

# Cherry Creek News

## Newsflash

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### Nearly half of Colorado protected as open space



Written by Staff

Tuesday, 17 April 2007

Colorado's first statewide inventory of open space has been released by the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Board and the Natural Resource Ecology Lab (NREL) at Colorado State University that conducted the study on behalf of Lottery-funded GOCO. The inventory provides consistent, current, and comprehensive information about the status and trends of open space lands in the state and detailed maps with a comprehensive set of attributes associated with each parcel.

Nearly 30 million acres in Colorado have some form of protection by federal, state, local or private conservation organizations. Additionally, the inventory documents that roughly 1.8 million acres -- 3 percent of Colorado -- is made up of locally protected open areas through city and county governments and land trusts. These parcels are protected both through fee title ownership and through conservation easements. GOCO has helped fund roughly 460 land protection projects across the state since 1994 totaling 551,127 acres. The definition of protected lands used in the study refers to lands that are either owned by government agencies or conservation organizations, or privately owned with legal protections such as a conservation easement.

Since 2000, the number of acres of land protected by conservation easements has more than doubled. Under a conservation easement, landowners give up the right to develop their property, but not the property itself. Important public benefits related to GOCO's mission, including wildlife habitat protection and the preservation of scenic view corridors that mark the state's western heritage, are reaped through the purchase of easements.

In June 2005, after a building interest over the last decade for such an inventory including a recommendation by a Governor's Commission, the GOCO Board agreed to provide Lottery funds to conduct the study.

"GOCO is uniquely positioned as a statewide organization to work with NREL to undertake this project," said GOCO Executive Director John Swartout. "After more than a decade of work by multiple entities to protect Colorado's landscapes, the time is right to assess progress with such an inventory. Colorado citizens, land trusts, local governments, and state agencies can greatly benefit from current, consistent information about the status and trends of protected open space in order to assess remaining open space needs."

The information for the study was drawn from existing data of federal, state and local governments and nonprofit organizations. Four hundred fifty agencies were contacted for data with more than 222 spatial datasets having been compiled for the inventory by Colorado State researchers David Theobald and Grant Wilcox along with Janis Whisman from Southpaw Consulting, a Boulder County firm. For each protected area of land, the researchers collected data about the agency that owns and/or manages the land, the date it was protected, the type of conservation mechanism applied to protect the land and researchers noted whether public access was allowed on the lands. Additional legal descriptions of property gathered from County Clerk and Recorder offices was also digitized and added to the system.

"This is the most ambitious and comprehensive mapping of open space in Colorado ever undertaken, that provides critical information to help focus conservation resources where they are most needed and to document successful conservation," said Theobald. "But we aren't done yet. Through continued collaboration with our partnering organizations we are striving to maintain a current and consistent

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picture of the unfolding conservation legacy for future Coloradoans.”

The study was built on the existing Colorado Ownership, Management, and Protection (COMaP) project to avoid the collection of duplicative data that researchers at CSU have been using to map information on protected lands in Colorado since 1999. This release of data is COMaP version 6.

In addition to the report, the inventory is available through a number of digital maps and databases, including PDFs, Google Earth and ArcGIS. Researchers will host workshops to teach users how to navigate the comprehensive database.

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