examples include: water development, weed management, fencing materials, and many more.

<https://cpw.state.co.us/habitat-partnership-program>

**Game Damage Program:** The Game Damage Program is a prevention and reimbursement program that compensates ranchers, farmers and landowner for damage caused by big game wildlife species.

<https://cpw.state.co.us/game-damage>

**Wolf Conflict and Depredation:** Both compensation for livestock confirmed to be depredated by wolves as well as assistance and materials in deterring wolves from livestock conflicts are important elements of Colorado's wolf restoration efforts. <https://cpw.state.co.us/wolf-depredation>

**Walk-in Access Program:** CPW works with landowners to compensate them for allowing public access on their property for a wide-range of hunting opportunities including: small-game, big-game and waterfowl. Landowners enroll their property, are compensated and CPW provides mapping and signage to assist in managing public hunters. <https://cpw.state.co.us/hunting/walk-access-program>

**Wetland Wildlife Program:** This program is a voluntary, collaborative program eligible for private landowners to apply for funding for projects focused on wetland conservation and habitat for wetland dependent wildlife. <https://cpw.state.co.us/wetlands-wildlife-grants>

**Ranching for Wildlife Program:** This program partners with large ranches (minimum of 10,000 contiguous acres) for the improvement of wildlife habitat, coordination in managing wildlife and access for public

hunters. Ranches receive dedicated licenses, extended seasons and flexibility and technical assistance on habitat management. <https://cpw.state.co.us/hunting/ranching-for-wildlife>

**Bighorn Sheep Access Program:** This program partners with ranches (minimum of 5,000 contiguous acres) where bighorn sheep are predictable present to ensure public access for bighorn sheep hunting. Ranches receive dedicated licenses, extended seasons and flexibility and technical assistance on habitat management. <https://cpw.state.co.us/hunting/big-game/bighorn-sheep-access-program>

**Landowner Recognition Program:** In partnership with Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Colorado Farm Bureau, and the Sand County Foundation CPW works to recognize Colorado landowners dedicated to the wildlife, habitat and coordination with CPW on their private lands. To nominate deserving land stewards, contact: [raymond.aberle@state.co.us](mailto:raymond.aberle@state.co.us) or your local District Wildlife Manager.

**Partner Wildlife Biologist Program:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife works with USDA/NRCS, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and Pheasants Forever, through funding agreements, to place biologists in NRCS field offices to provide technical assistance and program funding opportunities for private landowners wanting to enhance their properties for wildlife. Position locations can be found through our partner's websites:

- Pheasants Forever: <https://www.coloradopf.com/pheasants-forever-staff>
- Bird Conservancy of the Rockies:  
<https://www.birdconservancy.org/what-we-do/stewardship/stewardship-contacts/>

**Technical Assistance and Habitat Restoration Programs:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife has employees dedicated to habitat restoration. These include biologists focused on pinon-juniper, sagebrush, grasslands, wetlands, and forested habitats. Biologists can assist private landowners with technical assistance and direction, as well as project development and potential funding. To contact these biologists please connect with your local CPW office. <https://cpw.state.co.us/contact-us>

### Additional Opportunities and Connections

**USFWS Partner for Wildlife Program:** This program works with private landowners, providing them technical assistance, project funding and management.  
<https://www.fws.gov/program/partners-fish-and-wildlife/contact-us>

**Colorado Association of Conservation Districts:** Local conservation districts oftentimes have assistance programs for private landowners wishing to improve habitat on their property.  
<https://www.coloradoacd.org/conservation-districts.html>

### Steps...

After reviewing the above information and the information on provided websites contact the program managers identified on the website, and/or connect with your local District Wildlife Manager and/or local CPW Office. <https://cpw.state.co.us/contact-us>

# Private Lands Matter

## Relevancy

SWAP goals, recreational opportunity, and at-risk species in your state all depend on the quantity, quality, and connectivity provided by habitat found only on private lands, making the land-use decisions by landowners among the most important factors in our ability to affect conservation outcomes for wildlife. Is private lands conservation a priority in your State?

85%

85% of hunters use private land annually and greater than 64% exclusively rely on private land for their hunting opportunities.

## Essential Habitat

75% of more than 2,300 plant and animal species that are listed as threatened or endangered rely on habitat found on private lands.

75%

### Sara Parker Pauley, Director – Missouri Department of Conservation

“Aldo Leopold once said “*Farmers are the team in conservation*”. His thoughts on the role of private land in moving the needle on conservation are still relevant today. Private land sits on the Roadmap to Relevancy; it’s one of the bricks on that road. If that brick is missing, will the path lead us to where we want to go?”

\$20  
BILLION

The recently passed Inflation Reduction Act adds \$20 Billion in additional funding for USDA working lands programs. This is an opportunity for wildlife conservation on private lands by **MAKING THEIR \$ OUR \$**. Your investments in capacity and programs for private lands conservation can act as match to leverage federal resources and become a force multiplier for habitat!

## Private Lands State?

MAFWA	464,836,348 ac.	90%
SEAFWA	520,465,336 ac.	89%
NEAFWA	102,456,291 ac.	82%
WAFWA	399,264,942 ac.	38%

*Acres of private land and percentage of private land by AFWA Region. Most states are Private Lands States. Private lands are important for supporting wildlife populations in places where conservation needs are most urgent.*

## Prioritize Private Lands Conservation

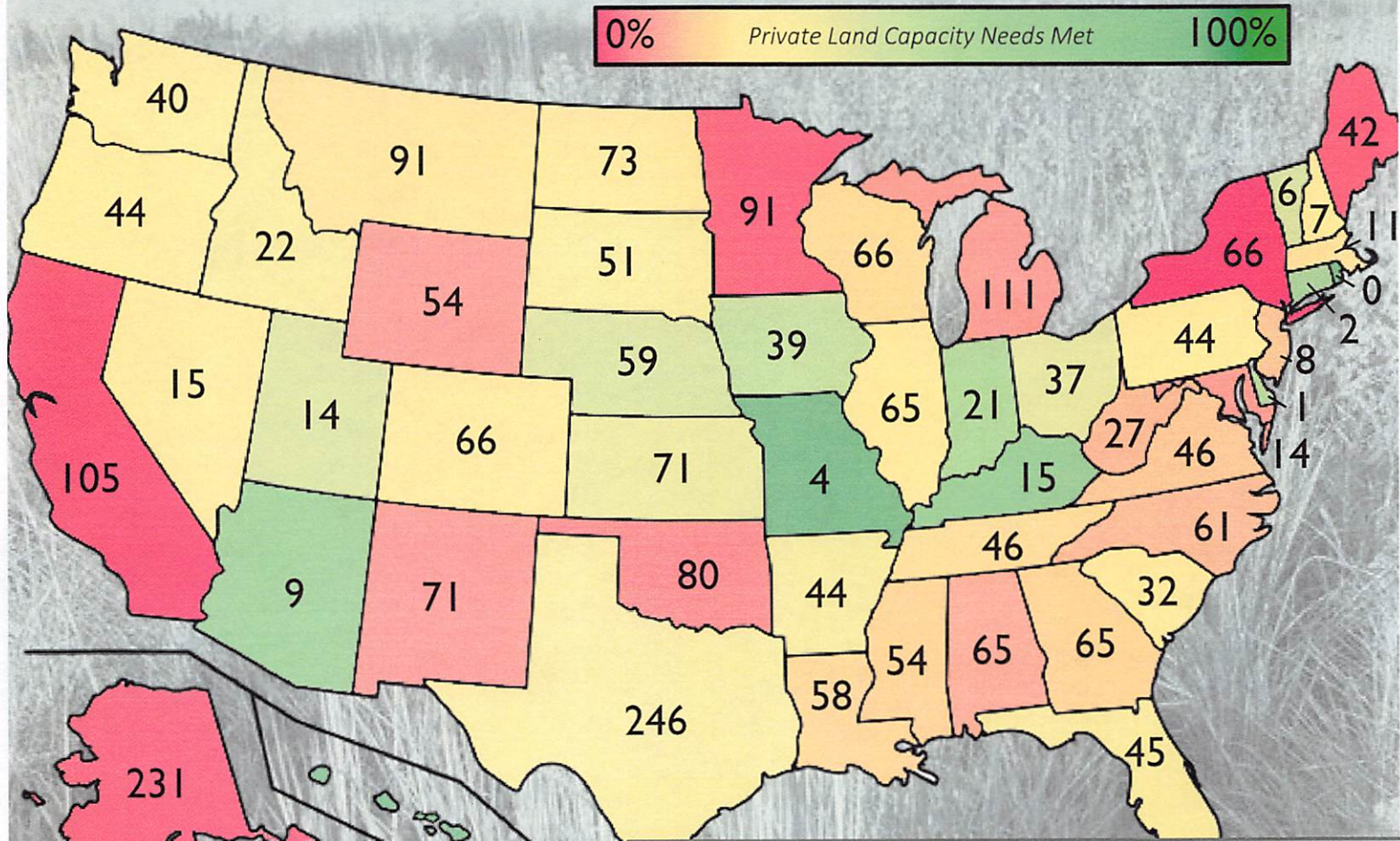
Put your money where conservation happens, Private Lands. For State Wildlife Agencies, meeting the challenge of habitat conservation on a meaningful scale requires a commitment of effort and capital directed to where habitat exists and ensuring stewardship by supporting landowners with quality customer service. Private Lands Capacity = Relevancy



ASSOCIATION of  
STATE & WILDLIFE  
AGENCIES

Agricultural Conservation Committee  
Private Lands Working Group

# Is Capacity Adequate in Your State?



*\*Numbers represent additional private lands delivery and support staff needed by state to meet estimated capacity need, based on acres of private land and 900 sq mi of effective coverage per biologist. (2020 analysis of the AFWA Private Lands Survey data)*

**1/3**

## RAWA READY?

A commitment of reliable funding equivalent to only 1/3 of your state's projected RAWA allocation, would support enough staff capacity to deliver needed conservation on private lands. Dedication of resources to conservation delivery on private lands are effective investments towards realizing SWAP goals.

**Kevin Robling,**  
**Director – South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks**

“Creating partnerships with landowners and agricultural producers is absolutely vital regarding the future of wildlife management across this Country. Focusing on habitat management and development while expanding public access opportunities on private lands is the foundation of ensuring our strong outdoor heritage remains strong for current and future generations and we as wildlife management agencies are committed to building those partnerships.”

## National Agricultural Statistic System: A Colorado Interpretation

**Background:** The NASS National, all farm survey, is completed every five years. These results paint a broad stroke of “the state of agriculture”. The recently released report is for the survey year, 2022. In addition to the Nationwide Report, they also break out a simple report by State. This Report and Interpretation, provided here, offer insights that may be important considerations for CPW efforts and awareness. For the purpose of this report “FARM” is used synonymously for both Farm and Ranches.

This interpretation document references the Colorado specific NASS report. Link: [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick\\_Stats/Ag\\_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=COLORADO](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=COLORADO)

### Number of Farms and Land in Farms

The 2022 Report has the number of farms in Colorado at 36,056. This is relatively stable compared to the previous 3 survey terms, though it has grown by nearly 10,000 farms since 1992. Much of this is due to the increasing number of small acreage operators in the past two decades driven by the local food movement, Community Supported Agriculture and general recognition and inclusion of small acreage operators. 15,000 of the 36,000 farms operate on 49 acres or less.

- Total acres in Colorado reported as being included in farms is 30,213,899 acres down from 33,983,029 (1992). This is a decrease of 3,769,130 acres. That equates to 125,637 acres per year decrease over the past 30 years.
- The number of individual farms operating on or above 2,000 acres (the largest farm size accounted for) has dropped by 800 operators from 1992-2022. 3,138 (2022) versus 3,968 (1992).
- Average size of farm has shifted downward to 838 acres (2022) compared to 1,252 acres (1992).
- Irrigated acres and Harvested Cropland are both down over the past 20 years by 28% and 19% respectively.
- The largest categories for farm income are those with sales less than \$2,500 (17,688) and \$100,000-\$499,999 (3,333). The number of operations in the highest sales category has increased from 909 in 1992 to 1,814 in 2022.

### **Crop Acres and Livestock Inventory**

- 12,0303 farms report having cattle/calves. Total inventory for cattle/calves is 2,658,012 which is stable over the past 20 years but down between 500,000-800,000 cows since 1992-2002.
- Corn and wheat are the two leaders in number of acres under cultivation at 1,197,579 acres in corn production and 1,507,696 acres in wheat (of which 1,498,818 acres are winter wheat). These are widely variable over 30 years, though with an general increase in corn acres and decrease in wheat acres.
- Hay/Forage production for harvest covers 1,373,070 acres.

### **Narrative**

Colorado's agricultural landscape continues to shift. Reduction in the number of acres identified as being a part of farms over the past 30 years is due to a multitude of factors: loss of agricultural land to human development and land use changes (housing, energy, infrastructure, idle or abandoned land). While the total number of identified farms remains somewhat stable, the decrease in acreage per farm identified indicates more small acre operators being included in surveys like the NASS. The value of sales by farm illustrates that there is a duality of process happening: There is movement at the two ends of the farm size/sales spectrum - an increase in the number of small farms while also an increase in agricultural sales in the large farm categories.

During the period of time between the last NASS survey the economics of agriculture have been stochastic with high commodity prices and challenging weather conditions, particularly drought.

Shifting of cropping has implications for wildlife. For example: winter wheat can provide habitat for both spring nesting species as well fall habitats depending on harvest strategy (stripper headed, non-bailed stubble) and the decrease in winter wheat acreage to corn or other crops can provide less suitable wildlife habitat in different seasons and for different species.

Loss of agricultural lands, depending on what their conversion is to, continues to happen in Colorado and can provide complexity to wildlife management and loss of wildlife habitat including not only net-loss of habitat but also less connectivity across habitat and types.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State statistics identify that out of the 66,678,400 acres in the State, 24,714,296 acres (37%) are identified as privately held rangelands. This demonstrates the large impact and opportunity grazing has the potential to play in supporting wildlife conservation and illustrates the need for CPW to engage with agricultural producers.

## CRP in Colorado

### 2023 Status Snapshot:

Colorado Total CRP Acres: 2,457,087

Traditional/General\* CRP Acres: 1,159,000

Grassland\* CRP Acres: 1,193,120

SAFE\* and Continuous CRP Acres: 104,967

\*Description of the "Type" of CRP are included on page 2 & 3

**Intent:** The purpose of this document is to describe the current state of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in Colorado from a wildlife perspective with a glance to the past, report on the present, and opportunities for the future.

### History:

#### Purpose

Rooted in the Soil Bank program of the 1950's, CRP was first established in 1985 with the purpose of taking lands subject to high rates of erosion out of annual crop production after the production boom of the 1970's. Additionally, economic and market concerns and water quality concerns were also driving factors in the program's establishment.

Wildlife was seen as a beneficiary of the program and today soil, water and wildlife continue to be three expressed pillars of the program. Colorado's CRP provides benefits across a suite of mid-to-tall grass dependent/benefitted species including big game, range/grassland grouse, quail, pheasant, furbearers and a host of non-game species.

With each Farm Bill, modifications to the program have ensued as well as practice types, rental rates and incentives and how the program is implemented with the Farm Services Agency (FSA) administrating the financial and tracking ends of the program and the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) doing the direct implementation, planning, monitoring, and technical delivery of the program.

Recent trends point to the following: "I think the bottom line is that it (Grassland CRP) is a working lands program, and that is just more popular in the day and age than a land retirement program," said farm policy analyst Ferd Hoefner. Trends continue to support that both in Colorado and throughout the CRP program Nationally.

<https://www.agriculture.com/grasslands-surge-to-no-1-in-conservation-reserve-enrollment-8416535>

#### Acreage

Starting with program initiation in 1986, with a National acreage cap of 45 million acres and 2.2 million acres enrolled, the CRP program reached a high point of 35.5 millions acres in 2007 (National Acreage cap was 40 million acres). The acreage cap was lowered to 32 million acres in 2008 and acreages dropped to 27 million acres by 2013 when the cap was again reduced annually reaching a low point of 20 millions acres in 2021, rising to 23 million acres

by enrollment closing in August of 2021 (short of the 25.5 million acre cap). The acreage cap for 2023 was set at 25 million acres.

### **Colorado's Current CRP Status:**

#### Current Acres Enrolled

- TOTAL: 2,457,087 CRP enrolled in Colorado, as of December 2023.  
( 2,444,470 in 2022)(2,131,964 acres in 2021)(1,552,772 in 2020)
- 1,159,000 acres of total are enrolled in General CRP (1,284,287 in 2021)
- 1,193,120 acres of total are enrolled in CRP Grasslands (725,333 in 2021)
- The remaining 104,967 acres are enrolled in other CRP programs such as Continuous, SAFE, CREP and Farmable Wetlands (95,300 in 2021)
- Colorado has ~340,000 acres that have been enrolled and re-enrolled in CRP 2-3 times, meaning those same acres have been in restored grass for 20-30 years.

#### Defining Program Types

CRP Grasslands: landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion. These are acres that are already in grass. Management when enrolled in the CRP program likely will not be altered from management prior to enrollment.

CRP General/Traditional: producers have the opportunity to offer land for CRP general enrollment annually during announced enrollment periods. Generally, replacing historically cropped acres with grass or renewing a contract on already existing CRP acres.

CRP Continuous: environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices may be enrolled in CRP at any time. Can be a mix of improving existing grass stands or establishing grass where there previously was cultivated crop. P42- Pollinator Planting (13K acres) and SAFE (State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement) is included in CRP Continuous in 2022.

CRP State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Program: Colorado has 3 SAFE focal areas: NE Colorado Upland Bird SAFE, SE Colorado Lesser-Prairie Chicken SAFE, West-Slope Grouse SAFE (two, disjunct areas). These acres are defined by certain, multi-species seed mixes to benefit target species. For maps and additional information see maps and images at the end of this document.

## Colorado CRP Challenges:

### Not all Grass is Equal

An examination of the numbers above illustrates that despite the fact Colorado has over 2 millions acres in the CRP program, not all of those acres are equal in providing wildlife value.

When properly established, SAFE acres have the potential to provide the most wildlife benefits with complex seed mixes including a diversity of grasses, legumes, forbs and sometimes shrubs. Practice CP4D, permanent Wildlife Habitat, is a multi-species blend of grasses and forbs. CP1, Introduced Grass, (63K acres) is almost exclusively smooth brome or crested wheatgrass (low wildlife value). CP2, Native Grass, (817K acres) has a simple seed mix of several grasses and one forb. Oftentimes, these can become monocultures of one grass type: Side-oats grama, or western wheat (depending on location), greatly diminishing their benefit to a wide range of wildlife.

Further, the rapid increase in CRP acres in CRP Grasslands enrolls land in various states of value to wildlife without “improvement” to their state. Essentially, the program is a short-term “lease” program (10-15 years) working to prevent conversion of existing grass/shrublands to development. Colorado’s increase in CRP acres this past year was almost exclusively due to CRP Grassland enrollments. Over 10 years Colorado has declined from 2.2 million acres in “new grass” CRP to ~1.2 million acres in “new grass” and the rest in the CRP Grasslands program.

Finally, not only the type of “grass” matters, so does the location depending on the target wildlife species. The “Opportunities” section, below, puts forward some solutions.

### Management Matters

FSA allows for and requires mid-contract management of CRP stands. These management techniques vary from moderately helpful to detrimental. In areas where haying is a management practice, field conversion from a polyculture to a monoculture is often evident. In other instances, such as discing, prescriptions and implementation is not done aggressively enough to provide the desired enhancement to stands.

### Emergency Haying and Grazing

CRP\* can be hayed and grazed in response to drought triggers in an area. 98% of Colorado qualified as of June 2022, and despite the favorable moisture received in winter/spring of 2023, many counties were eligible as of January 1st 2023 and so were open to emergency haying or grazing. As of December 28th, 2023, only a portion of the State is in D2 or worse drought and that is concentrated in and around the San Luis Valley. Current statute allows for full field grazing at 50 percent stocking rate or 100 percent of field haying. Both of these are challenging to manage and often result in liquidation of wildlife benefits across a large portion or all of the field. (\*SAFE acres are NOT eligible)

### Commodity Prices

CRP's history of enrolled acres is tied directly to commodity prices and the value of the land in production or in a program like CRP. Recent commodity prices are at or near all-time highs. December, 2023 corn is at \$4.75 a bushel (down ~\$2.00 from 2022) and Wheat prices were trading at \$6.69 per bushel down - \$2 per bushel from last year. Both point to a moderating of the major commodity prices.

### Land Value

Land value for development, energy and resource extraction have increased significantly and can compound the attractiveness of long-term enrollments in programs like CRP.

### New Emphasis on Carbon

USDA has designated significant dollars to research on CRP's role in sequestering carbon. This has the dual impact of potentially increasing the role and value of grasslands in carbon sequestration, though also may lead to a devaluation of grassland types of special importance to wildlife in favor of grasslands of any stripe with a focus on acres, not quality.

### Drought

The productivity of grasslands is tied to precipitation, especially as it applies to the timing of the precipitation and response by grass or forb type. Long-term drought certainly has a detrimental effect on productivity of CRP and resulting wildlife benefits. Winter, into Spring/Summer 2023 saw increased moisture across much of Colorado and the benefit to grass habitats was evident. The later part of 2023 saw a "drying out" with long-range forecast predicting increased moisture in late-Winter, Spring 2024 and then extreme drying out over summer 2024.

### CRP Program Policy Limitations

Existing county acreage caps for CRP can limit new enrollments when counties are at the county acreage cap (no more than 25% of farmland in the county) as well as AGI (Adjusted Gross Income) caps on eligibility for producers to enroll in USDA programs and caps on payment to producer (\$50k) for CRP programs. Additionally, soil rental rates are not always indicative of the true rental value of leased ground and can adversely lower the rental rate paid to the landowner, thus discouraging CRP participation.

### **Colorado CRP Opportunities:**

#### State Funded Cost-share Incentives

Due to the higher establishment costs associated with CRP practices with higher wildlife value (SAFE, CP4D) cost-sharing establishment and/or sign-up incentives with producers provided through CPW is likely the single most effective way to increase the wildlife value of CRP enrollments. Establishment and maintenance of both a robust and dedicated budget line for this purpose can maximize use of agency dollars in delivering habitat. While current incentive and cost-share programs exist within the agency, valuing these with additional financial and staff resources can significantly multiply these benefits.

### Producer Outreach and Field-Days

Recent research\* points to something long intuited: Recruiting new enrollments in wildlife beneficial CRP requires relationships and especially landowner-landowner testimonials. Investment of time and resources to connect landowners to beneficial CRP practices is essential in growing the wildlife benefits of the program. States, like South Dakota, have made funding and partnering with grazing associations and local producer groups, such as Conservation Districts, a hallmark of their habitat delivery on private lands. The partner wildlife biologist program, in collaboration with NRCS, Pheasants Forever and Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is a key component to trying to achieve greater engagement.

\*([https://www.swcs.org/static/media/cms/Conservation\\_Practitioner\\_Poll\\_2021\\_58F72FBA81040.pdf](https://www.swcs.org/static/media/cms/Conservation_Practitioner_Poll_2021_58F72FBA81040.pdf))

### Expired CRP Stays in Grass

Research\* indicates that expired CRP tends to stay in grass cover in many locations and transitions into grazing ground for livestock when programs are in place to support the infrastructure needed (fences, water). Both partner organizations, conservation districts and the NRCS EQIP program provide these resources. Utilizing both of the above opportunities can assist in wildlife benefits being considered.

\*(<https://www.lpcinitiative.org/ask-an-expert-keeping-it-grass-how-the-nrcs-helps-landowners-maintain-grasslands-when-crp-contracts-expire/>)

### Partner Wildlife Biologists

The continued development, support and clear articulation of goals for partner biologist positions (partnerships include NRCS, Pheasants Forever and Bird Conservancy of the Rockies) can have a significant effect on the positive aspects of the CRP program towards wildlife. Cooperative training and vision setting with partners is essential to ensure partner position efforts address the needs of CPW. Often, partner biologists are the sole voice and experts in their local USDA offices for wildlife conservation USDA program options.

### Advocacy and Policy

Ongoing cultivation of working relationships with NRCS and FSA leadership is essential to addressing concerns over issues such as mid-contract management, seed mixes and inclusion on non-native plants of value such as alfalfa, emergency haying and grazing and program delivery, and partner biologist effectiveness. On the national level, ensuring Colorado's needs and concerns are addressed is also important for a Federal program being implemented nationally. Ongoing participation in State Technical Committees, Conservation Districts and nationally, through AFWA (Association for Fish and Wildlife Agencies), are key to ensuring CRP considers and incorporates provisions of the program important to Colorado.

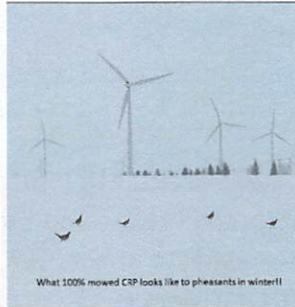
## Colorado CRP in Pictures

### CRP and Land Use Pressures:



CRP (foreground) with wind development adjacent. Increasing wind and solar development has the potential to not only fragment or devalue CRP for wildlife use, it may also replace enrollments in future years.

### Emergency Haying and Grazing:



Note the delineation of grass colors: Red on left, yellow on right in photo to left. This is one, continuous CRP field. The portion on the right was emergency hayed ONCE. Subsequently a conversion from a polyculture of warm and cool season grasses with vegetative and structural diversity to a monoculture of cool season, western wheat, took place on the hayed portion. In years directly after haying, fields leave very little for wildlife use (middle photo). Finally, photo on the right shows a CRP stand emergency grazed next to an ungrazed pasture.

### Mid-Contract Management and Seed Mixes:



The photo on the left is a CRP stand with a mix of warm and cool season grasses and forbs (bluestems, switchgrass, yellow indian grasses, side-oats grama, forbs) This same field is shown on the right after failed mid-contract management. The field has almost entirely succeeded into a monoculture of side-oats grama which does not stand-up to winter snows and winds. This leaves a lack of vertical structure and thermal and escape cover that would benefit deer, upland birds and a host of other species.

**CRP Grasslands:**



CRP Grasslands provide a short-term incentive to keep grasslands intact while still being grazed. This can provide benefits, though it does not introduce “new grasslands” nor does it ensure management beneficial to wildlife. The trend is to increase the number of acres enrolled in this program to off-set the loss of acres in other CRP practices.

**CRP SAFE:**

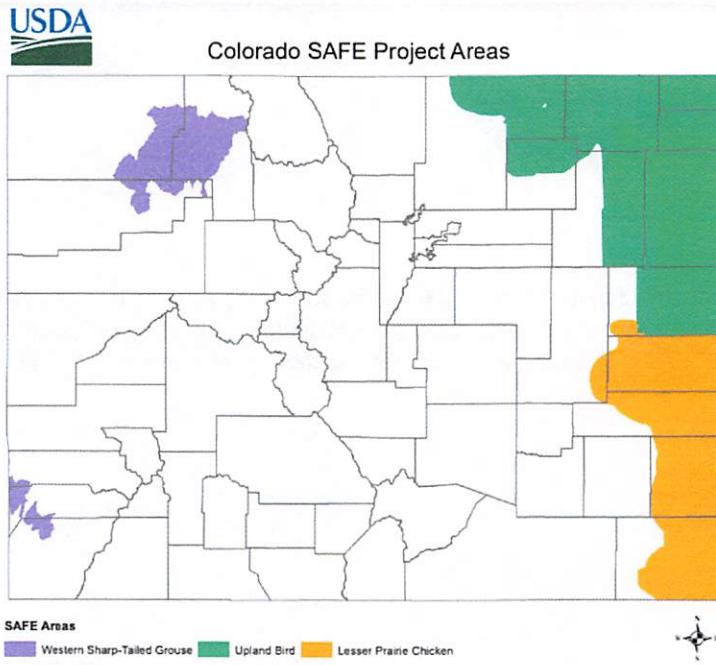


SAFE (State Acres for Wildlife) CRP fields offer a multitude of benefits beyond conventional CRP with benefits to a wider range of wildlife species, including pollinators, as well as aesthetic appeal. These fields are “alive” with wildlife benefits. The increased establishment costs and technical planting aspects deter many producers, though incentive programs can help to overcome and offset these.

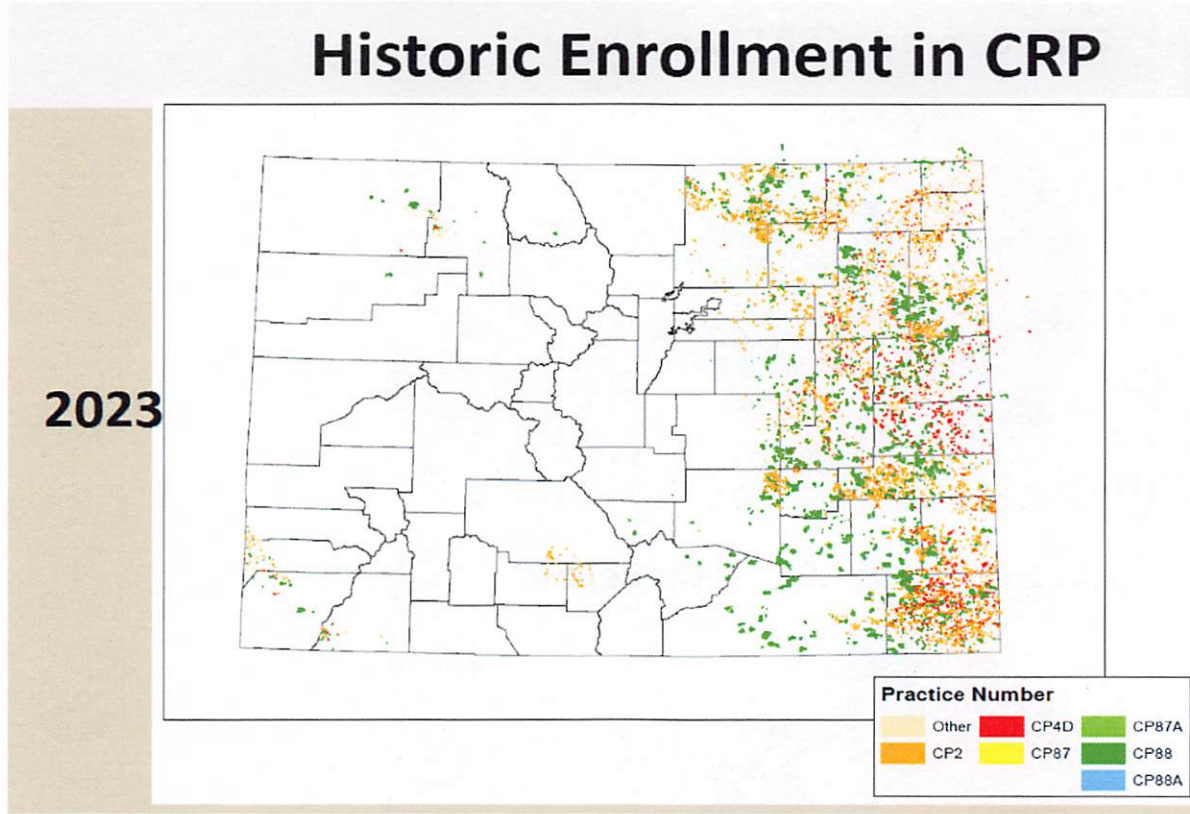
**SAFE Target Acres and Current Enrolled Acres:**

SAFE Name	Target Acres	Current Acres - 2023
Lesser Prairie-Chicken	50,000	45,018
Upland Bird	200,000	24,235
Western Slope Grouse	20,000	7,193

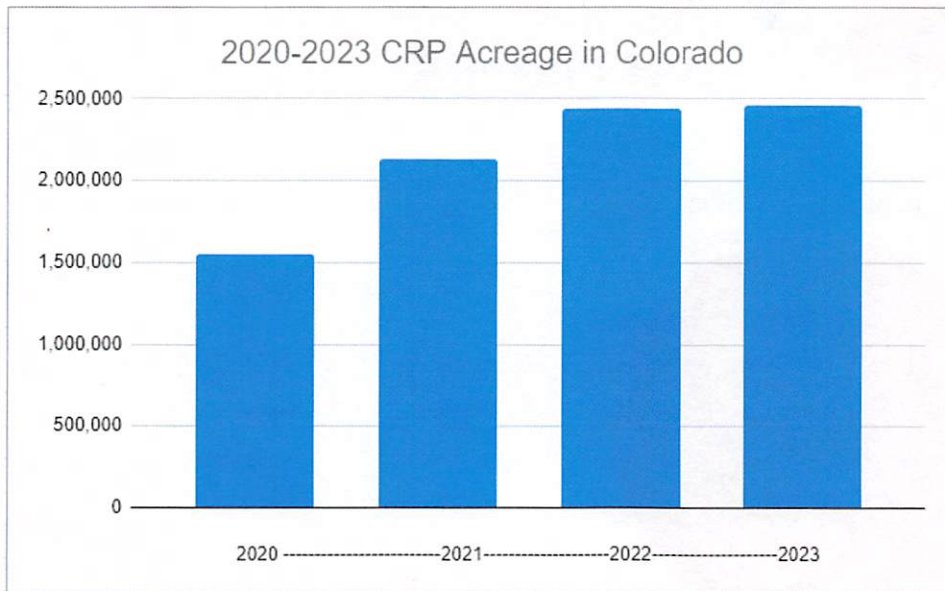
Current CRP SAFE Areas:



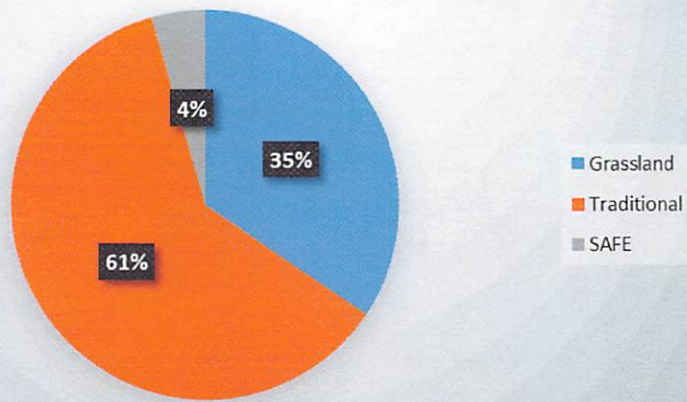
CRP Type in Colorado by Distribution:



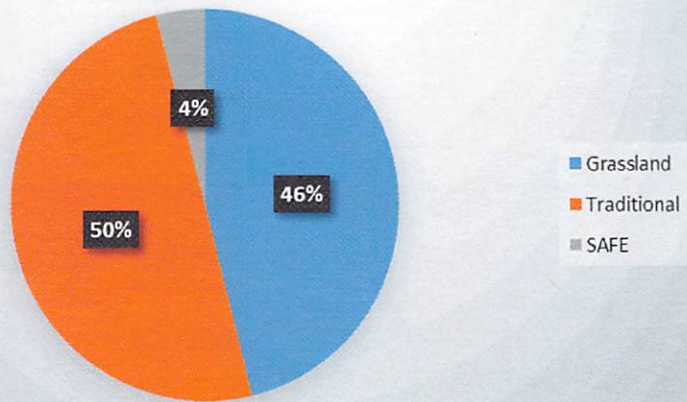
CRP Information Charts:



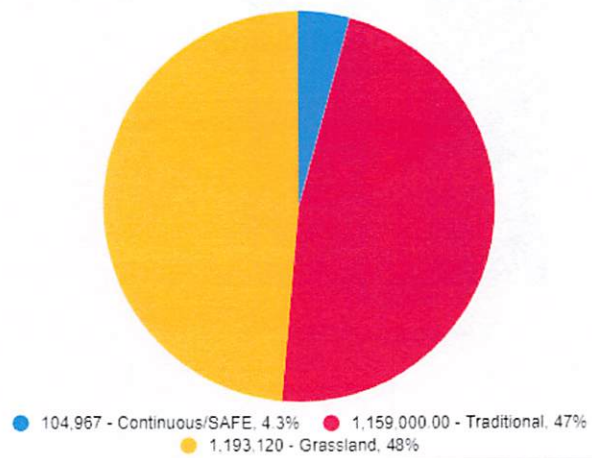
### 2021 Colorado CRP Status Report



### 2022 Colorado CRP Status Report



### 2023 Colorado CRP Status Report

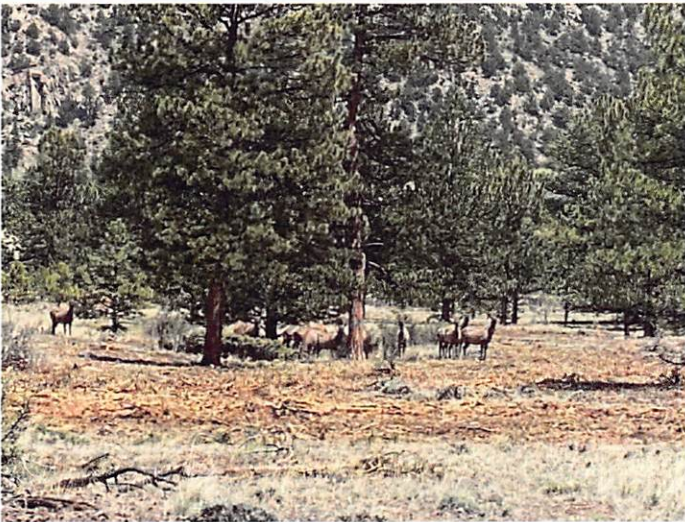




July 2018 – June 2023

## Five-year Report

CPW Contract: CT PMAA 2018\*3748



Elk enjoying a restored ponderosa pine forest; photo by Kyle Deschenes



Ute Mountain Ute Tribe tour of Sapinero Mesa and Pinecrest Ranch wet meadow restoration; photo by Marcella Tarantino



Bird  
Conservancy  
of the Rockies

Submitted August 2023

Submitted to: Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Authors: Rachel Belouin, Rob Fenwick, & Eric Zach – Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

*Connecting People, Birds and Land*

[www.birdconservancy.org](http://www.birdconservancy.org)



## About Us

Our mission is to conserve birds and their habitats through an integrated approach of science, education and land stewardship. We envision a future where birds are forever abundant, contributing to healthy landscapes and inspiring human curiosity and love of nature.

**Science:** Advancing Knowledge

**Stewardship:** Collaborative Conservation Delivery

**Education:** Inspiring the Next Generation

Our work radiates across the breeding, wintering and migratory ranges of birds—from the Rockies to the Great Plains, Mexico and beyond.



### Contact Information:

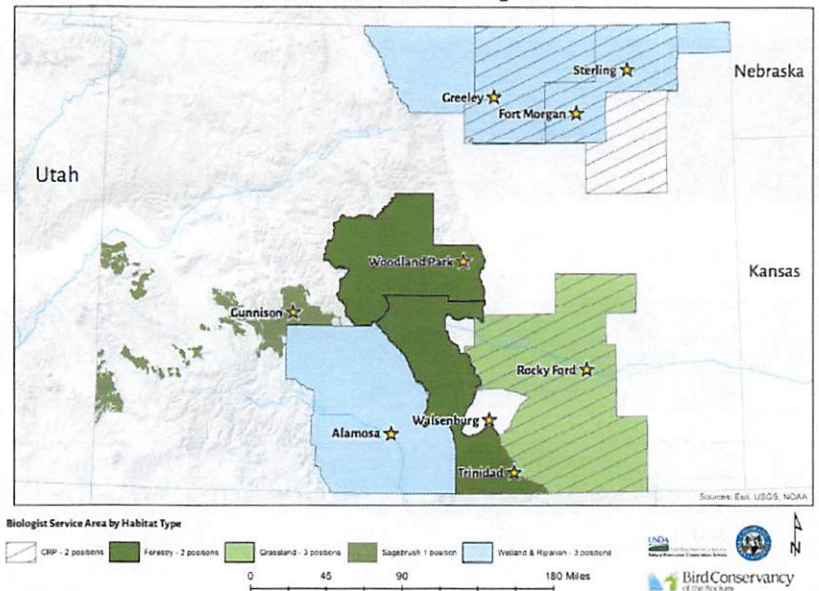
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## Program Overview

The Private Lands Wildlife Biologist (PLWB) Program in Colorado is a partnership between Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (Bird Conservancy), Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with supplemental funding obtained by Bird Conservancy from private family foundations, donors, and grants. This program provides technical assistance and capacity to implement wildlife habitat projects using Farm Bill and other programmatic funds (CPW-Wetlands, CPW-HPP, USFWS-PFW) in Colorado.

PLWBs are stationed in NRCS offices, developing and implementing habitat conservation management plans on privately-owned agricultural land, and providing biological guidance and input to local working groups within their region.

Network of Private Lands Wildlife Biologists in Colorado



## Background & Vision of PLWB Program

This partnership began in 2008 in Colorado with 4 PLWBs and now encompasses 6 states and includes 15 PLWBs. This multi-organization partnership is the result of a consensus that private land habitat conservation efforts in Colorado are critical to sustaining wildlife populations in the state. Over the course of this 15-year partnership, with strategic discussions between the partners, the program has grown to employ nine different PLWB positions stationed in NRCS offices throughout Colorado. This longevity and growth are a testament to the important impact PLWBs have on the landscape and the accomplishments achieved.

Bird Conservancy, and our PLWBs, continue to broaden our partner network and engage new partners to leverage financial and technical resources to advance conservation investments. We work collaboratively to promote projects which build on the unique strengths of regional and local partners to ensure conservation efforts add scale and are not duplicative. The goal is to implement conservation actions that meet the needs of wildlife and people, thereby encouraging the development of resilient communities. To further this effort, PLWBs work with NRCS, Farm Service Agency, CPW, US Fish & Wildlife Service – Partners Program, CSU Extension, and local Counties, Conservation Districts, and local/regional schools.

## Looking Towards the Future

The partnership between Bird Conservancy and CPW continues to strengthen and grow as we collaboratively work towards our shared conservation goals. Over the last five years, the increase in number of PLWBs in Colorado set a foundation for this partnership to achieve more milestones to benefit wildlife well into the future. Bird Conservancy values the resources and expertise provided by CPW through local Area Wildlife Biologists and District Wildlife Managers; PLWBs connect regularly with CPW field personnel for site evaluations, landowner contacts, and management recommendations. Working together, we have been able to identify, design, and implement projects throughout the state, with work continuing, and more opportunities developing in 2023 and beyond. Bird Conservancy is thankful for CPW's continued partnership and working together to achieve historic outcomes over the course of the next five-years.



## July 2018 - June 2023 Conservation Actions by the Numbers

### Acres Impacted

Technical Assistance by Habitat Type July 2018- June 2023				
Grassland	Shrubland	Forest	Wetland	Total TA Acres
320,779	41,363	13,010	47,186	422,338

Obligated Acres by Habitat Type July 2018 - June 2023				
Grassland	Shrubland	Forest	Wetland	Total Obligated Acres
203,019	39,141	13,942	9,462	265,564

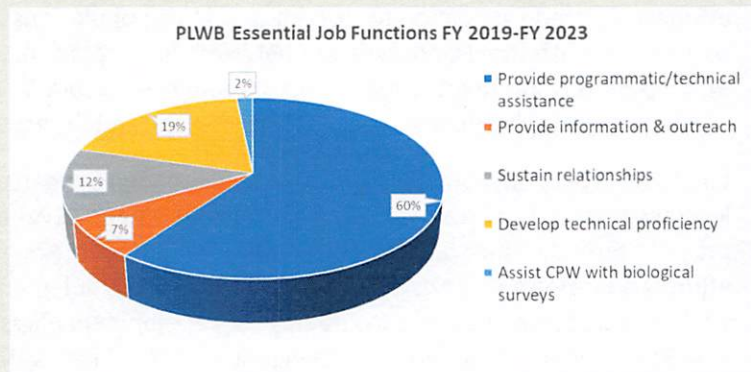


*Black-throated Blue Warbler, photo by Kyle Deschenes*

Every dollar contributed by CPW during July 2018 – June 2023 was leveraged for an average of \$17.01 in Farm Bill contributions. \*Farm Bill dollars were reported by biologists as yearly payment and do not reflect the full amount to be paid for the duration of each contract.

### Essential Job Functions & Outreach

The essential job functions (EJF) were written and defined by representatives from partnering organizations and are meant to act as a directive for how the biologist's time is allocated. Typically, new employees will spend less time on providing delivery and technical support for habitat projects (EJF #1) and considerably more time on developing technical proficiency (EJF #4). Developing and sustaining working relationships with resource professionals and private landowners (EJF #3) is always a portion of their time. As biologists become more comfortable with their position, they take a leading role with habitat projects and sharing more conservation knowledge through trainings and workshops (EJF #2). They offer their services to CPW and USFWS staff to assist with wildlife surveys, as opportunity allows (EJF #5).



Outreach & Workshops			
Year	Landowner Contacts	Workshops	Estimated # of people reached
2018-2019	383	71	5430
2020	396	23	2921
2021	735	36	3979
2022	691	81	6081
2023	571	77	1868
<b>Total</b>	<b>2776</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>20279</b>

**Connection to SWAP**

**Grassland Species Benefiting:** Mountain Plover, Northern Bobwhite, Cassin's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Thick-billed & Chestnut-collared Longspur, Burrowing Owl, Golden Eagle, Lesser Prairie Chicken, black-footed ferret, Long-billed Curlew, Loggerhead Shrike, Ferruginous Hawk, and swift fox

**Conservation Actions:** enrollment into EQIP, CRP & Grassland CRP programs, managed grazing plans, drought planning, water infrastructure planning & development, wildlife-friendly fencing & cross fence installation, woody plant removal, riparian area restoration, rangeland restoration, seeding & planting, herbaceous weed mitigation, pollinator plantings.

**Sagebrush Species Benefiting:** Gunnison Sage-grouse, cutthroat trout, elk, and mule deer

**Conservation Actions:** river restoration, erosion controls, removal of pinyon and juniper, grazing and cattle management, herbaceous weed control, wet meadow restoration, re-seeding & planting, and wildlife-friendly fencing & cross-fence installation.

**Forest Species Benefiting:** Colorado checkered whiptail, little brown myotis, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Pinyon Jay, Virginia Warblers, Lewis's Woodpecker, Mexican-spotted Owl, bighorn sheep, Northern Goshawk, elk, mule deer, Abert's squirrel, hoary bat, and snowshoe hare

**Conservation Actions:** forest restoration, thinning & density treatments, open meadow construction, fire mitigation, regeneration management, inventory assessments, multi-species stand improvements, grazing management, stream & riparian restoration, timber harvest, mastication, herbaceous weed treatment, and native plant seeding

**Wetland/Riparian Species Benefiting:** Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Sandhill Crane, American Bittern, brown trout, Northern and plains leopard frog, Rio Grande chub, and black-necked garter snake

**Conservation Actions:** enrollment of private landowners into NRCS easements/agreements, grazing management, pest control, hydrologic function restoration, river restoration, water table monitoring, slough restoration, re-seeding & planting, invasive species removal, sediment removal & headgate restoration, installation of riparian buffers & beaver analogs, development of hydrology schedules & monitoring protocols, and pollution reduction practices

**PLWBs in Action**



PLWB Ashley Mertz texturing soil; photo by PLWB Olivia Laws

"I love that I get to use ecology, communication, and creativity to complete projects ranging from inventorying plant species, to working on conservation plans, to hosting workshops." – PLWB Anna Gaw, Fort Morgan



PLWB Katie Merewether assisting CPW with a black-footed ferret release, Photo by Trent Delehanty



"I'm grateful for the chance to work with these stewards of the land, to teach them new things about their forests, and to help them accomplish their goals on the ground." – PLWB Zoe Moffatt, Walsenburg

PLWB Anna Greenberg ATV training and conducting pika surveys with CPW, photo courtesy of CPW