



The Field Press



A Publication of the Colorado Natural Areas Program

Volume 11, Issue 1

Spring 2009

Colorado Natural Areas preserve some of the finest examples of Colorado's original and unique landscapes for the benefit of present and future generations. Sites qualify as Colorado Natural Areas when they contain at least one unique or high quality feature of statewide significance:

- Native plant communities**
- Geologic formations and processes**
- Paleontological localities**
- Habitat for rare plants and animals**



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CNAP has a New Publication!

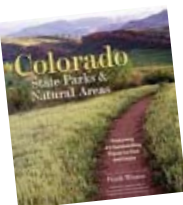
Colorado State Parks and Natural Areas,
by Frank Weston

This book is the first-ever printed guide to our state's Natural Areas as well as the most spectacular State Parks.

It makes a great gift or addition to any bookshelf!

To purchase, visit

<http://parks.state.co.us/parksstore/>



LIVING IN INTERESTING TIMES

From the Program Manager

CNAP, like everyone else, is facing the curse of "living in interesting times". The state budgets are suffering from the economic situation and we've had to cut back on our operating funding for this year quite a bit. We foresee additional operating reductions next year as State Parks is looking at a \$2.6 million reduction of its general fund. This year, I've been very focused on State Parks issues including major forestry concerns in the northern part of the state as well as the discovery of zebra mussels in Colorado last January. These have required a lot of my time as they have the potential for major impacts to the ecology as well as the water infrastructure in the state. Brian Kurzel has done the lion's share of the work for Natural Areas this year, coordinating an amazing amount of very important work along with our very talented temporary staff. The inserted Triennial Report highlights some of the work that the Colorado Natural Areas Program has done over the past three years.

One of the most significant developments this past year was that, thanks to the support from our new Parks Director, Dean Winstanley, we secured funding from the Species Conservation Trust Fund. Using these funds, CNAP has worked very effectively with many partners across the state to help complete many projects that are very significant for rare plant protection. Projects include: significant cooperation with the Heritage Program on monitoring and inventory of rare plants; a project to explore the potential biochemical values of some rare plants; fencing and weed work to protect key areas; and on-the-ground restoration of several Natural Areas. Restoration is something we haven't had funding to do in many years. We hope to receive Species Conservation Trust funding again this coming fiscal year and continue with a number of significant projects across the state with many partners.

We have also designated and registered some important new Natural Areas such as the Flatirons, which is now designated as the Boulder Mountain Park Natural Area. Special thanks to the hard-working Boulder staff who really made this happen. We also expanded the Mt. Callahan Natural Area and forged a strong relationship with the oil company that owns it to protect the rare plant, Parachute Penstemon, a candidate for the federal endangered species list. We have a number of other Natural Areas we hope to designate soon including areas on Division of Wildlife land, oil company land, private ranches in SE Colorado, and BLM areas on the West Slope.

Protection of existing Natural Areas is going well thanks to the help of all our dedicated Volunteer Stewards as well as additional help from State Parks field staff across the state. We are particularly excited about the partnership with Denver Botanic Gardens and the new Rare Plant Monitoring (RPM) Stewards. The discovery this year of several exciting plants at Lone Mesa by Al Schneider and Peggy Lyons reminded us all of the importance of looking carefully and the excitement that can come from inventorying remote locations. We also hope that you have seen the new book, "Colorado State Parks and Natural Areas", which is available for sale on the State Parks website. It is a beautiful book that highlights the work of Frank Weston, one of our dedicated volunteers who just happens to be a very talented professional photographer. This book shows off these most special and important natural treasures in this great state. It highlights why we need to heed Governor Ritter's words and be "stubborn stewards" to protect these areas for future generations. 🌿

Rob Billerbeck
Stewardship and Natural Areas Manager





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[http://parks.state.co.us/
NaturalResources/CNAP/](http://parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP/)

Bill Ritter

Governor

Harris Sherman

Executive Director

Department of Natural Resources

Dean Winstanley

Director

Colorado State Parks

**Colorado Natural Areas
Council**

Kathy Yates

Chair

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Vice Chair

Renee Rondeau

Member

Jill Ozarski

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State Board of Land Commissioners

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Natural Areas Council News *By Kathy Yates, CNAC Chair*

Dear Friends of Colorado Natural Areas Program:

When I first visited Colorado years ago I was amazed to learn that Colorado had once been under water. Maybe I should have known that, but I didn't.

Years later, after I had moved to Colorado, married, had a child and settled here, I was appointed to the Colorado Natural Areas Council.

I'll always remember the visit the Council made to one of the Colorado Natural Areas, the Kremmling Cretaceous Ammonite Locality, where you can find ammonite fossils as well as fossils of 70 other species from the Cretaceous sea. Visiting Kremmling, I felt I had been transported to another world; the site offers such a rare glimpse into a life from 65 million years ago. We are still learning from this site, and others like Dinosaur Ridge, today.

Like all of our Natural Areas, Kremmling offers lessons in history, geology, biology and paleontology, to name a few. By protecting these areas we protect our past, present and future.

I'm now in my final term on the council, and I have had the honor to serve as the chair this past year. The council has representatives from the State Land Board, the State Parks Board, the Wildlife Commission and four governor appointees. Our role is to help advise the Natural Areas staff as they identify, designate and register Natural Areas. I have valued the opportunity to travel to some of the most beautiful locations of Colorado and see rare and/or native plants, geologic formations and paleontological locations and to be guided by highly qualified staff.

Since my first meeting as a council member I have felt fortunate to be on the council. The program has always employed dedicated, brilliant staff that exceeds the high standards set for them by the Council, and by the Department of Natural Resources. They do an incredible job of leveraging resources and achieve significant results. They have a detailed knowledge of the Natural Areas, and share their expertise with state and local governing entities as well as private landowners.

State Parks and Colorado Natural Areas are now facing budget challenges as the state grapples with the global economic downturn. Still, the Natural Areas staff is continuing its work of protecting and providing services to Natural Area landowners. These services include documenting the rare plants on the land, providing volunteer stewards to watch over the changes in the land, and bringing in experts to maintain the natural area values.

If you haven't let your representative or senator know the importance of maintaining this program, please do. It's important that they know that the Natural Areas staff is still hard at work protecting an important part of what makes Colorado so special.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for being a part of this important program,

Kathy Yates

Chair, Colorado Natural Areas Council
Colorado Natural Areas Council



The Council with CNAP staff in March, 2008
From left to right: Rob Billerbeck, Lee Shropshire, Dennis Buechler, Renee Rondeau, Dr. Tom Ready, Michele Bloom, Jill Ozarski, Katy Yates, and Brian Kurzel

The CNAP website has been updated!
Please visit us at: <http://parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP/>

2009 Triennial Report to Governor Ritter

Colorado Natural Areas Program

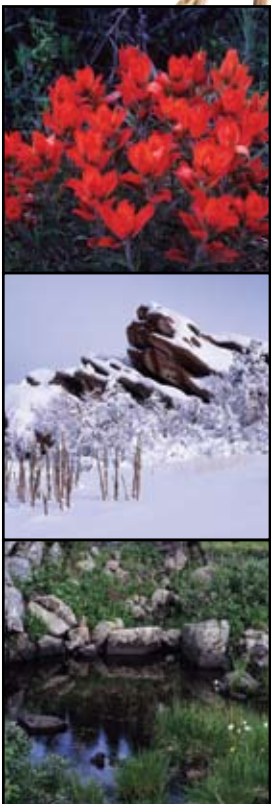


Wheeler Geologic Natural Area, photo by Frank Weston

Thirty Years of Protecting Colorado's Natural Treasures

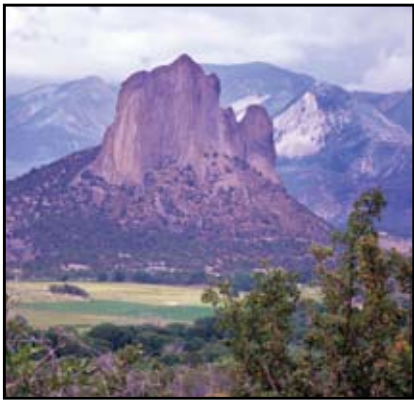
The Colorado Natural Areas Program is a unique statewide agency that has protected Colorado's natural treasures since its inception in 1978. For thirty years, the most significant natural features in Colorado have been identified, monitored and conserved through voluntary land management agreements between the Natural Areas Program and federal, state, local or private landowners. Through cooperative work with landowners who wish to be good stewards of Colorado's natural treasures, this program provides an invaluable service to the citizens of Colorado by protecting our most significant natural features. Colorado's best rare animal habitats, rare plant habitats, unique ecosystems, geologic sites and fossil localities are protected in the Natural Areas system.

Through the passage of the Natural Areas Act in the late 1970s, the Colorado General Assembly recognized that the best places in Colorado are "increasingly threatened with irreversible change and are in need of special identification and protection." Now more than ever, the Colorado Natural Areas Program fulfills the role of a persistent steward, working cooperatively to alleviate growing threats to the most significant natural features in Colorado. As required in the Natural Areas Act, the Natural Areas Program submits this report to Governor Ritter documenting our recent accomplishments and highlighting the best places in Colorado.



Colorado Natural Areas Program





Needle Rock Natural Area,
photo by Frank Weston

The Colorado Tourism Office has identified 98 destinations highlighted for their natural beauty. 34 Natural Areas are included in these top tourist destinations, where the Colorado Natural Areas Program is working to protect sensitive features and keep the most attractive areas in the state in pristine condition.



Over the past three years, the Colorado Natural Areas Program has maximized its budget and staff to conserve Colorado's most significant natural features. With 1.5 full-time employees, a handful of committed seasonals and a legion of volunteers, the Program has bolstered the protection of state Natural Areas while extending its reach to include new areas, supporters and conservation successes. The Natural Areas Program has made great progress over the past three years, but the threats to natural resources in Colorado are also increasing at an alarming rate. The challenges that face Colorado Natural Areas are mounting, and the work that the Natural Areas Program does has never been more pressing.

Program Accomplishments

As a steward to the best places in Colorado, the Colorado Natural Areas Program has sought to work with a variety of Colorado landowners (see chart on p. 2) to monitor and protect those places of greatest conservation need. By increasing its role in conservation work across the state, the Program is surviving to keep pace with increasing conservation threats.

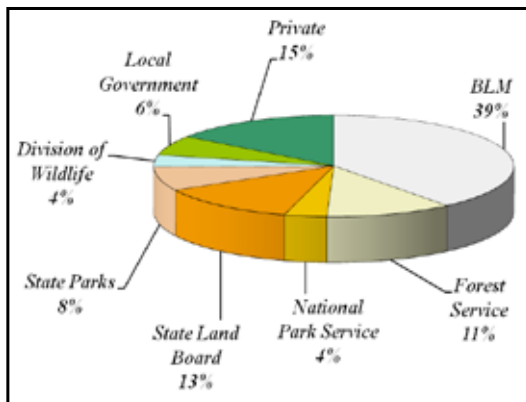
- **10,000 acres** of the finest lands in Colorado were added to the Natural Areas System, increasing the number of **registered and designated Natural Areas** from 105 to **113**.
- The Natural Areas System has grown to encompass **77 species of non-listed rare animals and plants** to keep these species **off of federal Endangered Species lists**. Also, **35 federally listed species** occur on Natural Areas where the Program is assisting in recovery efforts.
- For the first time in Colorado history, **Species Conservation Trust Funding** has been committed to protect Colorado's threatened wildflowers and is supporting a variety of rare plant conservation projects (see '**Rare Plant Protection**' on page 4).
- Staff **evaluated 20 potential natural areas** to assess their qualifications for inclusion in the Natural Area System.
- **100 committed volunteers** now help to monitor state Natural Areas.



Private Land Conservation

Conservation projects on private lands occur through voluntary landowner collaboration with the Natural Areas Program.

- Several private landowners have sought monitoring assistance and management advice on privately owned Natural Areas.
- Working cooperatively with ranch owners in Montrose County, the Natural Areas Program **acquired a portion of the Wacker Ranch** to protect an essential population of a federally endangered plant. With this protection project, the Natural Areas Program worked to move this listed species one step closer to de-listing (see sidebar to the right).
- In Prowers County, a **cattle rancher is working with the Program to provide stewardship** to unique geologic and biologic features on his private ranch.



Ownership of state Natural Areas

“I’ve worked with the Colorado Natural Areas Program over the last 20 years to help protect this [rare] plant and I’m happy to see interest in protecting this land.”

Harold Wacker, Private Landowner



Photos left to right: Gothic Research Natural Area, Escalante Canyon Natural Area, photos by Frank Weston



Clay-loving wild buckwheat, photo by Dickson Pratt

Harold and Kathleen Wacker are private ranchers in Montrose County who worked closely with the Natural Areas Program to assure that the federally-listed clay-loving wild buckwheat will be protected. With the help of funding from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Colorado Lottery, The Nature Conservancy and others, Wacker Ranch Natural Area now commemorates the Wacker’s stewardship to one of Colorado’s rarest plants.



Harold and Kathleen Wacker

Energy company, state team up to protect site with rare GarCo flower

By DENNIS WEBB
Tuesday, August 05, 2008

The Grand Junction Daily Sentinel

Across the world, the Parachute penstemon is known to grow only in Garfield County, where it clings to steep shale slopes in just four viable populations.

The two best sites are on Mount Callahan, about three miles west of the town that shares the plant's name. The land is owned by OXY USA WTP LP, which wants to drill for natural gas on its property.

OXY and a state agency say they have come up with a plan that allows for such development while protecting the Parachute penstemon, which is a candidate for federal Endangered Species Act designation.

OXY and the Colorado Natural Areas Program are seeking to expand a 21-year-old State Natural Area designation for Mount Callahan. Under the proposal, OXY also has agreed to practices designed to safeguard the plant as gas development proceeds.

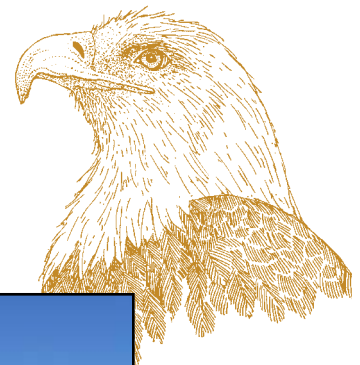
With OXY's permission, the state has been monitoring the Parachute penstemon population on Mount Callahan for 21 years. Now that the company wants to drill there, it has agreed to buffer zones, motorized travel limits and other measures designed to protect the plant.



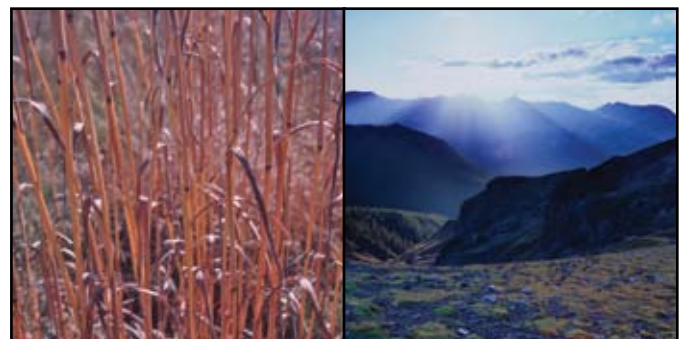
The New Energy Economy

The Natural Areas Program has worked closely with energy companies to minimize the impacts of energy development on significant natural features while providing guidelines that allow for sensible energy development. As fossil fuels and renewable energy are booming across the state, the Program is attempting to monitor the impacts to Colorado's rarest and most unique features.

- Working as an advisor to the State Land Board, the Program provided **lease stipulations for wind energy development** that protected rare plants and raptors in Weld County.
- In a model of collaboration with the oil and gas industry, the Natural Areas Program worked **with OXY USA to protect the rare Parachute penstemon**, which is being considered for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act (see story on the left).
- A threatened plant species in the Piceance Basin has received added protection through the **registration of a natural area on property owned by Shell, Inc.** in Rio Blanco County.



Colorado Senator Ken Salazar, Colorado Governor Bill Ritter and Executive Director of the DNR Harris Sherman visit the Western Slope of Colorado to view the energy developments occurring there. Photo by Kim Kaal.



Rare Plant Protection

Impacts to Colorado's rare plants are at an all time high. The only state agency that is legislatively mandated to work on rare plant protection is the Natural Areas Program, and recent efforts have brought the Program to the forefront of rare plant conservation in Colorado.

- **37,500 acres of habitat for the rarest plants** in Colorado occur on state Natural Areas, where the Natural Areas Program is working cooperatively to protect these species from growing threats.
- For each of the past three years, \$30,000 has been acquired through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service **Endangered Species grants**, and has **assisted in the conservation of 22 of the rarest plants in Colorado** with the aim of recovering listed species and keeping imperiled species off federal lists.
- The Program has begun to utilize **Species Conservation Trust Funding for 30 conservation projects** that will result in research, monitoring and protection of the rarest plants in Colorado

Duck Creek Natural Area is home to a rare wildflower that only occurs in Rio Blanco County. Ken Holsinger, botanist with the Bureau of Land Management, has teamed with Colorado Natural Areas Program staff to monitor threats and build fences to reduce impacts to this beautiful plant.

The rare Dudley Bluffs Bladderpod



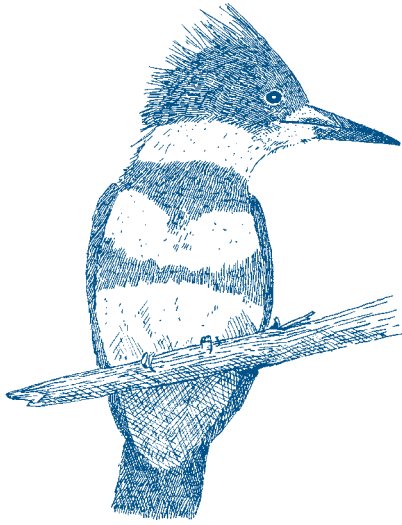
Photos left to right: Elephant Rocks Natural Area, photo by Frank Weston
Parachute pensilemon at Mount Callahan Natural Area, photo by Andrea Wolfe

With the growth of wind energy in eastern Colorado, there are places where development and sensitive natural features need to co-exist. The Natural Areas Program has been active on Chalk Bluffs Natural Area, a parcel owned by the State Land Board, to provide Best Management Practices for wind energy development near rare plants.



Wind Turbines near Chalk Bluffs Natural Area





A partnership between the Friends of Dinosaur Ridge, Jefferson County and the Natural Areas Program resulted in the stabilization of irreplaceable dinosaur tracks that were cracking and weathering on the Dakota Hogback Natural Area. State Lottery funding provided essential support to assure a rare Colorado treasure was not lost.



Dinosaur tracks at Dakota Hogback Natural Area



Geneva Basin Iron Fen Natural Area, photo by Frank Weston

The Geneva Basin Iron Fen is a rare wetland that has taken millenia to form. Illegal use of off-road vehicles has threatened the sensitive area, so Clear Creek County and the Pike National Forest are working with the Program to monitor impacts and close the area to illegal use.

Partnerships

Facing the growing threats to Colorado's natural values is easier with collaboration. Protection of Colorado's best natural features has been accomplished through partnerships with landowners and scientific experts who know the land best.

- The Natural Areas Program has served as an **internal resource for the Department of Natural Resource** agencies on such topics as rare plant protection, ecological restoration and noxious weed management.
- **43 Federal properties** (31 BLM, 9 U.S. Forest Service and 3 National Parks Service) are in the Natural Areas System. The Program has provided management recommendations, conservation assistance and thousands of volunteer hours to **protect Colorado's most sensitive features on federal land.**
- **Protection Projects on 18 natural areas** resulted from cooperation with landowners, scientists and other partners.



8 Photos left to right: CNAP staff work with partners to build fences at High Mesa Natural Area, and to monitor rare plants at Duck Creek Natural Area

“The Natural Areas Program is invaluable to federal land management agencies. The Program provides invaluable professional expertise and volunteers who assist the agencies in resource monitoring and scientific study. Through the Program’s efforts, federal agencies are able to more effectively make sound management decisions.”

BLM Botanist, Montrose Field Office

Outreach

In order to increase the capacity for conservation, the Program has focused on strengthening public support and engaging stakeholders over the past three years.

- In 2008, a **large format book, entitled “Colorado State Parks & Natural Areas,”** was published with the help of the Foundation for Colorado State Parks, Friends of the Natural Areas and a Natural Areas volunteer. This beautifully photographed guide book will promote public awareness of the state’s most significant places.
- Friends of Colorado Natural Areas hosted a **30th Anniversary ‘Friend-Raiser’** that brought together three-decades of natural areas supporters, including Harris Sherman, who was the Director of DNR during the Program’s inception in the late 1970s.
- **Promotion of 15 visitable Natural Areas** brought awareness of the best natural features in the state to the Colorado public.



Boulder Mountain Park Natural Area, photo by Frank Weston

One of the most dramatic, well-known and highly visited features in Colorado, the Boulder Flatirons, are included in the most recent Natural Area designations. Boulder Mountain Park Natural Area is invaluable for its recreational, scientific and aesthetic values.



Photos left to right: Dakota Hogback Natural Area, photo by Frank Weston, Lake Fork Registered Natural Area



Photos left to right: Gateway Palisade Natural Area, Dakota Ridge Natural Area, Stungullion Slide Natural Area, Deep Creek Natural Area

*“Let’s fulfill the Colorado Promise... by being stubborn stewards of our land, our air, our water and our wildlife.”
Bill Ritter, Inaugural Address,
January 9th, 2007*



STATE OF COLORADO • COLORADO STATE PARKS

Bill Ritter, Governor

Harris Sherman, Executive Director, Department of Natural Resources

Dean Winstanley, Director, Colorado State Parks

Colorado Natural Areas Council: Kathy Yates, Chair • Dr. Lee Shropshire, Vice-Chair • Michele Bloom, Board of Land Commissioners
Dennis Buechler, Wildlife Commission • Lenna Watson, State Parks Board • Reneé Rondeau, Member • Jill Ozarski, Member

Colorado State Parks/Colorado Natural Areas Program
1313 Sherman Street, Room 618, Denver, Colorado 80203 • 303-866-3437 • www.colorado.gov/parks

Cover photos bottom left: Indian Paintbrush at Aiken Canyon Natural Area, Dakota Hogback Natural Area, Mexican Cut Natural Area, photos by Frank Weston

Volunteer Stewards Corner

The Values of Volunteers

The value of CNAP’s volunteers is hard to quantify... but we can try! Over the past year, CNAP’s Volunteer Stewards and Rare Plant Monitoring Stewards hiked over tough terrain, logged long hours and generated invaluable reports about the best places in Colorado. Overall, 105 volunteers logged over 2000 hours of their time in 2008! And these aren’t just your average hours. Some of the unique and exciting projects happening all over the state in 2008 included:

- Travis and LaDonna Ward surveyed for rare plants at Elephant Rocks to inform the BLM’s Travel Management Plan implementation.
- Miryam Broughall worked closely with the BLM to resurrect monitoring of a federally-threatened plant surrounded by oil and gas development at Ryan Gulch.
- Andy Herb completed a wetland assessment of Haviland Lake to support the designation of the site with Division of Wildlife.
- Dave Bathke led a trip of Native Plant Society members to Geneva Basin Iron Fen.

It is because of these dedicated individuals, and many more like them, that CNAP is able to provide high-quality monitoring to the Natural Areas all over the state. But the extensive monitoring that volunteers provide is not the only value...

In 2008, CNAP volunteers contributed almost \$42,000 worth of value to the Natural Areas of Colorado. That’s like adding a full-time employee to help monitor the best features in the state! The breakdown of volunteer value by landowner is below. Thanks to all volunteers who have committed their time to making CNAP a valuable partner in conservation!

Bureau of Land Management

Glenwood Springs and Kremmling Field Offices.....	\$1,250
Grand Junction Field Office.....	\$15,200
Gunnison Field Office.....	\$760
Royal Gorge Field Office.....	\$1,640
San Juan Field Office.....	\$1,760
Uncompaghre Field Office.....	\$360
White River Field Office.....	\$6,100

United States Forest Service

Arapaho National Forest.....	\$155
Comanche National Grasslands.....	\$425
Gunnison National Forest.....	\$550
Pawnee National Grasslands.....	\$715
Pike National Forest.....	\$1,170
San Juan National Forest.....	\$740

Rocky Mountain National Park..... \$940

State Land Board..... \$4,810

Other (including Division of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, and Counties)..... \$5,800

Remember: If you donate 48 or more hours to the Colorado Natural Areas Program and State Parks, you receive a year-long Parks Pass, good at all 42 of the State Parks!



CNAP staff, Partners and Rare Plant Monitoring Stewards teamed up for a day of plant monitoring at Mount Callahan Natural Area. Photo by: Nicola Ripley.

Upcoming Events:
There will be a Volunteer Steward gathering at Hurricane Canyon in El Paso County this year on **August 8th**. Please let Brian Kurzel know if you are interested in attending.

Go Paperless!

If you’d like to receive the Colorado Natural Areas Program newsletter by e-mail only, please e-mail us at: brian.kurzel@state.co.us
In the subject or body of the e-mail please state:
“Newsletter via e-mail only”

If you want to continue getting paper newsletters, there is no need to contact us.

Become a Volunteer Steward and help protect Colorado's best natural features!!

Opportunity: CNAP is currently looking for volunteers to monitor some of the most spectacular and sensitive areas in the state! The Natural Areas Program needs volunteers to get out and visit these sites regularly to ensure these sites are being preserved for future generations. You can help!

Below, you'll find a list of designated Natural Areas for which we urgently need Volunteer Stewards. If you are interested in any of these opportunities, please contact Brian Kurzel at: 303-866-3203 x 4301 or brian.kurzel@state.co.us.

SITE NAME	COUNTY	OWNER	ACRES	HIKING	ATTRIBUTES
Bonny Prairie	Yuma	State Parks	51	Easy	Four fragments of little bluestem loess (wind-deposited glacial silt) prairie in the central Great Plains. A small colony of a rare plant that is extremely rare in Colorado.
Dome Rock	Teller	DOW	640	Moderate	Massive exfoliating outcrops of Pikes Peak granite rise 800 feet from the canyon floor. Ponderosa pine, limber pine, Douglas-fir and montane grassland plant communities and lambing grounds for bighorn sheep.
Garden Park	Fremont	BLM	2668	Moderate	Very rare and plentiful fossil location; rare plants.
Indian Spring	Saguache	SLB	640	Difficult	Found in the midst of an active, warm climate dune field. Unique aquatic fauna and invertebrates occur here.
Kremmling Cretaceous	Grand	BLM/SLB	1037	Moderate	The area's exceptionally diverse fossil biota, including rare tropical and subtropical forms, represents an unusual fossil assemblage in North America.
Lookout Mountain	Moffat	BLM	6500	Moderate	An excellent example of an isolated, flat-topped erosion remnant of a once extensive Tertiary alluvial plain. High quality plant communities, as well as four plant species of special concern.
North Park Phacelia	Jackson	BLM	310	Easy	Federally-listed plant; examples of the Seriphidium novum/Stipa comata community in good condition.
Redcloud Peak	Hinsdale	BLM	5974	Very Difficult	Habitat for rare butterfly
Shell Rock	Baca	SLB	640	Easy	Contains one of the largest populations of a rare Colorado endemic plant.
Wheeler Geologic	Hinsdale	USFS	640	Difficult	A mass of pinnacles and domes, some over several hundred feet tall. The geologic features occur within virgin forests of spruce & subalpine fir.
Yanks Gulch/ Upper Greasewood Creek	Rio Blanco	BLM	2687	Difficult	High-quality examples of four types of Great Basin plant communities. Significant populations of one federally threatened and two other plant species endemic to Green River shale are also found on the site.
Zapata Falls	Alamosa	SLB	619	Easy	Stunning geologic exposures, including falls cut through granite by a Pleistocene subglacial stream. Excellent montane grasslands, rare birds.

BLM = Bureau of Land Management; DOW = Division of Wildlife; DPOR = Department of Reclamation SLB = State Land Board; TNC = The Nature Conservancy; USFS = U.S. Forest Service