

COLORADO NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

2025–2030 Five-Year Strategic Plan



INTRODUCTION

THE COLORADO NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

2025-2030

Five-Year Strategic Plan

The [Colorado Natural Heritage Program](#) (CNHP) tracks and ranks Colorado's rare and imperiled species and ecosystems. CNHP provides information and expertise on these topics to promote the conservation of our state's valuable biological resources. Data maintained in CNHP's database are an integral part of ongoing research and reflect the current state of knowledge of many scientists and institutions. Data are acquired from various sources, with varying levels of accuracy, and are continually updated and revised. CNHP also offers a wide range of related services including biological monitoring, research, mapping, and conservation planning services.

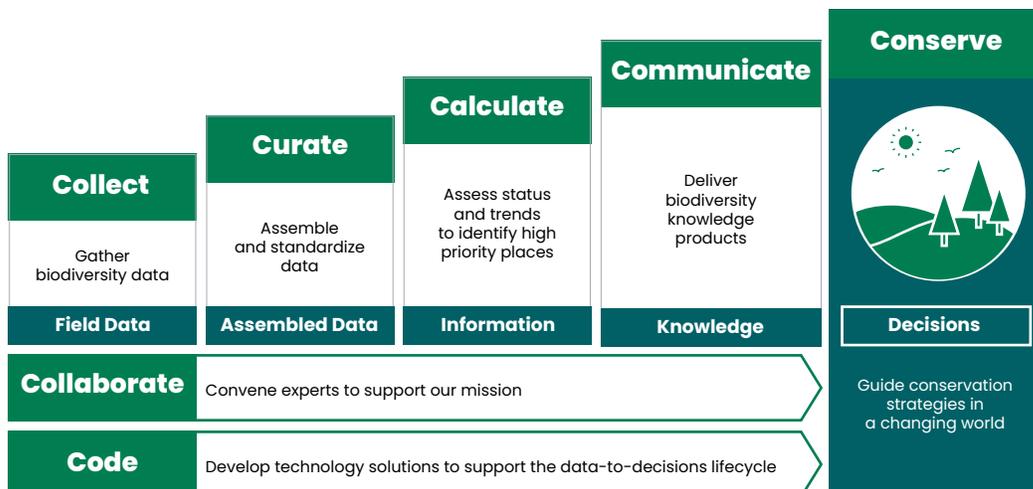
CNHP is a non-academic department housed within CSU's Warner College of Natural Resources and is Colorado's member of the NatureServe Network, an international network of partners that provide foundational data and guidance for monitoring the status of species and natural plant communities from state, national, and global perspectives. CNHP is a CIOSU (Center, Institute, and Other Special Unit), and as such we are funded through agreements, grants, and donations.

As a source of information and guidance for all Coloradans, CNHP is a key part of CSU's land-grant mission — applying research, teaching, outreach, and service to meet the needs of our citizens. Our work directly supports local communities and advances biodiversity conservation, a critical need for our growing and changing state.



The NatureServe Network

CNHP and the [NatureServe](#) Network turn data into knowledge needed for effective conservation decision-making. Our work is guided by the data to decisions lifecycle.



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WHO WE ARE

Mission

We advance the conservation of Colorado's native species and ecosystems through science, planning, and education for the benefit of current and future generations.

Vision

Our vision is a future in which Colorado's native species and ecosystems are secure and thriving. We are committed to helping partners actualize this vision. We support decision-making needs and provide science and data to conserve our state's natural heritage.



Values Statement

CNHP is a scientific organization dedicated to providing biodiversity information. We believe that:

- the best way to make decisions about conservation is to start with data and science and use them to support an objective rational process of setting conservation priorities, strategies, and plans.
- communication is fundamental to bringing science to the entire stakeholder community and must be followed by a genuine spirit of helping people and working closely with them to help solve their problems.
- trust and respect are earned, and we are committed to earning them from the relationships we have with our partners across the entire conservation community.
- all of these things are needed for partnerships to flourish, and that it is only through successful partnerships that appropriate planning, management, protection, and stewardship can occur.

We are committed to following and integrating Colorado State University's [Principles of Community](#). This commitment involves educating ourselves on how to support and nurture our community and workplace.

Core Principles

- We believe that biodiversity is essential. A world rich in biodiversity is a better world.
- We will always use the best science available. We hold ourselves to the highest standards of scientific integrity and objectivity. We believe that the reliability of our data is critical.
- We believe in honest communication. We value input and contributions from all our staff, partners, and stakeholders.
- We are not advocates for special interests. We will serve our clientele with impartiality and will provide data and support without bias. We will only offer input based on science, never based on politics or special interests.
- We honor our obligations to our funders in full and on time. We use resources wisely to maximize impact.
- We seek innovations to improve the quality, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of our work.
- CNHP's greatest asset is our staff. We are committed to the welfare and professional growth of our employees and volunteers.

GOALS

Goal 1

Comprehensive Biodiversity Data to Inform Conservation

We are the biodiversity data clearinghouse for Colorado. We collect, curate, and provide the most comprehensive dataset of Colorado's priority species and ecosystems derived from our own field surveys, natural resource professionals, academic researchers, and community scientists. We carefully and respectfully navigate the complexities of managing sensitive data across a patchwork of land ownership and management. CNHP and our partners use our data to evaluate the efficacy of past and current conservation efforts, forecast future conservation needs, and identify and fill critical gaps in biodiversity information.

1. Maintain up-to-date tracking lists of priority species and ecosystems. Align species nomenclature with the most recent Colorado taxonomy and with national nomenclature used by NatureServe. Revise Colorado's vegetation classification to meet new standards within the [U.S. National Vegetation Classification System](#). Review tracked status annually to incorporate new data and changing conservation priorities.
2. Conduct field surveys and assessments to document the location and status of priority species and ecosystems at various spatial scales. Ensure all new data are incorporated into CNHP's Biotics database.
3. Incorporate external datasets on priority species and ecosystems into CNHP's Biotics database or [Colorado Conservation Data Explorer \(CODEX\)](#) to complement Biotics. Obtain data from key partners (e.g., resource management agencies, academic researchers, and community scientists) and develop efficient processes to ingest external data at regular intervals.
4. Develop accurate and comprehensive maps of priority ecosystems, such as wetlands.
5. Collect and curate negative data (locations searched where priority species were not found) to refine our understanding of both presence and absence of the species we track.
6. Maintain comprehensive and up-to-date spatial information on conservation easements and other conserved land through the Colorado Ownership, Management and Protection (CoMAP) data service.



Goal 2

Conservation Science to Address Critical Questions

Colorado's landscape is changing, and those changes have profound impacts on biodiversity. We work to prioritize and address research questions that are critical to the viability of our state's priority species and ecosystems. We do this by engaging with a broad range of partners and experts across various locations and sectors. Our research tracks the status of species and ecosystems in Colorado and across the West, analyzes threats that impact biodiversity, and identifies conservation and restoration actions to preserve biodiversity.

1. Model the current and potential future distribution of priority species, habitats, and the connectivity between and among ecosystems.
2. Monitor the population status and trends of priority species (e.g., Preble's meadow jumping mouse, boreal toads, bats, rare plants, and pollinators).
3. Assess and monitor the condition and functions of priority ecosystems (e.g. wetlands, grasslands, and forests) at multiple spatial scales.
4. Identify threats to species and ecosystems from climate change. Develop climate adaptation strategies that build resilience and promote climate-informed decision-making.
5. Provide scientific support for managing non-native species through inventories, distribution models, management plans, and Best Management Practices.
6. Identify and research existing and emerging threats facing native species and ecosystems (e.g., disease, development, resource extraction, and recreation).
7. Prioritize conservation and restoration areas at different spatial scales and for different planning purposes. Refine our approach to summarizing conservation value across large spatial areas. Regularly update the Potential Conservation Areas. Develop a process to identify priority restoration areas.
8. Synthesize knowledge of Colorado's biodiversity status, threats, and opportunities into an annual State of Biodiversity report.
9. Promote and research the efficacy of ecological restoration practices that incorporate biodiversity conservation and climate change.



GOALS

Goal 3

Modern Integrated Technology

Modern integrated technology is critical to communicating biodiversity science. We develop tools that allow decision-makers and the public to understand the importance of Colorado's biodiversity and access key information for effective conservation. Our tools are intuitive, integrated, and utilize the latest technology to improve the speed at which we can incorporate new data and deliver relevant and timely information.

1. Deliver comprehensive biodiversity data to support decision making through CODEX.
2. Develop online dashboards that track the status and trends of priority species and ecosystems.
3. Develop an interactive mapping tool to track and illustrate the geographic scope of CNHP's research activities.
4. Build links between CNHP's online tools and resources (e.g., CODEX, Biotics, Wetland and Riparian Plots Database, Wetland Mapper, Watershed Planning Toolbox, Rare Plant Field Guide, Wetland Field Guide) so the information presented across our suite of tools is consistent. Create standardized CNHP legends and templates for online tools.
5. Maintain the functionality of existing CNHP mobile applications (e.g., Colorado Wetlands Mobile App).
6. Develop efficient digital data collection methods and data processing procedures to streamline data collection and management. Assist partners in developing their own digital data collection.
7. Continue integration of CNHP IT services with WCNR and ACNS IT to increase resilience and reduce our carbon footprint.
8. Ensure our technology, website, and tools meet the accessibility needs of all our audiences.



Goal 4

Inclusive and Collaborative Conservation

Conservation must be inclusive and collaborative to be fully effective. We strive to build a larger coalition for conservation in Colorado through partnerships, education, and outreach. We engage an array of partners and connect decision-makers and thought-leaders from different sectors with each other and our work. We provide educational opportunities for students, professionals, and the public. We are actively working to increase collaboration and outreach with underrecognized populations.

1. Develop accessible outreach materials and resources to reach target audiences.
2. Host events and meetings that catalyze connections within the conservation community (e.g., biennial CNHP Partners' Meeting) and specifically invite new partners.
3. Work collaboratively as part of the NatureServe Network to lead regional and global conservation efforts.
4. Serve as the primary source for biodiversity information in statewide conservation planning efforts and with the land trust community.
5. Actively engage with community scientists to integrate their expertise into our data products.
6. Partner with Tribes to bring indigenous science and knowledge into focus as part of Colorado's natural heritage wealth.
7. Mentor the next generation of conservation professionals through internships, volunteer positions, academic credit, and early career positions. Provide educational opportunities and resources for professionals and the public.
8. Increase outreach and collaboration with both urban and rural communities to understand and support their conservation needs.



Goal 5

Long-Term Programmatic Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of CNHP is essential to achieve our mission. Sustainability includes a solid financial foundation and well supported staff. We will engage with leaders within state and local governments, natural resource agencies, conservation organizations, and the private sector to secure long-term funding for key data products.

1. Engage with elected officials and leaders within natural resource agencies to convey the value of biodiversity in Colorado and understand conservation needs and potential uses of CNHP data and services in land use and management decisions.
2. Seek long-term funding for CNHP through multi-year contracts, funding solutions through the Colorado State legislature and CSU, and philanthropy.
3. Ensure administrative funds are directed towards strategic priorities.
4. Maintain fair and representative compensation, professional development, and appraisal standards that support dynamic and productive staff.
5. Adhere to the CSU [Principles of Community](#) in all internal and external interactions.
6. Develop a consistent and comprehensive on-boarding process to cultivate a sense of belonging, and to foster a culture of shared values, standards, and accountability.
7. Develop cultural competency for all staff through training and open dialogue.





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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

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