



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

NoCo Places

A common voice for public lands

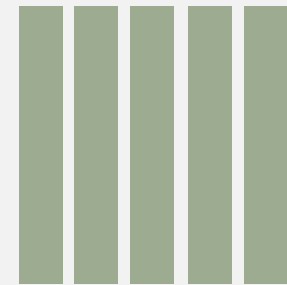


TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Letter, Executive Committee Co-chairs	01
2. Our Story	02
3. Conservation and Recreation Vision	06
4. Collaborative Work and Projects	12
5. Looking to the Future	16
6. Executive Committee Member Spotlight	18



01 FROM THE CO-CHAIRS



Shannon Schaller, Deputy Regional Manager,
Northeast Region, Colorado Parks & Wildlife
Randy Wheelock, Former Commissioner, Clear
Creek County

Welcome to the first annual report from NoCo Places in which we showcase the progress we made in 2024 in improving the future of public land management in the Northern Colorado Front Range.

2024 was a milestone year for NoCo Places. One of our most significant accomplishments was the creation of a Conservation and Recreation Vision for the NoCo region. This vision exemplifies what can be achieved through regional collaboration, partnership, and the combined knowledge of NoCo's nine agencies. The shared management philosophy born with the Vision will help support consistency in reaching conservation and recreation goals at a landscape scale.


Our coalition evolved and grew in 2024. We engaged with an ever-growing NoCo Partners group, forged more connections in the community, socialized common challenges and solutions with other Regional Partnership Initiatives, and shared stewardship messaging with tourism groups. Our regional approach began to touch more areas concerning both conservation and recreation.

Our Conservation and Recreation Vision sets the stage for our future and we are ready for more projects in 2025. The coming year will see the guidance of the Vision informing planning and projects within NoCo agencies. A regionwide shared management philosophy will be woven into individual agency plans and projects, creating a common synergy across multiple jurisdictions. This regionwide outlook and approach is at the core of what NoCo Places represents.

Our collaborative approach will continue to raise new opportunities to create a better future for the public lands in our region. When we dive into the data gathered on unauthorized trails in the region, what management decisions might come from looking through a regional lens? Once we examine our new information on regional ecological sensitivity from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, how will we use it to better protect critical wildlife habitats? As we learn more about the historic and cultural use of our public lands, how might the messaging, programming, and signage teach Coloradans about indigenous peoples and the cultural history of our region? What stories are waiting to be told, and how can we share those stories regionwide?

By working together across county, state, and federal boundaries, our foresight is expanded and allows for more efficiencies, collaboration, shared data-driven decisions, and smarter approaches. Our work aims to conserve and protect public lands, while also providing an enjoyable and safe visitor experience. Along the way, we hope to create land stewards for Colorado's public lands, one Leave No Trace principle at a time.

Wander well,


Shannon Schaller


Randy Wheelock



02 OUR STORY



A common voice for public lands

CHALLENGES IN THE NOCO REGION



Those who live and play in the Northern Front Range of Colorado know it is a beautiful and special place. And it's wonderful that so many people want to be outdoors in Colorado. We have stunning landscapes, biodiversity, unique recreation opportunities, and special places with cultural and community value. All of this is worth protecting, as is the ability of everyone to enjoy these assets.

People's needs, wants, and desires are much different now than they were in the 1960s and 1970s, the last time recreation planning was undertaken in some areas of the Northern Front Range. Climate change is also changing the environment of the Front Range. It is at more risk of extreme fire, flooding, and drought, and our ecosystems are stressed as a result. We need to protect our ecosystems because healthy ecosystems protect against threats from extreme climate events. A big part of protecting our ecosystems is how we experience and use the land, which recreation plans can help address. Lastly, wildlife interactions with people are becoming more common.

Addressing all of these challenges requires a multi-jurisdictional, landscape approach. This is the approach taken by NoCo Places.



"Through collaboration we are stronger. We can leverage our resources and work together. We can be more powerful, and more successful in keeping these great places while making it a great experience for everybody."

~ Shannon Schaller
Deputy Regional Manager,
Northeast Region,
Colorado Parks & Wildlife

WHO WE ARE



MISSION

NoCo Places collaborates to protect and conserve natural and cultural resources while providing equitable access and a quality recreation experience for current and future generations.



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The NoCo Places Executive Committee is our decision-making body. It consists of one representative from each of NoCo's nine agencies. It meets monthly and is co-chaired by a representative of the participating counties and one from either the federal agencies or the state. Decision-making is by consensus. Each agency retains its autonomy and commits to developing agency-specific plans that are informed and guided by NoCo principles and developed in collaboration with the other NoCo agencies. In addition to agency-specific plans, NoCo identifies actions it can take collectively with the participation of most or all of the NoCo agencies.

REPRESENTATIVES

- Therese Glowacki, Director, Boulder County Parks & Open Space
- Jody Hartman-Ball, Clear Creek County Commissioner
- Shannon Dennison, Director, Denver Mountain Parks
- Sandy Hollingsworth, Gilpin County Commissioner
- Daylan Figgs, Director, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources
- Tom Hoby, Director, Jefferson County Parks & Conservation
- Shannon Schaller, Deputy Regional Manager, Northeast Region, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Gary Ingram, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park
- Jason Sieg, Acting Forest Supervisor, Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland



PARTNERS & STAFF

NOCO PARTNERS

The decisions of the NoCo Executive Committee are guided and informed by the NoCo Partners, a group of approximately 75 individuals that includes staff from each of the agencies and individuals with expertise in subjects that are important to the management of these public lands. Their expertise is diverse and wide-ranging and includes outdoor motorized and non-motorized recreation, the environment, historic and cultural resources, transportation, the outdoor recreation industry, and other issues that directly impact the landscapes of the Northern Front Range.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Communications Subcommittee

Consists of communications staff from each of NoCo's nine agencies who meet regularly to coordinate communications and identify common messaging campaigns.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Work Group

A state and county-led effort, consisting of agency staff who meet regularly to share knowledge, best practices, and identify actions that can be used by participating agencies to ensure their public lands are welcoming and respectful of all.

STAFF

Steve Coffin, Executive Director
John Hannon, Programs Manager
Katie Matthews, Communications Manager

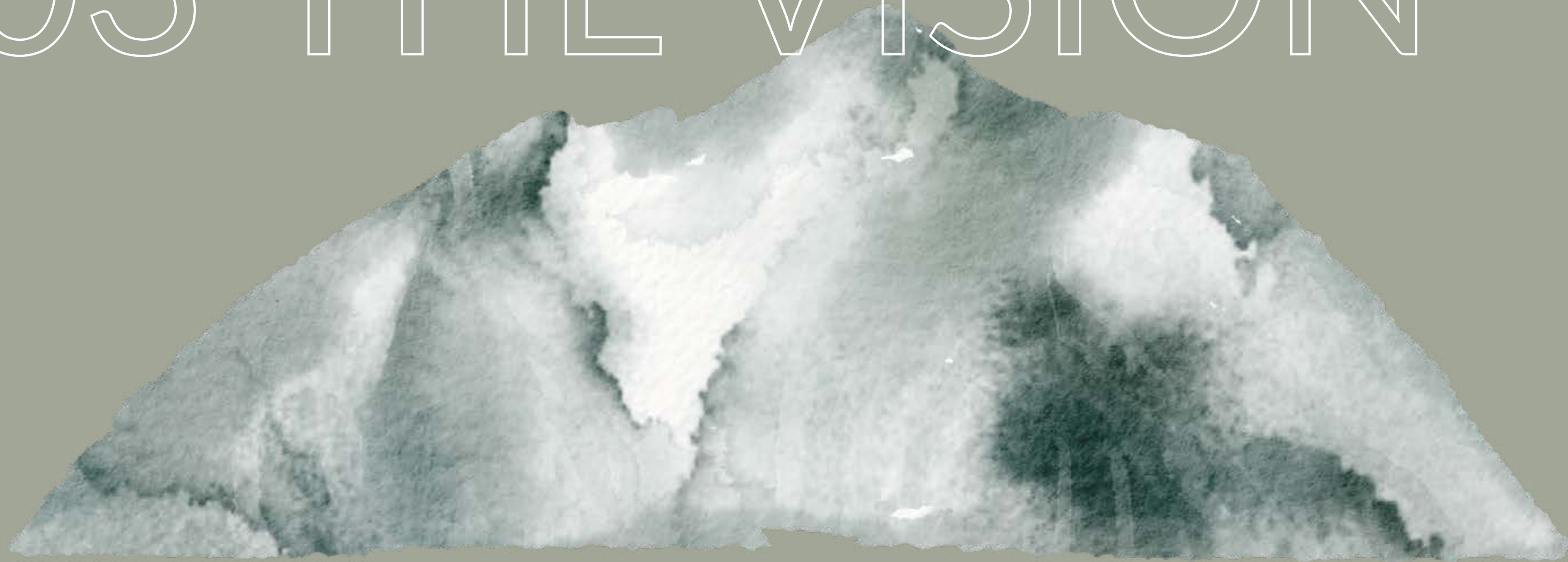


FUNDING

Funding for NoCo Places comes from a combination of contributions from participating agencies and grants. Special thanks to the following grant funders for NoCo Places:

- Colorado Parks & Wildlife
- The Mighty Arrow Foundation
- The Gates Family Foundation

03 THE VISION



Conservation and Recreation Vision

REGIONAL VISION & SHARED PHILOSOPHY



In 2022, a NoCo Places Executive Committee member noted that we needed a vision for the future of our region—a north star for which NoCo and its agencies could strive. That set us on a two-year path of work that we completed in 2024.

NoCo Places' Conservation and Recreation Vision articulates a shared, cross-jurisdictional approach to protecting and conserving natural and cultural resources in the Northern Colorado Front Range while providing equitable access and a quality recreation experience for current and future generations.

The Vision describes current conditions, shared values, desired future conditions, a shared management philosophy, and management strategies and activities to achieve conservation and recreation goals.

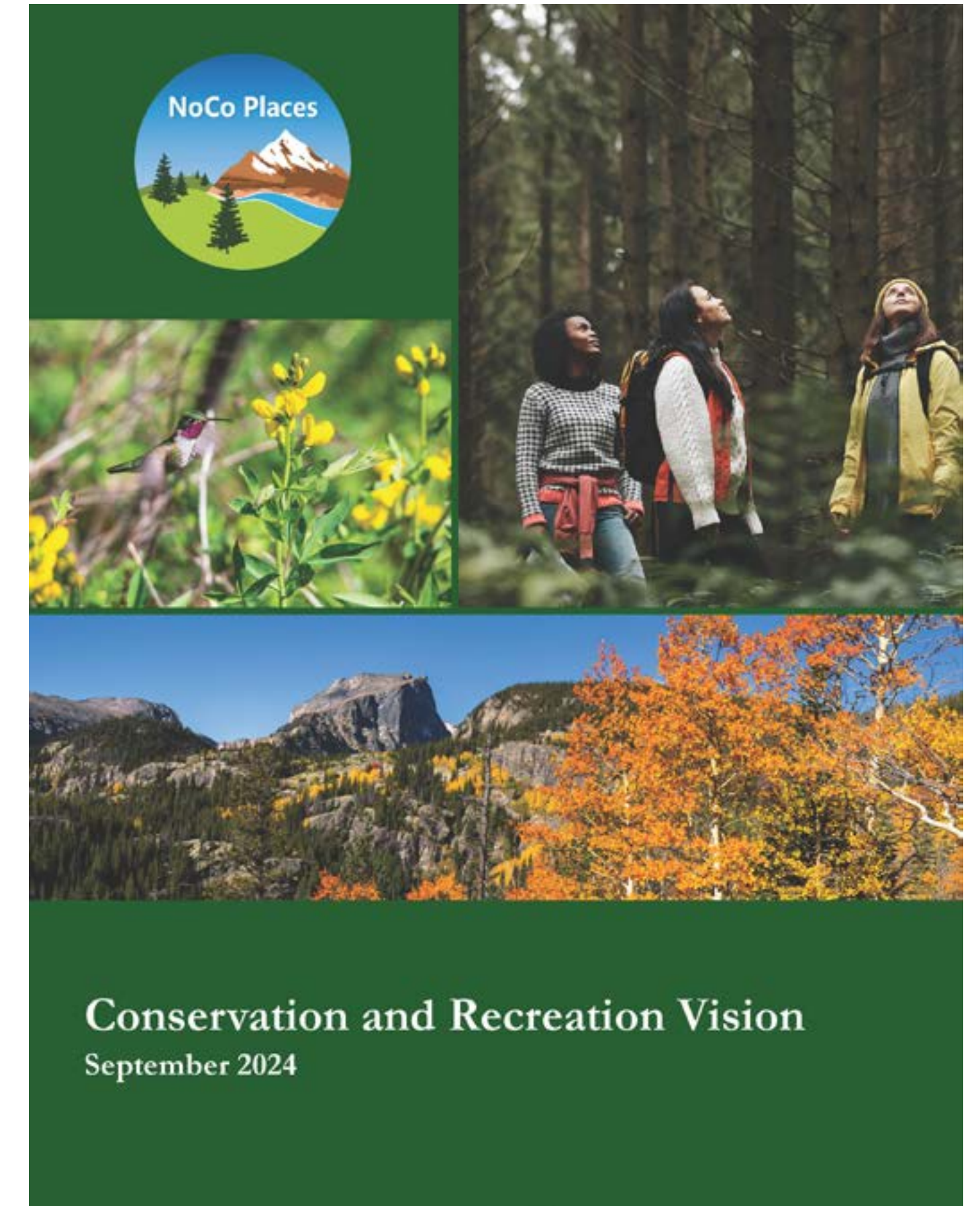
Process

The Vision builds on several years of collaborative work by NoCo Partners, including research into a variety of core topics of interest for recreation and conservation in the region; piloting of a variety of recreation management strategies; and education and messaging campaigns. Most recently, NoCo analyzed spatial data on biodiversity and recreation trends in the region, providing a further foundation for understanding current conditions. NoCo also conducted stakeholder focus groups to understand their values, desired future conditions, and management preferences. All of these inputs inform the Conservation and Recreation Vision. Future implementation of the Vision will continue to rely on and be responsive to learnings from adaptive management, conservation and recreation data, and stakeholder input and partnerships.

Shared Management Philosophy

The Vision outlines a variety of management tools and strategies that can be used to achieve desired future conditions and conservation and recreation goals. With increasing visitation pressuring both conservation and recreation resources, one thing is clear for a wide range of stakeholders and land managers: the status quo of management will not work in the future.

A forward-looking, shared management philosophy can help establish and guide expectations for future management trends in the NoCo region, subject to site-specific considerations and management authorities. In a region where wildlife and (frequently) visitors do not distinguish between land management jurisdictions, a shared management philosophy can help support consistency in reaching conservation and recreation goals at a landscape scale.



Read the [Vision document](#)

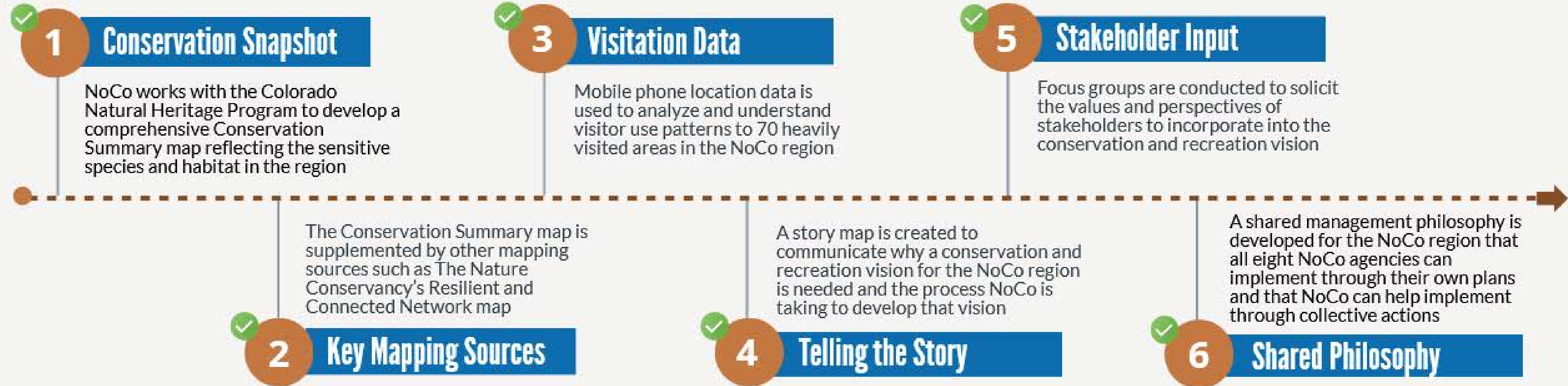
Read the [news release](#)

Watch the [video in English](#) or [Spanish](#)

The NoCo Places Conservation and Recreation Vision was made possible by a collaboration between the NoCo Places Executive Committee, Partners group, and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, as well as the following consultants: Keystone Policy Center, RRC Associates, Creative Content, and HJH Solutions.



Steps in Developing a Conservation and Recreation Vision



NoCo Places
www.nocoplaces.com



Desired Future Conditions

Landscapes and biodiversity are conserved, restored, and climate resilient.



Management balances environmental, social, and economic needs.



Outdoor opportunities are high quality and inclusive of diverse visitors.

Management balances environmental, social, and economic needs.



Cultures and histories are valued and celebrated.



Visitors care for lands, honor rules, and are courteous of each other.

Cultures and histories are valued and celebrated.



Managers, partners, communities, and the public work together.



Managers, partners, communities, and the public work together.



EXAMPLES OF SHARED MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHIES

Below are examples of one principle from each future condition. To read all the principles, view the [Management Principles document](#).



ECOSYSTEMS

Land acquisition, conservation, and restoration efforts are prioritized according to the greatest positive impact to and protection of areas with high biodiversity values. The connectivity and resilience of habitats are preserved and enhanced, while net loss of habitat and biodiversity are reduced and reversed.



EXPERIENCES

Access to recreation opportunities include close-to-home recreation experiences, regionally-connected recreation, and local and regional transportation solutions.



SUSTAINABILITY

Recreational access is planned and managed with impacts to wildlife and biodiversity in mind; draws from the best available data, knowledge, and practices; emphasizes impact avoidance; and employs minimization and mitigation techniques.



STEWARDSHIP

Increased and consistent, multi-agency messaging supports visitors' stewardship ethics, etiquette, safety, and preparedness – placing emphasis on the message rather than the land management jurisdiction.



DIVERSITY

Opportunities are maintained, cultivated, and enhanced for Tribal and Indigenous cultural and traditional access to public lands.



COLLABORATION

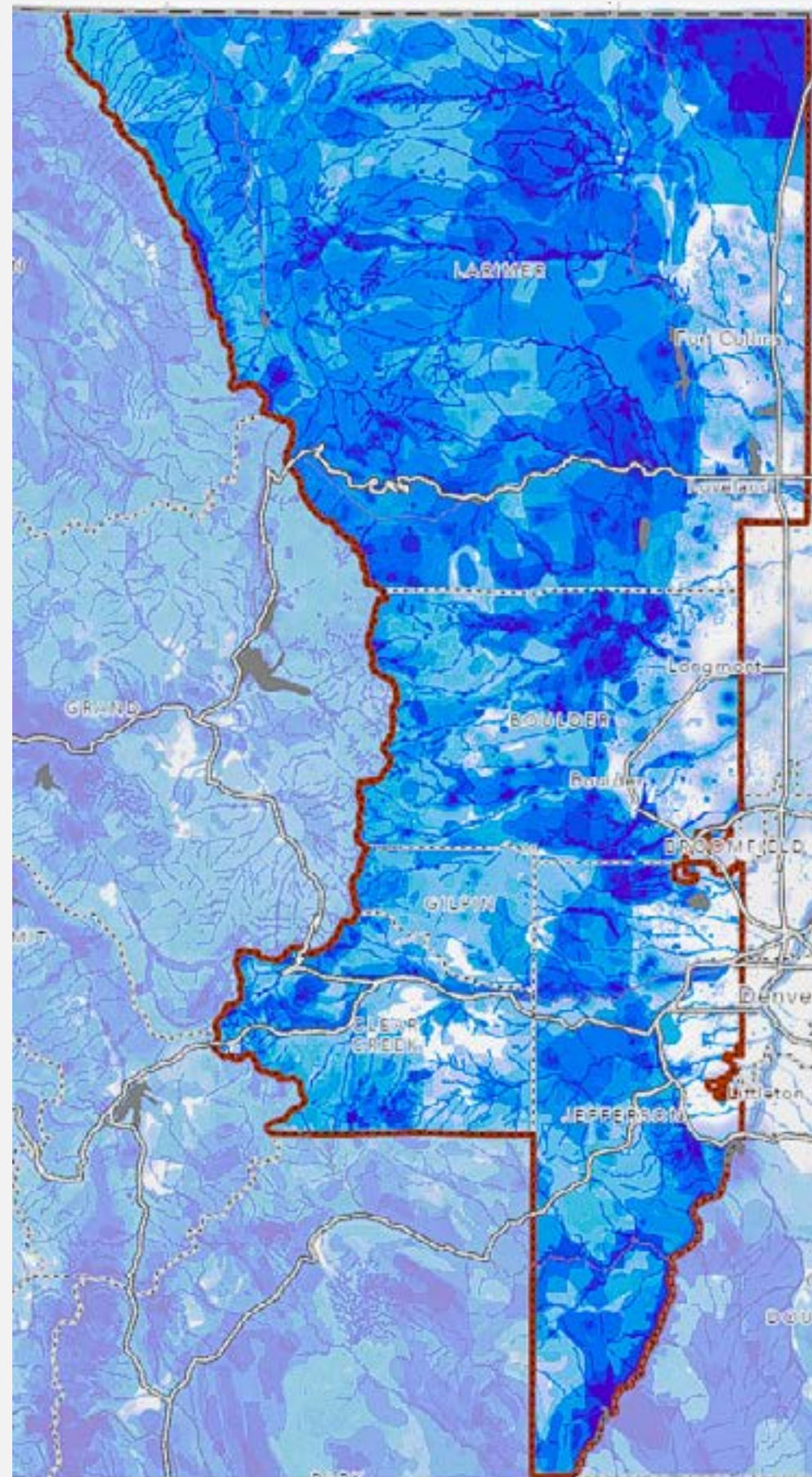
Partnerships between agencies and the private/non-profit sector are leveraged to support the capacity needs of land management agencies. These partnerships are also leveraged to support policy and funding opportunities.



GATHERING DATA & INPUT

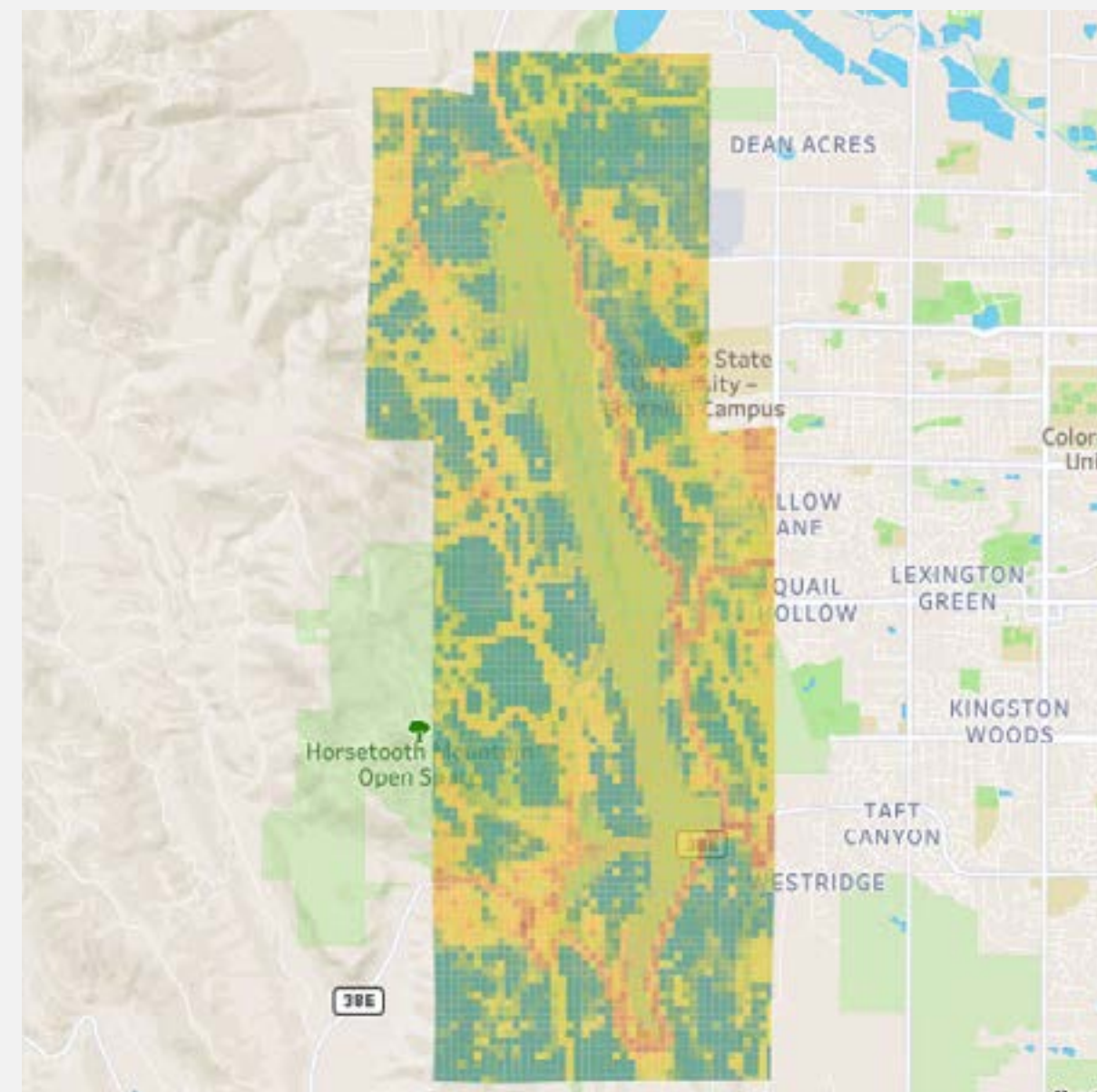
Conservation Summary Map

The Conservation Summary map shows the relative presence of biodiversity assets in the region; the darker the blue, the more biodiversity assets are present. (The white areas do not mean an absence of biodiversity; many simply have not been researched.) Mobile phone data is an additional layer that can be viewed simultaneously.



Mobile Phone Data

NoCo Places acquired visitor mobile phone data for 70 hot spots in the NoCo region. This allows us to understand more about what is happening in many of the most heavily recreated areas in the region and identify the high priority needs of the region. The data available includes visitor origins, demographics, cross visitation, trends over time, dwell time, and park use.



[View Dashboard](#)

Stakeholder Focus Groups

NoCo Places conducted 16 stakeholder focus groups to understand their perspectives on the trade-offs between conservation and recreation and incorporate their input, desires, and values into the region's vision. The focus group report summarizes what we learned from the groups, which included forest health and fireshed planning experts, motorized and non-motorized recreation, and others.

The sessions provided us with the following valuable information:

- Shared values and concerns
- Shared desired future conditions
- Unique concerns and desired future conditions
- Perspectives on management strategies
- Near and long-term priorities



[View Report](#)



04 PROJECTS



Our collaborative work

MAPPING UNAUTHORIZED

Starting in the summer of 2024, NoCo Places coordinated a trails mapping project across four of the NoCo jurisdictions: Gilpin, Clear Creek, and Boulder counties, and the Arapaho/Roosevelt National Forests. For this collaborative effort NoCo contracted with Crux Environmental to map trails and visitor use in “hot spot” areas identified by the jurisdictions. The contractor documented trails, trail infrastructure, and user types for those trail segments. GIS data and photos of key trail elements were provided. This data will be used by the agencies to determine if those trails are in fact part of an existing network, the use is permitted or part of a right of way agreement, or visitor created. From there, the agencies will decide which actions, if any, are necessary.



345.88

miles of unauthorized trails mapped in the jurisdictions within the NoCo region that participated in the project



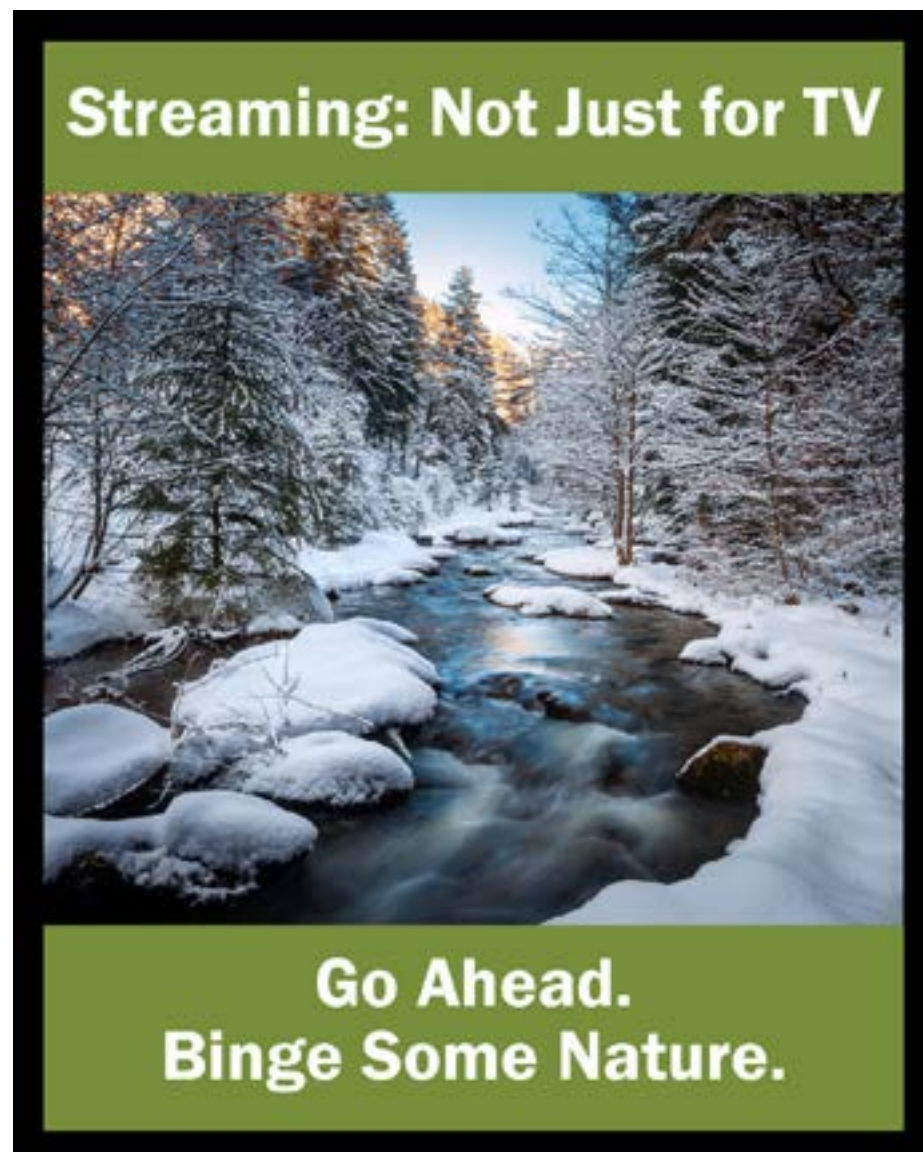
COMMUNICATIONS & MESSAGING



Sharing the same stewardship and safety messages with the visiting public is a key focus of the NoCo Places Executive Committee. The more cross-jurisdictional common messaging that reaches visitors to public lands, the more those messages become a part of their beliefs and values. We aim to create land stewards of all visitors so that not only do they help protect and conserve our public spaces, but they can also pass that knowledge and value onto their children—the future visitors and stewards of the land.

New communications efforts in 2024 included promoting the state COTREX app, working with tourism centers in the NoCo region to communicate stewardship messaging to tourists, working with the NoCo Fireshed Coalition on fire safety communications, and sharing messages from the Wintering Wildlife Conservation Initiative.

NoCo Places was selected to present at two industry conferences in 2024: the Partners in the Outdoors conference hosted by Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and the Colorado Open Space Alliance conference.



[View Campaign](#)

3 Common Messaging Campaigns in 2024

100%
of common messaging campaigns were translated to Spanish

53%
increase in web traffic over previous year

Headed Outdoors?
Find your place in the Northern CO Front Range

Interactive Regional Map:

- Highlighted Public Lands & Parks
- Wildlife Facts & Safety Tips
- Land Stewardship Principles

Courtesy of NoCo Places: A common voice for public lands

7,000 views of interactive story map

6 tourism centers promoted the map

500 QR code scans

Larimer County Parks

- Carter Lake
- Devil's Backbone Open Space
- Hermit Park Open Space
- Horsetooth Mountain Open Space
- Horsetooth Reservoir

Rocky Mountain National Park

- RMNP Beaver Meadows Entrance
- RMNP Grand Lake Entrance
- RMNP Fall River Entrance
- RMNP Wild Basin Entrance

National Forest (ARP)

- Brainard Lake Recreation Area
- Hessie Trailhead
- Mount Blue Sky
- Mount Margaret Trailhead
- Round Mountain

[View Map](#)

Campaign Objectives:

- Reach a broader audience through the tourism groups in the NoCo region
- Share land stewardship messages with an audience that is likely unfamiliar with Colorado public land
- Educate audience on the different areas of public land in the NoCo region (thus offering alternatives)

EDI COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

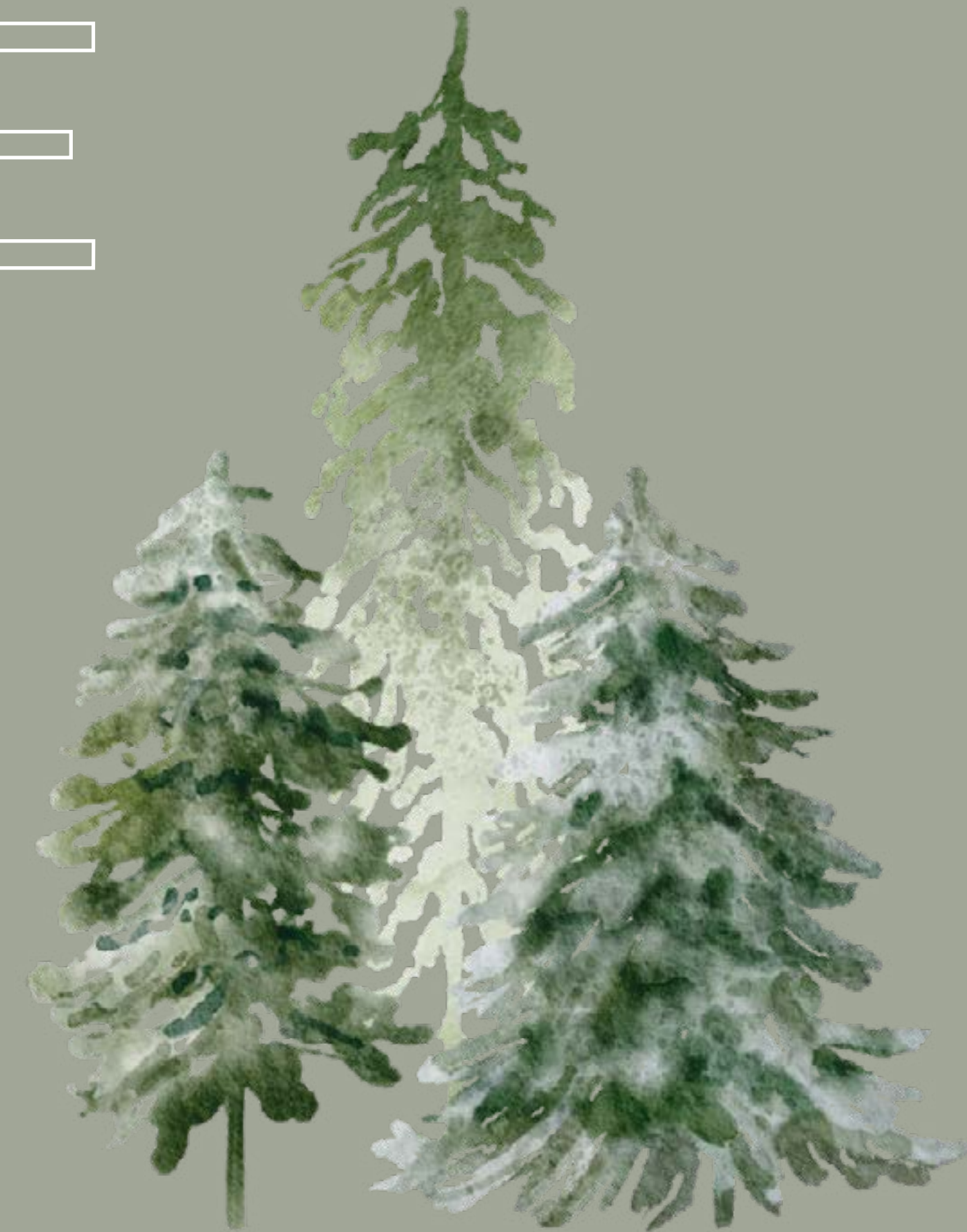
The NoCo Equity Diversity and Inclusion work group, consisting of state and county agencies, met consistently throughout 2024 and is an engaged group eager to discuss ways to collaborate and share resources between agencies.

Topics Covered:

- The Jefferson County Open Space ally program for LGBTQ youth and the RAD Program (Recreational Adventures for Visitors Experiencing Disabilities).
- The City of Fort Collins partnership building with the Indigenous community.
- Boulder County's Cultural Responsiveness & Inclusion Strategic Plan (CRISP).
- Boulder County's Indigenous Ways & Land Commitment Team.
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife's listening sessions with members of the Hispanic/Latinx community regarding the Eldorado Canyon State Park timed entry system.
- Larimer County Department of Natural Resource's ISTAR program (Indigenous Science, Arts, Technology, and Resilience).
- Colorado's Outdoors Strategy's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource and Action Guide.



05 FUTURE



Growth and evolution

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

A GUIDING VISION



As the Conservation and Recreation Vision for the NoCo region is utilized by the individual agencies in their plans and projects, the way in which it is used will be shared out by the coalition.

TELLING THE UNTOLD STORIES



NoCo Places is committed to uncovering and telling the stories that make up the NoCo region's rich cultural history, including tribal and indigenous people's history, the various communities on these lands, and historic use of the land.

In 2025 those stories will be collected with the help of History Colorado, and NoCo Places will determine how best to share those stories with the community and visitors to public lands.

EDUCATION TOURS



Increasing understanding and awareness of the challenges facing the NoCo region is an important goal in 2025. Planning has begun for offering a variety of field tours look at hot spot areas, visitation issues, and successes in the NoCo region. These field trips will be open to the NoCo Partners and staff from all nine agencies.

ADDRESSING UNAUTHORIZED TRAILS



The data from the agencies that participated in the unauthorized trails mapping project will be combined with the existing unauthorized trails data and knowledge from the other five NoCo agencies. This will provide an overview of the magnitude and locations of unauthorized trails across the region. The NoCo agencies will assess the data and collaborate on potential actions that are best for visitor experience, ecosystems, and wildlife. Their assessment will include comparing the mapped data to the conservation summary map to identify unauthorized trails that overlap with highly sensitive environments and provide detail on the impacts of those unauthorized trails. 17

06 SPOTLIGHT



Former Executive Committee member

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT

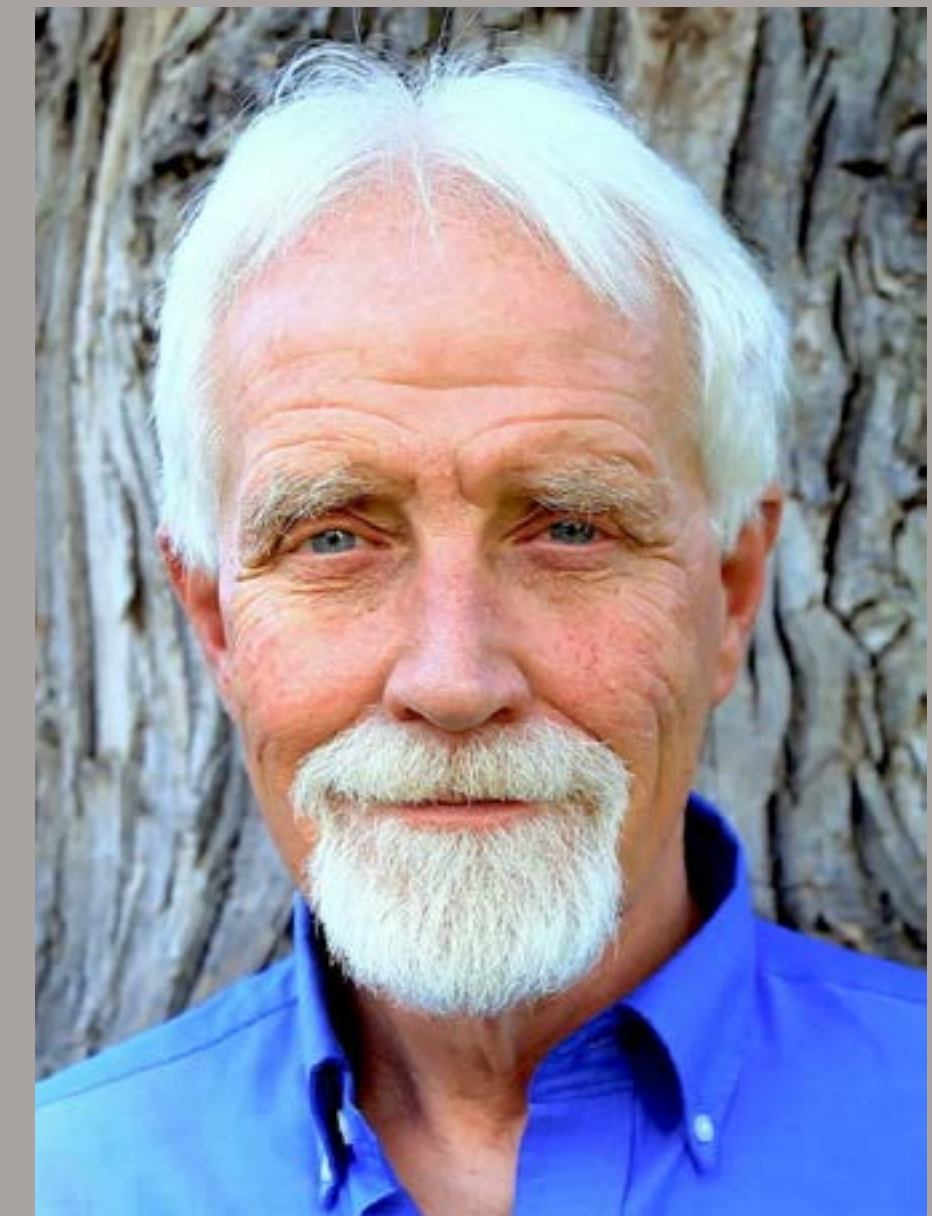
Randy Wheelock

Residing in Idaho Springs since 1971, Randy has been tireless in serving his community and advocating for Clear Creek County. In addition to two terms as a Clear Creek County Commissioner, he also served on the Idaho Springs City Council and the Clear Creek School Board, and was Chair of the I-70 Coalition, and Co-Chair of the I-70 Collaborative Effort and of NoCo Places.

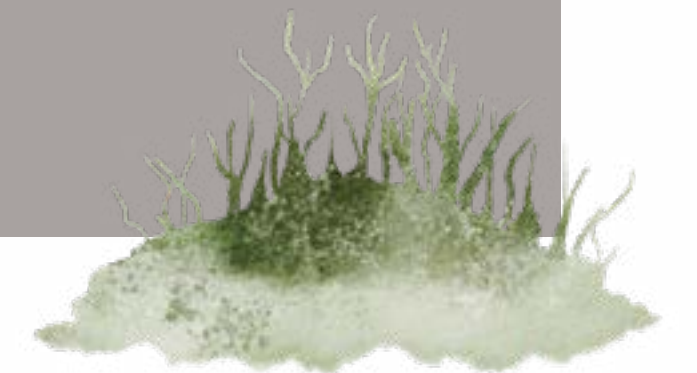
Randy has been a champion for protecting the environment and Clear Creek County's way of life. He was integral in renaming Mount Evans to Mount Blue Sky and fostering important conversations with indigenous tribal leaders.

His leadership as co-chair of NoCo Places was immensely valuable in the evolution of the coalition. NoCo would not be what it is today without his leadership. Randy was there when the coalition first formed and helped steer its direction while working collaboratively with fellow Executive Committee members. His input on endeavors such as the conservation summary mapping, the mobile phone data, stakeholder focus groups, and the overall Conservation and Recreation Vision was key.

As Randy's term ended with Clear Creek County Board of Commissioners, his position as NoCo Places co-chair also came to a close. His value to the coalition leaves a lasting impact.



NoCo Places would like to express gratitude to Randy for his incredible contributions to the coalition and for his dedication to making Colorado a better place.





Ben Hoppe



Anne Friant



Tez Hawkins



Jacob W. Frank



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