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## 2023 Annual Report on the Administration of Colorado Parks and Wildlife January 2024

To:

House Agriculture, Livestock, and Water Committee  
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

### I. Statutory Requirements

On June 6, 2011, Governor Hickenlooper signed Senate Bill 11-208 into law, merging the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and the Division of Wildlife into the Division of Parks and Wildlife, referred to herein as Colorado Parks and Wildlife (or CPW). On June 4, 2012, House Bill 12-1317 was signed into law to finalize the merger of the Divisions and to create the Parks and Wildlife Commission (the Commission). Among the requirements of HB 12-1317 is the delivery to the Legislature of an annual report, more fully described below:

#### C.R.S. 33-9-106 (2)

“Beginning in 2013 AND NOTWITHSTANDING SECTION 24-1-136 (11), C.R.S., the executive director shall report annually to the joint house agriculture, livestock, and natural resources committee and the senate agriculture, natural resources, and energy committee, or any successor committees, regarding the administration of the division, including an evaluation of division resources and their utilization and an identification of opportunities for efficiencies. Each such report must summarize stakeholder outreach conducted during the prior year and must also identify disposition of assets and cost savings, both planned and realized, since the previous year, including savings pertaining to personnel, equipment, services, and provisioning.”

### II. Division Resource Utilization

Utilization of division resources is reported to the Commission. The FY 2022-23 report on sources and uses of funds is available [here](#).

### III. Stakeholder Outreach

CPW is committed to engaging Coloradans and visitors to inform park, wildlife, and outdoor recreation management. In 2023, CPW conducted a variety of stakeholder outreach including, but not limited to:

- A. **Wolf Restoration and Management Plan.** In 2023, CPW continued the planning process to develop a wolf restoration and management plan (hereafter the Plan) as called for by the passage of Proposition 114 in November 2020. In the spring of 2023, CPW hosted seven public meetings (6 in-person, 1 virtual) to allow the public to provide verbal comments on the draft Plan. Additionally, members of the public could submit written comments via CPW’s [Wolf Restoration and Management Plan Engage CPW webpage](#). CPW staff shared the comments submitted during this time directly with the Commission to inform their decision-making process on the draft Plan. CPW also provided several memos outlining the volume and nature of the written comments received to the Commission, along with the comments themselves. The Keystone Policy Center also prepared a brief report for the



Commission on the high-level themes and trends of the comments received. The Commission passed the [Final Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan](#) on May 3, 2023.

- B. **Keep Colorado Wild Pass.** In June 2021, Governor Polis signed the [Keep Colorado Wild Pass Act](#), which creates an optional discounted pass for accessing Colorado's state parks that can be purchased at the time a motor vehicle is registered. To continue promoting the pass in 2023, CPW conducted marketing outreach with feedback from the Department of Revenue and Division of Motor Vehicles to encourage the public to opt-in to the pass, and distributed informational materials about the pass to Division of Motor Vehicle offices throughout the state. CPW utilized a robust budget to create new visuals (still and video) and to place updated print ads in relevant publications. CPW also developed a comprehensive digital media plan to reach vehicle owners, commuters, and the general public with a full suite of tactics including: radio and podcast advertising, paid search, programmatic advertising, social media marketing and connected television advertising. By the end of the first year of the pass being available, nearly 1.5 million Coloradans purchased the pass, bringing in over \$40 million in revenue for CPW.
- C. **License Distribution.** In November 2022, the Commission encouraged staff to continue hunter outreach on license allocation and preference points. In January 2023, CPW posted a public comment form and online guestbook on our [Big Game License Distribution Engage CPW webpage](#), and asked big game hunters to provide their input on various license allocation alternatives and several preference point topics. These online tools were well advertised through a statewide news release, CPW's hunting e-newsletter, and at events such as regional Sportsperson's Caucus meetings. During the 6-week comment period, CPW received a total of 2,819 completed comment forms and 214 guestbook tool entries from members of the public. Additionally, staff conducted a random sample survey in March and April of 2023 to gauge support for preference point banking among high preference point holders. Out of the 2,961 surveys delivered to high-point holders for elk, deer, and pronghorn, staff received 1,029 surveys back. During the [May 2023 Commission meeting](#), CPW staff presented their recommendations to the Commission based on the public input received.
- D. **Big Game Season Structure.** In January 2023, CPW launched the planning process for the 2025-2029 Big Game Season Structure (BGSS). To better understand hunters' perspectives on the current BGSS, opinions on possible changes for the 2025-2029 BGSS, and ideas for season dates and timing, CPW conducted a public outreach process that was divided into two stages. Stage One focused on 1) gathering public input on CPW's [BGSS Engage CPW webpage](#) and 2) targeted stakeholder briefings. CPW staff discussed BGSS, including possible changes, at several stakeholder meetings, including at the Colorado Sportsperson's Roundtable, regional Sportsperson's Caucus meetings, and stakeholder organization board meetings. Stage Two focused on hosting 17 in-person and 2 virtual public meetings throughout the state from May to late June 2023 to help inform the 2025-2029 BGSS. In August 2023, CPW staff authored a [summary report of public involvement](#) based on the public input received and presented it to the Commission at the [August 2023 Commission meeting](#).
- E. **Herd Management Plans.** Throughout 2023, CPW conducted stakeholder outreach related to big game herd management planning. When developing Herd Management Plans, staff carefully consider the biological capabilities of a specific herd and its



habitat, feedback from land management agencies and affected members of the public, and demand for wildlife recreational opportunities. In 2023, CPW engaged with hunters, landowners, and interested individuals to inform Herd Management Plans for pronghorn herds in the Southeast region, deer herds in the Northeast and Southwest regions, and elk herds in the Northwest region. Public outreach for each of these Herd Management Plans included public meetings held throughout the applicable region as well as opportunities to submit comments on each draft plan. Staff consider the public comments received when drafting the final herd management plans and often incorporate suggestions into the final draft plans that are presented to the Commission for approval.

- F. **Crayfish Regulations.** In July 2023, CPW staff conducted public outreach to solicit public input to help inform the review of its regulations prohibiting the import, transport, and possession of red swamp crayfish. These regulations had been in place for decades in an effort to protect Colorado’s natural aquatic ecosystems and native species. However, in 2023, CPW became aware of a significant market for live crayfish that are primarily imported into Colorado from outside of the state. As part of its public outreach and engagement, CPW staff published a [Crayfish Regulations Engage CPW webpage](#) to allow members of the public to share their thoughts (via an online guestbook tool) on the regulations and whether they should be revised to allow for the importation, transport, and possession of red swamp crayfish. CPW advertised this public input opportunity via a statewide news release and interviews with news outlets. The public comment period was open for 25 days, and CPW received a total of approximately 220 public comments. About two-thirds of the responses supported removing the ban on red swamp crayfish importation and possession. During the August 2023 Commission meeting, CPW staff presented [background information, potential regulation changes, and results of the public outreach effort](#) to the Commission. At the [November 2023 Commission meeting](#), the Commission approved [regulations](#) modifying red swamp crayfish possession and licensing requirements.
- G. **SWA Regulation Updates.** During the spring and summer of 2023, CPW conducted public engagement to solicit public feedback on proposed changes to regulations related to State Wildlife Areas (SWAs). CPW staff developed the proposed changes following a review of all SWAs to determine the uses that each property could sustain while still benefiting wildlife. In order to explain the proposed changes and gauge the general public’s thoughts on the proposed changes, CPW developed interactive pages on our [Engage CPW webpage](#). The webpage presented information on SWA management, suggested revisions to the general provisions, and notable changes at specific properties in a format that was easy to follow for the reader. Staff provided opportunities to comment on the proposed changes for both the general SWA provisions and for property-specific regulations. CPW advertised this public comment opportunity through a statewide news release, local news outlets, and announcements sent to CPW stakeholders. The comment period was open for six weeks from mid-April to late May. A total of 191 members of the public provided feedback on the proposed changes. CPW considered the feedback received and incorporated some of the suggested revisions into the final proposal presented to the Commission. At its June 22, 2023 meeting, the Commission unanimously approved the [proposed changes to regulations related to SWAs](#).
- H. **Statewide Habitat Conservation and Connectivity Plan.** Over the last several years, CPW has developed various planning documents related to big game habitat and migration ([SO 3362 state plans](#), [2020 Big Game Status Report and Opportunities to](#)



[Improve Sensitive Habitat and Movement Routes for Colorado's Big Game](#), etc.).

These two topics continue to be a major focus in many western states as increasing human density and development continue to impact big game habitats and populations. From highway crossings and understanding seasonal migration to protecting and enhancing seasonal habitats, there is a constant need for CPW to help the public understand where the most important places and habitats to protect and enhance are located across the state.

To help address these issues, in 2022 CPW was tasked with developing a process and plan that prioritizes landscapes, using CPW wildlife data, for the purpose of habitat conservation (e.g. habitat easements, fee title protection and active habitat management) as well as habitat connectivity. CPW has begun working with the Colorado Natural Heritage Program to develop and deliver a plan by June 30th, 2024. CPW has engaged staff and conservation partners through two public meetings and an online survey to help inform the plan to date, and will continue to conduct additional engagement efforts in 2024 to gather further input.

- I. **Park Management Plans.** For each park management plan, CPW solicits input from the public prior to drafting the plan as well as on the draft plan itself, most often via online surveys or comment forms. CPW staff also present the plans at Commission meetings. In 2023, CPW conducted public outreach on the management plans for Golden Gate State Park (in March - April 2023) and Steamboat Lake State Park and Pearl Lake State Park (in August - September 2023). The public had opportunities to comment on these plans via in-person meetings and via online comment forms. The public also had opportunities to inform new management plans for Castlewood Canyon State Park and Staunton State Park via online comment forms in summer 2023. CPW also approved the Lathrop State Park Management Plan in 2023.

Throughout 2023, CPW, along with Sweetwater Lake project partners from the White River National Forest and local non-profit Eagle Valley Land Trust, continued to engage local and statewide stakeholder groups on the planning of the proposed state park at Sweetwater Lake. The partners met regularly from fall 2022 until spring 2023, with a group of residents from the Sweetwater community to hear concerns and collaborate on high-level site planning for the Sweetwater property. Additionally, the partners hosted a virtual open house in March 2023, targeted at a broader stakeholder group, to share background information, relay stakeholder input gathered to date, provide updates on the planning process, and field questions from attendees. CPW has also been involved in the Cooperating Agency meetings along with Garfield and Eagle Counties, the United States Forest Service, the Town of Gypsum, and the Gypsum Fire Protection District, as the project transitions into the required National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) environmental assessment process.

Lastly, CPW continued its work to improve park visitation data that will be used to inform future management plans. While CPW has sound methods that produce excellent trend data, actual counts of cars and people entering state parks needs improvement. Accurate data is essential for a comprehensive understanding of park visitation. CPW distributed 140 vehicle and pedestrian counters at park entrances and conducted trainings for park staff in November 2023.

- J. **Partners in the Outdoors.** Through the annual Partners in the Outdoors Conference, CPW facilitates a signature platform for organizations to collaborate around the shared vision of advancing and balancing outdoor recreation and conservation in Colorado. The Partners in the Outdoors program chose to take a step back from



hosting a large-scale, in-person Conference in 2023. Instead, CPW used 2023 to engage, listen, and better understand how CPW and our partners can collectively work towards common goals. CPW worked with Civic Consulting Collaborative to implement a series of partner engagements including listening sessions, interviews, surveys, and a partner network gap analysis. Through these engagements, partners are helping CPW to reimagine the best way to cultivate common ground, explore best practices for partnering, and design collaborative solutions with diverse voices and stakeholders to come back better than ever in 2024 and conserve Colorado's outdoor way of life. CPW will host an in-person Partners in the Outdoors Conference in Breckenridge on April 15-17, 2024.

Additionally, the Partners in the Outdoors Grant Program received a record number of grant applications this year. Out of 100 applications, CPW awarded a total of \$274,443 to 38 organizations. The grant program supports CPW's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan priorities and encourages collaborative efforts between partner organizations.

**K. Colorado Outdoor Partnership and Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative.** The [Colorado Outdoor Partnership \(CO-OP\)](#) was formed in 2017 to advance conversations on how to address growing pressures on outdoor resources. The CO-OP is the lead advisory board on the Regional Partnership Initiative formalized when Governor Polis signed an [Executive Order](#) creating the Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative. The Outdoor Regional Partnerships are focused on making sure that our State remains a world-class outdoor destination while preserving our land, water, wildlife, and quality of life. In 2023, CPW announced six new coalition partners that were awarded support through the Regional Partnerships Initiative and held a second, fall funding round, expecting to bring on two new partnerships in early 2024. Regional Partnerships as of December 2023 include:

- Central Colorado Recreation Partnership
  - [Envision Recreation in Balance Partnership](#)
  - [Gunnison Sustainable Tourism Outdoor Recreation \(STOR\) Committee](#)
- Eagle County Community Wildlife Roundtable
- Grand PLACES 2050
- [Metro Denver Nature Alliance](#)
- Montelores
- [NoCo PLACES 2050](#)
- [Northwest Colorado Outdoor Coalition](#)
- [Ouray Regional Recreation and Conservation Alliance](#)
- [Outside 285](#)
- [Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance](#)
- Roaring Fork Outdoor Coalition
- [Routt Recreation Roundtable](#)
- [San Luis Valley Great Outdoors](#)
- Southwest Colorado Conservation & Outdoor Recreation Roundtable
- Summit County Outdoor Coalition
- Two Rivers Conservation and Recreation Roundtable

Through the Initiative, CPW, in consultation with DNR, GOCO and the CO-OP, will advance a state-level vision for balancing recreation and conservation and to ensure equitable and sustainable access to outdoor recreation. This work will inform [Colorado's Outdoors Strategy](#), a collaborative vision for conservation, climate



resilience, and sustainable recreation.

- L. **Social Media.** In 2023, CPW's presence on social media continued to work towards our main strategic goals - to build awareness and trust for our CPW brand while showcasing noteworthy agency content. Content aimed to be fun, approachable, informative, transparent, and genuine, while also providing educational value to CPW's social media followers. CPW's flagship social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn have 599,266 followers collectively, an increase of nearly 62,000 followers in 2023. Notably, Facebook followers grew by 83.5%. CPW garnered 85 million impressions and nearly 25 million video views collectively, an impressive growth of 118%.

Some notable content from 2023 includes the following:

- [Wildlife rescue](#)
- [A historic day for Colorado](#)
- [Hey Miami HEAT](#)
- [Noise makers](#)
- [Bears are gonna bear](#)
- [Come on Barbie](#)
- [DATA](#)
- [Making 112 million fertilized walleye eggs in only 13 days](#)

CPW's social media channels continue to be a place for digital customer service - CPW staff received over 90,438 inbox messages in 2023 (an increase of over 50%) with questions ranging from easy to difficult to answer. Questions often required collaboration with multiple CPW subject matter experts in order to effectively develop responses.

In addition to organic social media content, CPW placed paid digital advertising for our marketing efforts surrounding the Keep Colorado Wild pass, COTREX app, and officer recruitment.

- The Keep Colorado Wild campaign ran digital ads on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Google Search, Digital Display, and streaming commercials. These digital ads drove nearly 1 million website visits to the Keep Colorado Wild webpage, generating over 37 million impressions and over 925,000 clicks on ads.
- The COTREX (CPW's Colorado Trail Explorer App) campaign placed digital ads that ran on Facebook, Instagram, the Apple app store and the Google Play store, driving 2,639 app installs and 2.1 million impressions with nearly 20,000 clicks on ads.
- The officer recruitment campaign placed digital ads that ran on Facebook, Instagram, Google Search, and LinkedIn to spur awareness and applicants for CPW's Park Ranger and District Wildlife Manager roles. These digital ads drove 24,628 new users to the officer application webpage, and generated over 1 million impressions and over 87,000 clicks on ads. As a result, CPW received over 800 applications for these roles.

- M. **Other Planning and Management.** In 2023, CPW continued to collaborate with stakeholders through roundtables, regional caucuses and workgroups to share



information and discuss issues related to outdoor recreation and wildlife management. These efforts included the statewide Sportsperson’s Roundtable and four Regional Sportsperson’s Caucuses that met a combined eleven times, bringing sportspersons and CPW leadership together to discuss pressing issues. In addition, the Wildlife and Habitat Roundtable convened throughout the year, providing a forum for non-consumptive wildlife user groups to engage with CPW leadership on nongame wildlife and wildlife habitat conservation issues.