

# 2016-2026 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan

## SUMMARY









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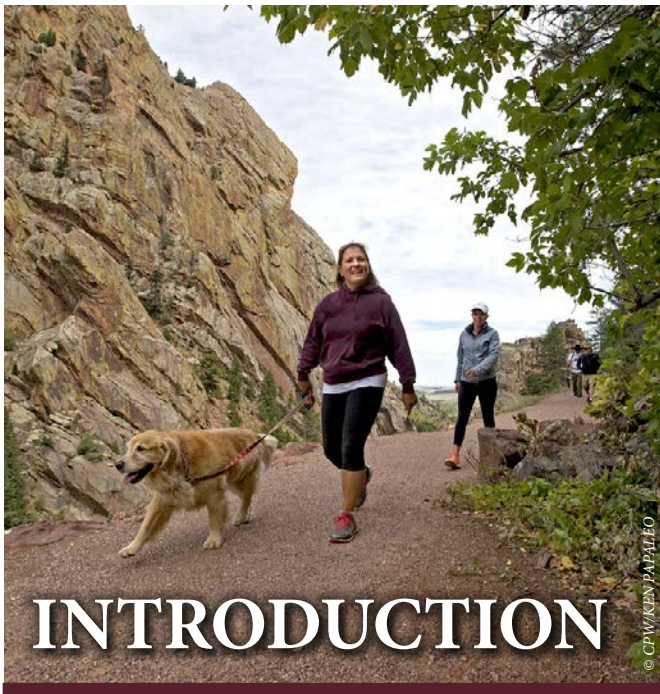
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This Statewide Trails Strategic Plan and the State Trails Program aim to ensure that program direction and efforts are consistent with other cooperators, funders, stakeholders<sup>3</sup>, and ultimately service the expectations and needs of Colorado’s residents and visitors. This includes Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) strategic vision<sup>4</sup>, as well as direction from other partners including the Colorado Dept. of Transportation, federal agencies, local and regional agencies, stakeholder organizations and especially comments received during the public process for this Statewide Trails Strategic Plan. The intent is to recognize and pursue the inclusiveness of all Coloradans and visitors to Colorado in as balanced a way as possible.

## Statutory Mission Statement

The statutory mission of the Colorado State Trails Program (STP) is:

*In order to provide for the greatly increasing outdoor needs of a rapidly expanding Colorado population for public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the out-of-doors of Colorado and for the conservation, development and use of natural resources against fire and other natural and geological hazards, it is hereby declared to be the public policy of this state and among the purposes of this article to: Increase the accessibility and encourage the use of such natural resources by the residents of the state; encourage an increase in riding, hiking, bicycling and other compatible recreation activities as influences for the improvement of the health and welfare of the people; and provide for the needs of specialized recreational motorized vehicles. It is recognized that joint simultaneous trail use by motorized and non-motorized interests may at times be incompatible, and it is the intent of this article to provide separate trails and facilities for each of such motorized and non-motorized interests, when feasible.<sup>5</sup>*

In June 2015, Governor John Hickenlooper announced the “Colorado The Beautiful” initiative. The proposal included three priorities: (1) identify 16 critical trail segments in 2016; (2) develop a statewide Colorado Trails System interactive map; and (3) produce an updated Statewide Trails Strategic Plan. The “Colorado The Beautiful” Initiative emphasizes protecting Colorado’s outdoors, connecting people to the outdoors and linking outdoor areas in Colorado. The Governor highlighted the goal of having every Coloradan live within ten minutes of a park, trail or open space.

Legislative direction is that CPW periodically completes a strategic plan and reports that to the Colorado General Assembly. The Parks and Wildlife Commission approved the most current strategic plan in late 2015.<sup>1</sup> This Statewide Trails Strategic Plan compliments and aims to advance the direction and goals of the CPW Strategic Plan. The State Trails Program (STP) is fully committed to advancing CPW’s strategic goals. Statutory direction for the State Trails Program is captured in C.R.S. § 33-11-102 (2013). The text of the legislative declaration appears in the statutory Mission Statement below.

The State Trails Program is one of several programs operating under Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW), a division of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The State Trails Program is also one of three CPW functions that DNR includes in annual reports to the Colorado General Assembly.

Additionally, federal Land and Water Conservation fund (LWCF) regulations require that Colorado periodically complete a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The current SCORP<sup>2</sup> provides statewide priorities and goals for outdoor recreation. Trail grant applicants are required to demonstrate consistency with the current SCORP as evaluation criteria. For these reasons, the 2014 SCORP provides additional guidance to this Statewide Trails Strategic Plan.

The State Trails Program, as a program under the division of Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR), explicitly incorporates the missions and goals of those agencies as well as other direction from the General Assembly and Governor. This plan inherently functions to advance those directions. For many Coloradans and visitors to the state, trails are the conduit to their intimate connection to Colorado’s great outdoors.

This plan and the actions of the State Trails Program seeks to encourage, facilitate and advocate for trails in Colorado, always while recognizing that the ultimate goal is to connect people to nature in such a way that their trails experience continues to protect and steward our wildlife, sensitive species and critical habitats. Trails are for everyone to enjoy, and always with the emphasis, that such enjoyment should not come at the expense of others. Ethics and stewardship are key aspects of the Trails Program’s direction and intention. Outdoor recreation includes all types of trail users as well as hunters, anglers, campers and others. As a Colorado poet laureate was reported to have said, “God only made so much Colorado”.<sup>6</sup> Our collective responsibility is to work together, cooperating to keep Colorado for those that come after us.

<sup>1</sup> CPW. 2015. “Colorado Parks and Wildlife 2015 Strategic Plan”.

<sup>2</sup> CPW. 2014. “Colorado Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan”.

<sup>3</sup> “Stakeholder or stakeholders” is used throughout to signify all outdoor recreationists: hikers, cyclists, mountain bikers, equestrian, hunters, anglers, wildlife watchers and all other people and organizations who have a vested interest in trails.

<sup>4</sup> GOCO. 2015. “Great Outdoors Colorado 2015 Strategic Plan”

<sup>5</sup> C.R.S. § 33-11-102 (1)

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hornsby Ferril. Quote used in 1988 Colorado SCORP.

# Purposes of this Plan

The principle purposes of this plan are to:

1. Ensure trails program consistency with legislative and Governor's direction and consistency with DNR direction and strategic priorities.
2. Establish program compliance with the CPW Strategic Plan and current Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), including all stated goals and appropriate objectives in those plans.
3. Ensure continued eligibility for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funding.
4. Continually strive to achieve the desired balance for trail recreation with wildlife, habitat and other management goals, especially as trail recreation is an inseparable part of outdoor recreation just as outdoor recreation is critical and essential to the success of wildlife and environmental conservation in Colorado.
5. Continue the statutory direction to provide quality motorized and non-motorized trail recreation opportunities in Colorado.
6. Delineate on-going and future priorities for the State Trails Program through specific strategies and proposed actions.

## Vision Statement

Everyone in Colorado should have easy access to a trail, park or open space. A large majority of Coloradans enjoy trail recreation regularly. Frequent trail use improves people's health, contributes to local economies and remains an important quality of life indicator for Colorado.

Accomplishing this includes encouraging trail recreation and management that appropriately consider the importance of environmental factors, including wildlife, habitats, sensitive species and quality landscapes. Additionally, funding for quality trails must include adequate funding for maintenance of existing trails and related facilities. Finally, appropriate enforcement of rules and regulations is needed to diminish the negatives caused by that very small portion of the population.

## Strategic Goals and Objectives

The following six strategic goals derive from a public discussion with the State Recreation Trails Committee in December 2015, augmented with public and staff input. The Committee accepted these at their April, 2016 meeting. Additionally, the CPW leadership team reviewed these concurrently with the Committee review of the strategic goals and objectives.

### 1. Provide statewide leadership for trail recreation in Colorado.

- 1.1 Make certain that trails are for all citizens, visitors and recreationists, and facilitate efforts to correct gaps in how trails serve the public.
- 1.2 Assure that Colorado's trail system enables and encourages Coloradans to experience the state's diverse landscapes in a variety of ways.
- 1.3 Emphasize sustainable<sup>7</sup> trails that protect the environment, sensitive species and wildlife habitat.
- 1.4 Build Colorado's program for trails and trail recreation, as one of the best in the nation.

### 2. Facilitate trail development and management across Colorado.

- 2.1 Work collaboratively to understand and address trail related issues, challenges, problems and needs.
- 2.2 Recognize that today's constituents expect accurate, convenient information about trails, pursue best available information, especially in conjunction with the Colorado Trails System mapping effort.
- 2.3 Communicate expectations for projects, especially through the grants process, with the goal of sustainable trails that protect the environment, especially habitats and sensitive species.
- 2.4 Maintain best practices for trail development, including thoughtful design<sup>8</sup>, long-term sustainability, and trail linkages.
- 2.5 Integrate trail efforts (statewide), sharing information with trail sponsors to support collaboration and avoid duplication.
- 2.6 Stimulate collaborative efforts among public and private entities, with the State Trails Program providing leadership to accomplish this vision.

“...while recognizing that the ultimate goal is to connect people to nature...”

### 3. Serve as the advocate for trails in Colorado.

- 3.1 Develop Colorado's opportunities for trail recreation, by funding an array of trails projects.
- 3.2 Build awareness for the importance of wildlife habitat conservation.
- 3.3 Improve awareness of the essential benefits of trails: health, economics, quality of life, environmental benefits.
- 3.4 Encourage the understanding of how “walkability” and “bikeability” enhance communities' quality of life and how trails help that.
- 3.5 Expand cooperation and collaboration with volunteer, educational and non-profit organizations.

### 4. Emphasize responsible stewardship for all phases of trail development and use.

- 4.1 Accentuate the importance of natural resources conservation, including wildlife and habitat, in conjunction with trail recreation, in the design, construction, maintenance, and enjoyment of trails.
- 4.2 Prioritize trails development and maintenance that is sustainable and sensitive to the environment, while complementing other land uses (e.g., people can use trails to commute to work or school as well as recreation).
- 4.3 Expand positive interactions and communications with Colorado's youth about trail recreation.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this Plan, sustainable and sustainability are used to represent the broad sense as sustainable environmentally, economically, physically, etc. Occasions where more specific use is intended include the specific associated term, such as “environmentally sustainable”. The term “long-term sustainability” is intended to include all or as many aspects of sustainability as feasible.

<sup>8</sup> The term “design” is used throughout to recommend that trails consider the mission and goals of the managing agency, and where possible include near and long-term considerations of environmental, social, construction, user satisfaction, and other factors, as feasible.



## *Strategic Goals and Objectives continued*

### **5. Advance ethical use and cooperation among trail recreationists.**

- 5.1 Stimulate all users to practice ethical and considerate interaction with other trail users, other recreationists, and the public.
- 5.2 Stress ethical interaction with the natural world and wise use of Colorado's natural resources, sensitive species and important habitats.
- 5.3 Seek to minimize conflict among trail users and impacts to trail settings through encouraging appropriate design, management, and education for trails and trail recreation.
- 5.4 Continue administrative and operational transparency for the State Trails Program.

### **6. Seek financial sustainability for the Trails Program.**

- 6.1 Publicize the funding challenges faced by all trail providers and managers across Colorado.
- 6.2 Highlight the success and benefits to trail recreation stemming from the user-funded model used for motorized trail recreation.
- 6.3 Explore how to improve funding levels and reliability for non-motorized trail recreation.

## **State Recreation Trails Committee**

Established by CRS § 33-11-105 the State Recreation Trails Committee (SRTC) is currently composed of nine (9) members, representing the seven (7) Colorado Congressional Districts and GOCO and an at-large, statewide representative. The Parks and Wildlife Commission appoint SRTC members. By statute, the SRTC meets at least four times per year, works with Trails Program Staff as well as their respective districts. The SRTC members provide a representative for different types of trail recreation, and are statutorily obligated to represent all forms of trail recreation in their deliberations.

The SRTC plays a major role in the review and approval of non-motorized trail and of motorized grants each year. Additionally, the SRTC serves as Colorado's State Recreational Advisory Committee as required by the Federal Highway Administration for eligibility for federal Recreational Trails Program funds.





# Importance of Trail Recreation in Colorado

Trails are a valuable resource for promoting health, fitness, and a connection with nature. Additionally, trails are how many Coloradans and visitors to Colorado connect to nature and wildlife. Continuing to improve trail recreation opportunities while protecting wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources, as well as other environmental aspects, is at the heart of CPW's mission.

Trail related recreation, including non-motorized and motorized recreation, continues to be the most popular type of outdoor recreation in Colorado. Recent studies about participation in outdoor recreation indicates that 83% of Coloradans recreate on trails, and that total participation exceeded 227 million activity days in 2013.<sup>9</sup> These figures are consistent with previous studies, indicating the long-term popularity of trail related recreation in Colorado.<sup>10,11,12</sup>

“...trail recreation often encourages participation in other types of outdoor recreation...”

Current estimates are that there are over 33 thousand miles of trails in Colorado. Of that total, approximately 58 percent (19,168 miles) are on federal lands, principally those managed by the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Local and Regional governments provide about 18 percent of the total (6,200 miles), while the remaining 24 percent (7,970 miles) are managed by CPW in state parks or state wildlife areas or CDOT in highway corridors.

Outdoor recreation is fundamentally important to Colorado, for Colorado's outstanding quality of life and vital economic contributions to the state. A recent, non-scientific, poll conducted for CPW indicated that Colorado resident respondents stated that trail recreation is very important to their quality of life.<sup>13</sup> Previous research<sup>14</sup>, found that outdoor recreation in Colorado generates:

- \$34.5 billion annually (2013) in direct and indirect economic impacts and \$21 billion on trips and equipment.
- The outdoor recreation industry in Colorado generates 313,000 jobs and \$4.2 billion in wages and salaries.
- \$4.9 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenues.

Motorized trail recreation, which typically involves travel to a location that allows motorized trail use as well as use of specialized off highway equipment, generates about \$2.1 billion annually in Colorado. Typically, non-motorized trail related recreation occurs relatively close to home, making it a very low cost recreational activity. Nonetheless, the huge popularity of non-motorized trail recreation likely generates another \$3 billion or more annually.<sup>15,16</sup> The specifics of this need further study and appear as an action later in this plan. Further discussion of the overall economic benefits of trails appears below.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>9</sup> CPW 2014. SCORP op. cit. Table 3-4, page 36.

<sup>10</sup> Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. 2009. "Market Assessment Study".

<sup>11</sup> Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. 1998. "Visitation and Use Report"

<sup>12</sup> Colorado Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. 1988. "Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan".

<sup>13</sup> CRL Associates. 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Southwick Associates. 2013. "The Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation in Colorado: A regional and county-level analysis." Prepared for the Outdoor Industry Association and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

<sup>15</sup> Outdoor Industry Association. 2016. "Outdoor Recreation Economy", accessed from <https://outdoorindustry.org/research-tools/outdoor-recreation-economy/>

<sup>16</sup> There is not a definitive study for economic benefits of trails in Colorado. Reference "White, E.M., and D.J. Stynes. 2010. "Updated Spending Profiles for National Forest Recreation Visitors By Activity", for comparative expenditure estimates for non-motorized trail recreation.

<sup>17</sup> The Colorado Dept. of Transportation (CDOT) is in the process of completing a study on the economics of biking and walking in Colorado. This was not available at the time this plan was completed.

## Key Benefits of Trail Recreation

People in Colorado have long appreciated and enjoyed trails. The passage of the Recreational Trails Act in 1971 speaks to that fact. Trails are one of the most effective and economical ways to get people outdoors. Recognized as a “gateway activity”, trail recreation often encourages participation in other types of outdoor recreation.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, this also helps increase support for nature stewardship/conservation.<sup>19</sup> Yet, getting people outdoors can affect wildlife, habitat, sensitive species and other environmental factors. Managers need to find a balance for how to accomplish this balance, as ultimately, trail recreationists are the largest body of citizens who could support efforts to protect our natural resources and environment.

There is a substantial body of research supporting the value of outdoor recreation, physical activity as provided by trail recreation and resulting health benefits. This includes both physical and mental health. Increasingly, evidence suggests that outdoor activity, such as walking, biking or hiking, provides societal benefits, including lower health care costs.<sup>20</sup>

## Consistency with the 2015 CPW Strategic Plan

The 2016 Statewide Trails Strategic Plan conforms to the strategic direction set out in the 2015 CPW Strategic Plan. The importance of conserving wildlife and habitat is the top priority in the 2015 CPW Strategic Plan. The Statewide Trails Strategic Plan recognizes this direction for CPW and highlights its significance as a top priority through the objectives and actions of the Statewide Trails Strategic Plan. Additionally, various actions in the Trails Strategic Plan will complement and further advance the other CPW Strategic Goals.

As a statutorily defined program, the State Trails Program has a distinct position within CPW. The State Trails Program is one of a handful of statutorily designated programs under the CPW umbrella. Hence, the Trails Program is an integral component of CPW, while also having specific requirements expressed in statute and as specified by its funders (e.g., GOCO, NPS and FHWA). The purpose of this Statewide Trails Strategic Plan is to accomplish all three directions as efficaciously as possible.

CPW’s Strategic Plan lists the agency’s goals, objectives and benchmarks. Each unit or program in CPW also develops specific indicators tied to the goals, objectives and benchmarks. The State Trails Program’s indicators appear in the DNR Strategic Performance Plan. These include:

- Annual number of registrations, permits and associated revenues (OHV and Snowmobiles).
- Number of OHV and recreational trail grant applications, awards, and dollars awarded.
- Dollars for snowmobile capital grants awarded and dollars for snowmobile grooming contracts.
- Miles of trails in State Parks.
- Additionally, the State Trails Program will annually report miles of trails constructed and trail miles maintained, with CPW funding.



## Public Process

This Statewide Trails Strategic Plan incorporated information gained through an extensive public process. The State Trails Program working with CPW Planning and Policy Staff conducted four focus group meetings around Colorado and a phone-in telephone town hall. Additionally CPW posted draft components on a dedicated Trails Strategic Plan web site, publicized on the CPW web page and the Trails web page. Discussions of the Statewide Trails Strategic process occurred at four (4) State Trails Committee meetings, with time for public comment at each, and then presented at Parks and Wildlife Commission meetings. Additionally, information about the Trails Strategic Plan went out to all CPW staff, with comments from staff incorporated in different drafts of this plan, consistent with direction in the “State Measurement for Accountable Responsive and Transparent Government (SMART)” Act.

Many of comments received from trail recreationists mentioned that this plan explains the needed balance between motorized and non-motorized trail recreation. The statutory direction for the program<sup>21</sup> includes both motorized and non-motorized trail recreation. Both are important to Colorado’s residents and visitors, and hence to the State Trails Program strategies and operations. Both will continue to receive programmatic attention over the life of this plan, consistent with appropriate uses and available funding. Considerable safeguards already exist to guard against a pragmatic bias toward one or other in terms of trail/recreational pursuits.

<sup>18</sup> Outdoor Foundation. 2011. <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchParticipation2011.pdf>. Accessed 5/31/2013.

<sup>19</sup> SHIFT. 2015. Conference Proceedings.

<sup>20</sup> Center for Disease Control. 2000. <http://www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/r2k1006a.htm>. Accessed 5/31/2016.

<sup>21</sup> C.R.S. § 33-11-102 (1), (2), and (3)



Another frequently offered comment concerned the criticality of protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat, and in giving wildlife experts representation in where trails might be constructed or how trails should be managed to protect wildlife resources. As noted elsewhere, the State Trails Program does not build trails, it provides funding to land managers and interested constituent groups. Currently the grant process includes very specific direction that every grant is reviewed by CPW regional staff, specifically field wildlife managers, so that wildlife related concerns are vetted first, and before the proposal goes to the next step in the review. This also means that any grant application with significant wildlife concerns faces a very challenging path before possible approval. This approach allows wildlife experts to comment and recommend changes, up to and including not funding grants with such concerns. This process is always open to review and can evolve if new concerns about protecting wildlife and habitat surface. In short, the design of the grants process aims to fully accommodate wildlife issues so that trail grants are not detrimental to wildlife objectives. An additional factor is that under CPW's employee duties, the Regional Trails Coordinators are specifically responsible for working with the trails community, CPW staff and by extension, sportsmen, to understand and build effective communications about proposed trails projects, potential concerns and possible solutions. CPW's approach is to take such issues to the local level, where discussions can accomplish results at the pre-grant application phase.

Additionally many comments expressed concern about funding for non-motorized trail recreation. Interestingly this came from all types of trail recreationists as well as sportsmen. Generally, this included recognition that motorized users have successfully funded their programs through vehicle registrations, generating adequate funding for maintenance and construction, as well as for enforcement and education. The GOCO amendment specifically mentions trail grants as one of the fund's designated purposes, on a par with wildlife education and viewing, habitat protection, state park improvements, recreational water and other uses. GOCO continues to be a major funding stream for non-motorized trail

**“In short, without volunteers, Colorado’s trail networks would not exist.”**

grants in Colorado. The Trails Program also directs federal funds, specifically Recreation Trails Program (RTP) and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), to trails, consistent with fund requirements.<sup>23</sup> However, whereas the Colorado Off Highway Vehicle and Colorado Snowmobile Programs both generate relatively adequate funding through vehicle registration fees, there is no dedicated user funded revenue specifically dedicated to non-motorized trails. Fluctuations in the two federal funds over the past decade or so, means that GOCO funds for trails are the only reliable source of funding and perhaps more significantly, non-motorized trail users are not paying their own way.

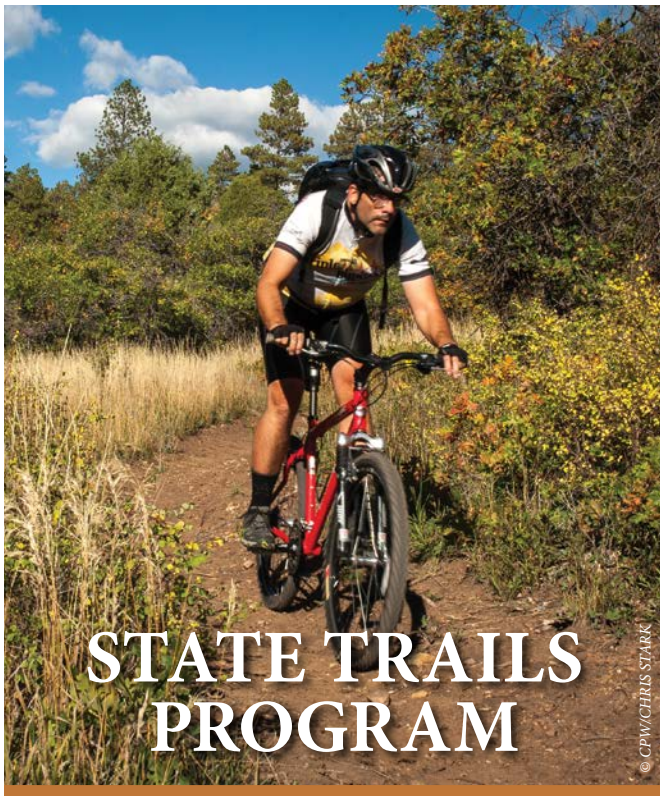
Another key comment involved the role of volunteers. Every year thousands of volunteers provide their time and desperately needed labor for trail maintenance and construction. Estimates of the value these volunteers provide ranges upwards of \$25 million annually. In short, without volunteers, Colorado’s trail networks would not exist. This plan recognizes that volunteers play a vital and significant role for trails. Actions shown below emphasize increasing coordination with volunteer groups as well as publicizing the valuable contribution of volunteers.

One other comment appeared several times during the process, specifically the critical need to work closely with communities and counties and indeed local interests to ensure that trails continue to provide needed recreation opportunities that serve local citizens. Over the 45 years of the State Trails Program, that aspect has been a constant. State Trails Program staff continue to work with communities, often times in coordination with Great Outdoors Colorado. Again, actions in the Goals and Measures tables below speak to the need to continue and improve that interaction.



<sup>22</sup> Article XXVII, Section 1, (b), (III)

<sup>23</sup> RTP funds derive from federal gasoline taxes and specifically proportions go to motorized trails and to non-motorized trails.



Consistent with the State Trails Program's legislative direction, the Program serves as the nexus for trail maintenance, construction and issues across Colorado. Through trail grants and on-going interaction with management agencies, the Trails Program cooperates with federal agencies, other state agencies, local and regional government groups, stakeholder organizations and the general trail recreation community. The trail grants funding for motorized and non-motorized trail recreation provide a portion of the resources necessary to accomplish trail work throughout Colorado. The goals and objectives discussed in this plan establish the priorities for directing the grants program as well as other functions of the Trails Program.

Again, the State Trails Program does not directly build or maintain trails in Colorado. Agencies with trail management jurisdiction handle both trail maintenance and construction. Grants from CPW's Trails Program provide the ability for landowners to accomplish work "on the ground", while ensuring that grant criteria are compatible with statewide priorities. Colorado does indeed have a world-class statewide trails network, principally the result of cohesive collaborative efforts among trails providers, citizens and effective use of limited funding.

Motorized and non-motorized trail grant application cycles take place at slightly different times of the year, to spread out the workload for Trails Committee and staff reviews of the applications. Regional CPW staff, including biologists, review every grant application at the beginning of the application process. If the CPW review determines that there are potential concerns about wildlife or habitat, staff notify the grant subcommittee of those concerns. If the trail project is on federal lands, the project

must pass a NEPA<sup>24</sup> clearance. Therefore, all trail projects receive biological and environmental reviews, including wildlife and habitat reviews, before the respective subcommittee's review of the application. Thus, sponsors have to address any concerns before the grant is approved or funded. The process for grant scoring and award is widely publicized and transparent, and open to public comment at several steps. The State Trails Committee approves the trail grant applications and submits their recommendations to the Parks and Wildlife Commission. The Commission then makes the final approval for trail grants. Following approval, Trail Program staff then work with the award recipient to set up the grants. Details of the grant process appear in the associated Appendix.

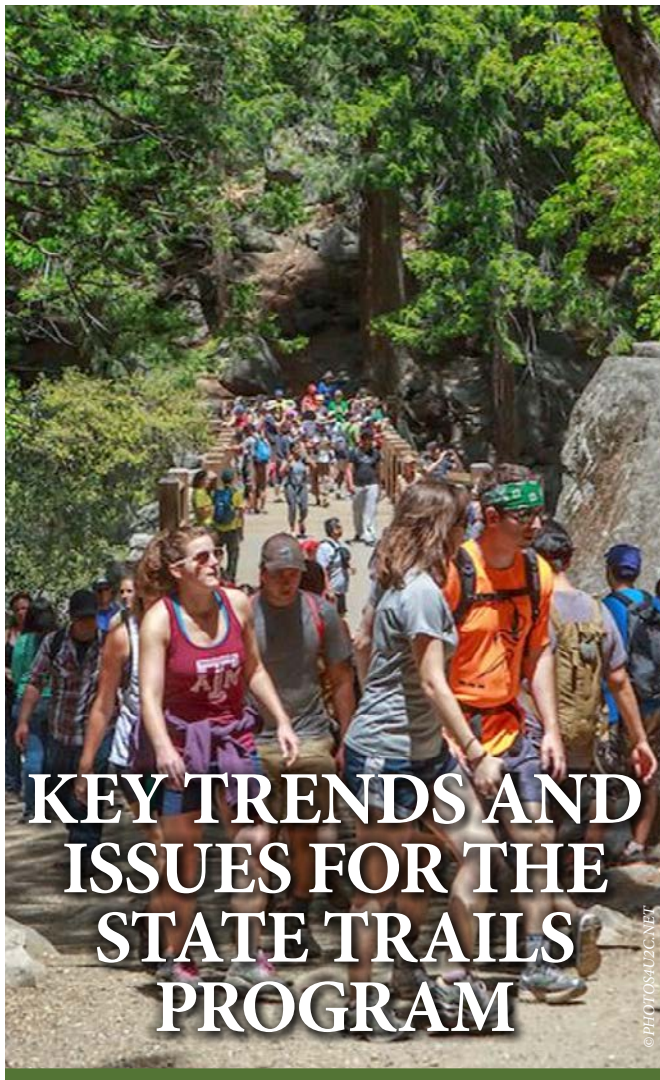
The Trails Committee and staff periodically review the grant application processes to ensure that it is effective and employs appropriate criteria. Often these reviews are the result of input from grant recipients and interested public, demonstrating the openness of Program staff and the Committee. In recent years, the Program adjusted the process to strengthen the review by CPW staff to guarantee that wildlife and habitat issues receive full consideration at the beginning of the process, before others review the applications. This ensures that wildlife and habitat issues are the top priority in grant selection. Additionally, the Committee and program staff used the "Lean"<sup>25</sup> approach to review and enhance the grant administration process. The current grant process should continue to undergo periodic reviews as needed. Furthermore, Program staff and the Committee maintain steady dialogs with GOCO, the Governor's Office through DNR and with other agencies to ensure that considering trail issues in Colorado includes many voices.

Much of work on trails in Colorado happens because volunteers. Grant sponsors provide a portion of the total project cost through "in-kind" services. These often involve sponsor members or other volunteering their time and work to complete the project. Additionally, volunteers provide thousands of hours of work each year to maintain and improve trails all around Colorado. Without these volunteer efforts, much of the needed work to build, maintain and improve trails would not happen.

<sup>24</sup> NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act (40 CRF §1508.18) involves an environmental review by the appropriate federal agency. Trail grant projects that involve federal lands must have NEPA clearance before the grant application is considered.

<sup>25</sup> "Lean" is a multi-step process that aims to maximize customer service while minimizing waste.





## KEY TRENDS AND ISSUES FOR THE STATE TRAILS PROGRAM

CPW's 2015 Strategic Plan and the "Existing Conditions, Trends and Projections"<sup>26</sup> report, considered important trends facing the agency. The same trends are germane to the State Trails Program and this Statewide Trails Strategic Plan. The top trends for Colorado include:

- Growth in population is among fastest in U.S.
- Population projections are that 75 percent of the population growth will occur along the Front Range, increasing demand for outdoor recreation (including trails) along the Front Range and from visitors living in those areas.
- The proportion of over 55 year olds is increasing; Baby Boomers (seniors) are an increasingly larger portion of the population, with specific interests and needs for trail recreation.
- In fact, Colorado seems poised to experience increases in both the portion of young people and older people as those groups are increasing faster than other segments.
- Population diversity is increasing, with an important increase the proportion of Coloradans of Hispanic origins.
- Among the top reasons people elect to live in Colorado are the clean environment, access to public lands and outdoor

recreation opportunities, and the ability to enjoy a healthy, outdoor oriented lifestyle.

- Trail recreation is the most popular recreational activity with over 80 percent of Coloradans enjoying trail activities. Other projections suggest that the proportion of people engaging in trail recreation will increase over the next decade.<sup>27</sup>
- An increased need for volunteers for maintenance and other trail work will increase the need to cooperate and coordinate efforts. Tapping volunteer efforts to increased education, steward and perhaps advocacy offer a proven and effective means to achieve substantial benefits.
- Cross-regional travel within Colorado for outdoor recreation is likely during the next 10 years and beyond.<sup>28</sup>
- Land conservation and preserving natural characteristics rank highly for Coloradans when considered against other priorities.<sup>29</sup>
- Climate change will affect many aspects of Colorado's environment, including trails and trail recreation.

Population growth, and the concomitant factors that accompany growth, such as more homes, more roads, greater demand for water, etc., are the greatest challenges facing CPW and the State Trails Program. Rather than facing tradeoffs between outdoor recreation and protection of natural resources, managers need to develop strategies that balance those factors, much as proposed in the Principles for Advancing Outdoor Recreation and Conservation.<sup>30</sup> Balancing the expected increased interest and participation in trail recreation<sup>31</sup> with CPW's strategic goals for wildlife and habitat is vitally important, yet initially at least, the current approach that using direct review and input from CPW field staff for wildlife related issues, is the best place to start.

Current projections are that Colorado's population may increase by over 20 percent by 2026.<sup>32</sup> This increase means more people wanting to enjoy Colorado's great outdoors, with a corresponding greater effect on natural settings, wildlife, habitat, and, for these purposes, trails. The only acceptable solution is for wildlife managers and recreation managers to work closely and cooperatively to find successful solutions that achieve the needed balance between protection of critical and sensitive habitats and species and outdoor recreation. Closing people off from the resources we seek to provide our grandchildren will only insulate citizens from appreciating the value those resources provide. In short, managers and trail users collectively need to foster and develop an ethical sense of stewardship toward wildlife and natural resources, as well as toward others enjoying the outdoors too. Ultimately, we share the same goals.

Intriguingly, the State Trails Program does not build trails. Rather the State Trails Program facilitates trail maintenance and construction through the trail grant process. Wildlife and habitat considerations are included in the preliminary review, and if a proposed trail project affects wildlife resources, trails grants staff will remove the application from further consideration or amend the conditions for grant funding to address those identified impacts. Additionally, applications receive other environmental reviews, such as NEPA review for projects on federal lands, as appropriate.

<sup>26</sup> CPW Policy and Planning Unit. 2015. Colorado Parks & Wildlife 2015 Strategic Plan; "Existing Conditions, Trends and Projections" 29 pages.

<sup>27</sup> Cordell, H. Ken. 2012. Outdoor recreation trends and futures: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment. General Technical Report SRS-150.

<sup>28</sup> CPW. 2014. Colorado Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Page 37.

<sup>29</sup> CPW. 2013. Colorado SCORP. Outdoor Recreation Participation Public Survey.

<sup>30</sup> SHIFT. 2014. Principles for Advancing Outdoor Recreation and Conservation. Recommendations from the 2014 SHIFT Conference, Jackson Hole, Wyoming. October 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Cordell, H. Ken. 2012. Outdoor recreation trends and futures: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment. General Technical Report SRS-150.

<sup>32</sup> State Demography Office. 2015. Population Totals for Colorado and Sub-state regions. Population Forecast. Accessed (5/31/2016) at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-vz6H4k4SESWkFleW5VWHRzMFfE/view?pref=28&pli=1>.

Technology also influences recreation. Smart phones provide a readily accessible facility for maps, information about trails, plant and animal identification, and a wealth of other things to learn. When properly used, this can enhance the experience of a trip in the woods for any age trail user, while readily expanding the word of mouth experience. Doubtlessly the current use of this technology has outstripped how we communicate ethically and at times safely. The challenge for managers is to provide accurate, quality information that educates and enhances the user's recreational experience.

Technology also encourages new types of recreation. The sport of mountain biking began when someone first rode their Schwinn down a rocky hill without resulting in serious injury. More generally, credit for originating the sport goes to any of several 1970's enthusiasts who modified their bikes so that they and the bikes could make more than one successful excursion. From there the sport grew in popularity as technology contributed to advances that made the sport more attractive to more people.

The use of and need for volunteers will continue to expand significantly over the next decade. Volunteer stewards to build and maintain our recreational trail system and to engage Coloradans in the outdoors has never been more important. There is a substantial body of data demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of using more volunteers to help address resource issues. The need for volunteers will continue to increase as Colorado's population increases, with growing impacts on all recreational resources, including trails, habitats, parks and open space on public lands. Added to this is the suspected impacts of flood and fire, against a backdrop of limited or shrinking financial resources to manage our lands.

Increasingly people are expressing an interest in e-bikes, bicycles with variable levels of motorized assist for the rider. Trail managers at all levels will soon develop appropriate regulations to allow e-bike recreation, while aiming to minimize impacts to other recreationists and resources.

The emergence of e-bikes further demonstrates how conflicts among recreationists evolve. The challenge for managers is not new, and every previous Colorado Trails Strategic plan includes discussion of ethical etiquette and stewardship. Trails provide the pathways to places where others recreate and where wildlife and nature exist. Concerns over growth or how changing technology introduces new aspects of what trail recreation means, modifies what managers need to do to protect the quality of the experience and the quality of the resources.

If growth is a leading concern for all types of recreation in Colorado, funding is the elephant in the room. Motorized trail users in Colorado have a history and culture of self-generating revenues to protect their recreational interests through registration fees. In fact, the motorized community has periodically joined with CPW to increase those revenues through registration and permit fee increases when they collectively felt the need for greater fiscal resources.

Non-motorized recreation is a different story. GOCO continues to be the principal source of funding for efforts to keep Colorado walking, hiking and biking opportunities vibrant and at pace with changing needs. Federal funds, decades ago the primary source of trail funding, have experienced a pattern of unstable funding. GOCO funding does face other challenges and priorities, however, GOCO's commitment to fund trails in Colorado remains strong. Unfortunately, the level of funding needed to maintain and construct trails across the state far outstrips what GOCO and CPW through the trails grant program can ever provide. Trails managed by local governments in Colorado face a \$22 million maintenance backlog. Trails on federal lands, where GOCO funds constitutionally have to come through a third party, also face a maintenance backlog of the same size. Projected costs to meet the needs of an additional 1 million more people by 2026 exceed \$30 million for local and regional trail providers. Non-motorized trails need a dedicated funding source.







The tables on the following pages show each strategic goal and objective with the associated actions for the State Trails Program. Many of these carry through actions from previous Statewide Trails Plans, demonstrating the continuity of the Trails Program over time. Other actions address Colorado's evolving circumstances. Throughout the actions, the programmatic intent is to satisfy the Trails Program's statutory direction, to advance CPW's mission and goals, to satisfy direction from the Department of Natural Resources and most importantly serve the Program's customers and constituents as effectively as possible.

## 1. Provide statewide leadership for trail recreation in Colorado

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### 1.1. Make certain that trails are for all citizens, visitors and recreationists, and facilitate efforts to correct gaps in how trails serve the public.

- Provide leadership to the trails community (e.g., managers, providers, stakeholders and recreationists) across Colorado by recognizing that trails rely on the integration of biological and social science information, tempered by a thoughtful decision process stemming from community-level input. Continuous action.
- Provide advice to the State Recreation Trails Committee, the Parks and Wildlife Commission and DNR (as requested) on trail-related issues, including regular reporting on grant administration, program accomplishments, progress on strategic goals, and other trail issues. Publish such reports and invite public input.
- Continue program operations and actions that support and complement CPW (or other statewide priorities) to provide and promote quality outdoor trail recreation opportunities for citizens and visitors to Colorado. Provide annual CPW-internal report on progress.
- Regularly update Trails Program actions over the life of the Statewide Trails Strategic Plan, adjusting for current information about citizen needs and expectations, and local, regional and statewide priorities for trails. This is an annual assessment.
- Work with local, regional, state, and federal agencies, non-profit and for profit organizations, to coordinate and improve trails coordination in Colorado. Continue and as possible strengthen community-level interactions with the program as both experience and research support that successful outcomes generally result from effective grass-roots level interactions.

### 1.2. Assure that Colorado's trail system enables and encourages Coloradans to experience the state's diverse landscapes in a variety of ways.

- Identify important gaps in Colorado's trails networks, in terms of linkages as well as appropriate trail qualities, and utilize the trail grant process to prioritize and address those gaps. Provide an annual report on such gaps (quality as well as connections) to the State Trails Committee and Commission, as trail recreation is likely to continue as the most popular recreation activity in Colorado.
- Develop a long-range motorized and non-motorized trail plans to ensure that all trail users continue to have access to and enjoyment of their sport, while reducing conflicts with other trails users and while protecting natural resources, including wildlife, sensitive species, habitat and overall environmental quality.
- Urge local communities, counties, and federal agencies to complete trail plans, especially in cooperation with conservation or general land-use planning, so trails are built and maintained within a broad, regional planning framework and options are preserved as development occurs. To meet the needs of Colorado's increasingly diverse population, balancing urban, rural and backcountry recreation, as well as motorized and different types of non-motorized trail recreation.
- Assist trail sponsors to consider regional trail links as well as multiple-use concept trails across the state, providing geographically diverse recreation opportunities as well as opportunities for tourism, economic development, and trail use between communities, so that people can experience a range of landscapes and settings across Colorado, always with a thorough focus on effective habitat and resource priorities. Review grant criteria every three years to respond to this action.
- Work with federal agency partners, to ensure that trails on federal lands are meeting the needs and expectations of Coloradans and visitors to the state. Report status and progress to the State Trails Committee by 2021.

# 1. Provide statewide leadership for trail recreation in Colorado *continued*

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## 1.3. Emphasize sustainable trails that protect the environment, sensitive species and wildlife habitat.

- Recognize that state, federal and local land management agencies retain the ultimate responsibility for trails on the lands they directly manage and that the State Trails Program should be an effective partner in working with those agencies and interested recreational user groups. Accomplish this by continuing positive, proactive efforts such as the OHV Good Management Trail Crew Program and the cooperative law enforcement effort with federal partners, and use experience and information gained from those efforts to improve trail management during the next 10 years. Provide annual reports on these partnerships to the State Trails Committee and Parks and Wildlife Commission.
- Recommend to CPW leadership that the State Trails Program staff work in conjunction with other CPW staff (including terrestrial staff) to publish an updated “Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind”. This action should also be part of the CPW operational plan.
- Continue to work closely with other CPW staff to ensure that trail placement focuses on proper location, design, development, sustainability, and use, rather than costly mitigation, especially for wildlife and critical habitat resources. Continuous action.
- Work with trail providers and managers to understand why social trails occur, to understand those reasons and how managers can work to ensure that there are fewer adverse impacts caused by social trails in sensitive areas. Open a web-based forum by late 2017 on this topic and other trail topics, targeting feasible solutions.
- Continue to integrate the needs of non-motorized, OHV, snowmobile, and other trail users into overall program efforts, always with a focus on balancing environmental priorities, consistent with CPW’s strategic goals. Continuous action.
- Continue to regularly (e.g., annually) brief the State Recreation Trails Committee, the Parks and Wildlife Commission and DNR (through the annual Operational Strategic Plan or other means) on efforts to ensure long-term sustainability and achieving a balance with other resource priorities, such as conservation of wildlife habitat and a quality state parks system.

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## 1.4. Build Colorado’s program for trails and trail recreation as a national model.

- Continue to be positive, proactive advocates for trails and trail recreation, not independent advocates for specific trail uses. Integrate the needs of all trail users into a “family of uses”, each of which deserves appropriate places to enjoy our state’s trails. Continue to balance environmental, wildlife and other aspects of CPW’s mission with quality recreation. Continuous action.
- Develop appropriate priorities for trails and trail recreation for integration with SCORP, future CPW and DNR strategies, while ensuring compliance with funding requirements and especially to ensure that recognition of trail recreation as the highly popular recreation activity that it is in Colorado. Support efforts to replicate the SCORP public participation survey – use 2013-14 as a base and analyze trends and patterns on a 5-year cycle.
- Work with trail managers to ensure that adequate trail recreation opportunities exist for seniors, including those with decreased mobility, that provide a mix of quality experiences in a mix of environments and locations and continue to make certain that Coloradans of all ages, abilities and other characteristics, have opportunities to enjoy the outdoors of Colorado. On-going effort.
- Pursue strategies to enhance recognition of the value volunteer efforts provide Colorado, specifically for trails, so that the public understands the benefits stemming from volunteering. Work closely with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC), other volunteer organizations, and the Colorado Volunteer Stewardship Coalition. Then work with GOCO, the Colorado Lottery, CPW, DNR and the Governor’s Office to acknowledge the importance of volunteering in Colorado. Continuous action.



## 2. Facilitate trail development and management across Colorado

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### 2.1. Work collaboratively to understand and address trail related issues, challenges, problems and needs.

- With the Colorado Trail System (CTS) mapping effort as a tool, work with state agencies such as CDOT and both county road programs and county/regional recreation providers to identify trail network gaps. On-going effort.
- Build on the CTS effort and information, and coordinating with DNR and the “Colorado The Beautiful” initiative efforts, identify and prioritize key missing segments, especially those that lend themselves to effective use of available funds and effective partnerships to provide the greatest benefit to the people of Colorado. On-going effort.
- Work with the federal recreation managers to improve data and information about trails on federal lands, priorities for maintenance or trail construction, backlog issues and other ways to improve trail recreational opportunities on federal lands in Colorado. On-going effort.
- Work with DNR and the Governor’s Office, encourage private sector support for trail efforts across Colorado. Share successful approaches consistent with the “2007 Recreation Forums” (American Recreation Coalition/National Forest Foundation) recommendations. Report annually to the State Trails Committee and federal partners.
- Conduct periodic surveys and other public preference investigations to maintain up-to-date information about citizen and recreational trail user expectations and trends. Integrate with SCORP public participation efforts.

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### 2.2. Recognize that today’s constituents expect accurate, accessible information about trails, pursue best available information, especially in conjunction with the Colorado Trails System mapping effort.

- Inventory and map trails statewide, and ensure that data and maps available through the Colorado Trails System mapping effort are current, useful and accurate. On-going effort.
- Use information and technology to best inform decisions about trail needs, priorities, grant awards, trail maintenance, trail construction, and balancing different priorities. Ensure that the information used in the decision or prioritization process is transparent and publically available. On-going effort.
- Update Motorized Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) information from USFS annually (January-February) and incorporate BLM’s trail information as that becomes available.
- Support CPW Regional Staff in using maps, input from local governments, state and federal agencies, and user groups/stakeholders to identify areas where new or improved trails are needed, along with areas where plant and wildlife values should be prioritized. Engage key partners, constituents and the public in review and adoption. This work is intended to streamline CPW’s project-specific review, not replace it. The product will inform the CPW trails grant review/approval process. Target – 2017 for assessment of priority areas for mapping.

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### 2.3. Communicate expectations for projects, especially through the grants process, with the goal of sustainable trails that protect the environment, especially habitats and sensitive species.

- Review and if needed enhance the grants process at all phases from application to post-completion review of the completed efforts, and share that information with the State Recreation Trails Committee, the Parks and Wildlife Commission (as appropriate), and directly with interested parties, so that information is a tool for accomplishing the best possible results. On-going effort.
- Maintain and update an electronic (e.g., web-based, app, etc.) “Trails Resource List” of helpful publications and information. Produce a guide for trail applicants/grantees on trail grant management requirements and best practices. Target by early 2018.
- Determine what trails information and maps are most useful to the public, and use appropriate information outreach strategies. On-going effort.
- Use best available information to inform the decision process for the program and for grant awards, and continue to update and make that information current. On-going effort.

## 2. Facilitate trail development and management across Colorado *continued*

### 2.4. Maintain best practices for trail development, including thoughtful design, long-term sustainability, and trail linkages.

- Ensure that the trails grant selection process remains an inclusive, fair and open process with opportunities for public input. On-going effort.
- Leverage state trail grant programs to the extent feasible with other funding sources and use of volunteers to maximize quality trail opportunities across Colorado. On-going effort.
- Encourage both multiple use and single use trails as appropriate for the specifics of the project. Multiple use trails provide an array of benefits to many people, while single use and dedicated purpose trails in some areas provide specific benefits to those certain trail users, and may enhance public safety on the trails. On-going effort.
- Serve as a clearinghouse for best practices about best practices for trails, using technology to disseminate that information cost effectively. Maintain information resource about trails impacts and how appropriate standards can alleviate those. On-going effort.
- Emphasize the appropriateness of good, inclusive communications with all interested parties through regular interactions with key stakeholder and interest groups, periodic town hall meetings and other approaches to obtain direct input from the public. On-going effort.

### 2.5. Integrate trail efforts (statewide), sharing information with trail sponsors to support collaboration and avoid duplication.

- Develop contacts in each county of the state that are familiar with the purpose and the goals of the State Trails Program, and maintain those contacts through a shared communications system (e.g., electronic forum, blog, etc.). Develop purpose and goals information by early 2017, update contact information by early 2018.
- Use the grant application process to obtain up-to-date trail information for the CPW's Colorado Trail System mapping effort. On-going effort.
- Produce a guide for local governments, land trusts, and other organizations on trail planning, development and maintenance best practices. Target initial release by late 2018.
- Reconvene the biennial trail symposium conference as a means to bring trail interests together to exchange ideas, foster partnerships and common efforts, and to encourage direct interaction with decision makers, managers and recreationists. Target for 2020.

### 2.6. Stimulate collaborative efforts among public and private entities, with the State Trails Program providing leadership to accomplish this vision.

- Work with CDOT, DOLA, health agencies and counties to facilitate and coordinate trail planning and development in conjunction with transportation system improvements, to leverage funds and trail recreation links around Colorado and adjacent states. Coordinate these actions with the Governor's Trails Council. Report progress to the State Trails Committee annually.
- Sponsor outreach efforts that are targeted and focused to trail users, trail interest and stakeholder groups as well as other interest groups, such as sportsmen, and the general public, at the local and regional levels to encourage outdoor recreation along with ethical use of the natural resources; Outreach to children should be age appropriate. On-going effort.
- Work with the constituencies who support the Trails Program, and work with those interests in strengthening positive information about the Program, including efforts to ensure a balanced approach toward trail development and use. A balanced approach should embrace appropriate regard for wildlife and other natural resources. On-going effort.
- Reinforce the understanding that trail users seek different experiences in urban, rural and backcountry areas, and administer the program so that Coloradans, no matter where they live, can enjoy the benefits trails provide their communities. On-going effort.
- Support the dedication of long-term trail easements on appropriate open space projects. On-going effort.



## 3. Serve as the advocate for trails in Colorado

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### 3.1. Develop Colorado's opportunities for trail recreation, by funding an array of trails projects.

- Assist DNR with the “Colorado the Beautiful” Initiative, and specifically for trail efforts such as the “16 in 2016”. Additionally work with GOCO and other funding partners to ensure that trail projects are mutually compatible with their vision and goals – “Protect. Connect. Inspire!” On-going effort.
- Work with Department of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), Colorado Tourism Office (CTO), Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office (CORIO) and other state and local agencies on messaging about trails, bicycle commuting and active living benefits in Colorado. Coordinate all such actions with the Governor's Trails Council. Target preliminary report by mid-2017.
- Share demographic characteristics – age, income, education, etc. – information and strive to keep information current as Colorado's population continues to evolve over time and those factors influence recreation choices. Link to SCORP related efforts.
- Take steps to ensure that local-level trails continue to function as a gateway to other forms of outdoor recreation, which in turn are the segue to various types of nature-based recreation, such as wildlife watching, as well as nature stewardship and conservation. On-going effort.
- Promote “signage”, “way finding” and other information through trail grants to inform the public on local trail opportunities. On-going effort.
- Develop messages and communication strategies (e.g., social media, PDA and phone technology) that appeal to all age groups, demographic and economic backgrounds and assist local partners in marketing the benefits of trails for their communities, as well as Colorado's world-class trails network. On-going effort.
- Use best available information to inform the decision process for the program and for grant awards, and continue to update and make that information current. On-going effort.

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### 3.2. Build awareness for the importance of wildlife habitat conservation.

- Prioritize trail design and development to protect important habitats, sensitive species and other natural resources, while emphasizing that trail recreation reaches the greatest number of citizens and provides vast opportunities to educate and encourage stewardship of all natural resources, including wildlife resources. On-going effort.
- Work to ensure that the Colorado Trails System mapping effort includes current information about critical wildlife, habitat, sensitive species and related information so that information is readily available for the development of and review of trail grant applications and awards. On-going effort.
- Create and maintain a statewide trails information clearinghouse, integrated as much as feasible with the Colorado Trails System mapping effort. Target preliminary planning by late 2018.

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### 3.3. Improve awareness of the essential benefits of trails: health, economics, quality of life, environmental benefits.

- Work with communication specialists and stakeholders, publicize how trail recreation provides many opportunities to connect citizens to nature, builds an appreciation of nature, and strengthens people's commitment to stewardship and conservation of Colorado's natural wealth, as well as the health and economic benefits that trails provide. Work with the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition and others to build a “giving back to Colorado” awareness. On-going effort.
- Work with CDPHE and health providers to promote healthy life-style choices through trail recreation and exercise. Coordinate these actions with the Governor's Trails Council. On-going effort.
- Publicize that trails can link communities across Colorado and become a magnet for trail related tourism and economic development, while being sustainable and environmentally friendly. Recognize that trail tourism needs long distance, well-designed and well-maintained trail loops/linkages to attract recreational outdoor tourists. On-going effort.

### 3. Serve as the advocate for trails in Colorado *continued*

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- Work with the Colorado Tourism Office/OEDIT, CDOT, GOCO, CDPHE and interested communities to understand and promote environmental, economic and health benefits from community and regional trail networks. Coordinate all such actions with the Governor's Trails Council. On-going effort.
- Work with education and outreach specialists to develop and implement effective strategies to interact with children and youth and encourage their participation in trail recreation in Colorado. Target mid-2019.

### 4. Emphasize responsible stewardship for trails and among trail recreationists

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#### **4.1. Accentuate the importance of natural resources conservation, including wildlife and habitat, in conjunction with trail recreation, in the design, construction, maintenance, and enjoyment of trails.**

- Continue the practice for early review of all trail grant applications by CPW field staff to ensure that trail grants do not affect wildlife, habitat or sensitive species or areas and do not result in further fragmentation of those resources. On-going effort.
- Emphasize that outdoor users are responsible for avoiding and minimizing the impacts of their use across the places they recreate and the larger landscape. ” On-going effort.
- Reinforce trail planning and management activities that view trails in a broader landscape perspective, and thereby help ensure trail alignments that are well suited to their natural settings and environmental issues. On-going effort.
- Encourage research efforts that lead to broader understanding of how trails affect our environment and how trail design or trail user education can help lessen those impacts. Link to SCORP process.
- Continue monitoring trail projects, directly with Regional Trail Coordinators and other field staff, as well as in response to input from the public, to understand and act upon any resource impacts. On-going effort.
- Continue to use the cooperative law enforcement partnership with federal land managers to educate the public, and monitor resource conditions related to trail recreation in Colorado. Explore the use of trail cams and similar technology, especially with key seasonal and other closures to identify violators. On-going effort.
- Encourage CPW regional staff to include trail interest groups in regional advisory committee meetings. This could increase positive cooperation between hunters and anglers and other recreationists working toward common objectives.



## 4. Emphasize responsible stewardship for trails and among trail recreationists *continued*

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### **4.2. Prioritize trails development and maintenance that is sustainable and sensitive to the environment, while complementing other land uses (e.g., people can use trails to commute to work or school as well as recreation).**

- Fund only environmentally appropriate trail projects to ensure trails do not degrade public lands, wildlife habitat or natural resources. On-going effort.
- Encourage the use of up-to-date trail design standards, and use the trail grant process to employ such standards, and to improve and promote trail sustainability. On-going effort.
- Understand trail Operations and Maintenance (O&M) challenges faced by many trail managers and share best practices and innovative solutions. Link to Trails Conference.
- Work with CDOT to identify and take advantage of opportunities to improve right of way trails, trail networks and linkages around Colorado. On-going effort.
- Work with sponsors and the Regional Trail Coordinators to monitor, collect information and evaluate trail projects over time to determine sustainability and to understand and act upon any unintended or cumulative adverse impacts from trail recreation. Link to Trails Conference.
- Share information and case studies and provide trail maintenance/construction workshops on environmentally sensitive and sustainable trail development, perhaps in conjunction with the grant application process. Link to trails conference.

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### **4.3. Expand positive interactions and communications with Colorado's youth about trail recreation.**

- Continue to work closely with volunteer organizations, such as VOC, CYCA and others, to get volunteers on the ground to improve trails around Colorado, and as possible, to encourage stewardship. On-going effort.
- Expand grant funding to support volunteer trail organizations, volunteer training and volunteer trail projects, as a means to accomplish needed trail maintenance and to promote trail and resource stewardship. On-going effort.
- Provide funding support for youth corps and youth crews and coordinate with CYCA and Regional Trail Coordinators to monitor and coordinate youth trail crew activities. On-going effort.
- Promote trail volunteerism, youth programming, and educational programming, which foster stewardship of our trails and public lands. On-going effort.
- Sustain technology and social media expertise and functionality to help inform people's recreation choices. On-going effort.

## 5. Advance ethical use and cooperation among trail recreationists

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### 5.1. Stimulate all users to practice ethical and considerate interaction with other trail users, other recreationists, and the public.

- Support efforts that help educate the public concerning appropriate trail use and good trail etiquette, including stewardship and protection for wildlife and other natural resources. Promote inclusion and respect of all trail users as part of the State Trails Program message. On-going effort.
- Periodically include ethical use and cooperation discussions in the public discussion sessions (e.g., phone in town halls, public meetings, partnership conferences, etc.) Report plan to State Trails Committee and PWC by mid-2018.
- Work with trail clubs and related organizations to better understand the needs of the public at large and those of specific user groups. On-going effort.
- Encourage trail planning and design that take into account the specific needs of varying modes of travel. On-going effort.
- Work with education and marketing specialists, employ effective strategies designed to share information with the public about trail recreation opportunities, efforts of the Trails Program (and partners) to improve trail recreation, and avenues to share constructive comments. Target preliminary plan by early 2019.

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### 5.2. Stress ethical interaction with the natural world and wise use of Colorado's natural resources, sensitive species and important habitats.

- Share information about the importance of habitat and resource protection in conjunction with the importance of trail recreation and the opportunities trail recreation provides to connect to and educate recreationists who are not specifically wildlife recreationists. Accentuating the importance of both trail recreation and wildlife recreation is vital for conservation efforts. On-going effort.
  - Work closely with CPW staff to develop appropriate messages about habitat, wildlife, sensitive species and other issues. On-going.
  - Create opportunities for volunteer and trails groups to work together on trail projects to increase awareness of environmental issues, stewardship and ethical use of trails. On-going effort.
  - Work with the general public, especially young people, to understand and value the natural world, the sensitivities of other users and to be good stewards of Colorado's resources into the future. On-going effort.
  - Work with trail user groups to share ideas and implement actions to protect the natural environment and the interests of other recreationists and the public. Review feasibility of awarding education grants for stewardship and proper trail etiquette, either as components of other grants or separate grants. On-going effort.
  - Request an opinion from the AG's Office as to whether past performance can be evaluated in the grant ranking and selection process. If so, incorporate input from CPW regional staff, grant administrators, other land managers and others as to past performance as part of the grant selection criteria.
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## 5. Advance ethical use and cooperation among trail recreationists *continued*

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### 5.3. Seek to minimize conflict among trail users and impacts to trail settings through encouraging appropriate design, management, and education for trails and trail recreation.

- Develop and maintain information about best practices in design and management of trails to minimize conflicts among different types of trail recreation. Link to trails conference.
- Share information and ideas with CPW staff, CDOT, local transportation providers as well as engineer/design programs at Colorado universities and colleges, about effective trail design approaches, and disseminate that information to trail managers. On-going effort.
- Maintain an easily maintainable forum for trail managers to share best practices and experiences to reduce conflicts and publicize the availability of that information. Establish by late 2017.
- Encourage trail monitoring, on the ground and from user comments, to identify potential conflicts as early as possible. Encourage good stewardship behavior and reward entities whose past projects have been thoughtful of wildlife. On-going effort.
- Encourage the use of consistent trail signing. On-going effort.

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### 5.4. Continue administrative and operational transparency for the State Trails Program.

- Meet with agency partners and stakeholders about trail construction to discuss issues and priorities that may benefit from common, coordinated efforts to ensure that trails groups throughout Colorado understand the principles and philosophy of the State Trails Program and the State Recreational Trails Committee.
- Administer a customer-friendly, transparent grants program to ensure the fair, efficient, and timely distribution of trail program funds. On-going effort.
- Explore and as possible, provide appropriate outreach efforts that share information about opportunities, progress toward completing the goals, objectives and actions of this plan, as well as other program functions. Staff could consider list serve, on-line bulletin board, or other options that accomplish this cost effectively. Identify options, costs and proposed deployment by mid-2017.
- Complete administrative reviews, such as the recent “LEAN” process, to optimize programmatic efficiencies and benefits to Program customers. On-going.
- Coordinate effort and Program activities by having the Regional trail coordinators and other staff regularly attend club and trail organization meetings to interact directly with interested trail users. On-going effort.
- Continue to incorporate volunteer and other in-kind match for grants, wherever consistent with specific funding regulations.

## 6. Seek financial sustainability for the Trails Program.

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### 6.1 Publicize the funding challenges faced by all trail providers and managers across Colorado.

- Expand the dialog with trail recreationists and others about available funds and funding mechanisms, and the constraints stemming from current funding resources. Working with interested parties, expand the discussion so that trail recreationists are more aware of the challenges. Report to State Trails committee by mid-2017.
- Periodically review and coordinate efforts with Great Outdoors Colorado, the Colorado Lottery, and DNR to address important trail needs in Colorado. This may include formal communications (e.g., reports, meetings, etc.) or informal communications (e.g., phone, email communications), during the course of program operations. This is an on-going effort.
- Engage trail grant sponsors and other stakeholders with wildlife discussion groups such as the Sportsmen's Advisory Council and pursue opportunities to advance conversations between trails and wildlife interests. On-going effort.
- Develop partnerships and leverage funding with trail supporters, wildlife groups, open space advocates, land trusts, local governments, and private industry to pursue mutually beneficial projects. On-going effort.

### 6.2 Highlight the success and benefits to trail recreation stemming from the user-funded model used for motorized trail recreation.

- Meet regularly with the Colorado Snowmobile Association, Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition and other stakeholders to understand and act upon pressing issues and ways to improve the programs. On-going effort.
- Continue to work in conjunction with motorized user groups and with federal agencies to maintain quality opportunities for motorized recreation on federal lands. On-going effort.
- Monitor and publicize best practices for motorized recreation, e.g., the Good Management Program and law enforcement efforts, on the effectiveness of those programs. Report to SRTC and Commission annually. Include efforts to correct outstanding issues.
- Work with federal partners for use of the Motor Vehicle Use Maps and related management efforts. Report to SRTC by 2017.

### 6.3 Explore how to improve funding levels and reliability for non-motorized trail recreation.

- Work with partners, including Great Outdoors Colorado, the Colorado Lottery, DNR and the Governor's Office, publicize the scope of non-motorized recreation challenges (i.e., participation levels, projected increase in use, maintenance backlogs, annual O&M needs, etc.) to raise awareness of the issues. Preliminary report to State Trails Committee by late 2017.
- Develop reliable information about the range of costs for trail design, maintenance and construction. Publish annually in 2018.
- Work to maintain existing funding streams, such as Land and Water Conservation Funds and Recreation Trails Program funds, and keep those available to project sponsors in a timely manner. On-going effort.
- Support, to the extent possible, efforts to adapt a separate funding mechanism for non-motorized trail construction and maintenance in Colorado. Report to State Trails Committee by late 2017.





# CONCLUSION

The process to develop a Statewide Trails Strategic Plan resulted in the goals, objectives and actions shown above. Additionally, this effort developed the following conclusions:

1. Trails are an effective way to get people outdoors, subsequently increasing support for nature stewardship/conservation. Yet, getting people outdoors can affect wildlife, habitat, sensitive species and other environmental factors.
2. Population Growth – and all that goes with it – is the biggest single “threat” to wildlife, habitat, sensitive species and other environmental factors, and often affects how and where trails are located. “Pivot” the conversation from don’t impact our wildlife with new trails to how to work together to protect, conserve and steward what we cherish in the face of 20 percent plus growth over the next 10 years.
3. Recognize that efforts such as the “Principles for Advancing Outdoor Recreation and Conservation” is a critical component of making this plan and CPW’s plan a success. Many types of recreation have a place in the outdoors, so long as managers and recreationists, among different types of users, and among all levels of government, non-profits and increasingly private landowners and the business sector work together to achieve cooperation and balance successfully.
4. Stable funding is critical to maintain and develop Colorado’s trail networks, which in turn position managers and recreation providers with wherewithal to protect wildlife and other environmental issues.
5. Recognizing Colorado’s expected population growth and the expected increase in trail use, along with funding challenges, the Program and our partners need to build on the already exceptional volunteer efforts across Colorado, expanding those, enhancing “give back to Colorado”, and encouraging cost-effective volunteer stewardship of Colorado’s trails.

6. Clear, transparent communications - and that encompasses planning, education, outreach - are absolutely, incontrovertibly vital, in fact mission critical.
7. New types of recreation will emerge, attracting people in different ways and creating new challenges for managers and recreationists to address. Colorado enjoys a community of dedicated people, committed to enjoying Colorado’s great outdoors, with a history of being able to put aside differences in pursuit of the common good.
8. Provide and share the best information possible about trails – where trails are, what experiences those trails offer, how to construct and maintain trails in the best possible way, and how to balance trail recreation with resource protection for wildlife, habitats, sensitive species and other environmental concerns.
9. Trails must be inclusive and broadly available. Given the expected increase in urban communities, especially along the Front Range, the Trails Program and partners should recognize the vitality of walking paths and biking paths, long distance trail loops, and backcountry trails across Colorado. Each of these presents different needs and costs, yet all are important to some portion of Colorado’s people, and therefore essential to Colorado’s future.

## Appendices

- A. Public Process for the Statewide Trails Strategic Plan
- B. “Colorado The Beautiful Initiative”
- C. Inventory and Projected Needs by 2026
- D. 2016 Trails Maintenance and Operating Costs
- E. Funding for Colorado’s Trails
- F. Glossary of Terms Used



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