

# Colorado Natural Areas Program

## 2016 Strategic Plan & Vision Statement



**Written collectively by CNAP Staff and Colorado Natural Areas Council  
Members**

**December 2015**

# Colorado Natural Areas Program

## 2016 Strategic Goals

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### **Background and Need:**

The Colorado Natural Areas Program (CNAP) is a statewide conservation program created in 1977 under the Colorado Natural Areas Act. The Program is housed within Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and is advised by of the Colorado Natural Areas Council (CNAC), a seven member Governor appointed board.

An updated strategic plan for CNAP has been long overdue since the last plan was written in 2000. With CNAP now being housed under CPW, a new Program coordinator, a motivated Council, and a CPW-wide strategic planning process underway, the timing was right for CNAP to write an updated plan. CNAP staff and Council members met for a two day retreat at Mueller State Park on March 31<sup>st</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 to outline the vision and five-year goals of the Program. Objectives and strategies were later drafted collectively by Program staff and Council members. The working document was approved by the CNAC at the December 2015 meeting.

### **Purpose:**

An updated vision and five-year goals were created to provide guidance and direction to CNAP staff and CNAC members. Additionally, the document is meant to provide valuable information to leadership within CPW and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The goals will be re-evaluated in 2020 to show successes, progress, and additional future needs.

### **Current Resources (as of 2015):**

CNAP staff consists of one permanent full-time employee, the Program coordinator. The coordinator is supported by one – two temporary technicians who serve six – nine month terms. The Program budget comes primarily from the Species Conservation Trust Fund (SCTF), appropriated by legislature. CNAP has received \$234,500 a year from SCTF for the past three fiscal years. Additional funding comes from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), averaging \$1,500 per year, and volunteer program support from within CPW (\$3,000 per year).

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### **DESIRED FUTURE:**

*A robust Natural Areas System in Colorado with a sustainable foundation which will tie into integrative landscape conservation efforts and support the protection of Colorado's most significant natural features for the benefit of current and future generations.*

### **GOAL I: Enhance and strengthen a robust and sustainable Natural Areas System**

**Objective 1: Define the criteria to create a more comprehensive Natural Areas System, develop and implement a strategy for accomplishment**

#### *Strategies:*

- A. Review & update our criteria for inclusion in the registry

- Compare our current criteria with similar programs (NNL, other state natural areas programs)
  - Staff to review criteria with Council and relevant CPW staff
  - Council to approve criteria
- B. Evaluate gaps in registry by building upon our current CNAP System Review
- Add/evaluate data such as: wildlife data (from CPW, CNHP, etc.), USGS Ecoregion Level IV, previous Geologic Advisory Group priority sites, National Wetland Inventory mapping, RPCI Important Plant Areas
  - Evaluate gaps using current SWAP: look at “poorly conserved” species from biodiversity scorecard, Tier 1 & 2 species lists, climate change vulnerability considerations
- C. Evaluate current designated, registered, and identified sites to determine which meet agreed upon criteria
- Formulate plan on realignment of identified sites, and potential sites for de-registration and de-designation
- D. Prioritize sites for future designation using updated designation criteria, system gap review, and current registry realignment

## **Objective 2: Expand and strengthen partnership network**

### *Strategies:*

- A. Increase communication with Natural Area owners/managers and relevant partners
- Communicate annually regarding site condition and management status
  - Communicate triennially before CNAP staff site visits to extend invitation to the field visit, along with follow-up after the site visits
  - Conduct partner survey to determine how CNAP can improve effectiveness and efficiency in Natural Area site evaluations and Program communications
  - Keep partner contact information up to date
  - Distribute site reports, triennial reports, and other relevant information
- B. Increase coordination with relevant CPW staff including biologists, habitat coordinators, species coordinators, area staff, region staff, etc.
- C. Increase communication with rare plant conservation partners
- Attend rare plant conservation related meetings
  - Meet at least annually with state contacts for BLM, USFS, and USFWS, and other relevant organizations such as CNHP and DBG

## **Objective 3: Enhance research and data to support Natural Areas System**

### *Strategies:*

- A. Evaluate historical and current data collection on Natural Areas
- Review existing monitoring for need and adequacy

- B. Prioritize current and future needs
  - Utilize the revised SWAP for species and habitat prioritization
  - Utilize subject matter experts and agency leads (USFWS, CPW, BLM, USFS, SLB, CNHP, DBG, NPS, etc.) and discuss consistent methodologies among agencies
- C. Determine who is best to perform research/data collection, contract out work when necessary

**GOAL II: Create and maintain a sustainable foundation for CNAP to thrive long-term**

**Objective 1: Improve staff effectiveness while also aiming to recruit, retain, and increase staffing to meet Program needs**

*Strategies:*

- A. Evaluate & implement ways to retain quality temporary technicians
  - Find alternatives to retaining technicians outside of state temporary assignments
  - Request pay increases for quality techs, adequate work space, flexible schedule, and appropriate job title
- B. Evaluate & implement ways to reduce staff burnout
- C. Council to continue working with DNR and CPW leadership to communicate Program needs and potentially increase staffing levels

**Objective 2: Evaluate current monitoring requirements and consider a new more effective monitoring regime**

*Strategies:*

- A. Conduct a partner survey to determine needs and preferences
- B. Consider alternatives to staff visits
  - Utilize annual telephone or email status check with landowner/manager
  - Increase reliance on quality volunteer steward visits/reports
  - Utilize contractors to complete a portion of site visits
- C. Consider field visitation schedule changes

**Objective 3: Develop a sustainable budget that is adequate for current needs, supports efficiencies, and builds towards future**

*Strategies:*

- A. Encourage CPW leadership to create an operating budget for the Program as opposed to reliance on soft money
  - Strategize the use of current SCTF funds
- B. Utilize outside funding sources when deemed effective (many restrictions in current State financial/procurement system)

**Objective 4: Orient new Council members and increase Council engagement and utilization**

*Strategies:*

- A. Provide orientation materials & resources to new Council members to increase their knowledge of the Program
- B. Provide regular Program updates to Council members between quarterly meetings
- C. Plan meaningful quarterly meetings with agendas that make the best use of time, and utilize the individual expertise from within the Council
- D. Encourage Council involvement outside of quarterly meetings

**Objective 5: Maintain and strengthen current volunteer steward program**

*Strategies:*

- A. Review and prioritize Natural Areas that need a volunteer steward, re-assign volunteer steward(s) if deemed effective
- B. Set duties and expectations for volunteers and Program staff through updated signed agreements and orientations
  - Staff to work with CPW statewide volunteer coordinator to coordinate consistent forms and training
- C. Provide opportunities for volunteers to give feedback and learn from staff & each other
  - Continue to coordinate staff Natural Area field visits with volunteer stewards
  - Host volunteer steward gatherings, alternate between west and east slope
- D. Improve communication in ways that better show appreciation and value of volunteer efforts
  - Increase emails and personal phone calls
  - Utilize media (newsletters, social media) to show off volunteer efforts and success stories
- E. Provide individual Natural Area visits goals to volunteer stewards in order to increase effectiveness of stewards
- F. Targeted recruitment of quality volunteers through professional societies, recommendations from CPW staff, etc.

**Objective 6: Improve CNAP's position in CPW's organizational structure and find ways to decrease limitations within current structure**

*Strategies:*

- A. Council and staff continue to seek opportunities to increase involvement of Program with DNR & CPW staff and leadership
- B. Discuss chain-of-command issues with CPW supervisors and agree on strategies to decrease limitations

**Objective 7: Evaluate and streamline the designation process**

*Strategies:*

- A. Increase awareness of current designation process within CPW leadership and request ideas for streamlining
  - Discuss possibilities within current statutory limitations, may need to consult attorney general's office

- B. Explore possibilities of changing statute in the future to update designation process and intent
- C. Finalize a template AOD that can be used for future designations

**GOAL III: Increase recognition and demonstrate the value of the Program within State/DNR/CPW (internal context) and to Partners/Public (external context)**

**Objective 1: Improve awareness of CNAP's contributions, skills, and knowledge to DNR/CPW**

*Strategies:*

- A. Program staff and/or supervisors to increase Program outreach at staff meetings and events (of all levels)
- B. Submit articles and photos to CPW's internal newsletter
- C. Encourage DNR/CPW staff to visit updated website and read distributed reports and newsletters
- D. Provide resources considered valuable to DNR/CPW staff (e.g. overlap of rare plants on CPW properties, status reports on T&E plants, land use consultation, etc.)
- E. Involve relevant CPW staff with Natural Areas monitoring and rare plant conservation efforts
  - Invite relevant staff to join CNAP on field visits
  - Seek advice from relevant staff on Natural Areas related topics (wildlife expertise, habitat evaluations, etc.)
- F. Provide Program updates to the Parks and Wildlife Commission through presentations, mailings, and personal communication
- G. Encourage visitation of Natural Areas for PWC field trips and other CPW events (i.e. trainings?)

**Objective 2: Increase visibility and promote recognition of CNAP's accomplishments and values, including designations, partnerships, volunteer stewardship program, and conservation actions, through better marketing techniques**

*Strategies:*

- A. Improve and provide regular updates to the CNAP website
- B. Increase postings on CPW webpage, social media (facebook, Instagram), and blog
  - Collaborate with CPW's social media coordinator to evaluate the best approach to posting on social media pages
- C. Evaluate the potential of CNAP's own social media page(s)
  - Coordinate with CPW social media staff
  - Evaluate the necessary time it will take for upkeep and potential "damage control"
  - Implement if considered appropriate
- D. Work with CPW videographers to produce short informative video(s) about CNAP
- E. Work with Colorado Outdoors editor for submission of Natural Areas article and more regular CNAP updates to be printed in the magazine and blog
- F. Increase media releases for significant events such as designations, as well as referrals to CNAP within other CPW media releases

- G. Involvement and presentations at professional meetings and events
  - Ideas include: Rare Plant Technical Committee meetings, Colorado Native Plant Society, NPS National Natural Landmark partnership events, etc.

**Objective 3: Acceptance and awareness of CNAP five year plan by CPW/DNR, including PWC**

*Strategies:*

- A. Coordinator distributes plan to CPW supervisors and encourage further distribution to CPW Leadership Team
- B. Council distributes plan to CPW Leadership Team and PWC, and discusses possibilities for presentation to PWC
- C. Council presents and/or promotes five-year plan to DNR representative(s)

**Objective 4: Increase CNAP involvement in relevant CPW & DNR conservation planning**

*Strategies:*

- A. Natural Areas designations to be used as a tool in the land conservation efforts of the Governor's Colorado the Beautiful Initiative
- B. Demonstrate the utilization of the revised SWAP by showing species and habitats within Natural Areas designations and conservation projects
- C. Provide input in CPW land use planning regarding rare plants and Natural Area boundaries
- D. Collaborate with relevant CPW/DNR staff when CPW owned and managed lands have rare plants
  - Work with real estate unit on acquisitions and easements that have rare plant resources
  - Work with property technicians, park managers, and other relevant staff when rare plants (specifically federally-listed plants) occur on CPW lands
- E. Continue to distribute valuable resources to DNR/CPW staff including status updates on federally listed plants, rare plant guide profiles, rare plant BMPs, etc.

**Objective 5: Promote Program accomplishments to Governor's office and DNR**

*Strategies:*

- A. Continue to produce and distribute meaningful triennial reports
- B. Empower and utilize Council members to reach out to DNR and Governor's Office
  - Plan face-to-face meetings with DNR staff
  - Promote communications and distribution of media releases, designation announcements, etc.

**Objective 6: Promote public visibility and education regarding rare plant conservation**

*Strategies:*

- A. Create rare plant page on CNAP website, include conservation projects and resource links
- B. Highlight rare plant conservation in media, newsletters, reports, and presentations

- C. Support the CNHP Rare Plant Field Guide development and distribution
- D. Support the Rare Plant Conservation Initiative (RPCI) outreach goals
  - Development of state statute for rare plants
  - Education of Colorado lawmakers on the importance of rare plant conservation

**Objective 7: Demonstrate the reasons why constituents value Natural Areas and CNAP**

*Strategies:*

- A. Develop and disseminate success stories (e.g. Oxy partnership, Wacker Ranch conservation, Pagosa skyrocket property acquisition, etc.)
  - Survey partners, volunteers, and/or Council members to gain insights on why they value Natural Areas

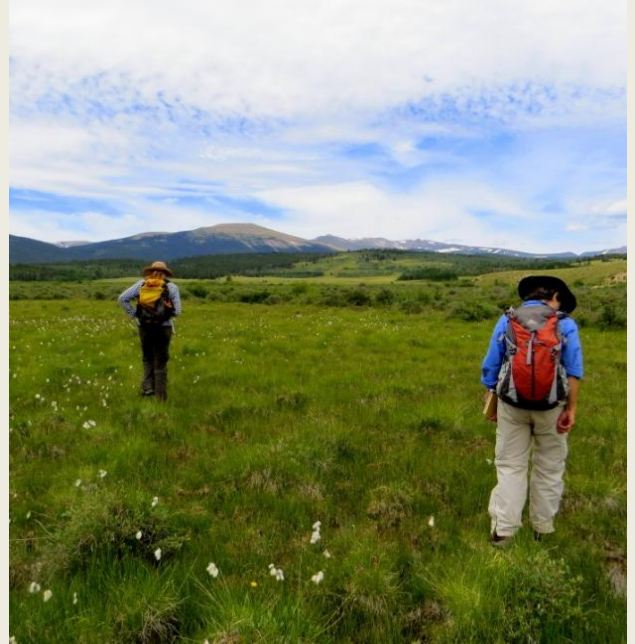


# Colorado Natural Areas Program

## 2016 Vision Statement



The Colorado Natural Areas Program (CNAP) was born from a growing awareness and deep appreciation of Colorado's iconic landscapes, impressive biodiversity, and unique geological and paleontological resources. With the signing of the Colorado Natural Areas Act in 1977, CNAP was established to recognize and monitor the state's finest examples of these natural elements. The Natural Areas Council, staff, and volunteer stewards fully appreciate and embrace the magnitude of this responsibility. By building strong partnerships with private and public landowners through voluntary agreements, CNAP is integral to the protection and enhancement of rare species and significant natural features. (over)



*Fourmile Creek Natural Area, Park County*



*Orient Mine Natural Area, Saguache County*





Since its establishment, CNAP has been paramount in the state's conservation efforts, identifying and evaluating over 30 remarkable geologic and paleontologic features and supporting the conservation of more than 250 rare, threatened or endangered species or communities. In 38 years, CNAP has built an impressive registry of 93 designated Natural Areas, totaling over 175,000 acres in 42 counties in Colorado. Natural Areas designation serves to bring new and long-lasting recognition to these unique natural elements on public or private lands, and formally acknowledges the essential role of landowners in their conservation. CNAP's capacity and impact is greatly expanded through the strength of its partnerships and the force of its volunteer stewards – engaged citizens who dedicate their time and expertise to monitoring designated Natural Areas.

Collectively, the Program, volunteer stewards, and partners work together to ensure that these prime examples of our natural heritage are conserved for future generations. These accomplishments have contributed directly to the state's efforts to prevent and reverse endangered species listings. For example, almost half of the world's population of the federally listed Clay-Loving Wild Buckwheat and three-quarters of the world's viable population of the threatened Parachute Penstemon are found on designated Colorado Natural Areas.

**W**ith the approach of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017, CNAP has designed a strategic plan to align Natural Areas designations into a comprehensive vision for the conservation of iconic landscapes and unique habitats in Colorado. Accordingly, the Natural Areas Council will foster a robust and sustainable Natural Areas System, building upon the program's core relationships with private and public landowners, and its workforce of dedicated volunteer stewards to lend new protections to even more of the state's most significant natural features. The result will be a valuable and comprehensive Natural Areas portfolio that ties into integrative landscape conservation efforts and enhances the connection of Colorado's citizens to our unique natural heritage.



Redcloud Peak Natural Area, Hinsdale County