

AN ENDURING
Resource



Triennial Report to Governor Owens

Colorado Natural Areas Program



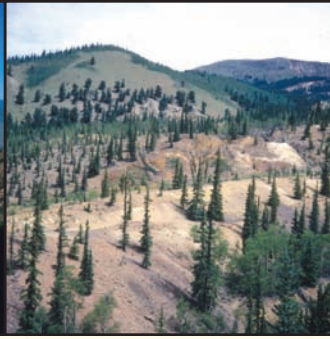


*W*so long ago – in the year 1977 – our Colorado General Assembly had future generations in mind when it declared that Colorado’s natural heritage was “increasingly threatened with irreversible change.” The subsequent “Colorado Natural Areas Act” established the Colorado Natural Areas Program – a statewide, innovative and unique voluntary resource protection effort. Through the use of cooperative management agreements, the General Assembly called for the creation of “**an enduring resource**” of protected sites, each having outstanding significance. Long before the word was coined, our legislators were calling for inter-agency “partnerships,” now a common and sought-after form of cooperation.

*T*wenty-seven years later – and after three additional votes of confidence from the legislature – their 1977 declaration of threat and irreversible change has only increased in its validity and sense of urgency. The Natural Areas Program is pleased to submit this report to Governor Owens documenting our recent accomplishments in pursuing this critical legislative mandate.

*“Colorado is blessed with some of the most distinct and beautiful lands in America.
Our duty is to preserve and protect this heritage for future generations.”*

Governor Bill Owens



"The loss of genetic and species diversity...is the folly our descendents are least likely to forgive us."

Dr. Edwin O. Wilson



The last three years have been banner years for the Colorado Natural Areas Program, seeing extensive accomplishments even while operating with minimal budget and staff. A total of **28 new or expanded natural areas** were designated or registered, comprising 37,000 acres. (Please see tables in appendices.) Our **large cadre of volunteer stewards** has been significantly expanded, now totaling 76. By their on-going site visits, stewards have contributed over **\$137,000 in value** to the Program. The Program also funded 17 research projects on natural areas, and convened a group of 40 earth science professionals to define geology and paleontology sites of statewide significance.

Overall, **175 rare species and community types are protected** within Colorado's 105 natural areas. The national and global significance of these sites is impressive. For example, 17 sites are designated as Important Bird Areas (IBA) by the inter-agency IBA program; six sites are National Natural Landmarks identified by the National Park Service; up to 200,000 Brazilian free-tailed bats find habitat at Orient Mine Natural Area; 13 sites are US Forest Service research areas; 30 sites protect species found only in Colorado; Slumgullion Earthflow, Kremmling Ammonite and Indian Springs sites are internationally-known research areas; and Trinidad K-T Boundary is one of the best exposures in the world of the dinosaur extinction event.

The **largest populations** in the state **for 57 rare species** are protected in natural areas — protection that can temper the need for possible future listings as federal endangered species. According to Colorado State University, 27 of these species are considered vulnerable on a global scale.

Visitation to natural areas, particularly through viewing enjoyment, is equally impressive. **Recreation visits** to natural areas **total 2.3 million per year**. “Scenic visits” – enjoying a natural area viewshed while driving by a site – is estimated at an astounding 100 million visits per year, based on Department of Transportation daily traffic volumes.

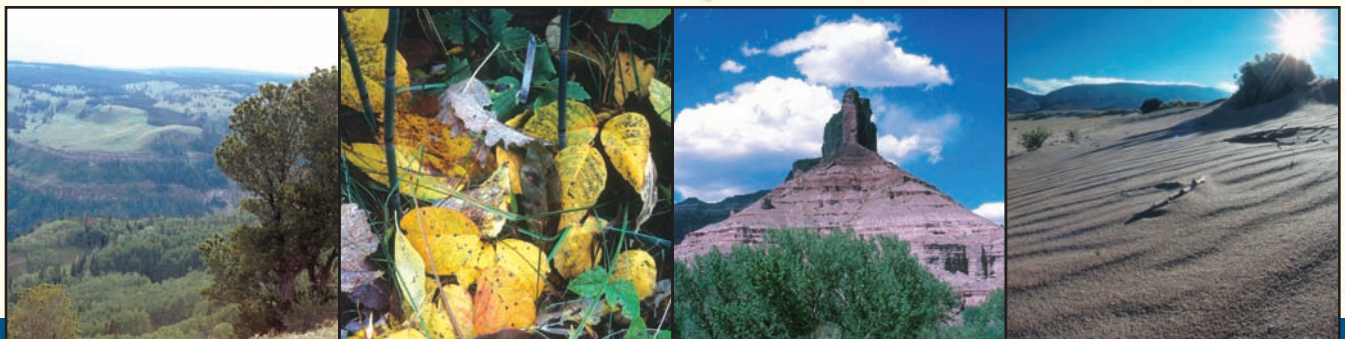
Natural areas help to achieve a major component of **Great Outdoors Colorado’s** constitutional mandate – to identify, acquire and manage natural areas of statewide significance. The Program also contributes to the state’s Smart Growth Initiative through its Natural Landscapes component.

The Program has just completed natural value inventories for all **three million acres** of State Land Board holdings. This 12-year endeavor has been both long and valuable for both the Land Board and the Program. We also received a \$75,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to inventory wetlands on state lands. Natural Areas nominated 22 sites to the Land Board’s Stewardship Trust, of which 15 were added to the trust. An additional 33 potential natural areas were also evaluated on lands of various ownership.

We’ve now twice reprinted our popular manual “*Native Plant Revegetation Guide for Colorado*.” Together with our most recent of the **Caring for the Land series** – “*Creating an Integrated Weed Management Plan*” – the Program has distributed about 2,500 copies of these 300-page manuals, across the West and beyond.

*“Something hidden. Go and find it.
Go and look behind the Ranges.
Something lost behind the Ranges.
Lost and waiting for you. Go!”*

Rudyard Kipling



Photos left to right: Deep Creek Natural Area, Garfield County; Dakota Ridge Hogback Natural Area, ©K. Phoenix; Gateway Palisade Natural Area, Mesa County and East Sand Dunes Natural Area, Jackson County



As defined in statute, the **benefits of natural areas** include:

- Sites serve as examples of native conditions for natural resource research
- Contain resource material from which new knowledge may be derived
- Are reservoirs of genetic material that have present and future values
- Provide habitat for rare species
- Serve as outdoor classrooms for students of all ages
- And serve as areas of natural beauty, inspiration, and diversity that meet aesthetic needs, enriching the meaning and enjoyment of human life.



*"The eyes of the future are looking back at us,
they are praying that we see beyond our own time."*

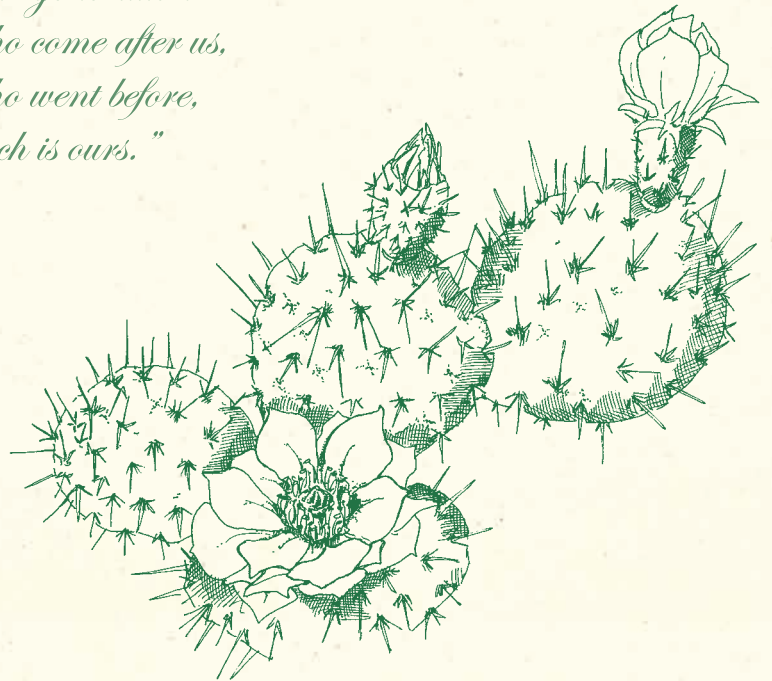
T.T. Williams



Photos left to right: Lookout Mountain Natural Area; East Sand Dunes Natural Area, Jackson County; Gothic Research Natural Area, Gunnison County and Mt. Callahan Natural Area, Parachute beardtongue

"It is our task in our time and in our generation to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours."

John F. Kennedy



State of Colorado, Bill Owens, Governor

Department of Natural Resources, Russell George, Executive Director

Colorado State Parks, Lyle Laverty, Director

Natural Areas Council, John Masson, Kathy Yates, Dave Anderson, Dr. Kenneth Lee Shropshire, Dr. Tom Ready, Phil James, Dennis Brinker

Colorado State Parks/Colorado Natural Areas Program

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Cover photos left to right: East Lost Park Natural Area, © K. Phoenix; Mt. Goliath Research Natural Area, © K. Phoenix; Dudley Bluffs Natural Area, Physaria and Wheeler Geologic Natural Area, Mineral County