



2015 Strategic Plan

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Executive Summary

Colorado is a rapidly growing and changing state. Great Outdoors Colorado was created in 1992. Within a few years, Colorado's population will have nearly doubled since that time. An additional three million people will live here by 2040. Population growth will be concentrated along the Front Range with a much greater proportion of Hispanics, youth, and seniors. This growth will impact all areas of Colorado's great outdoors. In the coming years, there will be more people in parks and on trails. There likely will be more conflicts over the best uses for land and water for people and wildlife. GOCO, our partners and others must make a greater effort to balance increased recreation with the protection of natural resources and wildlife to help reduce the risk of Coloradans losing the rivers, plains, mountains, parks, trails, and open spaces that contribute so much to Colorado's beauty, economy, identity, and way of life. Despite these challenges, Colorado remains one of the nation's great treasures. GOCO can help keep it a treasure. GOCO has a responsibility and the unique opportunity to invest not only in places for people and wildlife, but also to inspire Coloradans to appreciate and care for our great outdoors.

With an eye to these challenges, and after a thorough public and stakeholder outreach and information gathering effort, GOCO developed a new five-year strategic plan. Reflecting what was learned as well as the Board's expertise and experience, the plan is anchored by three overarching goals:

1. **Protect** more land and wildlife.
2. **Connect** people to the outdoors and connect trails, parks and open spaces.
3. **Inspire** Coloradans to take care of our great outdoors.

To achieve these goals, we will:

- Set specific financial, programmatic and grant-making goals for the next five years.
- Aggressively pursue partnerships with other foundations, corporations, and public and private entities to mobilize around a common agenda and find new ways of collaborating that produce better outcomes for the people and places of Colorado.
- Work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, local governments and nonprofit land conservation organizations to align priorities and goals.
- Remain flexible to address new challenges and opportunities that emerge.

Strategic plan priorities

Five strategic priorities will guide GOCO's investments and funding to address the **Protect, Connect** and **Inspire** goals:

- A) Protect Our Land, Water and Wildlife,
- B) Increase Access and Opportunity to Connect People to the Outdoors,
- C) Connect Trails, Parks and Open Spaces,
- D) The Cornerstone Initiative and
- E) Take Care of Our Great Outdoors.

Goal 1: Protect
Priority A: Protect Our Land, Water and Wildlife

Land protection is a major element in all four of GOCO's funding purposes as established in the state Constitution, and demand for protection of land for open space, parks, river corridors, and wildlife, remains a top priority. Conservation easements, land acquisitions and targeted enhancement and restoration projects are critical to preserving Colorado's natural heritage.

GOCO will continue to respond to proposals through existing grant and investment programs that protect open space of local and statewide importance, including agricultural land and critical wildlife habitat. We will also pursue new strategic opportunities, including protecting large, connected landscapes, protecting Colorado's waterways, protecting urban open space, and improving the standards and sustainability of land trusts and open space programs to ensure the long-term stewardship of protected lands.

Goal 2: Connect
Priority B: Increase Access and Opportunity to Connect People to the Outdoors

There is noticeable public concern regarding awareness of and access to outdoor amenities among youth and underserved populations, such as low income families and the growing Hispanic population.

To improve access, strategic initiatives will focus on investments in outdoor destinations within a 10 minute walk for underserved communities and in the reinvigoration of aging, prison-like school yards that serve as parks for entire communities.

To increase use, GOCO will encourage greater participation by underserved communities in the planning of parks and open spaces, and we will invest in educational campaigns to build public awareness of outdoor destinations.

Goal 2: Connect
Priority C: Connect Trails, Parks and Open Spaces

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and GOCO's public meetings confirmed significant interest in increasing regional and local trail connectivity to outdoor destinations, such as more safe trails to access local parks. However, Coloradans want such trails to accommodate wildlife and not cause any harm to herds or their habitats.

GOCO will offer more funding opportunities for local and regional trails and work to leverage our funding with that of other partners. We will work with communities across the state that have yet to embark on large and/or regional trail efforts to identify local barriers to such efforts and provide opportunities for technical assistance and/or planning.

Goal 3: Inspire
Priority D: The Cornerstone Initiative

There is particular concern about the growing disconnect between people, particularly youth, and Colorado's outdoor resources. Additionally there is fear that if people do not engage with the outdoors, they will not be inspired to care for it, and Coloradans will lose what makes this state such a special place.

To combat that disconnect, the Board will make a significant investment in an integrated program that engages Coloradans from all walks of life with the outdoors. GOCO will lead a five-year cornerstone initiative (to be formally named at a later date) to potentially be funded by all four of GOCO's purposes. This initiative will provide places, programs and pathways from the backyard to the backcountry allowing substantially more youth and families to engage with the outdoors.

Goal 3: Inspire
Priority E: Take Care of Our Great Outdoors

Colorado's beauty and diverse landscapes need continued attention and stewardship. Developing a conservation ethic, encouraging more volunteer stewards and educating people about the connections between agriculture, local foods and land conservation are considered vital to preserve our great outdoors.

GOCO will continue to make annual investments in the Colorado Youth Corps Association and explore ways to fund other outdoor stewardship organizations for work on state and local lands and land protected by nonprofit land conservation organizations. We will also encourage outdoor volunteer groups to identify a priority list of statewide outdoor volunteer opportunities/projects.

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 skill.

Strategic Planning Process

GOCO's thorough public and stakeholder outreach effort to inform this strategic plan included:

- 1. Polling.** GOCO conducted a statewide survey of 800 registered voters, an internet survey of 500 GOCO stakeholders, and a survey of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission.
- 2. Public Meetings.** GOCO conducted 14 public meetings in 13 locations –Alamosa, Durango, Grand Junction, Silverthorne, Sterling, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, Lamar, Pueblo, Salida, Aurora, Golden and two in Denver – that attracted nearly 400 people.
- 3. Youth Focus Groups.** GOCO conducted three focus groups with youth in Denver, Lamar and Montrose.
- 4. Hispanic Focus Groups.** GOCO conducted two focus groups with Hispanic residents in Denver and Grand Junction.
- 5. Online Engagement.** More than 200 people who could not attend the public meetings answered an online questionnaire.
- 6. Input from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).** GOCO continues to engage CPW to align priorities and is involved in CPW's strategic planning process.
- 7. Board Retreat.** The Board reviewed public feedback and staff research and then identified priority areas for the staff to develop.
- 8. Targeted Stakeholder Meetings.** Staff engaged stakeholders in meetings and discussions to allow stakeholders to provide guidance on plan implementation.

Recurring themes and ideas that emerged through the outreach effort are reflected in the priorities and goals outlined in this plan.

Overall, the results showed that protecting land remains the top priority, followed by providing more nature education opportunities for youth, and providing parks and trails within walking distance of communities. Youth employment in the outdoors also emerged as a top item. The youth focus groups revealed challenges that deter young people from spending time outdoors including insufficient resources such as time or money for transportation; a lack of access to nearby natural resources; a lack of information about opportunities and activities; and a belief that getting outside is too difficult or otherwise inaccessible. Participants in the Hispanic focus groups revealed the same priorities and barriers and added that feeling unwelcome may limit the activities in which they choose to participate.

Current Trends

To inform this plan, GOCO studied current conditions, trends and projections around the state that would impact GOCO's grant-making, investments and mission in the next five years.

1. Demographic Changes

Since the 2010 strategic plan was adopted; the state added 300,000 residents, reaching a total population of 5,363,689.ⁱ The state is expected to top 5.9 million by 2015 and eight million by 2040. Hispanics comprised 21% of the population in 2010 and are projected to reach 25% by 2020 and 34% by 2040.ⁱⁱ

2. Obesity

Colorado's obesity rate has risen 200% in the last 20 years to 21% of the population, the second-fastest rate in the nation. More than 22% of Colorado kids are obese or overweight.

3. Recreation Trends

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)ⁱⁱⁱ found that:

- Walking, hiking/backpacking, and picnicking are the most popular recreation activities.
- 83% recreate on trails, followed by water activities at 57%, winter recreation at 50% and 29% participating in wildlife activities.
- 53% rated "Wilderness areas or open lands with little to no development and opportunity for solitude" as extremely important.
- When asked to prioritize future investments in their own backyards, more than 40% supported dirt walking trails and paths; nature and wildlife viewing areas; and playgrounds made of natural materials. Regarding playgrounds, natural materials outpace manufactured materials 44.3% to 23.7%.^{iv}

4. Land and Water

Land Conversion

Colorado comprises 66.5 million acres total. Nearly half of that are farms and ranches, ^v federally controlled land comprises 23.5 million acres ^{vi} and three million acres are state-controlled. ^{xi} Over 1.4 million acres of farm and agricultural land in Colorado are under conservation easement.^{vii}

More than 2.5 million acres are developed with another million acres projected to be developed by 2030. By some estimates, Colorado loses up to 90,000 acres a year to development. Colorado is also experiencing a significant decline in larger farms. The reduction in Colorado's average farm and ranch size led the nation in the early 2000s and was nearly four times greater than the second ranking state, Texas.^{viii} Most of the size reduction can partly be attributed to 1972's Senate Bill 35, which only requires county review when land is subdivided smaller than 35 acres. As a result, developers and land speculators frequently purchase large farms and ranches and subdivide them into 35-acre parcels (aka "ranchettes").

Compounding these trends is the rising average age of Colorado farmers. Able-bodied agricultural operators are needed to steward the properties, yet the average age of a Colorado farmer/rancher is growing increasingly older (currently 58.9 years, compared to 50.4 in 1982).^{ix}

Land conservation capacity and orphan conservation easements

Land protection capacity increased tremendously between 2000 and 2010, largely due to the creation and incremental enhancement of the conservation easement state income tax credit. However, following the Great Recession organizational conservation capacity for existing land trusts leveled off and no new land trusts formed. The future of a limited number of small land trusts that fail to meet minimum industry standards is in question, and it is likely that the number of state certified non-profit conservation organizations will be reduced in the foreseeable future. These land trusts are essentially orphaning their easements and rehabilitating and assigning an orphaned easement can come with high legal and due diligence costs.

Energy Development

Colorado's expanding energy exploration and production boom can also present conservation challenges as technological advances make it feasible to open up new areas to drilling that were previously uneconomical.

Water Considerations

The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) estimates that Colorado will face a municipal and industrial water supply gap of up to 630,000 acre feet per year by 2050. The CWCB also estimates that water from up to 500,000 irrigated acres could be transferred out of agriculture to meet that demand. Agricultural dry-up disproportionately impacts rural communities and has negative ecological consequences.

Stewardship and Volunteer Resources

Volunteer resources are in greater demand as agencies deal with an increasing state population and visitors/ users on public lands; increasing impacts from natural events such as the 2013 floods, wildfire, beetle kill and prolonged drought; and inadequate public financial resources within public land agencies to adequately address these challenges.

5. At-Risk Habitats and Species

A majority of Colorado's plants and animals are not at risk. The species most at risk – fish and amphibians – are aquatic dependent species. Riparian and wetland areas in Colorado make up less than 3% of our landscape and yet 75% of the state's species use them in their lifecycles.^x Wetlands and grassland habitats host the largest number of our at-risk species.^{xi} The 2015 Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) – scheduled to be finalized this fall – identifies five primary habitats facing a spectrum of threats. A majority of the state's river and stream basin habitats are moderately to severely impacted by dams and diversions; mining; grazing; energy development; encroachment of non-native vegetation; channelization and bank-hardening; municipal and irrigation return; and groundwater depletion.^{xii}

6. Funding

Demand for GOCO funds

Since GOCO's inception, we've invested more than \$850 million in proceeds from the Colorado Lottery into the outdoors. GOCO remains the primary statewide funding source for parks, trails, wildlife, rivers and open space in Colorado. GOCO is a critical funding source to leverage other federal, state and private funding, yet is only typically able to fund a third of all requests.

Local need and funding

The 2012 SCORP Local Government Survey found a current unmet need of about \$965 million for capital development projects, park/open space maintenance, monitoring, restoration and acquisition. Five-year local government investment plans for outdoor recreation indicate additional need for another \$2.16 billion with only 24% of this total currently budgeted.^{xiii} We also know from prior surveys there is between \$100 million and \$150 million in immediate need for larger land conservation projects.

State and Federal funding for conservation

Despite high demand, state and federal conservation funding remains level or is on the decline. Due to budget shortfalls, CPW will have fewer dollars for acquisitions and the CWCB, which recently started funding conservation easements, will likely have to pull back due to the 2013 flooding.

On the federal side, the Byways program, which provided significant funding for land conservation, was merged into one program with numerous other Department of Transportation grant programs. The new program does not place the same emphasis on land protection.

While the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) awarded approximately \$11 million to Colorado agricultural land conservation projects in 2013, it only awarded about \$4.5 million in 2014. The Land and Water Conservation Fund remains underfunded, and other federal funding sources remain stagnant.

Conservation easement tax credit program

After Colorado's conservation easement tax credit program was adopted 15 years ago, most landowners donated the full value of their conservation easements to take advantage of the tax credit.^{xiv} However, since 2010, a growing number of landowners will only conserve their properties through a "bargain-sale", or partial purchase.^{xv} Meanwhile, transaction costs associated with a conservation easement transaction, particularly attorney's fees and appraisal costs, also have risen dramatically since 2010.

Leadership and Partnership

The achievements of the last 22 years are a testament not only to GOCO's leadership in strategic grant-making and investments; they are a testament to the power of partnerships as well. The combined accomplishments of protecting land, enhancing and creating new community outdoor recreation areas and State Parks, protecting wildlife and expanding and enhancing the state's trail system provides a legacy for Coloradans that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The GOCO Amendment (Article XXVII of the Colorado Constitution) outlines four specific program areas to guide GOCO's work in implementing its mission to help preserve, protect, enhance and manage the state's wildlife, parks, rivers, trails and open space heritage. It also asserts that the Board has the discretion to make other expenditures which it considers necessary and proper to accomplish the Amendment's purposes. Guided by the four program areas, GOCO has a responsibility to implement our mission in the most meaningful and effective way. We also have a responsibility to evolve over time to meet current challenges and opportunities that could not have been anticipated when voters approved the Amendment written in 1992.

GOCO will use our leadership, unique funding resources and the flexibility of the Amendment to advance innovative projects that leverage our on-going grant programs and investment opportunities with additional efforts that address today's challenges and emerging issues. The success of the plan will require the aggressive pursuit of strategic partnerships with businesses, other funding organizations and foundations and continued collaboration with key partners such as local governments, non-profit land protection organizations, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and the Colorado Lottery.

As part of the effort to implement the goals of the 2010 Strategic Plan, GOCO cultivated relationships with other key private and public foundations and organizations whose missions and visions align with ours and with those that have a stake in the work we do. What we know from these developing relationships is 1) there is strong interest in landscape-scale conservation and 2) there is strong interest in addressing the growing disconnect between youth and the outdoors. The 2015 Strategic Plan presents an opportunity for partners to mobilize around a common agenda to address these issues and to find new ways of collaborating that produce better outcomes for the people and places of Colorado. GOCO is uniquely positioned to coordinate efforts and be a central hub for funding and integrating projects and partners.

GOCO will continue to work closely with its key partners – particularly CPW – as they develop their strategic plans and identify mutual priorities. Together we can target combined resources to accomplish goals efficiently and strategically to protect wildlife species and habitat, protect water, restore riparian corridors, engage youth with the outdoors, and implement best practices for building parks and trails. GOCO will also continue to work closely and collaborate with the Colorado Lottery to raise awareness about how critical our partnership is to the outdoors in Colorado.

The Board will introduce and lead the implementation of an agenda with its partners to achieve the statewide public priorities set forth in this strategic plan. We will work with grantees to leverage federal, public and private resources to develop and pursue targeted, priority initiatives. We will set specific financial, programmatic and grant-making goals for the next five years.

Strategic Programmatic Goals and Priorities

The Board defined the following three overarching goals and five associated priorities:

Goal 1: Protect

Priority A: Protect Our Land, Water and Wildlife

Goal 2: Connect

Priority B: Increase Access and Opportunity to Connect People to the Outdoors

Priority C: Connect Trails, Parks and Open Spaces

Goal 3: Inspire

Priority D: The Cornerstone Initiative

Priority E: Take Care of Our Great Outdoors

While unique efforts will be taken to achieve each priority, none will thrive or endure without the others. Collectively the priorities represent a complete and interconnected vision for conservation and recreation. These goals will be implemented through all of GOCO's current funding and investment opportunities and through strategic initiatives and efforts as outlined below.

PROTECT

A. Protect Our Land, Water and Wildlife

Land protection remains a top priority, which is not surprising in light of the state's continued population growth and land development. GOCO will continue to dedicate resources to existing grant and investment programs that protect open space of local and statewide importance, including agricultural land and critical wildlife habitat. At the same time, strategic investments by GOCO could significantly advance some current opportunities and priorities, including:

- Protecting large, connected landscapes

There are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to protect larger landscapes and properties for wildlife, buffers, agriculture and passive recreation that require multi-million dollar investments. GOCO will develop strategic partnerships with other funders to provide grant opportunities sufficient to address the demand.

- Protecting Colorado's waterways

GOCO will support 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.

- Protecting urban open space

GOCO will create an initiative to address demand for expensive, urban land acquisitions that do not meet the criteria of GOCO's existing grant programs yet are critical to providing accessible outdoor experiences for urban youth and families.

- Improving standards and sustainability

Through the Conservation Excellence program, GOCO will invest in improving the standards and long-term sustainability of land trusts and open space programs to ensure proper stewardship.

Approaches

A1. Protect large, connected landscapes

- With funding from multiple GOCO purposes, create large-scale funding initiatives to invest in large, once-in-a-lifetime open space properties including agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and river corridors.
- Create a conservation easement transaction cost loan and/or grant program that offsets the issue of rising transaction costs and strategically targets properties that continue landscape-scale conservation, and land-rich, cash-poor agricultural operators.
- Revise the Open Space project scoring criteria to include more points for projects that connect to already conserved properties and/or those that are part of a defined strategy to connect conserved properties.

A2. Protect, enhance and/or provide access to Colorado's waterways

- Continue to place a priority on the preservation of rivers and riparian corridors within all Open Space grant programs.
- Continue to explore and fund mechanisms that protect the water which is critical to conserved lands.
- Work with CPW to identify opportunities for joint programs that protect river corridors and other important wildlife habitat.
- Prioritize projects in strategic initiatives that target recreational access – when appropriate – to Colorado's waterways.
- Create a conservation easement transaction cost loan and/or grant program to strategically target properties along riparian corridors.

A3. Protect and enhance urban open space and urban agricultural land

- Develop a new land acquisition program that targets the acquisition of urban open space and urban agricultural properties that currently do not fit within the criteria of GOCO's current Open Space or Local Government Land Acquisition programs.

A4. Ensure existing conserved lands and open spaces are effectively managed

- Provide restoration grant programs, riparian restoration and fire mitigation grant programs, which focus on managing and enhancing existing conserved lands and open spaces. Projects that engage youth and other citizens through volunteer stewardship

opportunities will be encouraged.

A5. Ensure the capacity of organizations to steward protected lands in to the future

- Continue to provide Conservation Excellence grants that help ensure that past and future investments are safeguarded.
- Explore models and approaches that create the greatest efficiency for addressing the sustainability of land trusts, collaboration and merger, and those that address the long-term sustainability of ranches under conservation easement.
- Continue to support efforts that help land trusts and other entities to incorporate water: 1) protection into their land conservation strategies and 2) conservation as a component of a comprehensive approach to protect and enhance river corridors, wetlands and landscapes.

CONNECT

B. Increase Access and Opportunity to Connect People to the Outdoors

People across the state supported increased awareness and access to all types of GOCO-funded outdoor destinations, with particular concern for youth and underserved populations such as low income families and the growing Hispanic population.

GOCO will invest in efforts that reduce local barriers faced by youth and underserved communities to outdoor experiences including inadequate transportation, costs, and lack of awareness.

To increase use, GOCO will encourage greater participation by youth and underserved communities in the planning of parks and open spaces. Finally, GOCO will invest in and direct educational campaigns to build greater public awareness of outdoor destinations and experiences.

Approaches

B1. Provide free, accessible, engaging outdoor experiences for all

- Work with communities to identify local barriers to outdoor experiences and provide funding opportunities to help address those barriers.
- Invest in parks, environmental education centers/areas and public open spaces within a 10 minute walk for underserved communities/neighborhoods.
- Continue to invest funds in the construction and renovation of school playgrounds and outdoor learning environments through the School Play Yard Initiative and CPW's Schools and Outdoor Learning Environments.
- Continue to award points in the Open Space program for projects that provide public access, including access for education, fishing and hunting.

- Work with CPW to establish ways to increase access to and opportunities for communities to enjoy State Parks and Wildlife Areas.

B.2 Inspire outdoor connections by engaging communities in the planning process

- Strengthen the public process questions in GOCO applications to better engage underserved communities in planning. Ensure local governments are making a meaningful, deliberate effort to reach out to these groups.
- Fund the development of a Youth Engagement guide for communities to use when planning for parks and open space.

B.3. Educate communities about how to access and enjoy outdoor experiences

- Partner with local entities to establish a communication/education campaign in the 24 counties with a Hispanic population of more than 16% that includes a step-by-step guide to enjoying local outdoor amenities with their family. The guide will include an access ticket or some other tracking device to measure its effectiveness. Pilot this campaign in three counties.
- Increase awareness of completed park, trail, public open space, etc projects by working with grantees on a communications plan that targets urban households within a one-mile radius and all rural households within a five-mile radius of the project site.

C. Connect Trails, Parks and Open Spaces

GOCO's public meetings confirmed significant interest in increasing regional and local trail connectivity to outdoor destinations. People desire more trails as a means to safely access the outdoors. They also want to ensure that all trail and park development is first respectful of wildlife and that a healthy balance between recreational development and wildlife vitality is maintained.

GOCO will respond to this interest by offering more funding opportunities for local and regional trails. With so much demand, GOCO will work to leverage its funding with that of other partners. Additionally, GOCO will work with communities across the state that have yet to embark on large and/or regional trail efforts to identify local barriers to such efforts and provide opportunities for technical assistance and/or planning to address them.

Approaches

C1. Build more trails that connect outdoor destinations

- Direct local government purpose funds to local and regional trail projects administered through GOCO.
- Encourage CPW and other potential partners to increase funding to the State Trails program and encourage partnerships in large-scale trail initiatives, such as an initiative to fund local trails that provide access to State Parks and Wildlife Areas.
- Continue to invest in the construction of new trails or expansion of existing trails that provide safe connections to existing outdoor recreational amenities, open spaces, natural

areas and/or environmental education opportunities. Grantees must include funding for sufficient trail signage/markings to ensure awareness and easy access for users.

- Seek partnership opportunities to leverage GOCO funding for trails.

C2. Provide technical assistance to communities to kick-start large trail projects

- Provide start-up support to communities interested in local and regional trail planning and construction who don't have the expertise/resources to kick-start it.

C3. Ensure trail construction is completed with respect for natural resources

- To address public concern about balancing outdoor recreation on public lands with wildlife vitality, fund a guide to recreational development with respect for land and wildlife, similar to the 1998 State Parks' "Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind" document.

INSPIRE

D. The Cornerstone Initiative

GOCO will address a growing concern that if people, particularly youth, do not engage with the outdoors and are not inspired to care for the outdoors, Coloradans will lose what makes this state such a special place.

The public expressed an interest – in various ways – for GOCO to be a leader in helping address the barriers that prevent children and their families from spending time in and connecting with the outdoors, and to provide opportunities that inspire a connection with the outdoors that ensure our natural resources thrive for future generations.

The Board recognizes that with a significant investment now in a creative, integrated program that engages Coloradans from all walks of life, we can help combat that disconnect, create the next generation of stewards and inspire Coloradans to appreciate, enjoy and take care of Colorado's great outdoors.

The vision of this Initiative (to be named at a later date) is that children and families across Colorado are connected by a network of parks, greenways, trails, open spaces, natural areas, outdoor gardens, natural playscapes, multidimensional school playgrounds and outdoor learning environments. Through experiences and programming, these places provide opportunities for children and families to connect to the outdoors. These connections are the foundation on which outdoor volunteers and stewards are born.

Opportunities will focus on a local hub such as a school, youth-centered organization, local nature center, etc. The hub organization will be responsible for designing the locally-designed approach, identify programs they want to work with, and identify physical space needs such as revamped school playgrounds, parks, and trails.

Opportunities for the youngest children will include planning and building a kid-inspired natural playground and outdoor education space. Experts in the fields of outdoor education programming such as Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), museums, botanic gardens, non profits, schools, environmental education organizations, science centers, nature centers, colleges and universities,

local governments, etc will make the outdoor space come alive by designing and/or providing accompanying curriculum and experiences in science, biology, math, etc.

As children get older, opportunities grow from the natural playground and outdoor education space in their own backyards to State Parks and on to the backcountry. Family activities will be central to this effort and transportation will be provided. Experiences include field trips, camping and hands-on science activities such as bird banding, water quality monitoring, growing and caring for plants, etc.

Providing and empowering meaningful backyard experiences are critical as these are the experiences kids will regularly access when returning from the backcountry. We want children and families to know that Colorado and all of its outdoor experiences are available to them if they choose. We also want them to know that there are rich and meaningful outdoor experiences right in their own backyards if they choose not to frequent the backcountry.

This vision can be achieved by harnessing the expertise of a network of governmental entities, non-profits, foundations, colleges and universities, schools and private sector businesses to advance how Coloradans access and engage with the outdoors. While there are local and state agencies and non-profits already delivering programs and protecting some places, the effort is uncoordinated and the impacts are diffuse. The impact of a more coordinated approach has the potential to produce a deeper, more sustainable connection.

GOCO will create a five-year cornerstone initiative to potentially be funded by all four of GOCO's purposes. This one initiative addresses all goals discussed in this Strategic Plan, providing places, programs and pathways as a means of connecting youth and families with the outdoors.

Approach

The initiative will start with an RFP to fund planning and potentially capacity building in five pilot communities. Pilot projects will then have several months to develop specific physical places, programs, and pathways ideas and proposals. The goal is to scale up to at least ten communities by the end of the five year plan.

The approaches below will be modified to address the specific barriers to outdoor experiences as identified by each community.

D1. Engage Leaders and Partners

- Explore ways to elevate the profile of the issues surrounding getting kids outdoors, including the creation of an advisory group or other structure that could both inform GOCO programs and the public.
- Leverage GOCO funding dollar-for-dollar with contributions from corporate, foundation, and other public and private sources.
- Explore and establish partnerships with entities such as museums, botanic gardens, non profits, schools, local governments, state and federal agencies, environmental education organizations, science centers, nature centers, colleges and universities, organizations serving youth, businesses, foundations, etc.

- GOCO will serve as the coordinating entity to keep the initiative well organized, administered and informed.

D2. Accessible Places (EXAMPLES)

- Invest in outdoor places within a ten minute walk for every citizen in each priority community. Outdoor places can include neighborhood parks, local parks, State Parks, nature centers, natural areas, urban farms, school play yards, etc.
- Invest in kid-inspired outdoor classrooms, natural play areas and natural habitats on school grounds or at local youth-centered locations. These places should serve youth from kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Invest in trails and other pathways that provide safe access for youth between schools, neighborhoods and parks.

D3. Programs & Experiences (EXAMPLES)

- Provide every K-6th grader with outdoor learning opportunities at their schools and/or nearby parks, natural areas, outdoor learning centers, etc.
- Provide every K-6th grader with opportunities to visit and learn about State Parks and Wildlife Areas, conserved lands and agricultural operations. Also provide recreation experiences such as biking, fishing, and hiking. These children will visit outdoor venues in more distant intervals over time and may ultimately end up about 200 miles from their own backyards. Transportation grants, passes/entrance fees, programming and hands-on instruction will be provided.
- Implement a program that connects each of the selected communities through a coordinated learning effort like a backyard biological assessment of their community, or a joint trail building project by all participating communities. Through technology, local efforts will be linked to statewide efforts for more diverse assessments and learning opportunities.
- Provide every 4th grader and their family with passes to State Parks and/or National Parks.
- Provide every 5th grader and their family with an outdoor camping experience.
- Connect participating communities through contests, blogs, collective outdoor experiences and volunteer projects and workshops.

D4. Pathways (EXAMPLES)

- Provide every high school in the community with opportunities for participation in service learning opportunities tied to the stewardship of Colorado's natural resources.
- Expand outdoor volunteer opportunities for younger children.
- Connect existing outdoor volunteer organizations with a combination of projects that are either specifically tied to participating communities or are located elsewhere in the state.
- Invest in more youth jobs in the outdoors, including internships at CPW, Youth Corps, etc.
- Invest in veterans' corps jobs in both backyard and backcountry locations.

D5. Measure results (EXAMPLES)

- Identify and partner with an entity with the expertise necessary to measure the impacts and results of within each pilot community, across pilot communities, and other ways to identify and track results.

E. Take Care of Our Great Outdoors

Whether it is through youth programs aimed at developing a conservation ethic, encouraging more volunteer stewards or educating people about the connections between agriculture, local foods and land conservation, there is demand for education efforts to protect, preserve and appreciate Colorado's natural qualities.

Approaches

E1. Support volunteer and stewardship organizations and efforts

- Continue annual investments in the Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA) and fund other outdoor stewardship organizations for work on state and local lands, and land protected by non-profit land conservation organizations.
- Encourage the coordination of outdoor volunteer groups such as Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Wildlands Restoration Volunteers, CYCA, etc. to identify a priority list of statewide outdoor volunteer opportunities/projects.

E2. Provide experiences for youth that foster connections to our protected lands

- Through partnerships with schools and other organizations working with youth, identify and provide opportunities for urban youth and families to visit urban and rural farms or ranches and other protected properties that provide wildlife habitat.

Funding

Article XXVII of the Colorado Constitution provides the framework to guide the Board's grant and investment decisions. It requires GOCO to allocate its proceeds to four purposes in substantially equal portions over time: wildlife, outdoor recreation, open space, and local governments. In addition, the Board will use the discretion provided in the Amendment "to make expenditures which it considers necessary and proper to the accomplishments of the purposes of the amendment."

The Board will adopt a five-year spending plan in June 2015 that will address the strategic goals and priorities set forth in this plan. It will assume the following:

- At least 50% of total GOCO Lottery revenue for five years will be invested in strategic initiatives with partners to address the priorities and goals in the plan. GOCO Lottery revenue will continue to be invested in ongoing grant programs and investments.
- At least 10% of total GOCO Lottery revenue will be invested in Goal D: The Cornerstone Initiative. This revenue will *potentially* come from all four of GOCO's funding purposes as it positively impacts all purposes and addresses all strategic priorities.
- GOCO and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) will work together to develop investment proposals which address mutual strategic priorities and goals in the most effective and meaningful way.
- The timing of strategic initiatives will be formalized in the five-year spending plan after additional input is sought from stakeholders in February and additional conversations with Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission.
- Large planning grant opportunities will be offered in the first two years to provide opportunities for entities to plan for special initiatives.

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- ⁱ Colorado Department of Local Affairs (https://dola.colorado.gov/demog_webapps/cpcParameters.jsf), accessed July 2014).
- ⁱⁱ Table prepared by the State Demography Office, Colorado Division of Local Government, October 2013.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Colorado Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, CPW, 2014
- ^{iv} 2013 Outdoor Recreation Participation Public Survey Summary Report, Research, Policy and Planning Unit (September 2013). <http://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Trails/SCORP/2013PublicSurveySummaryReport.pdf>
- ^v 2012 Ag Census (page 7)
- ^{vi} <http://www.colorado.edu/libraries/govpubs/fedlands.htm>, last visited 8/8/14
- ^{vii} USDA National Agricultural Statistic Services, 2012 Census of Agriculture, July 2014 Highlights (page 2)
- ^{viii} Id.
- ^{ix} 2012 Ag Census (page 7)
- ^x 2008 CPW Strategic Plan for the Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program
- ^{xi} Id. (page 8) (74 out of 112 [two-thirds] of Colorado's at-risk vertebrates depend on wetlands and grasslands)
- ^{xii} 2014 CPW SWAP, Habitat Review draft (page 47-51)
- ^{xiii} Colorado Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan, CPW, 2014
- ^{xiv} Interview with Natalie Lutz, Division of Real Estate Conservation Easement Program Manager (Aug. 7, 2014)
- ^{xv} Interview with Natalie Lutz, Division of Real Estate Conservation Easement Program Manager