

CNAP Frequently Asked Questions

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When and how was the Colorado Natural Areas Program (CNAP) established?

The Colorado Natural Areas Program was established by state legislation with the signing of the Colorado Natural Areas Act in 1977.

What are the goals of the Colorado Natural Areas Program?

The Program was established to identify, evaluate and protect specific examples of natural features and phenomena as enduring resources for present and future generations, through a statewide system of Designated Natural Areas.

Who manages the Colorado Natural Areas Program?

The Colorado Natural Areas Program is a small program housed within Colorado Parks and Wildlife, a Division of the Department of Natural Resources. CNAP is administered by one full-time coordinator and two to three seasonal technicians per year. There is a 7 member Governor appointed council, the [Colorado Natural Area Council](#), which serves as an advisory board to the program.

What is a Colorado Natural Area?

A Colorado Natural Area is a property which has received a Colorado Natural Areas Designation following the signing of an agreement between the landowner and the State of Colorado. Natural Areas Designation is bestowed upon properties with at least one unique or high-quality natural feature of statewide significance and exemplary management to conserve that feature. Colorado Natural Areas often contain multiple natural features of statewide, or even national or worldwide, significance.

What types of natural features are considered for the Natural Areas Designation?

Colorado Natural Areas are designated for high-quality populations of rare plants, rare plant communities, habitat for rare wildlife, and significant geologic and paleontologic features.

Why are Colorado Natural Areas important?

Colorado Natural Areas represent the “best of the best” of significant natural features in Colorado. This recognition highlights the conservation value of these special areas and acknowledges outstanding landowner stewardship. There is no other statewide program within Colorado that provides a system for recognizing these unique natural places.

How are Colorado Natural Areas protected?

Natural Areas are primarily protected by recognition of the significant features and the exemplary management of the landowner. By being placed on our registry, the Program has identified this area to be a place to monitor over time. Program staff assesses the status of the site on a triennial basis, and reports site condition to the Governor.

What type of agreement is involved in a designation?

The agreement, referred to as the Articles of Designation, is voluntary and it identifies the owner/manager of the property, the legal description and location, the significant natural resource features of the property, and outlines the rights and duties of the landowner and the Program.

Can lands of any type of ownership be designated as Natural Areas?

Yes. Natural Areas can be designated on any type of land ownership, including private, federal, state, local or land-trust holdings.

Who manages Colorado Natural Areas?

Management of Colorado Natural Areas is the responsibility of the landowner and/or their designated land manager.

Does Colorado Natural Areas designation change property ownership?

No. The ownership of the property remains the same.

Does Natural Areas Designation invoke land use restrictions?

No. Any uses of State Natural Area lands are at the discretion of the landowner/manager. However, the agreement signed between the landowner and the State to create a Natural Area does constitute a management agreement, and land use restrictions may be mutually agreed upon at the time of signing.

Is Natural Areas Designation permanent?

Yes, unless the voluntary agreement is terminated. The Natural Area Designation is attached to the deed of the property, and will be transferred to new ownership if the property is sold or transferred.

If a Natural Area is damaged, will the Natural Areas Designation be withdrawn?

The Program may de-designate a property if the significant feature(s) for which it was designated for become degraded and/or no longer fit the criteria of a Colorado Natural Area. Potential sites for de-designation will be evaluated by CNAP staff, Colorado Natural Areas Council, and possibly other natural resource experts.

How are Colorado Natural Areas selected?

Areas are either nominated for designation by interested landowners or identified by staff after consultation with a panel of experts. With landowner permission, staff evaluates site condition and proposes Natural Areas boundaries. Criteria include ecological and physical condition, representation in the system, disturbance, size and buffer, and management.

How does an area become a Designated Colorado Natural Area?

Landowner interest must be given in writing for the Program to pursue designation. Articles of Designation are drafted and agreed upon by Program staff and the landowner. Designation requires approval by the [Colorado Natural Areas Council](#) and the Parks and Wildlife Commission. County Commissioners will be notified of pending designation and a hearing may be requested. Upon approval by the Parks and Wildlife Commission, designation will be recorded with the County Clerk. Articles of Designation will be signed, and a Certificate of Designation, signed by the governor, will be given to the landowner.

Does each owner get a certificate?

Yes. When a Natural Area is designated, the landowner will receive a certificate of designation signed by the Governor of Colorado, Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources, and Chair of the Colorado Natural Areas Council.

What are the benefits to the landowner who participates?

The designation of a State Natural Area recognizes a landowner's/manager's outstanding environmental stewardship, and documents the significant natural value of the site in the context of Colorado.

Designation provides enhanced awareness of the conservation value to land use decision-makers and public land users. These conservation actions and long standing partnerships with the state may help to avoid listing of species under the Endangered Species Act , prevent species extinction, and support species recovery. For more benefits, visit our [About CNAP webpage](#).

Can the Natural Areas Program provide landowners with funds to manage Natural Area resources?

The Program typically provides in-kind services, rather than financial support. The Program can provide assistance by monitoring sensitive areas with staff and volunteer stewards, opportunities for expert scientific review and research of significant features of the property, as well as access to the Program's network of partners and knowledge of resources to support conservation and stewardship.

Are Colorado Natural Areas open to the public?

A Natural Areas Designation does not require that the area be open to the public. Property access is at the discretion of the land owner/manager. In many areas, public access (including recreation) is either closed or discouraged in order to protect sensitive resources.

How large are Colorado Natural Areas?

Individual Natural Areas vary in size from 5 acres to almost 13,000 acres.

How many Colorado Natural Areas are there?

As of 2015, there are 93 Designated Natural Areas.

Do Colorado Natural Areas boundaries coincide with other protected area boundaries?

Not always, but often. The Program has had various agreements with land management agencies to pursue Natural Areas Designation of lands with special conservation status, such as the BLM's Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Our designation adds an extra layer of recognition and conservation support to the significant feature(s), as well as acknowledging the commitment of the landowner for exemplary management of these features.

Where do I go for further information?

For further information, please contact our Program staff at dnr_cnap@state.co.us or call our Program Coordinator, Raquel Wertsbaugh at 303-291-7267.