

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado's economy and quality of life are inherently connected to its abundant and diverse outdoor recreation opportunities. With elevations ranging from 3,350 feet to 14,431 feet, a high percentage of public land (42%), close to 300 days of annual sunshine, and year-round recreation opportunities, Colorado is an outdoor recreation haven.¹ Whether ice-climbing a frozen waterfall, touring one of many scenic and historic byways, fishing a gold medal trout stream, riding horseback through remote wilderness areas, climbing the second tallest peak in the continental U.S. (Mt. Elbert), or riding off-highway vehicles on a designated Forest Service route, Colorado has something for everyone. The array of outdoor recreation opportunities contributes significantly to Colorado's overall economy (more than \$10 billion annually), as more than 28 million people visited the state in 2007.^{1,2}

2008 SCORP - Planning for the Future

Building on the success of Colorado's 2003 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the 2008 SCORP provides a critical five-year plan for addressing key outdoor recreation needs through 2013. Developed in collaboration with a diverse 33-member Steering Committee representing a wide array of government, for profit, and nonprofit interests, the SCORP is the principal guide for outdoor recreation planning statewide.

The 2008 SCORP proposes a varied and balanced statewide outdoor recreation system capable of meeting current and future outdoor recreation needs. The plan assesses statewide outdoor recreation issues and outlines a strategic plan to meet the various issues affecting outdoor recreation. The SCORP also evaluates supply and demand for Colorado's outdoor recreation resources, including public lands, open spaces, trails, and other recreation facilities.



When you walk through your local park, push your children on the swings at a nearby playground, or bike on a trail in your community, you are likely enjoying the benefits of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program in Colorado.

To apply for an LWCF grant or find a project in your neighborhood, visit: <http://parks.state.co.us/Trails/LWCF>

Some projects in Colorado made possible by LWCF funds include:

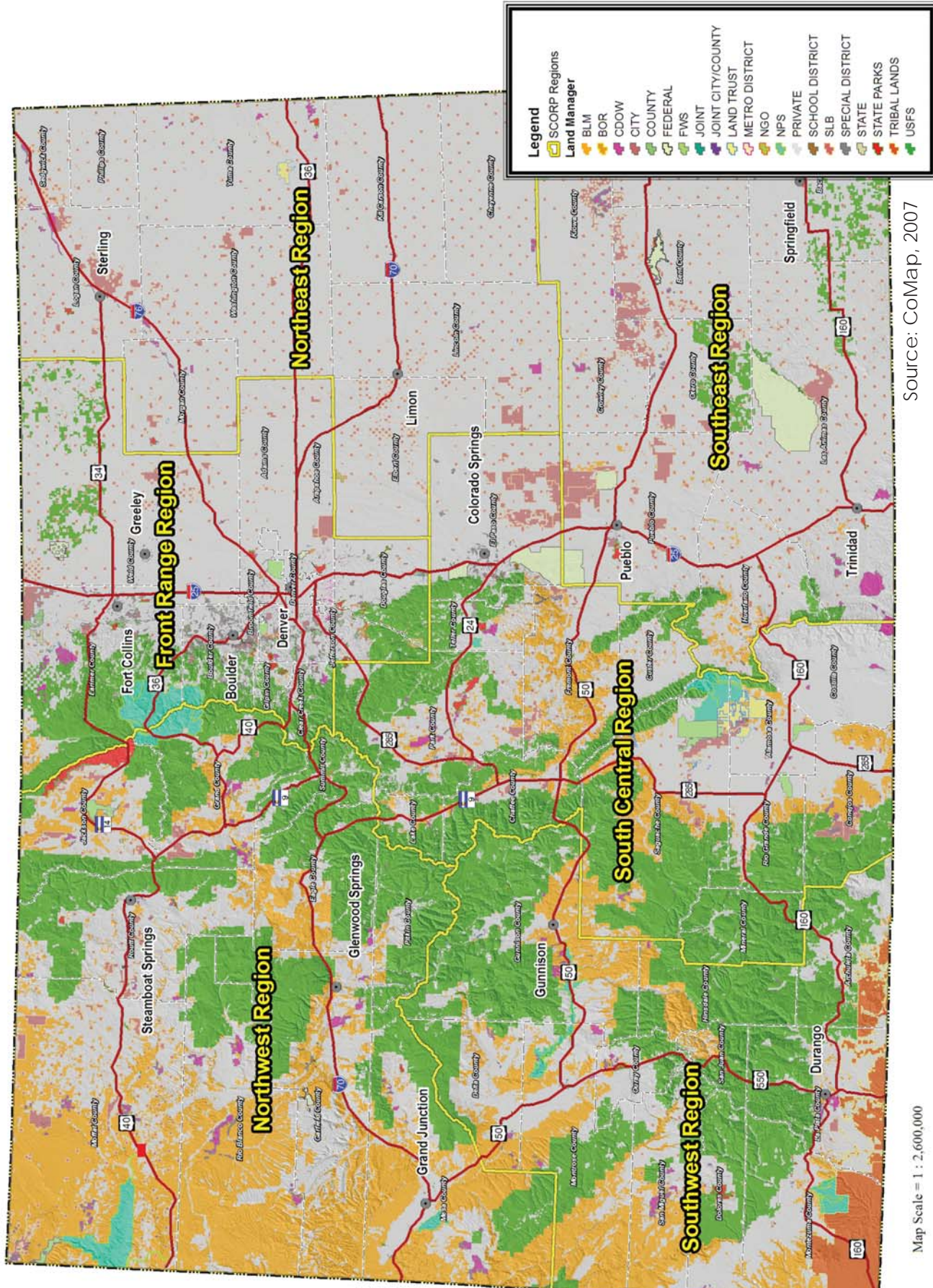
- Cheyenne Mountain State Park near Colorado Springs, Colorado's newest state park*
- Howelson Hill Ski Area in Steamboat Springs (the largest natural ski jumping complex in North America and a training facility for over 64 Olympians)*
- Garden of the Gods Park in Colorado Springs*
- Community facilities across the state, including Carbondale Municipal Pool, Hillcrest Park and Bike Path in Montrose, Clear Creek Park in Golden, and tennis courts in Lamar*

¹Wilcox, G., D. M. Theobald, J. Whisman, and N. Peterson. 2006. Colorado Ownership, Management, and Protection (CoMap) V5. <http://www.nrel.colostate.edu/projects/comap/contact.html>.

²State by State Active Outdoor Recreation Economy Report. Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2006. Jan.-Feb. 2007 <<http://outdoorindustry.org/research.html>>.

³Aguilera, E. "2007 Jump 4th in Row." *The Denver Post* 18 June 2008, sec. 7B.

Map 1: Colorado Land Management & SCORP Regions



More than Just Outdoor Recreation

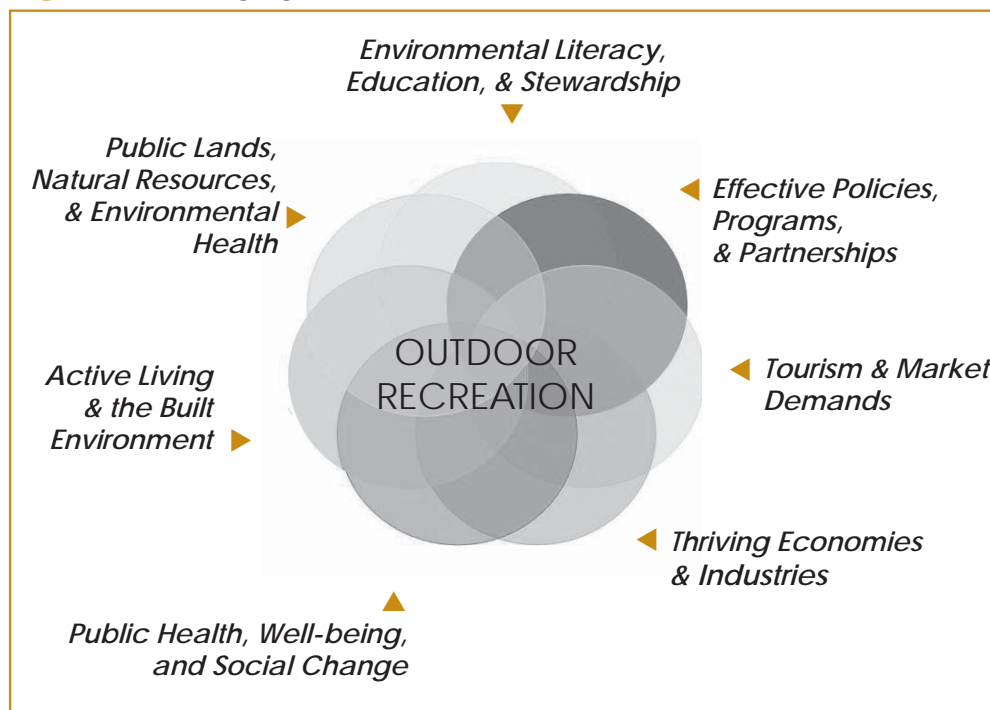
When outdoor recreation is discussed in the 2008 Colorado Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), it needs to be considered within the context of numerous interconnected industries and relevant factors that influence recreation, as depicted in Figure 1.



Some of these include:

- The state’s tourism industry, which includes the communities, businesses, and industries that rely on tourism and outdoor recreation
- Coloradans’ public health and well-being
- Environmental literacy, education, and stewardship ethics.

Figure 1: Converging Elements Related to Outdoor Recreation



Annual economic activity generated by outdoor recreation in Colorado is likely \$10 - \$15 billion dollars based on the results of nine known economic studies related to outdoor recreation activities (albeit with different methodologies and possible overlap in user groups), plus a number of popular activities that likely contribute economic benefits to the state, but have not yet been quantified.

The connection between outdoor recreation, tourism, public health, environmental stewardship, and Colorado’s economy, along with many other considerations, are inherently interdependent. Effective policies, programs, and sustainable partnerships must be pursued to further strengthen the relationships of the groups that oversee or manage these elements. All the factors mentioned above and presented in Figure 1 were considered during the SCORP planning process because outdoor recreation encompasses more than simply outdoor recreation.



SCORP & THE VISION FOR COLORADO'S OUTDOOR FUTURE

Challenges Affecting Outdoor Recreation Planning and Management

Despite extensive outdoor recreation opportunities, Colorado citizens are finding many of the areas they have come to enjoy affected by a range of human-induced and natural changes to the landscape. Based on the outcome of several SCORP Steering Committee meetings and survey data gathered during the SCORP planning process, the following five issues were identified as the highest priorities:

- Issue #1: Effects of **Environmental Change** on Recreation and Tourism
- Issue #2: **Population and Demographic Change** and Related Recreation-Tourism Market Demands
- Issue #3: **Connection Between Public Health and Recreation**
- Issue #4: **Funding Shortfalls** for Recreation Management
- Issue #5: **Improved Integration of Recreation Interests and Needs** in land use and other relevant planning efforts

Some regions of the state are experiencing massive forest decline as a result of the bark beetle and aspen blight—contributing to immediate and long-term issues ranging from diminished scenic value to elevated forest fire risk, both of which directly affect outdoor recreation. Non-native invasive species, such as the zebra mussel, have been found recently in one of Colorado's most popular recreation destinations (Pueblo Reservoir). Climate change also increases the serious long-term threat to Colorado's recreation and tourism economy. (Tourism comprised about 10% of the state's economy in 2006).⁴

Increasing population growth and its associated effects on outdoor recreation activities pose a major challenge for local, state, and federal recreation managers. Shifting generational trends, such as the aging of the “baby boomers” (born 1946 to 1964), and an increasing Hispanic population in Colorado are changing use patterns and increasing demand for various types of recreation opportunities.

Another important issue is the connection between public health and outdoor recreation. A heightened interest exists in making outdoor recreation a catalyst for social change, which will address public issues, such as obesity. In addition, many people believe that outdoor recreation is vital to facilitate a life-long appreciation of our outdoor heritage, thus fostering environmental stewardship and reversing the trend of declining outdoor recreation participation rates among Colorado's youth.

Educating the public and decision-makers about funding shortfalls for outdoor recreation management is another important need. Declining funding for outdoor recreation is a common theme for many local, state, and federal agencies. A slowing economy, increasing fuel costs, and other factors further contribute to funding constraints for local governments and state and federal land management agencies. This directly impacts each agency's ability to address recreation management needs and meet increasing statewide recreation demands.

In many ways, Colorado's future is tied directly to our ability to adapt and address such needs and challenges. Effectively integrating planning efforts that impact outdoor recreation, such as transportation, tourism, and conservation initiatives, is critical in this process.

⁴Let's Talk Colorado Road Show. Colorado Travel and Tourism Facts and Figures, 2007, Colorado Tourism Office. 11 July 2008 <www.colorado.com>.



A Strategic Plan for Addressing Significant Issues and Influences

The SCORP provides background information on recreation and offers strategies to ensure that Colorado's outdoor recreation heritage is maintained and improved for future generations. It supports local and statewide initiatives that sustain the long-term maintenance and enhancement of Colorado's recreation resources.

One of the most useful tools in the SCORP is a planning framework that addresses priority outdoor recreation needs and aims to achieve the vision outlined by the Steering Committee. The 2008 SCORP Strategic Plan (Section 7) was developed collaboratively, based on SCORP Steering Committee input and a thorough analysis of statewide recreation issues and needs. Also considered were the 2007 Colorado Public Survey and 2007 Local Government Survey, completed as part of the SCORP. The Strategic Plan contains key implementation recommendations, prioritized goals, objectives, and supporting actions that, when executed, will help address the most pressing issues facing outdoor recreation interests in Colorado.

Key Recommendations

Embedded within the SCORP Strategic Plan are several recommendations integral to its successful implementation. Executing the suggestions are essential for Colorado to meet the goals, objectives, and supporting actions outlined in the Strategic Plan. Further, taking these actions directly influence whether other strategic plan elements will be achieved. Descriptions of these key implementation recommendations are provided below.

Key Implementation Recommendation #1:

Form a Governor's Commission or Statewide Advisory Council on Colorado's Outdoors to implement key policies related to recreation and open space initiatives.

A Governor's Commission would provide a unified voice that represents statewide outdoor recreation interests. The SCORP document, particularly the Strategic Plan, would provide the Commission with a platform to analyze the most pertinent trends, issues, and needs related to outdoor resources, including the key implementation considerations. This group may lead the implementation of goals, objectives, and suggested actions set forth in the Strategic Plan and form policy relevant to outdoor recreation.

At a minimum, a Statewide Advisory Council comprised of several SCORP Steering Committee Members (as well as policy makers and a representative from the Governor's Office and the Lt. Governor's Office) should convene and meet semi-annually to review plan elements that need to be implemented, initiate discussions with stakeholder groups, organize lead implementers, gather resources necessary to spur action on key items in the SCORP Strategic Plan, and review progress.

Formation of a Governor's Commission on Colorado's Outdoors would help implement important policy initiatives related to outdoor recreation.



Key Implementation Recommendation #2:

Coordinate an annual mini-conference or summit on outdoor recreation in conjunction with the Governor’s Tourism Conference (or as a stand-alone event) to continue fostering sustainable partnerships, assessing policy initiatives, identifying stakeholder roles and agency niches, and tracking progress in implementing priority recommendations.

Continuing to develop partnerships with the many groups (government, non-profit organizations, and private interests) that are interconnected with recreation is essential to managing outdoor recreation holistically and effectively in Colorado. To avoid duplication of effort and leverage limited resources, interests must be organized and tracked. In addition to building sustainable partnerships, the proposed mini-conference or summit would focus on the strategies outlined in the 2008 SCORP Strategic Plan, address policy solutions to the issues and influences identified in the SCORP, and create a mechanism to collaborate with the members of the proposed Governor’s Commission (or Statewide Advisory Council) on Colorado’s Outdoors.

Key Implementation Recommendation #3:

Educate Colorado’s citizens about the many important issues affecting outdoor recreation and the benefits of outdoor recreation through coordinated public outreach and environmental education efforts.

After closely examining each goal, objective, and suggested action, the Steering Committee concluded that none of the SCORP Strategic Plan recommendations can be accomplished without comprehensive education efforts. Colorado residents need to better understand the range of issues affecting outdoor recreation and potential solutions to address these issues. Colorado residents must be better educated about the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of outdoor recreation to inspire them to become active in the outdoors. This educational campaign also should address known barriers to being outdoors.

Aside from improving public awareness about outdoor recreation benefits and opportunities, efforts to educate the public about the environment should be made to further the initiatives in the Strategic Plan and reconnect citizens to the outdoors. This education serves to raise environmental literacy and creates responsible and engaged citizens who think critically and make responsible decisions. Through participation in outdoor recreation activities that foster environmental education and immersion in nature, children can develop learning and problem-solving skills, and become adults who are prepared for the challenges and opportunities in life of the twenty-first century.

