

PREPARED FOR THE CITIZENS OF COLORADO AND ITS VISITORS
BY COLORADO PARKS AND WILDLIFE

State Wildlife Action Plan



A STRATEGY FOR CONSERVING WILDLIFE IN COLORADO



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Foreword

United States laws and policies place primary responsibility for wildlife management in the hands of the states. The states have a lengthy record of success in conserving species, including those that are hunted or fished and those that are not. In Colorado, these successes have been paid for by a variety of sources, including lottery proceeds distributed by Great Outdoors Colorado, the Species Conservation Trust Fund, and federal dollars. Development of partnerships has added to the efficiency of conservation success. It is no surprise that the task of conserving **all** species will take more than traditional funding sources and single agency action.

The State Wildlife Grants program (*Title IX, Public Law 106-553 and Title 1, Public Law 107-63*), created through federal legislation, is meant to help close the funding gap by providing federal aid to states to secure the status of Species of Greatest Conservation Need. This State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) has been prepared in fulfillment of the requirements of that legislation.

Beyond those requirements is a more fundamental goal for this strategy, held by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the state as a whole: to secure wildlife populations so that they do not require protection via federal or state listing regulations. This requires collaboration among a diverse set of agencies, interests, and citizens. CPW's Species Conservation Program works in conjunction with our stakeholders, using the best available science to conserve Colorado's at-risk species and habitats. The SWAP is the roadmap for this collaboration.

Colorado's revised SWAP serves as a blueprint for conservation and provides a catalog on the status of our knowledge about native wildlife and plants (most of which are not commonly hunted or fished), threats to the habitats upon which they depend, and strategies to lessen, mitigate, or manage those threats. Thus, **Colorado's SWAP is comprehensive in scope and strategic in nature**. This SWAP reflects the data that currently exist for Colorado species and their habitats and the collective judgment of many of Colorado's scientists, as well as the interests and concerns of citizens with a stake in Colorado wildlife conservation.

Again, implementation of this plan is beyond the scope of a single agency. The issues addressed and the actions outlined in this plan cross political, jurisdictional, and ecological boundaries. Commitment, coordination and communication among the diverse and interested parties involved are critical to the collaborative success that the SWAP describes and aims to achieve. Developing the plan to achieve those goals is the first step, and this has been accomplished. Implementation is the next step and we look forward to this important and collaborative effort.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the SWAP

Historically, all fish and wildlife conservation in Colorado, and in the nation, was funded largely by sportsmen and women. Recently, funding for conservation of non-hunted species has been undertaken using non-traditional sources of funding to establish a reliable base. This funding comes from sources such as lottery proceeds distributed by Great Outdoors Colorado, the Species Conservation Trust Fund, federal aid dollars, and other sources. Species identified as federally threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act receive additional attention, but not necessarily adequate funding.

Recognizing that there has not been enough revenue at a national level available for conservation of all wildlife species, leaders in the conservation community sought to provide a new source of funding. Teaming with Wildlife, a diverse national coalition of conservationists, hunters, anglers, and conservation-minded agencies, organizations, and businesses lobbied for passage of the necessary national legislation for this new source of funding. The Commerce, Justice and State Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2001, Title IX, Public Law 106-553 created the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP), designed to provide funding for the conservation needs of wildlife, as well as for education and wildlife-related recreation. The WCRP was only funded for one year. A second act, the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2002, Public Law 107-63, Title 1, created a State Wildlife Grants program (SWG), which provides annual funding for conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats. The SWG requires that each state prepare and adopt a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to remain eligible for SWG funding. This SWAP meets Colorado's obligation under this law.

Philosophy and Guiding Principles

Although development of Colorado's SWAP was coordinated by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), it is not simply a plan for that agency. Rather, it is a plan for all of Colorado. The task of conserving and managing Colorado's wildlife is too big for any one group or agency to achieve alone. This document identifies conservation priorities that can be used by everyone in Colorado as a guide for planning, partnership building, and project design.

The SWAP articulates a set of conservation priorities that considers an expansive array of wildlife from a statewide perspective. The purpose of this SWAP is to foster greater coordination between the conservation actions of CPW and other members of Colorado's wildlife

conservation community, thus enabling all partners to collectively meet the state's wildlife conservation needs. As such, this SWAP is designed to complement the substantial planning and active management programs that already exist in Colorado, and to support cooperation with adjacent states when such cooperation will result in range-wide conservation of species of greatest conservation need.

Colorado's SWAP is not a legal document, a regulatory document, a Recovery Plan under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision document. All parties should consider this guidance, along with other information, as they follow established public participation protocols and legal requirements when preparing decision documents and project proposals.

The guiding principles of this strategy are to:

1. Encourage and support conservation actions that meet the needs of Species of Greatest Conservation Need;
2. Manage for healthy habitats and ecosystems so that all species will benefit;
3. Create a strategy that will be flexible enough to incorporate new research findings and successful management innovations into conservation actions;
4. Acknowledge the pivotal role that private landowners and local stakeholders play in conservation;
5. Enhance, not replace, other planning efforts; and
6. Maintain an atmosphere of cooperation, participation, and commitment among wildlife managers, landowners, private and public land managers, and other stakeholders in development and implementation of conservation actions.

Federal SWAP Requirements: The Eight Elements

Colorado's SWAP meets the requirements of guiding federal legislation. It is based on the best available information and identifies data gaps where they exist. It is, and will continue to be, the result of involving virtually all of Colorado's conservation agencies, organizations, and affected stakeholders.

The enabling legislation and regulations governing the SWG and related programs stipulate that a state's SWAP contain the following eight elements (referred to throughout the SWAP as "Element 1, Element 2, and so on):

1. **Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife**, including low population and declining species that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife;

2. Descriptions of **locations and relative condition of key habitats** and community types essential to conservation of species identified in (1);
3. **Descriptions of issues** that may adversely affect species identified in (1) or their habitats, **and priority research and survey efforts needed** to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats;
4. Descriptions of **conservation actions** proposed to conserve the identified species and habitats and **priorities for implementing such actions**;
5. Proposed **strategies for monitoring species** identified in (1) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (4), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions;
6. Descriptions of **procedures to review** the Wildlife Action Plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years;
7. Strategies for **coordinating** the development, implementation, review, and revision of the Wildlife Action Plan with federal, state, and local agencies and Native American tribes that manage significant land and water areas within Colorado or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats; and
8. Provisions to ensure **public participation** in the development, revision, and implementation of the Wildlife Action Plan, and associated projects and programs.

Roadmap to the Eight Required Elements

The SWAP addresses the eight required elements using both species and habitat approaches. Table 1 lists the locations within the SWAP where information pertaining to each of the eight required elements may be found. Tables 7 and 8 identify cross-relationships between species and their habitats. Information pertaining to plants and invertebrate animals (with the exception of mollusks) can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

Table 1. Locations of Required Elements in the SWAP.

Required Element	Location(s)
1 – Distribution and abundance of wildlife species	
a. sources of information	Chapter 2
b. abundance and distribution	Chapter 2; Table 7
c. low and declining populations	Chapter 2; Tables 3 & 7
d. consideration of all major wildlife groups	Chapter 2; Appendices A & B
e. process for selecting SGCNs	Chapter 2; Table 2
2 – Locations and conditions of key habitats	
a. level of detail	Chapter 3
b. location, relative condition, and conservation actions needed	Chapter 3, Table 8; Chapter 8, Figures 17 - 19
3 – Problems that may adversely affect species and habitats	
a. sources of information	Chapters 1, 5, and 6
b. detailed threats	Chapter 4; Chapter 5, Table 7; Chapter 6, Table 8; Appendix F
c. threats relevant to species and habitats	Chapter 5, Table 7; Chapter 6, Table 8; Appendix F
d. research and survey efforts needed	Chapter 5, Table 7; Chapter 6, Table 8
4 – Conservation actions that may conserve species and habitats, and priorities for implementing actions	
a. how conservation actions address threats	Chapter 4; Chapter 5, Table 7; Chapter 6, Table 8
b. descriptions of conservation actions	Chapter 4; Appendix D
c. linking actions to objectives and indicators	Chapter 5, Table 7; Chapter 6, Table 8
d. actions for partners	Chapter 5, Table 7; Chapter 6, Table 8
e. research and survey efforts needed	Chapter 5, Table 7; Chapter 6, Table 8
5 – Proposed plans for monitoring species and habitats	
a. plans for monitoring SGCN and habitats	Chapter 7; Appendices A & B
b. monitoring outcomes of conservation actions	Chapter 7; Appendices A & B
c. species not monitored	Chapter 7; Appendices A & B
d. monitoring at multiple levels	Chapter 7; Appendices A, B, & G
e. relationship to existing monitoring/survey systems and determining effectiveness of conservation actions	Chapter 7; Appendices A, B, & G
f. geographic scale	Chapter 7; Appendices A, B, & G
g. adaptive management	Chapter 7; Appendices A, B, & G
6 – Procedures to review the SWAP	
a. review process	Chapter 9
7 – Coordination with other land management agencies	
a. involvement of federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes in development of SWAP	Chapter 9; Appendices H & I
b. continued involvement of agencies and tribes in implementation, review, and revision	Chapter 9
8 – Public participation	
a. public involvement in development of SWAP	Chapter 1; Chapter 9; Appendices H & I
b. continued public involvement in implementation and revision	Chapter 9

SWAP Development Process

Maximizing the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of stakeholder participation was a primary consideration in establishing the methods used to prepare Colorado's 2015 SWAP. To this end, CPW created an online participation platform consisting of a web page¹ and a dedicated email. The process for revising each of the required elements with scientific content (the first five elements) in Colorado's 2006 SWAP involved the following steps:

1. Review of 2006 SWAP content by CPW and Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) biologists, and drafting of proposed revisions based on the most current information available;
2. Stakeholder review of draft revised chapter using dedicated online resources (webpage and email);
3. Final draft chapter prepared;
4. All stakeholder comments compiled along with CPW responses; and
5. All materials posted on CPW's SWAP webpage for public access.

Over 100 CPW staff were involved in the revision process, including Species Conservation Coordinators, Habitat Coordinators, GIS analysts, CPW Terrestrial and Aquatic biologists, and regional staff and representatives from CPW's Research, Real Estate, and Leadership Teams. Please refer to Chapter 9 of this document for a more detailed description of the agency coordination and the public participation process.

Management and Legal Authorities

A diversity of state, federal, and county regulations offer protection to Colorado's species of greatest conservation need, and there are many management programs that support population and habitat conservation actions. More broadly, there is a diversity of entities that directly or indirectly manage or affect wildlife through their actions. The job of coordinating this diversity of managers is an important institutional determinant of success for Colorado's SWAP. That job falls to CPW. The following statutory authorities and policies provide necessary guidance for CPW in its role as the state's SWAP coordinator.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, a branch of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, has the statutory charge for managing and conserving wildlife resources within state borders, for hunted, fished, and non-game wildlife, including state-listed threatened and endangered species². The

¹ <http://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/StateWildlifeActionPlan.aspx>

² Colorado Revised Statutes, Title 33 Article 1-101 states: "It is the policy of the state of Colorado that the wildlife and their environment are to be protected, preserved, enhanced, and managed for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people of this state and its visitors. It is further declared to be the policy of this state that there shall be provided a comprehensive program designed to offer the greatest possible variety of wildlife-related recreational

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has management for the species that are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission is embarking on a strategic planning process to guide CPW's efforts into the future. This new strategic plan will set a high level vision, overarching goals, and strategies for Colorado's state parks, wildlife and outdoor recreation resources. Following completion of the Commission's 2015 Strategic Plan, CPW will develop finer scale implementation plans to outline how agency goals will be achieved. The SWAP will help to guide the implementation of plans to achieve conservation goals for Colorado's Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Overview of Colorado Wildlife Species

Colorado's native species occur across our state's 103,000 square miles, including 480 square miles of waters. There are over 960 native species for which CPW has statutory authority, including mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, mollusks, and crustaceans. Colorado is also home to many hundreds of plant and invertebrate animal species that fall outside of CPW's authority. Colorado manages wildlife at the species, subspecies, and population level, depending on various factors such as legal requirements, interagency coordination needs, stakeholder concerns, funding eligibility, national or international reporting conventions, and/or taxonomic determinations through scientific documentation. Colorado also manages assemblages of species and the array of habitats important to them (i.e., ecosystem management).

opportunity to the people of this state and its visitors and that, to carry out such program and policy, there shall be a continuous operation of planning, acquisition, and development of wildlife habitats and facilities for wildlife-related opportunities." Title 33 Article 2-102 states, "The general assembly finds and declares that it is the policy of this state to manage all nongame wildlife, recognizing the private property rights of individual property owners, for human enjoyment and welfare, for scientific purposes, and to insure their perpetuation as members of ecosystems; that species or subspecies of wildlife indigenous to this state which may be found to be endangered or threatened within the state should be accorded protection in order to maintain and enhance their numbers to the extent possible; that this state should assist in the protection of species or subspecies of wildlife which are deemed to be endangered or threatened elsewhere; and that adequate funding be made available to the division annually by appropriations from the general fund."