



Conservation **Colorado**



**WESTERN  
RESOURCE  
ADVOCATES**

# COLORADO

# PATHWAYS TO 30X30





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction .....	4
Why Protect 30 Percent of Colorado’s Lands and Waters by 2030? .....	6
Defining Protected Land .....	8
Colorado’s Blueprint to 30x30.....	9
A Note about Pathways to 30x30.....	10
Colorado State Lands.....	10
Federal Public Lands.....	13
Tribal Involvement.....	17
Private Land Conservation .....	18
Getting to 30x30.....	19



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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,<sup>1</sup> driven primarily by an expansion of extractive industries and sprawling housing development.

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.<sup>2</sup>

This report provides attainable and realistic policy solutions — a pathway to help Colorado conserve 30 percent of its lands, or 20 million total acres, by 2030. With 10 percent of land, or about 6 million acres, already in protected status, Colorado should seek to protect and restore at least 14 million more acres of lands and the waterways that pass through them by 2030.

This is an ambitious goal, but it is one that nearly three-quarters of Coloradans support.<sup>3</sup> Achieving it will conserve nature and wildlife, connect people, mitigate the impacts of climate change, protect our economy, increase our food and water security, and safeguard Coloradans’ quality of life for generations to come.

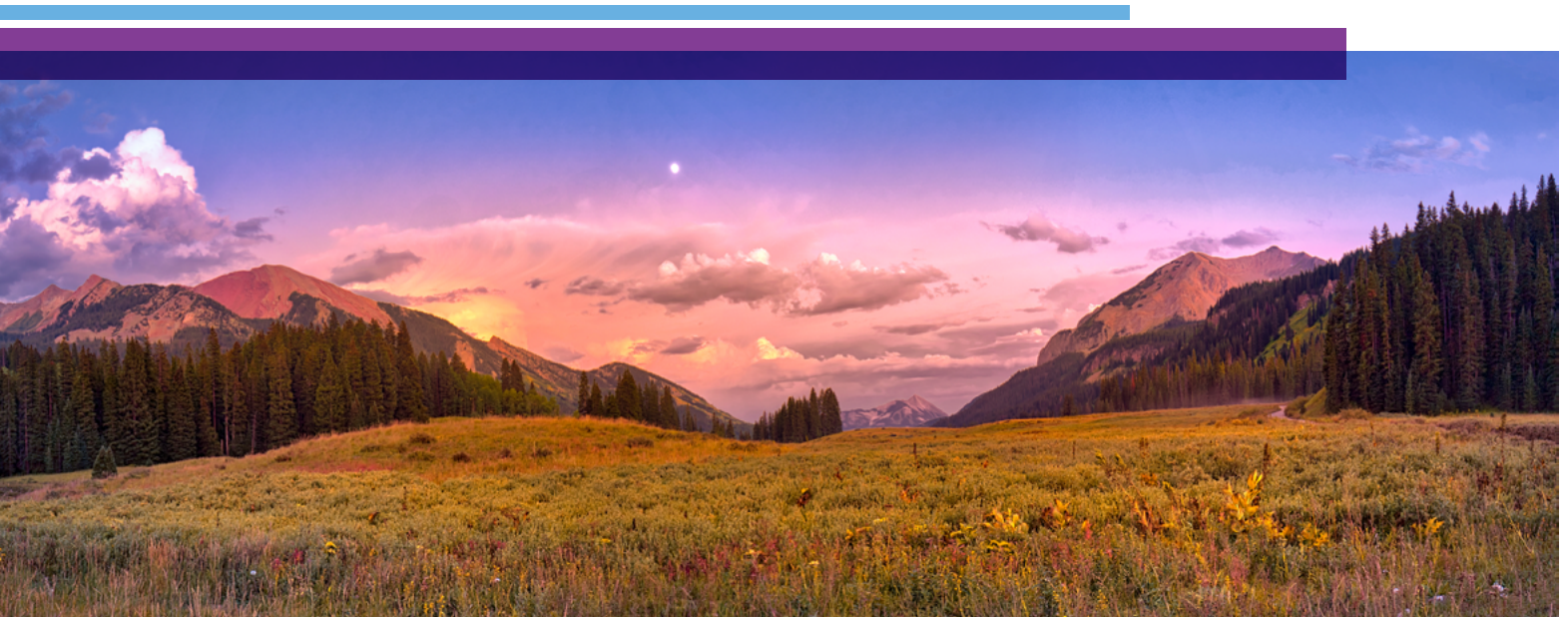
As a state that has historically led the way on innovative environmental policies, we must lead the way to end the loss of nature, close the “nature gap” by ensuring access to nature for all, and build a movement to meet the vision of protecting 30 percent of our lands here at home.

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1. Matt Lee-Ashley, “The Green Squeeze”, Center for American Progress, 2019

2. [www.campaignfornature.org/home](http://www.campaignfornature.org/home)

3. Colorado College - State of the Rockies 2020 Conservation in the West Poll



# INTRODUCTION

**Colorado is losing its most iconic asset: nature.**

In a state known for its mountains, rivers, and scenic beauty, the slow but persistent loss of nature threatens life as we know it in the Centennial State. **Since 2001, Colorado has lost over a half-million acres of natural lands to development**, driven primarily by a huge expansion of the energy industry and sprawling housing development throughout the state.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes these are lands that haven't been developed significantly and where the natural ecosystem is still largely intact, but they are lost an acre at a time — a new drilling facility here, a new subdivision there — and the cumulative impact is vast and destructive. The United States as a whole loses natural lands at a rate of about one football field every 30 seconds, or about 1.5 million acres per year.<sup>5</sup>

Globally, nature is in a state of collapse. We are facing a mass extinction of the plants, animals, and microorganisms that keep our air clean, our water pure, and our food supplies plentiful; in other words, support human existence. The documented losses are staggering:

- Almost a million species are at risk of extinction around the world;<sup>6</sup>
- Half of the rainforests are gone;<sup>7</sup>
- 68 percent of the world's wildlife have been lost since 1970;<sup>8</sup>
- Three-quarters of the planet's lands and two-thirds of its oceans have been significantly altered by human activities;<sup>9</sup> and,
- In North America, there are nearly 3 billion fewer birds than there were just fifty years before.<sup>10</sup>

These losses are terrible on their face, but are associated with incalculable detrimental costs to human well-being, including threatening clean water supplies, food security, medicines, clean air, and so many other ways in which we rely on the natural world. How can we respond to this loss? Can we slow the trend line or turn it around? What kind of world can our future generations look forward to? *What's at stake if we fail to act?*

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. The Global Deal for Nature was developed by scientists and policymakers to address the climate and nature crises, slow the rate of extinction, and ameliorate the worst impacts of climate change. To deliver on this deal, nations and subnational entities must accelerate the pace and scale of conservation by protecting at least 30 percent of the planet by 2030.<sup>11</sup>

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4. Jenny Rowland-Shea, “The Nature Gap”, Center for American Progress, 2020

5. See Footnote 1

6. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), “Nature’s Dangerous Decline ‘Unprecedented’ Species Extinction Rates ‘Accelerating’”

7. John Vidal, “We are destroying rainforests so quickly they may be gone in 100 years”, The Guardian, January 23, 2017

8. World Wildlife Fund, Living Planet Report 2020

9. See Footnote 2

10. Jonathan Baillie and Ya-Ping Zhang, “Space for nature,” Science 361 (6407) (2018): 1051, available at <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/sci/361/6407/1051.full.pdf>

11. See Footnote 2



In the United States, the movement to protect and restore 30 percent of our nation's waters and lands is gaining momentum. The benefit to Americans of achieving this goal would span the economy, climate, wildlife, public health, food and water security, and more. In the United States Senate, Colorado Senator Michael Bennet has joined New Mexico Senator Tom Udall to sponsor a resolution committing the nation to the "30x30" goal.<sup>12</sup>

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**WE MUST HELP TO MOBILIZE THIS NATIONAL MOVEMENT, AND PLAN FOR HOW TO  
ACHIEVE IT HERE IN COLORADO. DOING SO HAS THE POWER TO UNITE OUR STATE'S  
EFFORTS TO PROTECT NATURAL LANDS FROM DEVELOPMENT, ADVANCE RACIAL  
JUSTICE, AND SAFEGUARD OUR CLIMATE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.**

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Protecting our environment, communities, lands, waters, and wildlife is a critical part of how our nation and state can "rebuild better" from the COVID-19, economic, climate, and other crises that we have collectively faced over the course of 2020.

This report provides an attainable and realistic suite of policy solutions that will help Colorado conserve 30 percent of its lands, but only if we can summon the collective will to get there. Moreover, this report shows that the "30x30" goal is not only possible for Colorado, but is deeply within our collective self-interest as a state. We show that achieving the goal can be accomplished through large-scale land conservation, restoration, and management policies that are equitable and inclusive for all, and a bold political vision.

We must acknowledge that like many facets of our society, land preservation has racist and white supremacist roots and a history built upon displacing native people to "protect" a place. Historically, environmentalism has too often excluded people of color and Indigenous communities from the movement. The 30x30 effort presents an opportunity to ensure that future efforts to conserve nature involve partnerships with communities and tribes who have tremendous knowledge and expertise on the issue, but have been excluded from policy and decision making.

There are nearly 67 million acres of land in the state of Colorado. This includes all types of lands: private property, federal public lands, tribal lands, and state and municipally owned lands. While each type of land has readily available, time-tested conservation methods, it is the scale and pace of that conservation that must be accelerated to meet the 30x30 goal. At the same time, it is the stark reality that communities of color in Colorado are more than 20 percent more likely to experience nature deprivation than white communities.<sup>13</sup> We must work to close this "nature gap."

In short, we can meet the ambitious 30x30 goal and close the nature gap by scaling up our existing conservation tools alongside new community-driven policies that protect and restore nature at the federal, state, and local levels.

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12. S.Res.372, A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the Federal Government should establish a national goal of conserving at least 30 percent of the land and ocean of the United States by 2030, 116th Congress.

13. See Footnote 4



## WHY PROTECT 30 PERCENT OF COLORADO'S LANDS AND WATERS BY 2030?

From 2001-2017, Colorado lost over 1,000 square miles of natural lands to development.<sup>14</sup> At this point, about 28 percent of Colorado, an area roughly the size of South Carolina, has been developed for human purposes such as residential areas, energy development, and transportation.<sup>15</sup>

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.

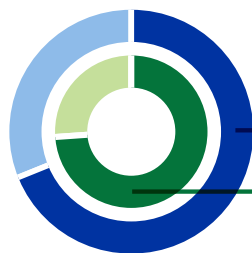
Data from the United States Geological Survey shows that about 10 percent of Colorado is already conserved with permanent or otherwise durable land protections managed for biodiversity.<sup>16</sup>

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.

**FOR COLORADO, A GOAL OF 30 PERCENT PROTECTED LANDS EQUALS ABOUT 20 MILLION ACRES. WITH 10 PERCENT OF LAND ALREADY IN PROTECTED STATUS, OR ABOUT 6 MILLION ACRES, COLORADO SHOULD SEEK TO PROTECT AND RESTORE AT LEAST 14 MILLION MORE ACRES OF LANDS, AND THE WATERWAYS THAT PASS THROUGH THEM, BY 2030 TO MEET THE 30X30 GOAL.**

The threats to our lands, waters, wildlife, and communities are intertwined. Thankfully, so are the benefits of protecting them — and Coloradans know it.

Polling suggests that Coloradans instinctively support an ambitious conservation goal. The 2020 “Conservation in the West” poll from Colorado College found that 69 percent of Coloradans consider themselves to be a “conservationist.”<sup>17</sup> And, fully 74 percent of Colorado respondents support a national goal of 30x30.<sup>18</sup>



### PERCENT OF COLORADANS WHO:

**69%** consider themselves to be a “conservationist.”

**74%** support a national goal of 30x30.

14. See Footnote 1

15. See Footnote 1

16. United States Geological Survey, Gap Analysis Project, Protected Area Database of the United States 2.1 (2020)

17. See Footnote 3

18. See Footnote 3



In addition to their intrinsic values, intact and functioning ecosystems provide quantifiable economic benefits to Colorado — termed “ecosystem services” — which diminish with the loss of nature. Wildlife habitat and migration corridors give wildlife room to move and thrive, especially as habitat is forced to shift with climate change. Intact spaces also 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.

Additionally, conserving natural places is a valuable strategy for combating climate change. Intact nature and ecosystems make Colorado a more resilient place in the face of a warming climate, creating more connections for wildlife to adapt to changes in habitat conditions. Natural lands can help offset or soften the impacts of climate change on a variety of fronts including drought, extinction, food and water security, and wildlife migration. By managing lands to be net neutral or net negative in their carbon emissions, land managers and land management policies can play a powerful role in helping keep global temperatures from rising over 1.5 degrees Celsius, the recommended threshold of climate scientists to prevent the worst effects of climate change. Thankfully, one of the most cost-effective strategies for mitigating climate change is to protect more connected and resilient land and water.<sup>19</sup>

Conserving our lands is also good for our economy and quality of life. At the local level, conserved spaces often make communities more desirable places to live and establish businesses.<sup>20</sup> Proximity to trailheads, national parks, and public lands improve property values and are associated with higher tax receipts. People want to live in beautiful places where there is recreational access to nature.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> Sustainable outdoor recreation can be a leading job creator as Colorado recovers from the economic devastation unleashed by the COVID-19 crisis, but conserved open spaces and public lands are the engines of this economic sector. Conservation that thoughtfully considers the role of sustainable outdoor recreation can be a win-win for jobs and the environment.

And recreation is not the only way to boost rural economies. Agriculture is an important industry in Colorado, and incentivizing sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices — in tandem with protected lands — can help ensure that farms and working landscapes are both protected from development and supportive of 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.

Humanity is at a tipping point on answering the interconnected challenges of climate change and loss of habitat, all while grappling with the fallout of a global pandemic. As we begin to rebuild, Colorado can and must play an important role in protecting our water, scenery, wildlife, and quality of life.

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19. Waldron, et. al., Protecting 30% of the Planet for Nature: Costs, Benefits, and Economic Implications (2020)

20. Headwaters Economics, Recreation Counties Attracting New Residents and Higher Incomes (2019)

21. Casey, et. al., “Grand Valley Public Trail Systems Socio-Economic Study” (2018)

22. Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2019)

## DEFINING PROTECTED LAND

How should we define protected land and water to reach the goal of 30 percent of lands protected by 2030? It is clear that permanent designations such as wilderness or national parks should be considered protected. But what about long-term protections by federal agencies that are achieved through a land use plan or a federal rule-making? What about conservation easements on private lands? What about state parks and wildlife areas, or county parks and open spaces?

One way to calculate existing protected lands is to follow the classification system developed by the U.S. Geological Survey's Protected Area Database (PAD-US) and its Gap Analysis Project (GAP).<sup>23</sup> This report treats GAP status codes of 1 and 2 as protected, because they both denote a management that either prohibits or minimizes disturbances to natural systems. This is the methodology employed to estimate that 10 percent of lands in Colorado are already protected.

This estimate of protected lands has limitations. One limitation with USGS definitions is that some exceptions ought to be made to include lands that are protectively managed, but not always reflected as such in the PAD-US data, such as state wildlife areas, and some parks and open spaces.

Additionally, there are many policy-level tools that would help protect nature, but would be more difficult to quantify in terms of acres protected. These include, for example, state-level reforms of oil and gas drilling regulations, as well as national tools such as creating a carbon budget for public lands management. Some protections will be bestowed by legislative bodies, and some by agencies or executive actions, and some by private landowners and NGOs. And some will be in perpetuity, while others may be durable for the life of a land use plan.

Protecting 30 percent of Colorado's lands by 2030 will require a variety of approaches and creative solutions. But this expansive view of conservation will help engage more people and build support at all levels of government through community-driven and ground-up efforts. While national and state-level tools get the most attention, community buy-in and grassroots support assures the right set of policies and protections are applied and have political durability. It bears repeating the inclusion of people of color and tribal nations is critical to achieving an equitable and just 30x30 conservation goal.

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23. See Footnote 16





# COLORADO'S BLUEPRINT TO 30X30

## Vision Statement:

Colorado will be a leading state in the national movement to protect 30 percent of lands by 2030, building an inclusive coalition to get there. By 2030, Colorado will have secured protections for at least an additional 14 million acres of lands by enacting lasting reforms and policy changes that protect nature, address the climate crisis, and ensure equitable and inclusive access to nature for communities of color. Achieving the 30x30 goal will conserve nature and wildlife, connect people, mitigate the impacts of climate change, protect our economy, increase our food and water security, and secure the quality of life for Coloradans for generations to come.

	Colorado	% of total
Total Land Area (in acres) <sup>24</sup>	66.5 million	
Federal Lands	23.8 million	36
Tribal Lands	770 thousand	1
State Lands	3.2 million	5
Private Lands	37.8 million	57

24. Acreage sources: USGS, BLM and COMap



## A NOTE ABOUT PATHWAYS TO 30X30

There are many pathways to achieve the 30x30 goal, crossing local, state, and federal laws and policies. The following sections provide an overview of the major land ownership and management structures in Colorado in order to explore how those entities currently do and do not protect and restore lands and waters. Following each section, we present a number of options for how stakeholders can work with these entities to achieve new protections. The pathways are not meant to be comprehensive. They are examples. Identifying and determining the appropriate pathways should be undertaken in collaboration with stakeholders, including communities of color, tribes, conservation and environmental organizations, organizations that provide outdoor access and education opportunities for people of color, wildlife, hunting and angling organizations, and outdoor recreation groups.

In the following sections, we outline ways various entities can protect more lands, as well as “other policy pathways” that would protect nature and also help us achieve our 30x30 goals.

## COLORADO STATE LANDS

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis wrote that states are the “laboratories of democracy” to describe how states can lead the way under the system of federalism in the United States. Colorado has a proven track record of pioneering concepts that have grown to other states and the national government. Colorado was the first state to impose a methane capture regulation on the oil and gas industry, which was copied by other states and the federal government before being scrapped by the Trump Administration. Renewable energy standards, leadership in partnering with the outdoor recreation industry, and novel climate policies that center the voices of frontline communities are additional examples where Colorado has been a policy innovator. We can and must be a policy innovator on achieving the 30x30 goal as well.

### Colorado State Trust Lands

The state of Colorado owns 2.7 million acres of trust lands, ceded to Colorado by the U.S. government at statehood in 1876, and managed by the State Land Board (SLB). State trust lands are common in Western states and are a “fiduciary trust obligation” between the states and federal government to generate revenue for public schools. The legal mandate obligates these lands to be managed for long-term stewardship and revenue for education, and is enshrined in the state constitution. State trust lands are not “public lands” in the traditional sense, in that access is limited to most trust lands. Currently there are nearly a half-million acres available for some public access, mostly for licensed hunting and fishing, though the agency is committed to doubling the acres available for public access.<sup>25</sup>

In 1996, Colorado voters approved Initiative 16, which amended the state constitution to elevate stewardship of natural resources as an additional mandate for state trust lands along with the fiduciary mandate for education funding. The resulting “Stewardship Trust” program can protect up to a maximum of 10 percent of trust lands, though it is a revolving registry, so protections are not permanent.

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25. CPW, Hunting Acreage Soars for 2020 as Colorado Parks and Wildlife again expands Public Access Program, (2020)



Opportunities for tightening conservation protections on trust lands beyond the 10 percent in the Stewardship Trust are limited by constitutional constraints. The lands must be managed to provide “long term benefits” in the form of revenue for education. This has generally meant agricultural and energy leasing. However, the SLB could develop new long term conservation or recreation lease types that produce revenue for education while protecting wildlife, natural resources, and recreational opportunities while limiting extractive uses. Additionally, non-governmental organizations or Colorado Parks and Wildlife could hold these leases and focus on protecting the most high-priority conservation parcels.

### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- The State Land Board should develop a long-term “conservation and recreation” lease for State Trust Lands that allows these lands to be managed for conservation of wildlife and natural resources while meeting the fiduciary obligation to education. This will allow for larger scale conservation than the capped 300,000-acre Stewardship Trust program.
- The State Land Board and the federal government should look for opportunities for land exchanges that help conserve larger, unbroken tracts of lands and increase access to the public. Currently, there are scattered and isolated parcels of state trusts lands that produce little revenue and complicate management of surrounding federal lands that may be managed differently. Exchange of isolated trust parcels with federal parcels that may be nearer to communities can benefit both the revenues for education and simplify management.

## Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) under the state Department of Natural Resources manages a system of 42 state parks and recreation areas, encompassing 205,407 acres. CPW also administers 350 state wildlife areas totalling 684,000 acres of lands protected for wildlife and wildlife habitat. With the recent addition of the 20,000 acre Fishers Peak State Park near Trinidad, CPW is adding a large natural area to its state parks portfolio that links together parks and wildlife areas in both Colorado and New Mexico.

CPW is overseen by the 13-member CPW Commission which has broad authority. The CPW Commission has the power to acquire lands; execute leases, easements, and other conservation and access instruments; establish rules and regulations to manage wildlife; create new state parks and wildlife areas; and manage uses in all CPW-owned or managed lands.

CPW’s ability to conserve wildlife habitat and increase recreational opportunities is significantly boosted by the lottery-funded Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). Half of GOCO’s funding supports CPW, and CPW also directly receives 10 percent of lottery proceeds. Together, GOCO and the lottery account for around 15 percent of CPW’s annual budget. Funding for conservation is critical to CPW’s ability to establish newly protected areas, such as state parks and wildlife areas.

Finally, CPW is the largest single holder of conservation easements on private lands in the state through its Colorado Wildlife Habitat Program. CPW has invested over \$164 million dollars into the program and has protected over 300,000 acres with this program and other easements.

### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- CPW should set an ambitious vision and numeric goal for the designation of new parks and wildlife areas and work with lawmakers to identify opportunities to create additional state parks and state wildlife areas. The agency should also work with Colorado's congressional delegation to identify lands for federal protections.
- CPW should play a leadership role for the facilitation of a state conservation and recreation plan, analogous to the Colorado Water Plan. Such a guide can help establish a complementary vision for sustainable outdoor recreation, protection of wildlife, and conservation of lands. These efforts must be inclusive and, in particular, engage and position Native American communities, communities of color, and other communities historically underrepresented in such processes, as coalition leaders with decision making power to ensure that their communities equitably benefit from conservation and recreation policies.
- CPW should look at its land management, land acquisition, and other practices to ensure that it is using all of its authorities in a manner that achieves a 30x30 goal.

## Broader Conservation Policy Tools & Pathways to 30x30 for State Lands

The state of Colorado has significant authority over recreation, wildlife, and state lands, as well as powers to regulate pollution and other activities that cause the loss of nature. Policies and regulations to protect nature can be created by the state legislature, the governor, and through promulgation of agency regulations. Here are some major opportunities for Colorado to act to protect nature:

- Commit Colorado to the 30x30 goal through an executive order or other executive action or a bill at the state legislature.
- Expand and improve state conservation funding and investment for lands, water, wildlife, and equitable access — including leveraging the recent fourfold increase in Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars available to the state — in order to help increase the number of state-level protected areas and to address the nature gap.
- Complete oil and gas regulatory reforms initiated by SB 19-181 to ensure the protection of lands, wildlife, riparian areas, and other parts of nature. The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission should also ensure there are appropriate setbacks from areas of concern, the cumulative impacts of oil and gas drilling on habitat and communities are analyzed and avoided, and communities are protected with strong environmental justice policies.
- Implement Colorado's "Climate Action Plan" as laid forth in HB 19-1261, which sets ambitious but achievable science-based emission reduction targets for carbon over the coming years.





- Create a robust state wildlife corridor designation program informed by Executive Order 2019-011.
- Require state agencies to provide formal comment on federal land management plans to advance 30x30 priorities.
- Implement “just transition” funding and policies for rural areas with economies that are diversifying and moving beyond their traditional reliance on fossil fuels.
- Continue to elevate the goal that everyone in Colorado has access to parks and open spaces in their communities.
- Ensure that public lands are safe and restorative spaces for everyone by removing harmful policing practices, removing and changing historically inaccurate interpretive sites, and changing the names of landmarks named for racist individuals.

## FEDERAL PUBLIC LANDS

The federal government manages the largest percentage of public lands in Colorado: over 24 million acres, or about 36 percent of the state’s land area. Various federal agencies have differing conservation-related priorities and existing protections, and conservation tools vary widely by agency.

Federal public land conservation is accomplished through administrative action — i.e. action under agencies’ legal authorities — and Congressional action. State and local governments can work to influence the decisions of federal agencies and members of Congress but do not have any direct authority over federal public lands. Federal land managers frequently use land use plans or “resource management plans” to govern management of public lands. These documents can guide decisions and determine the operational level of conservation management for up to several decades. Colorado’s public lands have seen several high profile land use plans completed in recent years.

### U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is the largest federal public lands agency in Colorado, with eleven national forests encompassing over 14 million acres. Colorado is home to the White River and Pike National Forests, which are among the most visited and oldest in the U.S., both established in the early 1890s. The USFS is the oldest of the four federal public lands agencies and carries a legal mandate to manage national forests for multiple uses including forestry, watershed protection, fish and wildlife management, wilderness preservation, and outdoor recreation — all while guaranteeing that the nation’s forest resources would be stewarded in perpetuity for the American people.

Wilderness designation and the Colorado Roadless Rule are the two main conservation designations on USFS lands. Wilderness is both permanent and the most protective designation, bestowed by Congress. Colorado Roadless Areas are a durable administrative designation that have a high level of political investment by the state of Colorado. The Colorado Roadless Rule covers 4.1 million acres in 363 separate areas and, with some exceptions, imposes restrictions on logging, road-building, and other human disturbances. A unique feature of Colorado’s rule is a higher tier of protection on 1.2 million acres that is more restrictive than the national 2001 Roadless Rule. Importantly, lands protected under the Roadless Rule are not wilderness. They allow for some limited energy development and motorized recreation, including the possibility of motorized trail construction. Congress should legislate a higher and more permanent level of protection for these areas.

Finally, the USFS is in the process of revising “forest management plans” for several Colorado forests. These planning documents will govern management of the forests for decades, and the state should ensure the federal plans incorporate conservation measures consistent with the 30x30 vision. Additionally, these forest plans determine which lands the USFS will recommend to Congress for wilderness and “wild and scenic river” designations.

### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- Congress should increase wilderness and other protective designations on USFS lands, beginning with the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act. In addition, Congress should work to protect areas that the agency has recommended for wilderness and evaluate Colorado Roadless Areas for short-term protections.
- The USFS should provide Colorado Roadless Areas with the highest level of administrative protections, at a minimum ensuring consistency with the Colorado Roadless Rule, but work to exceed baseline provisions established in the rule.
- The agency’s forest plans and project-level decisions should prioritize management for conservation — including, and especially, at the landscape scale — to maximize the resiliency of our national forests.

## Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the custodian of 8.3 million acres of public lands in Colorado, mostly on the Western Slope. In 1976, with the passage of the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act, the agency received a coherent mission: management of lands for multiple uses including energy extraction, recreation, and conservation. Importantly, this law also made BLM lands eligible for wilderness designation.

In 2009, the BLM added a “conservation lands” program to manage lands that were worthy of high levels of protections. These lands include BLM-administered national monuments, wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, and national conservation areas. Though BLM’s original mission omitted consideration for protections, up until recently, the agency had made a significant evolution towards conservation and non-extractive uses.

The BLM also manages a vast amount of oil, coal, and natural gas, often below lands that are either privately owned or managed by another agency like the USFS. This means that leasing for oil and gas and coal mining is done through the BLM with huge impacts to both public and private land conservation and the climate. Managing our public lands to mitigate, not accelerate, climate change will require special attention to the 27 million acres of federal mineral estate in Colorado managed by the BLM.

Similar to the USFS, the BLM uses “resource management plans” to govern management of public lands, including decisions on where leasing and drilling can occur, how to manage outdoor recreation, and special designations like “Areas of Critical Environmental Concern” and “Lands with Wilderness Characteristics.” Recently, resource management plans completed by the Trump administration lack conservation protections and broadly favor the interests of the extractive industry. Fixing these deficient plans and reorienting management plans towards conservation and climate mitigation must be a high priority for subsequent federal administrations.



### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- Congress and the BLM should increase conservation designations on Colorado's BLM lands and expand the Conservation Lands System by passing legislation like the Colorado Wilderness Act, in addition to evaluating Wilderness Study Areas and agency-identified "Lands with Wilderness Characteristics" for near-term legislative protections.
- The BLM should proactively manage a decline of fossil fuel production on our public lands, consistent with global climate targets and just transition principles.
- The BLM should revise its deficient resource management plans to protect wildlands and limit extraction and surface-disturbing activities. It must also ensure that, moving forward, resource management plans and project-level decisions prioritize conservation-oriented management, including designating new Wilderness Study Areas.

## National Park Service

In 1916, the Organic Act formally created the National Park Service charged with the mission to *"conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."*

While national parks and monuments have been hailed as "America's best idea," the parks have a problematic history, especially in the early 19th century when establishment of parks often was accompanied with seizure, exclusion, or expulsion of Native Americans.

In its more recent history, NPS has added units to tell a more inclusive story of America such as designation of Stonewall Inn in New York City as a national monument pivotal in LGBTQ history or the Medgar Evers House in Jackson, Mississippi, honoring the murdered civil rights era organizer. In Colorado, the National Park Service is currently undergoing a Special Resource Study process to determine whether Amache, a WWII Japanese internment camp, can be designated an official National Park Site, which would be a step forward toward telling a more inclusive story of our nation.

The NPS manages over a half million acres in our state that includes Colorado's four national parks, five NPS-managed national monuments (other national monuments in Colorado are managed by the BLM and USFS), two national historical sites, and one national recreation area. NPS parks and monuments are protected public lands by default, and while about half of these lands have the additional overlay of wilderness protection, many of the lands surrounding parks and monuments face considerable threats from the extractive industry, including air pollution from coal, oil, and gas production.

### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- Congress should permanently protect recommended wilderness areas within all NPS units in Colorado.
- Congress and the next administration should consider designation of more national park sites in Colorado to help conserve public lands and cultural resources, and tell a more inclusive story of our nation.
- Congress should fund a professionalized workforce within the NPS to manage, interpret, and care for cultural resources management and historic interpretation.

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) manages about 175,000 acres of wildlife refuges and hatcheries across Colorado, and holds conservation easements for over 200,000 acres. The mission of the agency is to conserve plant and animal species, but other multiple uses are permitted insofar as they do not hinder the primary purpose of the refuge. USFWS properties conserve some exceptional lands in Colorado, from bird refuges in the San Luis Valley that protect critical stopovers for migratory birds, to the bison refuge at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal in urban Denver, to protecting part of a 14,000-foot peak and managing designated wilderness at the Mt. Massive National Fish Hatchery near Leadville. The USFWS also manages plants and animals listed under the Endangered Species Act.

### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- Congress and the next administration should consider the designation of new or expansion of existing wildlife refuges in order to close the nature gap and expand access for nature-deprived communities, safeguard wildlife corridors, and to expand access to hunting and fishing where appropriate.
- The USFWS should proactively manage wildlife refuges for climate adaptation and mitigation to ensure resiliency of our plant and animal species.

## Broader Conservation Policy Tools & Pathways to 30x30 for Federal Lands

Since federal lands comprise the bulk of targeted acres for conservation, it is not surprising that the federal government has many other policy levers that are important to conservation of nature and can support Colorado in achieving 30x30. The various policy tools available to Congress and the executive branch are vast, but could begin with:

- Congress should pass the “Thirty by Thirty Resolution to Save Nature.”
- Congress should pass public lands, waters, and wildlife protection legislation, beginning with the “Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act” and the “Recovering America’s Wildlife Act.”
- Congress should pass federal oil and gas leasing reform and a moratorium should be placed on new oil and gas leasing and federal coal leasing should be permanently ended.



## TRIBAL INVOLVEMENT

What is now the state of Colorado is the historic homeland for many native American people, including the Utes, Shoshone, Cheyenne, Pueblo peoples, Arapaho, Apache, and other tribal communities.

According to 2010 U.S. Census Bureau data, there are over 100,000 residents of Colorado who identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, or some combination with one or more races.<sup>26</sup> While Colorado's Native American population is spread across the state, Colorado is also home to two federally recognized tribes — the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute — both with reservations in Southwest Colorado. These reservations total approximately one million acres.

Any discussion of conservation of our public lands, including tribal lands and historic tribal lands, must be in partnership with and respect tribal sovereignty. Early and consistent outreach to tribes should be a cornerstone to Colorado's 30x30 commitment. Given Colorado's violent history of oppression and expulsion of native people, there is a restorative justice element to inclusion of tribes in future conservation planning.

Models of including tribes in land protection and land management are slowly becoming more common, but must be even more so. Successful tribal-led conservation efforts have included the Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition in Southeast Utah and the Badger-Two Medicine campaign in Montana. In Colorado, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe manages a 125,000 acre tribal park immediately to the south of Mesa Verde National Park along the Mancos River where the emphasis is on conservation and stewardship of Ancestral Puebloan cultural sites.

### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- Engagement with tribes should be a long-term partnership built on respect for tribal sovereignty and the right to tribal self-determination so that Colorado's tribal communities and those tribal communities with ancestral lands located in Colorado can fulfill what each views as priorities for the stewardship of the natural, cultural, and historic resources in pursuit of the 30x30 goal.
- Political leaders should respect tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government relationship between the state, Congress, and the tribes by recognizing the right of tribes to self-govern. Any conservation goals should be designed and implemented in partnership with tribes and in the spirit of collaboration.
- Conservation tools and management structures should be inclusive of and responsive to tribal interests, such as establishing co-management areas, providing for sustainable and traditional land uses to occur, and acknowledging ancestral homelands in establishing or updating place names.

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26. Urban Indian Population, Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs





## PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION

Private lands are the most prevalent form of land ownership in Colorado, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the state's land area. This includes everything from single family homes in the suburbs to population-dense urban cores and larger agricultural holdings.

The main tool for long-term protection of nature on private lands is called a “conservation easement.” Through a conservation easement, landowners voluntarily agree to forgo certain property rights in order to protect a set of defined conservation values unique to their land. Landowners must work with a land trust or government agency which purchases and holds the conservation easement and is responsible for the enforcement of its terms and conditions. This permanent deed restriction, which covers the land in perpetuity, has been critical to protecting both ranches and other agricultural lands from development pressures and has successfully protected 2.3 million acres in Colorado. The majority of conservation easements are held by non-profit organizations such as land trusts, but local open space programs, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and GOCO make large investments in conservation easements to protect habitat and increase recreational access.

The statewide coalition of land trusts called “Keep It Colorado” is preparing a conservation plan to guide the work of private land conservation in Colorado over the next decade. This is a helpful resource for maximizing the potential for protecting natural lands in private ownership, and will go a long way toward supporting Colorado's overall 30x30 goals.

### *Pathways to 30x30:*

- Conservation and political leaders should support more voluntary land conservation through implementation of the “Keep It Colorado” conservation plan.
- The private land conservation financial valuation processes should incentivize protection of lands with the highest biodiversity and wildlife habitat values, rather than just the market values of the lands if otherwise developed.
- Conservation easement agreements should encourage and incentivize soil health best practices, water conservation, and other sustainable agricultural practices.



## GETTING TO 30X30

As this report demonstrates, the 30x30 goal is ambitious but achievable in Colorado. As a state that has historically led the way on innovative environmental policies, we must lead the way to end the loss of nature and close the “nature gap.”

We have to organize our communities around the 30x30 goal and build a movement to achieve this necessary and ambitious task. We must make the 30x30 effort just, inclusive, and equitable, building a coalition that includes and benefits those who have been marginalized not just by polluters and developers, but by the conservation community, too.

The 30x30 goal has been endorsed by Colorado’s Senator Michael Bennet and Congressman Joe Neguse as original cosponsors of the “30x30 resolution” in Congress. We must expand the support and commitment by others in Colorado’s political leadership class, including the governor, other members of the federal congressional delegation, state legislators, and elected and appointed officials at county, local, and tribal government-levels across the state. We have to activate the voices of thought leaders, academics and experts, community leaders and wildlife advocates. We will need to activate community groups of all stripes across the state to build a groundswell that the vision of 30x30 is a necessity to preserve nature, combat climate change, and make sure the beauty of Colorado that so many of us have been privileged to enjoy will remain accessible to all for future generations.

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