

Strategic Plan for the Southwest Wetland Focus Area Committee

Version 3.5
March 2026



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Acronyms

CNHP	Colorado Natural Heritage Program
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code
IWJV	Intermountain West Joint Venture
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
PLJV	La Playa Lakes Joint Venture
SW-WFAC	Southwest Wetland Focus Area Committee
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
WFAC	Wetland Focus Area Committee

Introduction

Colorado's Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) launched a successful and still active Wetlands Program in 1997. The Wetlands Program stresses conservation of wetlands through voluntary incentive-based programs involving willing landowners and communities. The Wetlands Program fosters cooperation among individuals, interest groups, organizations, and agencies. CPW also assists in establishment of Wetland Focus Area Committees (WFAC) in key areas throughout Colorado; these WFACs consist of private landowners, interest groups, organizations, federal, state, and local (municipal) agencies, and tribal governments. While not the only source of support, the Colorado Wetlands Program plays a major role in wetland conservation across the state. The Program has two major goals:

1. "Improve the distribution and abundance of ducks, and opportunities for public waterfowl hunting."
2. "Improve the status of declining or at-risk species associated with wetlands and riparian areas."

— CPW (2011)

The target species in Goal 1 refers to nine species of ducks (Table 1). Goal 2 refers to 20 Tier 1 species/subspecies (4 birds, 3 mammals, 2 amphibians, and 11 fishes) and 13 Tier 2 species/subspecies (7 birds, no mammals, 1 amphibian, 5 reptiles, and no fish, Table 2). Also listed in Table 1 are species of greatest information need.

Mission Statement

The Southwest Wetland Focus Area Committee works with partners to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands, riparian areas, and associated uplands and to promote functional, resilient wetlands and riparian areas through education and outreach.

Purpose of Strategic Plan

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to provide a framework that will help guide the future direction and activities of the Southwest Wetland Focus Area Committee (SW-WFAC). It is an internal document meant to serve the committee; it is not intended for use as a recruitment tool or as a substitute for outreach materials such as brochures. It also does not represent all possible activities or directions that the SW-WFAC may wish to follow, currently or in the future. Similarly, primary goals may be achieved using less than all potential strategies.

The Wetland Focus Area Concept

Originally, WFACs were designated by CPW to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and to concentrate efforts in local areas needing conservation.

Historically, ten WFACs have existed in Colorado, with the SW-WFAC being among the most recent (August 2001). Colorado's WFACs are also officially recognized by the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) and La Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV), which is critical to implementation of the NAWMP through the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA). The SW-WFAC was officially recognized by Intermountain West Joint Venture in 2002.

Since inception of the state wetland program and formation of WFACs, an important and calculated shift has occurred from targeting habitat for waterfowl to a more comprehensive approach benefiting other wildlife species, including other birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, and amphibians. More recently, IWJV and PLJV both adopted all-bird approaches (PLJV 2008, IWJV 2013).

Role of Focus Area Committees

The roles of the WFACs were clearly defined by the CPW Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program (CPW 2011):

- “Identify and generate, evaluate and prioritize funding proposals for wetlands projects at the local/regional level.
- Serve as a source for local wetlands knowledge, including quantity, quality, threats, opportunities for conservation, wildlife use, recreational significance, etc.
- Assist in site visits for grant proposals.
- Conduct education and outreach with the local community on wetlands conservation opportunities.
- Provide a forum for wetlands conservation discussions, including how national, regional, and statewide initiatives can be implemented locally on the ground, and establishing local buy-in for projects, especially those that are potentially controversial.
- Participate in forming and nurturing wetlands conservation partnerships.
- Assist the local community in the success of wetlands conservation projects.
- Develop and maintain a strategic plan.”

All of these roles are either explicitly or implicitly stated as strategies under the section, *Goals and Strategies*, in this plan.

Table 1. Priority duck species identified by the Colorado Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program, Colorado Parks and Wildlife. All duck species, except Barrow’s goldeneye, listed in table occur with regularity in the Southwest Wetland Focus Area.

Common name	Scientific name
Tier 1 (highest conservation priority)	
Blue-winged teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>
Cinnamon teal	<i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>
American wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
American green-winged teal	<i>Anas creca</i>
Lesser scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>
Tier 2 (important conservation priority)	
Barrow’s Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>

Table 2. Wetland priority species in Tiers 1 and 2, species of greatest information need, and occurrence in the Southwest Wetland Focus Area, population status, and listing status. From CPW (2025).

Common name	Scientific name	SW-WFA	Vulnerability score	Listing status*
Tier 1 (highest conservation need)				
Birds				
Black swift	<i>Cypseloides niger</i>	√	5	
Eastern black rail	<i>Laterallus jamaicensis jamaicensis</i>		7	FT
Southwestern willow flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii extimus</i>	√	4.5	FE, SE
Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i>	√	6.5	FT
Mammals				
Beaver	<i>Castor canadensis</i>	√		
Preble’s meadow jumping mouse	<i>Zapus hudsonius preblei</i>		2.5	FT, ST
New Mexico meadow jumping mouse	<i>Zapus hudsonius luteus</i>	√	4	FE, SE
Amphibians				
Boreal toad (S. Rocky Mtn. Population)	<i>Anaxyrus boreas boreas</i>	√	9	SE
Northern leopard frog	<i>Lithobates pipiens</i>	√	5	
Fish				
Arkansas darter	<i>Etheostoma cragini</i>		9	ST
Bluehead Sucker	<i>Catostomus discobolus</i>	√	5	
Bonytail	<i>Gila elegans</i>		9	FE, SE
Brassy minnow	<i>Hybognathus hankinsoni</i>		3	ST
Northern redbelly dace	<i>Phoxinus eos</i>		9	SE
Orangespotted Sunfish	<i>Lepomis humilis</i>		5	
Orangethroat Darter	<i>Etheostoma spectabile</i>		3	
Plains Topminnow	<i>Fundulus sciadicus</i>		9	
Rio Grande Chub	<i>Gila pandora</i>	√	3	
Rio Grande Sucker	<i>Catostomus plebeius</i>	√	7	SE
Southern redbelly dace	<i>Phoxinus erythrogaster</i>		9	SE
Tier 2 (important conservation need but more stable)				
Birds				
Greater sandhill crane	<i>Antigone canadensis tabida</i>	√	1	
Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	√	2	

Common name	Scientific name	SW-WFA	Vulnerability score	Listing status*
Northern harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	√	1	
Piping plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>		6.5	FT, ST
Virginia's warbler	<i>Leiothlypis virginiae</i>	√	2	
White-faced ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	√	4	
Wilson's phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	√	0.5	
Mammals				
N/A				
Amphibians				
Western narrow-mouthed toad	<i>Gastrophryne olivacea</i>	√	2	
Reptiles				
N/A				
Fish				
N/A				
Greatest Information Need				
Birds				
American dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>	√	2.5	
Clark's grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>	√	4.5	
Cliff swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	√	3	
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	√	3	
Lewis's woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	√	1.5	
Marsh wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	√	2	
Western grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	√	4	
Wilson's snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>	√	1	
Mammals				
N/A				
Amphibians				
Canyon tree frog	<i>Dryophytes arenicolor</i>	√	5	
Reptiles				
Black-necked garter snake	<i>Thamnophis cyrtopsis</i>	√	2	
Red-sided (common) garter snake	<i>Thamnophis sirtalis</i>		2.5	
Smooth softshell turtle	<i>Apalone mutica</i>		1.5	
Yellow mud turtle	<i>Kinosternon flavescens</i>		1	
Fish				
N/A				

*Listing Status: ST = State Threatened; SE = State Endangered; FT = Federally Threatened; FE = Federally Endangered.

Boundaries

The geographic focus of the SW-WFAC is the San Juan drainage west to the Utah border and south to the New Mexico border and includes parts of eight counties (Figure 1) and 11 watersheds (Figure 2). These boundaries, however, are not always strictly adhered to, and when a potential project extends beyond the borders (particularly when a wetland system or watershed crosses a border), the SW-WFAC may be interested in working with partners on the other side of the border.



Figure 1. Map of counties in the Southwest Wetland Focus Area.

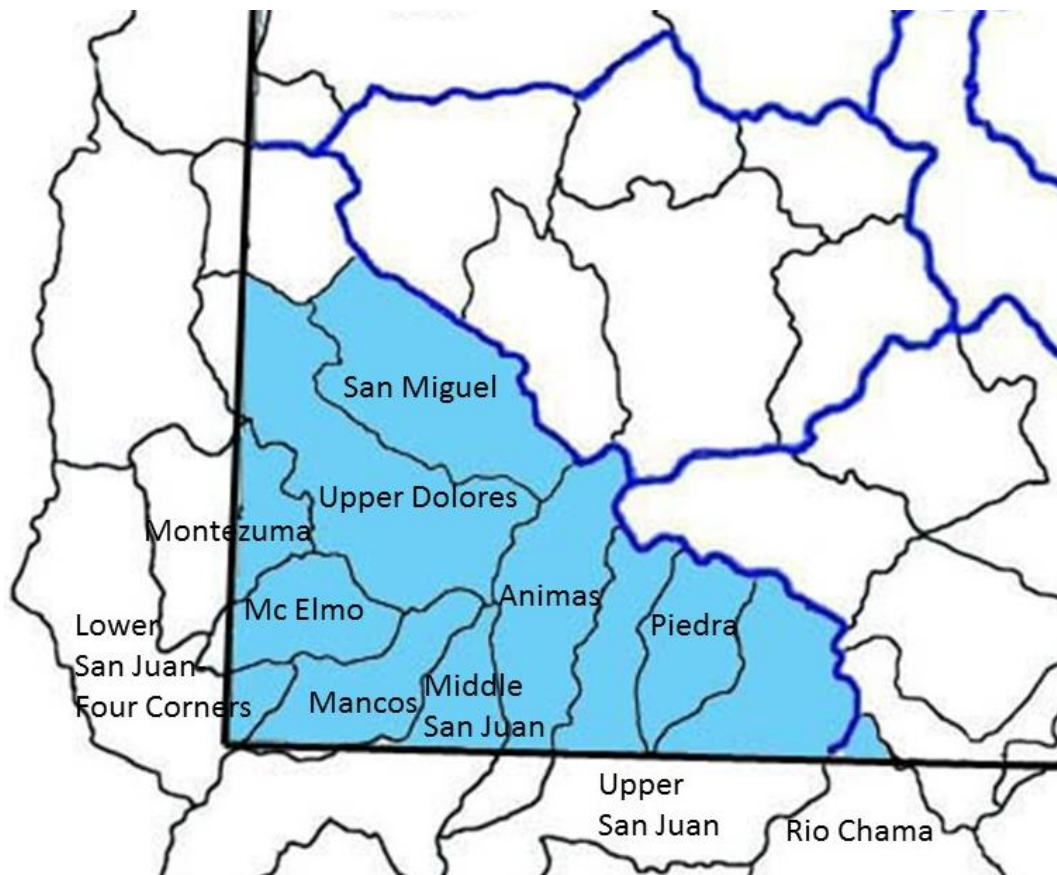


Figure 2. Map of Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs) in the Southwest Wetland Focus Area.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Conservation of wetlands and riparian areas

Assist landowners and managers of public and tribal lands in the restoration and enhancement of wetlands and riparian areas to improve and/or maintain biodiversity, water quality, and native habitat for wetland-dependent wildlife that will be resilient through environmental change over time.

Strategies for Goal 1

Identify

- Identify and maintain an inventory of potential projects.
- Define spatial planning units.
- Identify areas of potential connectivity using the following tools:
 - Conservation Registry: update projects
 - Work with state coordinator and Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) to get wetland maps digitized.
 - Create maps.
 - Use CNHP inventories where they have been done.
 - Work with other partners who have data, e.g., USACE.
- Develop and maintain working relationships with landowners/managers.
- Use additional resources to identify projects:
 - Irrigation districts
 - Land conservancies
 - CPW personnel
 - Other outreach strategies (see below)
- Identify threats to wetlands in the Focus Area

Plan

- Assist landowners/managers with project planning and funding applications.
- Develop Management Handbook based on the following goals in CPW (2011):
 - Select priority and focal species (*Strategy BP2*).
 - Identify limiting factors and appropriate management strategies (*Strategy BP4*).
 - Formulate habitat objectives (*Strategy CD5*).
 - Develop conservation project monitoring program (*Strategy M2*).
- Evaluate and prioritize wetlands projects for funding, specifically CPW wetland funding.

Deliver

- Assist landowners/managers by defining and helping secure resources to accomplish their project goals; this may involve one or more of the following:
 - Funding through the Colorado Wetland Wildlife Conservation Program
 - Referral to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Partners for Fish and Wildlife for private lands
 - Funding through other sources

Maintain

- Assist landowners/managers with resources to maintain their project goals; this may involve one or more of the following:
 - Management recommendations

- Monitoring recommendations
- Coordination of volunteers
- Management and monitoring reference material, e.g., relevant species profiles.
- Develop and maintain cohesive relationships with technical and financial partners.

Goal 2: Education and outreach

Provide education and outreach that will facilitate our efforts in conservation of wetlands and riparian areas. This may include landowners/managers, K-12 and college students, professionals in the wetland business, and the general public.

Strategies for Goal 2

Education

- Provide education to the public and landowners/managers about assistance from the WFAC regarding project planning, management, and funding.
- Identify potential demonstration sites, e.g., Animas Wetlands, James Ranch, Craig wetlands.
- Hold educational workshops for landowners and professionals with an interest in wetlands every 2–5 years.
- Coordinate with local educators, starting with Fort Lewis College (senior projects).

Outreach

- Provide project tours to the public at least once during summer.
- Assist Animas Wetlands with their annual tour.
- Develop tools to increase knowledge of and sustain the Wetland Focus Area Committee.
 - Advertise through local sources throughout Focus Area.
 - Update brochure with stickers (contact needs to be updated).
 - Key members of the WFAC will take stack and hand out opportunistically.
 - Other sources to place brochure include
 - Public Lands Center
 - Southwest Conservation Corps
 - Land conservancies
 - Update and maintain website: swcoloradowetlands.org
 - Provide business cards for regular WFAC members.
 - Recruit additional key players to WFAC.

Partners

The SW-WFAC has historically partnered with over 125 agencies and organizations. For the purpose of maintaining this history, these partners, including historic names as written in 2003, are listed in Appendix 1.

Partners currently involved with the program are listed in Table 3, and a list of potential partners targeted for recruitment is provided in Table 4. The SW-WFAC invites all new partners, whether or not they are identified in these lists. These lists will be updated as needed on the website and in the next version of the Strategic Plan.

Table 3. Recently or currently active WFAC partners.

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies	Mesa Verde National Park
Bureau of Reclamation	Mountain Studies Institute
Chama Peak Land Alliance	National Park Service
Colorado Natural Heritage Program	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Colorado Parks and Wildlife	Private landowners
Colorado Partners for Fish and Wildlife	Southern Ute Tribe
Ducks Unlimited	Southwest Conservation Corps
Environmental consultants	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Fort Lewis College	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Intermountain West Joint Venture	

Table 4. Potential WFAC partners targeted for recruitment.

Animas River Stakeholders Group	Montezuma Land Conservancy
Boy Scouts of America	RiversEdge West
Bureau of Land Management	San Juan Citizens Alliance
Durango Nature Studies	San Juan Mountains Association
Environmental Protection Agency	Southwest Water Conservancy
La Plata Open Space Conservancy	The Nature Conservancy
La Plata Water Conservancy	U.S. Forest Service

Continued collaboration with existing and new partners will be important to achieving the goals in this strategic plan.

Literature cited

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- CPW (Colorado Parks and Wildlife). 2025. Colorado State Wildlife Action Plan: 2025 Revision. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Natural Resources. <https://cpw.state.co.us/state-wildlife-action-plan>.
- IWJV (Intermountain West Joint Venture). 2013. Implementation Plan – Strengthening Science and Partnerships. Intermountain West Joint Venture, Missoula, MT.

Johnson, R. R., L. T. Haight, and J. M. Simpson. 1977. Endangered species vs. endangered habitats: A concept. *In* Importance, preservation and management of riparian habitat. Pp. 68-79. USDA Forest Service General Technical Report RM-43.

PLJV (Playa Lakes Joint Venture). 2008. Playa Lakes Joint Venture: Area Implementation Plan for the Shortgrass Prairie Bird Conservation Region (18) of Colorado.

Appendix 1

Historic partners of the Southwest Wetland Focus Area, as of 2003.

Animal Damage Advisory Committee	Mesa Verde National Park
Animas Conservancy	Montezuma Land Conservancy
Animas La Plata Water Conservancy	National Park Service
Animas River Stakeholders Group	Natural Resources Conservation Service
B.U.G.S. Consulting	Plateau Environmental Services
Boy Scouts of America -- Troop 538	Private landowners
Bureau of Land Management	Rhea Environmental Consulting
Bureau of Reclamation	Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory
City of Durango	San Juan Basin Research Center
Colorado Department of Natural Resources	San Juan Citizens Alliance
Colorado Division of Wildlife	San Juan Mountains Association
Colorado Natural Heritage Program	San Miguel Conservation Foundation
Colorado Partners for Fish and Wildlife	Southern Ute Tribe
Colorado State Parks	Southwest Restoration Services, Inc.
Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation	Southwest Water Conservancy
Diné College	Sugnet Environmental
Ducks Unlimited	Tamarisk Coalition
Durango Nature Studies	The Nature Conservancy
Ecosphere Environmental Services	Town of Ignacio
Environmental consultants	Town of Rico
Environmental Protection Agency	Turtle Lake Refuge
Fort Lewis College	U.S. Forest Service
Friends of the Animas River	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Intermountain West Joint Venture	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
La Plata County Extension	Water Resources Division
La Plata County Planning Department	Whole New Concepts LLC
La Plata Water Conservancy	