

COLORADO STATE PARKS

2010

Strategic Plan



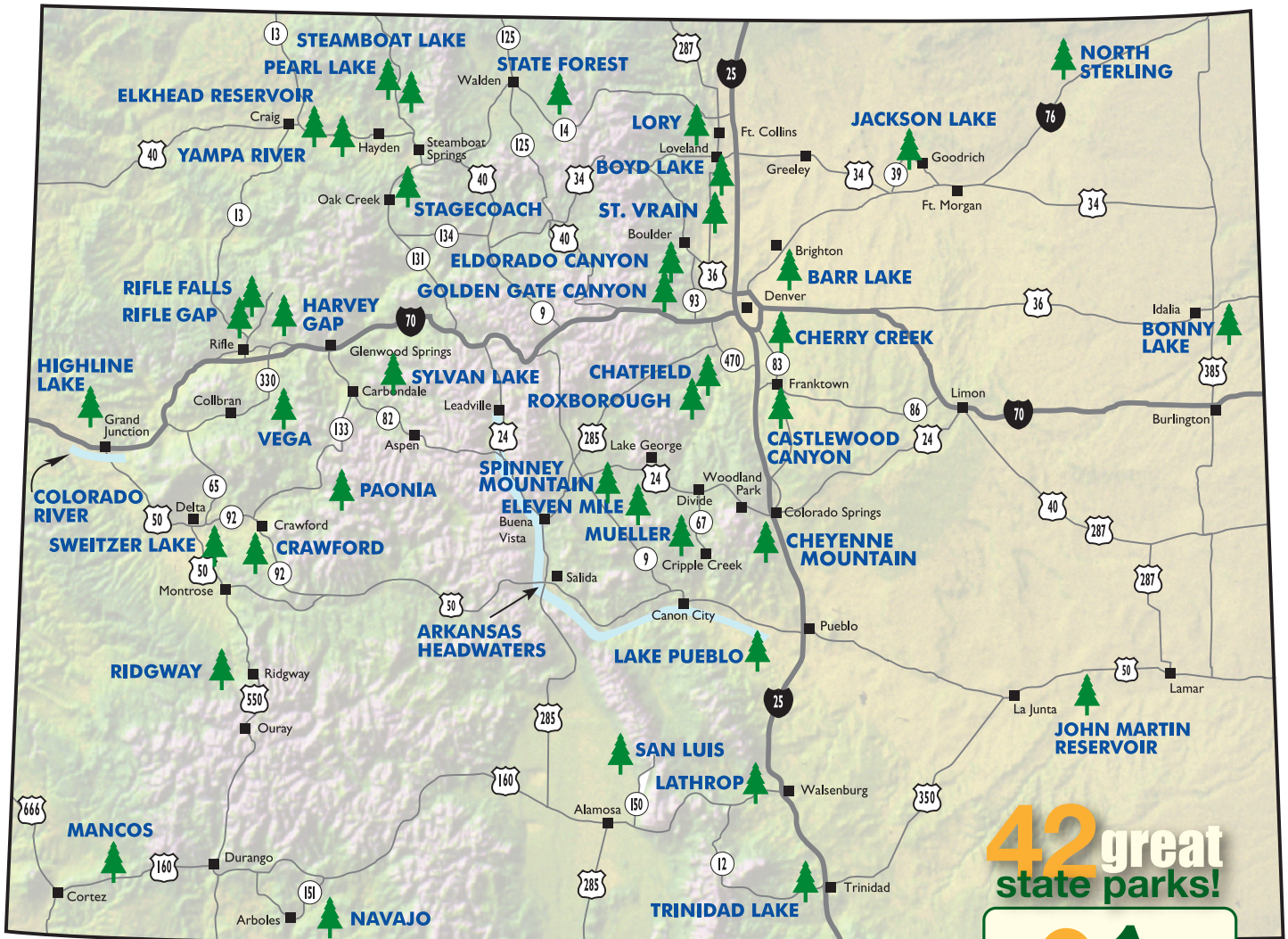
protect
preserve
enhance manage

42 great
state parks!



www.parks.state.co.us

Welcome to our Parks!



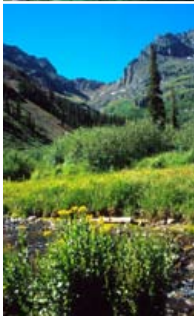
**42 great
state parks!**



The Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is more than our beautiful 42 state parks. The Division also oversees and provides important statewide outdoor recreation programs that deliver important services to the public, as well as administrative support for our parks.

To view our full color electronic version of the Strategic Plan, please visit us: www.parks.state.co.us





Bridge in Eldorado Canyon State Park

2010 Strategic Plan

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Acknowledgements

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Colorado State Parks Board

The five-member Colorado State Parks Board represents the North, West, South, and Metro regions plus one member-at-large. Appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Colorado Senate, board members serve four-year terms. Members of the Parks Board were engaged throughout the Strategic Plan update process and helped guide development of the plan; their names are listed below.

Bill Kane North Region Representative, Chair	Lenna Watson West Region Representative/Secretary/Vice Chair
Laurie Mathews Metro Region Representative	Gary Butterworth South Region Representative
James Pribyl At-Large Representative	

Colorado State Parks Leadership Team

Members of the Colorado State Parks Leadership Team were involved at key junctures in the Strategic Plan update process and assisted in public meetings, Strategic Plan “visioning sessions,” and overall development of the plan.

Dean Winstanley , Director	
Ken Brink , Assistant Director of Field Operations	Gary Thorson , Assistant Director of Statewide Programs
Steve Cassin , Chief Financial Officer	Kurt Mill , Rocky Mountain Region Manager
Heather Dugan , High Plains Region Manager	Bob Wiig , Rocky Mountain Assistant Region Manager
Margaret Taylor , High Plains Assistant Region Manager	Patrick Gavin , Chief of Public Safety
John Geerdes , Southeast Region Manager	Eric Scholz , Capital Development Manager
Rich Dudley , Southeast Assistant Region Manager	Tom Morrissey , State Trails Program Manager

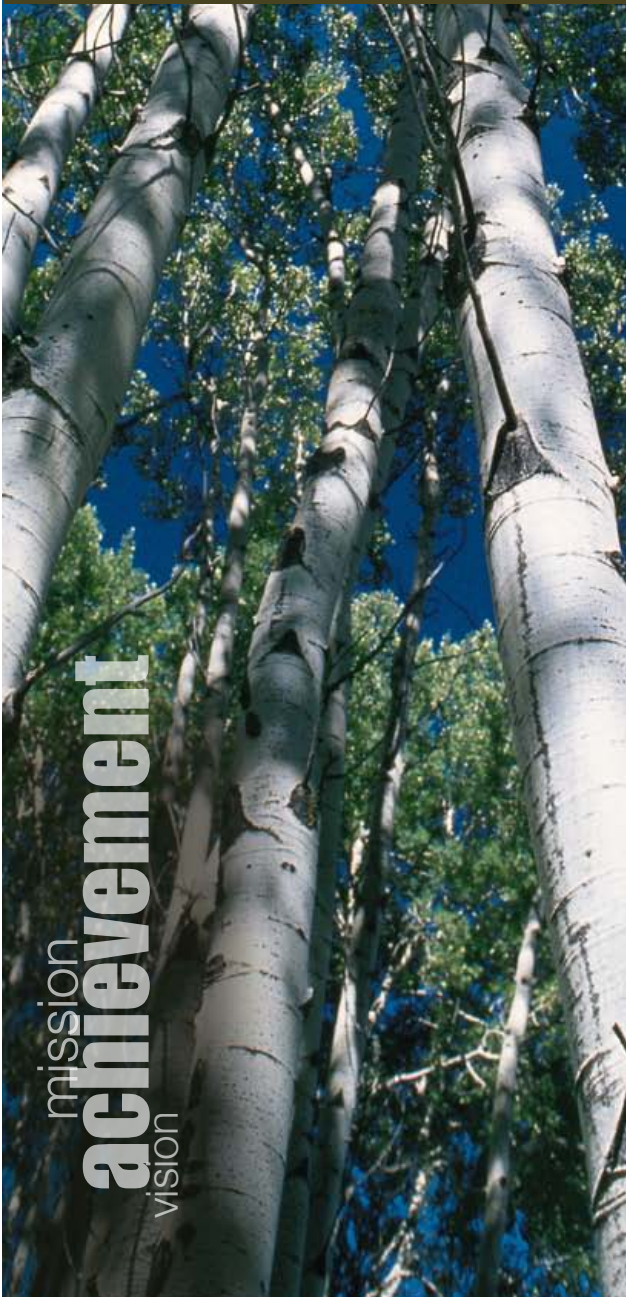
Scott Babcock, Strategic Planning Program Manager, facilitated the development of this plan.





Executive **Summary**

The 2010 Colorado State Parks Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) outlines the agency's overarching mission and purpose, and establishes a shared vision across all levels of the organization. The Strategic Plan ensures that the general public, our visitors, and staff all have a common understanding of where Colorado State Parks is headed, as our "roadmap for the future."



Included in the Strategic Plan is a brief summary of major issues for which Colorado State Parks must account as it positions itself for years to come. Internal considerations include legal mandates, budget limitations, and staff needs. Key external considerations include public recreation preferences and needs, statewide population and demographic change, ongoing efforts to connect more Coloradans to the outdoors, environmental change (e.g., declining forest health and climate change), and invasive species (e.g., zebra mussels).

Developing a plan that is both responsive to public needs and desires and issues outlined above required comprehensive outreach and data collection efforts. Public survey research, public input via public meetings and email, evaluations of statewide outdoor recreation and trend data, a staff survey, and feedback from the Colorado State Parks Board were all important components of the Strategic Plan update process.

Included in the 2010 Strategic Plan is a concise breakdown of Colorado State Park's core goals, objectives, and desired outcomes that will help guide various future budget, capital development, and key policy decisions. Agency-wide goals herein are consistent with Colorado State Park's mission, vision, and core values, and are as follows:

Goal 1: Connect People to the Outdoors by Providing Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Settings

Goal 2: Conserve, Enhance, Manage, and Interpret Natural, Cultural, and Scenic Resources

Goal 3: Foster and Actively Promote Excellence in Our Workforce

Goal 4: Stabilize and Strengthen Colorado State Parks' Financial Condition

Goal 5: Strengthen Outreach and Partnerships

The Strategic Plan is designed to be a "living document" that is to be supplemented each year with an Annual Implementation Plan. While goals and objectives are not expected to change significantly from year-to-year, specific actions designed to meet these goals and objectives may vary. For this reason, action strategies are left out of this plan and will instead be incorporated within an Annual Implementation Plan. The Annual Implementation Plan will complement the Strategic Plan by prioritizing actions that Colorado State Parks will undertake in the forthcoming calendar or fiscal year. Each November or December, Colorado State Parks Board members and the State Parks Leadership Team will meet to identify targeted action strategies that correspond to key agency goals and objectives and evaluate Strategic Plan implementation progress. Progress in achieving agency-wide goals will be highlighted in the Colorado State Parks Annual Report.





Introduction



“We LOVE camping in our State Parks!
The diversity of the different parks, the great campgrounds, the ability to make reservations for a camping site, especially the parks with the most available activities while camping: hiking, fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and so much more!”

– K. D., State Park Visitor



Colorado State Parks at a Glance

The Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (Colorado State Parks) originated in 1959 when Cherry Creek State Park welcomed the first state park visitor. Today, Colorado State Parks manages over 225,000 acres of land and water for outdoor recreation purposes at 42 state parks, and provides statewide leadership in a variety of statewide outdoor recreation programs, including the Colorado State Recreational Trails and Colorado Natural Areas Programs. The Legislative Declaration, or statutory mission, for Colorado State Parks is called out specifically in C.R.S. 33-10-101, which states:

“It is the policy of the State of Colorado that the natural, scenic, scientific, and outdoor recreation areas of this state are to be protected, preserved, enhanced, and managed for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people of this state and visitors of this state...”

In 2009, Colorado State Parks proudly celebrated its 50th anniversary. Since its inception, Colorado State Parks has focused on providing diverse, high quality, outdoor recreation opportunities for Coloradans. Each state park features unique natural and outdoor recreation qualities that reflect the distinctive geography where they are located. Residents have come to rely on our park system, statewide trails, and programs as a way to interact with the natural world and to renew their spirit. Our parks and trail systems are integrally connected to our outdoor lifestyle and stand as a tribute to the state’s inhabitants who have supported their creation, development, operation, and protection over the years.

Over 12 million visitors will visit Colorado State Parks in 2010. Visitor expenditures generate significant benefits to local and regional economies. From June 2008 through May 2009, visitors to Colorado State Parks spent approximately \$571 million in local communities within 50 miles of the state parks, or \$48 per visitor.¹

Although Colorado State Parks clearly benefits the state and its citizens (97% of citizens love their parks, according to a recent statewide survey),² the state park system is aging and needs care. Substantial reductions in General Fund taxpayer support have reduced the agency’s ability to meet the needs of Colorado’s growing population, and make it difficult to address existing park requirements.³

Colorado’s state parks and trail systems are an invaluable asset to Coloradans; the business of parks and the memorable outdoor opportunities we provide are extremely important to the state. Even during difficult economic times, it is imperative that the Colorado State Parks’ staff, its customers/visitors, and other partners ensure the long-term sustainability of our parks and programs.

¹Corona Insights. Colorado State Parks 2008/2009 Marketing Assessment. 2009.

²Ibid.

³General Fund support, as a percentage of State Parks’ total operating budget, has declined from about 25% in FY 2000-01 to about 6% in FY 2009-10, and will decline to 0% in FY 2011-12. While some of these General Fund dollars have been replaced by Severance Tax funds (another taxpayer fund, but much less reliable than the General Fund), the percentage of State Parks’ total budget supported by both of these taxpayer funds combined will decline from 25% in FY 2000-01 to an estimated 14% in FY 2011-12.



Purpose of the Strategic Plan

Colorado State Parks updates its strategic plan about every five years to evaluate agency-wide needs and to develop a framework to guide the agency's parks and programs. As part of this process, the agency gauges public opinion on key issues via public meetings and statewide surveys, and solicits staff and Parks Board input and direction.

The Strategic Plan establishes a shared vision across all levels of the organization. The plan is relevant to both internal (e.g., core administrative functions) and external agency functions (e.g., providing leadership on statewide outdoor recreation issues) that are important to the Colorado State Parks' ability to provide quality service to the public. The Strategic Plan also seeks to clarify Colorado State Parks' mission, vision, goals, and desired outcomes. Additional performance indicators will be developed as a standalone component of the plan to measure progress in meeting desired goals. These performance indicators will serve as threshold criteria for measuring implementation success over time.

This plan is not intended to list all activities undertaken by Colorado State Parks over the next five years. Instead, this document focuses on broad goals and objectives that will position the agency to best meet public needs and desires while addressing key challenges and issues.⁴ Some individual park or program-specific needs or actions may not have a direct correlation to the Strategic Plan.



Bonny Lake State Park



Hiking at Castlewood Canyon State Park



Aspens at State Forest State Park

Annual Implementation Plan

The Strategic Plan is designed to be a "living document" that will be supplemented each year with an Annual Implementation Plan. While goals and objectives are not expected to change significantly from year-to-year, specific actions designed to meet these goals and objectives may vary. For this reason, action strategies are left out of this document and will instead be incorporated within an Annual Implementation Plan. The Annual Implementation Plan will complement the Strategic Plan by prioritizing actions that Colorado State Parks will undertake in the forthcoming calendar or fiscal year. Before the end of each calendar year, Colorado State Parks Board members and the State Parks Leadership Team will meet to identify targeted action strategies that correspond to key agency goals and objectives, and to evaluate implementation progress. Priority action strategies will be outlined in the Annual Implementation Plan and distributed to all staff early each calendar year. Additional information on specific staff and/or funding resources needed to implement each action item will also be provided. Strategic Plan implementation progress will be reported in the Colorado State Parks Annual Report.

⁴The Colorado State Recreational Trails Program will launch a separate strategic planning process in late 2010 that will build off of themes in the Colorado State Parks 2010 Strategic Plan and will focus more specifically on the State's trails mission, vision, goals, and desired outcomes.

“Thanks for conducting the planning meeting in Colorado Springs. We appreciate you taking the time to hear our ideas on the future of Colorado State Parks.”

– D.R., State Parks Stakeholder



Key Steps in the Planning Process

Developing a strategic plan that is both responsive to public needs and desires, but also relevant to internal and external legal mandates, budget limitations, statewide population and demographic change, and other issues and influences required comprehensive outreach and data collection efforts.

The update process included:

- Analyzing data from relevant public surveys and other documents highlighting outdoor recreation trends,
- Gathering public input via public meetings and outreach through the Colorado State Parks website,
- Surveying Colorado State Parks' staff,
- Considering strategies and recommendations resulting from a facilitated planning retreat for the Colorado State Parks Board and the Leadership Team.

A brief summary from these efforts is described below.

Relevant Research and Studies

2009 Market Assessment Study

Colorado State Parks hired Corona Insights in 2008 to explore perceptions and attitudes about Colorado State Parks from the perspective of both State Park visitors and non-visitors. The study identified Colorado State Parks' position in the outdoor recreation marketplace and provided information relevant to the future direction of Colorado State Parks. The survey focused on distinguishing the facilities, services, and programs valued by Coloradans and visitors to Colorado State Parks.

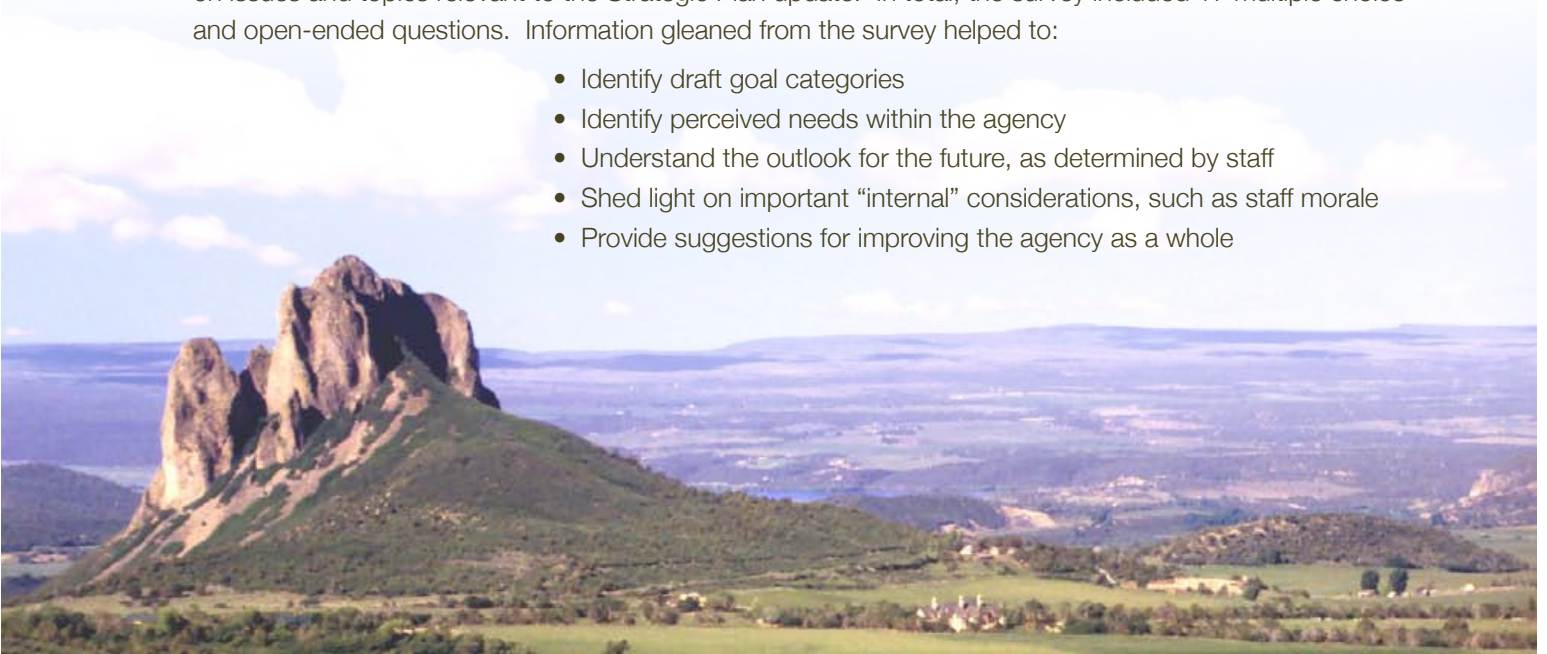
2008 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The 2008 SCORP identified statewide outdoor recreation trends, needs, and issues, and a plan to address statewide priorities. In addition, the SCORP evaluated the demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities throughout Colorado. The SCORP is an assessment of recreation and tourism trends in Colorado, as well as the primary tool for determining priorities for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants to the State Park system and local governments.

Staff Survey

Colorado State Parks' full-time staff was asked to respond to a brief online survey to gauge their perceptions on issues and topics relevant to the Strategic Plan update. In total, the survey included 17 multiple choice and open-ended questions. Information gleaned from the survey helped to:

- Identify draft goal categories
- Identify perceived needs within the agency
- Understand the outlook for the future, as determined by staff
- Shed light on important "internal" considerations, such as staff morale
- Provide suggestions for improving the agency as a whole





Parks Board Input

In December 2009, the Parks Board and the Leadership Team participated in a facilitated planning retreat to: 1) clarify the values, aspirations, and role of Colorado State Parks, in light of its strategic context; 2) agree on what distinguishes Colorado State Parks and makes the agency unique; 3) identify possible business models, funding streams, and market niches; and 4) outline a 2010 action plan that encompasses top level organizational priorities. With Corona Insights' facilitation, the Parks Board and Colorado State Parks' leadership came away with valuable information that helped guide development of the Strategic Plan.

Public Involvement

Colorado State Parks invited the public to *"Have a Say in How You Play"* by soliciting comments about the Strategic Plan update online and in public meetings. The Colorado State Parks' website provided a Strategic Plan update information page where the public could read more about the process and submit their comments electronically or use the contact information provided to call or write planning staff. Most comments were submitted electronically.



Six public meetings were held throughout the state in major metropolitan areas to provide the public with the opportunity to learn first-hand about the Colorado State Parks Strategic Plan, explore key issues and needs, interact with State Parks' personnel, and ask questions. In all, 112 individuals attended the meetings, which included:

City/Town	Location	Date
Fort Collins	Harmony Library	March 11, 2010
Golden	American Mountaineering Center	March 16, 2010
Pueblo	Marriott Pueblo	March 23, 2010
Colorado Springs	Clarion Hotel	March 24, 2010
Grand Junction	Courtyard Marriott	March 30, 2010
Centennial	Embassy Suites Hotel	April 6, 2010

Other Resources

Special effort was made to review recent strategic plans from other partners (e.g., the Great Outdoors Colorado, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife) to ensure that the 2010 Strategic Plan considered and aligned with mutually compatible goals. Additional plans and studies relevant to outdoor recreation were reviewed, including the Colorado Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy.

Key Issues and Trends Considered in the Plan

External Considerations

Population and Demographic Shifts. Between 2000 and 2010, Colorado's population increased from 4.3 million people to 5.2 million people (19 percent, or about 2 percent annually).⁵ Population growth has slowed, but remains higher than the national average. The Colorado State Demography Office estimates the state population will grow to 7.2 million by 2030.⁶

In addition to population growth, more baby boomers (born 1946 to 1964) are retiring and seeking leisure time recreation, younger people are flocking to the state, and Colorado's Hispanic population continues to grow. These trends drive the need for new and different outdoor recreational opportunities to serve diverse cultural communities and age groups. It is necessary to educate new park users on outdoor and wildlife educational opportunities, and promote responsible stewardship of park and trail resources.⁷

Environmental Change. Climate change, forest health, fire mitigation, and invasive animal and plant species (e.g., zebra mussels, tamarisk, and other noxious weeds) pose increasing threats to outdoor recreation activities across the state. Pine beetle infestations are currently impacting accessibility to a number of Colorado's most popular trails. Potential impacts to water resources from the aforementioned factors could also affect outdoor recreation at many parks.

Connecting Families to the Outdoors. Colorado State Parks is at the forefront of connecting Coloradans of all ages to the outdoors. Being outdoors can enhance a family's mental, physical, and social well-being, which is especially timely, considering rising obesity rates and the economic downturn.

focused
researching

⁵ Colorado State Demography Office. Colorado Department of Local Affairs. 9 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.dola.state.co.us/dlg/demog/index.html>>.

⁶ Colorado State Demography Office. Colorado Department of Local Affairs. 10 July 2010 <<http://www.dola.state.co.us/dlg/demog/index.html>>.

⁷ 2008 Colorado Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Colorado Department of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, 2008. Print.



Public Needs and Desires. Public needs and desires considered during the development of the 2010 Strategic Plan were identified via public meetings, online and email comments, and the 2009 Colorado State Parks Market Assessment Study developed by Corona Insights. Key findings included:

- Park visitors are evenly split between those who want more development in the parks (such as more campgrounds and other facilities), and those who prefer a more primitive, backcountry type of experience when they visit a state park. However, on an individual park basis, visitors may feel strongly that a given park should be more developed or stay in a more natural state.
- Camping, fishing, and hiking were cited as the main reasons survey respondents visited a park in 2009.
- Park visitors believe that state parks are clean, safe, and well-run with quality staff.
- Most people like that there are state parks relatively close and accessible to them.
- Most people believe that the state park system provides a diverse array of affordable recreational opportunities and parks featuring their own unique qualities.

Commonly mentioned suggestions at public meetings included:

- Focus on maintaining existing resources and facilities rather than constructing new facilities.
- Continue to provide a diversity of camping experiences.
- Develop new and enhance existing partnerships.
- Provide more community outreach.
- Re-examine the current fee structure to generate additional revenue.
- Explore opportunities to accommodate unique or “niche” outdoor recreation opportunities at suitable state parks.
- Reach out to families, not just kids.
- Encourage and more effectively utilize volunteer services.
- Encourage smart growth and planning.



Key Issues and Trends *(continued)*

Relevant Agency Considerations

Current Park Use. The 2009 Market Assessment provided information relevant to future planning efforts by identifying the facilities, services, and programs valued by Coloradans and visitors to Colorado State Parks. A few key findings from the market assessment are provided below.

- Fifty-seven percent of State Park visitors travel less than 50 miles from their home to visit a State Park.
- About half of Coloradans (46 percent) visit state parks regularly; 9 of 10 park visitors are from Colorado.
- Park visitors contribute substantially to local and regional economies. From June 2008 through May 2009, visitors to Colorado State Parks spent approximately \$571 million in local communities within 50 miles of the state parks.
- Non-local visitors generate about 70 percent (\$396 million) of these total visitor expenditures related to their trip to the parks.⁸

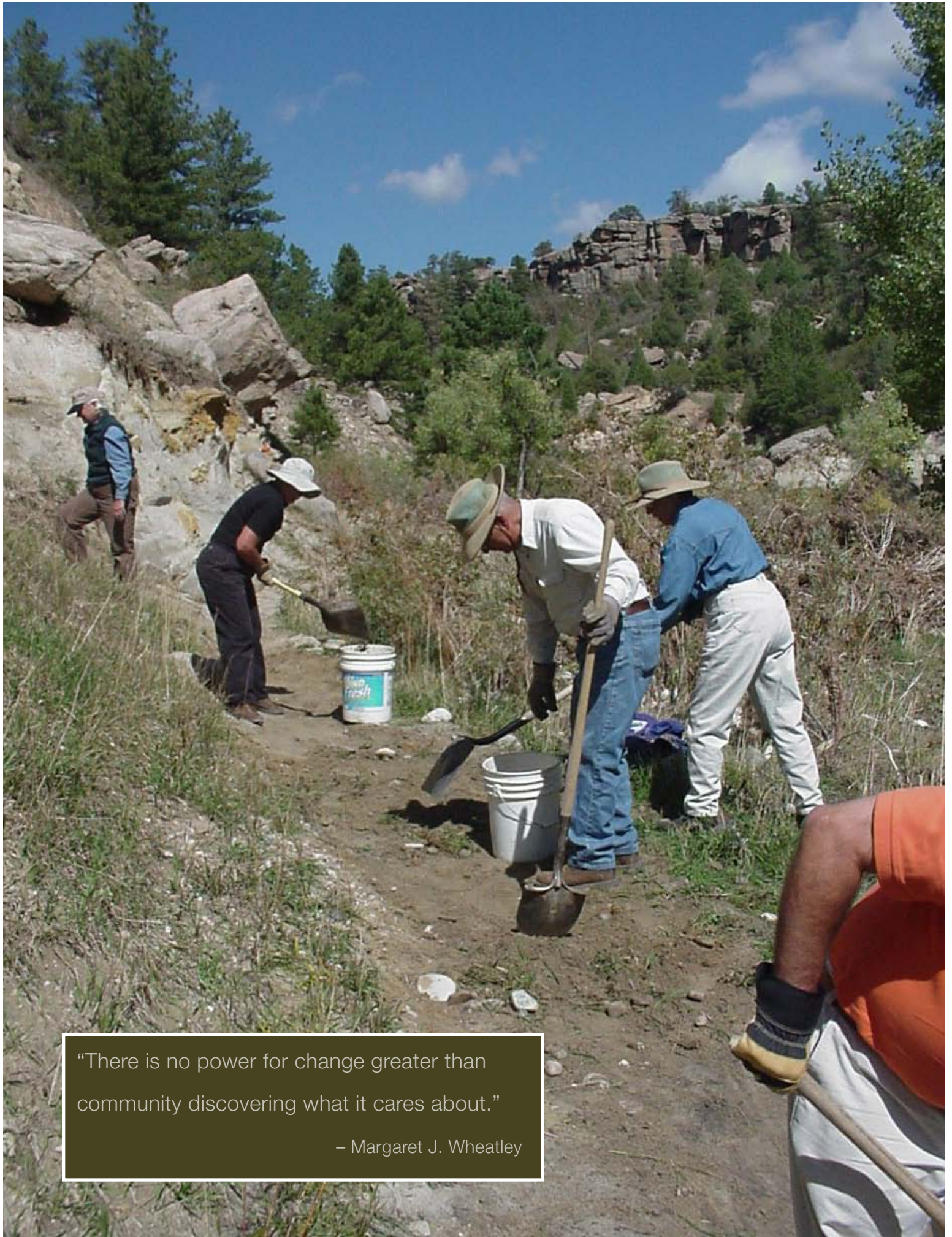
Financial Challenges. To consistently meet operational and capital investment needs, Colorado State Parks must maintain adequate and stable funding. While the agency's annual revenues are comprised of a broad array of funding sources (i.e., fee-based revenue, Great Outdoors Colorado, Colorado Lottery, Federal and State Grants, and general taxpayer funding), decreases in any one funding source can have significant impacts. Also, some funding sources may only be used for certain purposes, which may preclude the ability to transfer money from one funding source to replace reductions in another source. In response to these and other financial challenges, Colorado State Parks is developing a separate Comprehensive Financial Plan that will identify additional cost reduction measures and revenue enhancement options.

Staff Considerations. Staff responses to the Strategic Plan Staff Survey revealed support for Colorado State Park's mission, vision, and core values, and also provided insight to improve and move the agency forward. Some repeated themes are:

- Generate more sustainable funding.
- Address the maintenance backlog.
- Improve advancement potential for non-rangers.
- Provide more diversified training for park staff.
- Ensure transparency in all we do.

⁸Colorado State Parks 2009 Marketing Assessment. Corona Insights, 2010. Print.





“There is no power for change greater than community discovering what it cares about.”

– Margaret J. Wheatley



COLORADO STATE PARKS

2010 Strategic Plan

“It’s important to tie each member of our work force and their work assignments back to our mission and vision statements, to make sure we are all working towards common and critical ends.”

– Kirstin Copeland, Ridgway State Park Manager



mission
vision
core values

Mission

To be leaders in providing outdoor recreation through the stewardship of Colorado’s natural resources for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of present and future generations.

Vision

Colorado State Parks offers exceptional settings for renewal of the human spirit. Residents and visitors enjoy healthy, fun-filled interaction with the natural world, creating rich traditions with family and friends that promote stewardship of our natural resources. Parks employees and their partners work together to provide ongoing and outstanding customer service through recreational programs, amenities, and services.

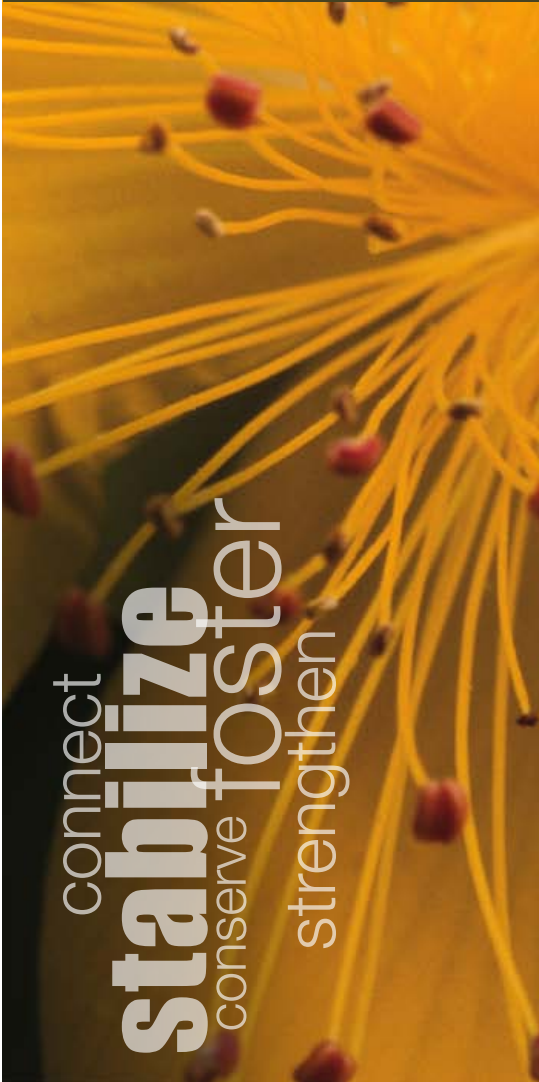
Core Values

Colorado State Parks considers the following three core values as essential tenets of our work: natural resource stewardship, the outdoor experience, and integrity. Each core value is integrally linked to all we do, at all levels of the agency. These core values also provide the context in which Colorado State Parks conducts internal operations and external visitor relations and programs. Our core values and how they are manifested in our work are provided below.

Core Value	Internal Manifestations	External Manifestations
Natural Resource Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking stock of our resources (inventory) • Monitoring resources • Sustainability of natural resources • Defining carrying capacity • Energy conservation • Built into the State Parks’ culture • Internal leadership and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership role and modeling in the community • Interpretation and environmental education • Building public interest • Environmental protection, restoration, habitats • Maintenance and restoration • Conservation • Recognized “go-to” in the community – branding • Sustainability of natural resources • Colorado Natural Areas
The Outdoor Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer-focused orientation – not merely transactional • Training to make emotional connection with visitors • Sustainability of park infrastructure • Built into the State Parks’ culture • Anticipating the needs of our customers • Trails that connect visitors to the outdoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality customer service • Quality facilities • Accessibility – proximity and affordability • Quality trails and regional trail connections • Cleanliness • Provide renewal and respite • Public safety • Interpretation and environmental education • Ability to be recognized; branding
Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service/leadership model • Financial responsibility • Organizational sustainability • Courage/perseverance • Vision for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership – responsibility as a “go-to” organization in statewide outdoor recreation • Accountability • Model for other organizations to follow



Goals and Supporting Objectives



“I enjoy all aspects of the Colorado State Parks, but enjoy the beauty of the rivers most of all. I would like to continue our efforts to conserve Colorado’s pristine waters, keeping them clean, and maintaining access for fishermen, boaters, hikers, and other river-goers.”

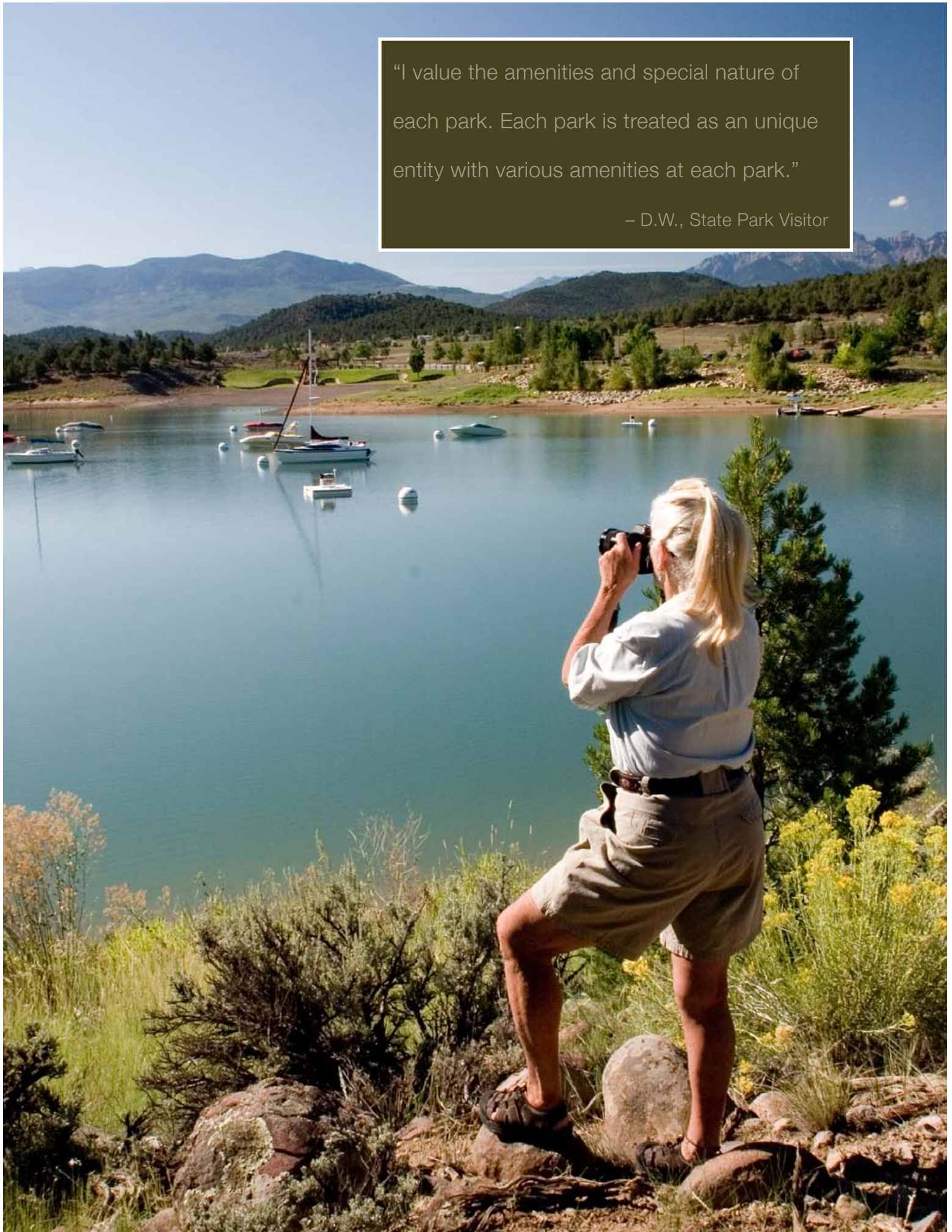
– R.B., State Park Visitor

connect
stabilize
conserve foster
strengthen



“I value the amenities and special nature of each park. Each park is treated as an unique entity with various amenities at each park.”

– D.W., State Park Visitor



Visitor capturing the view.

Goal 1: Connect People to the Outdoors by Providing Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Settings

Strategic Objectives

- Objective 1:** Operate, maintain, and enhance park resources and services to meet visitor needs and enrich the Colorado State Parks' experience.
- Objective 2:** Ensure that quality outdoor recreation settings are provided by using informed decisions, proactive and transparent planning, and accurate and reliable information.
- Objective 3:** As financial resources permit, strategically pursue new park lands, water resources, and facilities to meet current and future demand.
- Objective 4:** Continue to direct leadership, support, and resources to promote and establish a statewide interconnected trails network.
- Objective 5:** Promote participation in Colorado's outdoor recreation opportunities.



Background

Colorado's state parks, trails, and statewide outdoor recreation programs serve as a conduit that connects children, families, and friends to the outdoors. Our state parks give Coloradans a place to play, experience nature, and learn about the natural world. Trails are often an individual's first interaction with the natural environment.

Recreation opportunities like those provided at our parks are one of the reasons Colorado ranks among the fittest states in the nation. In addition, the Colorado State Recreational Trails Program helps to expand and maintain a diverse trail network and connect communities around the state. With obesity increasing in the population, the need to get people active in the outdoors is more important than ever.

Colorado State Parks is committed to continuing statewide leadership in the area of outdoor recreation and ensuring that park visitors enjoy a high level of customer service. We are also committed to providing quality outdoor recreation experiences and interaction with Colorado's great outdoors. However, achieving this goal requires that we properly maintain the assets we already have. Park visitors, Coloradans, and staff all agree that taking care of existing resources should be a high priority. Renovating and enhancing facilities that need repair will take time, but taking the appropriate steps today will ensure that our parks and programs will continue to serve future generations.

Given the current needs of the park system and financial challenges, Colorado State Parks must strategically consider both short- and long-term financial and operational implications of future acquisitions and park development. Capital expenditures, operating and maintenance costs, and appropriate scales and types of recreational facility development, must be considered if we are to ensure that the Colorado State Parks grows responsibly and does not create future burdens that cannot financially be sustained. Colorado State Parks also recognizes that our parks comprise a diverse system that feature a wide array of opportunities and experiences, and that each park cannot be all things to all people.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **More Coloradans know and appreciate Colorado State Parks.**
- **The agency plays a lead role in growing and nurturing support among the public for our parks and outdoor recreation.**
- **Loyalty and satisfaction rates of our current customer base are maintained.**
- **Colorado's critical regional trails are completed, thereby providing connections to the state's vast landscape, natural resources, and urban centers.**



Goal 2: Conserve, Enhance, Manage, and Interpret Natural, Cultural, and Scenic Resources

Strategic Objectives

- Objective 1:** Inventory and monitor natural, cultural, and scenic resources to establish their identity, location, and condition, and to determine which resources require protection and which are suitable for interpretation.
- Objective 2:** Establish carrying capacity and zoning considerations for park resources and integrate those with park management and development decisions to minimize impacts and keep resources intact for future generations.
- Objective 3:** Seek to maximize sustainable design and energy efficiencies wherever possible.
- Objective 4:** Provide meaningful interpretive and environmental education opportunities that expand public awareness and appreciation of important park resources and issues.
- Objective 5:** Cooperate with other agencies and conservation organizations to collect, share, and disseminate natural resource information and to coordinate resource management.

Background

The abundant outdoor recreation opportunities that occur within Colorado's state parks are directly linked to the unique natural resources, scenic amenities, and historic values that comprise each park. Proactively managing and maintaining these resources is essential, because our visitors are accustomed to outdoor recreation experiences in a high quality, natural setting. Whether camping under an umbrella of stars, rafting a rushing river, snapping a photograph of a bald eagle, fishing for a trophy trout, or simply accessing a trail to enjoy the scenery, quality natural settings and surroundings make such activities worthwhile.



Over the years, Colorado State Parks has been proactively inventorying, conserving, and managing natural resources in our parks, and in some instances, playing a leadership role on a statewide level (e.g., establishing boat inspection guidelines to prevent the spread of zebra mussels and working with state and federal partners to conduct fuels mitigation and forest management to address the mountain pine beetle). In addition, Colorado State Parks administers and oversees management of Colorado's 114 registered or designated Natural Areas, which preserve important natural resources found throughout the state.

Balancing recreational use with preservation and protection of natural resources continues to be a fundamental component of our work. However, striking this balance is increasingly difficult in the wake of invasions of exotic species, population growth, climatic changes, budget issues, and the pressures associated with human access. To meet this challenge, Colorado State Parks must continue to proactively inventory resources on our parks, including archeological and paleontological assets, and increase volunteer monitoring to generate reliable data needed for solid management decisions. In addition, Colorado State Parks will use the best information available when analyzing and establishing visitor carrying capacities. Based on sound data and scientific studies, Colorado State Parks will consider appropriate mitigations and regulations when putting in place new recreation opportunities or development, and restore natural resources wherever possible.

With nearly 12 million annual visitors, Colorado State Parks has the unique opportunity to set a positive example in the areas of sustainable design, energy efficiency, and interpretation and environmental education. While implementing sustainable design and energy efficiency efforts may be costly initially, such investments can result in long-term cost savings, longer-lasting facilities, and parks that are more environmentally (and financially) sustainable.⁹ Playing a leadership role in interpretation and environmental education is also important. Each park serves as a unique outdoor classroom that is well positioned to provide meaningful interpretive and environmental education opportunities for park visitors. Such efforts help instill a greater public awareness and appreciation of park resources and critical issues ranging from a local to global scale. Colorado State Parks will seek to expand opportunities for self-guided tours and interpretive programs led by park staff, community partners, and volunteer naturalists.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Visitors to Colorado State Parks and citizens of Colorado have an increased appreciation for and understanding of the natural and cultural resources in their state parks.**
- **Sensitive wildlife habitat and native flora are conserved, maintained, and restored.**
- **Energy consumption is reduced.**
- **Trails are built to be sustainable, while protecting or avoiding sensitive resources.**

⁹ H.B. 1349 directs the Colorado Division of State Parks to generate enough renewable energy by 2020 to offset the amount of electricity consumed in Colorado's 42 state parks.



Goal 3: Foster and Actively Promote Excellence in our Workforce

Strategic Objectives

- Objective 1:** Maximize the ability to serve customers by providing staff with training, equipment, and resources to efficiently and effectively perform their jobs and manage park resources.
- Objective 2:** Establish a legacy of leadership through recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention of highly-motivated, exceptionally-qualified individuals with diverse skill sets.
- Objective 3:** Facilitate clear and effective communication between all Colorado State Parks' employees.
- Objective 4:** Foster a culture of collaboration, innovation, and commitment to the Agency's mission and vision among all members of the Colorado State Parks' team.

Background

Colorado State Parks believes the path to providing excellent customer service is through recruiting, hiring, training, empowering, promoting, and retaining high caliber staff. The agency is fortunate to have dedicated, hard-working staff that truly enjoy their work, but more can be done to recruit qualified people and provide ongoing and diverse training for staff. While public safety training is and continues to be important for our park managers, additional training in natural resource identification, monitoring and management, interpretation, and environmental education is also desirable. Colorado State Parks Leadership will work with its partners to secure the support and additional funding needed to further these efforts. Colorado State Parks will also strive to serve as a statewide model for hiring and promoting only the most highly qualified staff.

While some issues are out of the agency's control (such as employee compensation), other factors that contribute to a professional workforce are not (i.e., staff recognition, training, and facilitating effective communication). It is more important than ever that staff feel appreciated and motivated to continue performing at a high level. Further, Colorado State Parks must empower its staff by providing them with the information and technology necessary to maximize individual job performance, and effectively manage parks and outdoor recreation programs. Colorado State Parks' leadership will work hard to recognize staff accomplishments, provide opportunities for professional development, and provide the tools and resources staff need to be effective at their jobs.

Current and impending employee retirements pose yet another challenge for Colorado State Parks. While losing some of our most experienced employees represents a significant drop in institutional knowledge, it provides an opportunity for the agency to train and empower the leaders of tomorrow. Colorado State Parks will do its best to implement succession planning and ensure seamless leadership transitions.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Colorado State Parks is recognized as having highly professional, motivated staff to serve state park visitors.**
- **Staff excels in a variety of disciplines to more effectively meet the diverse needs of our parks and programs.**
- **A "culture of collaboration" is instilled across all levels of the agency.**
- **Safety, health, and wellness are ensured for all employees.**

“Our staff is who we are. Let’s put an emphasis on recruiting, retaining, and training high quality personnel. We need to make job satisfaction a priority by creating programs for career development, employee appreciation, and maintain fair and standard human resource procedures.”

– Staff response from the 2010 Strategic Plan Update Survey.

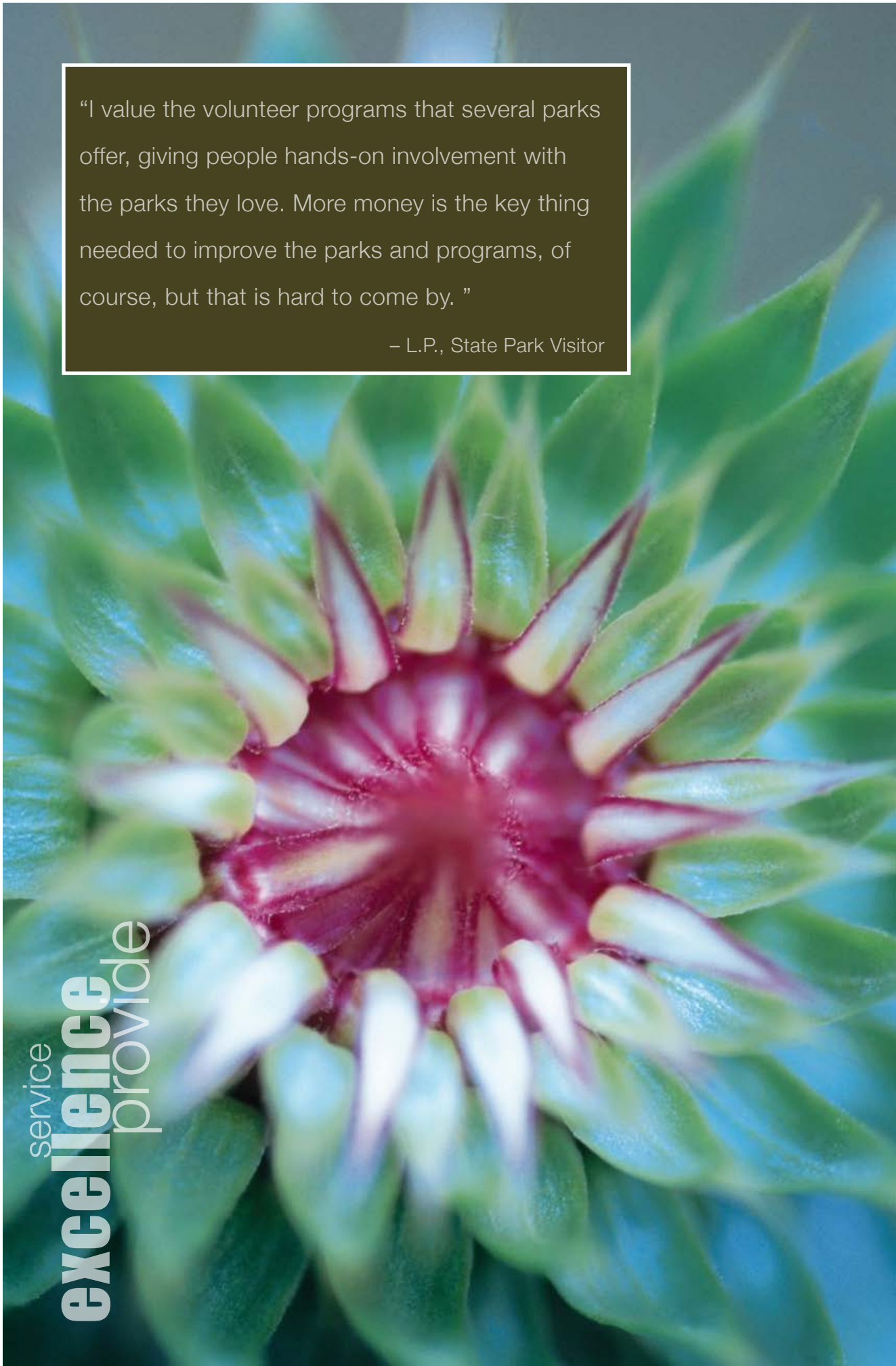
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“I value the volunteer programs that several parks offer, giving people hands-on involvement with the parks they love. More money is the key thing needed to improve the parks and programs, of course, but that is hard to come by. ”

– L.P., State Park Visitor



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Goal 4: Stabilize and Strengthen Colorado State Parks' Financial Condition

Strategic Objectives

- Objective 1:** Identify efficiencies and eliminate unnecessary costs.
- Objective 2:** Develop strategies to enhance existing and secure new and more sustainable revenue sources.
- Objective 3:** Effectively market and expand awareness of and support for Colorado State Parks.
- Objective 4:** Maintain accountability and transparency in all financial decisions.

Background

In recent years, significant funding challenges have affected the agency's ability to fulfill its mission, address recreation management needs, and meet increasing statewide recreation demands. The national and statewide economic recession has resulted in drastic cuts to state agency budgets. In 2009, Colorado State Parks' operating budget was reduced by \$3 million. Despite an uncertain financial outlook, Colorado State Parks must take the steps needed to ensure that its parks and programs remain available to the public.

Financial uncertainty affects all aspects of the agency, whether it is future planning or daily operations. Developing strategies to secure new and more sustainable revenue beyond the state's general taxpayer funding and severance tax dollars is critical to ensure that parks and programs are financially stable.

Key financial strategies for the coming years will be included in the Comprehensive Financial Plan, which will be completed in late 2010. In addition to identifying potential new revenue sources, Colorado State Parks recognizes that it must ensure that parks and programs are operated as efficiently as possible and that limited dollars are invested wisely. This means identifying additional operational efficiencies, employing innovative technologies, using cost savings measures, maximizing energy efficient technologies, and, if necessary, reconfiguring or divesting assets. In addition, Colorado State Parks should continue to devote financial and staffing resources to the areas of greatest need and public benefit, and avoid investing in infrastructure or initiatives that do not align with the agency's mission and/or lead to undue financial burdens.

Our staff has done a commendable job in recent years of spending funds wisely and trimming costs where possible. Strengthening Colorado State Park's financial condition requires that our staff continue these and other efforts to ensure that each investment decision is defensible, well grounded, and transparent.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Colorado State Parks is more financially sustainable and can more effectively meet current and long-term financial needs.**
- **Programmatic efficiencies are utilized while maintaining past visitor satisfaction rates.**
- **Colorado State Parks possesses the organizational capacity to ensure that all park lands are appropriately maintained and accessible.**
- **Awareness among the public about the agency's long-term funding needs is expanded throughout the state.**

Goal 5: Strengthen Outreach and Partnerships

Strategic Objectives

- Objective 1:** Establish and cultivate Colorado State Parks' champions and advocates, including individuals, communities, private and non-profit organizations, government entities, and user groups.
- Objective 2:** Effectively utilize "friends" groups and volunteers by promoting and expanding meaningful opportunities that leverage and enhance on-the-ground park, trail, and program resources.
- Objective 3:** Seek new and creative partnerships with nontraditional organizations, such as public health organizations, civic tourism partners, birding and wildlife groups, and land trusts to promote healthy activities, engage future stewards, leverage resources, and promote our parks and trails system.

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"I value taking my kids into the outdoors and spending quality family time with them being active in the outdoors...rather than seeing them sit in front of a computer or TV playing video games."

– T.W., State Park Visitor



Background

Colorado State Parks' future hinges largely on how effectively we reach out and attract potential visitors, foster new advocates for state parks, and leverage support of key partners. Successful outreach and partnerships will improve and promote our parks and statewide outdoor recreation programs. New visitors who return often will become some of our strongest supporters, ensuring access to and availability of parks for future generations.

Whether promoting parks to attract new visitors, working with volunteer groups to improve trails or lead interpretive programs, or partnering with private industry to further outdoor recreation interests statewide, outreach and partnerships must remain an integral component of our work. By utilizing existing partnerships and fostering new ones, Colorado State Parks can expand its ability to offer unique, high-quality experiences to the public, and provide valuable educational and stewardship opportunities.

Strengthening outreach and partnerships is a priority at all levels of the agency. At the park level, this means working with local chambers of commerce or governments to expand awareness of what our parks have to offer. Park managers will be encouraged to initiate and establish formal "friends" groups that can further assist park staff in leveraging park resources and services, and building connections to unexpected and productive partnerships. At the statewide level, this will entail strengthening existing partnerships with the federal agencies like the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service as well as other important partners like Great Outdoors Colorado, Colorado Youth Corps, and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado. Such partnerships are critical to securing support for Colorado State Parks (e.g., financial support or time and labor to make improvements and provide new facilities). The bottom line is that our parks and trail systems need supporters all across the state, regardless of age, professional background, or political affiliation.

Colorado State Parks also recognizes that successful outreach and partnerships means reaching out and lending support to our partners. In the years to come, Colorado State Parks will continue to serve as a statewide organizer and catalyst for planning and partnership efforts that align with the agency's overall mission.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- **Residents have a greater awareness of, and a new appreciation for Colorado State Parks and trails.**
- **Local and statewide partners see Colorado State Parks as a responsive and indispensable partner organization.**
- **Volunteers are recruited, trained, and used successfully in as many areas of the agency as possible.**
- **The financial health of Colorado State Parks is strengthened through the active support of our partners.**



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