

COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

Golden Gate Canyon State Park

2023 MANAGEMENT PLAN



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Management Planning Team

Todd Farrow, Golden Gate Canyon State Park, Park Manager

Kacie Miller, Planning Manager

Matt Schulz, Forest Management Coordinator

Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Jonathan Meats, Senior Ranger

Mike Knight, Park Resource Technician

Brian Dornbock, Park Resource Technician

Jake Murray, Park Resource Technician

Ian O'Brien, Ranger

LeAnn Orick, Ranger

Bronwyn Phillips, Administrative Assistant

Additional CPW staff and partners

Jonathan Boydston conducted extensive research on options for the hunting program. Mark Lamb, Tim Woodward and Shannon Schaller provided guidance on appropriate changes to the hunting program. Mike Quartuch and Ryan Filtz (Colorado State University) assisted with trail user surveys and other public engagement planning. Jeff Thompson and Melissa Belmar (Collective Ecological Consulting) provided expertise on the natural resources of the Park. Amanda Biedermann edited the draft plan. Dylan Lewan and Adrian Martinez created maps.

CPW Leadership Team

Heather Disney Dugan, Acting Director

Reid DeWalt, Assistant Director for Aquatics, Terrestrial, and Natural Resources

Ty Petersburg, Acting Assistant Director for Field Services

Justin Rutter, Chief Financial Officer

Kristin Cannon & Rebecca Ferrell, Assistant Directors for Information and Education

Jeff Ver Steeg, Assistant Director for Research, Policy, and Planning

Cory Chick, Southwest Region Manager

Mitch Martin, Acting Southeast Region Manager

Travis Black, Northwest Region Manager

Mark Leslie, Northeast Region Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(to be added after public comment on draft plan)

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Acronyms

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CNHP	Colorado Natural Heritage Program
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
DFPC	Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control
FTE	Full-Time Employee
GGCSP	Golden Gate Canyon State Park
GOCO	Great Outdoors Colorado
LNT	Leave No Trace
MBR	Membrane Bioreactor
PCA	Potential Conservation Area
RV	Recreational Vehicle
SAM	Species Activity Mapping
SAR	Search and Rescue
SCORP	Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
TWP	Temporary Work Program
USFS	U.S. Forest Service

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1 Introduction

Park Description

Containing more than 12,000 acres of beauty ranging in elevation from 7,280 to 10,388 feet, Golden Gate Canyon State Park (GGCSP or the Park) offers a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities within a 1-hour drive of the Denver metro area. GGCSP is Colorado's third largest State Park and welcomes over 1.5 million visitors per year. A prime destination for fall "leaf peeping" activities¹, GGCSP also contains over 35 miles of multiple-use trails providing access to high mountain meadows, lush streamside corridors, rocky peaks, and dense forests. Overnight accommodations in GGCSP range from the Harmsen Ranch Guest House, to tent and recreational vehicle (RV) sites at the family-friendly Reverend's Ridge Campground, to rustic backcountry sites with no amenities. One of the most popular viewpoints in GGCSP, Panorama Point Scenic Overlook, offers spectacular views of over 100 miles of Colorado's Continental Divide throughout the year. This Plan includes a broad description of the complete spectrum of recreational, cultural, and natural resources at GGCSP.

Park Goals

GGCSP's goals support a long-term vision for the Park that builds on its 6 decade history. The goals are outlined below:

1. Provide safe, quality experiences for Park visitors.
2. Protect the Park's unique natural, cultural, and scenic resources.
3. Make data-driven decisions.
4. Strive to match the demands of park operations with appropriate staff and infrastructure resources.
5. Implement Management, Resource Stewardship, Weed Management, Forestry Management, and other plans.
6. Proactively enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of the Park through communication, education, and interpretation.

Purpose of the Plan

The Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan (the Plan) serves as the primary guiding document for GGCSP. The ultimate purpose of developing a State Park management plan is to plan for both public enjoyment and protection of the State Park's resources. The Plan provides a conceptual planning framework for setting management priorities and providing specific management direction for Park resources. The Plan also:

- Serves as a guide and policy document for current and future Park staff, partnering agencies, elected officials, and interested members of the public.

¹ Leaf peeping is an informal term for the activity in which people travel to view and photograph fall foliage in areas where leaves change colors in the autumn season. Source: <https://www.foliagenetwork.com/>

- Guides the management of natural, cultural, and recreational resources at GGCSP.
- Provides a framework for monitoring and maintaining resources at GGCSP.
- Identifies Park enhancement opportunities, including possible facility upgrades, new park facilities, restoration and rehabilitation projects, and important management initiatives.
- Serves as a guide for future park budget allocations and annual funding requests.

Implementation of the Plan will assist Park staff in their efforts to preserve and enhance GGCSP for future Park visitors.

Park managers should regularly review the Plan to evaluate implementation progress. This includes annually reviewing the document and providing it to new staff. Park and other Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff (e.g., Planning, Region, Natural Resource, and Capital/Region Development staff) should update the Plan every 10 years.

This Plan and its implementation is also an opportunity to support Governor Jared Polis' philosophy to build a "Colorado for All." On August 27, 2020, Governor Polis signed Executive Order D-2020-175, directing the Department of Personnel and Administration to advise state agencies in integrating this philosophy into state government workplaces, community engagement efforts, standards of accessibility, and other specified areas. All agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources, of which CPW is a Division, have equity, diversity, and inclusion goals focused on hiring, retention, community partnerships, and communication. Over the coming months and years, CPW will use related policies and guidance from these initiatives to refine the implementation of strategies in the Plan.

Relationship to the CPW Strategic Plan

The CPW Commission adopted the CPW Strategic Plan on November 19, 2015. This plan sets a high-level vision, overarching goals, objectives and strategies that will guide CPW's work into the future. While CPW's Strategic Plan is a useful overall guide for achieving a broad range of CPW-wide goals and objectives, the Plan is the primary guidance document for Park staff for Park-level planning efforts in GGCSP. The Plan is consistent with the CPW-wide mission, vision, and goals as defined in the Strategic Plan, which are outlined below.

Mission

CPW's mission is "to perpetuate the wildlife resources of the state, to provide a quality State Park System, and to provide enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities that educate and inspire current and future generations to serve as active stewards of Colorado's natural resources" (C.R.S. 33-9-101).

Vision

CPW's vision is to be a national leader in wildlife management, conservation, and sustainable outdoor recreation for current and future generations.

Strategic Goals

CPW's Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for achieving the agency's vision and mission through concrete goals and objectives. The 6 CPW goals identified in the Strategic Plan are:

1. Conserve wildlife habitat to ensure healthy sustainable populations and ecosystems.
2. Manage State Parks for world class outdoor recreation.
3. Achieve and maintain financial sustainability.
4. Maintain dedicated personnel and volunteers.
5. Increase awareness and trust for CPW.
6. Connect people to Colorado's outdoors.

Previous Planning Efforts

The previous management plan for GGCSP was completed in 1997. Park staff currently rely on the following plans to guide management of GGCSP:

- 2021 Resource Stewardship Plan (Appendix C)
- 2014 Forest Management Plan
- 2017 Noxious Weed Management Plan

Future Plan Updates

The majority of the Plan should remain relevant for many years to come, as much of the information in the Plan includes historical documentation and factors that influence Park management or recommendations that will remain static or ongoing in perpetuity. As stated previously, the Plan shall be updated every 10 years by Park and other CPW staff. To ensure that the Plan is a dynamic document that meets the changing needs of the Park and Park visitors over time, Park managers may supplement the Plan with updated information, provide minor changes to management actions, or add management actions that help the Park to meet changes in recreational trends and visitor demands, adapt to changes in the natural environment, and maintain a high-quality visitor experience. These actions may occur during the annual review period or whenever relevant information comes available. In general, park management plans are to be amended when changes in circumstances are significant enough to merit updating the plan. Examples of when formal amendments to the Plan may be necessary are listed below.

- There are changes to the land base (e.g., additional lands are purchased or portions of the park are sold off).
- Major new facilities or infrastructure are planned for the Park.
- A policy or directive is instituted that significantly affects Park management direction.
- Major changes to land use occur within or adjacent to the Park.

- Changes to the management zoning.
- Significant environmental stress events (e.g., fish kill, drought, etc.) occur.

Public Input Process

Public input is an important part of the management planning process. While Park staff may have a good understanding of visitors' ideas, concerns or issues, survey results can help confirm or clarify the magnitude of an issue or concern from an outsider's perspective.

A Visitor Satisfaction Study conducted in 2019 to 2020 was used as “prescoping” (i.e., initial information gathering) to inform this Plan. Based on that study and the known popularity of GGCSP's trails, CPW conducted a small trail user survey in 2021. In addition, due to staff concerns related to multi-use in the Jefferson County portion of GGCSP, CPW conducted a hunter survey to understand hunter preferences for management strategies related to the park's hunting program. Finally, CPW gave the public an opportunity to review a draft of this Plan. The highlights of these efforts are summarized below.

Visitor Satisfaction Survey

CPW conducted intercept (on-site) and corresponding online follow-up surveys with visitors at GGCSP as part of a larger State Park System study on visitor satisfaction. The full methods and results are in Appendix A. Below is a summary of key findings:

Intercept Survey Responses

- The vast majority (92%) of visitors who were asked to participate in the intercept surveys did so (n = 741 people).
- Of those who participated in the intercept survey, most visitors (79%) were from Colorado and about 90% indicated having between 1 and 4 people in their vehicle while visiting the Park.
- Hiking and camping were the most frequently identified activities that interviewees intended to do (or had done) during their visit.
- Approximately three-quarters (77%) of individuals who participated in the intercept surveys (n = 571) provided a valid email address and received a link for the online questionnaire.

Online Survey Responses

The 225 visitors who participated in the online survey provided the following information:

- Demographics
 - On average, respondents were 46 years old and slightly more than half (55%) were female.
 - In total, 180 respondents self-identified as White, non-Hispanic/Latino; 13 self-identified as Hispanic/Latino; and 4 self-identified as Asian.
 - The number of years respondents have lived in Colorado ranged from less than 1 year to 74 years (mean = 22 years).
- Recreation activities
 - The top 5 recreation activities that visitors enjoyed at GGCSP were: (1) hiking/backpacking (61%), (2) walking/dog walking (32%), (3) photography

- (26%), (4) wildlife watching (does not include bird watching) (21%), (5) camping (14%), and bird watching (14%).
 - When asked “what was the one activity respondents were most excited about,” hiking/backpacking (61%), camping (7%), and fishing (6%) were the top 3.
- Motivations (*moderate-to-very important responses combined*)
 - Nearly all respondents identified enjoying scenic views (98%) and enjoying/spending time in nature (98%) as the most important reasons why they recreated at GGCSP.
 - Engaging in the primary activity that brought them to the Park was also important to about 97% of respondents.
 - Relaxing and exercising/improving physical health rounded out the top 5 activities at 91% and 88%, respectively.
- Management preferences (*strongly agree responses indicated below unless otherwise indicated*)
 - Park maintenance: More respondents agreed with statements about the Park being well maintained (83%) and free of vandalism (81%) than they did with statements about the water for fishing, boating, etc. being free of litter/trash (47%) and about amenities (e.g., restrooms, picnic tables) being clean and in good condition (55%).
 - Potential concerns: About two-thirds (68%) of respondents were not bothered by other visitors’ pets or other visitors themselves (66%). Slightly more than half (55%) agreed that the Park was not crowded. However, another 28% somewhat agreed with this statement.
 - Park facilities: Two-thirds (66%) of respondents agreed that the Park had well-designed and maintained trails and slightly more than half (53%) agreed that trash containers were readily available, there was adequate parking (53%), and that the Park had adequate places to rest (52%). More than one-quarter (28%) agreed that the Park had enough water fountains/faucets and fewer (26%) agreed that recycling containers were readily available.
 - Park personnel/information: Most (83%) respondents agreed that Park staff were courteous/friendly and about 78% agreed that staff were helpful. About 57% agreed that the Park had adequate signage though another 32% somewhat agreed with this statement.
- Satisfaction
 - The vast majority (97%) of visitors were satisfied with their most recent experience at GGCSP, and 75% were very likely to visit again in the next 12 months. About 17% of respondents were somewhat likely to visit again during the same period.
 - About half (49%) of visitors would prefer that staff at GGCSP leave the Park as is (i.e., prioritize doing nothing) in the next 10 years.
 - Slightly more than one-quarter (26%) would prefer staff to prioritize additional recreation trails and about 10% would like staff to prioritize additional (developed) camping areas.
 - Overall, the top 5 trails that respondents used during their last visit to the Park were: Raccoon (64%), Mule Deer (30%), Horseshoe (12%), Mountain Lion (10%), and Burro (9%). However, about 16% of respondents were not sure which trail they used. It is also important to note that about 12% of respondents suggested that staff prioritize “other” aspects of the Park, many of which included additional (or improved) signage and maps.

Hunter Survey

CPW emailed a survey to hunters (343 individuals) from the previous two years (2019 and 2020), which CPW also made available to those signing in at the Park during September 2021's hunting seasons. CPW asked the hunters about their motivations to hunt in general and specifically why they chose to hunt at GGCSP. In addition, CPW asked what factors impact their hunting experience and their thoughts about adding hunting reservations at GGCSP (thus reducing the numbers of hunters per day) and increasing communication efforts with all visitors regarding multiple recreation opportunities occurring in the same area of the Park.

CPW received a total of 149 responses. A high percentage (89%) of respondents chose "proximity to home" as the reason they hunt at GGCSP. Nearly half (47%) chose "the Park is easily accessible for hunting via parking and trails" and only 16% selected "quality hunting experience." Overall, respondents understand user numbers (including hunters) are high at GGCSP, leading to human safety and resource protection concerns. However, the unique opportunity to hunt close to home, in this Game Management Unit, and at a park with fantastic scenery, watchable wildlife, and great staff is valued by hunters.

Full results from the hunter survey are in Appendix B. Park staff will undertake Management Initiatives related to the hunting program as discussed in Chapter 5.

Trail Users Survey

Trail users were surveyed on various days of the week, during various times of the day, and at trailheads throughout the Park from August 28 to September 21, 2021. 51 interviews were conducted, mostly with individuals and groups hiking, but a few bikers and picnickers participated as well. Group sizes ranged from 1 to 4 people with 2 as the average. Most (69%) were from the Denver metro area, with 14% from elsewhere in Colorado and 18% from outside the state. Just over half of the respondents were visiting GGCSP for the first time. Of those that had been to the Park before, most (60%) visit a few times per year and the others were evenly split between more frequent visits either a few times a week or month. A majority of respondents (59%) planned to be at the Park for about 3 hours, another 20% expected a 6-hour visit, and the rest were either staying overnight or making a short stop (less than an hour) in the Park.

Respondents chose the following responses when asked "why did you pick this trail?" Respondents could choose as many responses as they wanted, and response choices were distributed across the trails.

- It is near where I parked: n= 8
- I was directed here by staff/volunteers: n= 1
- I saw it on social media/other lists: n= 6
- A friend told me about it: n= 0
- I came for the length/difficulty: n=24
- It was my particular destination: n=26
- It has flowers/wildlife I want to see: n= 5
- I am familiar with this trail: n= 9
- Other: n=8 (n=4 gave a response related to the trail 'is not crowded' as a reason)

When asked if they were able to access the trail they wanted, 94% of respondents responded 'yes.' The few who responded 'no' indicated this was due to full parking or they could not

find the trailhead (n=1). Although 22% responded that maps/signage were not clear to find/use the trail, only about a quarter of those respondents said that this detracted from their experience. Other activities respondents participated in during their visit included: picnicking (n=9), photography (n=8), staying overnight (n=7), and nature viewing (n=6).

Out of the total respondents, 65% were aware there is hunting at GGCSP, and 59% said that awareness of where/when there is hunting would influence their choice of trail. Only 16% of respondents were hunters, none of which hunt at GGCSP. Several hunters commented they would not hunt at the Park due to concerns related to crowding in a multi-use area.

When asked about other comments or thoughts on the Park and its future, respondents were generally positive. They appreciated the survey, cleanliness of the Park and its facilities, opportunities to enjoy a 'lovely and serene' place, and felt that the Park is a great introduction for families new to the outdoors (e.g., laundry and showers make camping/visiting easy). There was a small number of comments related to other visitors (some were very positive and some expressed concerns about other users groups).

Signage comments were the most frequent and included the following topics (unless otherwise noted, these were comments by single individuals):

- Replace faded signs at trail intersections (3)
- Add 'you are here' at trailheads
- Replace tracks with names or colors (3)
- Add segment mileage to maps
- Add signage to backcountry shelters and campsites and surrounding trails (5) and around service roads (2)
- Great maps and signage
- Beaver Trail could be rated moderate (2); same for the Mountain Lion Trail in Forgotten Valley (counterclockwise)
- More paper maps at trailheads in case you go there first and there is no cell service for other maps
- Mountain Lion Trail parking could be clearer; love the access to campsites

A few other thoughts are included below:

- More social media presence (e.g., leaf changing updates)
- Trails are well maintained (2)
 - Mountain Lion Trail could use some maintenance at the top
- Concerns about dogs off leash and bags of dog waste
- Should be free
- Priced out of camping and day passes - camp at Kelly Dahl instead
- Put pump handles back on - concerned about putting out fires; ok if not potable
- Would like to have volunteer trail crews
- Please keep winter camping loop open
- Reservations limit their use of campgrounds
- Neighbor would love Green Ranch access but understands it is for wildlife

Public Input on Draft Plan

<<placeholder for public input on draft plan; >>

Influences on Management

Factors that are not entirely under CPW's control but influence Park management include:

- Externally managed roads (i.e., State Highway 46 and Gilpin County's Gap Road) go through the Park. These roads cannot be "closed" during extreme weather events, high visitation periods, or other extenuating circumstances.
- The Park is in a rural area that spans Jefferson and Gilpin Counties.
- The Park is bordered by private land and National Forest land, as well as a State Wildlife Area, which is managed for different purposes than a State Park.
- Visitation to public lands along the Front Range and statewide is increasing dramatically.
- There are ever-increasing requirements for compliance and costs for maintaining wastewater treatment facilities.
- Upstream sedimentation is impacting the quality and quantity of water resources in GGCSF.
- Evaporative water loss from the Parks' 7 recreational fishing ponds must be addressed via a water augmentation plan to identify and acquire replacement water sources.
- Climate change impacts such as expanded fire seasons, drought, increased visitation when winter weather/snow comes later in the season, and changed cycles of pest infestations (e.g., mountain pine beetle) affect the Park currently and are a concern for future impacts.

Management Considerations

Management considerations include issues and concerns that have been identified by Park staff based on first-hand experience, knowledge, and information gathered from the public.

Some key management considerations include:

- GGCSF is the third largest park by land area and fourth by visitation in the State Parks System.
- There are 9 entrances to the Park and 35 miles of trails.
- The Park is managed for backcountry and frontcountry experiences.
 - The spectrum of overnight opportunities ranges from backcountry camping to developed campgrounds and cabins.
 - There is a wide variety of management operations and challenges, ranging from remote trash pickup and backcountry toilet access to wastewater treatment.
- Efforts to ensure forest health, fuel mitigation efforts, insect and disease mitigation efforts, and noxious weed resource management projects are funded and completed annually through coordinated efforts between the Park staff, Resource Stewardship staff, and Colorado State Forest Service staff and volunteers.
- Multi-use areas are experiencing increased potential for conflicting uses. This is especially a concern during hunting season in the Jefferson County portion of the Park.

- Increasing visitation is resulting in increased impacts from issues such as more frequent social trails/off-trail use, parking outside of designated areas, and frequently full campgrounds. Overcrowding and capacity issues at many locations in the Park require additional staffing resources and law enforcement activities.
- Balancing expanded recreational uses and facility maintenance with minimum operating budgets.

This information, in addition to the knowledge and experience of Park staff, directly influenced the development of Park Management Zones and Enhancement Opportunities described in Chapters 4 and 5.

2 Regional Planning Context

This chapter provides information on the regional setting in which GGCSP is situated. Regional issues or considerations that may influence management of GGCSP include climate, proximity of the Park to major population centers and other geographical considerations, eco-regional issues, adjacent land ownership, and regional population trends. These topics are discussed in detail below. Unless otherwise noted, information was sourced from the Resource Stewardship Plan (Appendix C).

Physical Setting

The Park is located in CPW's Northeast Region, which contains 14 State Parks. GGCSP spans the boundary between Jefferson and Gilpin Counties within the foothills of the Rocky Mountains (Map 1). Elevation in the Park ranges from 10,388 feet (at the top of Tremont Mountain) to 7,280 feet (where Ralston Creek flows out of the eastern side of the Park). The majority of the Park is located within the Ralston Creek watershed.

Eco-Regional Setting

GGCP is located in the Southern Rocky Mountain Ecoregion, which is primarily located in Colorado but also extends north into Wyoming and south into New Mexico. Over 180 plant and animal species are considered endemic and uniquely adapted to the Southern Rockies. The Colorado National Heritage Program (CNHP) is responsible for identifying Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) in the state. PCAs highlight locations that contribute to Colorado's biological diversity due to rare species, natural plant and ecological communities, and ecological conditions. Of the 1,800 PCAs in Colorado, the Park overlaps with 4 (located in or near Macy Gulch and Ralston Creek). The very eastern tip of the Park is part of the Middle Ralston Creek PCA, which has "very high biodiversity significance."

Climate

The climate in GGCSP is typical of higher elevations in the Front Range of Colorado. Average temperatures range from around 18 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit. Most precipitation falls in April and May with the highest snowfall totals in December. Snow covers the Park for most of winter. Due to the vast elevation and aspect differences across the Park, weather conditions can vary significantly over short distances.

Adjacent Land Use and Land Ownership

GGCSP is mostly surrounded by private land, with the Arapaho National Forest located along a section of the northern border and the Ralston Creek State Wildlife Area bordering the Park

to the south. Much of the private land surrounding the Park has been subdivided into residential areas with lot sizes typically ranging between 5 to 35 acres. The closest high-density residential development is in Golden, located about 15 miles away. The Crescent Meadows Trailhead in Eldorado Canyon State Park is located approximately 10 miles from GGCSP's Rifleman Phillips Campground. Many Jefferson County Open Spaces are also in close proximity to GGCSP.

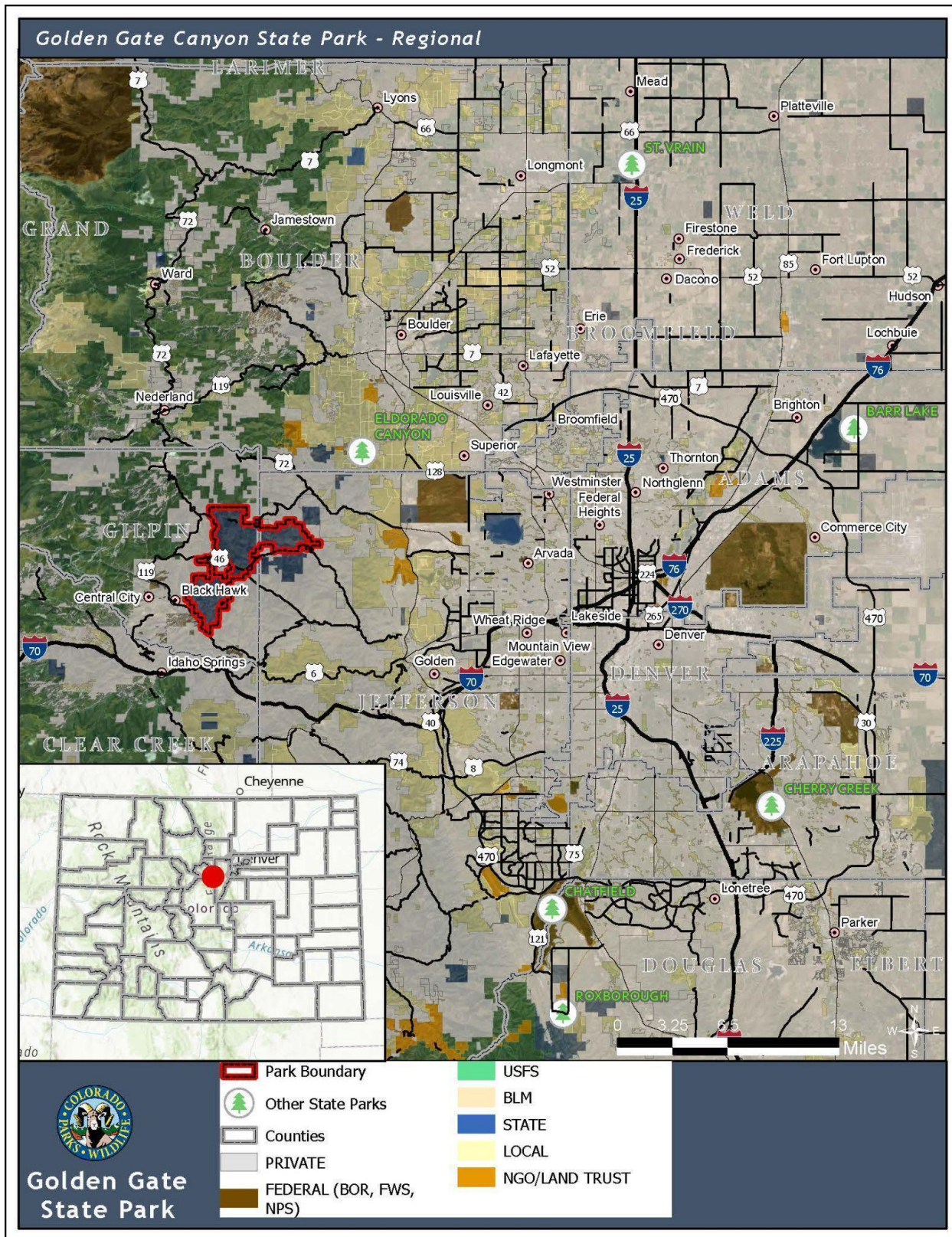
Gilpin County is one of Colorado's smallest counties (by land area) and is characterized by a rural mountain environment with the Continental Divide running along its western edge. Over half of the County is public land managed by the state or federal government. The County has limited services: it has no grocery store, only a few gas stations, and 1 recreation/community center located near the Park. County Offices are located in Central City, which is a historic mining town. Central City and Black Hawk are well-known for their casinos, which bring a major influx of tourists into the area. The Gilpin County website² summarizes the history and impacts of the casinos as follows: *"In 1990 a state-wide amendment passed that legalized limited-stakes gambling in Black Hawk and Central City. The initiative required that much of the proceeds from gambling would be provided to the Colorado State Historical Fund for Historic Preservation. Both Black Hawk and Central City saw a major resurgence in their economies that continues to this day. Gaming tax revenues and property taxes from the casinos comprise over half of the county's total revenue, keeping the residential property taxes low for residents."*

Jefferson County is more than 5 times larger than Gilpin County (by land area) and contains over half a million residents. The western side of the County, where the Park is located, is still fairly rural, with most cities located in the northern and eastern parts of the County that border Denver. As the "Gateway to the Rocky Mountains," Jefferson County residents appreciate living in proximity to Denver metro area services, employment, shopping, and entertainment, as well as abundant opportunities to recreate outdoors. Additionally, for Front Range residents, public lands in Jefferson County are often the closest places to access the foothills and outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests are located in the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Rocky Mountain Region and are managed jointly by the USFS. The Arapaho National Forest experiences some of the highest visitation rates of any national forest. President Theodore Roosevelt established the Arapaho National Forest on July 1, 1908, which was named after the Native American tribe that occupied the region for summer hunting³. The Boulder and Clear Creek Ranger Districts cover areas near the Park.

² Source: gilpincounty.org.

³ Source: fs.usda.gov/detail/arp.



Map 1. Regional Location of Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Colorado and Regional Population Trends

The 2020 census showed Colorado's population to be just over 5.8 million people and is forecasted to be near 6.5 million by 2030. Most of this population growth will occur on the Front Range, including in the Denver metro area just west of the Park.

According to the State Demographers Office⁴, Jefferson County had a population of 582,782 in 2020, which grew from 535,651 in 2010 and 565,161 in 2015. However, over the next decade the County's population growth is estimated to slow slightly, increasing to just over 600,000 people. Gilpin County's population is just under 6,000; the population size has remained fairly stable and is projected to slightly decrease into the future.

Regional Recreation and Tourism Trends, Needs, and Opportunities

The 2019-2023 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for Colorado offers valuable insight into recreation trends in each region across the state. In the SCORP, GGCSP falls into the North Central Region, with a small portion of the Park in the Denver Region.⁵ This Region offers a breadth of outdoor experiences from neighborhood parks to remote wilderness. The North Central Region includes popular towns for recreation such as Fort Collins, Boulder, Greeley, Idaho Springs, and Estes Park. Recreational activities in and around these towns include camping, hiking, biking, fishing, and boating in the numerous city, state, federal, and county public land properties. The North Central Region is also home to Rocky Mountain National Park, the Flatirons, Poudre Canyon, and Longs Peak, which offer a variety of recreational experiences. Based on the SCORP's public survey, the top 3 recreational activities in the North Central Region are: 1) walking, 2) hiking/backpacking, and 3) playground activities. This Region generates around \$13.8 billion of direct economic output each year from recreation, providing the second highest economic contribution out of all the regions in Colorado.

The 2019 SCORP cites population increases and demographic changes as factors to consider in the future management of Colorado's public lands. Undoubtedly, the quality of life that Colorado offers plays a key role in attracting new residents. However, as the state's population increases, there are associated challenges for conservation and outdoor recreation. For example, the amount of land available for recreation and wildlife habitat is finite. Additionally, as the population grows, protected lands per capita declines. Lastly, as the demographics change within the state, planners must evaluate the different ways in which people recreate in order for outdoor recreation to remain culturally relevant. Providing the same types of traditional recreation options may not accommodate the unique needs and interests of different racial and ethnic groups, people with disabilities, an aging population, and other user types.

Currently, many popular recreational areas in the North Central Region are grappling with parking and access challenges. Many trailhead parking areas in the Region fill up on peak

⁴ Source: demography.dola.colorado.gov

⁵ Source: coloradoscorp.org

days. Some recreation destinations already have programs in place to address these issues. Examples include shuttles to the Hessie Trailhead in Boulder County on the Arapahoe National Forest, at Rocky Mountain National Park, and to Chautauqua in the City of Boulder. The USFS plans to continue its online reservation system for some of the more popular developed recreation areas for day use and camping.

To address Colorado's population growth impacts to the way public lands are managed, CPW, Arapahoe and Roosevelt National Forests, Jefferson and Gilpin Counties, and other land managers are participating in "NoCoPLACES 2050" to work cooperatively in finding an approach to systemic change. The program's vision statement reads as follows: *"NoCoPLACES 2050 collaborates to protect and conserve natural and cultural resources while providing equitable access and a quality recreation experience for current and future generations."*

3 Park Setting and Resources

This chapter provides detailed information on the existing conditions within the Park in order to provide: 1) a contextual framework for better understanding management needs and constraints and 2) a “baseline” from which to identify Enhancement Opportunities and Management Initiatives.

Knowledge of GGCSPP’s natural and cultural resources is a result of surveys and monitoring that are the foundation of the Resource Stewardship Plan. Unless otherwise noted, information in this section comes from the Resource Stewardship Plan (Appendix C) and former Management Plans (Appendix D), which have additional extensive and detailed information on all resources.

Physical Characteristics

The Park is characterized by steep ridges and rocky outcrops, as well as dense forests interspersed with open meadows. Elevations in the Park range from 7,400 feet at the extreme southern and southeastern portions of the Park to 10,388 feet at the top of Tremont Mountain. Numerous intermittent streams and gulches dissect the Park, and there is 1 major drainage, Ralston Creek, which travels west to east through the Park. Portions of The Green Ranch drain into the North Fork of Clear Creek, which joins with South Clear Creek and together they flow as Clear Creek through the western suburbs of Denver and into the South Platte River. Although there are no naturally occurring lakes, several small (ranging from 1 to 5 acres in size) ponds have been built throughout the Park.

Significant topographical features in the Park include Tremont Mountain, Promontory Ridge (elevation varies but is around 9,500 feet), Ralston Roost (9,334 feet), Centralia Mountain (9,795 feet), City Lights Ridge (8,680 feet) and Windy Peak (9,141 feet). From Panorama Point, visitors can see Mount Evans to Longs Peak and beyond.

Flat land is scarce in the Park, with meadows at The Green Ranch, Frazer Meadow, Aspen Meadow, and Forgotten Valley having the most moderate slopes in the Park, which likely contributed to why these areas were the most attractive homestead sites for early Euro-American settlers in the region.

Park Land Ownership

GGCSPP was created when the State of Colorado began purchasing parcels of land in the area in the 1960s. The state officially designated GGCSPP as a State Park in 1960, becoming Colorado’s second State Park. Since then, 48 land purchases have brought the Park to its present size of over 12,000 acres. See the former Management Plan (Appendix D) for maps and lists of the first 46 purchases. Since completion of that plan, CPW acquired the Vigil parcel and Works Ranch. Additionally, Ralston Creek was re-designated a State Wildlife Area in 2002.

The Ellyson family owned the first purchases made by the State of Colorado and are the lands around the Visitor Center and Slough Pond. In the 1980s, about 2,000 acres of inholdings were acquired for the Park. Most of the Park is fee titled and owned by CPW, with a small part of The Green Ranch owned by the State Land Board. There are a few private inholdings in the center of the Park (Map 2), totaling about 600 acres. Several of these inholdings have long-established residences, which are likely to remain privately owned.

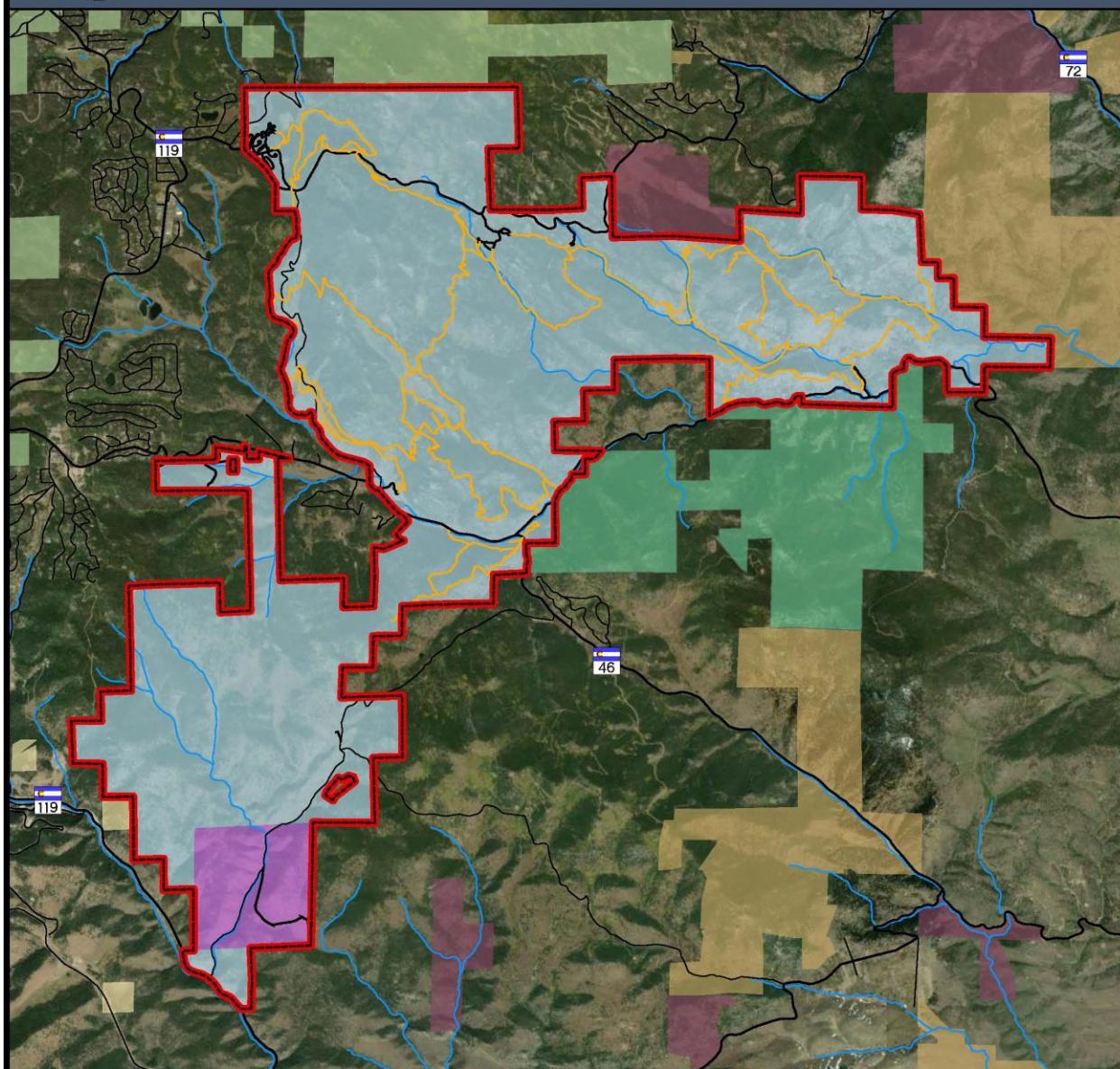
Major parcels within the Park include the former Green, Harmsen, and Strang ranches. The Strang family established their ranch in the 1930s and 1940s, totaling 1,610 acres in what is now the northeast corner of the Park. The Harmsen Ranch included over 2,000 acres in the north central part of the Park. The Harmsen family purchased it in the 1950s and are the founders of Jolly Rancher Candy.

The Green family established what is now The Green Ranch parcel, totaling nearly 2,900 acres, starting in 1917. The Green family bought land initially settled by approximately 19 different holders ranging in dates from 1869 to 1927. The Park added The Green Ranch in the 1990s as the single largest addition to the Park.

By way of a letter to the park manager in 1995, Ken and Lela Green requested that the name “Green Ranch” be preserved in memory of the family and that “Our first, and foremost hope was that it be preserved and protected from development forever, and remain in as natural a state as possible, consistent with State Park use.” Additionally, the Green family requested that The Green Ranch: 1) be a place where disabled and older people would be able to observe wildlife in its natural state, 2) possess limited hunting opportunities as needed, and 3) not contain any horseback riding facilities (i.e., visitors would need to bring in their own horses). In November 1996, the Colorado State Parks Board approved including the name “The Green Ranch” on entrance signs to this portion of GGCSP, as well as conceptual recommendations for future recreation activities and facilities. The Park also added the 640-acre State Land Board parcel leased to the Green family (as well as a transfer of Bureau of Land Management [BLM] lands) in 1994. And in January 2023 a half-acre parcel with a former fire station (to be used for storage) was added to The Green Ranch. As of 2023, The Green Ranch is closed to public access except for limited lottery hunting. See Chapter 5 regarding any future development or opening of this parcel.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Ownership

Land Ownership

- BLM
- USFS
- State Land Board
- Local (City/County)
- Private Conservation
- Raston Creek SWA (CPW)
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Park Features

- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- Park Boundary



Map 2. Land Ownership within Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Natural Resources

Due to the Park's size and proximity to other protected lands, there is a large and contiguous landscape within the Park for long-ranging mammals such as elk, mule deer, black bears, moose, and mountain lions. Approximately 40 sensitive species may occur in the Park, and several of these species have been documented over the years. Perennial drainages provide well-developed willow and riparian areas that numerous wildlife species require for foraging and migration. Forest communities dominate the Park and support many of the wildlife species within the Park. Most of the Park is located in the montane life zone, with the highest reaches of Tremont Mountain located in sub-alpine zone and the lower reaches of Ralston Creek and the bottom of Smith Hill Gulch located in the foothills life zone.

Wildlife

Amphibians and Reptiles: Most herptiles⁶ in Colorado do not occur above 8,000 feet. Five herptile species have been observed in the Park: the smooth green snake, tiger salamander, western chorus frog, western terrestrial gartersnake, and the invasive American bullfrog. Other native herptile species that have a high likelihood of occurring in the Park include the boreal chorus frog, prairie lizard, wandering gartersnake, and boreal toad. Additional herptile species (such as the Northern leopard frog, prairie rattlesnake, bullsnake, milksnake, and North American racer) could possibly occur in the Park, but are less likely to be present. Both the Northern leopard frog and boreal toad are federally protected species.

Birds: The Park supports a diverse assemblage of migratory and breeding birds. A mix of resident birds, short-distance migrant birds, and neotropical⁷ migratory birds are present in the Park, with high species diversity and population numbers indicating ample foraging and breeding habitat for these species. There are over 100 bird species that may breed in the Park with many documented nesting sites for various species. CPW has conducted raptor monitoring at the Park since 2012 and has historically documented nests for great-horned owls, northern goshawks, red-tailed hawks, and Cooper's hawks. CPW Species Activity Mapping (SAM) data indicates that potential peregrine falcon nesting sites, great blue heron foraging areas, and wild turkey ranges all overlap with the Park.

Fish: CPW stocks ponds within the Park primarily with rainbow trout but with brown trout and cutthroat trout. Brook trout inhabit many of the perennial creeks within the Park. With extensive willow establishment along Ralston Creek, the aquatic habitat in this area is in excellent condition to support fish species. Every fall, the willows drop their leaves into the water, providing the base food source for the aquatic food chain. The willows also keep the water at a cool, constant temperature, and provide cover for fish species from predators such as raccoons, great blue herons, and black bears. Throughout the Park, willow communities are in excellent condition.

⁶ Herptile: A reptile or amphibian.

⁷ Neotropical: Relating to or denoting a zoogeographical region comprising Central and South America, including the tropical southern part of Mexico and the Caribbean.

Invertebrates: Surveys conducted by a local volunteer and Colorado State University professor documented 43 species of butterflies in the Park. Two *Boloria*⁸ butterfly species (the Tolland Fritillary and Freija Fritillary) documented in the Park are not commonly found at the Park's elevation range and are therefore considered a unique asset within the Park. Overall, the Park possesses some of the richest butterfly species diversity along the Front Range, especially along the Nott Creek trails.

Mammals: GGCSF provides year-round habitat for a sizeable elk herd. Because of the low human use levels within The Green Ranch, elk utilize this area fairly heavily for calving and winter range. Moose are also believed to breed on The Green Ranch as well, as moose calves have been documented at the property. The Park also provides excellent black bear and mule deer habitat. Beavers have not been observed regularly in the area for some time, although there have been recent observations of this species on The Green Ranch.

Habitat for various bat species may be present in rock outcrops and trees in both upland coniferous and deciduous forests and riparian areas in the Park. SAM data shows that ranges for the big brown bat, long-eared myotis, long-legged myotis, red bat, silver-haired bat, and western small-footed myotis all overlap with the Park. In 2021, CPW conducted a bat acoustic survey. CPW selected a total of 6 sites for ultrasonic detectors that were deployed at various times over the summer and fall. CPW detected 4 State Wildlife Action Plan-listed species at GGCSF: the Townsend's big-eared bat (Tier 1), the fringed myotis (Tier 1), the little brown myotis (Tier 1), and the hoary bat (Tier 2). CPW detected at least 6 other species as well. CPW needs to conduct additional data analysis and future extensive surveys to fully understand the presence of bats in the Park.

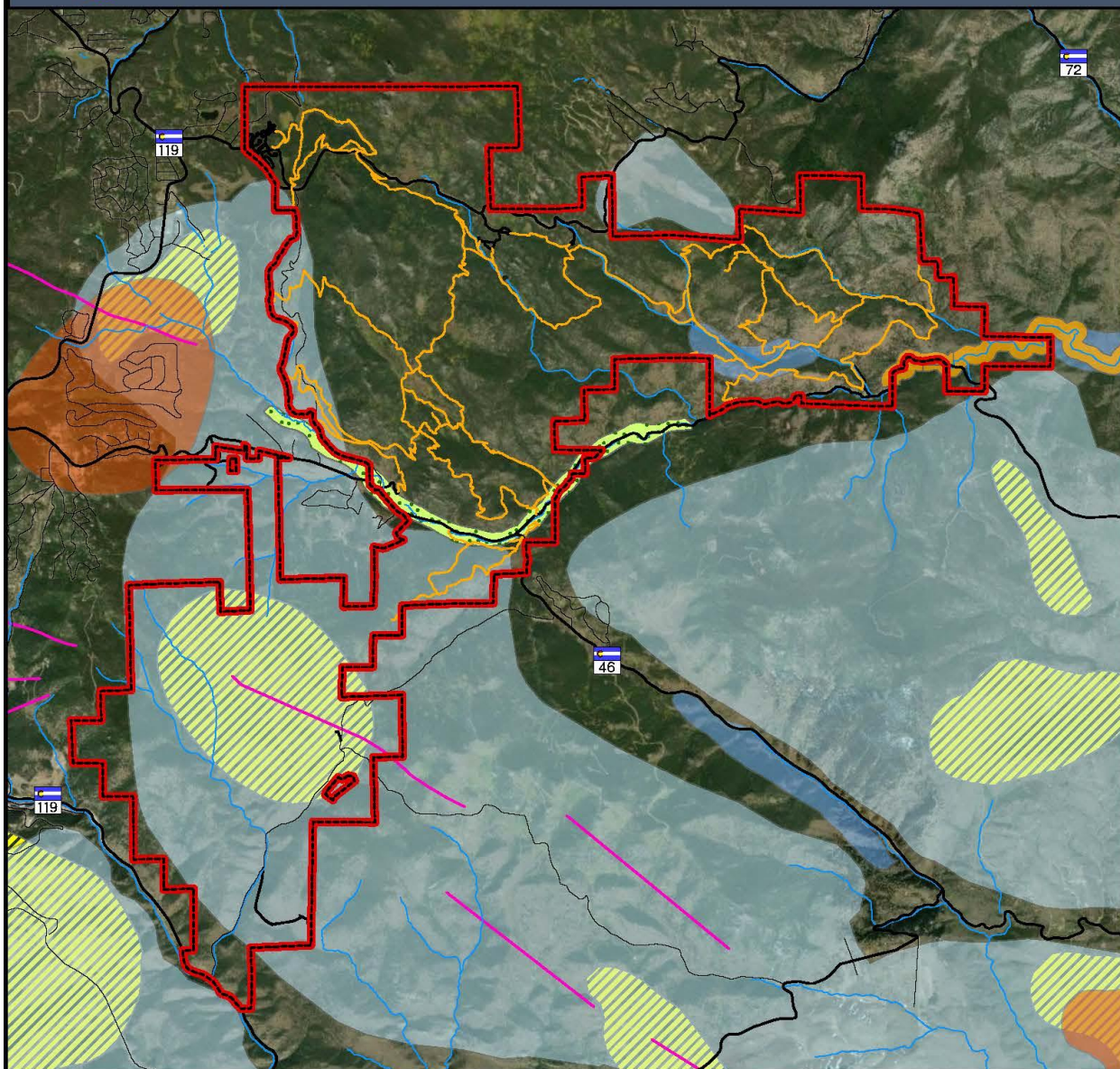
Other mammals that inhabit the Park include coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, long-tailed weasels, yellow-bellied marmots, pine squirrels, deer mice, red-backed voles, pine martens, porcupines, badgers, snowshoe hares, mountain cottontails, golden-mantled ground squirrels, chipmunks, and northern pocket gophers.

Sensitive Species of Conservation Interest: The Park may provide habitat for approximately 40 sensitive wildlife species (Map 3), 11 of which have historically been documented in the Park. Seven sensitive bird species were documented in the Park during either the 2012 migratory bird survey or other more recent surveys. Potential habitat for the CNHP-listed boreal toad and northern leopard frog exists in the Park, but neither species has been documented to date within the Park. The federally-protected Preble's meadow jumping mouse has historically been trapped near the Park and designated Critical Habitat for the species can be found along Deer Creek. The Park also provides almost 3,800 acres of suitable habitat for Canada lynx, a federally-protected large mammal, but it has not been documented on the Park.

⁸ *Boloria*: Brush-footed butterfly genus.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan

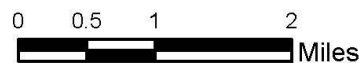


Significant Features

- Elk Production Area
- PMJM Critical Habitat
- Elk Migration Patterns
- GB Heron Foraging Area
- Elk Severe Winter Range
- Black Bear Fall Concentration
- Elk Winter Concentration Area

Park Features

- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- Park Boundary



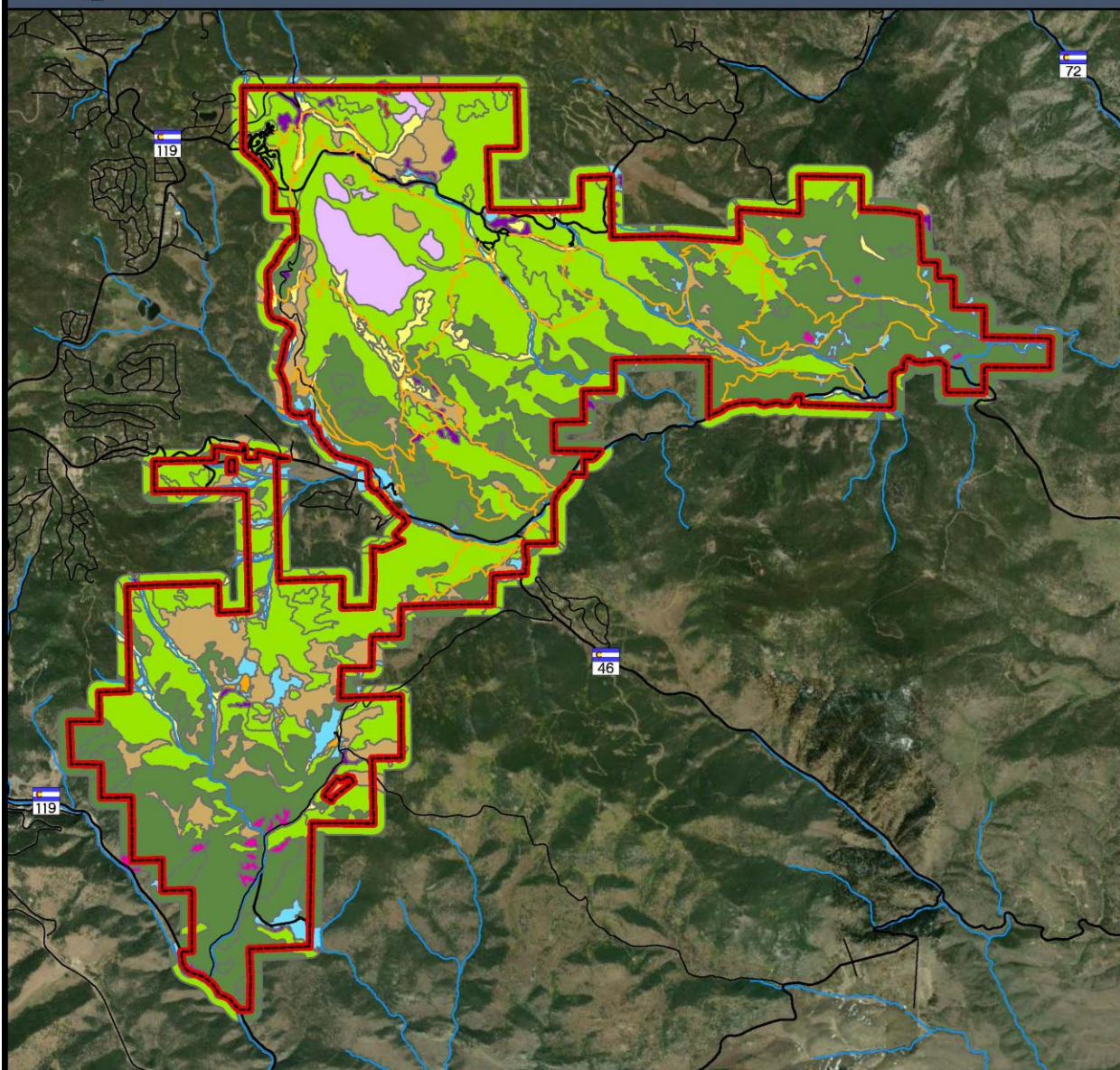
Map 3. Significant Natural Resources at Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Vegetation

GGCSP's habitat types are widespread across the Front Range, and CPW has identified 29 vegetation communities (Map 4) in the Park. Vegetation varies with elevation, aspect, and substrate and reflects past land uses such as logging, mining and ranching. Wildfires were historically a driving force that influenced the extent and structure of vegetation communities across the Park, but have been suppressed over the last century.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Vegetation Type

Vegetation Type

- Aspen
- Cliffs and Canyons
- Foothill and Mountain Grasslands
- Lodgepole Pine
- Mixed Conifer

- Ponderosa Pine
- Riparian Woodlands and Shrublands
- Limber Pine
- Upland Shrub
- Wetlands

Park Features

- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- Park Boundary



Map 4. Vegetation Communities at Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Forests: Most (83%) of the Park has been mapped as coniferous forest and woodland. Cottonwood woodlands dominate the lower elevations of the Park, while spruce often dominates the higher elevations. Lower elevation uplands primarily consist of ponderosa pine woodlands on drier slopes and Douglas fir on wetter slopes. Higher elevations consist of lodgepole pine forests as well as aspen stands either intermixed or scattered in pockets. Mesic⁹ drainages and north-facing slopes include a mix of spruce, fir (less common), and Douglas fir. Higher elevation xeric¹⁰ sites are sometimes dominated by limber pine.

Aspens are found in mixed stands and small patches throughout the Park; however, pure stands are rare, and large aspens are in poor condition due to elk browsing and succession¹¹ (which favors shade tolerant conifers). In general, aspen stands have a much higher understory diversity and more fertile soils, and support a large variety of wildlife compared to conifer stands. However, aspen stands also typically decline in condition as they age.

Past western spruce budworm and Douglas fir beetle outbreaks impacted many of the Douglas fir stands in the Park. Mountain pine beetle, Ips beetle, and dwarf mistletoe were all found in the Park at varying levels. These species are relatively under control, and trees in the Park are currently being treated to control the spread of these species. However, they could still cause impacts to forest communities if their spread worsens.

Active forest management has been critical to protecting much of the Park's natural character and should continue as outlined in the Forest Management Plan.

Meadows: Stream valleys contain meadows dominated by native and introduced grasses, as well as forbs and shrubs, including extensive willow thickets that are in good condition throughout the Park. Mountain meadows can be formed by wildfires, other disturbance, or often are likely the result of growing conditions that do not support trees (e.g., too wet, dry, or cold). These meadows support a high diversity of forbs and grasses not found elsewhere in the Park, creating landscape diversity and serving as essential wildlife habitat and potential wildfire fuel breaks.

Vegetation Condition: Map 5 shows the overall vegetation condition throughout the Park as of 2015, most of which (83%) is rated "good" and 14% rated "excellent." A very small percentage of the Park (3% or 301 acres) was rated "fair," and no acreage was rated as "poor." Condition ratings are a combination of exotic species presence, community health, structure, and species diversity. Sixteen noxious weed species have been identified in the Park. The Weed Management Plan outlines weed inventory and associated management recommendations.

Rare Plants and Communities: Based on background research, the location of the Park, historical occurrences, and baseline vegetation surveys, the Park may provide habitat for 9 rare plant species and 10 rare plant communities (Map 6) have been documented. A rare community does not indicate a rare plant but rather a rare association of multiple plants growing together.

⁹ Mesic: Of an environment or habitat - containing a moderate amount of moisture.

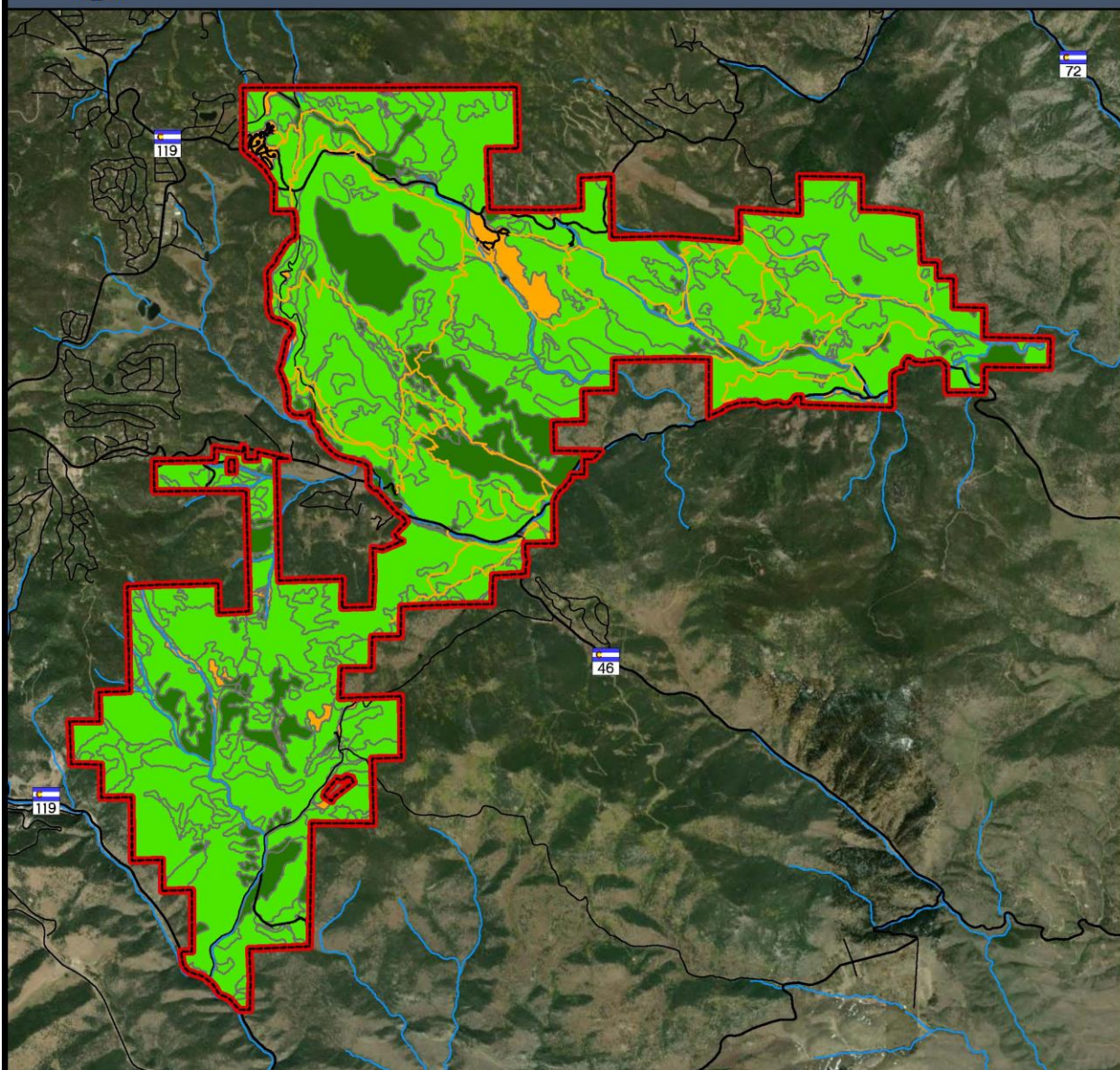
¹⁰ Xeric: Of an environment or habitat - containing little moisture; very dry.

¹¹ Succession: the orderly and predictable change in the dominant species of forest plants.

Documented rare plants include: alpine aster (found around 8,600 feet in aspen forests), Sprengel's sedge (found in a variety of habitats), broad-leaved twayblade (found in cool ravines and subalpine forests), and pale blue-eyed grass (found in wet meadows when standing water is present from late June to early July).



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Vegetation Condition

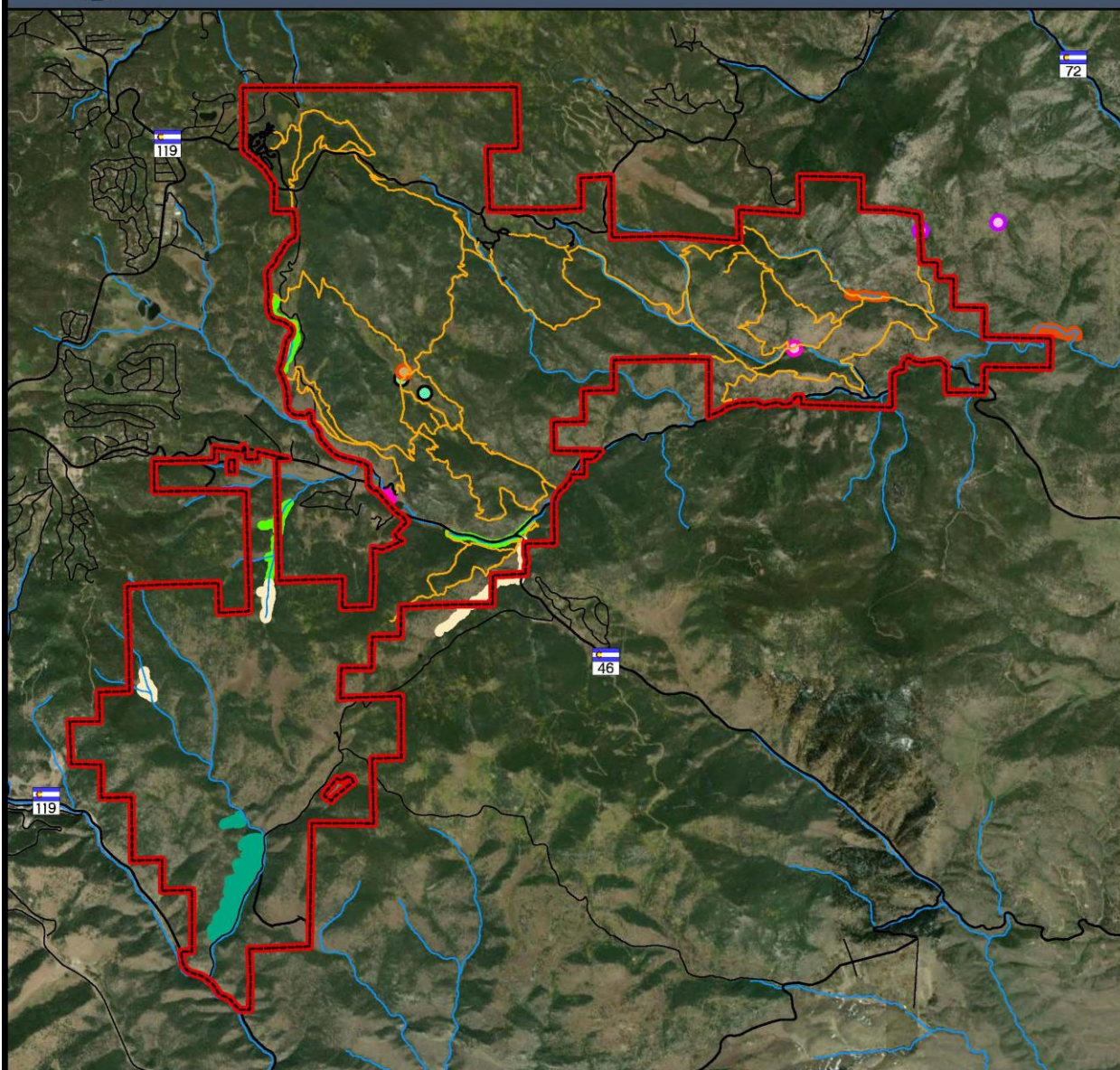
Vegetation Condition	Park Features
Excellent	Trails
Good	Roads
Fair	Streams
Poor	Park Boundary



Map 5. Vegetation Condition at Golden Gate Canyon State Park



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Rare Plants

Rare Plant Communities

- Diamondleaf Willow / Beaked Sedge
- Mixed Mountain Shrublands
- Montane Riparian Forest
- Montane Riparian Willow Carr
- Montane Willow Carr

Rare Plants

- Broad-leaved Twayblade
- Fiddleleaf Twinpod
- Pale Blue-eyed-grass
- Sprengel's Sedge

Park Features

- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- Park Boundary



Map 6. Rare Plants and Rare Plant Communities at Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Water and Wetland Resources

Ralston Creek begins about 3 miles west of the Park on Fairburn Mountain in Arapaho National Forest. As the creek flows east through the Park, it picks up water from several unnamed drainages, including those from Frazer Meadow and Dude's Fishing Hole as well as Nott Creek, Sawmill Gulch, and Deer Creek. Ralston Creek was dammed to create Kriley and Slough Ponds in 1964 and Ranch Ponds in 1967. Other ponds include Dude's Fishing Hole (built by homesteaders) and an unnamed pond in Forgotten Valley. Together these 5 ponds total about 20 surface acres.

Ralston Creek and its associated ponds make up a healthy mountain stream system providing fish and wildlife habitat as well as angling opportunities. Other creeks and streams act as sediment filters, assist with flood retention, and support rich plant and animal communities. Numerous springs and seeps provide various microhabitats, and the quality of groundwater is expected to be in good condition throughout the Park.

Map 7 depicts the significant surface water resources in the Park.

- Deer Creeks drains into warm, south-facing slopes after summer thunderstorms.
- Nott Creek drains approximately 2.75 square miles (mostly on the Park but some area from surrounding private land and National Forest land) after spring snowmelt and summer thunderstorms.
- Ralston Creek drains approximately 3 square miles over 2,000 feet of elevation drop.
- Macy Gulch drains approximately 2 square miles of steep, heavily wooded areas during spring runoff.
- Smith Hill Gulch drains from spring runoff and catches a significant amount of sediment from Smith Hill Road.

Kriley Pond (4 acres in size) is the largest pond in the Park and is heavily fished for stocked rainbow trout. Slough Pond is about a half-acre in size, and the Visitor Center's Show Pond is about a third of an acre in size. Erosion upstream of Ralston Creek threatens the longevity of these ponds, but management of visitor use through raised walkways and piers helps to protect the ponds and their associated vegetation. Sedimentation of Ranch Ponds is also a major concern.

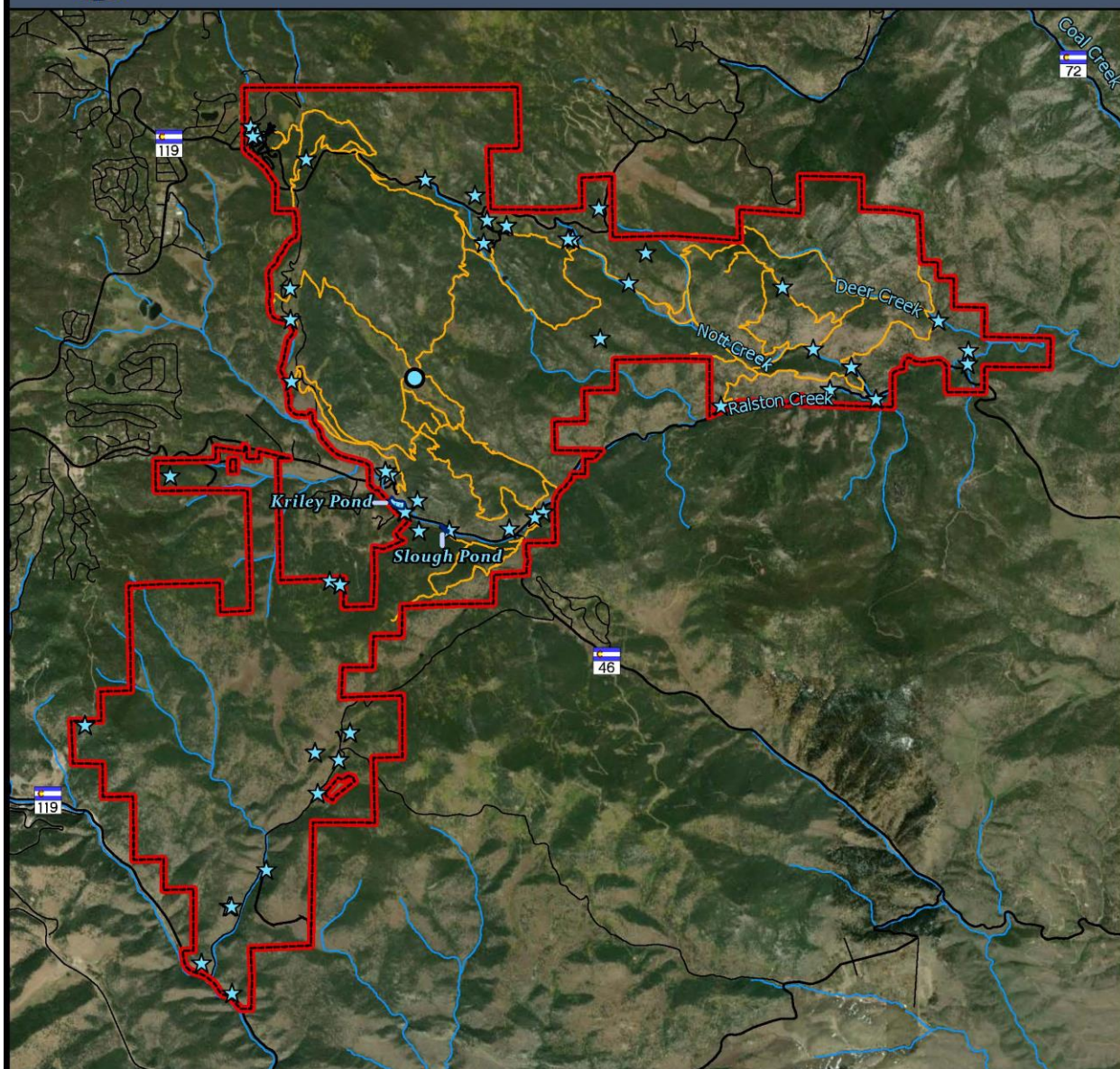
Human Uses: Ralston Creek flows are intercepted and regulated for irrigation and domestic use in Ralston Reservoir (managed by Denver Water) approximately 7 miles east of the Park. Early spring runoff is captured and slowly released over the course of the summer to supply crops and other agricultural uses with a consistent water supply. The Green Ranch once had shallow irrigation ditches used by homesteaders; these meadows are slowly recovering as agricultural production has ceased in the area. In the past, local mining activities significantly impacted surrounding drainages, but the area that is now contained within the Park lacked enough valuable gold to continue operations.

The Green Ranch held water rights for springs that were decreed for indoor, domestic use only. However, these rights were abandoned in 2020 due to lack of use, nonexistent records, and inability to physically locate the springs. In order to take over these domestic spring

rights, CPW would only be able to repurpose the amount of water that was historically used. However, without records or evidence of use of these rights, there is little ground for protest. Chapter 5 discusses the current efforts related to water augmentation plans for the Park. See the Operations and Maintenance section below regarding water and sewage treatment in the Park.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Water Resources

Water Features

- ★ Wells
- Seeps/Springs
- ▨ Lake/Pond

Park Features

- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- ▭ Park Boundary



Map 7. Water Resources of Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Geology

Geologic features in the Park are relatively undisturbed and in good condition. This resource is a major attraction of the Park for visitors. Universities and professional societies take field trips to see and study the geologic features in 3 large fault zones within the Park, as these 1.7 billion-year-old rocks provide important information about Colorado's earliest geologic history. Additionally, the 60 to 65 million-year-old dikes and mineral deposits in the Park are of interest because they provide information about how Colorado's ore deposits formed.

The current geology and soil conditions within the Park are likely similar to those that existed approximately 300 years ago. Possible changes to soils and/or geology include stream channels becoming slightly more incised or altering their course within their floodplain and the further development of soil from the granitic bedrock. Additionally, excess sediment has likely been deposited in the Park's waterways from accelerated erosion along trails, roads, and weakened stream banks. Other than these few changes to the soil and geology, it is likely that the abiotic¹² characteristics currently existing in the Park pose similar challenges to those experienced by early Euro-American settlers in the area. These challenges include the lack of gently sloping land on which to build structures and an abundance of exceedingly shallow soils that are susceptible to erosion. Trail use is currently the most significant impact on geology from Park activities.

Significant geological hazards in the Park (Map 8) include radon, faults, flooding, and rock falls. Landslides also present a minor hazard. The Park should avoid building major structures on faults or in shear zones, floodplains, or rock fall hazard areas. However, although these issues are present, they are unchanging and Park staff have little ability to limit their impacts other than having visitors avoid potentially hazardous areas.

Soils

Soils in the Park reflect the underlying geology typical of the Colorado Front Range. Generally, soils are shallow, sandy loams or loamy sands that have developed from the underlying gneiss, schist, and granodiorite¹³. These shallow, decomposing granite soils are susceptible to erosion, particularly where vegetation cover is sparse. Wide differences in slope, aspect, and elevation throughout the Park provide for corresponding differences in the degree of soil development. Loamy alluvium and colluvium¹⁴ soils have developed in flood

¹² Abiotic: physical rather than biological; not derived from living organisms.

¹³ Gneiss: Common and widely distributed type of metamorphic rock. It is formed by high-temperature and high-pressure metamorphic processes acting on formations composed of igneous or sedimentary rocks.

Schist: A coarse-grained metamorphic rock which consists of layers of different minerals and can be split into thin irregular plates.

Granodiorite: A coarse-grained intrusive igneous rock similar to granite.

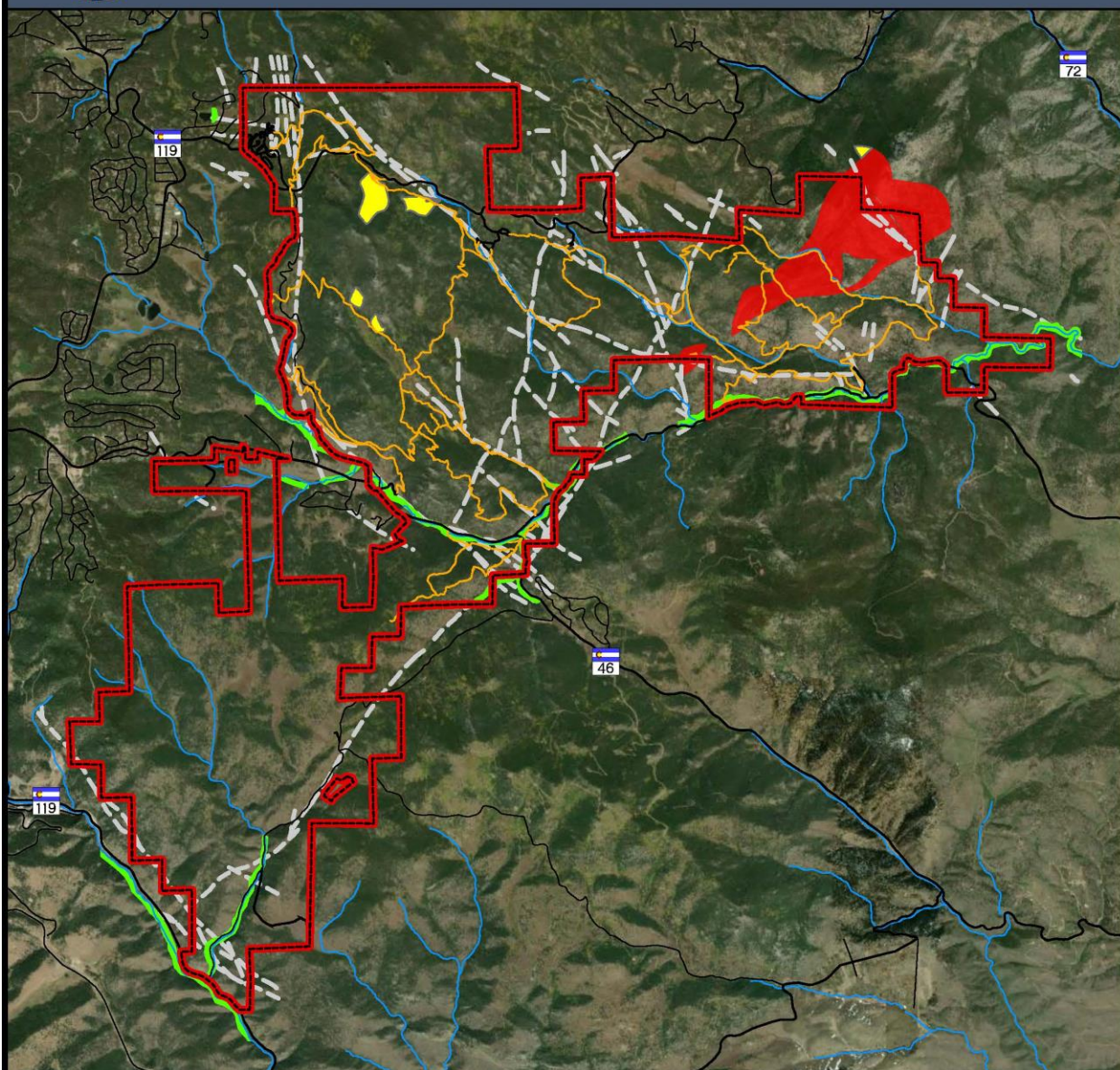
¹⁴ Alluvium: Loose clay, silt, sand, or gravel that has been deposited by running water in a stream bed, on a floodplain, in an alluvial fan or beach, or in similar settings.

Colluvium: Material (loose, unconsolidated sediments) which accumulates at the foot of a steep slope by either rainwash, sheetwash, slow continuous downslope creep, or a variable combination of these processes.

plains associated with drainages as well as in upland meadows. There are several locations on The Green Ranch with peat accumulations, which is very rare for the Front Range.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Management Zones

Rockfall Hazard

Severe

Floods

100-year floodplain

Radon

High

Fault Lines

Park Features

Trails

Roads

Streams

Park Boundary



Map 8. Geohazards at Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Threats to Natural Resources

Increasing visitation is one of the greatest management concerns for the Park, as this trend is impacting operations, staff, budget, facilities, and infrastructure, as well as the visitors themselves. Chapter 5 discusses efforts to address these concerns. While it can be challenging to directly tie any particular use or cause to changes in natural resources conditions, the following threats are at least partially a reason for concern.

Social Trails: Many non-designated “social trails” exist within the Park. These are mostly located around campgrounds, where visitors have created shortcuts to facilities or nearby official, designated trails. They are also present along lake shorelines where people go off-trail to find a good fishing or sightseeing spot. The riparian and wetland system can likely support some of these trails without serious degradation; however, there can still be visible impacts on the vegetation, water quality, and stream bank erosion in these areas. Social trails are noticeably impacting some areas in the Park in terms of vegetation loss, erosion (which exacerbates vegetation loss), and the spread of weeds. Generally, greater impacts and threats to resources are associated with social trails than with designated trails.

Noxious Weeds: The presence of noxious weeds in certain areas of the Park is of concern due to their known ability to displace native vegetation, reduce biodiversity, and degrade wildlife habitat. Riparian habitats are generally in fair condition, with areas away from trails and recreational zones in good condition. In riparian areas adjacent to old hay meadow operations, such as in Frazer Meadow and the meadows in the upper part of The Green Ranch, non-native agricultural grasses dominate the vegetation adjacent to creeks and streams. Noxious weed species tend to colonize wet areas more easily, making riparian and wetland habitats more susceptible to noxious weed populations. However, willow species are beginning to reclaim some of these creeks. With increased willow presence, more suitable habitat will be available for fish species and amphibians in the future.

Other Threats: Riparian and wetland areas surrounding high visitation areas, such as Kriley Pond, have experienced human-caused impacts including erosion, soil compaction, and vegetation trampling. Climate change, population growth, and urban development all compound the impacts of increasing visitation. Drought impacts riparian willow carrs¹⁵ (currently in excellent condition) and wet meadows/shrublands in good condition. Due to a lack of historic/recent wildfires in this area, the resulting high density of timber in the Park invites disease (ex., western gall rust), insect infestation, and catastrophic wildfires.

Cultural Resources

Many groups have called the lands that are now part of GGCSF home. These include the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Native American tribes. Intensive surveys of other parts of the Foothills, such as large-scale surveys on the Pike National Forest to the south of the Park, indicate that aboriginal archeological sites are relatively rare in the Foothills and are often

¹⁵ Willow carrs: Riparian shrublands that occur as narrow bands or broad shrublands in montane altitudes (8,000 to 10,000 feet) and into the upper reaches of subalpine areas (11,500 feet). Source: <https://conps.org/project/subalpine-willow-carrs/>.

limited to temporary hunting camps. To explain this phenomenon, archeologists have suggested that the Foothills zone was largely “passed through” by Native Americans traveling between the hogbacks along the edge of the eastern plains to their destination (the high country), where game such as elk and bighorn could be hunted using elaborate game-drive systems. The hogbacks were an attractive area for winter camps due to the warming effect of Chinook winds¹⁶ and the many rock shelters for protection from the elements. As a result, the Foothills, standing between the hogbacks winter camps and the high country, were likely traveled through rather quickly with no need for a formal camp; any overnight stays for hunting purposes would have left little trace behind. And while no prehistoric archeological sites have been documented in the Park, it does not mean that their presence did not play a significant role in the history of this region.

Homesteading

After the removal of the primary inhabitants of the region, the land was used for resource extraction, homesteading and transportation. The land known today as GGCSP starting in 1859 to 1860, who were flocking to the newly established Black Hawk-Central City Mining District. It is important to note that these settlements were illegal, as these lands were still legally part of the Ute tribe’s territory.

In 1859, the steep Golden Gate Canyon Toll Road opened, providing access to thousands of miners prospecting in the foothills. In 1860, a stagecoach service opened between Denver and the mines in Black Hawk and Central City. One of the stage stops was located on what is now The Green Ranch at the upper end of Smith Hill Canyon.

Despite being close to the mining district and within the Mineral Belt, prospecting endeavors proved unsuccessful. In fact, some of the earliest Euro-American settlers of the Park were unsuccessful miners who turned to making a different living by providing timber, beef, and vegetables to those working in the mining industry. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed each household to take up to 160 acres “for improvement” – for setting up farming or ranching, typically – that encouraged people to permanently settle in the area. Most homesteading took place from the 1860s to 1900. However, it is important to note that meeting homesteading requirements often took more than 5 years, so land parcels in the area may have been settled even earlier. While finding suitable land was challenging, successful homesteading often meant the establishment of farms and ranches that lasted for generations. Approximately 61 homesteading families lived in what is now the Park, and many areas of GGCSP are named after them.

Historic Sites

There are a number of historic sites eligible for listing on the National Register for Historic Preservation in the Park (Map 9):

- Bootlegger’s Cabin (listed on the State Register)

¹⁶ Chinook winds: Prevailing warm, generally westerly winds in western North America; there are two types (Coastal Chinooks and interior Chinooks).

- Belcher Ranch
- John Frazer Homestead listed on the State Register)
- Reverend Tippett's Cabin
- Tallman/Forgotten Valley/Wickstrom Ranch
- Philips Ranch

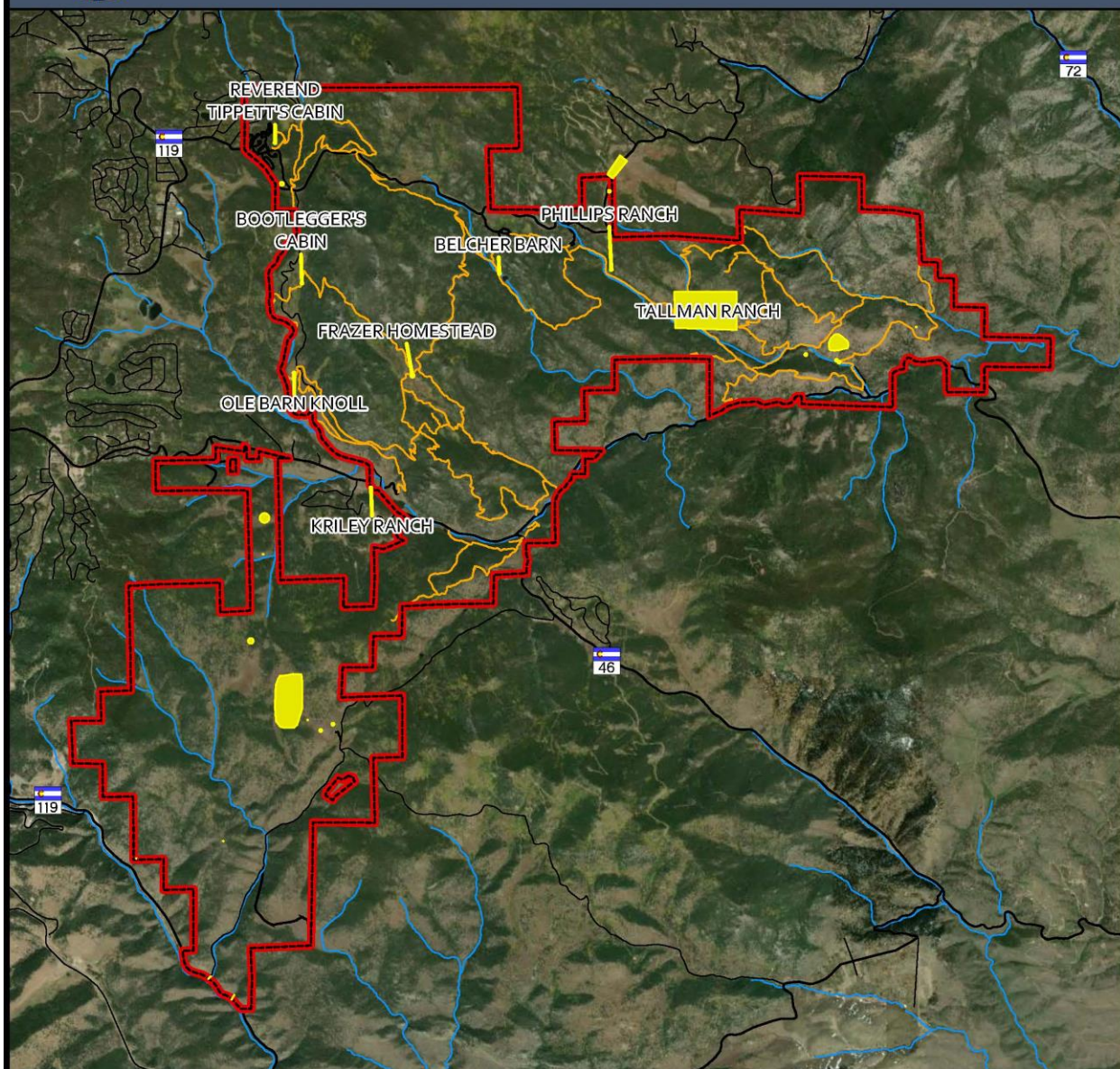
All historic structures located in the Park are fragile and considered hazardous to visitors. Weathering, the age of the structures, and visitor activity are all potential threats to human health and safety.

In the 1920s, E.C. Regnier and Roger E. Ewalt founded the Lincoln Hills Resort located just north of what is now GGCSF to provide a safe, relaxing space for Black families to recreate in Colorado. The location, along a stretch of South Boulder Creek notable for its exceptional trout fishing, offered easy, inexpensive transportation from Denver by railroad or automobile. As the sole Black resort in the Mountain West, Lincoln Hills attracted entrepreneurs, pastors, doctors, and other professionals interested in securing a Black space among a predominantly white leisure culture.

The Resource Stewardship Plan (Appendix C) contains more detailed information and resources on the history of the area and what is now the Park. It will be used to craft how the Park tells its story in any publications, signs, exhibits etc. The cultural sensitivity map (Map 10) indicates where it is necessary to undertake identification efforts for any unknown cultural resources prior to ground-disturbing projects. There are 3 types of sensitivity areas in the Park: high, moderate, and low. The Park determined these zones based on site density (number of sites in close proximity), site eligibility (inclusion in the National or State Registers), the date of any last assessments and surveys, and the natural environment that would have influenced prehistoric and historic human activity such as slope, vegetation, and water.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Cultural Resources

Park Features

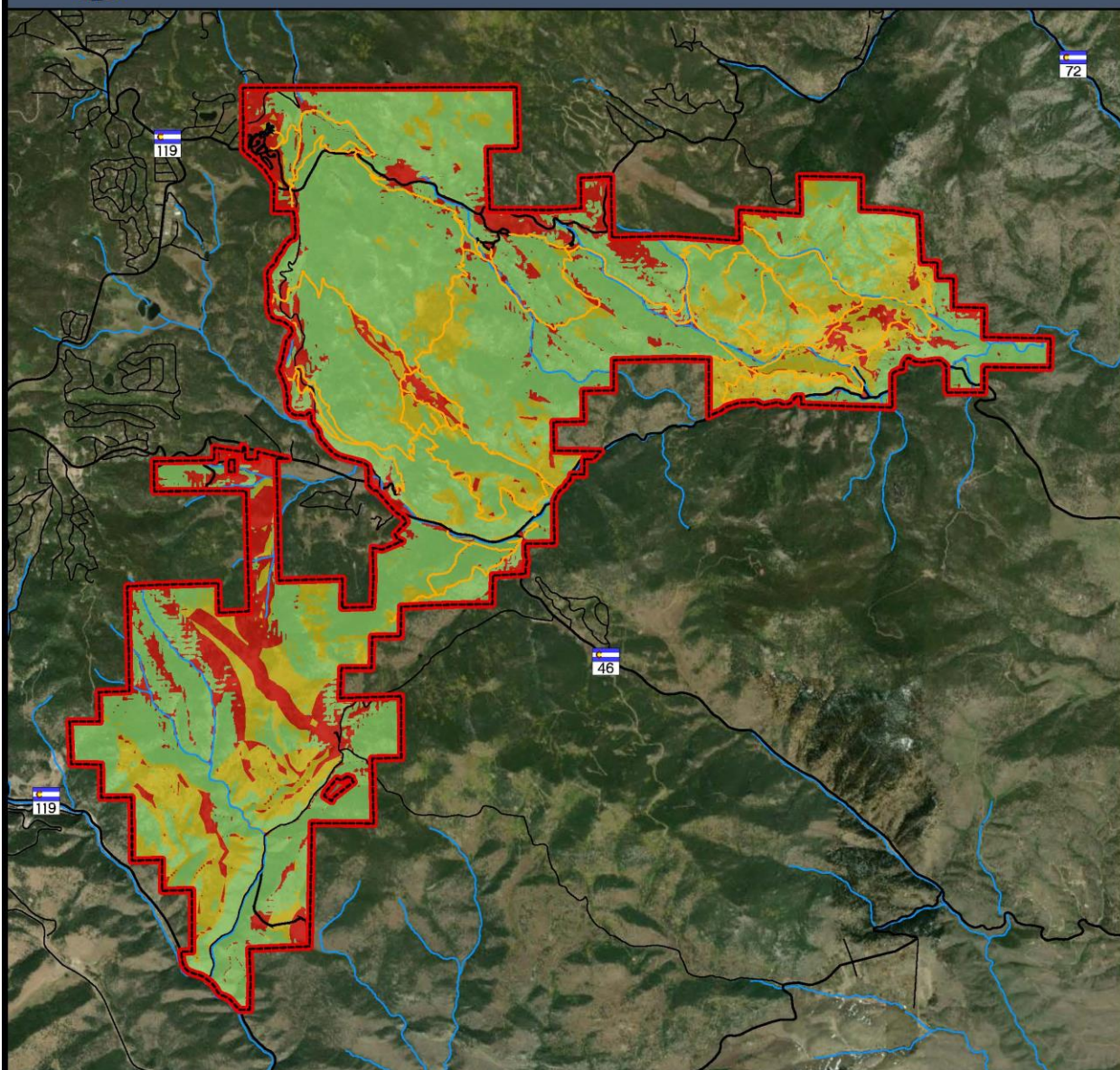
-  Cultural Sites
-  Trails
-  Roads
-  Streams
-  Park Boundary



Map 9. Cultural Sites at Golden Gate Canyon State Park



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Cultural Sensitivity

- | Sensitivity Zone | Park Features |
|------------------|---------------|
| High | Trails |
| Moderate | Roads |
| Low | Streams |
| | Park Boundary |



Map 10. Cultural Sensitivity Ratings at Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Scenic Resources

GGCSP offers excellent opportunities for sightseeing and wildlife viewing near urban areas. At several points in the Park (including City Lights Ridge and Windy Point), visitors can experience excellent views of the plains.

Panorama Point Scenic Overlook offers spectacular views of over 100 miles of Colorado's Continental Divide throughout the year. The Larkin Family donated the overlook to serve as a memorial to their son, Kenneth A. Larkin, and is one of the most popular attractions in the Park.

Historically, Panorama Point was a popular location to hold wedding ceremonies, and was used for over 20 weddings per year during the peak of its popularity. However, the increase in Park visitation over the last few years created logistical challenges to "saving" this area for reservations and displacing other users. Consequently, as of 2023, all special event reservations will be for the Red Barn Area only.

Recreation Resources

GGCSP offers a variety of recreation opportunities within a 1-hour drive of the Denver metro area. Over 35 miles of multiple-use trails await outdoor enthusiasts, providing access to high mountain meadows, lush streamside corridors, rocky peaks, and dense forests. The Park hosts various special events and activities throughout the year, including trail races and Boy Scouts of America Klondikes.¹⁷

The Visitor Center is open almost year-round, and is staffed by CPW employees and volunteers to answer questions from visitors. There are displays about the Park's wildlife and plants, a topographical scale model of the Park, and a retail area with books, maps, shirts, and other items for sale. There are also public restrooms as well as administrative offices. Directly outside, visitors can enjoy the Wilbur and Nellie Larkin Memorial Trail that goes around a trout show pond and is accessible for people with physical disabilities.

Trails

The eleven trails in GGCSP are each named after a different animal (see Table 1 below for a full list). Trailhead parking areas are easily accessible from the main roads within the Park. While some trails only allow hiking, multi-use trails allow for mountain biking and horseback riding. Ample parking space for horse trailers is provided at the Nott Creek trailhead located near the Red Barn Group Picnic Area and at Kriley Overlook above Kriley Pond. Dogs are welcome on all trails in the Park as long as they are on a 6-foot (or shorter) leash and their waste is disposed of properly.

In winter, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing is allowed on all trails and some roads. Mountain Base Road is closed to vehicle traffic during the winter season, making this an ideal place to ski or snowshoe with adequate snowfall. Visitors can access the road from either Highway 46 on the south side of the Park or off Gap Road on the north side of the Park.

¹⁷ Boy Scouts of America Klondike: An annual event held by some Boy Scouts of America and Scouts Canada districts during the winter months and is based on the heritage of the Klondike Gold Rush.

Parking for winter visitors is available at Kriley Overlook or at the top of Mountain Base Road. The level of difficulty for these winter activities varies from easy to moderate with a 1,000 foot elevation gain from south to north. For beginners, many of the roads and camping loops in Reverend’s Ridge are closed and not plowed in the winter, making this area an ideal play park for beginners. Additionally, the terrain in this area is mostly flat, and the snow generally holds in this area throughout the entire winter season.

Table 1. Golden Gate Canyon State Park’s Trails

Trail Name	Permitted Users	Total Distance	Degree of Difficulty	Usage
Beaver	Hikers only	2.3 mile loop	Most Difficult	Moderate
Black Bear	Hikers only	2.8 miles one-way	Most Difficult	High
Blue Grouse	Hikers, horses, and mountain bikers	0.8 miles one-way	Moderate	High
Buffalo	Hikers, horses, and mountain bikers	1.2 miles one-way	Moderate	Medium
Burro	Hikers only	4.5 mile loop	Difficult	Moderate
Coyote	Hikers only	2 miles one-way	Most Difficult	Moderate
Horseshoe	Hikers only	1.8 miles one-way	Moderate	Very High
Mountain Lion	Hikers, horses, and mountain bikers	6.7 mile loop	Difficult	High
Mule Deer	Hikers, horses, and mountain bikers	9.1 mile loop	Moderate	Medium
Raccoon	Hikers, horses, and mountain bikers	3.5 mile loop	Moderate	Very High
Snowshoe Hare	Hikers, horses, and mountain bikers	3 mile loop	Difficult	High

Camping, Cabins, and Yurts

Several overnight options are available to Park visitors, including developed RV sites and tent camping, backpack tent camping, group camping, cabins and yurts, and a guest house.

- Reverend’s Ridge: The Park built this campground in 1971 and opened in 1972, and consists of 97 tent and RV sites. Staff completed a \$1 million renovation effort in the late 1990s to improve the visitor experience and assist with increased visitor demand for the Park. Park staff enhanced the camping experience at this campground with the addition of electrical hook-ups, a new shower facility, and accessible sites and facilities. This campground provides various types of campsites, with each site including a picnic table and fire grill. There are 59 sites with electrical hookups that accommodate RVs/campers, vehicles, rooftop tents, and ground tents. There are also 38 tent-only sites. Facilities include flush toilets, showers, laundry facilities, and a dump station. The wastewater treatment facility for this site is a critical but unseen part of the operations in this area (see the “Water Systems” section below for more information on this facility). Some sites are available during the winter season, but the shower building and dump station are closed during winter. Campfire presentations and kids programs are scheduled at Reverend’s Ridge Campground Amphitheater on weekends during the summer.
 - Cabins and Yurts: There is a 2-night minimum stay required for cabins and yurts in GGCSF; these accommodations are available year-round via a reservation system. There are 5 cabins and 2 yurts and each of these lodgings can accommodate up to 6 people. All cabins and yurts have 2 bunk beds (1 twin-size and 1 double-size with mattresses but no bedding provided). Each cabin and yurt also has a natural gas heater, electric lights, table and chairs, counter top, and closet rack for storage (cabins only), and 2 to 3 electrical outlets. A cooler for food is recommended as there is no refrigerator provided in any of these lodgings. During the summer, flush toilets, showers, and running water are provided at Reverend’s Ridge Campground. During the winter, only flush toilets and running water are provided. A campfire ring and stand-up grill for cooking are available outside of each cabin and yurt. Pets are permitted in 4 of the cabins and 1 of the yurts for an extra fee.
- Aspen Meadows Campground: This campground opened in 1978 and sits at an elevation of 9,000 to 9,200 feet. There are 35 tent-only sites at this campground, which each include high-use tent pads, tables, and fire rings. Additionally, each site has vault toilets and water pumps. Two sites are specifically designed for horseback riders. This campground is closed during the winter.
- Group Camping: Rifleman Phillips Group Campground is a tent-only campground located in a 50-year-old stand of lodgepole pine and can accommodate up to 75 people. Facilities include picnic tables, fire rings, and areas for dispersed camping. There is a hand pump well and a vault toilet available as well. The Works Ranch is a secluded group tent camping area with a 6-person cabin available as well. Up to 30 people can stay at the site at a time (6 in the cabin and 24 tent campers). Amenities at this site include bunk beds, electricity, tables and chairs, fire rings, picnic tables, grills, vault toilets, water, and 2 large tent pads. A 2-night minimum stay is required, and pets are allowed with an extra fee.
- Harmsen Ranch Guest House: For groups of 8 people or less, the 4-bedroom, 2-bathroom guest house offers a full kitchen, linens, and gas fireplaces. Along with the guest house, 2 electrical RV sites are available. Horses are allowed for an extra fee; there is a horse shelter and a corral area with water provided. Pets and group events are prohibited.

- **Backcountry Camping:** There are 4 backcountry shelters and 20 backcountry tent sites in GGCSF. The shelters are built in the Appalachian trail-hut tradition as 3-sided structures with a roof and wooden floor. The shelters can sleep up to 6 people, and tent sites can accommodate 3 tents with a maximum of 6 people. Reservations are required and can be obtained through the Park’s reservation system. Fires are not allowed at these sites, and provided bear boxes should be used to store food and trash.

Table 2. Summary of Campground Facilities

Location	Number of Camping Sites by Type	Toilets	Other Facilities
Reverend's Ridge Campground	59 with hookups, 38 tents only	1 vault, 4 flush	Campground office, shower and laundry facilities, outdoor amphitheater, 5 Cabins, 2 Yurts
Aspen Meadows Campground	35 tents only	4 vaults	Hand pump wells for water
Backcountry Sites	20 tents only	2 (new in 2023, Deer Creek and Frazer Meadow)	Tent pad, no drinking water
Backcountry Shelters	4 shelters	None	No drinking water
Rifleman Phillips Campground	Accommodates up to 75 people	1 vault	Hand pump wells for water

Picnicking

There are 125 scenic picnic sites throughout the Park. Several sites are located along Ralston Creek on Crawford Gulch Road and along Mountain Base Road at Old Barn Knoll and Bootleg Bottom. Sites are available on a first come, first served basis and include a table and charcoal grills for cooking. However, large groups (up to 150 people) can reserve the Red Barn Group Picnic Area, which has sheltered picnic tables, large grills, vault toilets, and electricity as well as a playground, volleyball court, and horseshoe pit. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible picnic tables are located at Kriley Pond, Bootleg Bottom, Panorama Point, and Bridge Creek.

Rock Climbing

There are multiple rock climbing opportunities throughout the Park but in most cases, require hiking into the backcountry. The Park does not maintain climbing areas for rock falls, nor

routes for fixed hardware, and makes no representation or warranties regarding the safety, reliability, or suitability for use of any fixed anchors or other hardware currently existing or installed in the future. It is unlawful to place fixed or permanent climbing hardware in rock outcrops or walls without a permit obtained from the Park Manager.

Angling

Fishing is permitted in any stream or pond in the Park except in the Visitor Center show pond. A Colorado fishing license is required for fishing activities in the Park; licenses are available for purchase at the Visitor Center. The daily bag limit at GGCSF is 4 fish. The Park’s ponds include Kriley, Slough, Dude's Fishing Hole, Forgotten Valley and Ranch Ponds. There is an ADA-accessible fishing pier (which the Park extended for an improved user experience in 2022) at Kriley Pond. Ponds are stocked regularly during the spring and summer (Table 3). However, Ranch Ponds has not been stocked in recent years, as sedimentation in Ranch Ponds has resulted in poor water quality, and therefore is not included in the table below.

Table 3. Fish Stocking Records from April 2020 - January 2022

Pond	Species	Number of Individuals by Year		
		<i>April - June 2020</i>	<i>April - June 2021</i>	<i>January 2022</i>
Slough	Rainbow Trout	2,425	2,428	n/a
Kriley	Rainbow Trout	7,325	7,415	n/a
	Rainbow x Cutthroat Trout (hybrid)	202	n/a	n/a
	Snake River Cutthroat Trout		n/a	500
Forgotten Valley	Brown Trout	1,000	1,003	n/a
Dudes Fishing Hole	Brown Trout	500	531	n/a

Hunting

Hunting is allowed on the Jefferson County portion of the Park starting the Tuesday after Labor Day through the Friday before Memorial Day. Prior to 2022, hunters were required to sign in and out daily at the Visitor Center, and the Park limited hunting to 35 hunters per day. Per current regulations, a reservation is now required and may be made up to 14 days in advance (until 12pm the day before hunting). Hunting reservation slots are limited to 15 hunters per day.

The Green Ranch portion of GGCSF is open from September to November to allow limited access to elk hunting for wildlife management purposes. An annual lottery drawing is held on August 1st from applications received by July 31st of that same year. If chosen, hunters must attend an orientation class. For the 2022 seasons, up to 60 elk hunters will be allowed into the area during regular Colorado elk seasons, with a maximum of 10 hunters in each of the 6

seasons. To reach wildlife management goals, 7 cow elk and 3 bull elk hunter use permits will be awarded for each season, with the exception of archery. Archery hunters may take either a bull or a cow elk if they possess an over-the-counter either-sex archery license.

Interpretation and Environmental Education

GGCSP is a premier outdoor setting in which to explore and learn about Colorado's mountain environment. Interpretive exhibits at the Visitor Center promote an understanding and appreciation of the Park's environment and provide opportunities to learn about the entire State Park System. Panorama Point's interpretive panels promote the various watchable wildlife and scenic aspects of the Park. Additionally, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) funding has supported various educational programming efforts in the Park, such as the Junior Rangers and campfire programs. Additional interpretive facilities and programs are listed below.

Interpretive Facilities

The Visitor Center is the primary location for interpretive information. It contains interpretive displays, wildlife mounts, historical information, a 3D model of the park area, and a map and interpretive signs of the park that lists the variety of recreation opportunities available for all visitors. There is also the Visitor Center Show Pond, where people can feed and learn about trout. There is signage present at the Visitor Center along interpretive nature trail, the Reverend's Ridge interpretive nature trail, Panorama Point, Greenfield Meadow, Frazer Meadow, Forgotten Valley, Dude's Fishing Hole, Harmsen Ranch Guest House and trailheads. These signs help educate visitors on the nature and historical events that happened over the years at the park. The Visitor Center also sells informative products, such as natural and culture resource books and guides.

Interpretive Programs

As mentioned previously, GOCO funding supports several educational programming efforts in GGCSP. Additionally, the Park hosts a variety of other interpretive programs. A Junior Ranger program is available at the park for kids ages 8 through 12. This program provides an educational opportunity for children who are interested in learning about Colorado's natural resources and the history behind the park. Once completed a participant can sign and recite a pledge and receive a Junior Ranger bandage and patch. The 'I Hiked Golden Gate' program is designed to promote hiking in the park. It gives visitors an incentive to return to hike different trails. A visitor will receive a card to keep track of their hiking mileage and at a certain mile mark they will be awarded with a plaque of their name and mileage that will be displayed inside the Visitor Center. At the campground office, we also have interpretive educational backpacks that people can check out. Inside these backpacks are tools and guides to help visitors be able to explore the park better.

Guided interpretive programs are generally done on weekends throughout the summer season. The park usually has one seasonal interpretive naturalist that plans these events and will help facilitate them. Volunteers also help out with these programs from time to time.

These programs include; wildlife safety, arts and crafts projects using nature, campfire programs and storytelling, learning about animal skins, skulls and diets and trail bingo.

Interpretive Themes/Messages

The following subjects focus on the unique features of the Park and should be developed further into interpretive themes and messages as part of programming, communications, and signage. The Resource Stewardship Plan (Appendix C) may be referenced for more information on GGCSP's natural and cultural resources to aid in program development.

- **Unique features of GGCSP**
 - **Geology:** The Park's diverse geological features provide a window into the early geologic history of Colorado, as well as an understanding of the state's unique and economically important mineral resources.
 - An interpretive brochure or signs could be developed for the geological features along existing trails in the eastern part of the Park, as the Burro and Mountain Lion Trails have some interesting geologic features. An exhibit about the geology of the mineral deposits and mining history of the area could be developed for the camper services building at Reverend's Ridge.
 - **Wildlife:** Due to the Park's size and proximity to other protected lands, there is a large and contiguous landscape for long-ranging mammals such as elk, mule deer, black bears, moose and mountain lions. There are over 100 species of birds that may breed in the Park with many documented as nesting within the Park. Additionally, the Park has some of the richest butterfly species diversity along the Front Range especially along the Nott Creek trails.
 - **Water resources:** Ralston Creek and its associated ponds is a healthy mountain stream system providing fish and wildlife habitat as well as angling opportunities.
- **Cultural Resources and History**
 - Many groups have called the lands that are now part of GGCSP home. These groups include the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Native American tribes. See the "Cultural Resources" section for additional information.
 - The area has a unique and interesting history related to Euro-American settlement and the settler families who first settled in this area. Six remaining sites are eligible for listing on the National Register for Historic Preservation in the Park. See the "Cultural Resources" section for additional information.
 - In the 1920s, E.C. Regnier and Roger E. Ewalt founded Lincoln Hills Resort just north of what is now GGCSP to provide a safe, relaxing space for Black families to recreate in Colorado. See the "Cultural Resources" section for additional information.
- **Ethical Recreation/Leave No Trace (LNT)**
 - GGCSP has Gold Standard Designation (starting in 2023). Gold Standard Site Designations are awarded to public recreation lands that exemplify successful LNT ethics and showcase strong organizational commitment to the promotion

of outdoor skills, ethics, and stewardship in order to help preserve and protect the natural landscape for generations to come.

- Make visitors part of the solution (practice low impact behaviors).
 - GGCSF is a treasure for both people and nature—we need the help of visitors to keep it that way
- Observe seasonal closures for sensitive wildlife species, including nesting raptors.
- Visitors should “know before you go” about Park rules and requirements.
- “Keep Wildlife Wild” (do not approach or feed wildlife).
- Stay on designated trails.
- Dispose of waste properly.
- Connection and Belonging

As CPW works to address visitation/capacity issues at the Park, it will be important to include messaging to the public that everyone is welcome at the Park. Visitors should understand that the expressed need to disperse visitation is not intended to discourage visitation to the Park.

Facilities and Infrastructure

In addition to the Recreation Resources described previously, the Park includes the following facilities listed below in Table 4 and shown in Map 11. Vault and CXT¹⁸ restrooms are listed in Table 5.

Table 4. Golden Gate Canyon State Park’s Facilities

Facility Category	Improvement Name	Year Built	Value	Notes
Visitor Facility	Visitor Center	1968, remodeled in 1995	\$1,720,000	Exhibits, flush toilets, Park office, retail
	Reverend’s Ridge Administrative Building	1971	\$815,600	Campground office, retail
	Reverend’s Ridge camper services	1998	\$383,400	12 Showers, laundry facility, vending
	Backcountry Shelters (4)	1990	\$32,000	
	Harmsen Main	1900,	\$781,250	4 bedroom guest

¹⁸ CXT: Type of precast concrete restroom building.

	House	remodeled in 2007 to 2008		house
	Harmsen Barn	1920	\$525,000	
	Harmsen Horse Barn	2008	\$272,400	
	Harmsen Pump House	1950	\$37,500	
	Harmsen Shed	1930	\$46,800	
	Harmsen Stables (2)	1950	\$90,000	
	Panorama Point	1968	\$700,000	Deck
	Red Barn Area	1950	\$198,200	
	Reverend's Ridge cabins (5), yurts (2)	2001	\$71,400 \$62,800	
	Works Cabin	1975	\$102,400	
	Self-service kiosks with pass sales, regulation signs	varies	varies	At highway access points, campgrounds, and Panorama Point
	"Iron Rangers" (electronic self-serve kiosks)	varies	Approximately \$6,000 each	1 available, 4 more planned
Maintenance/Staff Facility	Maintenance shop (Upper - Kriley Pond)	1966	\$364,525	
	Vehicle storage building	2021	\$1,000,000	
	Maintenance shop (Lower - Nott Creek)	1969	\$313,600	
	Reverend's Ridge Pump House	1971, updated in 2010	\$48,000	

	Rimrock Pump House	2005	\$56,250	
	Bandimere Cabin	1900	\$49,000	
	Bates Cabin	1940	\$104,000	
	Green Barn	1950	\$396,000	Part of the Red Barn complex
	Green Ranch Garage	2004	\$202,500	
	Green Ranch Horse Barn	2000	\$150,000	
	Green Ranch House	1995	\$646,000	Staff housing
	Kriley House	2001	\$435,000	Staff housing
	Tallman Ranch House	2002	\$375,000	
	Toll Cabin	1900	\$100,000	
	Visitor Center Shed	1995	\$14,700	
	Vigil Barn	1940	\$150,000	Closed to entry
	Vigil House	1940	\$858,000	Closed to entry

Table 5. Trailheads (Parking Spots, Picnic Sites, Restrooms)

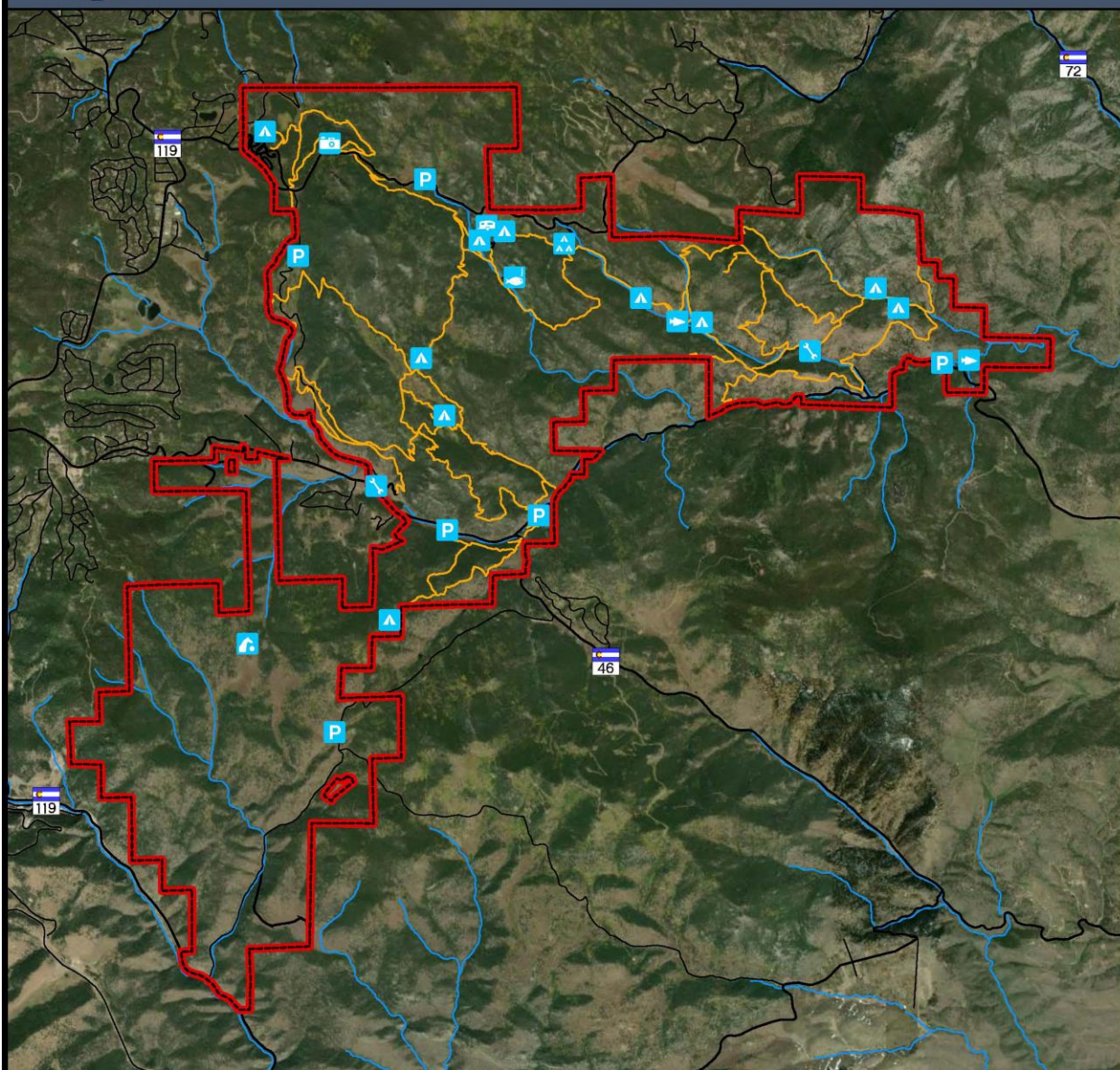
Location	Number of Parking Spaces	Number of Picnic Sites	Toilets
Bootleg Bottom	27	20	2
Bridge Creek*	28	16	2
Clinton Overlook	10	3	0
Dude's Fishing Hole	8	0	0
Frazer Meadow	14	0	1

Kriley Overlook	14	6	1
Kriley Pond*	23	7	1
Nott Creek	50	0	1
Old Barn Knoll	36	27	1
Panorama Point*	14	7	1
Ralston Roost	25	11	1
Ranch Ponds	34	23	1
Red Barn Group Picnic Area	30	Accommodates up to 150 people	0
Rifleman Phillips	10	0	0
Round the Bend	9	5	1
Slough Pond	11	0	1

*Indicates accessible facilities at this site



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Facilities

Facility Type

- Campground
- Horse Corrals
- Fishing
- Group Campground

- Historic Site
- RV Campground
- Maintenance Area
- Parking
- Scenic Overlook

Park Features

- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- Park Boundary



Map 11. Golden Gate Canyon State Park's Facilities

Operations and Maintenance

Potable water in the Park comes from wells owned and maintained by CPW. The Park handles sewage by a wastewater treatment facility at Reverend's Ridge Campground or by leach fields (at the maintenance shops, Visitor Center, Park housing area, and Harmsen Ranch). See the "Water Systems" section below for more detail.

Private contractors provide vault toilet sewage removal and general trash hauling. GGCSF receives electrical service from United Power, while Hygiene Propane delivers Hygiene Propane. CenturyLink provides phone service and internet services via fiber lines. There is a 3-acre Rural Electric Association utility easement with over 4.5 miles of highly visible power lines in the Park. This easement expires in 2035. Harmsen House laundry is handled by the Gilpin County Sheriff's Office via an agreement in which the Office receives \$150 per month for all laundry cleaned at the Gilpin County Jail.

Water systems

Maintenance of water systems for the Park are a critical but unseen component of Park operations. A Park Resource Technician is required to have specialized licensing and must meet state requirements (which increase in complexity and cost every year) in order to effectively maintain the water systems in the Park.

Wastewater Treatment at Reverend's Ridge: Initially, the Park treated wastewater using lagoons; however, due to too much evaporative loss occurring from this method, the Park needed to change systems. In 2011, The Park converted the campground wastewater treatment to a membrane bioreactor (MBR) Wastewater System. MBR returns water into the ground via a leach field, thus resolving evaporative loss issues. However, this system has several drawbacks, as this technology was newer to the United States at the time of installation and was a first for the State Park system; consequently, this system has never functioned well for GGCSF. This system is more appropriate for small cities (with multiple staff with related PhDs and other resources such as specialized instruments and laboratories) with a few million gallons of even, regular flows, whereas the Park has uneven flows (ex., campgrounds are not used the same every day of the year) and produces only around 8,200 gallons of waste on a busy weekend. On the busiest weekends in the Park, the system goes over capacity (ex., producing 10,000 gallons by late Sunday morning) and has to recover overnight. In addition, unlike a larger city system, the Park's system can get "shocked" easily (e.g., an RV dumping something down their sink can lead to biological kill at the treatment plant, resulting in the need to pump out the entire system). This phenomenon occurs a few times per year and costs nearly \$20,000 each time. The erratic nature of the MBR and staff time spent reacting to the system and troubleshooting has made it difficult to develop Standard Operating Procedures; however, Park staff have general operating procedures for day-to-day basics of operating the system.

While the MBR is not the preferred system for the Park, it has been difficult to determine an alternate solution. Returning to evapotranspiration fields may be an effective change, but efforts to augment water so that CPW can allow for evaporation loss have not yet been

successful. Pumping the effluent to another drainage could be another potential solution, but this method would require test wells (to ensure groundwater is not impacted) and would be expensive to build out. Additionally, winter access could be challenging for staff, requiring snowmobiles and a generator plus extensive time and effort (see Chapter 5 for additional detail on proposed actions).

Other Waste: Outside of Reverend's Ridge, the rest of the Park relies on either dry vaults or gravity-fed leach fields to get rid of waste. The older vault restrooms are pumped once per year and newer CXTs, which are smaller, are pumped 3 to 4 times per year. The frequency of pumping has increased in response to rising visitation. The Visitor Center is pumped every other year and has a lift station uphill to the leach field. The Kriley seasonal house is pumped every 5 years.

Water Treatment: Water treatment systems in the Park all rely on the same chlorinated systems. Reverend's Ridge has 3 wells, and there are also several wells at Aspen Meadows Campground, Harmsen Guest House, and Rifleman Phillips Campground. The Park moved the Visitor Center's well to an above ground well in 2021. The Park upgraded the Visitor Center's storage tanks to an on-demand system that now consistently provides 1,000 gallons of water to the Park.

Augmentation Needs: Besides needing water augmentation for the wastewater treatment system, CPW is searching for water augmentation options for the Parks' ponds due to their evaporative loss issues. However, CPW does not own the water rights for these ponds and must return water downstream in Ralston Creek for senior water rights. CPW staff are currently working with the Division of Water Resources to measure evaporative loss rates and evaluate solutions. See Chapter 5 for more information.

Roads

There are just over 21 miles of roads in the Park (9.5 miles are paved and the rest are gravel). These roads are a combination of state highways, county roads, and State Park roads. The main State Park owned and maintained road in GGCSP is Mountain Base Road. CPW built Mountain Base Road in 1972 to connect the Visitor Center and maintenance shops in the lower valley to Reverend's Ridge and Panorama Point. It is closed during the winter, and access to the Park is controlled via gates on each end. Other Park roads include access roads to campgrounds and Nott Creek Road. CPW is responsible for maintenance activities (including snow removal) on roads across Park-owned land and for maintaining the asphalt on the Gilpin County portion of Ralston Creek Road (as this road was paved at the request and expense of the Park). Golden Gate Canyon Road is paved and maintained year-round by the Jefferson County Road and Bridge Department. The Park uses sand, not chemicals, for snow control during the winter due to cost and impacts to the environment.

Park Access and Parking

There are 3 access points to the Park:

1. Golden Gate Canyon Road: This road becomes Highway 46 once it crosses into Gilpin County. Access to the Park is possible from both east and westbound traffic along Highway 46.
2. Crawford Gulch Road: This road becomes County Road 57 once it crosses into Jefferson County. Access to the Park is possible from both east and westbound traffic along Crawford Gulch Road.
3. Gap Road: This road is also called Gilpin County Road 2. Access to the Park is possible from both east and westbound traffic along Gap Road.

The Park does not and cannot control public access into or out of the Park at any of these 3 access points as they are County roads and state Highways, with private residents as well as through-travelers using them. As a result, capacity management in the Park can be extremely challenging, as GGCSF does not have gates that can be staffed with personnel who can control public access into and out of the Park. Therefore, visitors can basically come and go as they please and park at any of the trailhead parking areas (Table 5) along these access points. There are just under 400 parking spots in the Park. There are 6 trailhead parking areas along Crawford Gulch, 3 parking areas accessed via Mountain Base Road, and 5 parking areas accessed from Gap Road. There are 2 fishing ponds located along Highway 46 that provide fishing opportunities and trailhead access. Despite signage in these areas, these two areas are often used by through-travelers who are unaware that they are in a State Park that requires fee payment and simply stop to use the restroom or have a picnic.

During the busiest time of the year, which occurs from late September through the end of October for “leaf peeping” season, parking areas are often overrun. This can result in resource damage, as visitors park in undesignated areas, consequently destroying vegetation, creating a fire hazard with hot exhaust systems on tall, dry grass, and often partially blocking traffic as vehicles are parked illegally in the roadway. Attempts to direct visitors to designated parking areas include traffic cones, “no parking” signs, variable message boards, and additional staff patrols. While the latter method is the most effective, it is also resource intensive and there are other times of year when parking areas are full.

Visitation

By the mid-1980s, GGCSF visitation had reach half a million visitors per year and was considered “at capacity” on weekends. Now, with the regional population continuing to increase dramatically, the Park is under considerable pressure due to its proximity to the Denver metro area. As a result of the coronavirus outbreak in 2020, the Park experienced a massive increase in visitation during that year, as Front Range residents sought outdoor activities more than usual. Visitation increased to over 1.5 million people for the first time in 2020. Table 6 depicts the monthly visitation totals for the last 5 years, while Figure 1 shows the annual visitation numbers from 2002 to 2021.

Table 6. Golden Gate Canyon State Park’s Monthly Visitation Totals 2017-2021

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2017	31,188	30,855	40,555	46,436	76,818	133,146	134,527	116,156	97,502	72,427	33,205	45,470	858,285
2018	34,046	23,071	46,444	51,932	63,217	140,685	162,694	132,469	122,150	87,652	131,224	40,178	1,035,762
2019	73,900	32,353	41,433	82,565	89,459	105,327	97,659	184,152	145,108	136,260	38,699	18,216	1,045,131
2020	23,436	20,218	48,249	74,456	237,188	228,852	250,576	206,349	221,103	217,425	64,650	49,725	1,642,227
2021	58,332	41,811	49,831	61,152	112,963	169,503	210,610	163,139	195,471	211,485	57,649	41,647	1,373,593

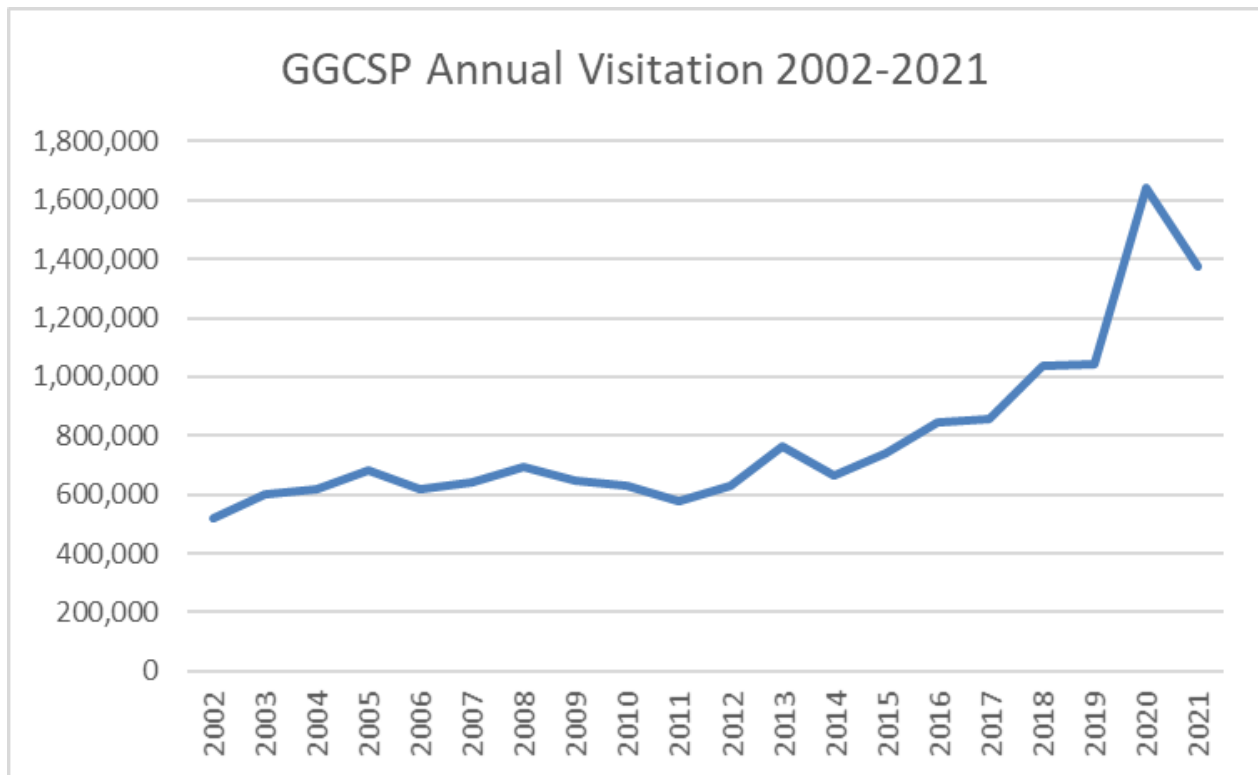


Figure 1. Golden Gate Canyon State Park’s Annual Visitation (2002-2021)

GGCSP is a large park and can absorb some of this increased visitation, but with limited staff and resources, some additional management strategies may be needed in order to contain and/or address increased visitation moving forward. Preserving large, undisturbed areas of the Park as well as its existing natural, cultural, and recreational resources will be vital to the long-term protection of the Park and the visitor experience. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the desired management approach to address this issue moving forward.

Visitor Use Trends

In 2021, Park staff installed TrafX trail and vehicle counters in 19 locations throughout the Park (Figure 2). Staff determined the locations based on known popular destinations and the ease of accessibility for monthly data downloads and battery checks. Data collected from these counters will be useful to Park staff for understanding visitor use patterns and helping Visitor Center and ranger staff provide guidance to visitors regarding areas of the Park to

explore. For example, during the busiest summer months and “leaf peeping” season, staff will be able to direct visitors to slightly less busy areas for their preferred activities. Figure 3 depicts trail counter monthly data that shows the summer and fall popularity levels of different trails, including the popular Raccoon Trail (which includes Panorama Point). Data from vehicle counters (Figure 4) shows similar seasonal trends, including the Park’s highest visitation rates in fall.

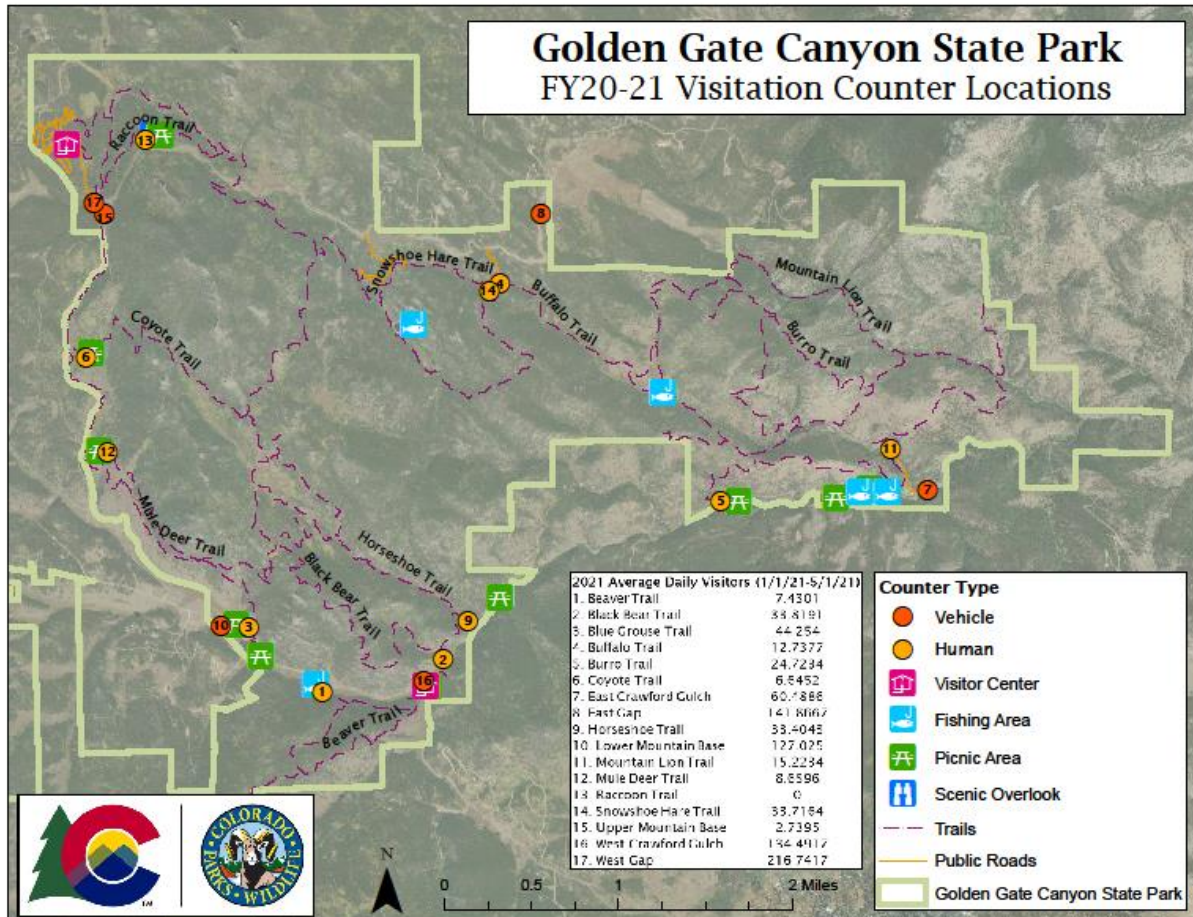
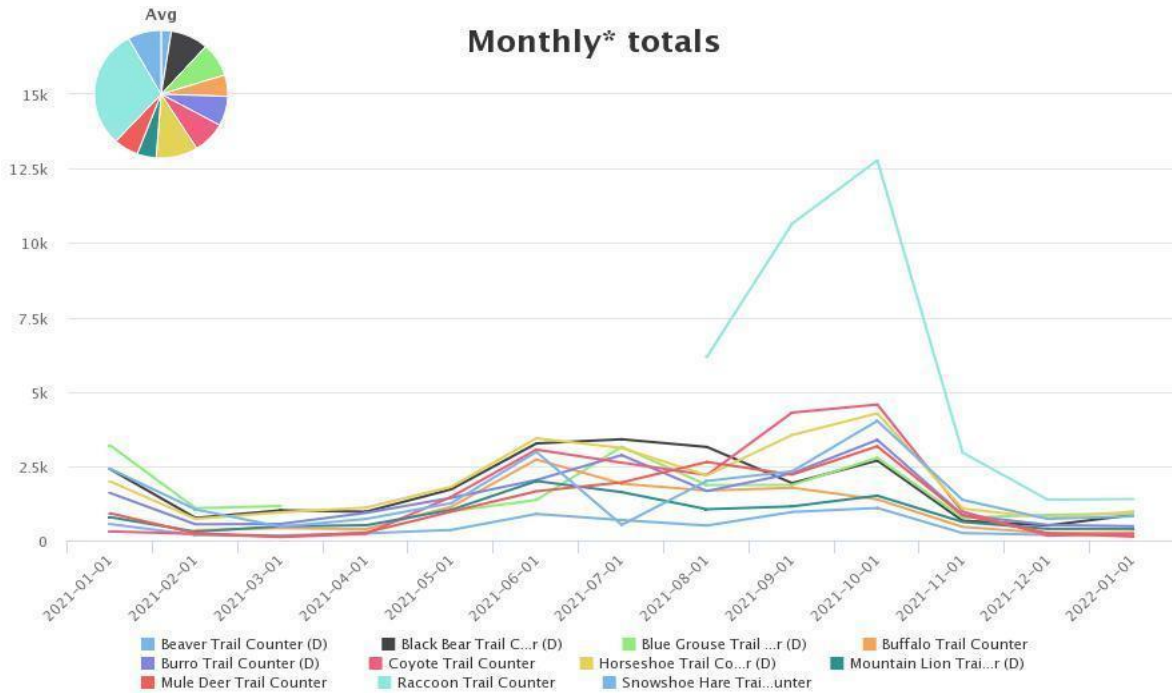


Figure 2. Locations of TrafX Counters in 2022



(Raccoon Trail Counter was deployed 8/4/2021)

Figure 3. January 2021 - January 2022 Monthly Trail Data



Figure 4. January 2021 - January 2022 Monthly Vehicle Counter Data (*Based on Average Daily Traffic)

Trail counters at Mountain Lion and Mule Deer trailheads tracked mountain bikes from August to November 2021 (Figure 5).

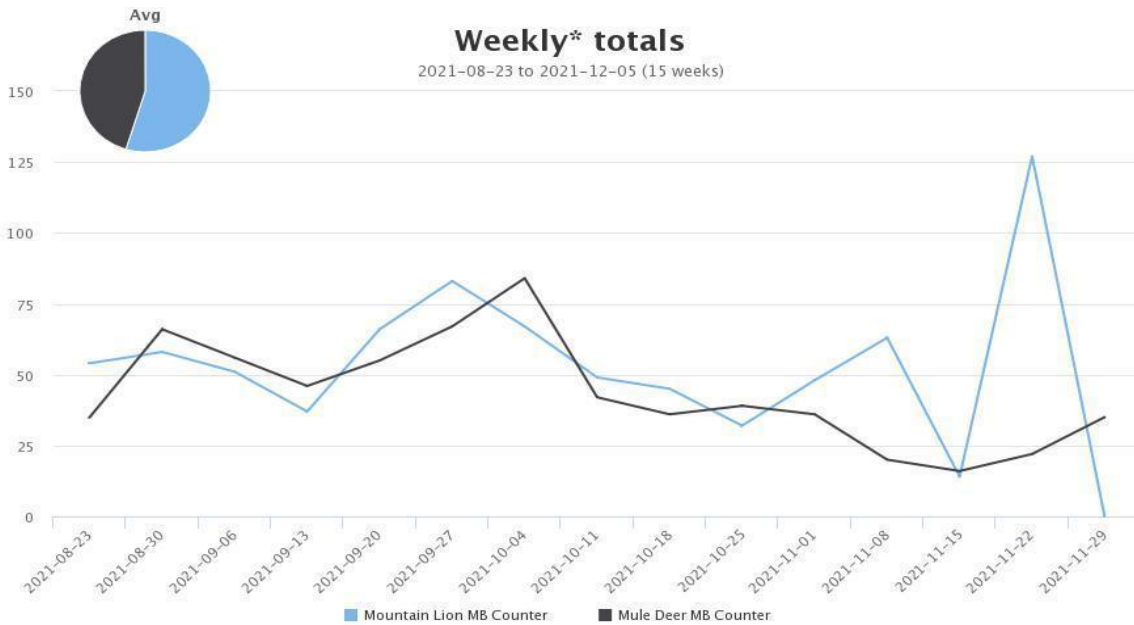


Figure 5. Mountain Bike Counts August - November 2021

Counter data is also helpful for analyzing visitor use patterns by days of the week (Figure 6) or other trends that can inform park management.

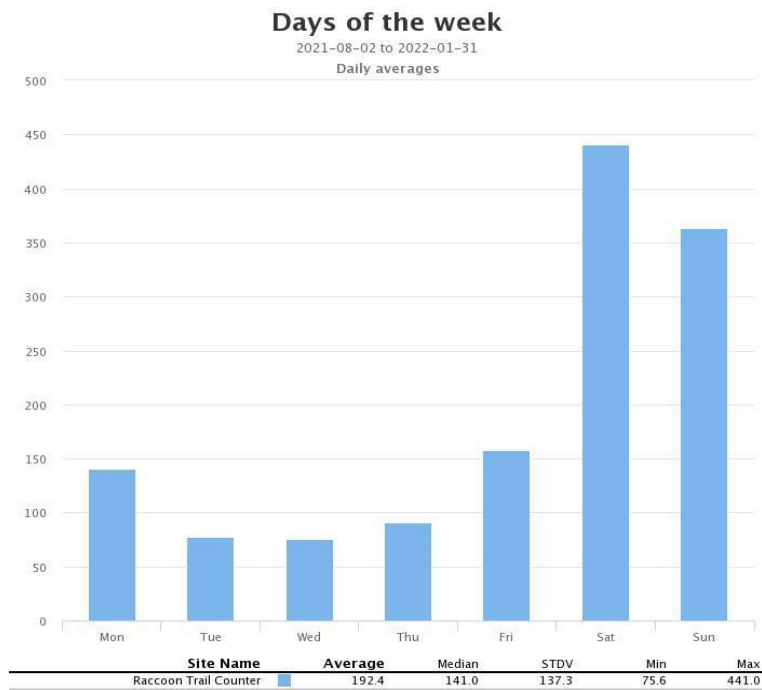


Figure 6. Raccoon Trail Use by Day of the Week

Park Administration and Special Functions

Full-time and Seasonal Staffing

GGCSP has 8 full-time positions with the following roles and responsibilities:

- Park Manager V (1) - Administration, budget, and project management; manages and supports employees; law enforcement; supervises Administrative Assistant, Park Manager III, and Park Resource Technician V.
- Park Manager III (1) - Field operations manager; special events manager; Temporary Work Program (TWP) budget management; law enforcement; sign program; supervises 2 Park Manager II positions and an intern.
- Park Manager II (2) - Law enforcement; public safety; campground operations; hunting program; snowmobile program; interpretation and education; website and social media; volunteer management. One position supervises 6 sets of campground hosts and an interpretation seasonal employee, and the other supervises 5 TWP rangers.
 - An additional Park Manager II will be added in July 2023.
- Park Resource Technician V (1) - All facility and grounds maintenance; repairs; project management; wastewater treatment plant operations; utilities, equipment and vehicles. Supervises 2 Park Resource Technician IVs.
- Park Resource Technician IV (2) - Backcountry campsites/shelter maintenance; trail maintenance; volunteer management; fleet coordinator; fuel mitigation; noxious weed program. One position supervises 5 TWP maintenance staff, and the other supervises 2 to 3 trail staff.
- Administrative Assistant III (1) - Park Administration; Visitor Center operations and staff supervision (1-2 Visitor Center hosts, 3 Visitor Center volunteers, and 4 TWP); budget management.

The Park hires approximately 15 temporary employees throughout the year as seasonal rangers, gate attendants, Visitor Center attendants, and maintenance workers.

Volunteers

Over 250 volunteers donate nearly 8,500 hours of their time per year to the Park as campground hosts, raptor nest monitors, and other important roles. Volunteers are critical to Visitor Center operations as they operate the front desk multiple days per week by answering visitor questions and selling park passes. Members of neighborhoods adjacent to the Park often help with trail maintenance, natural resource surveys, and other activities.

Law Enforcement/Public Safety

CPW shares jurisdiction of the Park with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, the Gilpin County Sheriff's Office, and the Colorado State Patrol. The Timberline Fire Protection District, Golden Gate Fire Protection District, Coal Creek Fire Department, and Division of Fire Prevention and Control respond to structural fires, wildland fires, automobile accidents, and other emergencies in the Park. Due to the backcountry nature of GGCSP, the expansive

trail system, and the proximity to the Denver metro area, Park staff are routinely involved in Search and Rescue (SAR) operations within the Park. On average, the Park coordinates and responds to approximately 8 to 12 SAR requests each year.

Partnerships

The Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) and the Colorado State Forest Service implement forest management projects identified by GGCSP's Forest Management Plan. The Gilpin County Sheriff's Office provides assistance throughout the Park including law enforcement support, dispatch services, and Harmsen Guest House laundry services (through the Gilpin County Jail). The Timberline Fire Protection District responds to calls in the Park for search and rescue efforts, automobile accidents, medical needs, and more. The Gilpin Ambulance Authority also responds to emergency calls in the Park, assists with medical equipment questions, hazmat disposal, and other needs. The Mile High Youth Corp, Teens, Inc., and Environmental Learning for Kids assist with projects in the Park (e.g. trails) and promote youth careers in natural resources.

Funding Agreements

The Park is supported by various family funds:

- **The Larkin Memorial Fund:** The Larkin Memorial Fund, established in 1969, is generally used to purchase materials for identified projects, while Park staff furnish the labor to complete the projects. CPW and the Larkin family have a Memorandum of Understanding to guide the use of these funds. There is also an associated donation account for this fund that earns interest and has a life insurance policy, which will direct funds to the Park in the future. Future capital projects may use funds from this funding source as long as they are in line with the agreement in place. The Larkin family built Panorama Point in 1968 as a memorial to their son. The family also supported the construction of the Visitor Center Show Pond Trail (also known as the Wilbur and Nellie Larkin Memorial).
- **Funds from the Green Family:** These funds are in a parks-restricted donation account and are to be used for any future development of The Green Ranch.
- **The Clinton Family Fund:** Members of various neighborhoods adjacent to the Park donate annually to this fund and have generously donated over \$300,000 to date for projects, partnerships, and equipment.

Park Budget and Finances

The Park relies on various budget allocations (e.g., General Operating, Permanent Personnel Services, etc.). These are commonly referred to as "Agency Budget Buckets" or "Categories," which are summarized in Table 7 below. Budgets are requested through various CPW processes on an annual or ad-hoc basis based on the nature/type of request. Table 7 provides a breakdown of the Park's expenses in FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21. The State of Colorado's Fiscal Years are July 1 to June 30.

Table 7: Park Expenses (FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21)

	FY 2019-20	Percent of Total	FY 2020-21	Percent of Total
General Operating	\$ 425,300.55	15%	\$ 448,093.52	30%
Permanent Personal Services	\$ 659,435.41	24%	\$ 652,242.83	43%
Retail Operations	\$ 54,128.27	2%	\$ 42,721.93	3%
General Donations		0%	\$ 1,019.21	0.07%
Restricted Donations	\$ 33,987.64	1%	\$ 28,476.63	2%
Parks Large Capital Projects Over \$100,000	\$ 1,447,917.11	52%	\$ 239,002.67	16%
Parks Small Capital Projects \$5,000 - \$100,000	\$ 90,579.54	3%	\$ 96,723.20	6%
Forest Management Program	\$ 66,000.00	2%	\$ 6,117.64	0.40%
Total	\$ 2,777,348.52	100%	\$ 1,514,397.63	100%

The sections below highlight some of the recent budget allocations and expenses for the primary budget categories shown above.

General Operating Costs

The operating costs for the Park remained relatively constant between FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21 with a slight increase in the second year. The majority of the operating budget is spent on temporary employees' salary and benefits, followed by property repairs, maintenance and improvement activities, and utilities.

Table 8: General Operating Expenses (FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21)

	FY 2019-20	Percent of Total	FY 2020-21	Percent of Total
Benefits	\$ 36,228.78	9%	\$ 41,392.19	9%
Communications	\$ 9,245.41	2%	\$ 8,894.14	2%
Contract Services	\$ 150.00	0%	\$ 5,782.00	1%
Equipment	\$ 553.48	0%	\$ 1,053.99	0%
Motor Vehicle	\$ 28,359.34	7%	\$ 22,185.86	5%
Other Miscellaneous	\$ 445.96	0%	\$ 593.31	0%
Other Services		0%	\$ 1,122.87	0%
Overtime	\$ 579.75	0%	\$ 351.47	0%
Property Maintenance	\$ 96,847.31	23%	\$ 99,017.26	22%
Publication	\$ 321.20	0%	\$ 280.75	0%
Purchase Services	\$ 2,696.50	1%	\$ 1,842.95	0%
Shipping	\$ 103.34	0%	\$ 22.00	0%
Supplies	\$ 10,027.97	2%	\$ 14,404.34	3%
Temporary Staff	\$ 164,304.05	39%	\$ 183,488.29	41%
Travel	\$ 476.00	0%		0%
Utilities	\$ 74,961.46	18%	\$ 67,662.10	15%
Total	\$ 425,300.55	100%	\$ 448,093.52	100%

Table 9: Temporary Employee Expenses Detail (Salary and Benefits) (FY 2019-20 and FY20-21)

	FY 2019-20	Percent of Total	FY 2020-21	Percent of Total
Customer Service	\$ 50,662.14	25%	\$ 69,444.12	31%
Environment & Wildlife Education	\$ 4,547.43	2%	\$ -	0%
Law Enforcement	\$ 46,985.91	23%	\$ 53,683.19	24%
Organizational Support	\$ 97,703.73	49%	\$ 95,810.38	43%
Park Recreation	\$ 633.62	0.3%	\$ 1,295.27	1%
Trails Recreation	\$ -	0%	\$ 4,647.52	2%
Total	200,532.83	100%	\$ 224,880.48	100%

Large Capital Construction Projects

Large capital construction projects are high-dollar improvements to the Park that are considered on an annual basis. For example, in FY 2019-20, the Park spent over \$250,000 on monitoring wells. A new vehicle storage facility was built for over \$900,000. CPW has spent over \$1.3 million replacing vault toilets with CXTs and will spend another \$350,000 for the final phase of this project. Also in the coming years, CPW will spend \$150,000 on designing wastewater improvements and then \$1.7 million to implement that design. Land and Water Conservation Fund and Great Outdoors Colorado fund these projects.

4 Management Zones

Methodology for Determining Management Zones

The existing conditions described in previous chapters provided the spatial context for setting up Management Zones. These zones establish the long-term vision for resource protection, visitor experience, and park operations in GGCSP.

CPW’s park management zoning scheme (Table 10) provides a framework for identifying suitable types of facilities and land uses along with the suggested visitor experience and management focus. The zone types are used across the State Park System, but zoning for each park is done at the park-scale. This allows for the individual parks to protect their most significant resources and provide a unique visitor experience.

Zoning is based on “desired future conditions” (i.e., beyond the timeframe of this Plan, what should the park resources, management focuses, and the visitor experience be into the future?). Any zone can incorporate seasonal closures or other temporal needs to achieve management focuses.

Table 10. Management Zone Classification Scheme and Characteristics

Zone Classification	Visitor Experience	Recreation Opportunities	Potential Facilities	Management Focus
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High social interaction. ▪ Low opportunity for solitude. ▪ Low opportunity for challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High-density recreation. ▪ Emphasis on providing opportunities, such as picnicking, that rely on motor vehicle access via roads, and at some parks could include RV and tent camping, and potentially motorized uses in designated areas. ▪ Some fishing, boating, equestrian use, mountain biking, hiking, and wildlife watching may occur in this zone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Typically includes parking areas, paved or high-use roads, utilities, group picnic areas, visitor services, restrooms, concessions, interpretive facilities, and developed camping areas at overnight parks. ▪ Less typically this could include marinas, motorized use areas, and dog off-leash areas at some parks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intense management needs. ▪ Manage to provide sustainable recreation and aesthetic qualities. ▪ Prevent weed spread, erosion, or other degradation. ▪ Intense fire prevention mitigation. ▪ Revegetate with natives where possible or with non-invasive landscaping.

<p>Passive Recreation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderate social interaction/low opportunity for solitude. ▪ Moderate degree of interaction with the natural environment. ▪ Moderate opportunity for challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medium-density recreation. ▪ Emphasis on providing hiking, fishing, equestrian use, mountain biking, and other dispersed recreation opportunities. ▪ Some picnicking or backcountry camping, canoeing and other non-motorized boating, and wildlife watching opportunities. Interpretive opportunities are likely to occur in this zone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Typically trails, interpretive facilities, and individual picnic areas. ▪ Less typically this could include dirt roads or light use roads, limited motorized uses (in larger parks only), hike-in campgrounds, or yurts. ▪ Minimize utilities to the extent possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderate to high management needs. ▪ Manage to maintain the natural character and provide sustainable recreation. ▪ Actively manage weeds in order to eradicate or suppress, and prevent erosion or other degradation. ▪ High level of fire prevention. ▪ Revegetate with native species.
<p>Natural</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low social interaction/moderate opportunity for solitude. ▪ High degree of interaction with the natural environment. ▪ Moderate to high opportunity for challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medium to low-density recreation. ▪ Emphasis on providing low impact, non-motorized, and dispersed recreation opportunities. ▪ All recreation opportunities in the Passive Recreation Zone are likely to occur here with the exception that there could be more emphasis on providing non-motorized dispersed recreation. ▪ Hunting also permissible at some parks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primarily trails and some interpretive facilities. ▪ Minimize utilities to the extent possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderate to low management needs. ▪ Manage to maintain the natural character, native flora, wildlife habitat, and ecological functions. ▪ Actively manage weeds for eradication and prevent erosion or other degradation. ▪ Moderate to high level of fire prevention. ▪ Revegetate with native species.
<p>Protection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Typically unmodified natural environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None, or heavily restricted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Least intense management needs. ▪ Preservation of very sensitive resources or restriction of visitor use for legal or safety reasons.

CPW relied on CPW staff expertise, the various maps included in Chapter 3, and the Resource Stewardship Plan (Appendix C) to determine appropriate management zones for GGCSP.

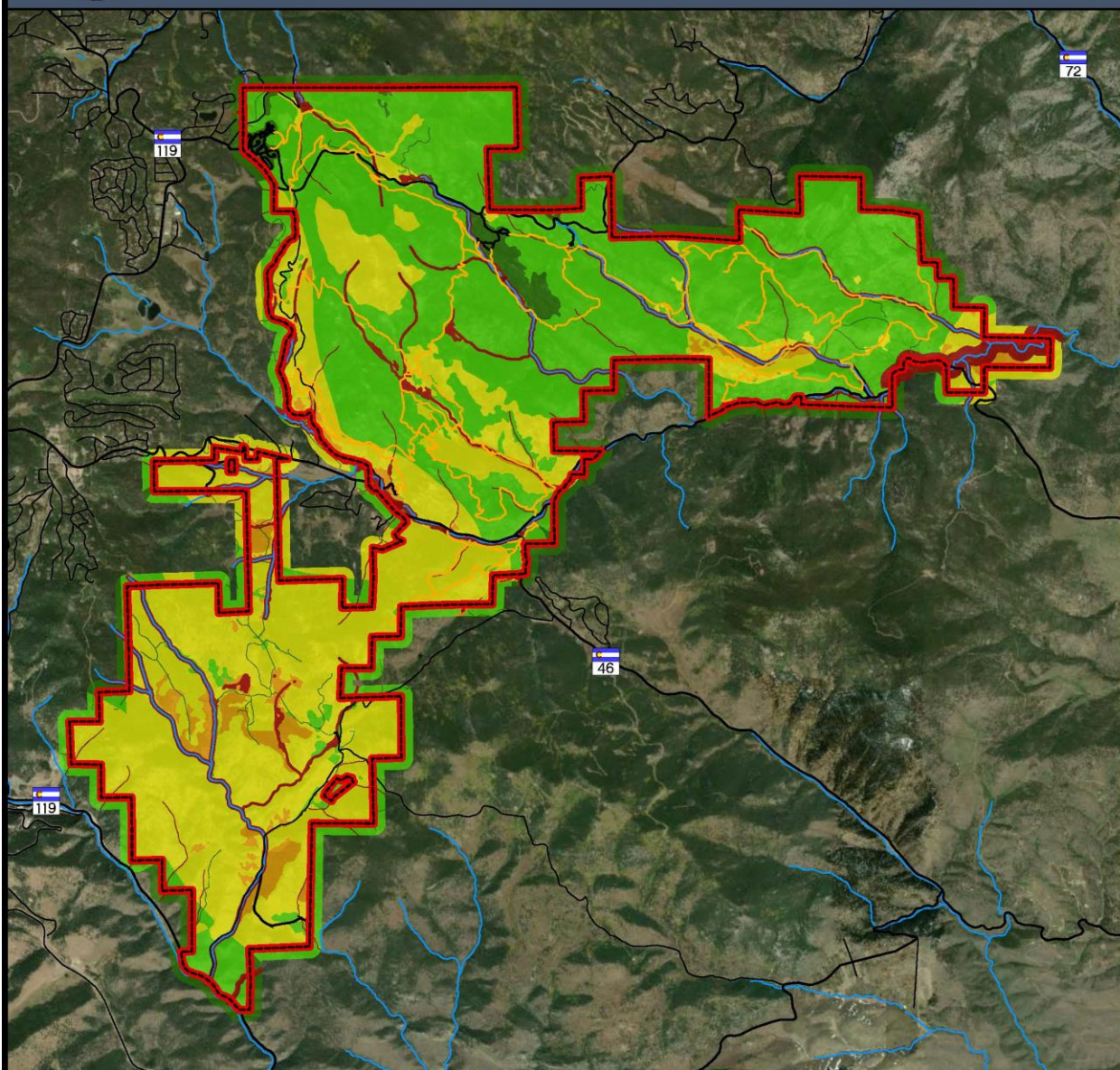
Key considerations that were taken into account during the Park management zoning process for the Park included:

- As the Park was developed, a conscious effort to maintain the main portion of the Park in a semi-wilderness condition with only trails and backcountry camping sites added to the interior. The majority of developments have been situated along Park, county, and state highways that provide primary access.
- The Park is located at the top of the Ralston Creek watershed and drainages throughout the Park flow across the Park area into 4 storage reservoirs.
- Vegetation conditions throughout the Park are categorized as good with some pockets of fair or excellent condition; no areas are considered in poor condition.
 - Forest habitats are improving with active forest management activities.
 - Horseshoe Trail/Frazer Meadow is a highly visited area and is currently in excellent condition. This area has excellent summer/fall wildflower viewing opportunities. There are also several rare plants in this area. These areas are easily accessible from the Visitor Center for an immediate easy walking/hiking opportunity after arrival to the Park. This is an important area of the Park to protect the natural resources and the visitor experience.
 - Fair condition typically indicates presence of weeds
- The Green Ranch provides some of the best habitat for wildlife in the Park, including in Macy Gulch (see Chapter 3 for more information). The Green Ranch is closed to public access except for limited hunting opportunities via an annual lottery. Current Park operations cannot sustain opening this area to more visitors.
- Cultural sensitivity (Map 10) is considered beyond the individual site area, as the surrounding natural environment (e.g., slope, vegetation, and water) may have influenced human activity. Consequently, there could be additional cultural resources in the area.
- Visitor surveys indicate strong support for not adding development in GGCSF and keeping much of the Park natural.
- The Park provides large, contiguous habitat for wide-ranging mammals. All of the Park is winter range for mule deer. Additionally, The Green Ranch provides winter and calving areas for elk, and moose are found in the Park, which is a rarer occurrence in the State Park system.
- There are many geohazards and highly erosive soils to consider when planning any infrastructure improvements.
 - The Visitor Center sits where fault lines intersect and is located in a floodplain.
 - There is high rock fall potential (due to soils and geology) throughout the Park.
 - The granitic soils in GGCSF are well-known to be erosive. Trails will have to be carefully planned, with a large number of structures designed to reduce the erosion of system trails. Roads within the Park will also need to be paved or re-surfaced with less erosive materials. Storm water design must take into consideration the impacts of concentrating large amounts of water from parking lots and roads onto highly erosive soils and will require water energy dissipating structures.

- Eco sensitivity ratings (Map 12) evaluate: the presence, critical habitat, patterns, corridors, and breeding areas for wildlife; vegetation community types and conditions; soil health conditions and erosion potential; areas of large, contiguous habitat; and the presence of wildlife and plant species of conservation concern. These characteristics help determine the susceptibility of an area to possible changes to individual attributes of an ecosystem or to the ecosystem as a whole. For GGCSF, the sensitivity ratings considered in zoning include:
 - Highest eco sensitivity
 - Wetland and riparian vegetation communities; aquatic habitat
 - Rare plants
 - Excellent vegetation condition
 - Preble's meadow jumping mouse designated critical habitat
 - Moderate eco sensitivity
 - Good vegetation condition
 - Mammal ranges
 - Rare vegetation communities
 - Low eco sensitivity
 - Developed areas (roads, infrastructure, etc.)
 - Areas dominated by non-native species
 - Vegetation in fair condition



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Eco-Sensitivity

Sensitivity Zone	Park Features
High	Trails
Medium High	Roads
Medium	Streams
Medium Low	Park Boundary
Low	



Map 12. Eco Sensitivity Ratings at Golden Gate Canyon State Park

Description of Management Zones

The purpose of establishing management zones at the Park are to provide broad, yet useful, parameters to help guide the future use, development, and management of the Park. Using the above zoning scheme, CPW developed a zoning map w for GGCSP that identifies appropriate management zones (Map 13). Most of the Park is classified as Protection (35%) or Natural (45%) zones, with only 3% designated as Development and 17% as Passive Recreation zones.

Key features and descriptions of GGCSP zones include:

Development - 358.9 acres

- Highest density of visitors occurs in these areas:
 - Red Barn Picnic Area
 - Panorama Point and the eastern half of Raccoon Trail
 - Visitor Center
 - Campgrounds and Harmsen Ranch Guest House
- Dude's Fishing Hole
 - This road requires access large enough for trucks.

Passive Recreation - 2,042.93 acres

- Most trail use occurs in this zone.
- Some of the smaller parking areas with less visitation occur here. Small wayside areas (instead of large parking lots) contribute to the visitor experience of less crowding and support the “look and feel” of these areas of the Park.
- Corridor from Upper Shop to Bootleg Bottom
 - This area can be busy, but there is also the opportunity for encountering few people. There are picnic areas, vault toilets, parking lots, and trails, but no running water or buildings.
 - Good habitat (i.e., proximity to stream, quality vegetation, and big game use) along Mountain Base Road should be maintained.
- Fishing access to Kriley and Ranch and Slough Ponds

Natural - 5,325.55 acres

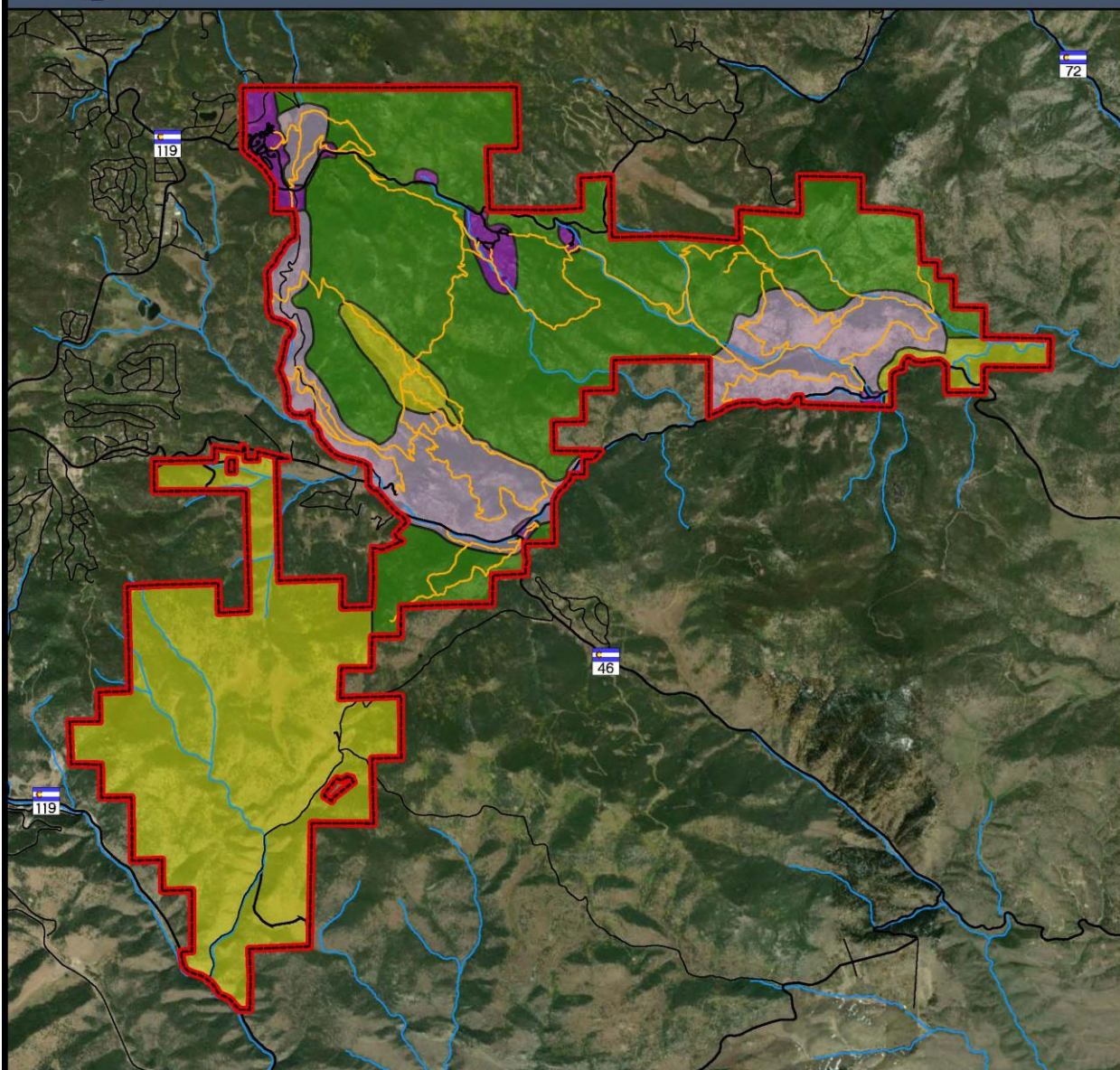
- Less busy trails with more opportunities for solitude.
- Forgotten Valley
 - Eligible cultural site with fewer visitors.
- Backcountry camping has high opportunity for solitude.

Protection - 4,183.39 acres

- Frazer Meadow
 - High-value habitat/vegetation and drainage that needs protecting.
 - Visitor experience in this area also depends on maintaining excellent vegetation conditions for wildflowers and other nature viewing.
 - See Chapter 5 for how this area will be managed (e.g., backcountry toilets and stay-on-trail requirements).
- Vigil parcel on the far southeastern end of the Park
 - Critical habitat for Preble's meadow jumping mouse as designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - Closed to the public.
 - Historic structure is a safety hazard for visitors (no access is allowed).
- The Green Ranch portion of GGCSP is open to the public from September to November to allow limited access for elk hunting for wildlife management purposes. A change in management of this parcel would require an amendment to this Plan.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park Management Plan



Management Zones

Zone Type

- Developed
- Passive Recreation
- Natural
- Protected

Park Features

- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- Park Boundary



Map 13. Management Zones for Golden Gate Canyon State Park

5 Park Enhancement Opportunities and Initiatives

Previous chapters in this Plan reviewed the history and current status of the activities and developments within the Park, provided a synopsis of information about the Park's natural and cultural resources, analyzed visitation data, and identified current and potential future issues affecting the management of the Park. In addition, Chapter 1 presented a long-term vision and management goals for the Park, while Chapter 4's Management Zones provided the spatial context for how the Park will manage into the future.

This section highlights specific Park Enhancement Opportunities and Management Initiatives that will help meet Park goals. Enhancement Opportunities and Management Initiatives support the goals outlined previously in the Plan and are situated within appropriate Management Zones. It is important to note that new development should be balanced with maintaining and conserving what already exists in GGCSF.

Enhancement Opportunities and Management Initiatives are not necessarily "commitments," and implementation is contingent on the Park securing adequate financial and human resources. These opportunities and initiatives must also be considered or weighed within the context of other CPW-wide needs. In addition, new opportunities may need to be added as conditions, recreation trends, and other factors change occur over time.

Enhancement Opportunities

Park Enhancement Opportunities include significant park improvements or efforts that are needed to help each park fulfill its full potential (as defined by each park's goals). Many Enhancement Opportunities consist of park improvements that are significant in terms of spatial-scale and effort needed to implement them, and may warrant considerable financial resources.

CPW staff developed Enhancement Opportunities for GGCSF based on suggestions from the public as well as the professional knowledge and experience of Park staff. Park enhancements are described in detail in this section and include the following categories:

1. Major rehabilitation or improvements to existing facilities and infrastructure.
2. New facilities and infrastructure.
3. Natural resource rehabilitation and restoration efforts.
4. Management initiatives critical to the long-term operational success of the Park.

1. Existing Facilities and Infrastructure

Development

- A. Upgrade brick vault restrooms to CXT. As of early 2023, Phase II is in progress, replacing 4 existing vault toilets with CXTs and Phase III will convert the last 2 (at Slough Pond and Lower Bootleg Bottom).
- B. Remove the fee/entrance station outside of the Visitor Center, as it is used infrequently and does not fit with the general “look” of the Park’s facilities.
- C. Remodel Aspen Meadows Campground. This is on the 5-Year Capital Plan.
- D. Bathroom at Reverend’s Ridge Campground: The existing bathroom will be replaced. This is used by the public year around and the only flush restroom during the winter.
- E. Replace the deck at the Visitor Center with composite-textured material for a less slick surface and hidden fasteners (to allow for easy snow shoveling). This is a small capital project projected to begin in the spring/summer 2023.
- F. Replace the deck at Panorama Point - On the 5-Year Capital Plan.
- G. Ongoing water treatment facilities and augmentation needs, which are discussed below in the “Management Initiatives” section.

Natural

- A. Forgotten Valley/Tallman Ranch: Ongoing monitoring of any needs for continued restoration/maintenance of historic structures.

Protection

- A. Vigil House: Continue to patrol daily and ensure lock and safety signage remains in place.
 - a. This facility is an eyesore and safety issue and will continue to degrade over time. Park staff covered additional windows with plywood in 2022 due to vandalism. However, due to its location in critical habitat for the Preble’s meadow jumping mouse, it would be challenging to time the removal of this structure, and there are limited options for removal with heavy equipment and stream crossings. If CPW develops any plans for removal, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must occur.
- B. Historic Structures:
 - a. Review cultural sites for state-listing status (see Map 9).
 - b. Work on stabilization (already complete for Tallman Ranch and Bootlegger’s Cabin).
 - c. Continue resource monitoring and preservation.
 - d. Improve and add cultural resource signage.
 - e. Evaluate the use of Harmsen Ranch as a group site.

2. New Facilities and Infrastructure

GGCSP is a well-developed park with little need for new infrastructure. The limited opportunities identified for new facilities and infrastructure are listed below.

Development

- A. **New Raccoon Trailhead:** Move the existing trailhead from Reverend's Ridge to the intersection of Gap and Mountain Base Roads. The new trailhead will include parking areas and use the existing self-service kiosk for park passes. The new trailhead will also have an iron ranger (electronic self-serve kiosk) and vault toilet (CXT). These structures will move hikers away from the Reverend's Ridge building and allow parking there to be designated for registered campers only.

Natural

- A. **Backcountry Toilets in Frazer Meadow and Deer Creek:** To improve the visitor experience and protect this area of the Park from human use impacts. The exact location will be determined based on avoiding rare plants. These toilets will be self-composting for solids and have a leach field¹⁹ for liquids (which can operate without management needs for 10 years).

3. Natural Resources Rehabilitation/Restoration Efforts

Implementing the Resource Stewardship Plan, Noxious Weed Plan, and Forest Management Plan is a priority for the Park. The Enhancement Opportunities listed above and any other projects near areas of high resource sensitivity should follow guidance in Administrative Directive B-304 for environmental and cultural review. Park staff should consult with Resource Stewardship staff for any needed support. The following efforts are some of the key considerations to protect the Park's natural and cultural resources.

- A. **Forest Management**
 - a. **Reverend's Ridge:** Conditions are poor for the lodgepole and limber pines but have been improving with phased projects conducted by DFPC. Dwarf mistletoe and western gall rust will lead to more trees eventually falling. Continued rotating thinning/cuts will address safety concerns and improve forest health.
 - b. **Aspen regeneration:** Since 83% of the Park is coniferous, it is important to continue to remove the conifer overstory where aspens exist to help them persist on the landscape. The Green Ranch has experienced improvement in the health of overbrowsed aspen stands since implementation of the hunt program.
- B. **Wetlands and Ponds**

¹⁹ Leach field: Consists of a series of trenches (or sometimes beds) that are filled with gravel and have perforated pipes running through them. The purpose of a leach field is to remove contaminants from the effluent water before it leaches back into the ground.

- a. Assessment: Erosion and sedimentation are impacting water resources in the Park. An assessment of upstream causes (sediment sources and movement) and any possible remedies shall be initiated. Within the Park, trails, roads, and waterways may be potential problem areas. Remedies for excessive erosion may include trail and/or road realignment, construction of various structures within trails, paving of roads, streambank stabilization, and working with adjacent landowners and other agencies to address erosion problems. Once CPW has addressed the excessive erosion issues, it then may be possible to dredge ponds to regain storage volume.
 - b. Dredging ponds: Ranch Ponds is currently too shallow and warm to stock fish. Besides potential dredging activities, CPW needs to continue to develop a water augmentation plan (see Management Initiative 5 below). As a result, the inlet could be restored with willows.
 - c. Restore wetlands surrounding Dude's Fishing Hole: Reclaim social trails, remove noxious weeds, use native seed mixes, and improve amphibian habitat.
 - d. Implement rotating temporary closures for riparian and wetland areas in high visitation areas (ex., Kriley Pond) experiencing human impacts such as erosion, soil compaction, and vegetation trampling.
- C. Manage Noxious Weeds
- a. High altitude meadows support a wide diversity of forbs and grasses not found elsewhere in the Park. Removal of smooth brome (and other invasive species) will help support native species.
 - b. Use native seed mixes specific to the Park to revegetate areas after any soil disturbing activities.
- D. Raptor management
- a. Install nesting platforms for raptors (potential locations include Kriley Overlook Meadow behind Kriley Seasonal House and Green Ranch Meadows for ospreys).
 - b. Continue volunteer raptor monitoring efforts.
 - c. Implement seasonal closures on trails as needed during nesting seasons.
- E. Surveys and Monitoring
- a. Address data gaps by collecting baseline data and regularly updating surveys as identified in the Resource Stewardship Plan. Some priorities include conducting a rare plant survey and updating breeding and migratory bird survey data every 5 years.
 - b. A survey for peat accumulations at The Green Ranch is needed. A specialist should investigate the areas of peat accumulation, and these areas may be potentially relocated and protected. Peat accumulation is extremely rare on the Front Range of Colorado; consequently, these areas should be protected from any development or proposed improvements.
- F. Fencing
- a. Remove unused fences.

- b. Follow best management practices identified in “Fencing with Wildlife in Mind”²⁰.

4. Management Initiatives

Management Initiatives are generally not specific to a particular Management Zone. Management Initiatives may need additional planning efforts to implement the strategies described below.

Management Initiative 1. Augment operational and personnel resources

While increasing visitation means that more Coloradoans are enjoying State Parks and results in revenue increases, higher visitation makes it more challenging to maintain public safety, understand who Park visitors are (and are not - who else could be coming to the Park?), and provide the level of customer service that Park guests have come to expect from CPW and its facilities and properties. Increased resources would allow for hiring more temporary staff, increasing trail maintenance, developing the volunteer program and partnerships (ultimately retaining full-time staff), protecting the Park’s resources, and maintaining the quality of the visitor experience.

Strategy: Participate in CPW efforts to create a 5-year staffing plan in consultation with Northeast Region leadership staff. There has been little change in staffing over the last 20 years at GGCSP. In 2001, the Park had 6 full-time employees (FTE); currently, there are 8 FTE. An additional FTE ranger (classified as a “Park Manager II”) has been approved and is effective July 1, 2023. Future additions to consider include an Operations Manager (similar to other large parks) and a Park Resource Technician focused on maintaining and improving the trail system.

Strategy: Increase operating budget to keep up with rising expenses of operations, maintenance, and staffing. While all parks need increases in their operating budgets, GGCSP is the fourth busiest park in the system but lags behind the top 3 parks in terms of operating funds and number of staff.

Strategy: Continue to offer on-park housing for temporary and full-time staff as a recruitment tool. Housing is challenging to find and expensive in the Denver metro area. In addition, commuting to the Park can be a significant personal investment of time and resources.

Strategy: Work with Region and Statewide Volunteer Coordinators to increase efforts to recruit individual and group volunteers.

²⁰

<https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/LandWater/PrivateLandPrograms/FencingWithWildlifeInMind.pdf>

Management Initiative 2. Explore and implement Visitor Use Management strategies and tools maintain resource conditions and the visitor experience

Strategy: In 2023, finalize the LNT Gold Standard Certification and initiate the development and implementation of LNT educational efforts and trainings for staff and volunteers.

- Complete self-assessment using tool developed by LNT and CPW volunteers.
- Use the LNT Start-Up Workbook to develop and implement GGCSP-specific messaging, educational programs, and other objectives related to LNT.

Strategy: Use existing and emerging technology (ex., apps that track visitation trends, variable road signs, etc.) and keep website/social media up-to-date to help visitors with trip planning.

Strategy: Develop and use consistent and inclusive messages on printed materials (e.g., brochures, signs, and maps) and in personal communications with visitors. These messages should be related to:

- Best times to visit the Park
- How to get to the Park
- Where to park/where not to park
- Facilities in the Park
- Recreation opportunities
- LNT principles

Strategy: Continue participation in CPW's State Parks Interpretive Signage Project to update Park signs.

Strategy: Limit the number and size of events that use all or a significant portion of the Park on the Park's busiest days.

Strategy: Continue to invest in resources related to tracking visitation. Maintain TrafX counters and utilize data to manage visitor use patterns. Participate in CPW efforts to standardize and update multipliers and determine appropriate visitation algorithms.

Strategy: Pilot test innovative and emerging management strategies that fit GGCSP's needs and circumstances, such as timed-entry reservations and shuttles.

Strategy: Enforce parking in designated areas through personal communications, signage, physical barriers (i.e., buck and rail fencing or traffic cones), coordination with the Gilpin County Sheriff's Office (to enforce restrictions on County roads), and other methods.

Management Initiative 3. Trail management

Trails are the most popular amenity at GGCSP and often provide the best means of experiencing the Park. Some trails are very popular while others provide an opportunity for solitude (see Chapter 3 “Visitation”). It is important for the Park to continue to offer the variety of trail experiences that visitors desire when they visit the Park. There are no plans to add to the Park’s 35 miles of existing trails.

Trail use may result in negative impacts such as wildlife disturbance, spread of noxious weeds, trampling of vegetation, and soil erosion. While trail management helps to mitigate some of these impacts, trails still require regular maintenance to repair impacts from weather and visitor use. At GGCSP, routine maintenance has been a challenge for decades as there are limited resources (i.e., funding, youth corps, temporary staff, trail crews, FTE to coordinate crews/volunteers) and increased visitor use.

Strategy: Beginning in 2023, designate sensitive areas as “on-trail use only.”

- Due to documented rare plants, cultural resources, and the value of the meadow ecosystem, a high priority for the Park is to designate Frazier Meadow as “on-trail only.” This area of the Park has been zoned as “Protection.”
- Other areas of the Park may be designated as “on-trail only” when appropriate, in line with the management zoning system, and staff resources support this effort.

Strategy: Reclaim inappropriate social trails. In these areas, add LNT signage to provide visitors with an explanation for why a trail has been closed. Install buck and rail fencing or other physical barriers as needed.

Strategy: Improve trail maps and signage. GGCSP trails have historically been denoted with animal tracks but maps will now have initials (ex., BB for Black Bear). Signage throughout the Park will need to be updated accordingly. Additionally, emergency locator stickers have been added to backcountry signage so lost hikers can share their location if they are able to reach emergency services.

Strategy: Produce and distribute printed and web-based materials with trail information. Visitors often ask the Visitor Center staff and other Park staff for trail segment lengths, elevation profiles, and help with choosing the right trail for their visit. A simple “decision tree” (e.g., flow chart questions related to desired experience) to help guide visitors would be useful as would some of the data from TrafX (such as popular/less popular trails by season, days of the week, and time of day).

Management Initiative 4. Management of multi-use in the Jefferson County area

As visitation increases in the Park, there have been concerns over safety in multi-use areas. This is of highest priority during the hunting season for hunters and other visitors in the Park.

Strategy: Implement new (as of 2022) regulations requiring reservations for hunting. This initiative aims to lower the number of hunters per day. Currently, additional work is needed to determine how to track harvest and if there are “no-shows” for reservations. Initial years may require more patrolling of Nott Creek, Buffalo Trailhead, and other areas accessed by hunters. See Appendix B for additional information.

Strategy: Work with Region education and public information staff to develop and implement a communications plan regarding multi-use in the Jefferson County area. Potential components include:

- Audiences: hunters, hikers/bikers, leaf peepers, etc.
- Messages: be aware of uses, wear orange even if not hunting, follow Park regulations to keep pets leashed, consider avoiding certain trails during peak hunting seasons/time of day, use alternate trails during hunting season located elsewhere in the Park, respect other users, and either use or cancel your reservation.
- Tools: trailhead signage (permanent signs and/or temporary sandwich board signs), social media, website, and personal communication (ex., rangers on patrol)

Management Initiative 5. Water rights and augmentation plan

The Park’s 7 ponds have not historically been administered by the Division of Water Resources (DWR). However, DWR is now seeking to administer these ponds within the water rights priority system, meaning that CPW owes water that evaporates from the ponds to downstream senior water right holders in the Ralston Creek drainage. In 2022, CPW submitted a Substitute Water Supply Plan to lease replacement water from Denver Water for 5 years or less. However, the Park still needs a suitable permanent water sources. The ponds themselves may be considered as a last resort, as draining them would result in a loss of recreation opportunities and habitat for wildlife within the Park, and also would require infrastructure development.

The 3 wells serving Reverend’s Ridge Campground are permitted as commercial exempt (i.e., similar to a residence with a septic system, the assumption is that most of the water from the well goes back into the ground). Due to the difficulty in meeting water quality permit requirements for the Park’s wastewater treatment facility (see Chapter 3), CPW is evaluating the feasibility of discharging treated effluent into an infiltration field. This action is not currently permitted under existing conditions, and new augmentation plan would be required to discharge. Depleted water from these wells accrues into the South Boulder Creek drainage above Gross Reservoir.

In March 2022, CPW began seeking a qualified firm to provide comprehensive engineering support to develop and adjudicate water rights and plan for water augmentation related to 1) the operation of ponds for fishing and recreational uses, and 2) well depletions related to the proposed construction and operation of a wastewater absorption field. The general scope of work will be to determine the amount, timing, and location of depletions resulting from the Park’s operations, identify appropriate augmentation sources that could be acquired by CPW,

and provide engineering support to develop and adjudicate water rights and plan for augmentation in water court. This multi-year project will require considerable staff and other resources.

Future Potential Actions outside the Scope of this Plan

The action below will either not be completed by the Park, will not be completed by the Park within the next 10 years, or would require amending this Plan if initiated.

The Green Ranch development: As part of the planning process, Park, Policy and Planning, Area, Region, and Resource Stewardship staff met to discuss the potential opening of this parcel to more public access. However, CPW determined it was not feasible or desired at this time. Additionally, staff value having open space protected from development. The primary concerns related to this potential opening include impacts to the valuable wildlife and habitat resources found here and continuation of the hunting program. Both the hunting program and large size of the protected area for wildlife in the Park are unique in the State Park system. Also, GGCSF would need additional staff to open this area. Some ideas for minimal development include a new trailhead (possible at the pullover on Highway 46, which would limit traffic issues for neighbors) and trails with seasonal closures. However, any future development of The Green Ranch requires amending this Plan as well as conducting public outreach to Park neighbors and other stakeholders.