

# Colorado Wildlife Action Plan

## What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy (CWCS). These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

## Colorado snapshot

**Geography:** Colorado is a mountainous state with headwaters for five major interstate river basins.

**Landscape:** With the Rocky Mountains' Continental Divide bisecting the State, habitat types range from alpine tundra at 10,000 ft, to aspen-fir-pine forestland at 8,000 ft. to shortgrass prairie at 4,000 ft. Superimposed on this landscape is a human history of westward expansion and settlement accelerated by explosive development from gold and silver mining and natural resource use.

Opportunities afforded by our scenic natural resources for big game hunting, trout fishing and outdoor recreation fuel the very development that stress and threaten all our wildlife communities.

**Wildlife:** Drawn by abundant herds of elk and deer, and trout fishing in mountain streams, Colorado's residents and visitors discover native cutthroat trout, sage grouse viewing on breeding leks, crane festivals, and ribbons of riparian-wetland areas with a startling diversity of wildlife viewing opportunities.

## Colorado's planning approach

To create an action plan, the Colorado Division of Wildlife developed an eight-



Big Horn Sheep/CO Division of Wildlife

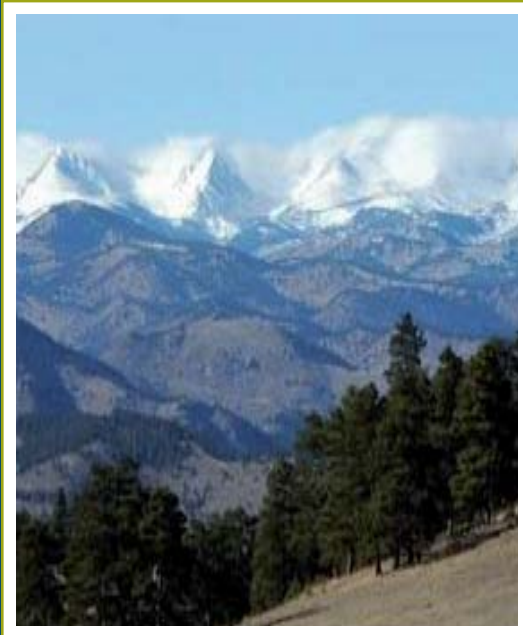
step process for acquiring scientific and stakeholder input to identify species in greatest need of pro-active conservation measures, as well as to identify key habitat conservation issues. The eight federally-required elements, including species' distribution and abundance status, location and relative condition of key habitats, threats and needed research or

surveys, required conservation actions, monitoring strategies, periodic plan review, coordination with governmental partners, and public participation, served as the planning framework. The plan combines a review of priority species and 41 land cover types in order to focus expert opinion and data-based documentation on identification of the highest conservation priorities while also addressing species and habitat protection, restoration, enhancement, and information gaps. Given the large library of conservation plans already

*“Colorado has repeatedly proven its ability to secure species at risk, and avoid the need for species protection through federal listing. Colorado’s wildlife conservation community continues to demonstrate its commitment to the goals of conserving all the state’s wildlife species with tangible, on-the-ground actions. Our State’s wildlife action plan demonstrates that Colorado’s conservationists are poised to take these efforts even further.”*

*-Governor Bill Owens,  
State of Colorado*

available for Colorado wildlife species, species groups and ecosystems, many specific actions are already identified as priorities, described in detail and are perhaps already being implemented.



CO Division of Wildlife

Where priority species and ecosystems are identified but lack specific information, another purpose of this plan is to provide guidance on inventory, research and monitoring needs. Federal, State, local, and private resource management agencies and organizations may also use this CWCS to inform and guide their conservation programs to fill gaps

identified as priorities for both species and habitat types.

*“Colorado has long been committed to the conservation of all wildlife spe-*

*cies, whether hunted, or fished for or not. One of the nation’s great wildlife restoration success stories – the American Peregrine Falcon – had its beginnings here in the early 1970’s. Other successes, such as breakthroughs in the restoration and recovery of prairie grouse, lynx, and a number of native fishes, also have their roots in the efforts of Colorado’s wildlife professionals and citizens.”*

- Bruce McCloskey, Director, Colorado Division of Wildlife

## Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Colorado

Given an expected increase in the State’s population of more than 50% over the coming 25 years, the primary challenges our wildlife conservation programs face are the conversion and fragmentation of habitat, human use and depletion of natural resources, pollution, introduction of invasive and exotic species, and alteration of ecological processes. Fragmentation of wildlife habitat is occurring through extensive statewide oil and gas well development, expanding road networks

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species in need of conservation *	Threatened/ endangered listed species
Mussels	83	9	0
Crayfish	6	0	0
Insects/Arachnids	39	34 (5)	2
Fish	48	26 (9)	14
Amphibians	17	9 (3)	1
Reptiles	51	14 (5)	0
Birds	365	87 (42)	9
Mammals	151	26 (14)	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>210 (87)</b>	<b>34</b>

\* Criteria used in Colorado for identifying this species group included Federal-State listed as T&E, federal candidates, State special concern; Colorado Natural Heritage ranking as G/S 1-3; scientist Internet questionnaire and forum input. ( ) indicate highest concern from forum assessment.

### Wildlife Highlights

with greater frequency of high-speed travel on interstate highways, and in-stream barriers for water storage, diversion or aesthetic purposes. All serve to disconnect and isolate wildlife populations, inhibit movement or migration corridors and increase mortality.

Intensive use and re-use of limited water resources degrade aquatic habitats and water quality, especially in eastern plains streams for mollusks, amphibians, fish, and birds. The effective coordination of population and habitat objectives and data/information sharing among a wide array of federal, state, and local agencies, native American tribes, and agricultural, water conservancy, environmental and other non-governmental organizations is also recognized as a key challenge in contending with population growth, as well as in bringing a landscape conservation message to the public.

## Working together for Colorado's wildlife

Species experts both within and outside the Division of Wildlife developed preliminary assessments of species' population status and key habitat conditions. The stakeholder input and draft strategy review processes were initiated with direct mailings to 1,000 interested parties, as well as through news releases and newspaper articles. A series of four public stakeholder meetings across the State were held to broaden input from all stakeholders. The input process culminated in an invitation to previously identified scientists to participate in a science-based forum which focused on gaining additional input on species and habitat issues, and collectively

developing status, condition, trends, and threats for identified species and habitats. A draft plan addressing the eight required elements was distributed via Internet and also reviewed in four public meetings across the State to prepare the final draft.



CO Division of Wildlife

*"The task of conserving and managing Colorado's fish and wildlife is too big for any one group or agency to achieve alone. This wildlife action plan identifies conservation priorities that can be used by everyone in Colorado. It reflects the interests, concerns, and ideas of citizens with a stake in Colorado wildlife conservation who also participated in its development. Thus, it is truly a strategy for all of Colorado."*

*- Russell George, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources*



Key Habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Shortgrass prairie</b>  <b>Total occupied habitat: 631,000 acres</b>	Black-tailed prairie dog, Swift fox, Mountain plover, Burrowing owl, Ferruginous hawk, Lesser prairie chicken, Greater prairie chicken, Plains minnow, Suckermouth minnow, Brassy minnow, Arkansas darter, Orangethroat darter, Plains leopard frog, Couch's spadefoot, Massasauga, Midget faded rattlesnake	Conversion to agricultural land; oil and gas drilling; groundwater depletion via center pivot irrigation; prairie dog control	Develop and implement defensible aerial survey monitoring for estimating populations and distribution of black-tailed prairie dog; initiate outreach for reporting of plague occurrences; monitor long term population trends for mountain plover, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk; implement mark-recapture monitoring of swift fox; identify and secure 150,000 acres of high quality shortgrass prairie habitat through partnerships; build partnerships with grassland conservation partners (e.g. Farm Bureau, Cattlemen's Assoc., NRCS, Soil Conservation Districts); mountain plover nest conservation in cultivated fields
<b>Sagebrush</b>	73 species-total 25 of concern (SCGN) Greater sage-grouse, White-tailed prairie dog, Black-footed ferret, Columbian sharptail grouse, Gunnison's sage-grouse, Gunnison's prairie dog, Kit fox*, Merriam's shrew*, Sagebrush vole*, Big free-tailed bat, Brazilian free-tailed bat, Long-eared myotis, Pallid bat, Spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, Western small-footed myotis, Western pipit, Black-throated sparrow*, Brewer's sparrow*, Green-tailed towhee*, Lark sparrow*, Northern harrier*, Sage sparrow*, Sage thrasher*, Vesper sparrow*	Invasive plants; energy development; ungulate grazing	Identify and preserve high-quality sagebrush habitats; minimize loss and fragmentation; target large habitat area for highest species richness; restore degraded sagebrush habitat; maintain self-sustaining populations of SGCN; improve understanding of SGCN habitat requirements and response to change for 11 SGCN (*); reduce encroachment of invasive plants in high priority areas (Moffat, Rio Blanco, Jackson, Grand, Costilla counties); reduce adverse energy development impacts during breeding, wintering of sage grouse (i.e timing, construction, speed limits); reduce pinyon-juniper encroachment; promote conservation easements on private land (CSCP, Land Trusts, Farm Bill); promote educational materials to local and county land use planners; reduce overgrazing by domestic and wild ungulates; develop and implement monitoring for 11 SGCN (*)

### Recommended actions to conserve Colorado's wildlife

#### Assn. of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

David Chadwick  
 Wildlife Diversity Associate  
 444 North Capitol St. NW, Suite 725  
 Washington, DC 20001  
 Tel: 202.624.7890  
 chadwick@fishwildlife.org  
 www.teaming.com • www.fishwildlife.org

#### State Contact

Thomas P. Nesler, Manager  
 Wildlife Conservation Section  
 Colorado Division of Wildlife  
 6060 Broadway  
 Denver, CO 80216  
 Tel: 303.291.7461  
 tom.nesler@state.co.us;  
 www.wildlife.state.co.us