

2010 Strategic Plan



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Executive Summary

The great outdoors gives Coloradans much to celebrate. Our state's unparalleled beauty, diverse wildlife, and recreational riches create an outstanding quality of life. Since the passage of the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Amendment by voters in 1992, GOCO has worked closely with its many partners to invest a portion of Lottery dollars in the state's wildlife, park, river, trail and open space heritage. These investments benefit the state's natural resources, economy and physical well-being of its citizens. Over time, GOCO has become a national model, and it will continue to play a prominent leadership role.

As it has done from time to time throughout its history, the GOCO Board engaged grantees, stakeholders and citizens around the state in a series of meetings during the fall of 2009 to get input on GOCO's future direction and solicit ideas about how the investment of Lottery proceeds should be prioritized—within the confines of Article XXVII of the State Constitution—in the coming years. The results of these meetings and an earlier public survey provide clear direction on GOCO's priorities, including the need to: protect open spaces and river corridors, and help create closer connections between land and water preservation; provide better trail networks and connections; update and enhance outdoor recreation infrastructure; and provide safe and proximate outdoor experiences for children and their families.

These priorities form the basis for the 2010 GOCO Strategic Plan.

To achieve these priorities, GOCO will:

- work with grantees to leverage federal, public and private resources to develop and pursue targeted initiatives that advance these priorities.
- set specific financial, programmatic and grant-making goals for the next five years (the funding framework chart is on page 25).
- work with State Parks, the Division of Wildlife, local governments and nonprofit land conservation organizations to align goals and strategies.
- remain flexible to address new challenges that arise in the future and take advantage of special opportunities.

The Board defined **three core program areas** in which to categorize the funding opportunities GOCO currently provides: 1) Land, Water and Wildlife; 2) Outdoor Recreation and Trails; and 3) Youth, Families and the Outdoors. GOCO identified specific goals within each of these core program areas.

Strategic Plan Goals

Land, Water and Wildlife Goal: Protect Priority Landscapes for Open Space and Wildlife

Land conservation continues to be a priority for Coloradans. While continuing to respond to proposals through its existing grant and investment programs, GOCO will develop a more targeted approach and prioritize investments in areas where polling, public meetings and conservation partners have identified strategic priorities that tie to GOCO's mission. These include protecting river corridors and acquiring parcels in urban areas to provide easily accessible outdoor experiences.

GOCO will also continue to build capacity and ensure the long-term sustainability of its land protection investments through funding for Conservation Excellence Grants to land trusts and local government open space programs.

Land, Water and Wildlife Goal: Integrate Land and Water Conservation Strategies

The GOCO Board has long recognized the underlying significance of streamflow preservation in the protection of Colorado landscapes. The Board supports statewide efforts to identify and protect the most threatened rivers and streams and other water of importance to wildlife, open space and outdoor recreation. Because most of the state's water is used by the agricultural community, any strategies for preservation and protection will incorporate agricultural perspectives and interests.

Outdoor Recreation and Trails Goal: Build Trail Systems that Connect Communities, Park Amenities and Regional Corridors

GOCO public surveys and outreach meetings consistently identified trails as a key recreational amenity and priority for GOCO grants. In the last few years, a growing need has emerged for connections/linkages between trails, especially in urban settings for children and families to reach outdoor recreation areas. The Board will dedicate additional funds for trails and trail connections over the next five years. GOCO will also dedicate funding to assist communities in preparing plans that incorporate trail access and connectivity.

Outdoor Recreation and Trails Goal: Renovate and Enhance Our Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure

There is strong public interest in improving existing outdoor parks and recreational amenities rather than constructing new ones, and the Board considers this to be a prudent investment strategy. GOCO will commit funding to the renovation, enhancement and development of basic recreational amenities at local and state parks, and seek to encourage more energy-efficient and quality building practices.

Youth, Families and the Outdoors Goal: Increase Participation by Youth and Families in All Areas of GOCO's Mission

The GOCO Board supports getting children and their families outside and will commit funding to provide accessible recreation opportunities, environmental education and stewardship training. Partnerships that link existing programs and capacity are keys to this effort. The Board will also seek opportunities to work with groups that have goals (such as reducing obesity) that may not directly align with GOCO's mission, but still present significant overlap in approaches, philosophy and potential funding strategies. The GOCO Board will identify a number of regional pilot projects that serve youth with limited access to outdoor resources.

In implementing the 2010 Strategic Plan, the GOCO Board will review its progress annually to ensure that its decisions have a lasting, meaningful impact on Colorado's natural heritage, and benefiting our current and future quality of life.

Foreword

Statewide Opportunities, Challenges and the 2010 GOCO Strategic Plan

Since awarding its first grants in 1994, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) has been an important funding partner for the conservation and outdoor recreation communities. GOCO's accomplishments and those of its many partners continue to have a tangible impact on the quality of life in Colorado. The investment of Lottery dollars in outdoor recreation infrastructure, conservation of wildlife habitat and important land, and protection of river corridors has been instrumental in protecting Colorado's outdoor legacy. In the process, GOCO has become a national model and is poised to continue to be a leader in conservation, outdoor recreation projects and other issues of importance to Coloradans.

GOCO's last strategic plan was adopted more than eight years ago, and much has changed in the state during that time:

- Continued **population growth** has increased development pressure on open space and land for recreation and wildlife habitat, and has depleted our recreation infrastructure.
- **Budget challenges** at the state and local levels have seriously eroded the ability of governmental agencies to keep up with demand for outdoor recreation at state and local parks, making the availability of GOCO funds increasingly critical.
- Our **children** are spending less time outdoors, contributing to a decline in their physical and mental well-being.

The 2010 Strategic Plan will help position GOCO and its partners for continued success while working to address the outdoor challenges facing our state. This strategic plan defines the Board's vision and direction for the next five to ten years. It provides a clear set of priorities and initiatives, and specific strategies for achieving the Board's goals.

The strategic planning process afforded the GOCO Board and staff an opportunity to talk with grant partners and citizens at a series of meetings across the state. These public meetings provided a forum to share perspectives and ideas on how we can work better together to preserve and enhance the things that make Colorado special. They also reinforced the notion that funding for land conservation and outdoor recreational opportunities remain high priorities for communities statewide. Based on the input received, the protection and stewardship of land and water for open space, wildlife, parks and outdoor recreation will continue to be GOCO's highest priority. However, increased attention and funding will be given to adding new trails, enhancing existing outdoor recreation facilities, and providing opportunities for youth and families to get outside.

Every year, the Board will determine the amount and types of grants it will give, and will continue to seek input from Coloradans. The Board will also revisit this strategic plan annually, remaining flexible in order to address new challenges that arise and to take advantage of special opportunities.

GOCO's Strategic Planning Process

The GOCO Board's planning and information-gathering process sought extensive input from grantees, stakeholders, state agency partners and the public. The strategic planning process was informed by four elements: 1) public polling; 2) public meetings; 3) a Board retreat; and 4) targeted stakeholder meetings.

- 1. Public Polling.** On behalf of GOCO, Ciruli Associates conducted a poll of 806 Colorado residents in 2008. The poll results indicated strong continuing support for using Lottery funds to preserve the state's outdoor resources, with preservation of river corridors, open space, urban greenbelts and agricultural land ranking highest. The poll results also emphasized the need for trails (both neighborhood and regional) and increased opportunities for youth outdoor education programs.
- 2. Public Meetings.** In the fall of 2009, GOCO conducted 14 public meetings around the state to solicit input from grantees and the public on local priorities and concerns, and to gauge current public sentiment on some of the findings in the 2008 Ciruli survey. Public meetings were held in the following communities:

Silverthorne
Fort Morgan
Pueblo
Alamosa
Manitou Springs

Fort Collins
Steamboat Springs
Castle Rock
Denver
Durango

Grand Junction
Boulder
Las Animas
Golden

These meetings attracted more than 400 individuals, including representatives from 76 local governments, 56 non-profit organizations, 27 state parks and a number of other state and federal agencies.

Public meeting participants were uniformly supportive of GOCO's mission and the importance of continued funding for its four constitutionally-mandated purposes (open space, wildlife, state parks and local governments). While each meeting produced somewhat distinct perspectives on GOCO's mission and purpose, some recurring themes and ideas emerged. They are reflected in the goals and initiatives outlined in this plan.

- 3. Board Retreat.** The GOCO Board met in October 2009 for a strategic planning retreat. The focus of the retreat was to understand key challenges and opportunities facing GOCO, review key findings from the polling and public meetings, and discuss possible new priorities and initiatives.
- 4. Targeted Stakeholder Meetings and Public Comment.** A number of priorities emerged from the Board retreat that GOCO staff were tasked with developing and refining; staff then convened a series of meetings with stakeholder groups to discuss possible goals and initiatives. The stakeholder meetings were designed around three distinct program groupings: 1) Land, Water and Wildlife; 2) Outdoor Recreation and Trails; and 3) Youth, Families and the Outdoors. Stakeholder input helped further refine the draft priorities. A draft strategic plan was then distributed for public comment and finalized in March of 2010.

Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

Vision

To fulfill the trust of the people of Colorado through wise investments in the great outdoors.

Mission

“To help preserve, protect, enhance, and manage the state’s wildlife, park, river, trail, and open space heritage.”

Guiding Principles

Integrity is never compromised. We pledge honesty, accountability and an open process.

We are financially responsible. We believe in maximizing the value of public dollars. We protect the assets of the Trust and invest them prudently.

We reach our goals through cooperation. We work to empower our partners and leverage our resources, optimize results and, when possible, award grants to projects that integrate GOCO funding categories of wildlife, outdoor recreation, open space and local government.

We are flexible and innovative. We seek out and respond to opportunities that otherwise might be lost. We appreciate both traditional and unconventional approaches to complex projects. We encourage and support entrepreneurial endeavors.

We value our public and private partners. We acquire advice, ideas and information from grantees, stakeholders and all of Colorado’s geographically-, ethnically- and culturally-diverse citizens. Careful listening and thoughtful investigation guide our decision-making.

We proactively and responsively pursue our mission. We are guided by the needs and aspirations of the people of Colorado and will be anticipatory in our approach to help people realize their goals.

We measure our results. We evaluate our decisions and measure our results against our vision, mission and guiding principles, as well as the goals of the people of the state as outlined in Article XXVII of the Colorado Constitution and this strategic plan.

We strive for a sustainable, lasting legacy. We recognize that growth challenges the sustainability of Colorado’s ecosystems. We value projects that anticipate the state’s long-term needs and protect its heritage.

We provide statewide leadership. We are a leading partner with our stakeholders and serve as a catalyst, convener and communicator to achieve GOCO’s goals. We stimulate dialogue and cooperation among local, state and federal government interests as well as those in the private and nonprofit sectors.

We value our employees. We value our employees and assist them in realizing their highest levels of technical and professional skills.

Current Trends

In preparing the 2010 Strategic Plan, the GOCO Board and staff carefully studied current conditions, trends and projections around the state that will have a bearing on GOCO's grant-making, investments and mission in the next five to ten years.

I. Population Growth, Demographic Shifts and Impacts

Population Growth

Colorado was the fourth-fastest growing state in the nation between 2008 and 2009. While the state's growth has slowed slightly from the rapid pace of the 1990s, its population growth continues to be double the national average and drives a need for preserving open space and providing outdoor recreational amenities. Between 1998 and 2008, the state's population grew by more than one million people, and the State Demography Office projects that Colorado will have an additional one million residents by 2020.

Most of the projected population growth will occur along the Front Range with Adams, Arapahoe, Douglas and El Paso counties each adding more than 100,000 residents in the next ten years. The most recent demographic figures show the fastest growing counties in the state to be Weld, Elbert, Park, Lake, Archuleta, Garfield and Rio Blanco. Each of these counties is growing at a rate of more than 3% annually, three times the national average.

Demographic Shifts

Despite the burgeoning number of aging baby boomers in the state, the fastest growing segment of Colorado's population is younger people (ages 20 – 30) who are migrating here from out of state. At the same time, the state has seen a dramatic change in its demographic makeup. These trends will drive a need for new and different outdoor recreational opportunities to serve diverse cultural communities and age groups. It will also be important to provide outdoor and wildlife educational opportunities and outreach.

Impacts of Population Growth

Simply looking at the rate of growth and numbers of people flocking to the state does not provide a complete picture of how that growth affects Colorado residents' quality of life and the state's outdoor resources. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Colorado's farm production decreased by almost 800,000 acres between 1997 and 2007. The vast majority of this lost acreage was due to development, which also destroys and fragments important wildlife habitat, leading to the decline of plant and animal species. The fastest growing parts of the state are also the places where the most threatened and endangered species live. Land loss also erodes a sense of place and identity by eliminating separations between communities. Finally, the conversion of open space leads to a general decline in the beauty of the state and our quality of life—reasons so many Coloradans choose to live, work and play here.

Population growth also means more wear and tear on current outdoor recreation amenities (trails, playgrounds, ballfields, state park facilities, etc.) and it creates a demand for new and additional amenities to accommodate the increased number of recreational users.

II. Capacity of GOCO and Its Partners

Despite the state's economic challenges, Lottery sales have remained even, and to date, GOCO has not seen a decline in available funding. Even with GOCO funding, however, there are varying degrees of ability in different regions of the state to address open space, wildlife, park and outdoor recreation, and trail needs. Demand for GOCO grants continues to outpace the funds available, with GOCO currently receiving twice as many requests for open space and outdoor recreation projects as it has the ability to fund.

New issues surrounding capacity have emerged in the last few years, including the ability of smaller land trusts to provide long-term stewardship, and the challenge of declining budgets and/or revenues for Colorado State Parks, the Division of Wildlife and local governments.

The good news is, partly because of GOCO's planning and capacity-building grants over the past fifteen years, there are more organizations and viable plans to pursue projects to address these needs. The three primary groups pursuing these projects are local governments, state agencies and nonprofit land conservation organizations.

Local Governments

While the economic outlook varies greatly from region to region, local governments are still well-positioned to meet open space, wildlife, park and outdoor recreation, and trail needs in their communities. A growing number of counties and municipalities have developed plans to address these needs. However, once plans are complete, capacity to implement them varies greatly, with a local government's level of technical expertise, political will and funding available to support implementation.

Local sources of funds available to be used as a match for GOCO funds include dedicated parks and open space taxes, LWCF dollars and the Conservation Trust Fund—the portion of Lottery funds distributed to local governments on a per capita basis for parks, recreation and open space.

The number of municipalities and counties that have dedicated sources of funding (such as sales and property taxes) for parks, trails and open space have increased dramatically since GOCO's creation. There are now over 100 dedicated funding measures at the local government level. Many of these local governments have also issued bonds to accelerate land acquisition for parks and open space. However, local governments with dedicated funding sources are located primarily along the Front Range and in resort communities.

It is important to note, however, that some of the fastest growing counties on the Front Range do not have a local dedicated funding source for open space/agricultural land preservation. This constrains their ability to provide matching funds for GOCO grants.

State Agencies

The Division of Wildlife and Colorado State Parks have expertise to plan for and advance statewide wildlife habitat protection, parks and outdoor recreation, trail, and environmental education projects. However, the degree to which they can advance the portions of their respective missions that overlap with GOCO's mission is constrained by staff resources, dwindling budgets or revenue declines (including a 30% General Fund budget cut at State Parks in 2009 and a decline in license sales for the Division of Wildlife), and competing priorities.

Nonprofit Land Conservation Organizations

Of special importance to the state's capacity to advance open space, agricultural land and wildlife habitat preservation are Colorado's 37 nonprofit land conservation organizations. State and national land conservation organizations often have the technical expertise and resources to work statewide to advance large landscape and/or complex transactions. Local land trusts can be effective in advancing local and regional land conservation goals and have important ties to the communities in which they operate. GOCO continues to provide capacity building dollars to develop technical and organizational expertise within the local land trust community, especially in the face of new challenges.

Building on the Colorado Conservation Trust's *Colorado Conservation at the Crossroads* report in 2005, the state's land conservation community has identified 25 priority landscapes in need of protection around the state. The findings of the Colorado Conservation Partnership's *Keep It Colorado* Vision Plan are sobering: For just 19 of the 25 priority landscapes identified, the fair market value was almost \$1 billion dollars. Protection of the almost 740,000 acres in those 19 threatened landscapes far exceeds the fiscal capacity of today's land preservation community.

The Division of Wildlife has also developed a statewide prioritization of lands with valuable habitat that is guiding acquisitions in its land conservation program. In addition to these statewide efforts, a number of regional prioritization efforts are also underway.

A similar partnership of groups concerned with water resources related to habitat conservation (the Priority Waters Project) has formed around the need to identify and protect instream flows for at-risk streams and rivers and the ecosystems they support. These statewide coalitions of land and water conservation organizations have made enormous strides in both raising awareness and prioritizing unmet conservation needs.

Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program

In 2000, the Colorado General Assembly established a conservation easement tax credit program—the first of its kind in America. This program has resulted in the protection of thousands of acres of open space and ranchland in the state. Given the current state budget, however, it is likely that the conservation easement tax credit program will be cut or capped in some fashion during the 2010 legislative session. While the exact impacts of a limitation or suspension of the easement tax credit program are not known, it is likely to slow land preservation efforts in Colorado.

III. Additional Challenges and Opportunities

The economy has created both challenges and opportunities for GOCO. In a time of reduced state, local and private financial resources, the need for increased strategic positioning and planning by GOCO is critical to the success of its mission.

Financial Challenges of GOCO's Partners

A challenge facing GOCO over the next few years is the effect of current economic conditions on local governments, state agencies and land trusts. Decreases in local revenue are making it more difficult to raise the matching funds necessary to compete for GOCO grants. State budget cuts affecting Colorado State Parks are making it harder for the agency to set future priorities. Land trusts are unable to raise as much money as in years past.

Land and Construction Prices

Given the temporary reduction in the prices of asphalt and concrete, and the flat real estate market, there is a potential opportunity for GOCO to consider making additional investments in the near future for land acquisition and regional trail systems and connectors.

Economic Impact of GOCO's Investments in Conservation and Outdoor Recreation

There is a growing body of research showing that investments in Colorado's outdoor resources present direct economic benefits to the state. These studies indicate that the citizens of Colorado are getting a good return on their investment in land protection and outdoor recreation. This economic return is reflected in things like tourism revenues, fishing and hunting license revenue, sales of outdoor equipment, and jobs created by the construction of park and recreation projects.

National Movements/Federal Opportunities

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, one of the authors of the 1992 GOCO ballot initiative, has pointed to GOCO's success as a national model for other states to emulate. At the Secretary's behest, a coalition of national recreation groups has completed a study entitled *Great Outdoors America*. The report calls for a renewed emphasis on natural resource preservation and stewardship, and recommends full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Full funding of LWCF could result in additional investments in the State Trails program and/or other conservation initiatives in Colorado.

Nationally, there is also an increased focus on getting our kids "unplugged" and getting families outside and more active. Numerous studies show a decrease in the amount of time children spend outdoors and the negative impact this has on their physical and mental health. Public health advocates who are concerned about rising obesity rates among our school-age children have also advanced this movement. Efforts by the Colorado General Assembly and Congress to develop programs and opportunities for kids and their families to get outside and explore the natural world, combined with the formation of several statewide nonprofit coalitions, have successfully raised awareness on the issue.

Goals and Funding Priorities

With the guidance of Article XXVII and the input received through the 2010 strategic planning process, the GOCO Board has defined three core program areas:

- **Land, Water and Wildlife**
- **Outdoor Recreation and Trails**
- **Youth, Families and the Outdoors**

These core program areas will be implemented through all of the funding opportunities GOCO currently provides and will include new initiatives and goals outlined below.

Strategic Plan Goals

The Strategic Plan Goals are the policy-specific priorities that GOCO has identified through the public poll, public meetings, Board discussions and stakeholder feedback.

<h3>Land, Water and Wildlife</h3>

Goal: Protect Priority Landscapes for Open Space and Wildlife

Land conservation continues to be a priority for Coloradans, especially in response to the state's growth and development. The acquisition of land is specifically described in all four purposes of the GOCO Amendment. The need identified by conservation organizations for land conservation dollars in the state far outstrips the amount of funds currently available. Given this shortfall, there is a critical need for a prioritization of investments in areas where conservation partners have identified strategic priorities that tie to GOCO's mission.

GOCO needs to be both responsive and strategic in its open space investments. GOCO should continue to respond to proposals through existing grant and investment programs that protect open space of local and statewide importance, including critical wildlife habitat. At the same time, there are several areas where strategic investments by GOCO could significantly advance some time-sensitive opportunities and priorities:

- Strategic conservation priorities, such as *Keep it Colorado* and habitat priorities identified by the Division of Wildlife;
- River corridors; and
- Urban lands.

As previously mentioned, several of the major land conservation organizations in Colorado have agreed on a set of statewide conservation priorities, and there are a number of other regional prioritization efforts across the state. These landscapes cover a wide array of important benefits to the state that align closely with GOCO's mission, including wildlife habitat, scenic viewsheds, recreational opportunities and vital waterways. GOCO has played a significant role in conservation work already achieved in some of these priority landscapes.

It is important to note that many of these landscapes overlap with opportunities to protect areas of agricultural importance. While the protection of agricultural land is not part of GOCO's constitutional charge, many of these lands contain the wildlife habitat, scenic view corridors, and/or community separators that GOCO is charged with protecting. Agricultural landowners will be a key partner in developing and achieving any land and water conservation goals as GOCO works to accomplish its land protection mission.

To support conservation of priority landscapes and time-sensitive opportunities GOCO will make additional open space funds available in the next two years and issue a challenge to private funders, federal agencies and foundations to increase participation in strategic opportunities where possible.

River Corridors

Polling and public meetings indicate that Coloradans continue to be particularly concerned with protecting river corridors. GOCO will continue to place a priority on these landscapes (many of the Legacy Projects to date are organized around the protection of river corridors).

Urban Lands

GOCO will also dedicate additional funds toward the acquisition of parcels in urban areas that may have important demonstration value as part of the Youth, Families and the Outdoors program outlined in this document. Most of the state's projected population increase is likely to occur along the Front Range, and in many of these communities, urban parcels may offer the only chance some families have to experience nature firsthand. These parcels also can serve as vital habitat links, natural areas and community separators. GOCO will also consider expanding opportunities in its open space grant program for urban brownfields and other properties in need of restoration.

Finally, GOCO will look for opportunities to build long-term institutional capacity for acquiring and managing protected lands. The state benefits greatly from the network of certified or accredited land trusts and national and local conservation organizations, the majority of which are affiliated with the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts. GOCO will continue to build capacity and ensure the long-term sustainability of its land protection investments through funding for the Conservation Fellows Program and grants for capacity building to qualified land trusts and local government open space programs, as well as groups that support them (such as the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts).

Approaches:

- Continue the Legacy Grant program or create another special grant program to award grants to projects that strategically preserve landscapes identified as priorities by the land conservation community, Division of Wildlife, and other efforts to more strategically identify and protect land.
- Identify and preserve urban parcels that may have special relevance as close-to-home open spaces and learning landscapes in the Youth, Families and the Outdoors Initiative.
- Continue to place a priority on the preservation of rivers and riparian corridors within Legacy or other special grant opportunities.

- Continue to partner with the Division of Wildlife to assist the agency in identifying, prioritizing and protecting important wildlife habitat.
- Place a new emphasis on/expand existing programs for acquiring urban parcels, including those in need of environmental restoration.
- Continue providing capacity building grants and funding for the Conservation Fellows Program and other projects that help safeguard past and future investments.

Goal: Integrate Land and Water Conservation Strategies

The GOCO Board has long recognized the fundamental underlying significance of water rights in the protection of Colorado landscapes. In many cases, the conservation value of land is tied to the availability of water to ensure the long-term protection of those values. Current programs and investments reflect this recognition in a number of ways: 1) Open Space grants currently require the protection of water rights necessary to maintain conservation purposes and benefits; 2) Division of Wildlife investments may be used to purchase leases or water rights for the benefit of wildlife; and 3) State Parks investments may be used to purchase leases or water rights for recreational use at state parks.

The Board supports statewide efforts to identify and protect the most threatened rivers and streams and other water of importance to wildlife, open space and outdoor recreation, while remaining cognizant of its Constitutional prohibition on having any effect on existing state water law. It is also important to remember that the majority of the state's water is in use by the agricultural community and much of it is owned or leased by agricultural producers. Strategies for preservation and protection need to incorporate the perspectives of the agricultural community.

GOCO will continue to work within the confines of the Constitutional amendment to help support streamflow protection efforts to achieve broader conservation and outdoor recreation values.

Approaches:

- Provide incentives for protecting open space and natural areas that incorporate the protection of water needed to sustain the conservation values. Remain receptive to projects that include a streamflow protection or restoration component as part of a comprehensive approach to protecting a river corridor, wetlands or other landscapes.
- Continue providing Conservation Excellence Grants that help land trusts incorporate the protection of water into land conservation strategies.

Outdoor Recreation and Trails

Goal: Build Trail Systems That Connect Communities, Park Amenities and Regional Corridors

GOCO public surveys and outreach meetings have consistently identified trails as a key recreational amenity and priority for GOCO grants. Extensive local and regional trail networks contribute greatly to a community's overall quality of life. In the last few years, a growing need has

emerged around the state for better connections/linkages between trail networks and local trails. Trails—particularly those in urban areas—are also becoming more heavily travelled by commuters who opt for bike and pedestrian alternatives.

Trail access and connectivity is also a feature of the Youth, Families and the Outdoors Initiative. In public meetings around the state, the GOCO Board repeatedly heard about the necessity of providing safe and easy access to outdoor recreation areas (regional parks, playgrounds, lakes/rivers, etc.) especially in urban settings, and about the importance of linking regional trails to one another. There is also an opportunity to partner with Safe Routes to Schools coordinators in providing safe walking and biking trails that allow kids to get to school under their own power.

Currently, only \$1 million a year in GOCO funding is allocated to the State Trails Program (\$500,000 from the Local Government purpose and \$500,000 from the State Parks purpose). State Parks supplements this investment with a variety of federal funding sources, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund. GOCO has also dedicated Local Government purpose funds through Legacy and other special initiatives for trails. Nonetheless, the demand in the program far exceeds available funds.

The Board will make additional investments in both regional and local trail linkages in the next five years. GOCO will dedicate additional Local Government purpose funds to fund trails and trail connections, and encourage State Parks to increase its investment with GOCO State Parks purpose dollars and other funding sources. GOCO will also dedicate additional funding to the Planning Grant program to assist communities with trail-specific elements in preparing outdoor recreation, land use and transportation plans that incorporate trail access.

Approaches:

- Work with State Parks and other stakeholders to bolster funding for trails and the State Trails Program. Consider directing additional Local Government purpose funding to the State Trails Program.
- Direct additional Local Government purpose funding to planning grants that will focus on trail access and connectivity.
- Seek partnerships with stakeholder groups (Colorado Walks, LiveWell Colorado, the Safe Routes to School Program at the Colorado Department of Transportation, Bicycle Colorado, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, etc.) to leverage additional dollars for trail enhancement.
- Encourage and fund the creation of a statewide trails plan.
- Encourage and fund opportunities for communities to share best practices in construction, funding and standards.

Goal: Renovate and Enhance Our Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure

Beyond initial capital investments in new outdoor recreation facilities statewide, the Board considers the long-term renovation and restoration of existing parks a prudent investment strategy. There is a strong public sentiment to first enhance and maintain existing outdoor recreational amenities before seeking funds to construct new ones. The Board also understands

that renovating existing parks facilities can be more cost-effective than constructing new amenities and features.

GOCO will continue to work with local governments and State Parks to meet the outdoor recreation needs of a changing and growing population. GOCO will commit funding to renovating, enhancing and developing basic recreational amenities at local and state parks. The GOCO Board will also seek to ensure that these facilities are designed to achieve the best cost return on energy and materials through its grant-making criteria.

Approaches:

- Dedicate additional Local Government purpose funding to renovating and enhancing existing parks and other outdoor recreation amenities.
- Support State Parks in its development of a more strategic approach to upgrading and renovating aging state parks and its investment requests to support this approach.
- Develop grant criteria to ensure quality control and energy efficient construction practices where possible.

Youth, Families and the Outdoors

Goal: Increase Participation by Youth and Families in All Areas of GOCO's Mission

Changing demographics statewide have highlighted the need to engage a new generation of Coloradans in outdoor recreation and resource stewardship. This need has resulted in a renewed emphasis on engaging today's youth—and their families—in active, outdoor pursuits and increasing awareness of the natural wonders in our own backyards. This movement currently lacks both funding and clear leadership—two needs that GOCO is well-positioned to help address.

The GOCO Board will define a leadership role that integrates different funding resources available for providing accessible outdoor recreational opportunities, environmental education, stewardship training and youth employment opportunities on public lands. Emphasizing partnerships with schools and linking existing programs (such as the Colorado Youth Corps Association) and capacity are critical to this effort, as is developing a metric to help define and track the initiative's success. Opportunities may also exist to work with groups that have goals (such as reducing obesity) that may not directly align with GOCO's mission but still present significant overlap in approaches, philosophy and potential funding strategies.

While the eventual scope of this initiative is statewide, the GOCO Board will identify a limited number of regional pilot projects that serve youth with limited access to outdoor resources. Ideally, these regional pilot projects will take children along a continuum from more urban environments to the wilder, more natural settings at our state parks, wildlife areas and other conserved lands.

Funding for that continuum will include support for formal programs through DOW, State Parks and their partners, and opportunities for more unstructured outdoor activities through acquiring and restoring existing urban parks and environmental education facilities close to home, and providing critical trail connections that allow kids to safely reach these local amenities. It should

also strive to provide amenities like urban gardens, interpretive kiosks at local parks, and other opportunities to learn about the natural world close to home. It may also include strategies and projects to provide better information about the range of regional opportunities and programs available to schools, youth clubs and other organizations.

The resulting initiative would seek to better integrate existing DOW and State Parks environmental education programs and engage non-traditional outside partners (such as the Denver Museum of Nature and Science/other local science museums, and other partners that can help reach families) to achieve the stated goals. Part of this integration may include opportunities for grant awards to be coordinated and re-granted through DOW and State Parks.

Taking advantage of the 650,000 acres of land conserved to date with the help of GOCO funds, the initiative will also look to provide places for learning about the outdoor environment beyond urban areas, and opportunities to work on restoration projects on those conserved lands. GOCO will work with the conservation community to develop pilot programs to bring kids onto conserved lands to learn stewardship principles firsthand.

GOCO will set aside a portion of each of the four funding purposes to accomplish this comprehensive initiative.

Approaches:

- Invest additional Lottery proceeds over the next five years in enhancing or expanding outdoor programs at State Parks and the Division of Wildlife, including the possibility of re-granting through the state agencies to outside providers. Provide incentives for stronger partnerships with outside organizations in delivering these education programs.
- Invest additional Lottery proceeds over the next five years to provide more funding for trail connectivity projects that will create safer access for youth and families to recreational amenities.
- Prioritize urban trail connections, restoration and enhancement of urban parks and environmental education facilities near schools within the Local Park and Outdoor Recreation Program.
- Identify and establish a series of three regional pilot projects where current nascent efforts at coordination can be enhanced by a partnership with GOCO. These pilot projects will receive a focused effort in delivering the targeted funding identified in the first three approaches above.
- Work with the land conservation community to develop opportunities for youth to learn stewardship on conserved landscapes, via service learning and other approaches to engagement.

Land, Water and Wildlife

Strategic Plan Goals/Initiatives	Amendment Goals	Approaches
<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Protect priority landscapes for open space and wildlife ➤ Integrate land and water conservation strategies 	<p>Wildlife</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect critical wildlife habitats through the acquisition of leases or easements and restore critical areas • Provide appropriate programs for maintaining Colorado’s diverse wildlife heritage <p>State Parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and improve state parks and recreation areas throughout the state • Acquire land for new state parks • Provide water for recreational purposes • Acquire river greenways <p>Open Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire, develop, and manage open space and natural areas of statewide significance <p>Local Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match local investments to acquire and manage open space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make strategic investments in the protection of priority landscapes via fee title purchase and acquisition of conservation easements • Make strategic investments in the preservation of parcels in urban areas • Continue to make priority investments in the preservation of rivers and riparian corridors • Provide continued funding to build the capacity of organizations to ensure the long-term sustainability of land protection • Make investments through the DOW to identify, prioritize and protect important wildlife habitat • Make investments through the DOW for the protection of threatened and endangered species • Continue to seek ways to more closely align water and open space preservation • Make investments through State Parks for the protection of buffers or inholdings to existing state parks or to acquire new parks

Outdoor Recreation and Trails

Strategic Plan Goals/Initiatives	Amendment Goals	Approaches
<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Renovate and enhance our outdoor recreation infrastructure➤ Build trail systems that connect communities, park amenities, and regional corridors	<p>State Parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish and improve state parks and recreation areas throughout the state• Acquire, construct and maintain trails <p>Local Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Match local investments to acquire and manage open space and parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue funding for local park and outdoor recreation projects• Dedicate a percentage of Local Government purpose funding to renovating and enhancing existing parks• Support State Parks in developing a strategic approach to upgrading and renovating aging state park facilities• Work to bolster funding for trails and the State Trails Program, including possibly dedicating more Local Government purpose funds• Provide additional funding for planning grants that focus on trail access and connectivity• Seek partnerships with stakeholders to leverage additional trail enhancement dollars• Fund the creation of a statewide trails plan• Develop new grant criteria that ensure sustainable construction and best management practices for park and playground construction

Youth, Families and the Outdoors

Strategic Plan Goals/Initiatives	Amendment Goals	Approaches
<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase participation by youth and families in all areas of GOCO's mission 	<p>Wildlife</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop watchable wildlife opportunities • Implement educational programs about wildlife and wildlife environment <p>State Parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop appropriate public information and environmental education resources on Colorado's natural resources at state parks, recreation areas, and other locations throughout the state • Invest in outdoor recreation, including trails <p>Open Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire, develop, and manage open space and natural areas of statewide significance <p>Local Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match local investments to acquire and manage open space, parks and environmental education facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in Watchable Wildlife and Wildlife Environmental Education Programs at DOW and seek additional partnerships/re-granting opportunities • Invest in Interpretation and Environmental Education Programs at state parks and seek additional partnerships/re-granting opportunities • Encourage better coordination of programs and projects by Parks, DOW and partners • Invest increased funds in trail connections that allow safer and easier access to recreation amenities • Invest funds in older community parks and work on connecting those parks • Develop opportunities for youth groups (schools, etc.) to visit conserved properties and learn stewardship values • Invest funds in partnership/projects with schools to develop resources (e.g. Learning Landscapes) • Invest limited funds in unique opportunities to build the capacity of organizations that are likely to significantly advance participation outdoor activities related to GOCO's mission

Leadership & Partners

During the GOCO Board retreat, two overarching organizational goals pertained to the need to align programs and priorities with partners, and to bolster leadership activity by the GOCO Board. These overarching goals are not policy or issue specific in nature, but instead reflect unifying organizational objectives the Board will seek to implement as part of the 2010 Strategic Plan.

Goal: Align Strategies and Visions with Key Partners

The achievements of the last 15 years are a testament to GOCO's strategic grant-making and investment decisions, as well as to the power of partnerships. The combined accomplishments of protecting urban and wild lands, enhancing and creating new community outdoor recreation areas and State Parks, protecting species, and expanding and enhancing the state's trail system provides a legacy for Coloradans that is greater than the sum of its parts. GOCO's continued success is predicated on collaboration and the ability to leverage outside resources to reach a better outcome for the citizens of Colorado.

The GOCO Board will work with partner agencies (State Parks and DOW) and organizations critical to accomplishing GOCO's overall mission (local governments and nonprofit land conservation organizations) to align goals and strategies toward priority areas of interest. Given the interdisciplinary nature of some of the project goals and initiatives outlined in this strategic plan, close collaboration with partners will be essential. GOCO will create incentives to achieve priority initiatives and be responsive to well-organized and developed projects that align with the strategic priorities set forth here.

Approaches:

- Develop a better understanding of what state agency partners intend to accomplish in the next five years, and then determine how to best coordinate and facilitate partnerships in areas of mutual interest (youth, trails, water, etc.)
- Create targeted initiatives that help achieve priority landscape preservation goals identified by the land conservation community.
- Work with key local government stakeholders to develop long-term strategies to address outdoor recreation infrastructure renovation issues.

GOCO will continue its existing grant and investment programs, but will also place a priority on funding targeted initiatives, which may be accomplished through a combination of existing grant and investment programs, Legacy or new grant opportunities.

Goal: Provide Leadership Surrounding GOCO's Mission

The GOCO Board will implement an agenda to achieve the statewide public priorities set forth in this strategic plan. It will work actively with grantees to leverage federal, public and private resources to develop and pursue targeted, priority initiatives. It will set specific financial, programmatic and grant-making goals for the next five years. The flexibility and discretion allowed for in the GOCO Amendment will be instrumental in accomplishing these initiatives and goals. Lastly, the GOCO Board and staff will continue seeking opportunities to establish a dialogue and raise the profile of the issues and priorities highlighted in this strategic plan.

Approach:

- GOCO will develop a five-year funding model that invests future monies in both existing grant/investment programs and implementation of the priority goals and initiatives set forth in the strategic plan (it should be noted that in many cases, parts of the goals and initiatives can be achieved through existing grant programs). This funding model will take into account the requirements of the Amendment to make investments in substantially equal amounts over time in the each of the four funding purposes.
- GOCO will also challenge and help its state and local government partners to continue to match GOCO funds with federal, public and private foundation dollars and seek opportunities for new and expanded partnerships.
- GOCO will use its leverage in the conservation and outdoor recreation community to convene stakeholders and other partners to discuss and work on issues of common interest.

Funding Framework

The framework that guides all granting and investment decisions by the GOCO Board is provided by Article XXVII of the Colorado Constitution, which requires GOCO to allocate its proceeds to four purposes in substantially equal portions overtime: wildlife, outdoor recreation, open space and local governments. In addition, the Board will use the latitude provided in the Amendment *“to make expenditures which it considers necessary and proper to the accomplishment of the purposes of the amendment.”*

Assumptions for Five-Year Funding Goals

- Provide \$8.6 million each year to State Parks and Wildlife for ongoing investments.
- Funding allocations between the three core programs for the annual \$8.6 million for State Parks and DOW are based on the most recent investment requests and are assumed constant for all years.
- Provide a higher portion of funding for land initiatives in the first three years primarily through the Open Space and Wildlife purposes.
- Develop a significant, integrated youth initiative with a commitment over at least three years. There will be an initial one- to two-year period needed to develop the integrated program and regional pilot projects.

Wildlife

- DOW currently anticipates making continued investment requests/capital requests of GOCO to fund its Habitat Protection/Acquisition program (such as that currently achieved through its RFP process with GOCO, Habitat Stamp, Wildlife cash and federal funds).
- The plan anticipates spending more from the Wildlife purpose in the first few years for the habitat acquisition mentioned above to take advantage of opportunities.
- DOW is in the process of rethinking and revamping its programs to get youth and families outdoors. The plan anticipates some increase in these programs and partnerships with State Parks and/or outside organizations.

State Parks/Outdoor Recreation

- State Parks has approved a five-year capital plan.
- This capital plan from Parks includes approximately \$14 million for development at Staunton and St. Vrain state parks. Funding these projects would be consistent with the Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Trails initiatives.
- This capital plan from Parks includes significant renovation and enhancement consistent with the Strategic Plan priorities (additional discussion is needed on specific projects).
- This capital plan from Parks includes \$500,000 per year in State Parks/GOCO funds for trails over five years and a new initiative for trails in State Parks at \$600,000 per year. They anticipate a large increase in federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation Funds for trails.
- This funding framework includes approximately \$2 million per year in operating for park operations and park planning/capital development planning and operations, and public information.

Open Space

- The plan anticipates spending more from the Open Space purpose in the first three years and less in years four and five to help address current opportunities and urgency in land acquisition.
- The plan anticipates the development of opportunities for land conservation organizations to participate in some way in efforts to bring youth and families to conserved properties as part of larger strategies to provide experiences in the outdoors.

Local Government

- The plan anticipates providing funding primarily for outdoor recreation and trails and a continued commitment to land acquisitions (although at a reduced level for land from the prior 15 years of investments).
- The plan includes funding for environmental education facilities, construction of interpretive facilities and enhancement/opportunities to use existing parks as places for youth and families to learn about the outdoors.
- The plan includes funding for building trail linkages and connections to schools and parks and funding at schools to develop unstructured play facilities/interpretive facilities in partnership with local governments.

5-Year Funding Goals

The approximate allocation of funds to each of three core programs from Fiscal Year 2011 through Fiscal Year 2016

Land, Water & Wildlife Protection	Outdoor Recreation Facilities & Trails	Youth, Families & the Outdoors
58%	32%	10%

From each of the funding areas outlined in Article XXVII of the Constitution, the following percentages will be dedicated to achieve the overall goals above.

	Land, Water & Wildlife Protection	Outdoor Recreation Facilities & Trails	Youth, Families & the Outdoors	Total
Wildlife	85%		15%	100%
	<i>Wildlife Habitat acquisitions (land and water)</i> <i>Restoration</i> <i>Species Protection</i>		<i>New initiative to get kids and families outside</i> <i>Watchable wildlife</i>	
Outdoor Recreation	23%	63%	14%	100%
	<i>Park buffers</i> <i>Water acquisitions</i> <i>Land stewardship</i>	<i>Park renovation</i> <i>New Parks</i> <i>Trails</i>	<i>Interpretation at state parks and partner projects</i> <i>Volunteer program and existing youth programs</i> <i>Participation in new initiatives</i>	
Open Space	97%		3%	100%
	<i>Regular open space grants</i> <i>Special initiatives for land and river Corridors</i> <i>Portion of urban lands initiative with LG</i>		<i>Programs on conserved lands</i> <i>Participation in new larger initiative</i>	
Local Government	20%	72%	8%	100%
	<i>Existing grants to buy park lands</i> <i>Portion of river corridors and urban lands initiative with open space</i>	<i>Park construction</i> <i>Park renovation</i> <i>Trails</i>	<i>Environmental education facilities</i> <i>Participation in larger initiative, including interpretive facilities and trail linkages</i>	