



COLORADO NATURAL AREAS COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, June 18th, 2024
Colorado Parks & Wildlife Headquarters
6060 Broadway Denver, CO 80216
Bighorn Room

CNAC Attendees: Lynn Riedel (Chair), Phyllis Pineda Bovin (Vice-Chair), Jessica Pierce, Courtney Krause, Steve Armstead, Josie Heath (SLB Commissioner), Rich Reading (Parks and Wildlife Commissioner)

CPW Staff: Raquel Wertsbaugh (Program Coordinator), Dave Klute (SCON Supervisor), Kacie Miller (SWAP Coordinator), Brittany Nordentoft (CNAP Field Technician)

Other: Savanna Smith (CNHP Botanist)

Council Chair Lynn Riedel called meeting to order at 9:32 AM

Presentations from Commissions and Appointees

Lynn Riedel: Reported on the recent CNAP visit to South Boulder Creek Natural Area in May. Provided an update on activities being planned for Coal Creek Tallgrass Prairie involving the Front Range Chapter of the group Harvest of All First Nations. They are working to plan a September event for plant and seed collection on the property. Highlighted the Great Plains Conservation Network and upcoming annual meeting opportunity.

Steve Armstead: The Xerces Society has helped launch the Bumblebee Atlas for several states, now including Colorado. They have recently hired a Mountain States Bumble Bee Atlas coordinator, Amy Dolan, based in Grand Junction. The Mountain States Bumble Bee Atlas is recruiting community scientists to help survey for bumble bees and fill data gaps. Discussed how CNAP volunteers may be interested in the program and State Natural Areas would be ideal places to help fill pollinator data gaps.

Dr. Richard Reading (CPW Commissioner): Butterfly Pavilion is working on a current project with BLM to assess invertebrates on BLM lands. There is opportunity for coordination on this project between BLM and CNAP. There may also be future opportunities for Butterfly Pavilion to partner with DNR/CPW to assess invertebrates on state lands. Also mentioned that ongoing firefly research through the Butterfly Pavilion may lead them to describe two new species. The most recent PWC meeting grew contentious on the issues of big game season structure, specifically over the counter archery licenses and overcrowding issues, as well as wolf related issues. Highlighted the recent CPW pinning ceremony, where new CPW wildlife officers and park rangers receive their law enforcement badges. Next month, the PWC will be moving into management plans for elk, deer, and bear.

Phyllis Pineda Bovin: No report.

Josie Heath (SLB Commissioner): Reported on a recent Board of Land Commissioners tour in Northeast Colorado, which focused on the Republican River Compact and how it impacts SLB land holdings. The board visited two State Natural Areas during the tour including Arikaree River and Fox Ranch (registered site). Josie gave an overview of the history of the Republican River Compact, which has been in place since 1943 and was updated in 2018. The meeting focused on concerns that Colorado is unable to provide the amount of water required by the Compact. There is a 2029 deadline set to meet the water requirements and remain in compliance. Josie expressed concerns about the dry up of agricultural lands including valuable wildlife habitat, and the closure of wells, including municipal wells. This could impact all of Northeast Colorado and its communities.

Jessica Pierce: No report.

Courtney Krause: No report.

CPW Updates

SCON Supervisor David Klute:

- The recent legislative session was busy for CPW and resulted in several new bills that passed:
 - HB24-1117: Grants CPW authority to study and conserve invertebrate species and rare plants. While this doesn't provide authority over regulation of these species, it does allow CPW to invest in the study and conservation of these species, including programs, allocation of funding, and the creation of six new full-time staff positions. A signing ceremony was held at the Butterfly Pavilion.
 - SB24-171: Approved the reintroduction of wolverines, held a signing ceremony at Loveland Pass.
 - SB24-230: Passed at the very end of the session, imposes a production fee on oil and gas development which allocates funds to CPW for climate change mitigation, sensitive species conservation, and habitat programs. The amount allotted to CPW could be between \$20-50 million. How the funds will be used is currently a work in progress.
- The Terrestrial Section is currently being re-structured. There are numerous new positions being created, many of them due to recent legislation. Due to the expansion of positions and responsibilities, the terrestrial section will split into Species Conservation Programs and Game Programs, with the addition of a deputy terrestrial section manager for each. David has recently been promoted to Deputy Terrestrial Section Manager for Species Conservation programs.
 - David will oversee multiple work units including east slope and west slope non-game biologists, species conservation, the new invertebrate and rare plant work group, and wolf work group. He will also supervise the SWAP coordinator, CNAP coordinator, and soon to be hired data manager.
 - There are several pending positions that will be requested in future budget decisions, including a new Assistant Coordinator for CNAP.
- David opened discussion for recommendations on how CNAP may change and grow under the new organizational structure. The new structure, and in particular the rare plant coordinator position, could give greater capacity for CNAP since the coordinator has been fulfilling duties related to a rare plant coordinator. Ideas on how CNAP could capitalize on expanded staff capacity included:

- Enhance CNAP's ability to build, improve, and sustain relationships with landowners and managers of Natural Areas as well as partners.
 - Greater capacity to manage the Natural Areas System including registration and designation of new Natural Areas, identifying potential new Natural Areas, and evaluating existing sites that can be de-registered or de-designated.
 - Greater focus and support of the CNAP volunteer steward program.
 - Increased capacity to help facilitate new interpretive signage and education opportunities, research, community science initiatives, additional monitoring, and addressing management concerns on Natural Areas.
- Discussion also included ideas for the future rare plant coordinator position and invertebrate positions. Ideas from discussion included:
 - Provide leadership and coordination for the Colorado Rare Plant Technical committee and other types of working groups
 - Greater leadership in rare plant monitoring, surveying, research, and land management
 - Implementing the SWAP
 - Implementing guidance within the state pollinator health study
 - Working with partners across state lines

Matters from Staff

- **2024 Staff Updates:** Brittany Nordentoft has joined the CNAP team as the new 9-month field technician and her current term ends in December.
- **2024 Field Season Updates:** Staff shared updates and photographs from the 16 sites visited thus far in the field season, including meetings with City of Boulder OSMP staff in May. Staff also discussed their upcoming trip to monitor Pagosa Skyrocket at Pagosa Skyrocket Natural Area and associated private lands.
- **Volunteer Program Update:** CNAP is currently at full capacity for volunteer stewards with 58 active stewards including 7 new onboards. Volunteers have received quarterly communications, updated field packets and permits, updated field forms and Avenza Guides, and CNAP staff held two online office hours for volunteer questions and support. In May, CNAP held a volunteer event at Corral Bluffs Natural Area. For the summer, Savanna continues to help with volunteer questions and is starting to process volunteer steward reports and photos.
- **Conservation and miscellaneous updates:**
 - Raquel is currently much involved with the SWAP revision efforts and is sitting on multiple SWAP committees including the steering, habitat, SGCN committees.
 - Raquel and Lindsey Brandt gave an informational presentation about CNAP to the State Board of Land Commissioners at their April meeting.
 - Staff recently met with the NPS National Natural Landmark coordinator Heather Eggleston to discuss coordinated efforts on State Natural Areas that overlap on National Natural Landmarks. Raquel explained the many similarities between the programs.
 - Staff recently met with the Denver Botanic Gardens research team to discuss rare plant coordination efforts.

- Raquel recently held a coordination meeting with the new USFS Pike San Isabel Comanche and Arapaho and Roosevelt Pawnee botanists as well as researcher Mark Beardsley to discuss coordination efforts on the Rocky Mountain monkeyflower.
 - Staff met with City of Boulder OSMP staff in May to discuss several designated natural areas with an emphasis on South Boulder Creek.
 - Raquel recently met with the new Chaffee County natural resources planner to discuss state natural areas, rare plants, and conservation opportunities in Chaffee County.
 - Raquel attended several FWS meetings focused on the post-delisting monitoring of Ute ladies'-tresses.
 - Raquel is involved with efforts led by NPS NNL program to help the Indian Spring Trace Fossil Natural Area private landowner build a new structure to protect the trace fossil bed after the current structure collapsed due to heavy spring snow.
 - Raquel is working with CPW Montrose area staff to implement rare plant habitat protection barriers and interpretive signage at Miramonte Natural Area (Dan Noble SWA) near Norwood. The habitat protection efforts are for the cushion bladderpod, a Tier 1 PGCN.
 - Raquel will be meeting next week with CPW's new Climate Resiliency Policy Lead, Angela Boag, to discuss climate efforts in CPW and opportunities with CNAP.
 - The Natural Areas Association annual meeting will be held in Manhattan, Kansas this October. Savanna's poster abstract was recently accepted. CNAP staff plan to attend the conference.
 - Upcoming Colorado Rare Plant Symposium will be held in Durango on Sept. 20th.
- **Updated Natural Area Ranking Tool:** Staff presented the results of the updated Natural Areas Ranking Tool, which includes a climate resiliency factor and updated weighting and scoring. Natural Area scores have been adjusted to reflect a total score out of 100 and added extra "buckets" to better determine changes in status. Natural Areas are now graded as Exceptional, Very High, High, Moderate, and Low. These changes help to capture the wide range of variation in qualities that determine ideal conditions for a Natural Area. Using these updated rankings, CNAP staff is better able to prioritize sites for potential de-registration and de-designation, evaluate potential sites for registration and designation, and prioritize resources on designated sites. Staff shared infographics and graphs with the council which summarized all designated and registered Natural Areas rankings and shared examples of different Natural Areas to highlight the differences between the scores. The council discussed the potential for council action on de-registering and de-designating sites at upcoming meetings.
 - **Triennial Report Update:** CNAP staff are working with the CPW graphic design team to finalize the 2021-23 Triennial Report. Once the report is finalized, CNAP staff will distribute a digital version to the CNAC, DNR, Governor's office, CPW staff, partners, and volunteer stewards. It will be posted on the CNAP website and shared with CPW media staff. Printed copies will be made and distributed to CNAC members for them to share as they see fit. Commissioner Reading offered to distribute the report to the PWC at the August meeting.

Matters from Council

- March 2024 minutes approval: Motion to approve by Lynn Riedel, seconded by Commissioner Reading. All in favor.

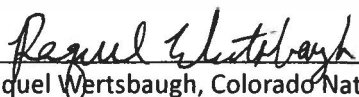
- The council advised that staff can move forward with finalizing the 2021-23 triennial report after staff edits are made.
- The council discussed the timing of the next meeting, which had been scheduled for September 18th. Due to several CNAP staff members and CNAC members not being able to attend on that date, staff will send out a doodle poll to reschedule the September meeting.

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Revision Presentation- Kacie Miller (CPW SWAP Coordinator)

- Kacie presented background information on the SWAP including its purpose, eight required elements, and revision timeline.
- Kacie is currently leading several working committees helping to inform the SWAP revision.
- Goals of the revised SWAP include: bridge the gap between implementation, planning, and action, build equity in the revision process, make each element more robust, more meaningful inclusion of additional taxa and emerging threats, complement and leverage other conservation planning initiatives, and create implementation friendly products.
- Highlighted changes include the addition of the Species of Greatest Information Need (SGIN) category, inclusion of rare plant and invertebrates in the main body of the SWAP, and creating a final project that is digital and user friendly.
- Initial stakeholder engagement opened on June 9th on the Engage CPW website. This will remain open for comment until July 9th, 2024 and is focused on vertebrate SGCN selection. There will be more opportunities for discussion on rare plants at gatherings for the rare plant technical groups and the upcoming Rare Plant Symposium.
- Kacie opened the floor for questions and discussion from the council. Discussion included additional details on SGIN compared to SGCN, incorporation of invertebrates and stakeholder input, spatial components, and future integration into CODEX.
-

Meeting Adjourned: Motion to adjourn by Lynn. All in favor. Adjourned at 1:37 PM

Respectfully submitted:

 9/3/24
Raquel Wertsbaugh, Colorado Natural Areas Program Coordinator

Approved:

 9/3/24
Lynn Riedel, Colorado Natural Areas Council Chair