

Protecting 30% of Earth's Lands and Waters by 2030: A Step Towards Solving the Climate and Nature Crises



Bighorn sheep in Badger Creek Canyon.

Photo: John Sztukowski

Colorado Unveils 30x30 Plan

by Beau Klikis, Public Lands Advocate, Conservation Colorado

In a state known for its scenic beauty, the slow but persistent loss of nature threatens life as we know it. Since 2001, Colorado has lost over a half-million acres of natural lands to development driven primarily by an expansion of extractive industries and sprawling housing development. Today, about 28 percent of Colorado, an area roughly the size of South Carolina, has been developed for purposes such as residential areas, energy development, and transportation.

In Colorado, not only is this loss of nature dramatic and devastating, we are also experiencing the impacts of climate change in the forms of increased catastrophic wildfires, decline of wildlife, increased drought, and tree disease. If we continue on the same path of nature loss compounded with climate change, we will experience ever-larger consequences that will ultimately collapse entire ecosystems, create dramatic water and food scarcity, and diminish our economy and our quality of life.

Thankfully, there is an emerging, science-based international goal — the “Global Deal for Nature” — that humanity should strive to conserve half of the lands, waters, and oceans of

Earth by 2050 to address the climate and nature crises, slow the rate of extinction, and avoid the worst impacts of climate change. To deliver on this deal, we must accelerate the pace and scale of conservation by protecting at least 30 percent of the planet by 2030. We call this state and national effort 30x30 (pronounced thirty by thirty).

This is an ambitious goal, but it is one that over 80 percent of Coloradans support according to Colorado College’s 2021 Conservation in the West Poll. Achieving this goal will conserve nature and wildlife, connect people, mitigate the impacts of climate change, protect our economy, and safeguard Coloradans’ quality of life for generations to come. Specifically, achieving this goal will:

- Conserve wildlife habitat and migration corridors and give wildlife room to move and thrive, especially as habitat is forced to shift with climate change.
- Protect our snowpack and safeguard the water supplies of Colorado and the 30 million people dependent on water from Colorado’s headwaters high in the Rocky Mountains.
- Be an invaluable strategy for combating climate change making Colorado a more resilient place in the face of a warming climate.

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Mission: Wild Connections, a science-based conservation organization, works to identify, protect and restore lands of the Upper Arkansas and South Platte watersheds to ensure the survival of native species and ecological richness.

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President's Message

Getting Back to Normal

from Jim Lockhart

Last year was the 25th anniversary of Wild Connections. Needless to say, our plans for a big celebration, made in January 2020, did not come to fruition. The COVID-19 virus epidemic swept the nation; and at the time this message was written, it continues to pose a serious threat. However, in looking back on 2020 and the first three months of 2021, we can see we still have a lot to celebrate. With a new and more environmentally friendly Administration in Washington, we can look forward to many changes in 2021. Most notably, our participation in the 30x30 Campaign, discussed elsewhere in this newsletter, will bring many new and exciting opportunities both to preserve and explore our irreplaceable Colorado wildlands.

We have all received a brutal reminder that our human society does not exist in sterile manmade isolation; that our lives are not immune to disruption by forces and circumstances beyond our control; and that pretending these threats do not exist in order to go on with business as usual is a sure way to make the harms that we suffer more severe. We can hope this new understanding will extend to other threats existing in and to our environment. As we get "back to normal" we should make sure that it is a new normal, recognizing our place in nature is not guaranteed, but is something we must work along with nature to sustain.

We at Wild Connections are proud of our work over the past years. However, rather than celebrating our 25 years of achievements, this *Landscapes* looks forward – not just to the rest of 2021, but far beyond. We hope you will join us in continuing this work for the next 25 years. ☺



Hindman Gulch, Table Mountain Proposed Wilderness.

Photo: Jim Lockhart

How Wildland Pieces-Present and Future-Fit into Colorado's 30x30 Puzzle

by John Stansfield

We have a nature crisis and a climate crisis, and we have to take urgent action to address both of them.

—Jim Ramey, State Director of the Wilderness Society

The puzzle picture challenging us now is only one-third complete. Conservationists have identified 6.7 million acres currently protected as pristine pieces of National Parks (NP), National Forests (NF), Wildlife Refuges, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), State, Tribal and private lands and waters in Colorado. To complete the puzzle of protecting 30% of Colorado by 2030, we must conserve a total of 20 million acres. A successful 30x30 campaign will curb deadly impacts on biodiversity and the many-headed climate monster.

Do 14 million more natural acres exist in the state?

The answer is potentially YES. With proper protection of our lands and waters by agencies and private and non-profit landowners, the 30x30 vision will be a reality.

The federal government manages 23.8 million Colorado acres for us. Look beyond the already protected federal lands and you'll see millions more acres with natural qualities appropriate for inclusion in the 30x30.

As a sample, let's consider the sphere of interest of Wild Connections (WC) in the upper Arkansas and South Platte (UASP) watersheds.

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Cucharas Canyon, rare Bureau of Land Management (BLM) designated Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) on the Eastern Plains.

Photo: John Stansfield

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From Energy First to 30x30: Bureau of Land Management & Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan Updates

by John Sztukowski

For the majority of 2020, we expected BLM to release their proposed Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECRMP), a plan revision that began in 2015. The last public version of this plan that we saw was the disastrous 2018 draft ECRMP, in which the BLM ignored local input, including that of the local field office, and stripped most of the special designations out of the plan's preferred alternative so the majority of the planning area would remain open for potential oil & gas exploits. This was a similar story we saw BLM deploy across the west in their management plans to comply with the Trump administration's "Energy First" agenda.

Now with a new administration in place, we have new expectations for BLM and the ECRMP. There is not only a chance to revive the once balanced ECRMP, but it gives the BLM the opportunity to look to the future and align this plan with the state of Colorado's and the Biden administration's climate priorities and 30x30 conservation goals. In the early stages of the Biden administration, they are showing commitment to these priorities as they hit the pause on plan releases so that they can be reviewed, and so the Department of Interior and BLM can get adequately staffed.

This is being reflected at the top of these agencies. Deb Haaland became the first Native American Interior Secretary, and she has very recently established a DOI Climate Task Force and issued a Secretarial Order (SO 3398) to repeal Energy Dominance SOs. President Biden also just nominated Tracy Stone-Manning as Director of BLM, who is currently with the National Wildlife Federation. And the new BLM Deputy Director, Nada Culver, formerly of the Audubon and TWS, is no stranger to Wild Connections, which has worked with Mrs. Culver on BLM issues over the years during her time leading TWS' BLM Action Center.

Colorado is doing its part as well to revive environmental protection on BLM lands. Governor Polis recently sent an environmental review letter directly to President Biden, which references Biden's climate executive order and outlines how this can be achieved in Colorado. Colorado BLM Resource Management Plans are prominently featured atop the 14 page letter. The governor's letter highlighted the big issues currently facing the ECRMP, in that the Trump era draft plan's preferred alternative (Alternative D) would significantly open up the planning area to future development and provides fewer protections for sensitive lands and wildlife, specifically citing the lack of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs) and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Governor Polis' letter also notes that BLM's ECRMP draft plan is inconsistent with Colorado's emission goals.

We are very pleased with the proactive steps Colorado is taking on this plan. Earlier this year we had met with the Colorado Department of Natural Resources regarding their thoughts for the ECRMP, and it seemed like they mostly aligned with our conservation coalition's concerns and recommendations for this plan. Our shared recommendations urge the BLM to reexamine climate impacts and expand recreational opportunities. It also restores earlier alternative plans to assure swift BLM cooperation with Colorado to protect wildlands, wildlife, natural resources, and air quality to align with the state's priorities.

It is reinvigorating to work on this BLM plan with these bold new national (and state) climate and public lands initiatives. Wild Connections and our colleagues are currently working on a support letter to BLM that highlights these state requests for the ECRMP, as well as the economic values these lands provide for tourism and recreation. If you would like to participate in outreach regarding BLM's ECRMP, contact Wild Connections' Conservation Director at john@wildconnections.org. Otherwise, be on the lookout for more info to come via our monthly Wild News and join us on a BLM wildlands hike, as we have resumed public outings with COVID-19 safety protocols in place. ☺



Wild Connections April 2021 social distancing BLM wildlands outing to Sunset City Gulch of the Grape Creek Wilderness Study Area and proposed Wilderness.

Photo: John Stansfield

Climate Planning Update

by Alison Gallensky

The 30x30 initiative will succeed in addressing the climate and nature crises if we protect the right places. Wild Connections' Climate Planning Project was started several years ago to identify climate refugia and wildlife linkages in our region that need to be protected. Climate refugia are areas that will continue to support biodiversity as the climate changes. Wildlife linkages are corridors that animals (and even plants) use for seasonal movement, dispersal, and to relocate as the climate changes.

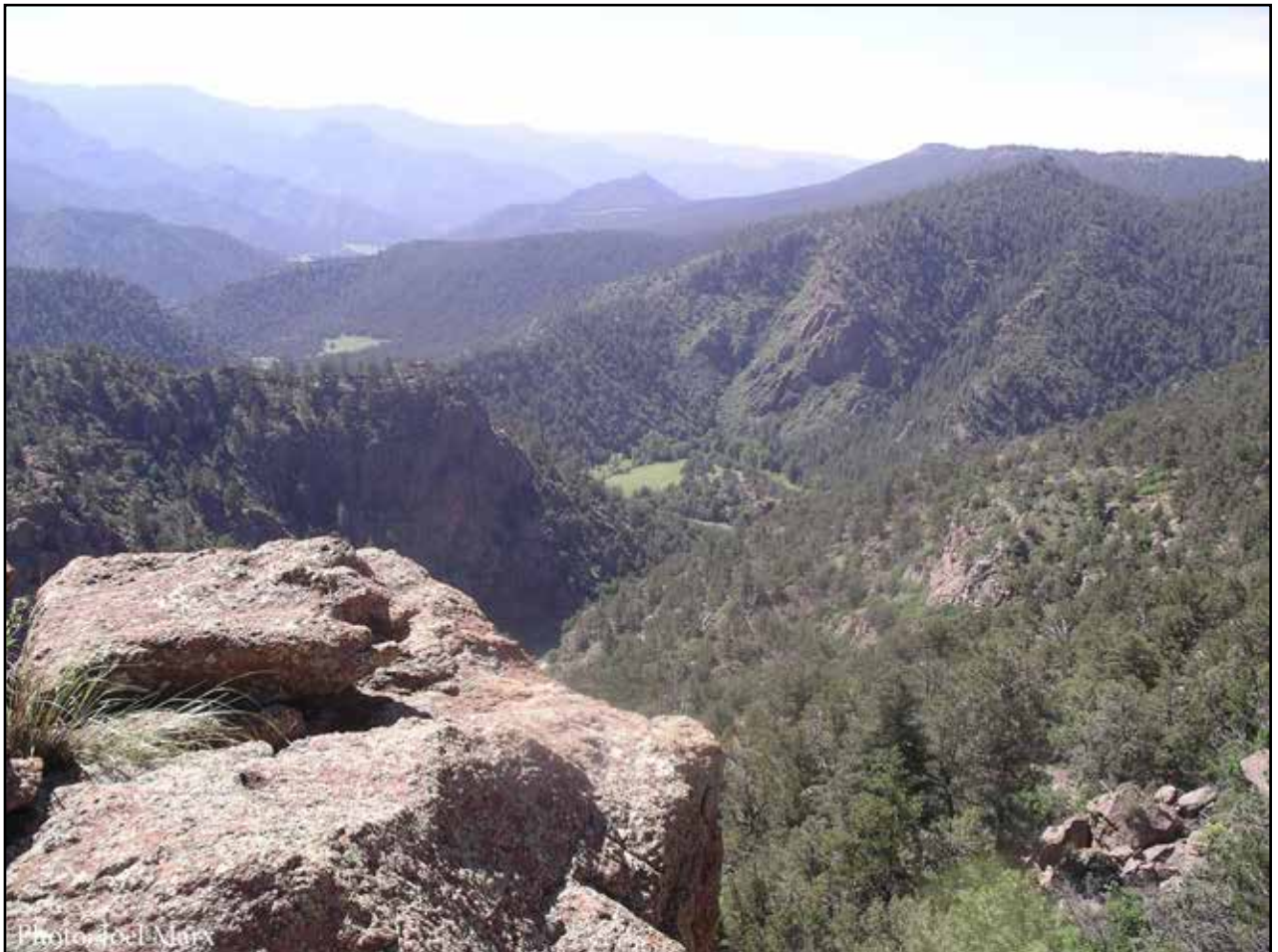
The Climate Planning project has focused so far on creating a geospatial model that identifies these climate refugia and linkages. The Nature Conservancy recently completed a similar project to define resilient and connected landscapes across the United States. Our model builds on those results using local data and knowledge to apply it to our region. We are currently working on using our analysis results to prioritize areas that need to be protected.

Our next steps will be to reach out to modeling experts and land managers to review our approach and then we will incorporate their feedback. We also continue to educate the public on the climate and nature crises and how to address them in Central Colorado. Wild Connections' outings, community science, and restoration projects provide opportunities for you to learn more and to help Wild Connections succeed.

Resources

- Wild Connections Climate Planning Video from January 21, 2021 on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/EpEKzo9ay4k>
- View the climate model data layers on an interactive map: <https://tinyurl.com/wcplan2020>
- Learn more about the modeling approach in the June 2019 *Landscapes* pages 4 and 5: <https://tinyurl.com/WCLandscapesJune2019>
- The Nature Conservancy Resilient and Connected Landscapes: <https://tinyurl.com/TNC-RCN>

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Lands with complex topology are predicted to work well as climate refugia. The rolling hills and canyons of Upper Red Canyon, north of Cañon City, are a good example.

Photo: Joel Marx

Mapping Progress Towards 30x30

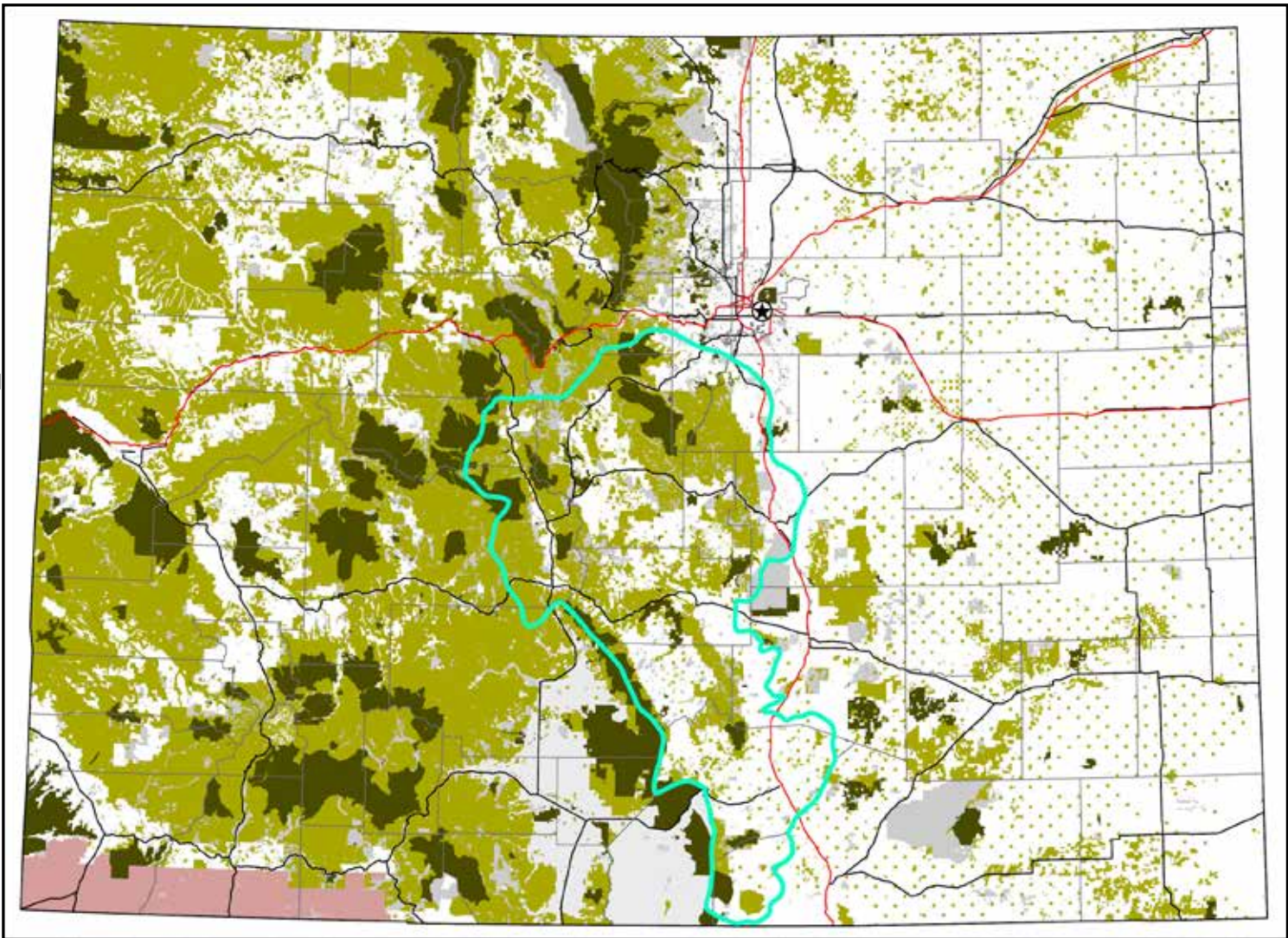
By Alison Gallensky

In order to protect 30% of the earth's lands and waters by 2030, we need to know how much is currently protected. Turns out that's not as easy as it sounds. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) created an inventory of U. S. terrestrial and marine protected areas that forms the basis for these maps.

The 30x30 goal can also be met on lands where nature is preserved and where it is conserved. According to the National Park Service "Conservation is generally associated with the protection of natural resources, while preservation is associated with the protection of buildings, objects, and landscapes. Put simply conservation seeks the proper use of nature, while preservation seeks protection of nature from use." (<https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/conservation-preservation-and-the-national-park-service.htm>)

Identifying areas where nature is preserved is straightforward. These are the darkest areas on the maps. Wilderness Areas, National Conservation Areas, and private lands with strict conservation easements are examples that preserve biodiversity with long-term, lasting protections.

Identifying areas where nature is conserved is more complicated. On the maps, the areas in lighter green are identified by the USGS as "managed for multiple use." Most of this is public land. Some of these lands are managed for quiet recreation, for the protection of big game, or identified as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. Other areas are managed for intensive recreation, cattle grazing, or for oil and gas development. And there are many management types in between. Some of these types of management meet the 30x30 goals and others do not.



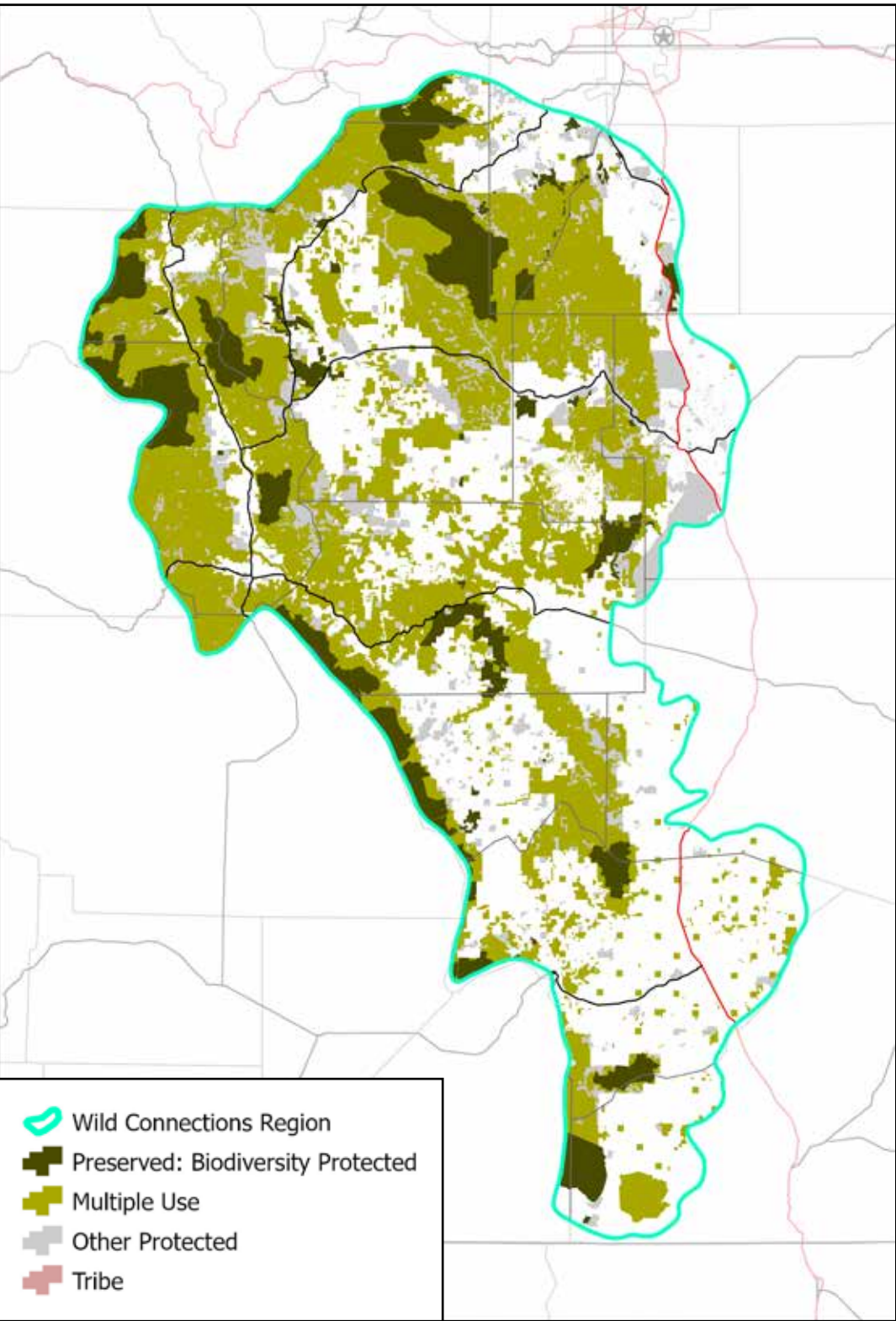
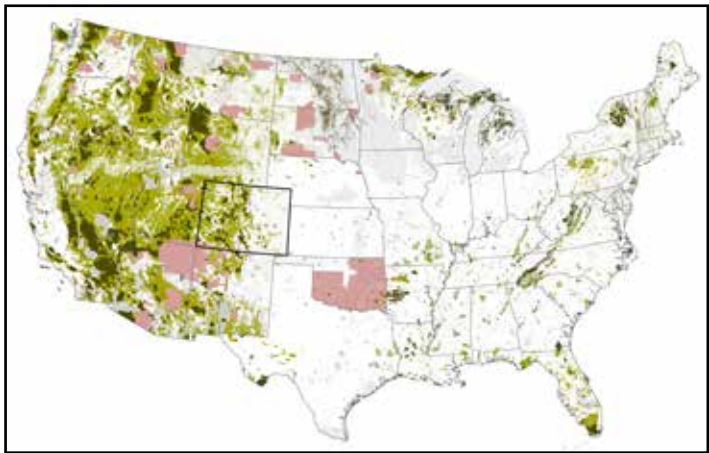
Smart people are currently working to figure out which is which. We expect good answers to this question will emerge soon.

The USGS also identified areas with some degree of protection but "no known mandate for biodiversity protection." This includes military bases, historical sites, and National Heritage Areas. These areas are shown on the maps in grey. Finally, the areas in pinkish brown are areas managed by Native American tribes according to tribal sovereignty.

Alison Gallensky is the Principal Conservation Geographer at Rocky Mountain Wild and a longtime volunteer and board member of Wild Connections.

Percentage of Land Area	Continental United States	Colorado	Wild Connections Region
Preserved with Biodiversity Protected	8%	10%	10%
Multiple Use (only some of these lands meet the 30x30 goals)	17%	30%	38%

Current Land Protections (USGS Protected Areas Data Version 2.1, 2019) 



The national (lower far left), state (upper middle), and regional (above) maps shown are based on data from the United States Geological Survey (USGS), Colorado Department of Transportation, and Esri. These maps show current land management and designation. We can reach our 30x30 goal when we understand what land is currently being conserved and where there are opportunities for additional conservation.

Maps: Alison Gallensky

Wolf Reintroduction-Can it Help Rewild Colorado?

by Karl Ford

Several actions are bubbling in Colorado politics that could help rewild Colorado public lands. Elsewhere in this issue are articles about the Biden Administration's support for protecting 30 percent of our public lands by 2030. By itself, this would reduce habitat fragmentation, help connect wildlife and forest corridors, and help restore biodiversity, even as our climate changes. But will wolf reintroduction make a difference?

Last year, Colorado voters narrowly passed a wolf reintroduction initiative, requiring Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to reintroduce northern gray wolves into the western slope by 2023. The issue is still a hot potato on the western slope, and actual interpretation of aspects of the initiative is a little uncertain. CPW plans to take time for listening sessions around the state while biologists begin the planning. Wolves were reintroduced into the Yellowstone and central Idaho ecosystems in 1995 and have dispersed into surrounding states, and recently into northwest Colorado. An outgoing Trump Administration removed gray wolves from federal protection under the Endangered Species Act except in National Parks; however, they are classified as endangered under Colorado state law. In other states, ranchers and government wolfers can kill them either on sight or if they are killing livestock. Some western states have a wolf hunt. And, importantly, ranchers can file for compensation on documented livestock predation. Such will be the case in Colorado. Reintroducing wolves is not a technical wildlife biology issue as much as it is a social-political issue. We can expect that debate to continue.

Most biologists believe that, as a top-level carnivore, wolves help control elk and deer populations, weeding out the old, sick or injured individuals, making the herds healthier and protecting habitat from damaging effects of ungulate overgrazing. This effect is called "trophic cascades." Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone National Park ecosystems have suffered as a result of elk overpopulation. In Yellowstone, wolf reintroduction has led to restoration of riparian areas as elk numbers are reduced and use these areas less, encouraging riparian habitat and beavers, storage of groundwater, and allowing a cascade of biodiversity among small mammals and songbirds. To be sure, there is still some scientific debate on the trophic cascades theory, mostly by anti-wolf factions.

Last year, the Wild Connections Board of Directors passed a resolution supporting wolf reintroduction into Colorado. A wolf presence fits with our mission of protecting and restoring native species and biological diversity in our region. While the best habitat and prey base is on the western slope, it is likely that some wolves will eventually disperse into our region. You can follow and participate in the reintroduction process at: <https://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/CON-Wolf-Management.aspx>. ☞



Gray Wolf.

Photo: Courtesy of Colorado Parks & Wildlife

US Forest Service Pike-San Isabel Travel Management Planning Update

by John Sztukowski

After several years of working on a court ordered revision of the US Forest Service's Pike-San Isabel (PSI) Motorized Vehicle Use Plan, the USFS PSI Travel Management Plan (TMP) is wrapping up. The public objections period for this plan ended in December 2020, and the USFS followed up in February by hosting a formal objections hearing for those that submitted objection comments. Wild Connections participated in both of these TMP processes, and received a follow-up from the USFS in March.

Unfortunately most of our objections were overruled; however, in some cases the reviewing officer did direct the Forest Service to provide more information to support their decisions.



Rampant illegal motorized use at and across the South Platte River at Wildcat Canyon, May 2020.

Photo: John Sztukowski

Wild Connections found the US Forest Service's PSI travel management analysis largely well done, as Alternative C was selected last year, which included many of Wild Connections' initial recommendations that we submitted in earlier comments. We did follow-up with objections on some specific trails and defended the USFS decision to continue to keep motorized use out of Wildcat Canyon, where illegal motorized recreation has become rampant, including in and across the South Platte River.

Barring litigation, the USFS Pike-San Isabel Travel Management Plan Revision should likely be finalized this summer. However, motorized groups have already voiced their intentions to sue on this plan, likely over the long-closed routes at Wildcat Canyon and "The Gulches" in Park County where illegal motorized use has increased over the years.

We will have to wait and see how the final US Forest Service PSI TMP transpires. It is unknown what effect the possibility of litigation will have on our ability to carry out previously scheduled restoration work at Wildcat Canyon that was delayed by the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

We are hopeful that this travel management planning process can be resolved soon. Regardless, Wild Connections will continue to be stewards for our USFS Pike-San Isabel public lands. Be on the lookout for upcoming Wild Connections USFS monitoring hikes, climate outings, and restoration projects in 2021.

Wild Connections has more info on the USFS PSI TMP at: <http://www.wildconnections.org/conservation/psitravelmanagement.html>. ☞

Protecting 30% of Earth's Lands and Waters by 2030

continued from the front page

- Provide a boost for our economy and quality of life, where statewide, outdoor recreation has emerged as a major economic sector, contributing \$62 billion to Colorado's economy and creating over 500,000 jobs in 2018.
- Make communities more desirable places to live and to establish local businesses.
- Incentivize sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices which, in tandem with protected lands, can help ensure that farms and working landscapes are both protecting biodiversity and supporting local economies.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, conservation of nature is an opportunity to include those communities who suffer greater impacts from air and water pollution, climate change, and a lack of access to nature. We must recognize and reckon with the fact that even our modern definition of wilderness is predicated on the false perception that these lands were vacant prior to white settlement. Instead, we must ensure that tribal voices guide and inform an inclusive dialogue on a conservation vision that confronts and rectifies historical injustices. Communities of color from across the state of Colorado have been historically excluded from decisions of access, land use, and conservation; and the 30x30 effort must be built on a more equitable and inclusive approach.

As a state that has historically led the way on innovative environmental policies, we must lead the way to end the loss of nature, close the "nature gap" by ensuring access to nature for all, and build a movement to meet the vision of protecting 30 percent of our lands here at home.

Increasing the share of protected areas in our state to 30 percent will take the collective efforts of all Coloradans, who must work together to identify lands and waters in our own backyards and across the state deserving of protections, and working with leaders to fulfill conservation goals.

Resources

Books

Edward O. Wilson, *Half Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life*, 2016.
Enric Sala, *The Nature of Nature: Why We Need the Wild*, 2020.

Webpages

- <https://conservationco.org/2020/07/22/30x30-goal-a-bold-vision-to-protect-our-lands-and-waters/>
- <https://westernresourceadvocates.org/publications/colorado-pathways-to-30x30/>
- <https://www.half-earthproject.org/>
- <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2021/index.html>



How Wildland Pieces-Present and Future-Fit into Colorado's 30x30 Puzzle

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Wilderness is both permanent and the most protective designation, bestowed by Congress in the 1964 Wilderness Act. Designated Wilderness in the state totals an acreage of 3,735,000, of which roughly 630,000 acres lies within the UASP. And lucky for us and 30x30, many Colorado wild candidates still await Congress's blessing.

For 21 years, WC, along with sister group Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition (CCWC) and many others, fought for six Arkansas Canyon areas in Rep. Diana DeGette's Colorado Wilderness Act (CWA). Statewide, CWA proposes 36 new Wildernesses totaling 660,000 acres in all. Most are administered by BLM as temporarily protected Wilderness Study Areas. After approval by the U.S. House this year, CWA is now awaiting a vote of passage in the U.S. Senate. Let's finally pass the CWA.

In the mountains encircling South Park, CCWC proposes Wilderness for five areas in the Pike-San Isabel NF, totaling 109,000 acres. These five are Upper Tier Colorado Roadless Areas (UTCRA), which gives them elemental protection from development and eligibility for 30x30 status. There are hundreds of UTCRAs identified by the NF and the WC Conservation Plan and more throughout the state. Let's identify all the potential UTCRAs for 30x30.

As part of its land use planning, BLM's Royal Gorge Field Office inventoried Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC), inviting the public to make their own inventories. WC took the challenge, examining more than 200,000 acres over several years. Considering the extensive work of both teams, BLM derived an official LWC acreage of 182,500, a sizable victory for conservation.

Most important in realizing the 30x30 vision is a tidal wave of support from the public. Join Coloradans everywhere in asking your state and federal legislators and administrators to support 30x30 legislation and projects.

An informative guide, "Colorado: Pathways to 30x30," is available for free from Western Resource Advocates. Downloads are available at: <https://westernresourceadvocates.org/publications/colorado-pathways-to-30x30/>.



Partnering Your Skills and Passions with Ours

By Claude Neumann


People like you are at the center of Wild Connections' mission to foster biodiversity and species survival. So we are reaching out again to our partners, supporters, and volunteers. If you have a particular skill with a good dose of passion, we encourage and invite you to become our partner as a volunteer, on one of our committees, or potentially part of our board.

There are many challenging needs including social media, writing and publications, public outreach, science based knowledge, photography/editing, events and field activity, or data management. If you want to explore possibilities for involvement, Jim Lockhart at (719) 385-0045 or jlock@datawest.net is ready to chat with you.

Financial Support

Finally, we urge you to support us as much as you can to carry forward critical programs like the 30x30 movement. Your support could be:

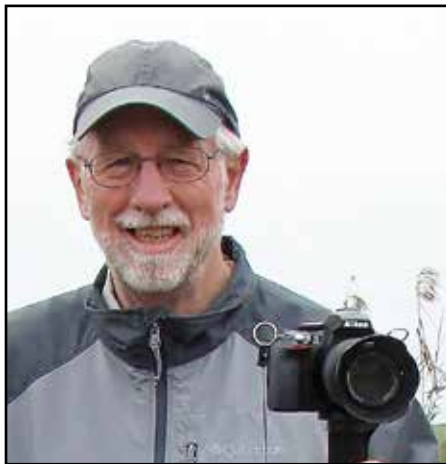
- A one-time gift or a continuing monthly gift of any amount. Check with Jean Smith jean@wildconnections.org about monthly giving.
- A tax free distribution from a retirement plan if you are over age 70 ½, or from a Donor Advised Fund.
- From a matching gift program if your employer has one, a great way to increase your gift.

If you have given in the past, please consider continuing or increasing your donation. If you have not yet given, we would be gratified to receive your first gift! Mail the enclosed envelope or go on-line to our secure web page at Colorado Gives <https://www.coloradogives.org/wildconnections/overview>. 

Volunteers Giving Back: Curt Nimz

Curt's photos below highlight the blossoms and their environment

By Jean Smith



Wild Connections Volunteer Curt Nimz.


Photo: Courtesy of Curt Nimz

Curt Nimz's eye for wildflowers is always shared along the trail with fellow hikers and then with Wild Connections for evocative images of people, places and the diversity of Colorado plant life. Wild Connections has known him for at least five years when he went on an excursion to Bureau of Land Management's Race Path Gulch, and he's been on many hikes ever since.

You might also find him and spouse Kathy among the wildflowers in Gothic or with the Teller Trekkers in the patchy snow at Dome Rock State Wildlife Area or near the Divide at Tin Cup. For one Kansas-born, he's taken to the mountains with gusto.

Curt says: "I started hiking with Wild Connections because I wanted to explore the area along the Arkansas River. I continue to hike and work with Wild Connections because

I appreciate the 'lesson' that is part of each hike. I also like that Wild Connections is about action on conservation issues and that the hike 'lesson' provides information about acting on current local issues."

Curt, like many of you, continues to give back to nature, to protecting wildlands, and to the beauty found in a crevasse. His photos speak for themselves. Thank you, Curt. 



Whole-leaf Indian Paintbrush in the sparse detritus of sticks and green shoots.

Photo: Curt Nimz



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Back on the Trail

Outdoors and Indoors

Hiking, camping, fishing and road trips are on the upswing here and afar. For example, more than 1,000,000 people visited Colorado State Parks in April 2021. Increased use has brought increased trail damage, wildlife encounters, trash and baggies of doggy poo left behind. So when you go, "Leave No Trace" and pack out all trash.



Events

Wildlands Day Hike

Thirtynine Mile Mountain

June 12, time TBD

The 14,000 acre Thirtynine Mile Mountain roadless area is located south of Elevenmile Reservoir on the southeastern edge of South Park. Hiking in the forests of Engelmann spruce-subalpine fir mixed with large stands of aspen and some ponderosa pine and bristlecone/limber pine is a pleasure.

Registration is required. Go to www.wildconnections.org/events.html for details and to register.

Where Will Biodiversity Persist in Central Colorado in the Face of A Changing Climate?

Wild Connections presentation

Colorado Native Plant Society Metro-Denver Chapter

July 13, 2021, 6:30 pm at the Denver Botanical Gardens

Go to <https://conps.org/> for more information.



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Yellow columbine blooms along a stream.

Photo: Curt Nimz