

Call to Action This strategy is a call to action, highlighting the conservation steps that federal, state, and local agencies, private groups, academic institutions and others can take to help meet the six objectives of rare plant conservation. Successful implementation and conservation of Colorado's native plant heritage is contingent upon adequate resources and funding to support the recommended actions.

Why conserve rare plants?

- Rare plants are an irreplaceable part of our natural heritage. If we lose these species, we will be losing valuable scientific treasures and the potential benefits these plants might offer.
- By protecting the full diversity of life on Earth we are helping to ensure our own health and that of future generations.
- Plants provide food and valuable medicines. Only 2 percent of the world's plants have been analyzed for chemicals that might be effective medicines.
- Rare plants are valuable indicators. Their persistence over time serves as a measure of good stewardship and ecosystem health.
- Each species, with its unique color, form and fragrance, contributes to the beauty of the natural landscape.



Penland penstemon (*Penstemon penlandii*) © Scott Dressel-Martin

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Colorado Rare Plant Conservation Initiative Partners

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| Betty Ford Alpine Gardens | Colorado Open Lands | The Nature Conservancy |
| Bureau of Land Management | Colorado State University | University of Colorado Denver |
| Center for Native Ecosystems | Denver Botanic Gardens | University of Colorado Herbarium |
| Colorado Department of Agriculture | Elliott Environmental Consulting | University of Northern Colorado |
| Colorado Department of Transportation | National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation | USDA Forest Service |
| Colorado Federation of Garden Clubs | Natural Resources Conservation Service | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service |
| Colorado Native Plant Society | Rocky Mountain Society of Botanical Artists | |
| Colorado Natural Areas Program | | |
| Colorado Natural Heritage Program | | |

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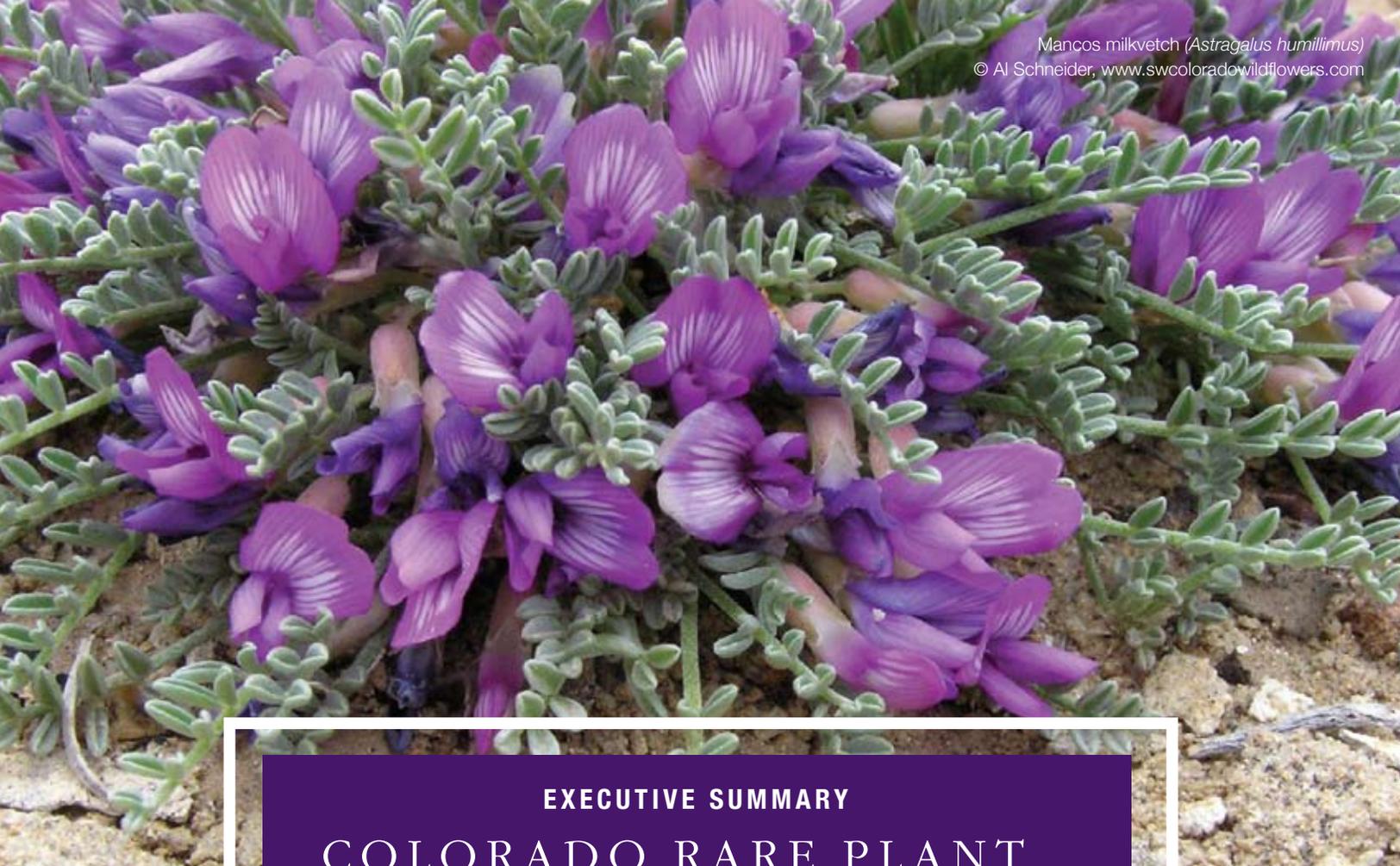
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
**COLORADO RARE PLANT
CONSERVATION STRATEGY**

Plants have too long been hidden in plain sight. The prospect of continued threats to the nation's plant life, coupled with the large proportion of the flora already at risk, argues that now is the time to bring plants out from the background, and to put the conservation needs of our nation's flora squarely into view. - Stein and Gravuer, 2008



Parachute penstemon (*Penstemon debilis*) © Steve O'Kane

The Colorado Rare Plant Conservation Initiative (RPCI)

A partnership of 22 public agencies, private organizations and academic institutions has developed the first statewide strategy to direct and coordinate conservation efforts for Colorado's imperiled plants and their habitats. The Rare Plant Conservation Strategy represents a collective vision for conservation in Colorado, emphasizing a proactive approach to ensure the long-term stewardship and survival of the state's rarest plants. The strategy will enable concerned partners to advance urgently needed plant conservation efforts across the state, reduce the vulnerability of rare plants, and help avoid the need for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Colorado's flora is an important and irreplaceable part of the state's natural heritage.

More than 75 percent of the state's 155 imperiled species are plants; 119 plants are considered globally imperiled, meaning they are at significant risk of extinction (Colorado Natural Heritage Program 2008). At least 68 of these plants occur only in Colorado and no place else in the world. Twelve plants in the state are currently listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. Approximately 70 percent of the state's imperiled plants occur on federal lands, 24 percent on private lands and 3 percent on state lands. The majority of Colorado's rare plants occur in barrens and shrublands; conservation efforts in these two habitats can make a great difference for these species.

Threats to Colorado's rare native plants and their habitats are at an all-time high.

The state has one of the fastest-growing human populations in the country, expected to increase from approximately 5 million to over 7.5 million by 2030. Demands for housing, energy, recreation and transportation place unprecedented pressure on plants and natural ecosystems. Climate change also poses a serious threat, particularly to plants restricted to specialized habitats (e.g., alpine). One of the greatest barriers to effective stewardship is a lack of awareness about rare native plants. Nearly half of the state's imperiled plants are poorly conserved, often due to significant threats or lack of protection.

Despite rapidly growing threats, Colorado lacks specific recognition and protection for rare native plants. A plant program supported by state government, with broad stakeholder involvement, is needed to achieve the long-term conservation of Colorado's imperiled plants.

Now is the time to conserve Colorado's rare plants.

Our actions over the next few decades will determine the state's botanical legacy. Fortunately, there are still many opportunities to make a difference for plant conservation. Rare plants are easy to conserve because they typically occur in small numbers and over relatively small geographic areas. The land area occupied by Colorado's imperiled plants is approximately 62,500 acres, a minute percentage (< 0.001%) of the state's total land area. Thus, plants can often be protected with a relatively small investment of time and resources. By working together, landowners, land managers and concerned partners can take proactive steps to improve the conservation of imperiled plants.



The majority of Colorado's rare plants occur in barren habitats, such as the shale barrens of the Green River Formation. © Andrea Wolfe

For the full Colorado Rare Plant Conservation Strategy and to learn how you can support the conservation of Colorado's rare plants, visit us online at:

<http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/corareplantinitiative>

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the RPCI is to conserve Colorado's most imperiled native plants and their habitats through collaborative partnerships for the preservation of our natural heritage and the benefit of future generations. Plants can only be considered effectively conserved when their populations are viable, threats have been abated, and land management/protection is sufficient to ensure long-term survival.

The RPCI has identified six objectives, with recommended actions, to guide plant conservation efforts over the next decade:

1. **Secure on-the-ground, site-specific habitat protection** and/or management for all of Colorado's imperiled plants.
2. **Minimize the impacts of specific land uses** that threaten many of Colorado's imperiled plants statewide.
3. **Improve scientific understanding** of the distribution, natural history and status of Colorado's most imperiled plants through inventory, research and monitoring.
4. **Develop and implement a state program** and policies to enhance the conservation of Colorado's most imperiled plants in cooperation with public land managers, private landowners and other stakeholders.
5. **Facilitate the stewardship** of Colorado's most imperiled plants through education, outreach and coordination.
6. **Adopt measures for off site conservation** of Colorado's most imperiled plants in the event that native populations are extirpated.

Locations of the most imperiled plants in Colorado

Locations are enlarged for greater visibility (Colorado Natural Heritage Program 2008).

