



The Field Press



A Publication of the Colorado Natural Areas Program

Volume 6, Issue 2

Fall 2002

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, fossils, or habitat for rare plants or animals.** It is the mandate 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.

An Enduring Resource—25 Years of Colorado Conservation

Back in 1977, a computer called the "Apple II" was introduced. It came in an innovative plastic case and included all of 4 K of memory. (Today, this newsletter alone requires 36,000 K.) In 1977, such desktop computers were not common in the legislative offices at the Colorado state capitol. What was seemingly common in these offices, however, was a widespread concern for the future of Colorado.

During the 1977 legislative session, 24 senators and representatives sponsored a bill known as the Colorado Natural Areas Act. In the Act, the lawmakers needed a 77-word sentence to state their Legislative Declaration. Edited down to fewer words, it goes like this: **The general assembly hereby finds that diverse ecological communities are increasingly threatened with irreversible change, and that it is in the interest of present and future generations to protect and enhance specific examples as an enduring resource.**

A decade later, this declaration continued to resonate with our senators and representatives. In 1988, when the Act was up for re-authorization, no fewer than 52 legislators sponsored the re-authorization bill. And for a second re-authorization in 1999, after yet another decade (and three governors since 1977), both chambers voted **unanimously** (94-0) to re-affirm the declaration that these resources are "increasingly threatened with irreversible change," and that protection is important to Colorado's citizens—both to generations now and to those of the future.

The Act continues, with strong legislative intent, to list some benefits of natural areas. Natural areas:

- serve as examples of the native condition in studies relating to air, water, and soil quality, as well as habitat productivity;
- serve as resource material from which new knowledge may be derived;

(continued on page 3)



In this issue

Natural Areas Council News	2
CNAP News & Notes	4
Volunteer Stewards	7
Natural Area Profile	8



Colorado Natural Areas Program
Colorado State Parks
 1313 Sherman Street, Room 618
 Denver, Colorado 80203
 303.866.3437
<http://parks.state.co.us/cnap/>

Bill Owens
 Governor

Greg E. Walcher
 Executive Director
 Department of Natural Resources

Lyle Laverty
 Director
 Colorado State Parks

Colorado Natural Areas Council

John Masson
 Chair

Kathy Yates
 Vice Chair

Shara Castle
 Member

Dennis Brinker
 Colorado Board of
 Land Commissioners

Dr. Tom Ready
 Colorado Board of Parks
 and Outdoor Recreation

Phil James
 Colorado Wildlife Commission

Program Staff:

303-866-3203
 email: firstname.lastname@state.co.us

Bob Finch x331
 Acting Director

Ron West x326
 Program Manager

Tom Damon x343

Natural Areas Council News

Governor Owens recently appointed Ms. Shara Castle to the Natural Areas Council. Shara is excited about the opportunity to serve on Council, and we look forward to working with her.

The June meeting was held at Castlewood Canyon State Park and Natural Area. John Masson was voted in as the new Council Chair, and Kathy Yates as the new Vice-Chair. (Kathy, by the way, recently married and we send them our best regards for the future!) The 640-acre State Land Board parcel in California Park (Routt County) was recommended for designation as the newest natural area. Subsequent to the Council meeting, this designation was also approved by the Board of Land Commissioners and now goes to the State Parks Board.

Staff has started to look at the lengthy registry of natural areas, deciding if registered sites should continue on to designation or be de-registered. Some sites have languished on the list, and site conditions or situations have changed in the interim. Council approved a protocol for de-registrations, and de-registered two sites—West Hoosier Ridge *Braya* site and Buckley Prairie. West Hoosier was de-registered on the recommendation of the U.S. Forest Service—the *Braya* species is no longer thought to be rare. Buckley Prairie was associated with the Plains Conservation site that was de-designated several years ago due to loss of integrity. Staff also presented slides of natural areas in the southern region of the state park system.

The September meeting was held in Alamosa and involved a number of field trips. The highlight of the meeting was the council's designation approval for Brush Creek Fen Natural Area, a private site in Custer County with the state's finest-quality population of yellow lady's-slipper, among other rare elements. This site now goes to the State Parks Board. A slide show on natural areas in the northern region was presented. We then traveled to the Orient Mine, on the northeastern edge of the San Luis Valley, to meet with the private owners of this registered site, and to witness the out-flight of the huge colony of Brazilian free-tailed bats. On Saturday, Council also visited Zapata Falls and Elephant Rocks designated natural areas.



wood frog

25 YEARS OF CONSERVATION

(continued from page 1)

- serve as a reservoir of genetic material that has present and future value to scientific inquiry;
- provide habitat for rare and endangered animal or plant species;
- serve as outdoor classrooms and laboratories for scientific study by students of all ages; and
- serve as areas of natural beauty, inspiration, and diversity that meet aesthetic needs, enriching the meaning and enjoyment of human life.

The Colorado Natural Areas program is small (compared to, say, Ohio's natural areas program which has 28 employees). This small program, however, has completed much over these past 25 years:

- over 100 natural areas have been designated or registered, protecting habitat for an amazing 180 species of rare animals, plants, or community types;
- over 100 research grants have been awarded;
- 52 wetland surveys and projects at state parks;
- field evaluations or reports on 67 U.S. Forest Service research natural areas;
- three major management manuals;
- 38 management and protection projects on natural areas;
- 40 management plans, monitoring plans, and management planning teams;
- four years of EPA wetland surveys;
- two statewide, geology site studies;
- 65 natural areas watched over by volunteer stewards;
- 11 years of State Land Board surveys covering 2.7 million acres.

While a total of 35 states have natural area programs, Colorado is the only Rocky Mountain state with a program. As identified in the Act, the need for identification and designation of natural areas in our rapidly growing state is critical—to act before a site sees “irreversible change.” For example, in Illinois a statewide survey of potential natural areas identified 250 possible sites. Over time and before protection could occur, 50 of these sites were simply destroyed. Coloradans should be proud that we saw this potential a full 25 years ago.

*In the blue night
frost haze, the sky glows
with the moon
pine tree tops
bend snow-blue, fade
into sky, frost, starlight.
the creak of boots.
rabbit tracks, deer tracks,
what do we know.*

Gary Snyder



Photo by Tom Damon





*Something hidden.
Go and find it.
Go and look
behind the Ranges.
Something lost
behind the Ranges.
Lost and waiting
for you.
Go!*

Rudyard Kipling

- We had to wish a farewell to our most senior staff member at the beginning of July. **Karin Decker** had been with the program for five years and contributed in so many ways. A skilled field ecologist, she also was a master at the office-end of things, concerning computers, GIS, and data analyses. She was a principle author/editor on many of our recent publications and reports. Staff is struggling without her answers to our daily difficulties. Karin continues with similar endeavors, however, and is close by at the Heritage Program in Ft. Collins. We wish her well.
- We'd like to recognize the excellent contributions of our seasonal employees over this last field season. **Collin Ahrens**, a recent graduate of CU, managed all the State Land Board surveys, completing an outstanding job. **Tom Damon**, a master's candidate at Antioch University, is involved in all aspects of the program from evaluations to designations, and remains with us until December. If anyone out there needs additional help, we'd offer two high recommendations.
- **Dr. Carol Dawson**, botanist at the state office of the BLM, and **Bonnie Koblitz** are updating their files, searching for all available information on the species on BLM's list of sensitive plants. Bonnie visited and searched our extensive files on rare plant research and monitoring reports. **David Salas** visited from the Bureau of Reclamation in Lakewood. BuRec is completing veg mapping for the NPS at Rocky Mountain NP, and David reviewed mapping that CNAP did on three USFS research natural areas that are adjacent to the park—Pennock Creek, West Creek and Hell Canyon.
- **Dr. Karen Houck** visited and was kind enough to delve into maps and show slides on the paleontological and geological sites around State Bridge. The area is thick with fossil sites, as well as a world-class example of an ancient delta fan formation, now exposed on the surface. Analyses on these and related structures are key for petrochemical geologists in their search for underground resources. We will be trying to interest BLM managers in some level of recognition and protection for these sites.
- Ron testified before the Larimer County commissioners on three designations. Based on valid concerns, the name for the N. Poudre Reservoir Natural Area was changed to more accurately describe the site—Park Creek Hogback. The commissioners had no objections to the designations. Ron also continues as a member on three interagency planning committees—the Rare Plant Technical Committee, the Uncompahgre Fritillary Recovery Team, and a Colorado Bat Conservation group. The Colorado Bat Conservation Plan is nearly complete.
- Rather amazingly, as far as we know, not a single natural area burned this summer. A large fire burned between Upper Greasewood/Yanks Gulch and Lower Greasewood, but did not cross natural area boundaries. Although the Big Elk fire did not find the registered Lake Pasture site, a portion of the owner's private land was burned.



BENEFITS OF NATURAL AREA DESIGNATION TO LANDOWNERS, MANAGERS, AND TO THE CITIZENS OF COLORADO

Identifies and protects what makes Colorado unique.

Public acknowledgement of the owner's outstanding stewardship.

Can serve as reference areas for other sites needing restoration.

Site's statewide significance is documented and a paper trail established for state & federal agencies.

Can provide educational tools.

Protection and research monies.

Access to program staff and expertise.

Helps to meet one of Great Outdoors Colorado's goals—to identify natural areas of statewide significance.

Helps to meet the governor's Smart Growth Initiative through its Natural Landscapes aspect.

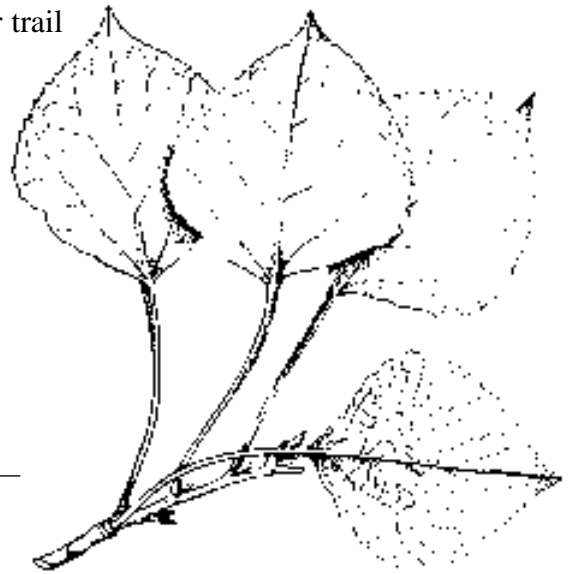
Large team of experienced volunteer stewards to observe and report on site conditions.

Can improve success in owner's grant proposals.

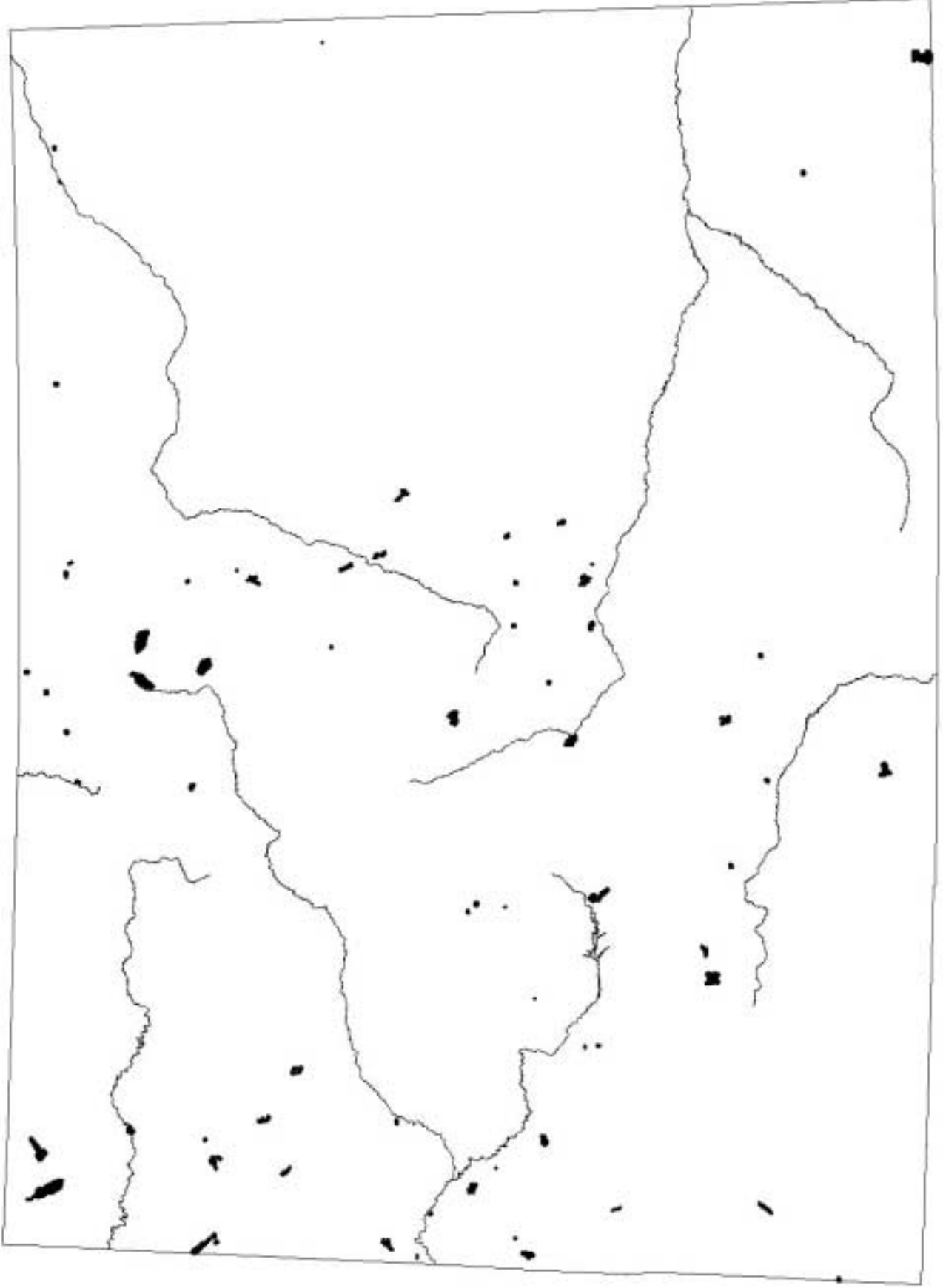
Can link or expand site protection to like-minded adjacent landowners.

Can help to avoid federal threatened or endangered species listings.

Field evaluations, ecological restoration and weed consultation.



Statewide Spatial Representation of Designated Natural Areas



Map Scale 1 : 2,600,000

Volunteer Stewards

A second Western Slope volunteer steward recognition evening was held at Colorado River State Park in Clifton on Oct. 4. Most awards fell into the “outstanding efforts” category. These included **Jeanne Wenger** and **Cindy Carlson** for thoroughly exploring the nooks, crannies, and hanging gardens of



Art and Mara Hertel in Gothic Natural Area

Escalante Canyon; **Lori Brummer** for trying to find every 4X4 road in 4500-acre South Beaver Creek, and reaching the 12,000-foot top of Mexican Cut; **Art & Mara Hertel** for GIS coordinates at all their observations at Gothic; **Nic & Mary Korte** for virtual botany at Badger Wash via digital photography and email; **Drs. Terry & Gerry Audesirk** for mapping all the ammonite fossils at Kremmling Ammonite; **Dr. Janet Potter** for tireless work at both Slumgullion Earthflow and Wheeler Geologic; and **Marian & Peter Robinson** as our longest-term supporters, stewards at McElmo, and for years of monitoring for the rare cactus, *Sclerocactus mesa-verdae*.

A welcome to our newest stewards: **Richard Renzetti** of Colorado Springs, who is willing to drive nearly to Oklahoma and the Comanche Grasslands Lesser Prairie Chicken site; **Trent Woolley** of Denver, who will be going nearly as far to Shell Rock Canyon, also in Baca County; and **Don & Laurie Tyre** of Grand Junction, who are taking over at the Fruita fossil site.

Field forms are coming in at an amazing rate. All of them have been read, if not responded to as well. Of course, the overall condition is extreme drought at most sites. A few noteworthy finds: **Bernie Smith** found numerous new rare plant occurrences at Castlewood Canyon including a first park sighting of *Viola pedatifida*, and new occurrences of *Heuchera richardsonii*, *Ribes americanum*, and *Smilax lasioneuron*; **Art and Mara Hertel** discovered a voluminous spring issuing from the face of Mt. Baldy in Gothic Natural Area (see photo); **Brenda Bafus-Williams** documented fresh OHV impacts on the rare plant populations of Fairview—the BLM has been notified; **Kristine Crandall** did not find any *Gilia stenothyrsa* (a biennial) during her Lower Greasewood visit June 1, however, a subsequent visit on August 7 did find them blooming, after minor mid-summer rains (the White River drainage seemed to be one of the slightly wetter areas this year); and **Jeanne Wenger** and **Cindy Carlson** joined the **Korte's** in a visit to Badger Wash. We highly recommend networking and visiting each other's sites. It's a great way to learn more and get another perspective. Many of your fellow stewards are highly skilled in a variety of fields.

Prairie and Desert— The State Land Board Survey

It's been 11 years now, and CNAP has completed surveys on 90 percent of the State Land Board's three million acres of holdings. (So that's 2.7 million acres down!) This year's survey held no major problems, though it wasn't a completely smooth road either.

The season was memorable due to flat tires, slightly-lacking map reading skills, cattle drives on the road, the absence of a tape player, and many mosquito bites—even during the drought. We visited most SLB lands in Moffat, Elbert, Phillips, Sedgwick and Logan Counties. Sites included Cold Spring Mountain, Little Snake River, the Chalk Bluffs, and the magnificent plains of the northeast.

The northeast was bleak from the prolonged absence of rain. We found few plants greening up and even fewer flowers. Even the native grasses stayed dormant; keying was rather difficult based on only last year's growth. As we walked the edge of Logan County's Chalk Bluffs, a prairie falcon flushed from her nest, screaming at such intruders.

We then moved to the northwest, where the “Yampa Valley weather” (as the radio jingle has it) was not kind. Most of our days in Moffat County were enriched with hundred-degree temperatures, no moisture and no clouds.

(continued on page 9)

Where the Prairie Meets the Mountains

A walk through Roxborough State Park and Natural Area provides a glimpse into geologic history juxtaposed with present day beauty and tranquility. Considered one of Colorado's most scenic places, this pristine section of foothills southwest of Chatfield Reservoir was the first state park to be designated as a Colorado Natural Area in 1979.

In 1980, Roxborough received national attention when the Secretary of the Interior designated the park a National Natural Landmark. This distinction by the National Park Service recognizes natural areas around the country for their unique ecological and geologic values. Roxborough has received additional recognition as a Registered National Historic Site due to the 40+ archeological ruins within the park.

The Natural Area designation is due in part to the Park's ornithological importance. The Colorado chapter of the Audubon Society has observed 157 species of birds. The Dakota Hogback (with a portion in the park) is a known migration corridor for 17 species of raptors—7,000 individuals pass through annually.



Photo by Tom Damon

Roxborough encompasses a unique representation of geological and ecological features within a relatively small area. Precambrian crystalline rocks date back one billion years on the western edge of the park, while “young” Cretaceous Niobrara sandstone dates back a mere 80 million years on the eastern boundary. Fossils have been found in strata from the Morrison, Dakota and Niobrara formations. Perhaps the most well known features are the eroded and sculptured spires of the Fountain Formation, sedimentary rock monoliths with a dramatic eastward dip dating to the uplift of Colorado's Front Range.

The geologic features of Roxborough create a cool, wet microclimate that fosters a vigorous shrub community. The park is the northernmost limit for Gambel oak on the Front Range, and the favorable growing conditions allow this species to reach tree-like proportions in excess of 40 feet! A rare species of shrub, American currant (*Ribes americanum*), can also be found in the park. In all, Roxborough has seven distinct foothill plant communities, including some not typically found at these lower elevations. For example, an aspen grove can be found in a moist pocket of the Fountain Formation, more than 1,000 feet below its normal range.

The serenity of Roxborough has been a challenge to maintain over recent years as the fast-growing suburbs of Douglas County encroach from the east. Since opening to the public in 1987, Roxborough has been able to acquire an additional 1,800 acres to buffer the park and preserve wildlife habitat and open space. Noxious weeds are a major concern and a constant battle for park managers. Volunteer “weed warriors” have helped gain the upper hand on undesirables such as diffuse knapweed, yellow and dalmatian toadflax, leafy spurge, and musk and Canada thistle.

(continued on page 9)



STATE LAND BOARD SURVEY

(continued from page 7)

At one site in a greasewood flat, we hiked over alkaline-white soils. Because even more heat was being reflected from the white earth than was descending from the sky, the overall effect at 100 degrees was like walking through an oven. The bright side was the hundreds of ducks and geese in the still-flooded oxbow of the Little Snake—an impressive sight in a bone dry year. By the end of the week, however, we knew that Oak Creek's milkshakes were only a short drive away (check out Bonifiglio's next time you're in town), and the mere thought got us through.



There are two things that interest me—the relationship of people to each other, and the relationship of people to land.

Aldo Leopold

NATURAL AREA PROFILE

(continued from page 8)

A trip to Roxborough in any season rewards visitors with an array of wildlife. The park provides habitat for mule deer, elk, coyote, white-tailed prairie dogs, red fox, western rattlesnake and elusive mountain lions. Black bears forage in the late summer along the riparian areas. Prairie and peregrine falcons have been known to breed in the park, and golden eagles nest nearby. Other rare species occasionally seen include the ovenbird, northern goshawk, sandhill crane, ferruginous hawk, Wilson's phalarope, willet, white-faced ibis and bald eagle.

The visitor amenities of Roxborough make it one of the best places in the statewide system of natural areas to explore and witness the unique qualities of Colorado's natural landscapes.





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 appreciate 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.

Make checks payable to: Friends of Colorado Natural Areas
 Mail to: Colorado Natural Areas Program • Colorado State Parks
 1313 Sherman St., Room 618 • Denver, CO • 80203



Colorado Natural Areas Program
 Colorado State Parks
 1313 Sherman Street, Room 618
 Denver, Colorado 80203
 341200300

PRSRT STD
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Denver, Colorado
 Permit No. 738