October 3, 2025

Governor Jared Polis
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Denver, CO 80203

Jeff Davis, Director
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
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Great Outdoors Colorado
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Dan Gibbs, Executive Director
Department of Natural Resources
1313 Sherman Street, Room 718
Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Convening Partners of Colorado's Outdoors Strategy,

The undersigned hunting, fishing, and wildlife conservation organizations and members of the Colorado Wildlife Conservation Project (CWCP) write to share our collective requests for increased public involvement and transparency to ensure the successful implementation of Colorado's Outdoors Strategy (COS).

The CWCP is the state's largest alliance of hunting, angling, and wildlife conservation organizations representing tens of thousands of outdoors enthusiasts across the state. We share a common interest in conserving wildlife and wildlife habitats, and in preserving our hunting, angling, and conservation heritage. For more information, please visit: https://www.cowildlifeconservationproject.org/

Hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing are important parts of the state's strong recreation economy and culture, totaling over $10 billion of spending annually.[1] Fish and wildlife drive more economic spending each year than the Colorado ski industry, but without adequate habitat conservation measures in place, the valued traditions and economic benefits provided by Colorado's iconic fish and wildlife populations will be at risk. We can philosophically support the vision of advancing conservation, sustainable recreation, and climate resilience together, if these values are considered and incorporated into plans and projects holistically through thoughtfully planned, high-quality, regionally developed, and regionally beneficial proposals.

Our primary interests in supporting successful implementation of COS are:

1. Advancing and celebrating top-caliber projects that have earned the support of hunting, fishing, and other wildlife conservation interests,
2. Making sure a wide range of stakeholders are given the chance to engage in the development and funding of Regional Partnership Initiative (RPI) proposals and COS implementation grants, not just those who have been selected for or historically involved in their local RPI, and

[1] *Southwick Associates. September 26, 2024. The 2023 Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation in Colorado [Table 3]. https://engagecpw.org/21201/widgets/69113/documents/59922*

3. Giving all Colorado stakeholders the chance to review proposals and flag concerns before proposals are scored, thereby increasing transparency and public trust that these state funds are being spent responsibly and meaningfully.

In order for the vision outlined in Colorado's Outdoors Strategy to be realized and for Great Outdoors Colorado's 5-year funding initiative to be hailed as a success, the state needs to demonstrate to community members and stakeholders right from the start that state leaders are carefully evaluating funding proposals and holding these to a particularly high standard. For the COS to be considered successful by CWCP members and the tens of thousands of Coloradans we proudly represent, we believe projects selected for funding under the banner of COS implementation must not advance one pillar at the expense of others, or concentrate habitat impacts in certain regions without mitigating local adverse impacts to wildlife, hunting and fishing opportunities, and/or other natural resources in that same region. Furthermore, as COS and RPIs in some areas are still very new, it's imperative that the state deliberately and strategically take extra care right now to make sure members of the public trust the processes and understand how exactly these initiatives can provide opportunities for *all* stakeholders. There remains some uncertainty and/or skepticism about *who* the COS and RPIs are intended to benefit, despite the convening partners' good intentions and hope that all stakeholders can benefit.

To broaden buy-in and increase transparency with the public, the undersigned organizations ask that:

- **COS roadshow events are <u>all</u> open to the public**, not restricted to official RPI members in some areas, as some RPIs are still very exclusive.
- **Colorado Outdoor Partnership (CO-OP) members are given the opportunity to contribute to the RPI/COS proposal evaluation criteria** for both the CO-OP scoring committee and coordinating partners well ahead of the next grant application period.
- **Colorado Parks and Wildlife regional wildlife management staff are given the opportunity to provide written feedback on all RPI/COS applications** before they are evaluated by scoring committees.
- **Convening partners consider funding enforcement capacity and recreational trail and/or range stewardship and maintenance** initiatives where appropriate, not just capital expenses or one-time investments.
- **Grant application materials and evaluation guidance clearly distinguish between conservation projects and recreation management or stewardship projects.** For example, projects providing new conservation benefits could include conservation easements, a new seasonal area or trail closure to protect wildlife, new wildlife guzzlers, and fisheries restoration work with bank stabilization structures or riparian vegetation added. Recreation management and stewardship projects on the other hand, which may have conservation benefits compared to the status quo but are needed due to recreational use, could include trail maintenance to protect stream health, new gates or signs to help increase compliance with existing closures, re-routing trails to protect natural resources, and enforcement. Both categories of projects are very valuable and important, however those that create *new* and increased long-term conservation benefits should be given a higher *conservation* score than those that seek to manage recreation-oriented conflicts, impacts, or needs. The latter should be given higher *recreation* scores.
- **Evaluation criteria significantly favor project proposals and plans that provide conservation <u>and</u> recreational benefits**, while avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating adverse impacts to wildlife. Projects

that only advance recreation, for example, should be ranked lower than those that provide conservation *and* recreation benefits.

- **Project proposals for RPI funding under the COS implementation umbrella require letters of support from regional or state-wide organizations that represent different land use and interest groups** (for example, hunting, fishing, agriculture, local businesses, etc.), in addition to letters of support from local stakeholders and key entities including federal, state, tribal, local land managers, and local governments.
- **Project proposals for RPI and COS funding be submitted to a public-facing portal to give members of the public the opportunity to review and provide feedback on proposals as soon as they're submitted,** potentially before the CO-OP scoring committee evaluates them. This could flag controversy or critical issues early in the evaluation and funding process so that CO-OP members, CPW staff, GOCO staff, etc. can investigate and discuss. Ideally though, this will help reassure the public that the majority of proposals are thoughtfully developed and community-driven while giving other RPI members or members of the public who are not yet involved in RPIs ideas for projects they could potentially advance in their areas. Exceptions would of course have to be made for real estate transaction proposals that would be negatively affected by public disclosure.
- **The criteria used for evaluating these proposals, and the project proposal scores and ranks given by the CO-OP and Convening Partners scoring committees be posted publicly on the CO-OP website** and available for the public to see *before* the GOCO Board considers final approval.
- **CO-OP member names and a CO-OP email address (one for the whole CO-OP) are provided on the CO-OP's website**, so stakeholders can contact the entire CO-OP about proposals or concerns if they arise.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the suggestions above, and we are open to discussing other ways we may be able to contribute to ensuring that the implementation of Colorado's Outdoors Strategy is a meaningful success that endures beyond the current administration.

Sincerely,

CWCP organizational members:

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Coloradans for Responsible Wildlife Management
Colorado State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation
Colorado Outfitters Association
Colorado State Muzzle Loading Association
Colorado Trappers and Predator Hunters Association
Ducks Unlimited
Gunnison Wildlife Association
Keep Routt Wild
Muley Fanatic Foundation
Rocky Mountain Big Game Recovery
Rocky Mountain Bighorn Society
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Safari Club International
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

CWCP professional members:

Dean Riggs
Gaspar Perricone
John Howard
Rick Cables
Ron Velarde