

Appendix I

High Priority Habitat Areas and Focus Areas for Habitat Conservation on Private Lands by Non-governmental Organizations.

Project Overview

One of the primary goals of Colorado's Wildlife Action Plan is to create opportunities for collaborative conservation efforts. Such an effort was initiated by the Colorado Conservation Partnership (CCP), resulting in a map depicting focal areas for private land cooperation. The Partnership is a joint venture involving The Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, Colorado Open Lands, the Conservation Fund and Colorado Conservation Trust. The purpose of prioritization effort was to identify landscapes where the lead organizations and local partners could focus their collective energy and resources to have the greatest possible impact in the realm of private land conservation in the coming decade, a critical time for conservation in Colorado. Stimulated by a grant from the Doris Duke Foundation targeting private land conservation and collaboration, the CCP worked with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to link their conservation focus on private lands with high priority habitat identified in state's action plan. The result is the map, "Colorado's High Priority Habitats within Private Land Focus Areas" (see Fig. I-1). The following narrative describes the CCP screening process.

Goals

There were four primary goals motivating this project:

- Engage local expertise and build or strengthen local partnerships
- Increase efficiency among organizations
- Express and foster a clear sense of urgency in order to increase public funding
- Increase private fundraising

Resource Values

The first step in the project was to identify the resource values that would inform the assessment, and then to develop approaches to map these values on a statewide basis. The values that were chosen for this step were:

- Plants, Animals and Natural Communities
- Recreational access and opportunity
- Working farms and ranches
- Scenic vistas
- Community separation

The lead organizations invested significant time and energy in identifying and collecting data that was available for the entire state for this step, and engaged a third party GIS contractor, Computer Terrain Mapping of Boulder, Colorado, to undertake the analysis.

Regional Breakdown

Conservation values were mapped across the state and then split into the following ten regions:

- Region 1 – Northwest Colorado
- Region 2 – North Central Colorado
- Region 3 – Northern Front Range
- Region 4 – West Central/Gunnison Basin
- Region 5 – Upper Arkansas/South Park
- Region 6 – Front Range South

- Region 7 – Southwest Colorado
- Region 8 – San Luis Valley
- Region 9 – Southeast Colorado
- Region 10 – Northeast Colorado

Regional Workshops

Upon completion of the preliminary maps, further insights were acquired through regional stakeholder workshops where the expertise of local government officials, local land trusts, and citizens was welded with the mapping effort in order to narrow down the universe of potential priority landscapes to a smaller list of priority areas. The workshops were structured such that the maps provided the basis for conversation and served as a tool to engage stakeholders in thinking about where particular resource values were accurately reflected or where deficiencies in the maps existed. Workshops were half-day in length and were held in the following locales, typically one per region of the state, with extra sessions to facilitate participation as necessary:

- Region 1 – Steamboat Springs
- Region 2 – Eagle
- Region 3 – Boulder
- Region 4 – Montrose and Grand Junction
- Region 5 – Salida
- Region 6 – Colorado Springs
- Region 7 – Durango and Telluride
- Region 8 – Alamosa
- Region 9 – Pueblo
- Region 10 – Fort Morgan

Workshop Participation

Over 175 individuals and/or organizations participated in these workshops. Participants generally included representatives from the following sectors:

- Local land trusts and conservation groups
- Municipal open space and planning professionals
- State agencies (CDOW, State Parks, CWCB)
- Federal agencies (USFS, NPS, USFWS, BLM, NRCS)
- Agricultural interests
- Elected officials and staff

Workshop Outcomes

Through the twelve regional workshops, 46 key landscapes of conservation focus across the state were identified. These key landscapes were areas that were consistently and/or explicitly identified by local and regional organizations as high priority areas for conservation action due to the existing resource values, ongoing efforts, partnerships, or opportunities found therein. Next, criteria for considering these 46 landscapes were developed and applied, project definitions were refined and a smaller set of priority landscapes was developed. The development and application of the criteria was undertaken by the five lead organizations, taking into consideration the extensive mapping analysis carried out, as well as the abundance of information and knowledge gleaned from the regional workshops. The criteria were as follows:

- Resource Significance
- Threat/Urgency
- Definable Project & Outcome
- Opportunity to Achieve Outcome
- Capacity to Achieve Outcome

By applying these criteria to the 46 key landscapes of conservation focus a more focused set of cooperative priority landscapes were defined. These landscapes encompass over 700,000 acres of crucial opportunities and represent an ambitious vision of success for the prioritization project. A list of the landscapes is as follows:

- Arapahoe Grasslands
- Delta County Agricultural Lands
- Dolores/San Miguel County Sage Brush
- Elbert & Arapahoe Co. Riparian Corridor
- Glade Park
- Gunnison Basin
- Huerfano Uplands
- Laramie Foothills
- Mesa County Agricultural Lands
- Metro Rivers and Streams
- North Park
- Northern San Juan Skyway
- Peak to Prairie
- Prairie Canyon Lands
- Rio Grande River Corridor
- South Park & Mosquito Range
- South Platte River Corridor
- SW Canyons & Agricultural Land
- Upper Arkansas Valley
- Upper Colorado River Corridor
- Upper San Juan and Navajo Rivers
- Upper White River Basin
- Upper Yampa River Basin
- Western High Plains
- Wet Mountain Valley

Linking Key Landscapes to the Wildlife Action Plan

The High Priority Habitats identified in Appendix F were so designated based on their association with Colorado's Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). To illustrate the importance of these habitats, they were mapped collectively on a state-wide scale for vegetative communities (see Figure I-2) and watersheds (Figure I-3). These maps depict the coverage of these habitat types across Colorado's landscape without identifying which segments are most vulnerable to threats. The CCP stakeholder process described here provides such an assessment resulting in the identification of the focal areas in Figure I-1.

Project Implementation

Having defined the landscapes of conservation focus, the partners turned their attention toward building an effective strategy for realizing the ambitious vision. Ultimately, the goal of the project is to work with local and statewide partners to develop funding and implementation strategies that will result in measurable progress towards success in these priority landscapes in the coming 5-10 years. Figure I-1 points conservationists to those landscapes in which a significant collective interest in collaborative habitat protection already exists.