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Colorado Natural Areas Program



The Field Press

Volume 5, Issue 1

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Colorado Natural Areas conserve 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 or processes, fossils, or habitat for rare plants or animals.** It is the responsibility of the Colorado Natural Areas Program to identify outstanding natural features throughout the state, to recognize landowners for their stewardship of these special places, and to work with interested landowners to maintain important pieces of Colorado's natural heritage. All management agreements are voluntary and non-binding.

Welcome to New Stewards

The steward ranks continue to blossom, now reaching 63. Dick and Marty Fisher of Steamboat Springs have agreed to look into competition between rare plants and wild horses on Yanks Gulch/Upper Greasewood in the Piceance Basin. Denver's Andy Herb will be looking deeply into Deep Creek (that's 2000 feet down) on the White River Plateau – both the BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern and the adjacent USFS proposed Research Natural Area. Dr. Mark Paschke of Ft. Collins – a professor of restoration ecology – will be taking the long road into California Park in the Elkhead Mountains, a site that is closed until July 1 due to nesting sandhill cranes.

(Continued on page 7)

Dakota Hogback Now a Colorado Natural Area

An important Front Range landmark is now one of Colorado's newest Natural Areas.

Articles of Designation for the Dakota Hogback Natural Area were signed in January, following unanimous approval by the Jefferson County Commissioners, Colorado Natural Areas Council, and State Parks Board. The signing capped months of effort by the staff of CNAP and Jefferson County Open Space to provide statewide recognition for this valuable area.

The Jefferson County Open Space properties which make up the Natural Area essentially outline the hogback itself in seven different parcels. Together with the Ken Caryl Natural Area (designated in

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From the Director

Partnerships For Conservation

I have to tell a secret. When an earlier Natural Areas director was asked how the Program was able to get so much done, he replied, "we use smoke and mirrors" (he was also an amateur magician). For you see the Natural Areas Program has no "power" in the conventional sense. Our agreements are voluntary. We don't buy land; we don't buy easements; we don't have deep pockets (hardly even shallow pockets). What we do have is the knowledge that there are so many Coloradans who care immensely about our state, about the things that make Colorado such a unique place to live, to raise a family, to have a career, or, as they say, to simply have a life.

So the "power" of the Program is in the very citizens, landowners and land managers who benefit from it. I'm amazed at the number of volunteer stewards (64 and counting) who materialized to donate their highly-skilled expertise, to watch over and report on the changing conditions in Natural Areas. I'm amazed at how many individuals in the resource management professions -- public-sector agencies across the state -- are dedicated to wise and prudent management of these obscure and not-so-obscure corners of our home in Colorado.

We currently partner with over 40 different "entities" -- from municipal and county governments, to a whole bunch of state and federal agencies, to individual district and field offices, to non-profits and land trusts, and to a growing number of private landowners who are looking for assistance in conserving their lands. Each of these entities represents at least a couple, if not quite a few, professional and lay individuals with whom we partner and network. For it's in this partnering and networking that the smoke and mirrors really pay off.

(continued on next page)

Natural Areas Council News

Two successful Council meetings were held since our last newsletter. The November meeting elected Dr. Lee Shropshire as the new Council Chair. Lee will serve until his term expires July 1. Two fascinating privately-owned sites were registered -- the Orient Mine in the San Luis Valley, home to 200,000 Brazilian free-tailed bats; and Brush Creek Perched Fen in Custer County, a bit of the subalpine transposed to the edge of the Wet Mountain Valley. After further visits to these sites this summer, more will be coming in the next newsletter on their values of statewide significance. Another privately-owned site -- Lake

(continued on page 4)

From the Director, continued

As public servants, it's possible for the staff at the Natural Areas Program to accomplish so much with so little simply because there are so many others out there who also have similar goals. Hence the title of this piece – Partnerships for Conservation. First off, partners support each other: then they identify common long-term objectives and a course of action, scrape up a little money here and a little there, and accomplish simple, on-the-ground conservation goals that have strong support across this beautiful state of ours. It's a simple system, but it works when we pool our knowledge, our resources, and our shared commitment to the lands we love.

Bob Finch

"When the Peacemaker set up the councils and instructed us he said, 'When you sit in council for the welfare of the people, think not of yourself, nor of your family, nor even of your generation, but make all of your decisions on behalf of the seventh generation coming.'"

-- Oren Lyons,
Onandaga Council, 1995.

DAKOTA HOGBACK NATURAL AREA (continued from page 1)



June 2000), the Dakota Hogback encompasses a 14-mile stretch of the hogback structure, forming a highly visible Natural Area adjacent to Colorado's largest metropolitan area.

The Dakota Hogback is outstanding among natural areas in that it contains all of the features that qualify a site for natural area status. The area supports good examples of the native foothills plant communities of ponderosa pine/mountain mahogany scrub woodland and mountain mahogany/needle-and-thread grass mixed foothill shrubland. The rare plant species *Physaria bellii* (Bell's twinpod) and *Aristida basiramea* (Forktip threeawn) occur on the hogback, and the area also supports a good representation of indigenous foothills birds, mammals and reptiles. The Dakota Hogback is also considered one of the most important migratory corridors for raptors in the western US.

Outstanding geologic formations and a paleontological locality of statewide significance are also represented. The area contains exposures that provide an excellent illustration of the geology of the Dakota Hogback, including exposures of the Dakota, Lyons, and Lykins formations. Finally,



Dakota Hogback Natural Area, view south of Alameda

the natural area includes Dinosaur Ridge, a national natural landmark paleontological site with well-exposed dinosaur tracks, bones, plants and trace fossils.

The Program is pleased and proud to have such an outstanding addition to the roster of Colorado Natural Areas. We thank the staff of the Jefferson County Open Space Department for their help in the designation process and their continued support of the Colorado Natural Areas Program.



CNAP News & Notes

- We've recently been awarded a \$75,000 grant from the EPA for wetland planning and assessment work. This will be used to inventory wetlands on new, and additions to, state parks; inventory a large identified Natural Area on SLB lands in Conejos County; and to complete a comprehensive wetland management plan for State Parks/Natural Areas.
- Two seasonal employees have just come on board. Melissa Antol finished her masters degree at UCD and returns from last year. It's very helpful that she knows all the ropes, as they say. Collin Ahrens brings a wealth of small mammal and wildlife expertise, and is also from CU.
- Dr. Juanita Ladyman visited while researching botanical status reports for a USFS contract. She said our extensive files on sites and species was extremely helpful.
- After high demand depleted our supply, we are re-printing the "Creating an Integrated Weed Management Plan" handbook. Such demand seems never to slacken.
- Results from the Geology Advisory Group II have been disseminated back to the 40 professionals who were involved. This effort, from workshops held in 2000, identified over 150 geology and paleontology sites of statewide, nation-wide or global significance. As no surprise to the professionals, Colorado geology offers one of the richest study curricula in the nation.



COUNCIL NEWS (continued from page 2)

Pasture in Larimer County – was registered at the March Council meeting. Lake Pasture is an excellent example of a montane pond with associated wetlands – probably the best preserved of such in the Front Range.

At the request of the BLM, two designated Natural Areas in Rio Blanco County – South Cathedral Bluffs and Raven Ridge – were expanded to 1330 and 4980 acres, respectively. Articles of designation were also approved for three State Land Board sites -- Shell Rock Canyon, Jimmy Creek, and Saddle Mountain addition (added to the existing US Forest Service research natural area).

We welcomed two new members to the Natural Areas Council. From Jackson County, Dennis Brinker is the new representative from the State Board of Land Commissioners. With a strong background in county government, schools and ranching, Dennis brings an excellent and needed

perspective to our current Front-Range-dominated Council. Kathy Yates was appointed by Governor Owens in December. From Denver, Kathy brings an equally strong yet differing background in the fields of management, organization and non-profits that should prove very helpful as we implement CNAP's strategic plan. We're glad to have them on board.

The next meetings of the Natural Areas Council will be June 7 and September 6 at locations to be determined.

"We need some contact with the things we sprang from. We need nature at least as a part of the context of our lives. Without cities we cannot be civilized. Without nature... we are compelled to renounce an important part of our heritage."

Natural Areas — By the Numbers

Number of Natural Area sites with volunteer stewards: 64
Number of stewards with BS degrees: 60; MS degrees: 33; PhD's: 10
Estimated value of services provided by volunteer stewards: \$47,000

Number of pages published in *Caring For The Land* handbook series: 366
Number of *Caring For The Land* documents requested: ~ 2500
Number of States/Provinces requesting *Caring For The Land* documents: 40

Number of sites evaluated by Program: 376
Number of small-grant research projects financed: 104
Number of state park wetland inventories completed: 39

Acreage of Research Natural Areas evaluated: 467,000
Acreage of State Land Board (SLB) surveys completed: ~ 2,500,000
Number of CNAP-nominated sites added to SLB's Stewardship Trust: 21

Number of rare/declining wildlife species on Colorado Natural Areas: 60
Number of rare/declining plant species on Natural Areas: 75
Number of rare/declining plant communities on Natural Areas: 45

Number of signed voluntary agreements for Natural Areas: 80
Number of partnering entities – private, NGO, city, county, state, federal: 43
Acres purchased for the Natural Areas Program: 0

Number geo/paleontology professionals volunteering on Advisory Group: 40
Years represented in Natural Area fossil sites: 500,000,000

Nation-wide, number of acres in state-sponsored natural areas: 1,000,000

Jason Beason, with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, will be checking in on the numerous rare plant species at Raven Ridge, almost in Utah. Bob Littleton, from Colorado Springs, enjoys the tundra at 12,000-foot Treasurevault Mountain with its tiny *Eutrema pentlandii* (federally threatened). Jill Handwerk, of the Natural Heritage Program in Ft. Collins, will be keeping an eye on the close-to-home North Poudre Reservoir site and its largest(?) population of *Physaria bellii* (S2) in the state. Denver's Rita Berberian and husband Dr. Tyrone Vincent were lucky to get one of the prettiest sites (I'm partial to the montane), Dome Rock -- a granite monolith near Mueller State Park. Al and Betty Schneider of Durango agreed to bushwack into the difficult-to-pronounce Narraguinnep. Likewise from Durango, Travis and LaDonna Ward will be crossing Wolf Creek Pass into the San Luis Valley and Elephant Rocks.

Jenny Nehring has agreed to watch Zapata Falls from her Monte Vista home. From Denver, Lori Billeisen will stop just short of Wyoming at North Park Phacelia. Likewise, Littleton's Gene Czyzewski will travel to E. Sand Dunes near Walden. Sue Scherner will take the long drive to the edge of Kansas, as well as Bonny Prairie within Bonny State Park. Ann and Tim Henson will be visiting the Laramie River valley for the newly-designated Jimmy Creek Natural Area. Just over the ridge is Sand Creek/Boulder Ridge, stewarded by Boulder's Lesly West. Ron Albracht will head from Ft. Collins to the timberline Mt. Goliath on the Mt. Evans road. Lakewood's Julia Miller will visit Copeland Lake Willow Carr on the edge of Rocky Mountain NP. Kristine Crandall of Basalt will visit the Picance Basin's Lower Greasewood Creek. Even more new stewards are mentioned elsewhere! The Program is fortunate to have such fine friends.

Assorted steward notes: CSU Researcher Linda Courter is joining Jill Handwerk at North Poudre to collect *Physaria* samples for DNA analysis. The Kortzes are watching the regional development of gas production roads around Badger Wash. Lori Brummer found a new population of *Askellia nana* (S2) at Mexican Cut, as well as a Gunnison sage grouse lek site at South Beaver Creek. Robert Karges is concerned about the effects of cattle grazing on *Astragalus ripleyi* (S2) at Rajadero. Al and Betty Schneider have developed a nifty website on southwestern Colorado plants (found at <http://www.swcoloradowildflowers.com/>).



A Good Time Was Had by All

We held our first (Front Range) volunteer steward gathering on March 29 at the offices of Boulder Open Space, home to four natural areas -- Colorado Tallgrass Prairie, S. Boulder Creek, Green Mountain and White Rocks. After some initial socializing, Ron gave a slide show on natural areas across the state. This was followed by a number of steward awards, in the form of field guides and maps. These included awards for the: "Longest Drive" to Jacob Morgan -- from Ft. Collins to Lookout Mountain in Moffat County; "Most Difficult Hike" to Megan Bowes at Paradise Park; and a "Trilogy" award to Alix Gadd for taking on three diverse sites -- Dave's

Draw on the Pawnee, E. Lost Park in the Tarryalls, and Hoosier Ridge in the Mosquitoes.

The gathering followed the latest Natural Areas Council meeting and thus most of the Council members were able to attend, as well as staff from the State Land Board, State Parks, and our hosts from Boulder. Robert Fenwick and his wife Kristin attended even though it was their anniversary -- you never know what will happen when you marry a biologist. Stay tuned for a Western Slope steward gathering in Grand Junction in the fall.



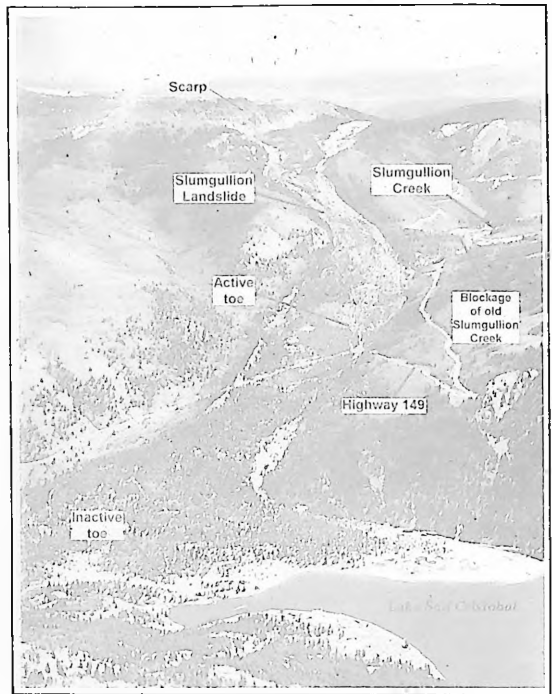
Natural Area Profile: Slumgullion Earthflow

"A Natural Area on the move"

Travelers on Highway 149 between Creede and Lake City may not realize that they are driving across both a landslide and a Colorado Natural Area as they descend from Slumgullion Pass into the valley of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison.

The Slumgullion Earthflow is located about four miles southeast of Lake City in Hinsdale County. This textbook example of "mass wasting", the downhill movement of rock, soil and other material under the influence of gravity, is an easy Natural Area to visit. The main mass of the earthflow is easily seen from highway, and there are several pullouts or overlooks with interpretive signs along the southern flank of the slide. A fairly strenuous hike of about a mile on USFS Trail #64 from the Cebolla Creek road provides a spectacular view of the slide from the top of the mesa.

Landslides are common in this region of volcanic rocks overlying the Mancos Shale. Slides can occur where the basalt cap which tops the volcanic tuffs is weakened by hydrothermal activity. Past glacial erosion steepened the heights, also contributing to instability. The earthflow material is generally yellow and red, with a consistency apparently reminiscent of the



Slumgullion Earthflow (US Geological Survey photo)

presumably unappetizing "slumgullion" stew eaten by local miners.

The Slumgullion Earthflow consists of an older flow that broke away from Mesa Seco about 700 years ago, and a younger slide atop the old that appears to have been continuously on the move for the past 300 years. The original flow is over four miles long, and descends from the mesa rim at 11,500 feet to the river some 2,600 feet below. The toe of the slide formed a natural dam on the Lake Fork of the Gunnison, resulting in the creation of Colorado's 2nd largest natural lake — Lake San Cristobal. The younger, active part of the earthflow is about 2.4 miles long, and moves at the rate of one to 18 feet annually. The movement of this part of the flow causes trees growing on the surface of the slide to lean in all directions, and



Toe of active slide

(continued on next page)

the toe of the slide gradually engulfs trees as it reaches them.

During the past 700 years, sediment entering the lake from the headwaters of the Lake Fork and from Slumgullion Creek have formed large deltas. The delta created by the Lake Fork exhibits many of the classic geomorphological features of an active delta. If sedimentation from the two streams continues at the same rate as in the past, the lake will fill with sediment in another 2,500 years or so.

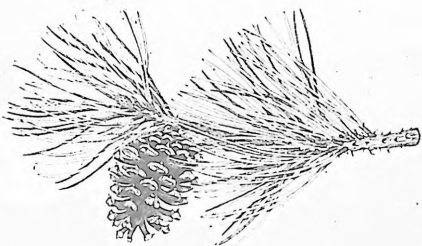
Slumgullion Earthflow is one of the most visible and easily accessible landslide complexes in Colorado, and unusual in having formed a lasting lake. The area is also the site of continuous research by US Geological Survey scientists. The upper portion of the earthflow was designated as a Colorado Natural Area in 1983, and the lower portion was added in 1993. Slumgullion Earthflow is also a National Natural Landmark.



Gone But Still Nearby

The Program lost three excellent professionals last year, and we'd like to offer three large thank-you's. Janet Coles and Kathy Carsey helped steer the Program for long and sometimes lonely years. They contributed so much in the areas of rare plant monitoring, Research Natural Area evaluations, EPA wetland work, geology/paleontology analyses, and scores of small-grant research efforts, not to mention the registrations and designations of so many Natural Areas. We haven't lost them entirely, though - Janet remains as the volunteer steward for Dudley Bluffs and Deer Gulch, and Kathy is a nearby colleague at the Natural Heritage Program. We wish them all the best.

We also lost our Council Chair, Will Murray. Will led the Council with his wonderful ability to find the precise key necessary to unlock any particular issue. Will also remains with us as one of the leaders of the Friends of Natural Areas.



Walking through a ponderosa pine forest is a sensual delight, the air redolent with the opiate essence of pine and the vanilla-like aroma of sun-warmed bark. John Muir said of ponderosa pine, "Of all the pines, this one gives forth the finest music to the winds."

—Audrey DeLella Benedict



FRIENDS OF COLORADO NATURAL AREAS APPLICATION

*I/We wish to join or renew our membership in Friends of Colorado Natural Areas!
(Choose among these annual tax-deductible memberships)*

\$15 Individual \$25 Family \$8 Student or Senior

A larger gift is greatly appreciated and will help protect individual natural areas.

\$50 \$100 \$1000

Name(s) _____ Phone () _____

Address _____ Fax () _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Yes, I would like to be a volunteer.

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