



  
Colorado State Parks

**COLORADO'S  
OUTDOOR  
RECREATION  
FUTURE**

*Strategies for  
Colorado's Outdoors  
Heritage*



## Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan **2003 SCORP**







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# STATE OF COLORADO

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## EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

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Bill Owens  
Governor

Dear Friends:

Coloradans are justifiably proud of our outdoors heritage. Our dramatic landscapes of towering mountains, wild river canyons, and wide open prairies are world renowned. Yet these special places also define our quality of life. Not only do we find personal reward out enjoying our great outdoors, but we understand that they are an integral part of Colorado's diverse economy.

Colorado is known for its commitment to protecting public parks, forest lands, waterways and the wildlife that dwells among them. But just as important for Coloradans are the local parks, trails and open spaces that sustain our healthy lifestyle.

In 2000, my Commission on Saving Open Space, Farms and Ranches reported on the vital progress Colorado has already made in protecting and preserving our undeveloped lands and recommended additional tools that are already being used to build on those efforts.

In much the same way, this *Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Future* report focuses attention on the tremendous role that outdoor recreation plays in our lives and in our economy. It documents Coloradans' love of the outdoors and the broad efforts taken to solicit their opinions about what matters most to them about maintaining our outdoors heritage.

Fortunately, local and regional efforts are already underway to invest in the parks, trails and open spaces that will meet the needs of our growing population. But there is much left to be done. I fully endorse the *Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Future* strategies to engage community leaders, public land agencies, business interests and non-profits in collaborative partnerships to sustain our special outdoors quality of life.

See you in the outdoors!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bill Owens".

Bill Owens





## Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

**SCORP**

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## ***Acknowledgments***

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction and Background</b> .....	<b>9</b>
• Vision, Goals and Objectives.....	9
• Process Components.....	10
• Contents of Plan.....	10
• Background of LWCF.....	11
<b>Chapter 2: Recreation Issues and Needs</b> .....	<b>13</b>
• Influences on Recreation in Colorado.....	13
■ Demographic Trends and Population Growth.....	13
– National Trends.....	13
– Colorado Trends.....	14
■ The Nexus of Tourism and Outdoor Recreation.....	19
■ Open Space.....	24
■ Recreation Access.....	26
■ Public Health.....	27
■ Drought.....	28
■ Water Demand.....	29
■ Forest Health.....	29
■ Forest Pests.....	30
■ Fish and Wildlife Stresses.....	31
• Participation and Trends in Outdoor Recreation.....	33
■ National Participation and Trends.....	33
– National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE).....	33
■ Colorado Participation and Trends.....	37
– Outdoor Recreation Trends.....	37
– Trends by Activity.....	40
▼ Bicycling.....	40
▼ Trail Use.....	41
▼ Wildlife Watching.....	42
▼ Hunting and Fishing.....	42
▼ Whitewater Rafting.....	44
▼ Downhill Skiing.....	44
▼ Motorized Sports.....	45
▼ OHV Use.....	45
▼ Cross-Country Skiing and Snowmobiling.....	46
▼ Camping.....	46
▼ Volunteerism.....	48
▼ Youth Corps.....	48
– Visitation Trends.....	48

---

## **Chapter 2: Recreation Issues and Needs (CONT.)**

■ Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Assessment (SCORA) .....	49
■ Colorado State Parks Market Assessment Study .....	49
- Methodology.....	49
- Key Findings.....	49
■ Colorado State Parks Five-year Acquisition and Development Plan .....	59
■ Colorado State Parks Local Government Survey.....	60
- Overview .....	60
- Survey Results.....	60

## **Chapter 3: Colorado's Recreation Regions.....65**

• Introduction .....	65
• Front Range .....	71
• Northeast Region .....	87
• Northwest Region .....	101
• South Central Region .....	121
• Southeast Region.....	141
• Southwest Region.....	159

## **Chapter 4: Colorado's Recreation Providers..... 177**

• Federal Agency Recreation Providers .....	179
• State Agency Recreation Providers.....	187
• Local Government Recreation Providers.....	198
• Outdoor Recreation Businesses.....	201
• Private Sector and Non-profit Organizations .....	205

## **Chapter 5: Statewide Strategic Plan ..... 211**

• Social, Economic and Environmental Backdrop .....	211
• Strategic Actions.....	212
• Collaborative Regional Forums Strategy.....	214
• Issue Descriptions and Action Frameworks .....	216

## **Chapter 6: Implementation Plan..... 225**

• Implementation Timeline and Action .....	225
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## **Appendices**

A. SCORA Table of Contents .....	229
B. Local Government Survey Report.....	233
C. Wetlands Component.....	267
D. Information Resources.....	273
E. References .....	313



# MAPS, FIGURES AND TABLES

## *Maps*

• Map 1: Land Ownership in Colorado .....	5
• Map 2: Colorado's SCORP Regions. ....	7
• Map 3: Public Land and Recreation Demand Hotspots. ....	13
• Map 4: Population Growth by County Between 1990-2000 .....	14
• Map 5: An Assessment of Fire Danger in Colorado .....	30
• Map 6: Demand for Land Activities Based on Participation Rates.....	36
• Map 7: Colorado's Fourteeners.....	41
• Map 8: Land Features in Colorado.....	66
• Map 9: Population Totals by County .....	67
• Map 10: Population Density.....	67
• Map 11: Median Age .....	68
• Map 12: Front Range Recreation Attractions.....	72
• Map 13: Northeast Recreation Attractions. ....	88
• Map 14: Northwest Recreation Attractions. ....	102
• Map 15: South Central Recreation Attractions. ....	122
• Map 16: Southeast Recreation Attractions.....	142
• Map 17: Southwest Recreation Attractions.....	160
• Map 18: Federal Lands in Colorado.....	178
• Map 19: Colorado State Parks. ....	188
• Map 20: Division of Wildlife Areas....	192
• Map 21: Colorado's Ski Areas. ....	203
• Map 22: Major Whitewater Rafting Rivers in Colorado.....	204
• Map 23: Colorado Vegetation .....	267
• Map 24: Known Riparian Wetlands in Colorado. ....	269

---

## *Figures*

• Figure 1: Historical Population Growth .....	14
• Figure 2: Percentage Growth by SCORP Region.....	15
• Figure 3: Colorado’s Projected Housing Density from 1960-2050.....	16
• Figure 4: Growth from 1998- 2002.....	17
• Figure 5: Population Forecasts by Percent Change Through 2015.....	17
• Figure 6: Colorado Ethnicity in 2000.....	18
• Figure 7: The Aging of Colorado’s Baby Boomer Population.....	18
• Figure 8: The Interface of Tourism and Recreation.....	19
• Figure 9: The Tourism and Recreation Matrix.....	23
• Figure 10: Eisenhower Tunnel Traffic Continues to Increase.....	26
• Figure 12: More Climbers are Ascending 14’ers.....	41
• Figure 13: Total Fishing License Sales Remain Steady.....	43
• Figure 14: Resident Hunting License Sales.....	43
• Figure 15: Non-resident Hunting License Sales are Declining.....	43
• Figure 16: Resident and Non-Resident License Revenue.....	43
• Figure 17: Tracking Skier Visits at Colorado Ski County USA Resorts.....	44
• Figure 18: Motorized Vehicle Registrations Continue to Grow.....	45
• Figure 19: State Parks Visitation has Increased Slightly Since 1998.....	48
• Figure 20: National Park Service Visitation Declines Slightly.....	48
• Figure 21: Tracking Skier Visits at Ski Country USA Resorts.....	49
• Figure 22: Percentage of Coloradans Visiting State Parks.....	51
• Figure 23: Participation in Activities at Parks.....	51
• Figure 24: Segmenting State Park Visitors (% of Population).....	51
• Figure 25: Value of State Parks Visits.....	52
• Figure 26: Park Visitation Increases/Decreases Due to Proposed Features.....	52
• Figure 27: Investments in Improving State Parks.....	53
• Figure 28: The Interface of Tourism and Recreation.....	65
• Figure 29: Percentages of Public Land Divided by SCORP Region.....	70

---

• Figure 30: The Availability of Public Land per Person .....	70
• Figure 31: Northern Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	74
• Figure 32: Northern Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	74
• Figure 33: Northern Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	74
• Figure 34: Northern Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	75
• Figure 35: Northern State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	75
• Figure 36: Denver Metro Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	76
• Figure 37: Denver Metro Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	76
• Figure 38: Denver Metro Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	77
• Figure 39: Den/Metro Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999.....	77
• Figure 40: Denver Metro State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	77
• Figure 41: Northeast Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	90
• Figure 42: Northeast Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	90
• Figure 43: Northeast Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999.....	90
• Figure 44: Northeast Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	91
• Figure 45: Northeast State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	91
• Figure 46: Northern Tier Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	104
• Figure 47: Northern Tier Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	105
• Figure 48: Northern Tier Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	105
• Figure 49: Northern Tier Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	106
• Figure 50: Northern Tier State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000....	106
• Figure 51: Resort Community Corridor Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 ...	107
• Figure 52: Resort Community Corridor Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	107
• Figure 53: Resort Community Corridor Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 200 .....	108
• Figure 54: Resort Community Corridor Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	108
• Figure 55: Resort Community Corridor State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000. ....	108
• Figure 56: Grand Junction/Mesa County Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001..	109

---

• Figure 57: Grand Junction/Mesa County Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	109
• Figure 58: Grand Junction/Mesa County Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001.....	110
• Figure 59: Grand Junction/Mesa County Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	110
• Figure 60: Grand Junction/Mesa County Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	110
• Figure 61: Grand Junction/Mesa County State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000 .....	110
• Figure 62: San Luis Valley Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	124
• Figure 63: San Luis Valley Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	125
• Figure 64: San Luis Valley Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	126
• Figure 65: San Luis Valley State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	126
• Figure 66: Arkansas River Valley Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	127
• Figure 67: Arkansas River Valley Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	127
• Figure 68: Arkansas River Valley Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	128
• Figure 69: Arkansas River Valley Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999.....	128
• Figure 70: Arkansas River Valley State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000 .....	128
• Figure 71: Colorado Springs/El Paso County Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	129
• Figure 72: Colorado Springs/El Paso County Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	129
• Figure 73: Colorado Springs/El Paso County Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001.....	130
• Figure 74: Colorado Springs/El Paso County Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	130
• Figure 75: Colorado Springs/El Paso County State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000 .....	130
• Figure 76: Pueblo Sub-Region Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	144
• Figure 77: Pueblo Sub-Region Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	144
• Figure 78: Pueblo Sub-Region Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	144
• Figure 79: Pueblo Sub-Region Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	145
• Figure 80: Pueblo Sub-Region State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.. .....	145
• Figure 81: I-25 Corridor Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	146
• Figure 82: I-25 Corridor Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	146

---

• Figure 83: I-25 Corridor Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	147
• Figure 84: I-25 Corridor Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	147
• Figure 85: I-25 Corridor State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	147
• Figure 86: Southeast Plains Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	148
• Figure 87: Southeast Plains Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.. .....	148
• Figure 88: Southeast Plains Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001 .....	149
• Figure 89: Southeast Plains Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999.....	149
• Figure 90: Southeast Plains State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	149
• Figure 91: West Central Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001 .....	162
• Figure 92: West Central Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	163
• Figure 93: West Central Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001. ....	163
• Figure 94: West Central Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999.....	164
• Figure 95: West Central State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	164
• Figure 96: Four Corners Employment Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	165
• Figure 97: Four Corners Income Shares by Major Industry and Household Groups, 2001.....	165
• Figure 98: Four Corners Median Household Income and Cost-of-Living Indices by County, 2001.. .....	166
• Figure 99: Four Corners Employment Shares Generated by Tourism and Travel Categories, 1999 .....	166
• Figure 100: Four Corners State and Local Taxes Generated by Tourism and Travel, 2000.....	166
• Figure 101: Land Status in Colorado.....	177
• Figure 102: Trails Grants Awarded Since 1992.....	189
• Figure 103: Private Campground Revenue in Colorado, 1996-2000.....	202

## ***Tables***

• Table 1: Colorado Land and Water Conservation Fund Apportionment.....	12
• Table 2: Projected Population Growth by Percentage.....	17
• Table 3: Fastest Growing Activities from 1982-2002 Among all Categories.....	34
• Table 4: National Population Trends from 1994-95 and 2000-02.....	34
• Table 5: The Most Popular Types of Outdoor Participation. ....	36
• Table 6: The Most Popular Overall Activities.....	36
• Table 7: Participation by Type of Outdoor Resource Base Among Colorado Residents.....	37



---

• Table 8: Participation by type of Outdoor Activity Among Colorado Resident.....	38
• Table 9: Percent Change in Participation in Outdoor Recreation Activities in Colorado.....	38
• Table 10: Expenditures and Participants in 2001 for Hunting and Fishing in Colorado.....	42
• Table 11: 2001 Economic Impacts of Watchable Wildlife Recreation in Colorado.....	42
• Table 12: River Outfitter Licenses.....	44
• Table 13: OHV Registrations Recorded by Colorado State Parks.....	45
• Table 14: Boat Registrations from 1995-2002.....	46
• Table 15: Number and Percent of Rocky Mountain Region Residents Participating in Outdoor Recreation by Activity in all Areas.....	47
• Table 16: Projected Winter Recreation Use on USFS Lands in the Rocky Mountain Region.....	47
• Table 17: Estimated Winter Recreation Opportunities on USFS Lands in Colorado.....	47
• Table 18: Information Sources Used When Planning Leisure Activities (%).....	54
• Table 19: Participation in Outdoor Recreation Activities in Last Twelve Months (%).....	54
• Table 20: First Choice Outdoor Destinations.....	55
• Table 21: Increased Visitation with Proposed Features.....	56
• Table 22: Motivations for Choosing Out-of-Home Leisure Activities.....	57
• Table 23: Participation in Leisure Activities (Average Number of Times per Month).....	58
• Table 24: State Parks Capital Spending Priorities.....	59
• Table 25: Land and Facilities Managed by Local Governments.....	61
• Table 26: Prioritized Local Government Issues.....	62
• Table 27: Prioritized Local Government Needs.....	63
• Table 28: Inception Dates for Grant Programs.....	69
• Table 29: Front Range Region Projected Population Estimates and Percent Changes.....	73
• Table 30: Front Range Region Population and Demographics 2000 Census Data by County .....	73
• Table 31: Front Range Region Demographic Profile of State Parks Visitors.....	78
• Table 32: Front Range Region Why Locals and Tourists Visit State Parks. ....	79
• Table 33: Front Range Region What People Plan to do During State Park Visits.....	79
• Table 34: Front Range Region First Choice Outdoor Recreation Destinations.....	80
• Table 35: Front Range Region Information Sources Used When Planning Leisure Activities. ....	80

---

• Table 36: Front Range Region Outdoor Recreation Activities Participated in During the Last Two Years.....	81
• Table 37: Front Range Region Participation in Leisure Activities .....	81
• Table 38: Front Range Region Motivation for Choosing Out-of-Home Leisure Activities.....	82
• Table 39: Front Range Region Increased Visitation to State Parks on the Basis of Proposed Features.....	82
• Table 40: Front Range Region Grant Information by County.....	83
• Table 41: Front Range Region Land and Facilities by SCORP Region.....	83
• Table 42: Front Range Region Agency Characteristics by SCORP Region.....	84
• Table 43: Front Range Region Ranked Priority Issues for Local Governments.....	85
• Table 44: Front Range Region Ranked Priority Needs for Local Governments.....	86
• Table 45: Northeast Region Projected Population Estimates and Percent Changes.....	87
• Table 46: Northeast Region Population and Demographics 2000 Census Data by County.....	89
• Table 47: Northeast Region Demographic Profile of State Parks Visitors.....	92
• Table 48: Northeast Region Why Locals and Tourists Visit State Parks.....	93
• Table 49: Northeast Region What People Plan to do During State Park Visits.....	93
• Table 50: Northeast Region Information Sources Used When Planning Leisure Activities.....	94
• Table 51: Northeast Region First Choice Outdoor Recreation Destinations.....	94
• Table 52: Northeast Region Participation in Leisure Activities.....	95
• Table 53: Northeast Region Outdoor Recreation Activities Participated in During the Last Two Years.....	95
• Table 54: Northeast Region Increased Visitation to State Parks on the Basis of Proposed Features..	96
• Table 55: Northeast Region Motivation for Choosing Out-of-Home Leisure Activities...	96
• Table 56: Northeast Region Grant Information by County.....	97
• Table 57: Northeast Region Land and Facilities by SCORP Region.....	97
• Table 58: Northeast Region Agency Characteristics by SCORP Region.....	98
• Table 59: Northeast Region Ranked Priority Issues for Local Governments.....	99
• Table 60: Northeast Region Ranked Priority Needs for Local Governments.....	100
• Table 61: Northwest Region Projected Population Estimates and Percent Changes.....	101
• Table 62: Northwest Region Population and Demographics 2000 Census Data by County.....	103
• Table 63: Northwest Region Demographic Profile of State Parks Visitors.....	111

---

• Table 64: Northwest Region Why Locals and Tourists Visit State Parks.....	112
• Table 65: Northwest Region What People Plan to do During State Park Visits.....	112
• Table 66: Northwest Region First Choice Outdoor Recreation Destinations.....	113
• Table 67: Northwest Region Information Sources Used When Planning Leisure Activities.....	113
• Table 68: Northwest Region Outdoor Recreation Activities Participated in During the Last Two Years.....	114
• Table 69: Northwest Region Participation in Leisure Activities.....	114
• Table 70: Northwest Region Motivation for Choosing Out-of-Home Leisure Activities.....	115
• Table 71: Northwest Region Increased Visitation to State Parks on the Basis of Proposed Features .....	115
• Table 72: Northwest Region Grant Information by County.....	116
• Table 73: Northwest Region Land and Facilities by SCORP Region.....	116
• Table 74: Northwest Region Agency Characteristics by SCORP Region.....	117
• Table 75: Northwest Region Ranked Priority Issues for Local Governments.....	118
• Table 76: Northwest Region Ranked Priority Needs for Local Governments.....	119
• Table 77: South Central Region Projected Population Estimates and Percent Changes.....	121
• Table 78: South Central Region Population and Demographics 2000 Census Data by County.....	123
• Table 79: South Central Region Demographic Profile of State Parks Visitors.....	131
• Table 80: South Central Region Why Locals and Tourists Visit State Parks.....	132
• Table 81: South Central Region What People Plan to do During State Park Visits.....	132
• Table 82: South Central Region First Choice Outdoor Recreation Destinations.....	133
• Table 83: South Central Region Information Sources Used When Planning Leisure Activities.....	133
• Table 84: South Central Region Outdoor Recreation Activities Participated in During the Last Two Years .....	134
• Table 85: South Central Region Participation in Leisure Activities.....	134
• Table 86: South Central Region Motivation for Choosing Out-of-Home Leisure Activities.....	135
• Table 87: South Central Region Increased Visitation to State Parks on the Basis of Proposed Features .....	135
• Table 88: South Central Region Grant Information by County.....	136
• Table 89: South Central Region Land and Facilities by SCORP Region.....	137
• Table 90: South Central Region Agency Characteristics by SCORP Region.....	138
• Table 91: South Central Region Ranked Priority Issues for Local Governments.....	139
• Table 92: South Central Region Ranked Priority Needs for Local Governments.....	139

---

• Table 93: Southeast Region Projected Population Estimates and Percent Changes.....	141
• Table 94: Southeast Region Population and Demographics 2000 Census Data by County.....	143
• Table 95: Southeast Region Demographic Profile of State Parks Visitors.....	150
• Table 96: Southeast Region Why Locals and Tourists Visit State Parks.....	151
• Table 97: Southeast Region What People Plan to do During State Park Visits.....	151
• Table 99: Southeast Region Information Sources Used When Planning Leisure Activities.....	152
• Table 100: Southeast Region First Choice Outdoor Recreation Destinations.....	152
• Table 101: Southeast Region Participation in Leisure Activities.....	153
• Table 102: Southeast Region Outdoor Recreation Activities Participated in During the Last Two Years.....	153
• Table 103: Southeast Region Increased Visitation to State Parks on the Basis of Proposed Features.....	154
• Table 104: Southeast Region Motivation for Choosing Out-of-Home Leisure Activities..	154
• Table 105: Southeast Region Grant Information by County.....	155
• Table 106: Southeast Region Land and Facilities by SCORP Region.....	155
• Table 107: Southeast Region Agency Characteristics by SCORP Region.....	156
• Table 108: Southeast Region Ranked Priority Issues for Local Governments.....	157
• Table 109: Southeast Region Ranked Priority Needs for Local Governments.....	158
• Table 110: Southwest Region Projected Population Estimates and Percent Changes.....	159
• Table 111: Southwest Region Population and Demographics 2000 Census Data by County.....	161
• Table 112: Southwest Region Demographic Profile of State Parks Visitors.....	167
• Table 113: Southwest Region Why Locals and Tourists Visit State Parks.....	168
• Table 114: Southwest Region What People Plan to do During State Park Visits.....	168
• Table 116: Southwest Region First Choice Outdoor Recreation Destinations.....	169
• Table 117: Southwest Region Information Sources Used When Planning Leisure Activities.....	169
• Table 118: Southwest Region Outdoor Recreation Activities Participated in During the Last Two years	170
• Table 119: Southwest Region Participation in Leisure Activities.....	170
• Table 120: Southwest Region Motivation for Choosing Out-of-Home Leisure Activities.....	171
• Table 121: Southwest Region Increased Visitation to State Parks on the Basis of Proposed Features.....	171
• Table 122: Southwest Region Grant Information by County.....	172
• Table 123: Southwest Region Land and Facilities by SCORP Region.....	172

---

- Table 124: Southwest Region Agency Characteristics by SCORP Region.....173
- Table 125: Southwest Region Ranked Priority Issues for Local Governments.....174
- Table 126: Southwest Region Ranked Priority Needs for Local Governments.....175
- Table 127: Recreation Facilities Managed by Local Governments.....199
- Table 128: 2002 Skier Visits.....204



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Coloradans, our heritage is centered on our connections to the spectacular landscapes that define our state. As highlighted by Governor Owens' Commission on Saving Open Spaces, Farms and Ranches, "Coloradans place tremendous value on their open spaces, farms and ranches. These undeveloped lands are the places where wildlife lives, vegetation flourishes, water and air are clean, and vistas are beautiful. Open space is essential to the state's quality of life. It is, in fact, one of the principal reasons Coloradans decide to make this place their home."

Just as significant for Coloradans are the active and passive forms of outdoor recreation in which they love to engage – 94% of the population engages in some form of outdoor recreation according to recent public polling. Colorado's proactive open space protection efforts provide the venues where the full range of Colorado's outdoor recreation attractions are enabled to flourish for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.

Not only do these unique landscapes define our communities and our quality of life, but also they are a cornerstone supporting our economy, particularly the tourism industry that has emerged as Colorado's second largest economic sector.

Yet today Colorado faces a substantial challenge in satisfying the outdoor recreation demands of a rapidly expanding population, while meeting the responsibility to conserve the world class outdoors resources for which Colorado is renowned.

Millions of visitors to Colorado continue to enjoy a wide diversity of outdoor recreation activities, yet recreation management agencies across the community, state and federal spectrum report difficulty keeping up with public expectations for quality outdoors experiences.

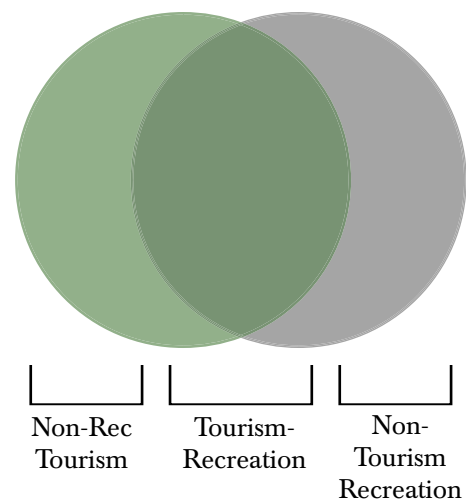
### *The Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Future Report*

This update of Colorado's *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP) is in accord with the provisions of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, which was enacted in 1964 to encourage the provision of greater recreation opportunities for American citizens. Colorado receives annual congressional appropriations from LWCF, administered through Colorado State Parks for state and local government sponsored recreation projects. Colorado's last SCORP was published in 1992.

Colorado State Parks' initial discussions with the Strategic Issues Steering Group convened to represent local government, private sector, non-profit and federal agency interests led to a consensus that the SCORP process presents an ideal opportunity to focus public attention on outdoor recreation's key role in Colorado's economy and quality of life. These key stakeholders preferred an approach that did not just meet LWCF requirements, but would also proactively adopt comprehensive strategies that respond to the challenges of meeting the outdoor recreation needs of a rapidly growing population. Accordingly, the report is titled *Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Future – Strategies for Colorado's Outdoors Heritage*, and focuses on a 10-year planning horizon.

A central theme of the report is the nexus of tourism and outdoor recreation in Colorado. The tourism industry, now Colorado's second-largest industry, generates more than \$7 billion in spending and contributes more than \$550 million to state and local tax coffers each year. The tourism industry is closely tied to Colorado's unique and world-renowned outdoors appeal, as exemplified by the Colorado Tourism Office's reliance on outdoor images in marketing campaigns and vacation guides. Critical to maintaining this market advantage is enabling visitors to get out and enjoy the breadth of Colorado's special outdoors heritage in ways that sustain the very qualities that visitors find so compelling.

Not only do Colorado's tourism industry and its outdoor recreation providers work with the same resources and attractions and serve the same customers in the area depicted by the overlapping circles below, but their functions are also complementary.



At the same time, tourism industry and public land managers must recognize that they also affect the service infrastructure, physical and cultural integrity, and the general quality of life of host communities and their residents. In order to sustain the viability of tourism businesses and the public land resource base, the tourism industry and public land managers have a responsibility to work closely with community leaders to maintain that infrastructure and community identity so important to residents.

Because of the interconnectedness between the tourism industry, public land managers and their host communities, logically they should work together as partners. One step toward this proposed collaboration was selecting the state tourism regions as the basis for the SCORP regions around which much of the data collection efforts for the plan were analyzed. The SCORP regions were adapted from the tourism regions utilized by the Colorado Tourism Office (see map below).

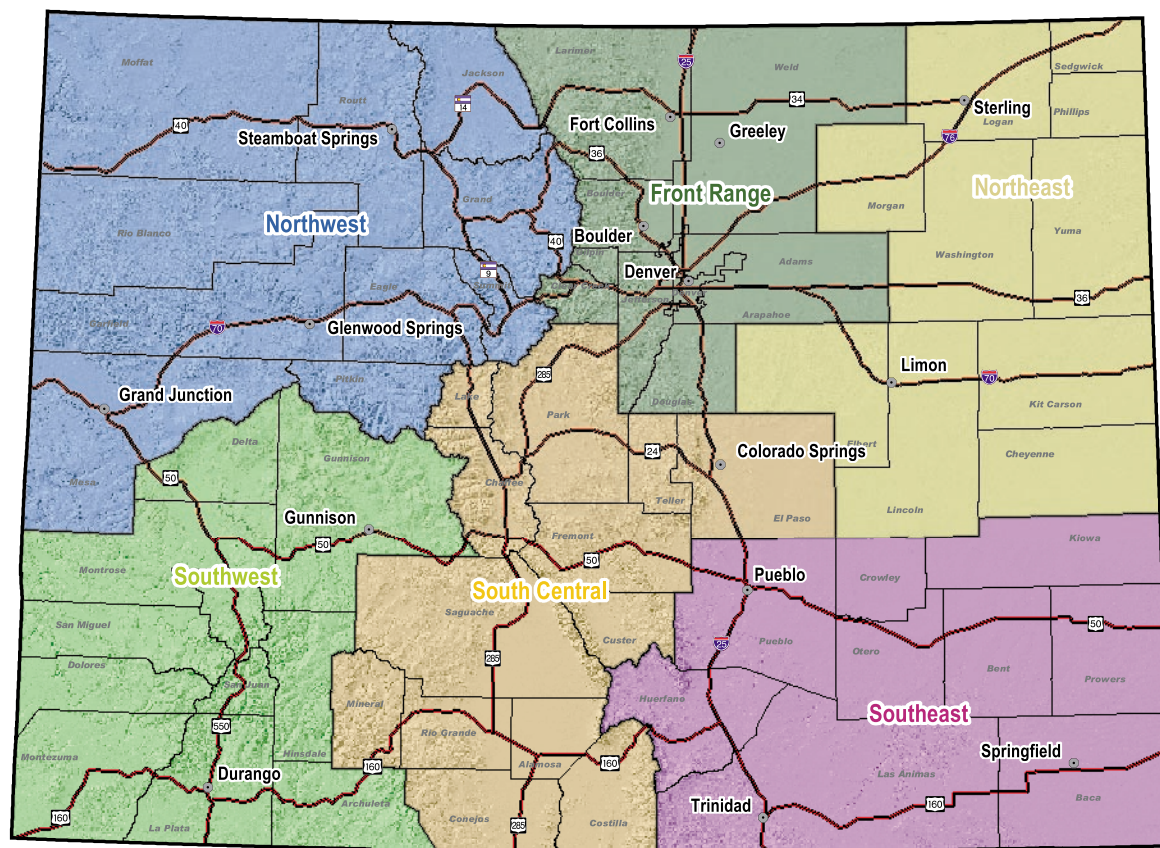
## Social, Economic and Environmental Backdrop

Profiled in the *Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Future* report are a wide range of trends and influences that comprise the backdrop to which the plan's strategic action elements must respond:

- *Trends in the ways Coloradans and our visitors choose to enjoy the outdoors.* Polling indicates that 94% of the population participates in outdoor recreation\* , and that participation rates are increasing faster than the rate of population growth. As outdoors enthusiasts' preferences for specific types of recreation expand and shift over time, recreation providers must find ways to meet those expectations while still recognizing the capacity of outdoors resources to support those activities.

*\*National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE), 2000*

## SCORP Regions



Map Scale = 1 : 2,700,000



- *Demographic trends of population growth.* Based on US Census information and the State Demographer's Office, many of Colorado's communities are among the fastest growing in the United States. Traditional use areas and wildland recreation landscapes are now "just out the back door" for many historically rural, but now urban communities. By 2002, Colorado's population grew to 4.52 million, an increase of 37% from the 1990 population of 3.3 million. By 2025, the State Demographer projects Colorado's population to grow by another 47% to 6.65 million. Trends in population growth and changes in the demographic, social and economic characteristics of our communities must be factored into recreation site planning and investments.
- *Strong open space protection efforts statewide.* In December 2000, the Governor's Commission on Saving Open Spaces, Farms and Ranches published findings affirming the strong open space protection efforts that characterize Colorado. State lawmakers passed some of the most innovative conservation incentives in the country over the past four years; voters in many communities have approved the use of taxpayer funds for open space, trails and outdoor recreation projects; and in 1992 voters amended the state constitution to require lottery proceeds be used for open space, parks and wildlife. A natural alliance among open space advocates and recreation agencies can help leverage financial resources.
- *Recreation access.* Several factors affect recreationists as they travel to and from popular recreation attractions. Colorado's roadway capacity is challenged by dramatic increases in traffic volumes that can lead to congestion, particularly during week-ends when highway systems are most in demand by recreationists. Public land managers address the capacity of public lands to accommodate recreation demand through increasingly high profile travel management plans that attempt to balance the range of motorized and non-motorized recreation uses of the land. Rights to access public lands and river recreation sites are subject to evolving interpretations and changes of state and federal laws.
- *Unprecedented environmental conditions.* Environmental stresses of unusual magnitude have contributed to the challenge of sustaining our outdoors heritage. These include a four year period of drought-like conditions, forests threatened by wildfires and bark beetle infestations, and fish and wildlife populations stressed by an unprecedented succession of diseases.

## Strategic Plan and Action Frameworks

This backdrop of social, economic and environmental influences calls for innovative approaches in providing the outdoors experiences people desire while meeting resource conservation goals. The Strategic Issues Steering Group identified six issues of statewide significance that Colorado must address to most effectively meet the challenge of satisfying the outdoor recreation demands of a rapidly expanding population, while meeting the responsibility to conserve the special outdoors resources for which Colorado is renowned.

1. Colorado's citizens and visitors need more effective ways to access the wide array of information about recreation sites and their host communities, and outdoor recreation providers need to better integrate outdoor recreation marketing and management to sustain Colorado's outstanding recreation attractions, its economic vitality, and resulting quality of life
2. Communities must invest in outdoor infrastructure through well planned, on-going commitments to meeting a growing population's expectations for a wide range of safe, up-to-date sites at which to enjoy the outdoors.
3. Public recreation agencies faced with tight budgets yet increasing demand for recreation services are considering increased reliance on fees and creative public/private partnerships to enhance public services.
4. The sustainability of natural and cultural landscapes and our capability to be stewards of those resources must be considered when agencies and communities plan for and manage the location and scope of outdoor recreation activities.
5. Public access to outdoor sites and management of travel on public lands is challenged by the capacity of our statewide transportation infrastructure and of our natural resources to accommodate the volume of demand.
6. Recreation agencies can more effectively engage Colorado's citizens and visitors in resource stewardship responsibilities through youth outreach and volunteer programs.

Described in the plan are specific Action Frameworks identified by the Strategic Issues Steering Group for each of these six issues.



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## *A Collaborative Regional Forums Strategy*

A key conclusion of the Strategic Issues Steering Group was that while these issues are common to all regions of the state, the recommended action frameworks are best adapted to the specific character of Colorado's distinctive and diverse regions and their residents.

Further discussion led to the primary recommendation of the *Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Future* strategic planning effort:

**Regional forums should be convened to develop collaborative strategies among communities with common interests, tourism business operators, non-profit organizations, and the public lands managers responsible for delivering the outdoors experiences visitors desire. The regional forums should focus on:**

- Parks, trails, open space and wildlife habitat stewardship planning, facilities development and management strategies
- Transportation planning and funding for access to recreation sites
- Public information and marketing responsive to visitor preferences
- Education, volunteer and youth outreach programs
- Cultural sites stewardship and heritage tourism
- Cooperative investment strategies

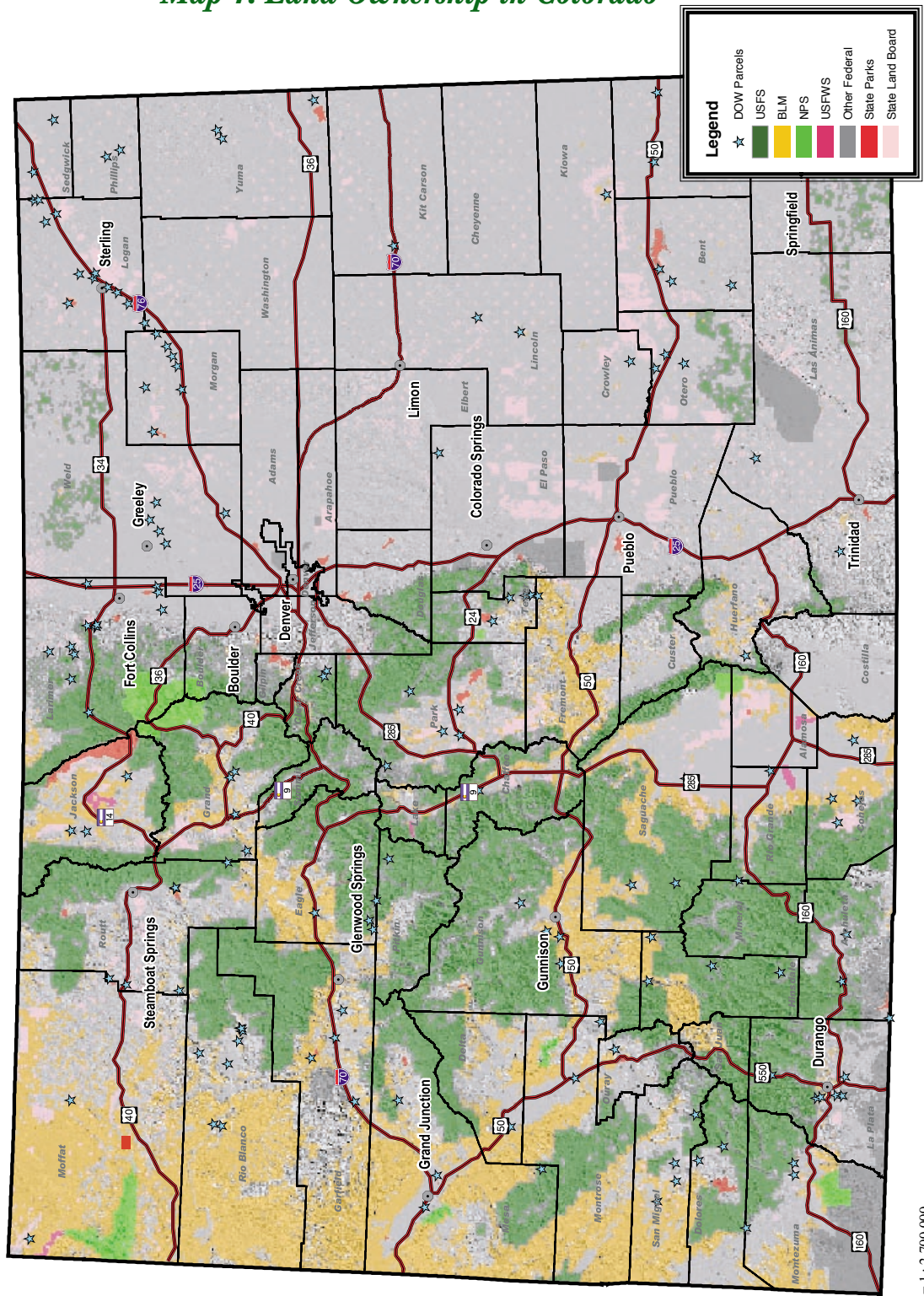
The Steering Group further recommended that two pilot forums be initiated as the most effective means to develop models for subsequent efforts statewide. Envisioned are one pilot project on the West Slope and one along a segment of the Front Range, deploying techniques adaptable to each region's unique set of characteristics and prior planning efforts. Participants in these roundtable forums should be comprised of a broad range of stakeholders who can best articulate integrated strategies for the region's outdoors heritage.

**The advantages of the regional scale approach include:**

- A broad range of recreation diversity best provided from a range of private sector, non-profit, and local, state and federal agency sources can be considered.
- The entire range of recreation site visitors, ranging from local residents to visitors within and from out of state, can be considered.

- Connectivity among recreation sites, heritage and cultural sites, communities, and privately and publicly owned open lands can be considered.
- Collaboration leads to better articulation of agency niches, discouraging duplication of efforts while identifying gaps in services and conservation sites.
- An increase in visitor capacity can be accommodated by best matching visitor preferences with the recreation sites best suited to meet those needs.
- At-risk recreation and species conservation opportunities can be better addressed.
- Existing social and political values and structures can be better incorporated into planning and decision-making.

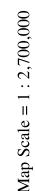
*Map 1: Land Ownership in Colorado*



Map Scale = 1 : 2,700,000







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